

Island Lake



View of Island Lake from Fierros home (USF)

The following narrative was derived from an interview with Island Lake resident Sharon Fierro in her beautiful home on February 12, 2002. In it, she recalls building her home, raising her family, and enjoying the peacefulness on the shores of Island Lake. Sharon Fierro is currently Island Lake's University of Florida LAKEWATCH volunteer and is also responsible for monitoring lake levels for Seminole County.

Personal History



Sharon and her two children fishing in the canal that runs in front of Island Lake (Fierro)

Sharon and Tim Fierro have lived on the shoreline of Island Lake for over fifteen years. During that time, the family has shared a great deal of happy memories. Sharon and Tim's children grew up on the lake or marsh as Sharon refers to it and over the years the Fierros have been host to many visitors. In the late 1980s, the couple was looking for waterfront property on which to settle and raise their two children. In the local newspaper, they found a one and a half acre piece of property advertised as lakefront for sale central Florida area. Sharon reflected:

"When we looked in the paper it was classified as lakefront, which is kind of a joke. It's not truly lakefront. There was more of a canal there than there is now because it has dried up over the years. However, we like the fact that you felt like you were out in the country. There is this huge area behind our home that would never be built on and yet, we're very close to things."

Not long after the move, Sharon's husband built an office nearby. Over years, the family has enjoyed this unique aspect of living so near marshland. Sharon said that is has provided them with a distinct opportunity to experience the nature of Florida and the children loved it. She reported: "I'm a native Floridian. My husband has lived here since he was four and feels like he is a Floridian. And we enjoy the natural part of the state." About the kids' experience with Island Lake, particularly her son, she said:

"He [her son] grew up fishing out there. In the dry months they would take four wheelers out there and hunt nature. When the water was up, they would take the johnboat out to see what they could find and explore. So, they've had a lot of fun over the years out there."

History/Information



View of Island Lake from Sharon's home (Fierro)

Island Lake is a 44-acre lake in the Yankee Lake Watershed of Seminole County. Sharon describes Island Lake as more of a wetland area than a lake by traditional standards. There is at least one small island within the marsh, which is perhaps the reason it is called Island Lake. Over the years that the Fierros have observed the lake, the water fluctuations have been extreme. At certain points in time there was enough water to support bass and other small fish, while at other times the lake would dry up completely. Sharon reported: "It's dried up, fills back, dries up, fills back up... It is constantly up and down." As to why Island Lake fluctuates so drastically, Sharon explained:

"I think some of the impact has been the weather. We have tremendous dry spells versus tremendous rainy spells. Hurricanes and things, we've seen it up over the bank. When we first moved here, we were told that when the water level got to a certain height on Island Lake it popped underneath a drainage system and went over to another retention area that was on the other side of 434. But they have since built in that area. So, where do we drain off to now? I do not know."

In terms of wildlife supported by Island Lake, the Fierros have "seen all kinds." These include snakes, baby alligators, a silver tail fox, playful otters, and an array of fowl such as blue heron, sandhill cranes, mallard ducks, peacocks, and egrets, to name the more prominent ones. One time, Sharon spotted a bobcat:

"One day I looked and I couldn't believe it. I called everybody because he was walking along at the top of the bank. Then you'd see him go down like he was getting water and then he would come back up and he did that all the way along the property line. It was real exciting to me because I know you don't see those as much as you do some of the other animals."

Although the bobcat has not been spotted since, Sharon reported that the majority of wildlife supported by Island Lake has remained consistent.

Development

About development, Sharon has a great deal to share. This is most likely due to the fact that the Fierro family owns a commercial construction firm, and Sharon's husband is a general contractor who has worked in the central Florida area for over 20 years now. Sharon pinpoints the start of development in the area at roughly 35 years ago. She remembers going to high school nearby in the 1970's and seeing sporadic building. The area was very different in those days than it is now. Sharon reflected:

"When you got off of Interstate 4 out by 436, the only thing was a bank...one bank. There were no red lights. There was nothing else besides orange groves on each side, except an elementary school. Altamonte Elementary right off to the left, but there was nothing but orange groves"



View of Island Lake from Sharon's home (USF)

and there were no red lights between I-4 until you got to Maitland Avenue. There was no development in Altamonte Springs; it was just this little community that had a sporadic number of houses. There was nothing up here, a gas station, a bank...there was nothing.”

Sharon attributes the boom in growth to Disney, which officially opened in the early 1970s. Today the shoreline of Island Lake that runs directly opposite that on which the Fierros live runs along State Road 434, where there is mostly commercial development. Although from Sharon's house all you see are pine trees. Along another side of Island Lake are industrial parks, but those are also hidden from view by trees. Sharon said there are a few houses on the side opposite the industrial parks, but not many. So in sum, two shores of the lake are residential, one is industrial, and the last is commercial.

The Future

According to Sharon, the future of Island Lake is sound. She believes its marsh-like characteristic might prevent future mass development mostly because of flooding concerns. Although, there is no formal organization with the lake as its main agenda, Sharon says, “People have just taken interest.” Often, if there are issues negatively impacting the lake, the Fierros work with their next door neighbors to address them. There is also a former County Commissioner who lives on the lake about which Sharon says:

“He patrols the area pretty regularly. No body gets anything by Mr. Drummond and it's kind of been good. He knows the laws of the County and knows what the direction of the County was. Talk about someone who has lived here a whole long time on this lake. He was here several years before we moved in and takes a great heart for the interest of this lake, this community, and this County. Luckily, we haven't had to worry too much in terms of zoning or issues that might do destruction or damage. If anyone did bring out a bulldozer or do anything that might damage the ecosystem, Mr. Drummond would pick up the phone. He would. So, we've just left it up to him. He's done such a great job.”

With such concerted action, it seems the future of Island Lake is in good hands and will continue to provide a home for wildlife and a place of serenity for humans. Soon, the Fierros plan to retire to the west coast of Florida. But Sharon wonders:

“It'll be interesting to see who takes over after we leave, but it's been fun and we have never regretted the vicinity and moving here, never.”

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