

Silver Lake Narrative

Hector and Martha Vila



Hector and Martha Vila, 18 year Silver lake residents and Lakewatch volunteers

Hector and Martha Vila moved onto the shores of Silver Lake 18 years ago. The lake had at one time been a part of the Carrollwood Country Club and when they went swimming in the early days, the Vilas could still find golf balls.

Since 1995 the Vilas have been active in improving the health of Silver Lake. They and other concerned residents of the lake have acted to organize others to address problems pertaining to vegetation and an influx of runoff from the many storm drains entering the lake. Hector muses, "When we first moved into this house...we wanted to know, because we have grandchildren, if the water was good for swimming, if the fish were good for eating..." At the time, an assessor assured them that Silver Lake was a healthy lake and their biggest problem was with a large duck population. The water quality of Silver Lake has declined over time and the quality of life associated with life on this lake has been affected as well.

Residents around the lake have organized to address the threats to their lake, their property value and to their quality of life. The Vilas are volunteers for Lakewatch data gathering to provide information to be applied in their endeavor to improve the health of the lake. Hector comments, "I'm concerned about lake health because...there is not much waterfront property left and we want to make sure this stays up to par...the lake is one of our selling points."

Silver Lake

Silver Lake is an 18-acre located in the Silver/Twin Lakes Area Watershed. The lake is bordered on three sides by residential development and on the north side by Waters Avenue. Silver lake is a deep lake, dropping into 24-foot holes and is twelve to twenty two feet on the average. The lake's highly urbanized location has had a major effect on the previously clear and sandy bottomed lake. Storm water drains



Photo: MSP

provide a steady influx of nutrients, trash, oil and gasoline directly into the lake's waters. Hector explains, "When we first came here you could still go to the lake and see white sand. [It was] very, very clear...I don't know exactly how far the drainage is coming from." Martha comments, "They told us at Lakewatch that it was...all the way back up to Sligh...I remember thinking, 'This is totally ridiculous. This is unbelievable!'"

Waters Avenue, 1998

The influx of runoff from the drains plays a part in the coating of the bottom of the lake with sediment and trash. While wading out into the water, Hector laments, "...you just keep sinking and sinking. I would say there must be three feet of this stuff." The added nutrient load in the lake compounded a vegetation problem in the early 1990's that was treated by the residents through the introduction of grass carp into the lake. Biological Research Associates recommended treating 25% of the lake with chemicals in addition to the carp. Residents were dismayed with the chemical's effect. Martha comments, "There's no border. The chemical does not know to stop at 25%." As a result, the lake lost the majority of its indigenous vegetation and it is only recently that it has begun to reappear.

Pollution increases combined with loss of vegetation have had a considerable impact on the wildlife in and around Silver Lake. Hector reminisces about the past, "It was like an aquarium. I would bring people out here and they just couldn't believe it. [We] had turtles with the bass and bluegill and other fish. It was just beautiful. In the last year it has just kind of disappeared." The fish loss has not been complete. A local fisherman still manages to pull in an occasional good-sized bass from the lake, but the residents realize it will take time before the water quality is stabilized, vegetation grows and a marked improvement can be seen.



Hector holding handfuls of the muck brought into the lake through stormwater drains

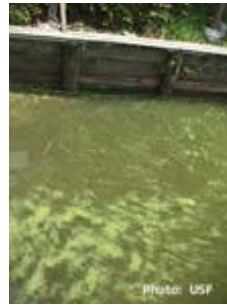
Development

Silver Lake is the setting for 34 homes spread out along its north, east and west shores. In the 1950's before residential development inundated the area, the lake was a part of the Carrollwood Country Club. Throughout the 1970's and the 1980's, the land surrounding the lake was developed for residential living. The Vila's home was the last to be built in 1980.

Over the years, easements have been granted to the County

for placement of stormwater drains, three of which drain into the lake. The County is seeking an easement to add a fourth from Waters Avenue, a proposal fought by residents. Hector asserts, "The biggest problem we have with the lake, I feel, is the drainage."

While the available property for the building of residential homes and commercial use no longer exists, the ongoing impact of continuing development on Silver Lake is still strong because of the existence of drains from the surrounding area.



Algae is often a problem in Silver Lake, 1998

The Future

The Vilas and other concerned residents on Silver Lake endeavor to adopt a proactive approach to addressing the present and continued health of their lake. Their concern is well founded as the quality of the water continues to be threatened. Martha explains, "According to Lakewatch...we need facts. If it takes ten years to gather the facts, that is ten more years that this stuff is coming into the lake." The residents are attempting to accumulate any information that will support their fight to protect their lake, property values and quality of life. Unfortunately, they feel much of the data they gather is of little use to them. Martha comments, "When we judge water quality, we judge it visually. We don't know if that really means much...Is it still good water if it has some green stuff in it or if it's a different color? We don't know enough about that, but we are interested enough to do our part."



Stormwater drain directly in front of the Vila's house is filled with algae-filled water that will make its way into Silver Lake, 1998.

Thus far they have contributed to a bank of information that indicates the decisions of the County regarding stormwater have had an impact on the health of the lake. Information is useful, but in this case only if it leads to positive action. It remains to be seen if the residents of Silver Lake and the County can come together to adopt workable solutions for the residents, the lake, and the users of the surrounding area. Meanwhile, Hector realizes, "It's a problem without ending if they continue what they're doing."