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TODAY ON



The Brown Tide is back

What's it doing to Long Island's bays, what's causing it and what can be done? Watch a News 12 Long Island special report beginning at 5 p.m. today.

CALL FOR PHONES TO MILITARY

A Suffolk legislator is collecting cellphones as part of a program to help soldiers stay connected with loved ones.

Legis. Steve Stern (D-Dix Hills) is offering his office as a collection site for Cell Phones for Soldiers, a nonprofit that aims to help deployed and returning troops communicate with family.

Since it was founded in 2004, organization officials say they have recycled more than 10 million cellphones and provided more than 150 million minutes of free talk time to members of the military.

Stern is encouraging people to drop off their used cellphones at his office.

"Rather than collecting dust, these phones can provide a lifeline of love and support to those who sacrifice so much for all of us," he said in a statement.

Stern recently accepted a donation of 106 used cellphones as well as chargers and cellphone cases from Lynne Dhyne of the Suffolk County Home-makers Council.

For more information, contact Stern's office at 631-854-5100.

— DENISE M. BONILLA



Divers map lake bed, find sunken boats along with Christmas trees, coconuts

BY SOPHIA CHANG

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It's like an archaeological dig in the middle of Long Island — except the treasure is buried underwater in Lake Ronkonkoma.

A team of scuba divers is tackling the detritus at the bottom of the lake with sonar technology and recording its findings in a public database — then diving to scoop up the more intriguing objects.

Led by Bill Pfeiffer of Island Diving, about 50 volunteer divers started the project in April. The spate of rainy weather in June delayed the divers, who are now videotaping specific targets for identification.

"We did find several sunken boats, and we can tell just by sonar they are boats," Pfeiffer said recently. "We don't know what kind yet, but we

can tell by the shape."

Pfeiffer, who grew up in Nesconset, spent a lot of time in the lake as a child. "I like diving here," he said. "There's so much interesting stuff to see."

He got the idea to map the lake bed when his friend Peter Canning, a member of the Coast Guard auxiliary, told him he'd gotten a new toy: a \$3,000 sonar scanner system mounted to the bottom of his 18-foot patrol boat, the Jeanne Marie.

The quality of the sonar scan, which uses sound wave signals to build an image, is excellent, Pfeiffer said. "It can be very much like an actual picture," he said. "You can even see the ripples in the sand."

And while the divers get to partake in a fun adventure, their volunteer efforts also benefit environmental agencies and geologists who aren't able to get to the bottom of the lake, which is deeper than 60 feet in some areas.

The diving team is creating a detailed map of the lake bed, and also pledged to extract any items that could endanger the health of the water — such as car batteries, Pfeiffer said.

"We're giving them all this data for free," he said. "Having this kind of research done

Bill Pfeiffer surfaces in Lake Ronkonkoma with one of his finds, a coconut. Left: Pfeiffer, a diver who grew up in Nesconset, leads a volunteer effort to scan the bottom of the lake with sonar.

Secrets of Lake



on the lake can open up many millions of dollars" in research and government grants. "It's a community service," he added.

Some elected officials praised the group's efforts as pivotal in revitalizing the lake. "This is one of the many positives to come out of the

Lake Ronkonkoma Task Force," said county Legis. John Kennedy (R-Nesconset) during a visit to the lake to check out Pfeiffer's work. "All of it is about reuse and reclaiming what used to be a major tourist center."

In the early 20th century, the lake was a popular vaca-