


Newsletter of the
Friends of Brooker Creek Preserve

September - October 2010

A letter from Paul Cozzie, Culture, Education and Leisure Director for Pinellas County:

Dear Volunteers, Friends and Supporters of Pinellas County's Environmental Lands and Education Centers,

Please accept my sincere thanks and appreciation to all of you who contribute to the continued success of Pinellas County's environmental lands and education centers. Your contributions are valued, and without your assistance we could not provide the daily operation, care and protection these properties require.

As many of you may already be aware, the fiscal year 2011 budget which begins October 1, 2010 includes significant changes in the manner the County will operate and maintain its environmental lands and education centers. First and foremost will be the consolidation and integration of the Environmental Lands Division into a new department - Parks and Conservation Resources. The Parks and Conservation Resources Department will be home to the Parks and Environmental Lands Division, County Extension, Air Quality, Heritage Village, and Countywide Mowing Operations. This new department will be under my direction, and the Culture, Education & Leisure Department will cease to exist.

As part of this consolidation, nine members of the Environmental Lands Division will migrate into the new Parks and Conservation Resources Department. The talents and experience of these individuals will be shared among the various program areas that make up the new de-

Letter from Paul Cozzie	p. 1
Chairman's Message by Barbara Hoffman	p. 2
Florida Wildflower Festival	p. 3
Keep Pinellas Beautiful	p. 3
Volunteer Breakfast by Craig Huegel	p. 4
Spiders by Craig Huegel	p. 5
Save the Date	p. 6
Passionvine by Craig Huegel	p. 7
Preserve News by Steven Harper	p. 8
Education Center Programs and Upcoming Events	p. 9
Mission Statements	p.11
Contacts	p.11

partment with the primary goal of protecting and preserving the County's natural resources and related assets. Similarly, the skills and abilities of other divisions within the department will be used to assist in the protection and maintenance of these natural areas by patrolling preserves and management areas; performing invasive exotic removal; maintaining and repairing boardwalks, restrooms and similar facilities; programming events at the education centers; and other duties as needed to provide sound stewardship to the preserves and management areas.

Given the budget reductions all departments are facing, this will not be an easy task, and there
(Letter, continued on page 6)

CHAIRMAN'S MESSAGE

By: Barb Hoffman

Surely you have heard by now that Brooker Creek Preserve has suffered tremendous budget and staff cuts with Pinellas County's attempts to balance the county budget. For Brooker, the remaining education staff will bid the program farewell on September 30; leaving a total staff of three persons for the upcoming fiscal year. It is frustrating and painful to watch ten year's worth of research and education come to a grinding halt, not to mention having to say goodbye to staff we have grown to love and respect. We have moaned and groaned, whined and complained, wrung our hands, and felt miserable. But the time has come to pull ourselves up by our boot straps, shake off the frustration and pain, and step up to the plate to help. After all, WE are still here, the volunteers are still here, and most importantly, THE PRESERVE IS STILL HERE.

I woke up one morning not long ago with this thought. We are not fighting some big developer who wants to pave the Preserve with roads and houses. We are not fighting DOT who wants to build some huge super highway through the Preserve. We are not fighting against a parking lot for the new high speed rail system. The Preserve is still a preserve. It is still 8,500+ acres of wildlands set aside for wildlife in Pinellas County, the most densely populated county in the state of Florida. It is teeming with wildlife - deer, otter, bobcat, hawks, owls, and more. The swamps and wetlands are healthy. The wildflowers are blooming. The flatwoods are, well, woods. Brooker Creek Preserve is still here in all its beautiful glory.

We have much to be thankful for. The Brooker staff, though small, is dedicated,

energetic, and smart. The head of the county department which will soon include preserves, Paul Cozzie, understands the mission of preserves - after all, many of Pinellas County parklands are composed of preserve-type areas. Our county administrator, Bob Lasala, promises to keep Brooker Creek ecologically healthy. And, most important, Brooker Creek Preserve simply exists.

Let's not just step up to the plate. Let's play ball with gusto. Let's help continue already well-received programs like the ecological adult education programs. Let's start new ones like a Fall Wildflower Festival. Let's think ahead and strive for monthly 6-mile hikes, or semi-annual visits to areas in the Preserve that are typically closed to the public. Let's do all this, and more!

We need you. We need your help to make this happen. When you see a request for volunteer help, please, please, please - help!

Barb



catbird photo by Karl & Kathleen Nichter



Fall Wildflower Festival

Saturday, Oct. 9, 9 am - 4 pm

A joint event sponsored by Pinellas County and the Friends of Brooker Creek Preserve, at Brooker Creek Preserve Education Center, Keystone Rd.

Free
Fun for the whole family
Presentations including wildflowers of Brooker, landscaping with wildflowers, bats, bugs, butterflies, and more.

Featuring:

Wildflower Scavenger Hunt
Butterfly Encounter
Wildflowers for sale
Honey Bee Exhibit
Wildflower hikes
Food

Help Needed!!

Two-hour shifts for the wildflower festival - *parking attendants, greeters, roving naturalists, more...*

Keep Pinellas Beautiful (Adopt-A-Mile)

Saturday September 11, 2010

We will be doing a trash pick up along Keystone Road in front of Brooker Creek Preserve. Please put this date on your calendar and come out and join the festivities.

The keep Pinellas Beautiful project provides us with orange safety vests, gloves, and big plastic bags. We hope to provide your smiling faces. We are so happy to do it.



Please call Ken Rowe at 727-781-0745 or ksr28@verizon.net

Brooker Creek Preserve Volunteer Breakfast By: Craig Huegel

The Friends of Brooker Creek Preserve sponsored a breakfast for Preserve volunteers, Saturday August 14 that was both a wonderful opportunity to say thanks for all the hard work they provide and a chance to listen to staff discuss the many changes coming up in the year ahead. The morning started off at 8:30 am with Commissioner Brickfield providing his insights on volunteerism and the future of the preserve's programs. We have to thank the Commissioner for his willingness to give up part of his weekend to speak to us and his commitment to keeping the program as intact as possible during the tough times ahead.

Breakfast provided all of us an opportunity to get to know each other better. Historically, most volunteers were also active members of the Friends and only a fine line separated the two. Today, that separation is a bit more pronounced though both groups are hard at work keeping the Preserve together. Events like the Friends-sponsored breakfast are important in bridging the gap and bringing us together in meaningful ways.

Following this, all of us had an opportunity to hear from staff and then ask questions. Division Administrator, Steve Harper, spoke first. He was followed by Education Manager, Phyllis Kolianos and then by Cooperative Extension Director, Mary Campbell. All spoke of their

commitment to keeping the overall program intact, initiatives meant to allow for expansion of programs currently reduced or cut by the County budget, and changes that are on the way. The greatest changes seem to be the result of having the education centers at both Brooker Creek and Weedon Island Preserves placed under the administrative direction of the County Cooperative Extension office. Mary Campbell took a good deal of time explaining the mission of Cooperative Extension and detailing new programs that will arise from the centers that extend from existing programs on living sustainably.

Questions followed their remarks and it was a lively and frank discussion. It is apparent that a great deal of apprehension exists among all of us that love and provide sweat equity to the Preserve. Mary, Steve and Phyllis handled each as thoroughly as possible, but some things are still a bit "up in the air" and will only be fully worked out as things evolve.

It was also apparent that meetings like this will be especially important during this evolution and that the Friends would do well to sponsor them on a regular basis and for as long as everyone involved with the Preserve has questions and the need to ask them. These are uncertain financial times, but all of us are absolutely certain that our commitment to this program is the only way to work through it. Your membership in the Friends will be vital in the months, and possibly years, ahead.



Spiders

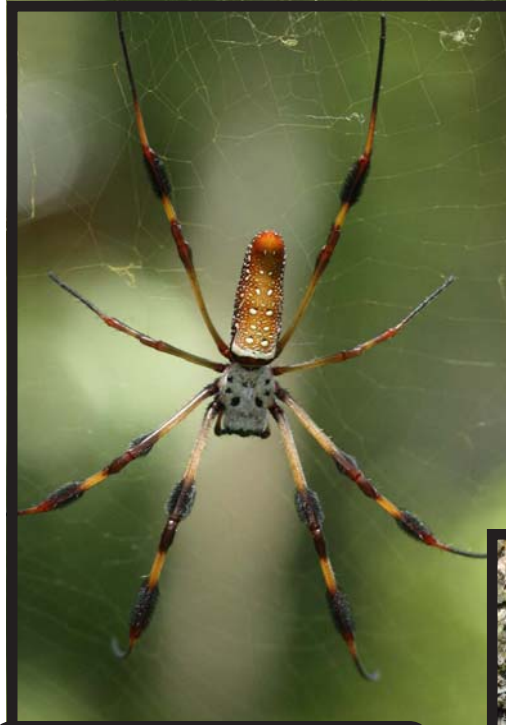
By: Craig Huegel

Many of us grow up with a certain respect, or even fear, of spiders. They are often portrayed as sinister or dangerous; creatures of the horror movies or something that creeps in unsuspected to bite us. Although a few of the thousands of native spiders actually can produce a painful bite that might actually result in having us seek medical attention, the very vast majority are simply interesting members of the natural world and worthy of a second look. As you wander around Brooker Creek Preserve, you are bound to see a few spiders whether you want to or not...

Spiders are not insects, but belong to the larger group known as arthropods. All spiders have eight legs and modified mouth parts with fangs that inject venom. This venom is not used for self defense as much as for killing prey. And, most spiders do not bite except for that purpose unless provoked to do so. Spiders are found worldwide on every continent except for Antarctica, and occur in nearly every conceivable habitat. At present, approximately 40,000 spider species within 109 separate families have been described worldwide. It is a very diverse and successful group.

Not all spiders spin webs, but all are capable of producing "silk". Their abdomens bear appendages that have been modified into spinnerets that extrude silk from up to six types of silk glands within their abdomen. Spider webs vary widely in size, shape and the amount of sticky thread used. It now appears that the spiral orb web may be one of the earliest forms, and spiders that produce tangled cobwebs are more abundant and diverse than orb-web spiders. Spider-like arachnids with silk-

producing spigots appear in the Devonian period about 386 million years ago, but these animals apparently lacked spinnerets. True spiders have been found in Carboniferous rocks from 318 to 299 million years ago and are very similar to the most primitive order of present-day spiders.



common golden orb-weaver

Web-weaving spiders, such as the common golden orb-weaver in the accompanying photograph use their sticky web to capture insects for food. Their life is centered around their web and much of their day is either spent maintaining it or waiting motionless for something to stumble in. As the prey becomes initially snared in the web, its struggles set off



fishing spider

vibrations which tell the spider where and how large it is. After this initial assessment, it can rush in and bite its victim to immobilize or kill it. Often, web-weaving spiders also wrap their prey up in more silk to keep it secure for a later meal.

Many other spiders, such as the fishing spider pictured here, are actually quick moving predators who wait patiently for their prey to get close before leaping or jumping out to capture them. These spiders only use their silk to produce protection for their egg cases or to

augment their homes. They do not need a web for capturing prey. The fishing spider can be seen near waterways and ponds, resting camouflaged on a tree trunk. They live near water, can walk on the surface, and may dive underneath it to feed on aquatic insects and even small fish. Their close relatives, wolf spiders, are more abundant on land.

As you walk along the Preserve's trails, pay attention to the diverse spider life you encounter and perhaps come to respect its great diversity. Realize that no spider wishes to come in contact with you and will try to avoid you at all costs. Perhaps eventually you will see some of the natural beauty found in this group and discover that, instead of being shunned, they have far more to be admired for.

(Letter from Paul Cozzie, cont. from page 1)
may be some bumps along the way. However, I strongly believe we have preserved sufficient knowledge and skill sets among employees from the various divisions and program areas necessary to protect our County's natural treasures. I also believe a key to our shared success will be open communication by all parties. Please do not hesitate to contact me with your questions and concerns as we begin this consolidation.

As I stated at the beginning of this message, volunteers will be integral to our future success. To that end, the Parks and Conservation Resources Department has retooled the organization to provide two volunteer coordinators in the new fiscal year to work closely with volunteers, program managers and front line employees so we may help each other achieve our goals for the parks, preserves, management areas and education centers. I look forward to some new initiatives in this area that will benefit all of our natural areas and provide volunteers with the guidance and support they deserve.

As volunteers, I look forward to hearing not only your concerns, but your suggestions as well. Your contributions will continue to be increasingly important to the preservation and protection of our natural areas as we move forward.

Again, thank you for all you do on behalf of Pinellas County's preserves, management areas and education centers!

Sincerely,
Paul Cozzie,
Culture, Education and Leisure Director
Pinellas County 727.582.2502

Save the Date!

Friends Adopt-a-Mile

September 11, 8:00 am

Road clean-up along the preserve where it borders with Keystone Road.

Fall Wildflower Festival

Saturday, Oct. 9; 9 am - 4 pm

A joint event sponsored by Pinellas County and the Friends of Brooker Creek Preserve, at Brooker Creek Preserve Education Center, Keystone Rd.

Annual Meeting of The Friends of Brooker Creek

November 13

This newsletter is published every other month. Please submit articles to Newsletter Editor Dr. Craig Huegel (727) 422-6583 or email Huegelc55@aol.com

To contact The Friends:

Email: fobcp@tampabay.rr.com

Phone: (727) 934-2680

(please leave a message and your phone number for a return call)

www.FriendsOfBrookerCreekPreserve.org

Passionvine

By: Craig Huegel

Passionvines are a New World genus and widely distributed throughout North, Central, and South America. Most species commonly used in landscapes here in central Florida are non-natives, and most of our native species are rather non-descript. The one exception is our native blue passionvine (*Passiflora incarnata*) which is found in open sunny locations statewide. It is common throughout Brooker Creek Preserve and most noticeable in the open fields near the entrance. Pay special attention on both sides of the road out as you exit and you are bound to see it growing throughout the understory vegetation.

Early Spanish explorers and missionaries are generally given credit for giving these plants their common name. The name, passionvine, helped in their conversion of native Americans to Christianity. They saw and used the beautiful

intricate flower parts to tell the story of the death of Jesus, making the story more memorable to listeners. The legend they told is that the passion flower's ten petals and sepals represent the ten apostles present at the crucifixion. The filaments portrayed the crown of thorns, or the halo about Jesus' head. The stamens, of which there are five, suggest the five wounds to Christ's hands, feet and torso. Other parts of the flower and leaves are also used to represent aspects of Christ's passion. It may take a bit of "faith" to see all of this, but the name stuck and remains today.

The native blue passionvine requires well-drained sandy soils to persist as well as plenty of sunshine. Do not attempt to use it in landscapes that are too shady or where soils remain too moist. When conditions are to its liking, however, it spreads rapidly and suckers extensively. Individual shoots may reach more than 10 feet long and each is equipped with tendrils that allow it to grasp adjacent vegetation and climb. Its aggressive growth form is necessary because it is often eaten as fast as it grows by the caterpillars of several butterflies - especially those of the Gulf fritillary. In most locations, it is a constant battle between caterpillar and vine. Sometimes the caterpillars eat everything above ground, but then the plant resurfaces a few feet away and starts over.



Left, gulf fritillary on a Florida paintbrush (*Carphephorus corymbosus*)



Blue passionvine (*Passiflora incarnata*)

Besides the gorgeous blue flowers, our native passionvine also produces edible fruit - not as tasty as the "edible passionvine" (*Passiflora edulis*) commonly grown commercially in California and elsewhere, but tasty nonetheless. The ripe fruit are egg-shaped and about 4 inches long. As they ripen, they go from green to yellowish and from firm to "squishy". If you pop one of these open, you find the seed mass surrounded by a gelatinous covering. It is this covering that makes a fine snack - if you get past the looks.

Our native blue passionvine makes an excellent landscape addition for those interested in butterflies. It works best when allowed to grow on a trellis, arbor or fence. Most blooming occurs in summer and these flowers are mostly pollinated by bees. If you are interested in obtaining it, it is often available from retail native plant nurseries. Just check the Latin name - most blue or purple-flowered passionvines sold in retail

garden centers are not native and some of these are not good for butterflies.



Passiflora incarnata
and ripe fruit



Preserve News

By: Steven J. Harper, PhD
Director, Environmental Lands Division

Change is in the air. Yes, the not-so-subtle increase in rain that marks a new season has brought many environmental changes to the preserves. This is a fantastic time to get out and enjoy nature! But equally evident are the changes affecting the staff responsible for managing the preserves and education centers. As the Environmental Lands Division prepares to transition to a new County Department, we have begun to address the numerous details associated with this move. Reporting assignments, core functions, and job responsibilities will all change, bringing both new opportunities and challenges. Rest assured that we will remain dedicated to public service in our new roles. The greatest change, of course, will occur for those staff members who are losing their jobs as a result of the reduction in force. The Environmental Lands Division has been blessed with incredibly competent, professional, and resourceful staff, and it is through no fault of their own that some excellent employees are being laid off. While the future remains uncertain, I'm confident that the Friends will join me and my colleagues in wishing Cathy, Lynn, April, Lori, Grant, Stephen, Rick, and Chris the very best success in their new endeavors. We appreciate their years of service and commitment to these natural areas that we all hold so dear, and know that they will become valuable additions to their new organizations! I'm also confident that the Friends will step up to help; now more than ever. As always, thank you for your dedicated efforts and enthusiastic support of Brooker Creek Preserve and the County's other environmental lands.

Brooker Creek Preserve Environmental Education Center Upcoming Events

All programs are free, unless otherwise noted, and presented by Education Services Volunteers, unless noted. Please call (727) 453-6800 for information and reservations.

Sept. - Oct. Guided Hikes

Every Saturday, from 9:00 to 10:30 am, led by Education Services Volunteers, Environmental Lands Division. Take a walk through time each Saturday morning on a guided hike along the Education Center Trail. Join us for this 0.7-mile walk as we look at how the land has changed over time and discuss the ecological footprints left by those changes. Sturdy closed-toe shoes are a must, and water and a hat are recommended. Please register by noon on Friday by calling (727) 453-6800. Free. All ages welcome - **children younger than 6 may find this hike challenging.**

BCPEEC September Programs

Night Hunters: Owls of Brooker Creek Preserve

Saturday, Sept. 4, 10:00 - 11:00 am

Owls have been the subject of myth and mystery for thousands of years. Join us to take an up-close look at the owls of the Brooker Creek Preserve. These specially adapted birds are skilled hunters in the night forest. Participants learn to identify these incredible birds of prey, recognize their calls and dissect a pellet to learn what they eat. Pre-registration is required. Free. **Recommended for families with children ages 6 and older.**

Book Time at Brooker Creek: Look Out for Turtles!

Thursday, Sept. 9, 10:30 - 11:15 am

This program is designed to connect pre-school children to the wonders of the natural world. This week features *Look Out for Turtles!* by Melvin Berger. Did you know that turtles roamed the earth with dinosaurs? This book explores the fascinating lives of many different

kinds of turtles. The program also includes a craft, game or other hands-on activity related to the story. Pre-registration is required. Spaces are limited so register early! Free. **Recommended ages: 3 - 5.**

Open Classroom: Discovering Nature with Your Child *Sat., Sept. 11, 12:00 - 3:00 pm*

Who lives in that skin? What is the difference between a carnivore and an herbivore? Whose tracks are those? Stop by our classroom anytime between 12:00 pm and 3:00 pm to participate in a variety of self-guided nature games and activities that will answer these questions and many more. Pre-registration is not required for this open activity. Free. **All ages** welcome.

Wild Wetlands: The Florida Aquarium, St. Petersburg, FL

Saturday, Sept. 18, 1:00 - 2:00 pm

What's wild about wetlands? Come face to face with some of Florida's most interesting creatures as you learn about wetland ecology. Join us for this interactive, educational and fun introduction to Florida's Wild Wetlands! Pre-registration is required. Free. **All ages** welcome.

Book Time at Brooker Creek: River Song: With the Banana Slug String Band

Thursday, Sept. 23, 10:30 - 11:15 am

This program is designed to connect pre-school children to the wonders of the natural world. This week features *River Song: With the Banana Slug String Band* by Steve Van Zandt. Rivers make beautiful music, from the trickle of snowmelt to the roar of a waterfall. Sing along with the recorded music of the Banana Slug String Band in this unique story. The program also includes a craft, game or other hands-on activity related to the story. Pre-registration is required. Spaces are limited so register early! Free. **Recommended ages: 3 - 5.**

Teacher Training Workshop

Saturday, Sept. 25, 8:30 - 3:30 pm

Presented by the Education Services Staff, Environmental Lands Division. Brooker Creek

Preserve is the perfect place to connect classroom concepts to the natural world. This workshop provides teachers with the training and materials necessary to design and lead learning experiences tailored to their classroom curriculum goals. Workshops are intended for teachers willing to lead their own field trips and are required of those teachers interested in using the Center's equipment and facilities other than public trails and the exhibit hall. Pre-registration is required. Call and ask for the educator in charge of this workshop for more information or to register. This event is free and open to the public. **Great for teachers of all grade levels.**

BCPEEC October Programs

Green Living

Saturday, October 2, 10 - 11 am.

Learn about easy ways to green up your life through energy conservation, green purchasing and sustainable living. See what everyone is talking about to reduce impacts on our environment, save money and reduce your Ecological Footprint. It would take four Earths to sustain the world at the level we are currently using resources and generating waste in the U.S. Be a part of the solution for future generations. Please register by noon on Friday by calling (727) 453-6800.

Landscaping the Florida-Friendly Way

Friday, October 8, 3 - 4 pm.

Learn to landscape the Florida-Friendly way. This class, taught by a UF/IFAS educator from Pinellas County Extension, will familiarize you with Florida-Friendly design principles. Everything from plants to landscape management techniques will be featured in the class. Come learn more about just how exciting a Florida-Friendly landscape can be! Please register by noon on Friday by calling (727) 453-6800.

Book Time at Brooker Creek.

Thursday, Oct. 14, 10:30 - 11:15 am.

This program is designed to connect pre-school children to the wonders of the natural world. The program also includes a craft, game or

other hands-on activity related to the story. Pre-registration is required. Spaces are limited so register early! Free. Recommended **ages: 3 - 5.**

What's Fresh Near You!

Saturday, Oct. 16, 10 - 11 am.

With the explosion of interest in local food, consumers now have more choices of products, labels, and ways to shop. An important part of buying local is making an effort to purchase fresh fruits and vegetables that are in season in our area. Join Nan Jensen from Pinellas County Extension for this session on buying produce here in Florida and experience the "taste" of freshly prepared Florida fruits and vegetables.

Protecting Our Coastal Community

Saturday, Oct. 23, 10 - 11 am.

People make extensive use of coastal areas and their productivity. We value our coastal ecosystems, but we also put pressure on them. Join Heather Hammers, Florida Marine Sea Grant Extension Agent from Pinellas County Extension for this session in fostering a shared, science-based understanding of coastal systems' ecology, wildlife, water quality as well as best management practices. Please register by noon on Friday by calling (727) 453-6800.

Florida's Fabulous Bats

Saturday, Oct. 30, 1 - 2 pm.

Many myths and misconceptions exist about one of the most unique mammals in Florida - the Florida bat. Did you know bats literally fly with their hands? Did you know bats have highly developed sonar capabilities called echolocation? Florida is home to 13 species of bats that are year-round or seasonal residents. All these bats devour insects and are beneficial to our environment. Come meet some of these live animals at this fascinating program presented by Cynthia and George Marks of the Florida Bat Conservancy, authors of *Bats of Florida*. This event is free and open to the public. Pre-registration is required. Please register by noon on Friday by calling (727) 453-6800. **All ages** welcome.

Friends of Brooker Creek Preserve - Mission Statement

The mission of the Friends of Brooker Creek Preserve is to provide public support for the Preserve through fund raising, volunteer programs, and education to ensure that the Preserve remains a natural wilderness for future generations.

Friends of Brooker Creek Preserve - Land Use Position Statement

The Friends of Brooker Creek Preserve support land uses within the boundaries of Brooker Creek Preserve which have a main purpose that furthers the preservation, conservation, restoration or protection of the land and resources of the Brooker Creek Preserve.

Pinellas County Environmental Lands Division - Mission

The mission of the Environmental Lands Division of the Department of Environmental Management is to provide sound stewardship to the County's wild lands and opportunities for the appreciation of their intrinsic value.

Pinellas County Environmental Lands Division - Vision

Pinellas County Preserves and Management Areas are designated wild areas that will be managed for the conservation, protection, and enhancement of natural and cultural resources while allowing for sustainable passive public recreational uses that are compatible with approved management plans and applicable ordinances and laws.

Friends of Brooker Creek Officers

Chair: Barbara Hoffman
Vice Chair: Cathie Foster
Vice Chair: Allyn Childress
Secretary: Chuck Parsons
Treasurer: Carson Morrow

Board Members

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Newsletter Editor: Dr. Craig Huegel
Birdman & Historian: Ken Rowe
Beverly Billiris
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Walt Hoskins

Friends of Brooker Creek website:
www.FriendsOfBrookerCreekPreserve.org

To contact The Friends:

Email: fobcp@tampabay.rr.com
Phone: (727) 934-2680
(please leave a message and your phone number for a return call)

Brooker Creek Preserve:

Phone: (727) 453-6900
Website: www.brookercreekpreserve.org

The Brooker Creek Preserve Environmental Education Center is located at 3940 Keystone Road, Tarpon Springs, Florida, 34688

Center Hours: Thurs. - Sat. 9 am - 4 pm
Phone: (727) 453-6800

Preserve & Hiking Trails: Thursday - Sunday 7:00am - 1 hour before sunset

Horse & Friendship Trails will remain open 7 days per week

Registration Info: FEID #59-3302182 tax-exempt, non-profit corporation

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