

Lake Howell



Adel and Richard Tennyson (USF)



Lake Howell in 2003 (USF)

The following narrative is based on an interview with longtime Lake Howell residents Richard and Adel Tennyson at their lakefront home on July 2, 2003. Richard first moved to the lake when he was only ten years old, and he and Adel have raised their two children there. This narrative offers their informed perspective on the past, present, and future of Lake Howell.

Personal History

The Tennysons live in a lakefront home on ten acres of land located off of Red Bug Lake Road. Richard's parents bought the house and moved the family to Lake Howell in 1964, when Richard was ten years old. In 1967, Richard's aunt and uncle built a house at the north end of the property, near the road. After Richard and Adel married, they bought this house in 1979. They lived in the house for twenty years and their two children, Theresa and Troy, were born there. In 1999, the Tennysons bought the lakefront home from Richard's mother, his father having passed away. They plan to live in this house at least until their teenage children graduate from college.

Richard has fond memories of growing up on Lake Howell. His family had a ski boat and after finishing their chores, Richard and his brother were allowed to water ski:

"We got to be pretty good. We'd slalom ski, barefoot ski, disk...Every day after high school we would meet here. I would have buddies and friends and we would just go skiing every day."

Richard and Adel met in high school, and she warmly remembers spending time at Lake Howell as a teenager. Although she lived only about five miles from Richard's house, her mother felt it was too far to drive her. So Adel would ride her bike:

"I'd ride it here but he [Richard] would give me a ride home. His mom and dad always had a Cadillac so it had a big enough trunk for me to put my bike in."

Richard draws parallels between his own experience growing up on the lake and his children's. Although they don't have a ski boat, the Tennyson's children have canoes, kayaks, and row boats. Much like when Richard was young, the house is a frequent hang-out for children and teenagers:

"It's a great place to grow up and that's why we bought the house...It was great for my brother and I to grow up. It's going to be great for them."



A snapshot of Lake Howell in 2003 (USF)



The water and fish near the shore (USF)

It already is. Kids love to come over here and hang out and do things. It's not all about video games and Internet."

Richard pointed out that his son Troy actually moved to the lakefront home at the same age that Richard did:

"I moved here when I was ten. My son, when we bought this place, he was ten. So it's kind of interesting to have my ten year old son moving in the same place."

Although there are many similarities between Richard's experiences on the lake as a boy and his children's, he joked that Troy and Theresa are responsible for far less yard work. Richard particularly remembers spending a lot of time cleaning Spanish moss out of cypress trees and clearing a beach area when they first moved to the lake:

"When we first moved here...the grass was up to your waist. And the lakefront here, it was all overgrown. Ten to twelve feet high, so you couldn't even see the lake. So for the longest time my mother and I and my brother, my dad...we would be out here just chopping away. Just chopping, chopping, chopping. Cleaning, cutting...putting it in piles and burning it. And eventually we had a nice beach."

History/Information

Lake Howell is a 404-acre lake located in the Howell Creek watershed of Seminole County. Although there have been some concerns about water quality in the past, Richard considers the lake to be relatively healthy. However, Richard has noticed that the bottom of the lake has become "mucky" about thirty or forty feet out from the shoreline.

Hyacinths have periodically posed a problem for lake residents. Richard related:

"The hyacinths on the beach here would go out 200 feet...My dad and I would just go out there and fill up our pick-up truck and go out to the Seminole County landfill and dump it....You'd put it in the johnboat and bring it to the shore. Just, by hand. All of this was by hand, with potato hooks."

Richard attributes the overgrowth of hyacinths in the lake to fishermen unknowingly bringing the vegetation in from other lakes. He recalled how, as kids, he and his brother would try to keep local fishermen from trespassing in the private access lake:

"When my brother and I were kids we would go up to the orange groves and we would dig ditches in the dirt roads where people would trespass on the orange groves to get in the lake to go fishing, drop drag lines. Back then in the '60s it was drag lines. We had milk bottles floating all over the lake with lines attached to them [from the fishermen]...So we would go in there and sabotage the roads...trying to get them out of there."



The stream leading into Lake Howell (USF)



A close-up of the stream (USF)



View of stream leading into Lake Howell taken from Red Bug Lake Road (USF)

As Richard remembers it, in the early 1990s the lake also experienced a problem with hydrilla. Overgrowths of vegetation are now controlled by having the lake sprayed regularly and also by introducing Russian carp into the lake. These treatments, which seem to have been effective, are funded by the Lake Howell Environmental Protection Agency and contributions by a number of the lakefront developments.

While the Tennysons have seen a decrease in the diversity of wildlife in the area over the years, Richard maintains, “There are all kinds of wildlife here.” As reported by Richard and Adel, the area supports leopard frogs, owls, and a few alligators. Regarding the decrease in wildlife in the area, Richard commented:

“There used to be alligator turtles in the creek here. And eels. There’s no more eels. Like I told you about the bullhead minnows, they’re gone. We used to have eels, they’re gone. You could go out in the creek here and clean and work and you’d pull up eels. And then there would be alligator turtles...Really huge massive turtles with the armored back and they would snap real hard...They’ve been gone probably fifteen years.”

Adel speculated that many of these changes occurred around the time Red Bug Lake Road was widened.

The Tennysons also remember a time when there was a population of bald eagles:

“We used to have bald eagles here. There used to be bald eagles living where Lakehurst [a nearby condominium complex] is. Well they [developers] chased the eagles away to make room for the 65 homes that are in Lakehurst now.”

Among the types of fish in Lake Howell are gar and the sterile Russian carp put in the lake to diminish overgrowths of vegetation. Having been in the lake 3-5 years, many of the carp are now over two feet long; they provide endless hours of entertainment for the Tennysons’ two dogs, who try to catch them. In terms of plant life, although Richard ended up cutting down the fifty foot tall palm trees that he estimates had been on the property approximately eighty years, there are still numerous cypress trees.

Development

The Tennysons have seen many changes in the area over the years. Although it is now located amidst considerable residential and commercial development, Richard recalls nearby Lyman High School being referred to as “the high school in the sticks,” even in the newspaper, when he was attending. Historically, land use was predominantly citrus and horses. Adel remembers when there were horse farms up and down Red Bug Lake Road instead of residential and commercial development. The previous owners of the Tennysons’ property raised Arabian horses, but the Tennysons board their horse elsewhere because the area has become too developed.



Some of the docks on Lake Howell (USF)

According to Richard, in the late 1960s or early 1970s the lake bottom was dredged to make the property next door to the Tennysons substantial enough for building. Where there are now condominiums, Richard remembers that the area “was all white sand over there.” The condominiums opened in the mid 1970s as the surrounding area began to grow both residentially and commercially. Adel recalls that Red Bug Lake Road was “a little two-lane road” when she and Richard were in high school. As a result of development, Red Bug Lake Road was widened to four lanes in the mid 1980s. Richard characterized the changes in Red Bug Lake Road as follows:

“You could get out here on the end of our driveway on Red Bug Road and you could literally wait 45 minutes before a car would come down. Nothing. Now, I leave for work and I’ll get out there at 6:30 in the morning. I’ll have to wait five, ten minutes before the traffic clears until I can pull out to go to work.”

When Richard moved to the lake as a child, there were only about twenty-five to thirty private residences on Lake Howell. That number has grown considerably, and there are now four apartment/condominium complexes on the lake.

The Future

Richard and Adel are optimistic about the future of Lake Howell. The only potential change Richard could foresee would be the lake becoming a public access lake. Currently lake access is limited to lake residents, but there are some benefits to establishing the lake as public access. Richard explained:

“I’ve been told that...if there is public access that then maybe the government will help keep the lake clean and do what they can with their resources. Mainly money and equipment to clean the lake...I think the future looks good. Even if there is public access I still think it would be a good thing.”

Written By: Ashley Spalding