

# North Lake



North Lake in 2002 (USF)



During the construction of North Lake in 1966 (John Banther)



The shore of North Lake in 2002 (USF)

*The following narrative is based on an interview with Bernie Weinland and Ruth Davis on June 25, 2002 at their home on North Lake. As co-presidents of the North Lake Association, the couple possesses a wealth of information about the lake, which they generously shared in this interview.*

## Personal History

In 1986, Bernie Weinland and Ruth Davis went in search of a home in Florida. After retiring, they decided to leave their home in Maryland and travel the state of Florida until they found a place to settle down. They finally found what they were looking for in Sun City Center, after two months on the road. Other retirement communities had appealed to Bernie and Ruth, but they were looking for a place to rent initially, and most of the communities they visited did not offer rental properties. Sun City Center was an exception.

After renting in Sun City Center for a while, they ended up buying a house, where they lived until 1995. The couple then decided to move to another house in Sun City Center and ended up finding one on North Lake. When asked what led them to move to a lakefront home, both Bernie and Ruth responded, "We just kind of did it." According to Bernie, one of the best parts about living on the lake is the "scenery." Bernie and Ruth especially enjoy watching the area's birds, which they often look up in a reference book to identify correctly.

## History/Information

North Lake is a man-made lake located in Sun City Center, in the Little Manatee River Watershed. The lake is 51 acres, and its maximum depth is eight feet. Documents passed on to Bernie and Ruth by former Association presidents impart that the lake was filled in 1966 when Bunker Hill Drive was still a dirt road.

As Bernie understands it, the lake's water quality is good, although a number of residents have voiced concern over the color of the water, which is often somewhat brown. Bernie has heard that a number of years ago, there was a problem with hydrilla, which residents successfully addressed by adding grass carp to the lake. In terms of the water level, it has fluctuated considerably over the years but is currently high.

The lake has four islands, which are named Goat, Blue Heron, Jungle, and Little Island. In 1967, Del Webb, the original developer of Sun City Center, introduced nine goats to the largest island, which soon became known as Goat Island. According to a document circulated to lake residents

in 1967, the idea was that the goats would consume some of the overgrown vegetation on the island:



One of the islands in North Lake (USF)

*“After there is evidence that the growth on the one island has decreased, it is intended to transfer 5 goats to the adjacent island. It is finally intended to have a pair of goats (one male, one female) on each of the islands for an indefinite period. This is to keep the weed growth under control.”*

The goats were removed from the lake before it came time to transfer some of the goats to another island. Bernie has heard that a number of lake residents complained about the noise. For a period, Jungle Island was called Maddox Island, after a lake resident who put wood duck boxes on the island. This island used to have a dock and a path that allowed people to walk around the island and look at the wood ducks. However, now all of the islands are too overgrown with vegetation to be visited by lake residents.

Bernie described a “controversy” that occurred a few years ago about who actually owns the islands. Lake residents were hoping that whoever owned the islands (i.e., the county or the state) would pay for their upkeep, since the vegetation on the islands had become overgrown. After lake residents learned that the islands were considered to be their responsibility, they decided to “treat them as a preserve and...maintain them in their natural state” (letter from the North Lake Association dated November 30, 1999). As Bernie remembers:

*“Well, several years ago. No fussing about it, but people wanted to know, did anybody else have the right to come in and take hold. The county said, ‘Well we don’t care about them.’ The developer said, ‘We don’t care about them.’ The water under the lake, of course, is...deeded to the state for flood control. So we decided...if nobody else wants them, then take them as a wildlife preserve. And let the wildlife take over. And they have too.”*

According to a former lake resident, more than 80 different species of birds have been identified on the lake.<sup>1</sup> Bernie and Ruth report having seen wood ducks, blue heron, mallards, anhinga, and cormorants, among others. Ruth told an amusing story about a cardinal she used to watch:

*“We have a window in the laundry room and...it’s got a covering on it. And we had a female cardinal who would get on the windowsill and peck. She had a reflection in it and we’d hear this pecking away.”*

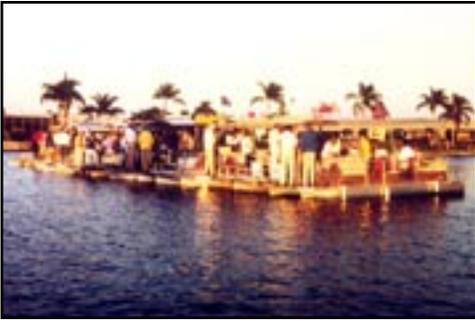
Bernie’s favorite bird to watch is the green heron, which he describes as “just a little fellow.”

Like nearby Middle Lake (see narrative on this website [http://www.hillsborough.wateratlas.usf.edu/upload/documents/OH\\_Middle.pdf](http://www.hillsborough.wateratlas.usf.edu/upload/documents/OH_Middle.pdf)), North Lake has had problems with vultures in recent years. Lake residents regularly shot blanks at the birds to scare them away, and there have been very few vulture sightings this year.

Large mouth bass, channel cats, and blue gills are among the types of fish in North Lake.<sup>2</sup> As Bernie understands it, right after the lake was filled in 1966, blue gill and shell crackers were stocked. A couple of residents fish the lake regularly, freezing their catches until it is time for their annual fish

fry. In addition to birds and fish, Bernie and Ruth mentioned having seen alligators and corn snakes.

North Lake has two organizations, one that primarily addresses lake issues and another that is more of a social organization. The North Lake Association attends primarily to water quality issues. Members' dues pay for ecological experts to test the lake's water quality every couple of months, and the Association will also pay for the islands' Brazilian pepper trees and cattails to be sprayed with chemicals. The lake organization does sponsor some social events such as a dinner in January and a large yard sale. Most lake residents are also members of the North Lake Yacht Club, which is organized more around social activities such as raft-ups, which Bernie describes as "a big cocktail party out in the middle of the lake" where lake residents tie their boat together and share snacks and drinks. Ruth and Bernie estimate that there are approximately thirty-five pontoon boats on the lake, but it is not necessary to own a boat to be a yacht club member.



*A rack-up on North Lake (John Banther)*



*A patriotic rack-up on the lake (John Banther)*

## Development

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In the early 1900s, the area now known as Sun City Center experienced its first development. After nearby Ruskin was founded, some of the community's agricultural development, primarily cattle ranching, came to extend into the Sun City Center area. Then in 1956, C. Palmore sold his 12,025-acre cattle ranch to Max Cohn, who sold the land to Universal Marion Corporation. In 1961, Del Webb bought the land to develop Sun City Center.<sup>3</sup> Included in Webb's plan for the community were a number of man-made lakes—North, South, Middle, and Simmons—and the enlargement of a natural watering hole into Swan Lake. Swan Lake was enlarged first, followed by the construction of South, North, Middle, and then Simmons.

Since its beginning, the community has changed dramatically. One lake resident has reported that the first houses on North Lake were built in 1965.<sup>4</sup> Over the late 1960s and 1970s, North Lake became entirely surrounded by houses, approximately 118 in Bernie and Ruth's estimation. According to an on-line community profile of Sun City Center, the early 1970s "marked the true building boom" for Sun City Center and its surrounding communities, including an increase in commercial development.<sup>5</sup> Bernie and Ruth have seen a great deal of development occur in just the last fifteen years. Since moving to Sun City Center in 1986, the couple has witnessed State Road 674 becoming a four-lane highway, a hospital opening, and the development of the area between the hospital and I-75, where before there was "pure nothing," according to Bernie.

Residential and commercial development continue to grow. Around 300 houses are constructed every year, with a build-out expected in 2010.<sup>6</sup> Recently a Community Hall opened on Pebble Beach Boulevard, providing Sun City Center residents with a place to hold formal meetings and to socialize and sometimes dance.

For additional information about Sun City Center's history, see John Bowker's account (<http://web.tampabay.rr.com/sccinfo/scchistx.htm>), an on-line community profile of Sun City Center (<http://villageprofile.com/florida/suncity/suncity.html>), or the Middle Lake Narrative on this website ([http://www.hillsborough.wateratlas.usf.edu/upload/documents/OH\\_Middle.pdf](http://www.hillsborough.wateratlas.usf.edu/upload/documents/OH_Middle.pdf)).

# The Future

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*A view of North Lake and one of its islands (USF)*

Bernie does not predict much change occurring on North Lake in the future:

*"I suppose it'll just stay as is. There's no lots for any new houses here."*

Because housing density on the lake will not change, Bernie sees the only possible change being that homeowners may begin tearing down the old houses on the lake and building "fancier" houses in their place. More and more residents are already renovating and upgrading the existing homes in the area. In terms of the future of the lake's health, it seems that the North Lake Association and residents like Bernie and Ruth will continue to remain actively involved in its maintenance.

<sup>1</sup> Report written by Warren Hutchins, former North Lake resident.

<sup>2</sup> Report written by Warren Hutchins, former North Lake resident.

<sup>3</sup> "Village Profile: Sun City Center Florida." <http://villageprofile.com/florida/suncity/suncity.html>.

<sup>4</sup> "Some History of North Lake." Document written by North Lake resident Rex Landis in 1999.

<sup>5</sup> "Village Profile: Sun City Center Florida." <http://villageprofile.com/florida/suncity/suncity.html>.

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