

WEST PALM BEACH

## Check out the Port of Palm Beach's new \$7 million manatee-decorated bulk cement unloader

Bill DiPaolo Special to The Post

Published 7:01 a.m. ET June 30, 2023 | Updated 12:36 p.m. ET July 3, 2023

[PORT OF PALM BEACH](#) — Ooohs and aahhs floated from the crowd Wednesday afternoon when an aqua, green, blue mural of [manatees](#) painted on the back of the new 225-ton, 70-foot-tall cement unloader was unveiled.

“More awareness of manatees and their habitat is the goal,” said Anne Messer, executive director of the Friends of [Manatee Lagoon](#).

Houston-based Cemex recently bought the massive \$7 million, 12-wheeled vehicle that will be used to unload cement from high-capacity carrier vessels from other countries. The unloader then deposits the cement into trucks at the port that deliver the building material around South Florida.

Cemex commissioned the mural in support of the Friends of Manatee Lagoon, said Jarra Kaczvara, director of government affairs for Cemex’s east region.



People snap pictures and applaud during the unveiling of the Cemex company's \$7M cement unloader dedicated to Friends of Manatee Lagoon at the Port of Palm Beach on June 28, 2023 in Riviera Beach, Florida. GREG LOVETT/THE PALM BEACH POST

Adding [manatees](#) to the mix shows how the international company is involved in the Palm Beach County community, she said at the event at the port attended by about three dozen people.

“Protecting manatees deserves our support,” Kaczwarra said.

The 13-foot-by-22-foot mural shows two whiskered, sleepy-eyed manatees meandering forward. Bright green sea grass below and gin-clear water all around, the slow-swimming sea cows look like they are paddling in paradise.

Not so, said several spectators.

Increasing dangers are confronting the grey-brown mammals that can eat up to 100 pounds of sea grass a day and grow to 14 feet and 2,000 pounds.



Julie Benevento Ball, left, takes a selfie with Zach Shelton and his son Zach Shelton Jr., during the unveiling of the Cemex company's \$7M cement unloader dedicated to Friends of Manatee Lagoon at the Port of Palm Beach on June 28, 2023 in Riviera Beach, Florida. GREG LOVETT/THE PALM BEACH POST

Vanishing sea grass, pollution from fertilizers and sewerage, algae blooms, speeding boaters and waterfront development are hurdles for the air-breathing gentle giants.

“Protecting manatees is drawing more attention. We need to keep that support growing,” said John Butler, board member and vice president of the Friends of Manatee Lagoon, a 501 (c) 3 organization that raises money and assists with projects at Manatee Lagoon.



Cemex terminal manager Matthew Horne smiles during the unveiling of the Cemex company's \$7M cement unloader dedicated to Friends of Manatee Lagoon at the Port of Palm Beach on June 28, 2023 in Riviera Beach, Florida. GREG LOVETT/THE PALM BEACH POST