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Last week brought about the conclusion of a successful 2007 Oyster Gardening Program. Forty-four volunteers from around the bay participated in this year's program in which oyster spat (baby oysters) were grown from four millimeters up to as much as two inches between June and November. The growth rates are aided by the protection that the oysters receive being in their "Page Cage" and by being suspended in the water column instead of resting on the bottom. About ten to fifteen minutes a week are all it takes for a volunteer to help these oysters grow up in the safety of their cages.

This year, program leaders from this office, the Auburn University Shellfish Laboratory, and the Mobile Bay NEP were joined by students and their teacher from Alma Bryant High School. Students began their involvement last year, and worked throughout the year recruiting volunteers, building cages, and most recently in collecting the oysters from the volunteers and stocking them on various reef sites. All oysters collected from Mobile and Baldwin County volunteers were stocked on different reefs in their respective counties in an effort to supplement numbers of oysters and aid the restoration process.

Through their participation in the program, students are a part of an environmental education and ecological restoration effort occurring in their communities. This project becomes a hands on application of the subject matter they discuss in class and provides a tangible connection between their classrooms and their world outside of school. We

look forward to a continued relationship between the students and teachers of Alma Bryant High School and the Oyster Gardening Program.

Thank you to those who volunteered for the 2007 program, we look forward to seeing you all next season. For people who may be interested in becoming volunteers for the 2008 Oyster Gardening season, you may contact me or the NEP for details.

For additional questions or information, contact P.J. Waters, Auburn University Marine Extension and Research Center, 438-5690.