

EARLY HISTORY OF BAREFOOT BEACH

Walter Mack, a Cadillac distributor from Chicago (also owned Shangri-La at one time) owned Barefoot Beach.

In 1959, Mack unveiled plans for homes, hotels, shops and an airplane landing strip for Barefoot Beach. Before he could realize his dream, Mack died in 1960. According to the Bonita Banner, Walter Mack had a lovely beach house in the center of his Barefoot Beach property that was nearly wrecked by vandals.

In December, 1965 the Gulf American Land Corporation purchased 4 miles of Waterfront property from the Walter Mack estate for \$1.6 million. In 1964 Kramlich Associates of Ft. Myers purchased a 1 mile strip of Barefoot Beach that ended at Wiggins Pass.

EARLY RECOLLECTIONS FROM FRIENDS

MEMBER, HAROLD SAYLOR

w/supporting testimony from Leon Eisenbud,

Marianne Sanders, Ira Dash

May 9, 2005

Originally the Poor House, a restaurant on the beach S. of Doc's (before Doc's was built) had a 50' easement owned by Lee County next to it. Harold would park there to access Barefoot Beach. Originally, Barefoot Beach was a dense thicket of woods. There was a dirt/shell road leading all the way from Bonita Beach Rd. to Wiggins Pass with several foot paths leading to the beach. The last 5000' was the old road. There was also a road along the back bay. These 2 roads form the basis of the Saylor Trail today.

When Gulf American Land Corporation (GALC) owned the property they had a blue clubhouse about 300-400' from the gatehouse that had bathrooms, showers, a concession stand & chickees on the beach over picnic tables. A brick path led to the beach lined with palm trees. The clubhouse was for the use of Golden Gate Estates residents.

Harold & Alice Saylor first came to Bonita in 1971. They rented when they first came because Harold had one more year left to serve in the military to

make 20 years of service. Harold worked on Flight Simulators in Little Rock, Arkansas. They bought a lot behind Sunshine Plaza in 1972. Then they bought their house in Bonita Shores in July, 1973.

Lely Corporation, a Dutch company, bought the property from GALC in the early 70's (?) they built 3 spec houses on the Gulf which sat vacant for several years. Susan Owens bought one of the spec houses. Lely offered the Barefoot Beach property (from the 3rd parking lot south to Wiggins Pass) to the State in the 70's for \$9 million because they were tired of paying taxes on the property. The state turned down the offer because they felt it was too expensive. Lely Corp sent in Christian Devoucot from the Netherlands to get the development going. Bobbe Hickman bought a lot further down from the three spec houses. The lots were divided & sold before the state bought the property. 1.69 acres was owned by Ricky Stauffer. She asked \$1 million for her property. The state wouldn't buy it for that price in '72.

John Winfield bought all the Bayfront Garden lots (23) + 10 lots along Barefoot Blvd. in the late 70's & Leon Eisenbud bought one of the first lots from John in 1983 and later was instrumental in changing the name of the subdivision to Heron Cove.

In the late 80's Lely Dev. Corparation put up a gatehouse at Bonita Beach Rd. and Barefoot Blvd. The locals were incensed. Adding to the tension was one of the first gatekeepers, Bill Hamilton, a cantankerous gentlemen who would quiz people entering about where they were going and when were they leaving. He even took down their license plate numbers.

In 1991, with the gatehouse differences still unresolved, Lely began issuing passes for people going to the County Park & charging \$1/car...when 70 passes were issued (the capacity of parking at the park at that time) they refused entry to anyone else even though there were spaces available as people left. Lely established hours that the public could ingress and egress into the park. The gates didn't open to the public until 8 a.m. (the opening time at the park) and closed at sunset (the closing time at the park). Marge Ward, President of CABB, would bring in a carload of people before 8:00 a.m. to challenge the rule. Resentment continued to grow and litigation began.

About this time, the Friends of Barefoot Beach was formed (the first meeting was held on 3-26-91). Nearly all the Friends were from the new Lely

development and they were viewed with a great deal of suspicion by the locals. Even though the Friends tried to disassociate itself from the brouhaha regarding the gate, it took some years for that to happen. CABB invited Leon to speak at one of their meetings and, because they associated him with the gatehouse issue, an angry confrontation ensued.

Nan Klein (now Gerhardt) provided a lot of the impetus to organize the park. She was very helpful to the friends even though Leon says, “she was a pain at first”.

EARLY HISTORY OF THE FRIENDS OF BAREFOOT BEACH

Timeline

- 1988 Collier Co. purchased 3100' of land from the Lely Development Corporation where the county park is today
- 6-26-90 Barefoot Beach Preserve was opened to the public (@ 2 miles of beach) 35 acres of land county owned
- 1991 County paved 70 parking spaces in the preserve. Collier County Parks & Recreation Director, Cliff Crawford does not anticipate any fees to enter the park
- Gatehouse established by Lely Dev. Corp. – everyone is given a pass w/rules regarding entry into the park. Pass is collected before leaving. Locals are incensed...mistrust of Friends organization because of the gate.
- Negotiations under way by the county for a 50 yr. lease on 5000' of state owned land at the South end of the island adding @ more 1 mile of beach
- Goals of the County:
- develop nature trails
 - put in a canoe trail on the bay side
 - add restrooms
 - add picnic areas
 - add boardwalks out to the beach
 - put in an observation tower
- 3-26-91 8 friends met at Bobbe Hickman's house to begin the Friends 1st meeting of Friend's of Barefoot Beach at the Lely Barefoot Beach Clubhouse –dues \$10-had 13 members Bobbe Hickman, President Leon Eisenbud, Prog. Dir. Nan Klein, Park Ranger Supervisor; Steve Peffer, Ranger
- The 1st project of the Friends was to clear a trail in the park

Dick Dempsey headed the committee w/Ira & Udaya Dash, Carol Timbers, Marianne & Bob Sanders, Bill & Marilyn Neuder, & Jack McDonald aiding him

Goals of the Friends:

watch over the turtles nesting on the beach
keep the preserve free of litter
start nature walk program
help with plant & animal identification in the preserve
build osprey platforms
set up purple martin houses

- 3-30-91 The Bonita Banner reports the controversy regarding the gate rages on. The gate keeper was accused of turning people away before the lot was full. Home-owners complained that people were driving down private roads. (Lely Blvd. is a private road w/a public easement to the park)
- 4-2-91 Workshop w/Collier Co. Parks & Recreation on how to detect, mark & protect the nests of Loggerhead turtles (1990 est. 250 turtle nests, most lost to raccoons)
Volunteers began protecting nests from 11 p.m. to dawn
46 volunteers, working in pairs patrolled ½ mi of beach & installed screening on nests
- 8-1991 62 turtle nests recorded resulting in 4,793 hatchlings
- 4-16-91 First Education Program sponsored by the Friends
Sea Turtle Activities at Barefoot Beach Preserve
By Nan Klein, Collier Park Ranger Superintendent
7:00 p.m. at the Presbyterian Church
- 7-27-91 First plant identification walk sponsored by the Friends
- 9-1991 Warning by Friends of Lethal Yellow Palm disease
- Fall 62 turtle nests, 62 false crawls
- 11-19-91 2nd education program sponsored by Friends
7:30 p.m. Diane Pierce, wildlife artist on the Birds of Barefoot Beach
- 1-28-92 Lecture by Mark Westall on Ospreys - 120 Friends members
- 1992 County opens \$186,000 1400 sq.' bathhouse, pavilion & concession stand at the preserve (Vanderbilt Beach Construction of Naples, contractor)
County sets aside \$160,000 to remove exotics from the park

& restore dunes

- 1992-3 Harold Saylor was a ranger at the park
- 4-1992 Friends sponsor Jennifer Semro lecture on Dolphins
- Fall 71 turtle nests, 129 false crawls (200 Friends members)
- 10-28-92 Friends bid to run concession stand – 90% of net profits to go back into education & improvements to the park
- 11-1992 40' pole is erected by Friends w/the aid of a local builder w/a 3'x3' platform build by Bob Hickman for ospreys at Bayfront & Lely Blvd. (Ospreys were building nests on top of construction cranes. Within 1 week an Osprey pair occupied the platform.)
- 11-16-92 Friends sponsors lecture by Mark Westall on Alligators
- 1993-4 Harold Saylor was a ranger at the park
- 2-1-93 Diane Pierce gave a lecture on Butterflies of SW Fl
- 3-14-93 Friends lose bid to operate concession stand
- 3-17-93 Kris Thoenke, biologist at Rookery Bay, gave a lecture Florida Through my Eyes 280 Friends members
- 4-19-93 Steve Theberge gave a lecture on Manatees 375 Friends members
- 5-18-93 Friends were given permission to build a trail at the preserve
- 7-1-93 250 people have taken ranger guided walks
- Fall 64 turtle nests recorded, 75 false crawls
Leon Eisenbud becomes President of Friends
- 11-3-93 Support is given by the County for a Learning Center
- 11-15-93 Tsani Yonah gives a lecture entitled Yesterday & Today
Dues are \$12 for individuals & \$20 for families
390 members
- 12-92 to 3-93 More than 45,000 cars have passed by the guard gate into the preserve making it the busiest park in the Collier Co. system
- 12-13-93 Steve Theberge gives a lecture on Fish & Fishing
Friends donate a John Deere cart which attaches to an ATV to the County for use in the preserve
- 1-17-94 Gene Lemire gives a lecture on Mosquitoes
Walter Goodier starts a recycling of cans in the park
400 Friends members
Dick Dempsey begins extending the trail to Wiggins Pass
- 2-1-94 Dr. Joe McClure gives a lecture on Decoy Carving

- 3-17-94 \$100/plate dinner/dance held on St. Patrick's Day at Quail West to raise \$6,000 towards Learning Center
- 3-21-94 Harold Saylor lectures on Shells, Fossils & Artifacts
- 4-21-94 Nature trail is dedicated
- Fall, '94 Plaque is started for "major donors" (\$500 or more)
102 turtle nests, 97 false crawls
- 11-21-94 Dr. James Snyder gives a lecture on Fire
- 12-21-94 Ira Dash new Education Director
- Dec. '94 Numbered cement trail markers are placed along the trail identifying 27 different species of plants
Clearing of exotics continues, county takes over clearing
Nan Gerhardt requests a space for education in the park
Joe Boscaglia, Gary Franco & Bob Nash -- rangers
- 4-1-95 Ground breaking for 20' x 30' Learning Center in the Preserve
- 2-14-95 Valentine's dinner-dance fundraiser at Quail Creek
\$16,000 raised towards Learning Center by Feb.
- 5-31-95 1st pilings dropped off for Learning Center
Framing starts at the Learning Center – O.B. Osceola, O.B. Jr. & Kevin Goldie
- 9-16-95 Friends begin decking for Learning Center
Friends crew:
Udaya & Ira Dash
Richard LeBlanc
Jeff Moore
Bill & Marilyn Neuder
John Hagedorn
Jim Haywood
- Fall, '95 6202 turtle hatchlings John Pear, Park Ranger & Robin ?
6 lectures planned for the season at the Presbyterian Church
- 12-15-95 Richard Le Blanc installs the cabinet he crafted into the Learning Center
- 12-16-95 Dedication ceremony for Learning Center
- 1-6-96 First docent training session held at the Learning Center
- 1-20-96 Irene Lindquist of the Bonita Shell Club donates shell display
300 Friends members Andy Rennig, Ranger
- 3-13-96 4 display cases ordered from Gully's Discount Store
Fixtures of Ft. Myers

Early Friend's Donors

Major Donors (\$1,000 or more)

Lely Development Corporation
Mr. & Mrs. John Agnelli (not on plaque?)
Mr. & Mrs. Edward Oelschlaeger
SW Florida Community Association

Sponsors (\$500 - \$1,000)

Bonita Springs Rotary Club
Bonita Springs Shell Club
Steve Brinkman
Dr. Udayi & Dr. Ira Dash
Dr. & Mrs. Leon Eisenbud
Caroline A. Fleig ?
Hendricks Jewelry
Mr. & Mrs. William Maney
Bill & Marilyn Neuder
David & Susan Owens
Ed Ruff Realty
Dr. & Mrs. Gary Stevens
Mr. & Mrs. Herman Walker

Supporters (\$100 - \$500)

Mr. & Mrs. O.P. Adney
Mr. & Mrs. Nick Fontana
Dr. & Mrs. Robert Kaplan
Dr. & Mrs. Theodore Klopman
Mr. & Mrs. Pat Martens
Mr. & Mrs. Charles Marshall
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Owens Strategy Group
Mr. & Mrs. Leo Salvatori
Dr. James R. Snyder
Dr. & Mrs. Albert Sutton

Mr. & Mrs. A. White
Winfield Development Companies
Mr. Alan Zeilinger

Contributors (\$50 - \$100)

Mr. & Mrs. Erwin Danielson
Mr. & Mrs. Gary Golenberg
Mr. & Mrs. George Huml
Mr. & Mrs. Joseph Millimet
Mr. Jeff Moore
Mr. & Mrs. O.D. Schoedinger
Mr. & Mrs. Michael Volpe