



## Special Edition: 20<sup>th</sup> Anniversary and Ground Breaking Ceremony

### FOF 20th anniversary luncheon celebration looks back at history and ahead to bright future



*Francine Stevens, Pat DeGroot, June Taylor, Marya Repko welcome guests to the 20th Anniversary Luncheon.*

The Friends of Fakahatchee celebrated its 20th anniversary in a packed dining room at the Everglades Adventure Center in Everglades City the afternoon of December 7. There was plenty of time to greet old friends and make new ones before the formal program hosted by FOF Executive Director Francine Stevens.

Stevens started the meeting with a standing ovation for Tom Maish in recognition of his “impressive tenacity” in spearheading the Boardwalk Expansion Project which had its groundbreaking earlier the day. “We were sensitive about lobbying for it,” Stevens said, “but then former park director Donald Forgione told us we could educate anyone about the project and we were off to the races.” Said Maish as everyone sat down: “It was a real team effort. A lot of volunteers made this happen.”

Stevens said the Friends of Fakahatchee was incorporated in May of 1998 with Roger Dykstra as President, Park Manager Greg Toppin - Vice President,

Barbara Lewinski - Secretary, Alan Caldwell - Treasurer and Brian Donohue and Elsa Caldwell as board members. “A year later, they had \$2,540 in donations,” she said. “Last year, we provided more than \$70,000 in park support.”

FOF President Patrick Higgins then presented the group’s Mel Finn award in recognition of Mrs. Jane Park’s outstanding efforts to save the Fakahatchee from real estate development “In the early 1960’s years before our organization existed,” he said, “she was working tirelessly to preserve the Fakahatchee as Chairman of the Junior Women’s Club. She organized an aggressive letter writing campaign and presented a petition to the state in support of preservation on a roll of paper 175 feet long.” Noted Stevens: “Jane does not brag, so we have to brag for her.”

continued >>



*John Elting, Elsie Caldwell, Francine Stevens, and Tom Maish proudly display the memorial groundbreaking shovel for the Boardwalk Expansion Project.*

Featured speaker Eric Draper, Director of Florida State Parks, praised the contributions of Mrs. Parks, Franklin Adams and his mentor former Florida Park Director Ney Landrum in saving the Fakahatchee for future generations “The Parks Department deeply appreciates the Friends organizations,” he said. “You are laying down a path for the people behind you.”

FOF historian Franklin Adams shared his Fakahatchee memories with the group. He read from a 1964 letter from Mel Finn to Jane Parks assuring her that “we will be successful” in the efforts to preserve the Fakahatchee. He recalled how then Park Manager Greg Toppin posted a notice on a church bulletin board in 1998 that lead to the formation of the Friends of Fakahatchee. Several months later FOF volunteers were clearing exotics in the park.

After recognizing the contributions of members Bill Mesce, Alan Caldwell and Saul Friess who had passed away, Adams thanked all the original members of the group. “Mel, we’ve come a long way,” he concluded.



Eric Draper, Jane Parks, Patrick Higgins – Jane receives the 2018 Mel Finn Award.



Jerry Winters with Park Manager Steve Houseknecht and Greg Toppin who was Park manager when FOF was incorporated in 1998.



FOF Historian Franklin Adams shared his Fakahatchee memories with the group.

Longtime friends – and longtime FOF members  
– John Elting, Franklin Adams, Marya Repko.





## Festive groundbreaking ceremony kicks off Boardwalk Expansion Project

The roseate spoonbills appeared at the midpoint of the festive groundbreaking ceremony at the Big Cypress Bend Boardwalk the morning of December 7. Someone shouted “Spoonbills!” and everyone’s gaze shifted from the speaker’s podium to the skies above.

High in the bright blue morning sky, glowing pink from the sun behind them, a pair of roseate spoonbills glided in silent formation above the Fakahatchee. The words of the speakers at the ceremony were eloquent, but the silent presence of the birds above spoke volumes about the importance of the project far below them.

For the day, the abandoned road east of the boardwalk entrance took on a festive air complete with assisted parking, coffee, rolls, fruit, programs, display boards and shiny groundbreaking shovels ready to plunge into piles of imported earth.

Before the program, members of the Friends of Fakahatchee mingled with Fakahatchee park staff, representatives from other nature groups, tourism and local political officials and returned snowbird friends. The formal program was a testament to the coalition of state and local officials and dedicated FOF volunteers that was necessary to keep the project alive and finally get it off the ground.

One name mentioned by every speaker was Tom Maish, former FOF president and the man who championed the project for the past thirteen years.

*“...a great success and thanks for all your work on this project and event. Very exciting for Fakahatchee after all these years!”*

– Former President Patty Huff



FOF President Patrick Higgins welcomed attendees to “a momentous day for the Friends, the Park, the county and the state. He said the project, which includes safe parking, restrooms, a bridge across the canal and the park’s first interpretive center, “would have a significant economic impact on the county.”

Collier County Commissioner Donna Fiala told the group that “tourism focusing on the environment” is the wave of the future. “The enthusiasm for this project that the Friends of Fakahatchee volunteers expressed was beautiful,” she said. “I just opened the door.”

State Senator Kathleen Passidomo praised the strong partnership between the park service and the FOF. She said she was convinced of the need for improvements when she saw people trying to cross US 41 on foot from the existing parking lot on the other side of the road. When she discussed the project with the Friends, she said she was “blown away” by the plan, asking “how much do you need?” *continued >>*



Park Rangers Mike Duey, Guy DiGiovanni, and Steven Bass, Assistant Bureau Chief BJ Givens, State Senator Kathleen Passidomo, Director of Parks Eric Draper, Collier County Commissioner Donna Fiala, Park Manager Steve Houseknecht, Bureau Chief District 4 Valinda Subic, Park Biologist Mike Owen, Florida Division of Recreation & Parks Assistant Director Chuck Hatcher.



One name mentioned by every speaker was Tom Maish, former FOF president and the man who championed the project for the past thirteen years.



Patrick Higgins, Francine Stevens, Collier Visitors Bureau Executive Director Jack Wert, Tom Maish, Visitors Bureau PR & Communications Manager JoNell Modys.



Keynote speaker Eric Draper, director of the Florida Park System, told attendees “look around at this remarkable state park. That’s the real keynote today.” After praising the contributions of Tom and Judy Maish at Corkscrew Swamp and the Fakahatchee, he told the group “we walk in the footsteps of other leaders like Mel Finn, Nathaniel Reed, Franklin Adams and Jane Parks. Without their individual efforts years ago, where we are standing today could well have been another Cape Coral...Instead you are laying more footsteps—building a place where visitors will be inspired to protect land in our great state of Florida.”

Moments later, eleven dignitaries lined up and grasped their shovels. As they tossed clumps of soil into the air, cameras and cellphones captured the symbolic scene.

*“Congratulations on putting together a truly memorable event... The FOF is a remarkable organization and a template for CSO's around the state.*

*As pressures mount threatening our environmental integrity, the health, sustainability, and continued growth of our Park System is crucial. Eric Draper and I have been through many wars together, and I know that he was much impressed by, one, the quality of staff, and, two, the turnout of members. Again, well done.”*

– Former President John Elting





Ready, set, go! Chris Whipple, David Corban, Francine Stevens, Patrick Higgins, Kathleen Passidomo, Eric Draper, Donna Fiala, Tom Maish, Valinda Subic, BJ Givens, Steve Houseknecht.



Boardwalk Vision Committee Extraordinaire with Eric Draper: Francine Stevens, Tom Maish, Jimene Rinehart, Glen Stacell, Eric Draper, Patrick Higgins, Kit Kitchen-Maran, John Kaiser, Bruce Bunch.

*“I thought both the ground breaking and the lunch went smoothly !”*

– Dino Barone, FAK-A-HACKER



## Friends of Fakahatchee Boardwalk Vision

**SPECIAL THANKS TO OUR DONORS**

Dept. of Environmental Protection     **\$2,591,929**  
 Florida Legislature  
 Championed by:     **\$1,331,500**  
 Senator Kathleen Passidomo  
 Representative Bob Rommel  
 Commissioner: Donna Fiala  
 Friends of Fakahatchee     **\$175,000**  
 Tom and Judy Maish     **\$150,000**

**MAJOR CONTRIBUTIONS**     **\$5000.00 plus**  
 Chapman Foundation     Naples Zoo  
 Christine Hepburn Foundation     James Nicl  
 Naples Garden Club     Jane Parks

**CONTRIBUTIONS FROM**     **\$1000.00 plus**

Julie Appleget	Carol Hastings
Paul & Jeanine Bannicke	Tom & Cindy Jones
Barry Berger	Naples Orchid Society
Bruce & Janet Bunch	Nick Pennington
Jimene & Robert Stinehart	Donald Harmon
Art & Nancy Cullman	Jo-Ann Sanborn
Cindy Hackney	Richard & Margaret Scott



Design: David Corban, Architect  
 Interpretation: The Acorn Group

**BOARDWALK VISION MEMBERS**

Tom Maish, Chair  
 Patrick Higgins, Co-Chair  
 Dr. John Kaiser, Secretary  
 Kit Kitchen Maran  
 Jimene Rinehart  
 Glen Stacell  
 Francine Stevens

**FLORIDA PARK SERVICE**  
 Eric Draper, Director of Parks  
 Valinda Subic, Bureau Chief District 4  
 Ezell, "BJ" Givens, Assist. Bureau Chief  
 Steve Houseknecht, Park Manager

**FRIENDS OF FAKAHATCHEE BOARD**

Patrick Higgins, President	Donald Leonard
Glen Stacell, Vice President	Tom Maish
Ken Shapiro, Secretary	Gayle Norton
Scott Geltemeyer, Treasurer	Andrew Tyler
Chris Gair	Virginia Ball (In Memorium)
Dr. Paul Joslyn	Francine Stevens, Exe Dir.

**BOARDWALK VISION EMERITUS**

Rita Bleasdale	Rose Flynn
Allen Caldwell	Dennis Giardina
Elsa Caldwell	Marya Repko
Rick Cruz	Nelson Tilden
John Elting	Jerry Williams
	Jerry Winters

Celebrating 20 years dedicated to financial and volunteer support to preserve the unique ecology and cultural heritage of the Fakahatchee Strand Preserve State Park and educate the public about it's importance.

*This billboard at the site of the groundbreaking ceremony honored those who helped make the Boardwalk Expansion Project a reality.*

## Our photographers capture history in the making



We are very grateful for Jay Staton and Rita Bauer who captured pictures memorializing both the Ground-breaking Ceremony and the Friends 20th Anniversary Celebration. You will see Jay Staton's name bottom right corner of his photographs. The others are Rita Bauer's photos. Thanks again!



Fakahatchee Preserve Boardwalk Expansion Project Ground Breaking Ceremony, Dec 7, 2018. Video by Jay Staton. 45 minutes. View the video at <https://youtu.be/JioQXeVyXUw>



## Executive Director's Report

by Francine Stevens  
Executive Director, Friends of Fakahatchee

I have always felt fortunate to have been given the opportunity to serve the Board and our members. The Boardwalk Expansion Groundbreaking Ceremony, combined with the 20th Anniversary Celebration Luncheon, increased my sense of pride to be of service to everyone.

The success of this very special day for the Friends was made possible with the help of our dedicated volunteers and Park staff; to list everyone's names would fill an entire page. A special thanks, however, goes to Tom Maish for his leadership, and to the Boardwalk Vision Committee for making the Ground Breaking Ceremony a flawless once-in-a-lifetime event.

Over eighty people attended the Ceremony, most had never visited the future Park entrance site. Soon there will be a bridge over the canal and an Interpretive Pavilion on the horizon. I am sure everyone recognized, as Eric Draper did, that it will be a spectacular improvement. These enhancements will help make our state park a sought after destination for visitors from around the world which in turn will benefit the nearby communities who depend on tourism for their bread and butter!

Moving onward to the 20th Anniversary Celebration lunch, I was happy to have been able to contact almost everyone who paved the way for the Friends from 1998 to 2018. I was particularly happy to reach Greg Toppin, the first Park Manager to work with the Friends. Most past Presidents were able to attend with only a few exceptions; former Presidents Nelson, Tilden, and Caryl sent their regrets for being unable to attend due to travels in a different direction. From comments I've received, everyone enjoyed sharing memories and optimism about the future of the FOF on this memorable occasion.



Several Past Presidents joined FOF in celebrating its 20th anniversary. Left to right: Incoming FOF President Glen Stacell, with FOF Past-Presidents Elsie Caldwell, Patrick Higgins, Patty Huff, John Elting, Francine Stevens, Tom Maish.

*"I was so happy to see Greg Toppin and so many I had not seen in a long time, I know how much work is involved in preparing such an important event, well done!"*

– Past President Elsie Caldwell

A special thank you to Glen Stacell for donation of his creative woodwork, to Craig Britton who auctioned his Fakahatchee Hilton Cabin to the highest bidders, Dave & Patti Boesche and Kit Kitchen and Law Maran. Thank you to Tom Evans Jones who donated a quilt, and to Marya Repko who donated her Brief History of the Fakahatchee books – together they helped raise \$920.00.

I was pleased to invite the first permitted commercial tour operators in the Park to this Friends event. These Eco-tour operators care enough about the Fakahatchee Preserve to enter into Sub-Contractor Agreements that increase the Friends' capacity to support the Park. Three of the five current tour operators joined us at the Celebration. I introduced Kyle Mc Kenzie of Adventure Paddle Tours, Dillon Griffin of Ivey House and Pete Corradino of Everglades Day Safari to Parks Director Eric Draper for a special recognition and photo session.

In closing, I must mention our heart-felt recognition of Mrs. Jane Parks, recipient of the Mel Finn award. It was a wonderful moment that demonstrated our gratitude to those who cared to save the Fakahatchee before many of us even knew it existed!

We hope you'll enjoy the numerous pictures and video taken by Jay Staton as well as pictures taken by Rita Bauer. We will also post them on the FOF website in the near future.



Permitted Tour Operators Dillon Griffith of Ivey House and Kyle Mc Kenzie of Adventure Paddle Tours, Pete Corradino of Everglades Day Safari, with Executive Director Francine Stevens and Incoming FOF President Glen Stacell.

*“GREAT JOB with the 20 year celebration! We thought all went well!”*

– Dave and Patti Boesche, FOF Boardwalk Volunteers

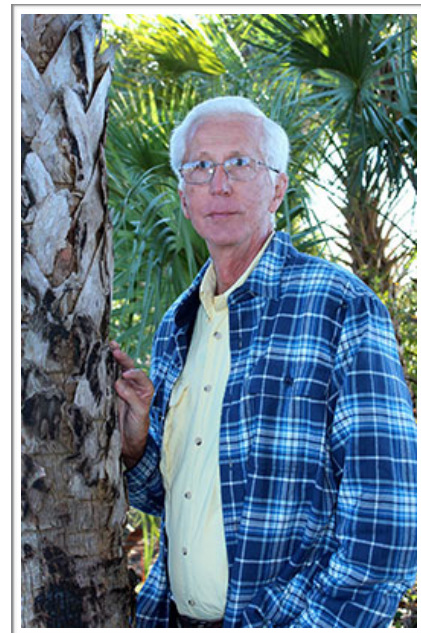
## News from the Strand

### New FOF president Glen Stacell praises our progress and cites our challenges

Former Friends of Fakahatchee vice president Glen Stacell moved into the president's role at the group's board meeting December 15. Glen, known for his dry wit, describes himself as being “inserted” into the job after the resignation of former president Patrick Higgins.

Stacell, a former high school science teacher, has been visiting the Fakahatchee for more than 20 years and has served on various board positions for more than a decade. He was the driving force behind the purchase of the Ghost Rider tram and launch of the organization's annual interpretations tour program in the Preserve, has drawn praise from scores of visitors for his role as a knowledgeable and humorous tour guide.

The new president is all business, however, when describing the challenges of the job ahead. “Patrick did an incredible job of establishing the Friends as the master concessionaire for the park,” he said. “All the organizational work is behind us, now we have to be sure we implement the plan and meet our commitment to the state and the tour operators who've entered into Sub-contractor agreements to work in the park.”



Continued >>



With the launch of tram tours five years ago and the new role as master concessionaire, Stacell says “we have in many ways become a business. And that’s good because it increases our non-profit revenue to pursue our mission to support the park.”

As he takes over as president, Stacell says “both Francine (Stevens) and I have pretty full plates. We have to find enough dedicated volunteers and board members to continue our progress and meet our goals. We’ve got to change our history of having just a few dedicated members who do an awful lot,” he said. “We always have a lot of ideas, but we need boots on the ground—both volunteers and new board members who can get to the park and do the hard work we have committed to do.”

## Be a Friend of the Fakahatchee: Support the Park



*After the 20th Celebration Lunch we kept our promise to bring Director of Parks Eric Draper for a stroll in the swamp with Mike Owen, Steve Houseknecht, and Tom Maish.*

**Become a Friend of the Fakahatchee**  
Visit <http://orchidswamp.org/support/memberships/>

### Members make a difference.

Welcome to our new members Joseph Clayton, Jorge Fernandez, William Mitscht, John Palaschak, and Greg Toppin.  
Welcome also to our new Lifetime Member John Spengler.  
We now have 348 members!

A heartfelt thank you to Bruce and Janet Bunch for their most generous donation of \$5,000.00.  
You are all individually contributing to the mission of the Friends of Fakahatchee. Bravo!

## Labors of love

The Friends of Fakahatchee work throughout the year to help people learn about and enjoy the Fakahatchee Strand Preserve State Park. Their efforts have resulted in more friendship for the Fakahatchee throughout the state and beyond!

**Click to learn how you can volunteer at the Fakahatchee!**  
<http://orchidswamp.org/support/how-to-volunteer/>

### Friends of Fakahatchee Board

President – Glen Stacell  
Vice President – Tom Maish  
Secretary – Ken Shapiro  
Treasurer – Scott Geltemeyer  
Chris Gair  
Paul Joslyn  
Donald Leonard  
Tom Maish  
Andrew Tyler

Executive Director – Francine Stevens

### Lifetime Preservers

Bruce & Janet Bunch

### Lifetime Protectors

Kit & LaRaw Maran

### Lifetime Individual Members

Karen Berkley  
Rita Bleasdale  
Warner Blow  
Elsie Caldwell  
Peter Haffenreffer  
Don Harmon  
Susan Hauze  
Patty Huff  
James Nici  
Wendy Becker Payton  
Ken Shapiro  
John Spengler  
Carol Vartanian

### Lifetime Family Members

Tom & Judy Maish  
Noel Nation  
Van & Jane Sayler  
Glen & Laura Stacell

### Business Patrons

North American Canoe Tours  
(Ivey House B&B)  
Shurr Adventures

### Business Benefactor

Everglades Day Safari

## Does your employer have a “Matching Gift” program?

Several of our members have taken advantage of their employer’s matching program (General Electric, Exxon Mobil) for donations to not-for-profit organizations by sending us the “matching” form. We do the rest – it’s that easy! We have revised our Membership Form with a reminder.

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## Annual Fund appeal to build the Pole Barn continues

You can still donate to the Pole Barn Project which will protect the FOF and Park equipment and vehicles. Give via PayPal through our website at <http://orchidswamp.org/>. If you prefer to mail a check, download the 2018 ANNUAL FUND APPEAL FOR POLE BARN form at <http://orchidswamp.org/support/>. Either way, many thanks for your ongoing support of the Park!



If you haven’t yet opened your free AmazonSmile account, please take a few minutes to do so. Visit [smile.amazon.com](http://smile.amazon.com), then choose the Friends of Fakahatchee as your charity to receive the donations from your purchases. To get there quicker, go to <http://smile.amazon.com/ch/59-3511352> which is our direct link. This works for your shopping all year round, and when more FOF members join in the donation parade, we’ll see more money for our Park. Thank you!



## Ruggedly beautiful place to bike or hike

*The website says that, “the emphasis at Fakahatchee is on the preservation of its natural character” and they’ve done a fantastic job of that. This is wild Florida at its finest and it’s amazing.*

– Cabopc, Ft. Myers, Florida



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<https://www.facebook.com/orchidswamp>

### Our mailing address is:

Friends of Fakahatchee, Inc.  
PO Box 35, Everglades City, FL 34139z  
Contact the Friends of Fakahatchee at [FOF90@hotmail.com](mailto:FOF90@hotmail.com) or call 239-695-1023.

Miss an issue of the Ghostwriter? Visit the archives at <http://orchidswamp.org/about-fof/the-ghost-writer-archives/>

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The Friends of Fakahatchee, Inc, a 501(c)(3) not-for-profit corporation Citizen Support Organization, provides financial and volunteer support to preserve the unique ecology and cultural heritage of Fakahatchee Strand Preserve State Park and to educate the public about its importance. The Fakahatchee is the largest cypress strand in the world and the deepest slough in the greater Everglades.



The Ghost Writer, named after the endangered Ghost Orchid which blooms in the Preserve, is currently edited by Next Steps Collective, LLC, which also manages the [Orchidswamp.org](http://Orchidswamp.org) website. Contributions to Ghost Writer that relate directly to the business and purpose of the Friends of Fakahatchee, Inc. are welcome. Please write [news@orchidswamp.org](mailto:news@orchidswamp.org), subject line: Ghostwriter.

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