

Lake Searcy



Chris Cass on day of interview (USF)

The following narrative was derived from an interview with Lake Searcy residents Chris and Gina Cass in their home on the afternoon of January 22, 2002. Having lived on the lake for over 25 years, the Cass family has accumulated many stories about Lake Searcy, a number of which they share below.

Personal History

Gina and Chris Cass have lived on Lake Searcy for more than 25 years. Both of them moved to central Florida when they were quite young. Gina was born in Austria, but is of Polish descent. Her family moved to Florida when Gina was one year old and she has lived in the vicinity ever since. Chris is originally from Texas, but also moved to Florida at an early age. He grew up on Lake Triplet, which is not far from Lake Searcy. He explained:

"I've been around water all of my life... it's in my blood. You know, if I don't get out on the water every so often, I kind of have to go out and get my fix."

Chris' love of the water is one of the main reasons the couple purchased the land on Lake Searcy 27 years ago. Essentially, they had their choice of available lots since they were one of the first to buy there. The lot they decided upon was large and backed up against the lake, but not until it went through 256 feet of marsh-like land, providing the family with total privacy, which was very attractive to them. About their privacy, Chris shared:

"I guess because there is a greenbelt that goes all the way around the lake, there is no real boat traffic or activity on the lake. The only boaters that you have out there are the Searcys and they're typically out there in a canoe or a rowboat and that's about it. So, I think it does create a haven."

Over the years, that is just what Gina and Chris Cass have made of it, a haven. They have enjoyed raising their daughter at the lake and said the place they live is ideal due to its close vicinity to the greater Orlando area and the solitude and peacefulness the greenbelt provides.



Lake Searcy with view of Mr. Searcy's docks (USF)

History/Information



Lake Searcy (USF)



Lake Searcy/greenbelt to the right (USF)

Lake Searcy is an 11-acre lake located in the Soldiers Creek Watershed of Seminole County within the city of Longwood. According to Chris and Gina, the lake is named after a family that has owned much of the land surrounding the water body – The Searcys. Charles Searcy and his son still live on the lake across from Chris and Gina Cass. (For more about the Searcy family, see the second narrative provided for this lake.)

An aerial view of Lake Searcy shows this water body's uniqueness. Around its entire perimeter is what the Casses call a greenbelt. In terms of wildlife supported by Lake Searcy, Chris and Gina reported an abundance. Within the lake itself, Chris said there have been "some nice fish." Chris and Gina agreed that a great deal of wildlife find homes on and around Lake Searcy due to the undisturbed greenbelt. Over the years, the couple has spotted raccoons, opossums, armadillos, an occasional fox, alligators, turtles, osprey, squirrels, owls, and "lots of birds" in general. Uniquely, there was once a flock of green parrots as Chris reported:

"Sometime in the 1980s we had a flock of parrots. I say flock because we had a dozen or more green parrots and they were around for close to a year. This kind of started around this time of year, spring, and then once it started getting cold, it drove them south or killed them. I don't know what happened because we've never seen them since. But that was kind of unusual."

According to Chris and Gina, the fact that so much wildlife thrives in their backyard can be attributed to the greenbelt that surrounds Lake Searcy. Chris also credits the overall good health of the lake to this unique feature, considering the massive growth and development that has occurred in the vicinity.

Development

According to Chris, traditional use of the land surrounding Lake Searcy was primarily orange groves, which is why the area is called Longwood Groves. However, before that it was called Lake Searcy Shores for the Searcy family, who has owned most of the land as far back as Chris can remember. When some of the Searcy land was sold to a man by the name of George Nader, Nader changed the name to Longwood Groves. Chris shared:

"When you look at the plot maps of Seminole County, this area was originally plotted out as Lake Searcy Shores obviously because Mr. Searcy owned all the property."

Gina remembered Longwood in its early days during the 1960s when it was "undeveloped" and she was able to go horseback riding with friends along the dirt roads that ran through the orange groves. She said Longwood was a "very sleepy town." Chris said that all he remembers about the land at that time is that it was used for farming and growing citrus. The couple agrees that an incredible amount of change has happened since then, mostly due to development.



View of greenbelt from Chris' backyard (USF)

Chris pinpointed the start of development around Lake Searcy in the early 1970s. He says their house was the first built on his street and was probably about the 30th to go up in the whole development, which now houses roughly 200 homes. However, hardly any of the homes have access to the lake. In fact, no one has direct access due to the greenbelt. Besides the Cass family and their neighbor, Chris said about the rest of the lakeshore:

"There are only two homes. In fact when I was out there this morning looking at the dock. There are two distinct docks on the other side of the lake and I believe those actually belong to Mr. Searcy."

For the most part, the lakeshore is undeveloped and it seems that this is the way Mr. Searcy would like it to stay. The few families that do live on the lakeshore view the water as belonging to Mr. Searcy. Chris said about this understanding:

"He owns the lake and we've always taken it upon ourselves to ask permission from him to use his lake and he's always been very gracious and allowed people to do that."

The Future

In terms of the future of Lake Searcy, Gina and Chris have slight concerns about the potential of continued development increasing the amount of road runoff that might negatively impact water quality of Lake Searcy. However, again, the greenbelt serves as a buffer. Chris said that this swamp area acts as a filter of sorts that cleans road run off and storm water before it enters the lake. Due to this, Chris shared:

"I think it [Lake Searcy] is going to stay pretty much like it is. And I think it is going to continue to be a nice little wildlife habitat, which the area is definitely lacking...Here, you have plenty of areas for them to make nests and burrows."

A second aspect of Lake Searcy that helps guarantee it a positive future is the fact that there is no public access to the lake. Only the few families who own property on the lake have access to it. Essentially, as Chris sees it, the lake belongs to Mr. Searcy and the Cass family believes it is Mr. Searcy's wish to leave the lake and its adjoining greenbelt undisturbed.

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