

Lake Brantley Narrative



Lake Brantley (Source:USF)

Neighbors Rita Deschambeau and Nancy Peycke are long-time residents of Lake Brantley. In an interview with the two women, on which this narrative is based, Rita and Nancy provided a number of interesting stories about the history of the lake and the lake area. The interview was held on August 25, 2001 at Rita's home on Lake Brantley.

Personal History

According to Rita, Lake Brantley is crescent shaped, and she and Nancy reside on the northern “leg” of the crescent. Nancy has lived across the street from Lake Brantley since 1959—although from 1964 through 1973, she and her husband lived on military bases overseas and in the United States and rented out their house near Lake Brantley. Nancy and her husband are both from the urban north and wanted to move somewhere “way out,” away from residential and commercial development. The area surrounding Lake Brantley was such a place for about a decade, before residential and commercial development really began to have an impact on the community.

When Nancy and her husband moved to the lake, they had very little money. Her husband was in the military and had received “only one stripe at the time.” Because they couldn’t afford a lot right on the lake, they bought one across the street. Nancy told the following story about her husband catching fish to help make ends meet when they first moved to Lake Brantley:

“What happened is that at the end of the month, we didn’t have that much money left because you would get paid once a month. He [Nancy’s husband] could go down [to the lake] any day, throw a line in, and catch bass for dinner.”

Rita and her late husband moved to the lake in 1973. They had always wanted to live on water, and although the house still required a number of renovations when they moved in, Rita loved its lakeside location.

History/Information

Lake Brantley is a 285-acre lake located in the Big Wekiva watershed. Rita and Nancy described the lake as spring-fed. As is apparent from an aerial photograph of the lake, it is completely surrounded by dense residential and commercial development.



Rita's home on Lake Brantley (Source:USF)



Water Skiing on Lake Brantley (Source: Nancy Peycke)

Rita has heard that much of the area surrounding the lake was formerly a turpentine farm; she has a few pine trees in her yard that may be remaining from this farm. According to Nancy, some of the land near the lake was previously owned by a railroad, most likely the South Florida Railroad that connected Sanford and the towns of Lake Mary, Longwood, and Altamonte Springs with Jacksonville (www.visitseminole.com/travel/press_releases/pdf/PastAndPresentMeetInSeminoleCounty.pdf). Nancy remembers that when she and her husband bought their lot, there were a number of orange groves in the area:

“...there were many, many orange groves, gorgeous, gorgeous orange groves. Beautiful, beautiful orange groves, thriving, I don’t know how many acres.”

These groves have gradually been replaced by residential and commercial development.

Like most lakes in Florida, Lake Brantley was considerably affected by the extreme drought experienced in the summer of 2001. Rita described the resulting changes in the lake’s water level in the following story:

“Here in front of my place, there’s a drop off to deeper waters. Before the drought, I would have to get up to my chest in the water before I would reach the drop-off point. Until recently, before we got some rain, the water was only up to my shins when I was at the drop-off point. That’s how low the water got with the drought.”

Fortunately, in August 2001, Rita reported that her shoreline had already come up several feet.

As Rita sees it, although various water quality issues have arisen over the years overall, the quality of Lake Brantley’s water has been consistently good. Rita told an amusing story about the lake’s water quality:

“There’s an old man that lived there [two doors away] and he used to discharge...the water from his washing machine out to the lake...And it used to make suds along the shore and didn’t bother me any...but somebody complained about it to the health department and so the health department came out and tested the water. And they said, ‘This is cleaner than what they’re drinking in Orlando.’”

There was recently some concern about water pollution related to run-off from two nearby dirt roads—Terrace Boulevard and South Terrace Boulevard—that had been deteriorating. Instead of paving the roads, the road department would dump a load of shell to fill holes in the road each time a resident complained. After a while, there was so much build-up of shell that it was running into the lake when it rained. Rita had finally had enough:



Nancy's husband with his catch from Lake Brantley, 1963 (Source: Nancy Peycke)

“One time I got so sick and tired of hearing this truck come by and I would call up and complain about it and it never did any good. So the truck came by, dumped a whole load of this dirt down the street here...and I went out there and I sat on the pile of dirt and wouldn't let the grater come and do it.”

Finally the road was paved, and swales were dug on either side of the road to help eliminate the run-off. The paving of the road also solved Rita's problem with flooding in her yard and garage.

According to Rita, at one point in the 1980s hydrilla in the lake was a serious problem:

“When we first moved here...we had a motor boat...and when we would go into the lake, the hydrilla was so bad, it was...all the way up to the top of the water. And we would ride so far and all of a sudden he'd [Rita's late husband] have to back up and turn the motor in reverse to get the hydrilla off the propellers.”

Lake Brantley's civic association met and wrote a document they called “A Plan to Save Our Great Lake.” They circulated the plan around the entire lake, to every subdivision on the lake, and every household donated money to buy a special kind of grass carp that eats hydrilla and then will not reproduce. Unfortunately, the carp were too effective at eliminating vegetation; they ate so much vegetation that other fish, like bass and perch, had no vegetation in which to lay their eggs and provide protection for their young offspring. Rita related the following end to the grass carp story:

“In time they finally died, but I heard that there were some HUGE ones in there. They were huge because they ate well.”

For this reason there was a shortage of fish in the lake until fairly recently.

In terms of other wildlife in the area, Rita and Nancy have seen numerous raccoons, opossums, and an occasional fox. Additionally, Nancy reports having seen a Florida panther; when the game warden came to identify the paw prints, he told Nancy that the panther probably weighed 300 pounds. There have been a number of very large alligators as well. Nancy also remembers seeing quail and partridge when she first moved to the lake, although she hasn't seen any in years.

Development



Lake Brantley residents picnic near the lake (Source: Nancy Peycke)

When Nancy first moved to Lake Brantley in 1959, the area was still very rural:

“We almost didn’t buy because it was maybe TOO far out. Not knowing that everything was going to come to us...To grocery shop when I moved out here I had to go on 436 and 17/92 which is...ten miles away maybe.”

Residential and commercial development began in the 1970s and has been constant ever since. According to Nancy, the 1980s were especially “booming” on the other side of the lake. Winn Dixie and K-Mart were two of the first stores to be built in the area.

As part of the residential development, canals were dredged for homes to be built on the other side of the lake. As Nancy sees it, dredging canals enables a developer to advertise lots as waterfront, even though they are not directly on the water. However, many of the canals remain dry for much of the year. The family that lives across from Nancy has not been able to use their boat for two summers.

In many ways, Rita and Nancy are glad for the convenience brought by commercial development, but there are certain development projects that they feel would threaten their lifestyles. For example, the lake’s civic association successfully fought against a daycare center that was to be built at the corner of West Brantley Road and Sand Lake Road, near where Rita and Nancy live. The nursery would have caused serious traffic problems for residents in the area.

The Future

Rita and Nancy have spent much of their lives living on Lake Brantley and have interesting stories to tell about their experiences. Even their stories about potential water pollution and vegetation problems have positive endings because, so far, neighbors have been able to successfully organize around issues affecting the lake. Based on these successes, Rita and Nancy look forward to the continued health of their lake. Rita is especially optimistic about the future of the lake. The civic association meets frequently to decide what actions need to be taken to protect the lake, and samples of lake water taken regularly for testing have shown that water quality remains high.

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