

Lake Chapman North Narrative

The Marshes

Jack and Bonnie Marsh relocated to Lake Chapman in the late 1970's from the Carrollwood area. They moved particularly for the lake property with the aim to give their children something to do. Bonnie comments, "...we never had to look for our children; we always knew where they were. It was other people who had to look for theirs, so it was a wonderful experience for us..."

The lake served as the backdrop for the children's water-skiing, jet skiing, and fishing. The Marsh's house became the location for end-of-school, high school graduation and birthday parties. In fact Jack often commented, "What are we running, a day camp here?" The Marsh girls' interest in horses was facilitated by the move to the Lutz area. Part of the Marsh's five acres was used for raising their horses. Bonnie comments, "The lake is still a big part of our children's lives." And now a third generation of Marshes is hitting the lake as Jack and Bonnie's grandchildren are beginning to discover the lures of Lake Chapman.

Lake Chapman North

Lake Chapman is a 43-acre lake located in North Central



Lake Chapman looking northwest from the east shore

Hillsborough County in the Sweetwater Creek watershed. Chapman is a common name for lakes within the county and there are two lakes officially named for this early settling family. The Lake Chapman that the Marshes call home is sometimes referred to as Lake Chapman North as opposed to Lake

Chapman South located in the Brandon area. The horseshoe-shaped lake is located a short distance from Florida Avenue and just south of the Apex, the joining of Nebraska and Florida Avenues. The lake is situated in a slight depression and the residents on its shores experience little of the noise resulting from the increase in traffic that the widening of the highway has brought.

Residential housing surrounds the lake and is joined by a country club and golf course affiliated with the Avila residential development. One section on the northwest shore of the lake is protected as a wetland, but other than that, the land surrounding the lake has been developed to capacity.

In the middle 1970's, the lake was inundated by hydrilla, an exotic invasive aquatic plant. Bonnie comments, "It was so terrible, it looked like a green pasture out there. It had grown to the point that it was



The northwest shore of Lake Chapman is partially undeveloped because of protected wetlands

just laying on top of the water and it just looked like a continuation of our yard all the way across." The residents on Lake Chapman united to confront the challenge to the health of their lake and formed an incorporated lake organization to address the problem. The association conducted research through the Game and Freshwater Fish Association to explore possible treatments. After treating the lake with a chemical that rendered insufficient results, the association looked into white amora, a vegetation eating fish. They looked at other lakes, such as Bell Lake, whose residents had overstocked the vegetation-eating fish to the detriment of the delicate balance of the lake's ecosystem. The residents on Lake Chapman stocked less than the recommended number of fish per acre and the infestation problem was effectively addressed.

The Lake Chapman Association is no longer an active body, but should a challenge to the health of the lake re-emerge, Bonnie is confident the organization would swing back into action. She comments, "I find that when the need arises, then everyone rises to the need, but otherwise they're pretty loose about it."

After surviving the infestation of hydrilla in the 1970's the lake has rebounded and is a habitat for a considerable population of bird life that feasts on the mussels flourishing in the lake. What has declined in number is the population of fish sustained by the lake. Although fishermen still enjoy the water for sport, the

quantity of fish is less than when the Marshes relocated to Lake Chapman's shores. Bonnie comments:

"You don't see bass jumping. That used to be a regular occurrence, especially at about 4:00 in the afternoon, but you don't see that anymore...When we first moved out here, it was a fisherman's paradise. We used to feed all the bluegills...along our dock. I would give them everything that was stale. They were almost like an aquarium. They would see you come to the dock and they would come to the top. But all of those are gone...we used to have tons of turtles, they're gone..."

Although the number and diversity of aquatic wildlife exhibit a decline, there exists evidence that it is still around. Bonnie tells the following story:



East shore of Lake Chapman looking north

"We do still have a little 'gator. One of my little granddaughters, it's amazing how they take everything in stride, we were running down to the dock to feed the fish and I heard this loud plop. I said, 'Oh my goodness. What was that?' My little granddaughter leaned back and said, 'It was just a 'gator.'...Just a 'gator, we could have walked right up on the thing. It was right up by the dock, which is unusual. In all the years we have lived here, we have never had a 'gator come up on the land."

Development

The Cox family is one of the earliest families to settle on Lake Chapman's shores. They used to own much of the land surrounding the lake and cultivated it as orange groves. They plotted the remaining land around the lake, mostly on the eastern shore, in 50-100 foot-square lots.

The



An example of the diversity of architecture surrounding Lake Chapman

development of the built environment around Lake Chapman commenced early relative to the more recent late-1980's development boom, and has continued up until the present. Mr. Chapman, who the lake was named after, built his home in 1932, but the house and the groves were sacrificed to development in the 1970's.

The lake has experienced little turnover with respect to homeowners. Bonnie comments, "Most of the people lived here before we did...I think they all loved the lake and moved here for their love of water..."

Although the Cox's owned the majority of the land around the lake, the property that became the site for the Marsh's home had a different history, "This piece of property belonged to the Sunbelt Railroad and they sold it. It was given to them by the state, or they purchased it from the state, and then it became a frog farm..."

The lake in the past was home to a restaurant, "Sealey's", that many of the residents in Lutz are familiar with, if not from visiting it, then from the peacocks left over from its existence. Bonnie comments:

"Sealeys, and that is a name that has been in Tampa history forever, it was a restaurant on this side of the lake. He had taken three barracks from WW II and moved them from Drew Field, which is now Drew Park, out here and formed this restaurant. It was U-shaped and the people could look out on the lake... You had the restaurant and you had the ranch... It was way back off the lake and he lived next door... You went down about a block or a block and a half to just park. You didn't even see it from Florida Avenue. It was so popular that for New Years Eve, you made reservations on the Fourth of July... on the left hand side of his parking lot, or the east side, he had all these different animals there, different animals. He had a ton of peacocks, and we have three of them that just live here."

Eventually, Sealey's closed and was passed through different hands until it ended up as the site of Vince Naimoli's home, the owner of the Devil Rays. Mr. Naimoli's home is located in a country club development called Avila, located on the west shores of Lake Chapman. The development, which includes a golf course, began in 1980 and the Marshes feel that it was well-done development having little impact on the health of the lake.

The lake is presently home to



Entrance to the Avila community

approximately 40 houses, and turnover in ownership seldom occurs. The population on the lake has been on the rise in terms of age and the lake has settled into a good relationship with the human environment.

The Future

The lake has aged in many ways. The population has gotten older, the

development around its shores has increased, Avila has come along, Highway 41 has been widened and now carries more traffic to the area, but the lake has been able to adjust and survive increased human occupation. Bonnie comments, "The lake [unites the residents] and I say that because the majority of the people that live on the lake do not have children. They were older folks, quite a few of them were older folks that had lived here or retired here...but some of it was interaction with the children. But for the most part, it was the lake that drew everyone together."

A community still exists around Lake Chapman. The building of Avila did not significantly disrupt the balance nor did the disbanding of the Lake



Lake Chapman looking south and west from the east shore

Association. The lake serves to unite the neighbors and provides a common cause to ensure the health of the lake. Again, Bonnie comments, "We want the lake to be around and to be a resource for our grandchildren when they have grown and we are for doing anything we can to see that happens."