

The Head Spring

Friends of Blue Spring State Park Newsletter

June 2023

Meet a pair of CSO members – Katherine & Don Hallum

Katherine and Don Hallum started volunteering at Blue Spring State Park after they both retired. Volunteering at the park is easy since they live in nearby Deland. At the park, they've worked on a variety of projects like building benches or frames to hold interpretative signs along the boardwalk. The duo also works on maintaining the trails at the park – a job many people may not even be aware of! They ensure the 4.5-mile long Pine Isle Trail is clean from trash and trimmed so people can enjoy the hike to the St. Johns River. In addition, they also spend a lot of their time working on the lesser-known Starke Trail. Years ago, Hurricane Irma destroyed this trail, but Don and Katherine, with a lot of help from others reopened the trail and developed it into a beautiful and shady biking and hiking trail. Katherine and Don continue to maintain the trail, even cutting out roots to make it easier for bikes and all terrain wheelchairs to use it.



Some people may wonder why Katherine and Don do this hard, sweaty, and sometimes backbreaking work. The answer is simple, they love the outdoors and want to give back to the community. Plus, they like seeing people enjoy the natural beauty of the Starke and Pine Isle Trails. Please come out and enjoy the trails and you just might run into Katherine and Don.

Volunteer Awards Banquet

by Rich Hatton

Most of the readers of this newsletter have heard many times about the number of hours volunteers dedicate to Blue Spring State Park. Today you finally get to see some of the names and hours of those who have made a difference to the park. In April, park staff and the Friends of Blue Spring hosted an awards banquet honoring those volunteers. The banquet was held at the Stetson Aquatics Center overlooking Lake Beresford. The Friends of Blue Spring provided the food, making it a fun evening with lots of good conversation. Park manager Dustin Allen and Park Service Specialist Connor Wagner honored all the volunteers by handing out certificates and pins, thanking everyone for the hard work they did. Volunteers accumulated hundreds of hours over the past months or even years. Take a look at the list below and see if there are any familiar names, and if you get the chance, thank them for what they do.



Everyone enjoyed a meal at the Stetson Aquatic Center and each volunteer was awarded a pin to recognize their service accomplishments

December and April Honorees

- Tish Baum: Resident Host, 4000 Hours of Service
- Walt Baum: Resident Maintenance Host, 4000 Hours of Service
- Cynthia Kingma: Resident Host, Interpretation, 4000 Hours of Service
- Dennis Caldwell: Campground Host, 2000 Hours of Service Award
- Antoinette (Toni) Caldwell: Campground Host, 2000 Hours of Service Award
- Cora Berchem: Friends of Blue Spring, Save the Manatee Club, 1000 Hours of Service
- Donna Cobb: Friends of Blue Spring, 1000 Hours of Service
- Richard Hatton: Friends of Blue Spring, 1000 Hours of Service
- Karen Kellerman: Friends of Blue Spring President, 1000 Hours of Service Award
- Sally Andrews – Friends of Blue Spring, 500 Hours of Service Award
- Shari Dworkin-Smith – Park Volunteer, 500 Hours of Service Award
- Katherine Hallum: Friends of Blue Spring, trail maintenance, 500 Hours of Service
- Donald Hallum: Trail maintenance, 500 Hours of Service
- Chuck Honaker: Scrub Jay volunteer, Interpretation, 500 Hours of Service
- Trinket Mason: Friends of Blue Spring, Manatee Observer, 500 Hours of Service
- Gina McClain – Friends of Blue Spring, Save the Manatee Club, 500 Hours of Service Award
- Lois Posey – Park Volunteer, 500 Hours of Service Award
- Claudia Vanarsdall – Park Volunteer 500 Hours of Service Award
- Gary Seljan: Manatee Observer, 250 Hours of Service
- Kayla Diamond: Manatee Observer, Interpretation: 100 Hours of Service
- Hildy Kingma: Interpretation: 100 Hours of Service
- Nicole Verdecia: Manatee Observer, Interpretation: 100 Hours of Service
- Daniel Eilets: New Volunteer, Park maintenance: 50 Hours of Service
- Anna Elias – Park Volunteer, 50 Hour Award
- Paul Forestell: New volunteer, Friends of Blue Spring, Manatee Observer: 50 Hours of Service
- Sherri Hutto – Park Volunteer, 50 Hours of Service Award
- Nancy Jeffreys – Park Volunteer, 50 Hours of Service Award
- Morgan Quattrociocchi – Park Volunteer, 50 Hours of Service Award
- Laura Riddle – Park Volunteer, 50 Hours of Service Award
- Tatiana Rokicki – Park Volunteer, 50 Hours of Service Award
- Lauren Terrell: New Volunteer, Friends of Blue Spring, Resident Host: 50 Hours of Service

Junior Ranger Program

by Missy Gibbs & Cora Berchem

Calling all young park enthusiasts! Are you a Junior Ranger? Do you know about this special program? Next time you come to the park, ask for a [Junior Ranger Kit](#). You can take the Junior Ranger Pledge and receive a member ID card and Official Junior Ranger Badge. After you complete the six CORE activities from your kit, you can turn them in to a ranger and receive your Junior Ranger patch! As you complete other activities, you will earn stamps in your Junior Ranger Passport, and eventually earn your Junior Ranger pin. If you are unable to come to the park, there is also a [Virtual Junior Ranger](#) program.

On Friday June 23rd from 9-10 a.m., the park will sponsor a Junior Ranger event: "Search with Senses". If you are interested, please RSVP to [Connor Wagner](#), no later than Monday, June 19th. We will be meeting at the Roadside Pavilion in the lower day use area. The park is planning to hold an event every month, so keep an eye on the park's Facebook [page!](#)

You can join Junior Rangers Charlee the Manatee and Jake the Snake as they explore different areas of the park; they will post their adventures in the newsletter and on Facebook and Instagram!

Charlee Manati: Charlee recently obtained his Junior Ranger member ID card and he took the pledge to always educate others and only leave "flipper prints" instead of picking up any objects and removing them from the park.



Here Charlee can be seen checking out another animal that lives at the park – the gopher tortoise! Just like manatees, gopher tortoises are native to the southeastern United States and live in harmony with many other critters. While manatees share their habitat with alligators, turtles and fish, the gopher tortoise burrow can provide habitat and shelter for over 360 other animal species including snakes and small invertebrates! Ooh, look at the animal prints Charlee found in the soft mud at the park. Can you do a little research online or in the library to figure out what kind of animal made those tracks?



Jake the Snake: Jake found this funny looking pile of sand in the lawn in front of the Thursby House. Like a good Junior Ranger, Jake did a little research before getting too close, and it's a good thing he did, because that is a Fire Ant mound! If you disturb their nest, they will swarm out really fast and bite anything they can find. Have you been bitten by fire ants before? Jake the Snake has, and he says they really sting! Fire ants are native to South America, but they have become established here, which means they are here to stay and we need to learn how to live with them. Jake decided that although his snake friends told him to poke the mound to see what the ants would do, it wouldn't be very nice for the ants. Junior Rangers always try to avoid disturbing wildlife; it's much better to observe and learn from a distance.

Current Projects

by Rich Hatton

New Park Golf Carts. Over the past several years the park has mentioned that they were going to need new golf carts in order to accommodate the added staff and increased workload. Well, Christmas came early this year; thanks to the generosity of all of you, the Friends of Blue Spring State Park were able to purchase three golf carts for general use around the park. Thanks to everyone who helped with their donations!



Manatee Rescue & Release Ramp. Things are moving forward slowly, but we are very pleased to have raised over \$60,000 for the project. We had hoped to start the ramp construction this year, but there have been delays with the final stage of spring restoration. Stay tuned and we will keep you informed of the project's progress!

Commemorative Bricks

The most recent installation of commemorative bricks occurred in late April, and the next order of bricks should arrive in June. Our campaigns have been running about two months each and once we end a campaign we place the order. It can be anywhere from 2-4 weeks before we receive the bricks at the park, so from start to finish the entire process can take 8-10 weeks. [Order yours now!](#)

We could use some expert help to lay the bricks. If you have experience as a bricklayer or landscaper and could volunteer some time, [please email Park Service Specialist Connor Wagner.](#)



Bingo Night every Wednesday night at Riverwalk Pizzeria and Brew Pub in Orange City, FL. The pizzeria provides the space, a large menu, and a well-stocked bar. Come join the fun and maybe you will win a stuffed manatee or another fun prize! Hope to see you there next Wednesday at 6:30 p.m.

Would you like to help out at Bingo? We are always looking for volunteers to sell bingo cards and call numbers. Please click [here](#) to sign up to help out!

Upcoming Events

Remember that for all events in the park, general park admission fees still apply. Also, please plan your trip accordingly as the park can close for several hours due to capacity limits.

Guided Spring Walk - Thursday, June 15, 2023 from 10:30 a.m. – 11:30 a.m.

Come for a ranger-led guided tour on the boardwalk along the spring run and learn about the history, wildlife, ecology and management of Blue Spring State Park. Learn how Blue Spring achieves a balance between enjoying and protecting fragile spring ecosystems. Participants will meet by the restrooms at the lower parking lot.

Blue Spring JayWalk - Thursday, June 29, 2023 from 9:30 a.m. – 10:30 a.m.

During this ranger-led hiking tour we will trek through just about 0.25 miles of scrub to look for our iconic Florida Scrub Jay. The ranger will educate the visitors on Florida scrub habitat and the Florida Scrub Jay, including the bird's appearance, lifestyle, behavior, importance to the scrub, and threats. At the end of the tour, the ranger will tell visitors what they can do to help Florida Scrub Jays. Visitors should be prepared to bring water, sunscreen, bug spray, and closed-toe shoes. Most of the hike is on soft sand. Upon entering the park, please let the ranger at the entrance know you are there for the JayWalk, and you will be provided with additional directions. Binoculars are not required, but highly recommended. No pets are allowed on the tour for the safety of the birds.

Critter Corner

by Missy Gibbs

The Wild Turkey (*Meleagris gallopavo*) is a relatively common bird to see early in the morning at the park, and you are most likely to see them in a family group. You may even have turkeys in your own neighborhood from time to time. Turkeys have some of the best words associated with the male anatomy: the **wattle** which is that fleshy flap of tissue on their neck just below the beak, and the **snood** which hangs from the upper beak. What on earth are these for? Both structures have a lot of small blood vessels (capillaries) in them, so they are useful for getting rid of excess body heat (birds don't sweat, so this is important!). The wattle and snood are also used during courtship: a male can flood the wattle and snood with blood so they get larger and brighter. Male turkeys, of course, have another very dramatic display – they will puff up their body feathers and splay out their tail feathers like a fan to show females just how big and strong they are.



Upper left: Male turkey ©Petra DeBruine 2018

Upper right: Female turkey ©Conor Farrell 2019

Left: Close-up of male turkey wattle & snood
©Jeremiah Trimble 2017

For more pictures and information about turkeys, visit the Cornell Bird Lab's [All About Birds](#) website.