

Mirror Lake



Jean Mueller (USF)

The following narrative presents the story of Mirror Lake as seen by long term resident Sarah Jean Mueller. The narrative was developed from an interview with Jean in her home on the morning of July 30, 2003. In it, she shares some history, development trends, and personal connections to the lake.

Personal History

Sarah Jean Mueller has been living on the northwest corner of Mirror Lake since 1965. Jean and her husband Grant, now deceased, moved to the lake from nearby, although both are originally from Ohio. Grant was looking to live near water and the couple agreed their three bedroom, one bath was too small for their family of six. The couple had four children – three boys and one girl ages six months to ten years - when they moved into the four bedroom, two bath home on Mirror Lake.

On Mirror Lake the family started Lakeview Christian Church, which started out small in their home, but has now expanded to a structure on State Road 441 that now serves 1400 worshippers every Sunday. About the early days with the church, Jean reflects:

“We started Lakeview Christian Church here in our home. And we’d have people come for dinner and if they had kids and most of them did... they would ski on the lake. They would swim in the lake. We had slip and slides across the yard with the sprinkler systems on. The lake played a tremendous role [in family and church life].”

To the original home, the Muellers added a family room and porch extending their house on Mirror Lake closer to the water. Jean says her children spent countless hours out on the lake swimming, boating, fishing, and skiing. She shared:

“They skied all the time. I would get so aggravated because I would say we’re going to have supper at 6 o’clock and they’d go out skiing on the other end and wouldn’t hear the dinner bell or my yelling because they were just having too much fun.”

Now all grown, Jean’s three sons are dispersed throughout Florida, while her only daughter lives in Ohio. The family still gathers at the lake for holidays and some of Jean’s nine grandchildren continue to visit regularly. Nearing retirement from the real estate business, Jean now enjoys traveling, and spending time with friends and family. She’s been all over Europe, to Alaska, Hawaii, Australia, Japan, China, Thailand, and Taiwan.



View of Mirror Lake in 2003 (USF)



Jean and Grant Mueller with their neighbor near Mirror Lake (Mueller)



Older view of the lake's shoreline (Mueller)



High water levels in Mirror Lake (Mueller)

History/Information

Mirror Lake is a 28-acre lake in the Little Wekiva watershed of Seminole County near Apopka, FL. Mirror Lake is a long oddly shaped lake running from the south to the north. State Road 436 borders Mirror Lake's northern end, which shows much less marsh. According to Jean, Mirror Lake is a manmade lake, but she is unsure of when the water body was created.

The name Mirror Lake is likely to have been from a literal description of the lake. Although not as reflective as it once was, Jean explained about the name of the lake:

"It's because of the reflection. Look at the reflection of those trees; it's like a mirror. Quite literally, Mirror Lake. And in the mornings, every morning until all that crappy stuff started coming up to the top, you could just see the reflection of all the trees."

Both water quality and quantity have fluctuated in the near 38 years Jean has lived on Mirror Lake. In terms of water quality, Jean has noticed a definite deterioration. She reported:

"It [quality of the water] was great...you know you just walk out the back door and go swimming. It was a beautiful lake to swim in, but I wouldn't put my feet in there now."

According to water level data, the all time ten-year low of Mirror Lake was in 2000 and 2001 (www.seminole.wateratlas.org). Jean confirms this and says that water levels have been brought back up to normal levels since 2002. This downward spike was most likely related to the statewide drought that was occurring in 2000 and 2001. Jean also attributes low water levels to natural springs being clogged up and the expansion of nearby State Road 436, which lessened road run off into the lake. Jean explained:

"The biggest thing I'm disappointed in is the fluctuation of it now, you know, which we didn't have before. We moved here in '65 and for the first 20 years it never fluctuated. The springs are gone now. We used to swim right here in the front of the middle of our property and you'd feel the cold water bubbling up. And it'd be oh so cold. And when it was summer time, so hot and we didn't have air conditioning back then, it felt pretty good. Everybody would want to hunt to where the spring was. But the springs are gone."

Wildlife supported by Mirror Lake is abundant and includes fowl such as egrets, cranes, herons, ducks, and hawks. There are also alligators and the occasional snake. Jean related:

"We've got more wildlife now than we've ever had. It's unbelievable. There are cranes. You can take the boat and go down on the other end where that little island is. There are always cranes and blue herons... always there. And they're on my dock all the time. Those blue herons and the cranes are huge. Really we have more now, than we had back then and that's unusual."



Picture taken during the construction of nearby apartments in the mid-1980s (Mueller)



Small retention pond near Mirror Lake (USF)

Large vegetation around the lake includes cypress and pine trees. Currently, the lake is overgrown with torpedo grass, hydrilla and other water vegetation. In 1985, Mirror Lake was granted a permit to stock the lake with 700 grass carp that would eat the overgrowth. According to Jean, this did the trick. However, the Homeowner's Association is currently in the process of having to do this again.

Development

Early development history of Mirror Lake can be said to have started with the creation of the lake. Now defunct orange groves once thrived nearby and the farmers dug out marshy land to create a watering hole for their groves – thus the birth of Mirror Lake. Jean explained:

“All of that was orange grove, but it was never active since we’ve lived here. And I was told this is a man-made lake. Seemingly, they were going to use it to irrigate the orange groves. That’s what they dug it for.”

The lake and surrounding area have changed greatly as a result of development. Jean remembers State Road 436, now with six lanes, as a dirt road at least from the Orange Seminole County line all the way to Apopka.

When the Muellers first moved to Mirror Lake, there were fewer homes and more vacant land than there are now. Although Jean does not know exactly how many homes there used to be on the lake, there are now roughly 23, with no vacant land left on which to build. In 1984, a major apartment complex called Post Properties was built on the eastern side of the lake, where orange groves once thrived. On the lake sits the main office and gazebo of the apartment complex. However, according to Jean, the residents have had little impact on the lake because they do not enjoy direct lake access for boats.

In the works right now regarding development at Mirror Lake are plans for commercial development along State Road 436. According to Jean, a group called Florida Adventist Conference bought all of the homes along State Road 436 near Mirror Lake on a road called Sherrie Lane. As a real estate agent, Jean was involved in the selling of three of the houses. It took 20 years for Florida Adventist Conference to buy all of the property they needed. Jean related:

“They ended up buying all of the property over the years and I was the realtor involved in three of them knowing one day it was going to happen, but I really didn’t think it was going to happen in my lifetime. It didn’t happen in my husband’s lifetime because he died 15 years ago. But it will soon be commercially developed. The Fire Station is going to be on this end and a filling station on the other end. Then a bank and a there is one other parcel that they’re going to sell.”



*View of retention pond and lake in 2003
(USF)*

The Future

The future of Mirror Lake is difficult to predict. Being so close to State Road 436, the soon to be commercial strip running along its northern end might have a negative impact as commercial pushes out residential. However, what most concerns Jean is low water levels. As she expressed:

“If they don’t do something, it’s going to die. It’s going to die. It’ll be just like the one in Apopka, where all the water is gone.”

The recent heavy and regular rains have brought water levels back up, but factors that contribute to bringing the water back down remain in Jean’s mind. They are increased development, defunct springs, and water diversion from State Road 436. Positive hope for a healthy future for Mirror Lake is the Mirror Lake Homeowner’s Association, which came into place shortly after Jean first moved there. Part of the organization’s mission includes monitoring the lake and taking corrective action when necessary. This organization and a dedicated citizenry give hope to an uncertain future for the lake.

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