

Mound House Hosts Water Quality Conference

“Coliform Bacteria” Symposium August 6

By Gary Mooney

thewritestuff25@gmail.com

The Historic Mound House on Fort Myers Beach hosts the free water quality symposium, “Coliform Bacteria in Your Recreational Water,” on Friday, August 6, from 2 to 5 p.m. Cosponsors are Sea Grant Florida, The University of Florida, and Florida Gulf Coast University (FGCU). While the symposium is free and open to the public, you must register in advance due to limited seating at 239-765-0865.

Penny Jarrett, the Mound House’s Educational Coordinator, facilitates the symposium along with FGCU’s Dr. Toshi Urakawa. “Water quality is important not only to every single resident and tourist to Fort Myers Beach,” said Penny, “but everyone throughout Florida, the nation, and globally as it affects our health, economy, and marine life. The Mound House recently completed its ‘What’s in The Water’ two-year study for Fort Myers Beach water source pollutants with FGCU and the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration and this symposium is an offshoot of that FGCU partnership, to design a more broad-based water quality testing program.”

Dr. Urakawa informed the Mound House about his Sea Grant Florida funding so he and his students can develop a method to test and accurately discern between human Coliform Bacteria and that which occurs naturally, “and he wanted to provide a symposium to talk about identifying it in recreational waters,” Penny recalled. “The Mound House wanted to partner with him so our citizens understand what is good and what is not. We have a dynamic lineup of speakers and encourage everyone to attend.”

Coliform Bacteria occurs naturally but can come from fecal matter as well, “so while it is not necessarily a problem, it can be an indicator of other pathogens in the water,” offered Penny. “Currently, no test exists that can determine what occurs naturally in recreational waters and what comes from local septic tanks. This is a problem in our region, as Lee County alone has roughly 100,000 septic tanks, so Dr. Urakawa’s work will hopefully develop a test to tell the difference between the two sources. The Mound House and Town of Fort Myers Beach are happy to partner in this water quality study.”

Star-Studded Lineup

Speakers and subjects are Dr. Richard Whitman of the Charlotte County Democratic Environmental Caucus of Florida presenting “What is Coliform Bacteria”; Dr. L. Donald Duke of FGCU with “Coliform Bacteria: US & Florida Regulatory Setting & Rational”; Rick Armstrong of Lee County offering “Coliform Bacteria in Lee County Water”; Mike Kratz of FGCU with “Microbial Source Tracking in Three Impaired SW Florida Rivers”; Calusa Waterkeeper John Cassani presenting “Fecal Bacteria in SW Florida Streams: Problems & Prospects”; and Urakawa with “A New Approach for Accurate Identification of Enterococci in Recreational Water.” Jarrett and Dr. Urakawa will deliver opening remarks, with Urakawa doing a “Q&A” at the conclusion.

Penny encourages all elements of the general public to attend, “whether you are a resident, tourist, business owner, or government official. After the symposium concludes, the Mound House hosts a reception so attendees can speak with the star-studded lineup of water experts one-on-one, not only about Coliform Bacteria but any other water questions and concerns you have. I hope the audience takes away that Coliform Bacteria is present in our water and soil, and that it can be an indicator of other disease pathogens in our water, so that they better understand why studying the sources of Coliform Bacteria are so important to all of our water quality issues. Everyone hears about the problems and concerns over Blue-Green Algae and Red Tide, but understanding Coliform Bacteria is just as essential.”

The Mound House, at 451 Connecticut Street with overflow parking at 216 Connecticut, is the oldest standing structure on Estero Island and operated by the Town of Fort Myers Beach as a museum complex and cultural and environmental learning center. It is open Tuesdays, Thursdays, and Saturdays from 9 a.m. to 4 p.m. Admission is \$10 for ages 13 & up, \$8 for students with IDs, \$5 ages 6 to 12, and 5 & under free, with Town residents receiving a 50% discount. For additional information and a monthly programs schedule, call 239-765-0865 or visit www.moundhouse.org.