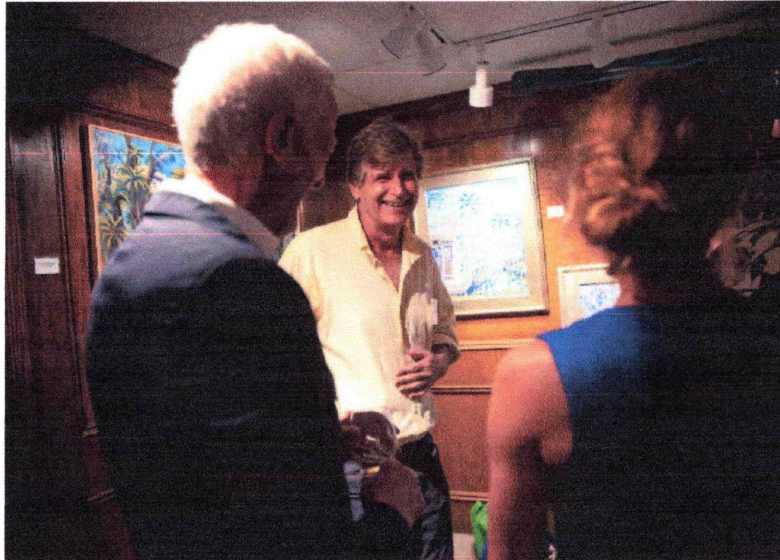


SWFLA Today



Naples artist Paul Arsenault talks with guests during the "Faces of Fakahatchee" gala at the Arsenault Studio & Banyan Arts Gallery in Naples. PHOTOS BY JON AUSTRIA/NAPLES DAILY NEWS USA TODAY NETWORK - FLORIDA

Art gallery proceeds benefit Fakahatchee

Boardwalk improvement project is getting a boost

Karl Schneider Naples Daily News
USA TODAY NETWORK - FLORIDA

The Fakahatchee Strand Preserve State Park will be getting an upgrade thanks in part to one artist's contribution.

Local artist Paul Arsenault contributed paintings to the Five Faces of Fakahatchee Gala in Naples earlier this month.

"My hope is that my artwork will inspire more people to visit the Fakahatchee Strand Preserve State Park and support the Friends mission," Arsenault said in a news release.

The friends he mentions are the Friends of the Fakahatchee, a non-profit organization dedicating time and financial assistance to the state park. The Friends set up the gala to help fund the boardwalk improvements.

"The most important part for me specifically is that everything that we're talking about would not exist without Lester Norris," said Francine Stevens, executive director of Friends of the Fakahatchee.

Proceeds from the gala will go toward improvements to the Big Cypress Bend boardwalk that Norris had built on a 600-acre tract of land he purchased and saved from logging operations in the 1950s, Stevens said.

The gala was set up to honor Norris's daughter, Lavern Norris Gaynor. One of Arsenault's paintings, "Reflections from the Boardwalk" was auctioned at the gala and Stevens said the event raised nearly \$20,000.

The boardwalk expansion project "will have an interpretive pavilion and brand new parking site," Stevens said. "We were recognizing that if Lavern's father had not (bought that land), we would not have this project."



Lavern Norris Gaynor, talks with guests during the "Five Faces of Fakahatchee" gala, on Jan. 16, 2020, at the Arsenault Studio & Banyan Arts Gallery in Naples. Gaynor was named honorary chair for the event. Gaynor's father Lester Norris built the boardwalk at Big Cypress Bend in the 1980s. Members of Friends of Fakahatchee maintain the board walk at the park.

Arsenault painted five pieces total and is selling the other four at his gallery in Naples. He plans to provide 40% of the proceeds from the sales back to the boardwalk project.

"There is no doubt that without the generosity and foresight of the Norris family, this National Natural Landmark would have been lost forever," said Glen Stacell, president of the Friends of Fakahatchee.

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