

PEAR PEARLS

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Our Heritage

Originally known as the "Leesburg Field Laboratory," the Central Florida Research and Education Center (CFREC) was established in **1929** by the Florida legislature. The primary mission of the center was to conduct research on diseases and insect problems of watermelon. In **1933**, funding was appropriated to add disease research to the center.

The CFREC – Leesburg has been the primary site for watermelon and grape research in Florida and perhaps the most significant research site for these crops in the entire Southeastern U.S.

In **1958**, the center relocated to its present site. These 263 acres is the location where very important varieties of watermelons and grapes were bred and commercialized.

Watermelon varieties with the suffix 'lee', such as Jubilee, Dixielee, and Sugarlee were developed here, grown worldwide, and are the parental base for most other watermelons produced.

"Florida Hybrid Bunch Grapes" are a unique race of grapes developed at the center, and combine fruit quality with resistance to "pierce's disease." This strain is used to produce the best quality wine made in the state.

The historical center of development for these two crops exists today much as it did in the beginning. Watermelon and grape breeding activities continue in **1998**. Note: This activity ended in 2000.

From **1958** until **2000** the University of Florida Institute of Food and Agricultural Sciences (IFAS) was the prime watermelon and grape research group at this site. In **1996**, IFAS consolidated their research centers, moving staff to Apopka. A valuable parcel of land – 263 acres was now available.

In affiliation with the Lake Soil and Water Conservation District, interested citizens met to consider obtaining this environmentally sensitive land as a community resource for the citizens of Lake County. The result was the forming of a Florida non-profit corporation – The Palatlahaha Environmental Reserve Association (PEAR).

Pear developed a conceptual plan to restore the wetlands areas with native plants, create a habitat for endangered bird species, establish open green space, and restore the woodlands. Wonderful plans, but no money. That's where Lake County came in.

In **2001** IFAS released the land. The Lake County Board of County Commissioners signed a 50 – year lease agreement with the Florida Dept. of Environmental Protection, Bureau of Public Lands. The real development of Pear Park began – Lake County's first Regional Park.

In **2004** an additional 50 acres of highway frontage was added to Pear Park. This was a complex matter involving a grant from Florida's Trust for Public Lands.

Pear volunteers conducted several plantings of trees.

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Barb's Beauties Sale – Wednesday, April 7, 2021 – 9 am til Noon.

To be held and sponsored by Pear Association at the Nature Center Building – University Avenue entrance.

Thanks to the generosity of Barb Grigg and her family, we were able to rescue a small, but nice, selection of native plants from her home in Sorrento. There will also be some of Barb's collectible vintage items available for donation, including grey enamelware, old glass bottles, and other neat items. All proceeds will go to Pear Association to support volunteer activities. A sincere Thank You, Barb!



Tony and Barbara Grigg



Tony – Pear's official Bagpiper

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These plantings began in **2002** and were held each spring over the next five years.

In March **2003** the Stephany Memorial Trail was dedicated. This trail borders the Palatka River. Our volunteers with Lake's Parks and Trails help developed this scenic area.

In September **2003** Pear Association volunteers opened a Dog Park. In a short time this amenity became PEAR's most popular attraction. This continues today.

In September **2006** the Pear Association opened another needed amenity. Community Gardens were an immediate success. In the last twelve months this area has undergone an upgrade with raised planting boxes.

Pear Association established the Science & Nature Center in **2006**. The collection of artifacts continues to grow. Our own Gene Bouley conducts seminars explaining the origins of rocks and minerals and the many species of animals, rocks, and other items.

Over the years Lake County has developed Pear Park adding four gazebos along the trails, established improved dog park areas, added exercise equipment, provided a bird blind overlooking one of several open vistas, and many other amenities too numerous to cover. The Pear Association is appreciative of Lake County's endorsement. This Regional park is truly a showcase.

Pear volunteers have added Demonstration Gardens in several locations. These are maintained by volunteers (we are always welcoming any help – Tuesday mornings).

The Heritage Grove is another amenity sponsored and maintained by your Pear Association. A variety of trees are now growing to maturity; many claimed in honor of or in memory of various environmentally concerned people. With benches and the perimeter trail in this section of Pear Park, many visit and relax here.

This is the Heritage of Pear Association, Inc. We are grateful that this parcel in the heart of Florida will remain forever in public hands.

A Tribute to Tony & Barb Grigg

For many years, Tony and Barb faithfully drove an hour each way from their home in Sorrento to Pear Park, rain or shine, with tools in hand, a thermos of coffee, and peanut butter sandwiches (Tony's favorite) in the car for the trip home. If we attempted to cancel our weekly volunteer work morning due to inclement weather, Barb would admonish us "but it's only going to be in the 30's!" or " we can work between the showers!" Even on Tony's last day with us at PEAR, despite feeling poorly, he was determined to do what he enjoyed the most, trim the palmetto fronds. If we saw or heard them rustling on work mornings over the years, we knew Tony was in there somewhere. Sadly, he passed away about a month later, in May of 2020.

When Tony wasn't busy pruning, he enjoyed serenading us with his bagpipes. One volunteer described him this way. "I had not long been a volunteer at PEAR when I was just back from a visit in Scotland pulling weeds one Tuesday morning. It was misty and then the swirl of the Scottish bagpipes came to my ears, playing "A Scottish Soldier". Did I drink too much scotch while away, I thought, but it was unmistakable. Bagpipes at PEAR. I went to investigate and there was Tony in the Scottish mist playing the bagpipes. Going to miss him but remember him whenever the pipes play or a palm rustles and shakes".

Since Tony's passing, Barb has been living in an assisted living facility and is doing well (Brookville Lake Tavares, Room 301, 1211 Caroline St., Tavares, FL 32778).

Barb was always our go-to person for questions about native plants, and loved to share her extensive knowledge with us. She also propagated and generously donated many Florida native species for our demonstration gardens and restoration areas. Barb's mission was to add to the diversity of native plants, which she did so well.

Not only did she grow and care for them, she and Tony tirelessly hauled truckloads of plants to the Beautyberry Native Plant chapter meetings (of which they were long time members), and to PEAR plant sales and other environmental venues. Many of her wonderful plants have found homes in our personal gardens as well.

Inevitably, at some point during our volunteer work mornings, one of us would come across a mystery plant and we would all agree that it was a "Barb question". We could always rely on her to come up with the answer. Hopefully, we can retain a fraction of her knowledge about the Florida native plants.

During our cookie breaks, we all enjoyed hearing stories about Barb and Tony's past and the "old Florida" days. Another volunteer said it best "I always think of their ever-present smiles. . They always had stories to entertain, especially Barb".

One volunteer is anxious to hear the rest of that coral snake story, when as a young girl Barb took the snake into the house to show her Mum!

And we all appreciated her sweet treats that she often baked for us to enjoy-a nice break from store bought cookies.

Tony also loved to share interesting nature or historical newspaper or magazine articles that he had carefully cut out for us. He was quite a history buff. He had graduated from the University of Maryland with a History major, and English minor. Barb had obtained her doctorate in botany at Duke University and taught at the University of Maryland. Barb and Tony met there while out with a local hiking club. He had forgotten his lunch so Barb had shared her sandwich with him, and he had shared his thermos of coffee.

Their simple, yet rich, way of life and hard work ethic were admired by all who knew them and they are both greatly missed by their fellow PEAR volunteers, and the environmental community of Lake County.

We are hopeful that, with the progress being made defeating covid, Barb will have the opportunity some day in the near future to visit her "PEAR family" and be available to answer the "Barb questions" that we will no doubt have for her.

With our great appreciation for both, and fond memories, the Pear volunteers salute you.

Article submitted by Peg Urban

Pear Association, Inc is a Florida 501C-3 non-profit corporation, the publisher of this newsletter. Our Directors are: Gary Salzman-President/Treasurer, Gene Bouley-Vice President, George Wolf-Secretary, Hal Urban and Peg Urban-Directors at Large.

Standing Committees are: Budget & Finance, Membership, and Volunteers. Other Committees are: Butterfly & Demonstration Gardens, Community Gardens, Gopher Tortoise, Heritage Memorial Grove, Mowing & Plowing, and Science & Nature Center.

You may reach us by calling our President, Gary at 352-323-6138 or our Secretary, George at 352-728-8956. George will also respond to email contact: vonflow43@gmail.com

There is still time to join with us and support our endeavors at Pear Park. Simply complete the application and mail it to our P O box.
Thank You.

Pear Association Inc 2021
Membership Application / Renewal

Name _____
City _____ State _____ Zip _____

Opp. Email _____

Membership type Enclosed

Single \$ 10 \$ _____

Family \$ 15 \$ _____

Support Organization \$ 40 \$ _____

Special Interests and concerns:

Skills & talents you offer

By signing this document I affirm that I am in

Agreement with the mission and purposes of

Pear Association.

Signed _____

Pear Pearls

Pear Association Inc

P O Box 424

Okahumpka FL 34762

