

Barefoot Naturalist History

In 2008, Barefoot Park Ranger Jim Truluck started a “Volunteer Ranger Assistant” program at the park. Under his direction, these new County volunteers were trained to help give programs and perform duties to assist rangers, such as patrolling beaches, trails, and doing counts. Both Rangers and Volunteer Ranger Assistants did interpretive programs such as Canoe trips, Shelling Talks, and Saturday Guided Boardwalks. During late 2010/early 2011, the Collier Parks and Recreation Department was having to cut back financially and implemented a hiring freeze. At that time, rather than lay off staff, they were reducing staff through attrition. The remaining park management and staff had to examine and determine necessary duties, as staffing was becoming limited. It was during that time the County had the Rangers stop doing all interpretive programs at Barefoot with the exception of Canoe trips, the ADA Trails on Wheels, and an occasional school program for children. After the retirement of Ranger Jim Truluck, the County’s Volunteer Ranger Assistant Program declined.

One of the previous Volunteer Ranger Assistants and now a Friend’s volunteer, Sharon Truluck, wanted to see environmental educational programs continue. The Friends already did a Lecture Series on Saturdays, so they were interested in educational programs. Discussions were started with the Friends of Barefoot Beach through then-President Margaret Winn and with County Parks & Recreation management staff. Sharon had created “Nature Notes” as training tools for the “Volunteer Ranger Assistant” Program and these were now shared with Docents and new Barefoot Naturalists. These are also shared on the Friends’ website.

The County agreed that the Friends could sponsor environmental education programs to be led by Naturalists. Sharon agreed to oversee these Naturalist Programs for the Friends and recruited some of the past Volunteer Ranger Assistants (and a retired park ranger) to help start the programs in February 2011. The Naturalist Programs schedule was coordinated with the County so Friends’ programs would not conflict with County programs. The Friends’ Naturalist Programs would target being regularly scheduled during the winter season.

The initial programs were “Beachcombing and Shelling” talks on Mondays and “Guided Boardwalks” on Saturday mornings before the lecture. It started with 6 naturalists (4 Certified Florida Master Naturalists and 2 Coastal Systems Naturalists). In 2012 season—a second “Beachcombing and Shelling” talk was added on Fridays (because shell talks were so popular) and a new Wednesday walk “Exploring Coastal Habitats” was added to encompass education on all five plant communities found within Barefoot Beach Preserve. In the 2019 season, the Monday “Beachcombing and Shelling” talk was revamped to target a “walk” on the beach to broaden the program. It was renamed “*Beaches Alive!*” This was after a dreadful summer of red tide and seemed people would be interested to learn about “living” things on the beach.

This brings us up to FY2020. In March, Sharon is handing the leadership of the Naturalist Programs over to Michele Lenhard—another Florida Master Naturalist and Friend who loves Barefoot Beach! Sharon will continue as a volunteer and Friend of Barefoot Beach Preserve. When asked what she would do, she said 4-hours a week. Her husband laughed.

Documented by
Sharon Truluck, Certified Florida Master Naturalist
Board Member, Friends of Barefoot Beach Preserve
December 30, 2019

The Story Behind the Barefoot Naturalist Shirts

In the initial programs, the Naturalists wore the cotton polo shirts with Friends' logo. When doing walks, the Naturalists were out in the hot sun a lot. One day, one of the Naturalists Dr. Bob Mohl was talking to Friends' President Margaret Winn and asked what the chance was of getting long-sleeved shirts for the Naturalists to protect them from the sun when giving outdoor interpretive programs. Margaret said she would talk to the Board about it.

The Board said "Yes!" to Dr. Mohl's request. The shirts on the market that seemed the best to be cooler in the heat and protect from the sun were the Columbia brand shirts. We started looking at different color options. We were told by the County to be sure to have our shirts different from the County's park rangers that had both white shirts and khaki shirts that were the Columbia-type.

Several of the Naturalists searched for the best style and colors. The team came up with a teal shirt—liked by both genders. It is easy to spot when out doing programs and certainly matches the Florida Master Naturalist's patch—and it is different from the rangers' shirts.

Now, if a program starts and there are late-comers, all the docents have to say is, "Look for the teal shirt" and tell them which direction to head.

Thank you, Bob Mohl and Margaret Winn!

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