

# South Lake



Doug, Shelba and Bob on the day of the interview (USF)



View of South Lake in 2002 (USF)

*The following narrative is based on an interview with South Lake residents Doug Fields, Shelba Fields, and Bob Bizzano conducted on the Fields' pontoon boat on August 14, 2002. During this interview, these residents provided their perspectives on the lake on which they live.*

## Lake Residents

Doug and Shelba Fields moved to Sun City Center's South Lake three years ago from Pennsylvania. Shelba's brother lives on Middle Lake, also in Sun City Center, and advised the couple about moving to the area. He specifically encouraged the Fields to buy a house on one of Sun City Center's lakes. According to Shelba, one of the advantages of living on South Lake is the convenience of watering one's lawn with water from the lake. However, she also enjoys the view that the lake provides. Shelba said about sunsets on the lake:

*"If anybody likes sunsets, this is the place. Last night, I told Doug, 'Look out there. I think we live on Golden Pond.' The whole thing was just gold."*

Bob moved to Sun City Center with his wife a year-and-a-half ago. After working at the same company for thirty-five years, he was ready to retire. He described the benefits of living on South Lake in the following way: "It's peaceful to look at...Aesthetically it's relaxing, like watching a fish tank."

South Lake residents have formed the South Lake Association. The main purpose of this association is to take care of the lake, but it also functions as a neighborhood group that assists residents and plans social events. Membership dues are collected to help with the upkeep of the lake, specifically to pay for chemical treatment of the lake's unwanted vegetation. The South Lake Association really becomes active during the winter months. About half of the lake's residents spend the summer months up north, but by October, almost all of South Lake's residents have returned. During these winter months, the Association publishes a monthly newsletter and sponsors community dinners and picnics. Around Christmas time, most houses on the lake string lights on their seawalls and decks to light up the lake.

## History/Information

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*South Lake and its shoreline (USF)*



*The lake being treated in 2002 (USF)*



*Some of the homes on South Lake (USF)*

Located in the Little Manatee River Watershed, South Lake was the second man-made lake created in Sun City Center. Originally built as a retention pond for road run-off in this planned retirement community, South Lake has a surface area of 18 acres. South Lake, Middle Lake, North Lake and Swan Lake are all located within the same vicinity. As Bob understands it, original plans for Sun City Center called for these lakes to be connected. Due to differences in lake elevations, this could not be done. However, Doug noted that when South Lake's water level gets too high, the overflow goes into Middle Lake.

Doug, Shelba and Bob described their lake as having clear water. According to data collected between 1998 and 2000, the secchi depth has ranged between 3 – 6.8 feet.<sup>1</sup> Doug attributes this water clarity to the care that the Lake Association has provided. He stated:

*“It might be because we do extensive care of our lake. Once a month we have Aquatics Systems that comes in and sprays our lakes, takes care of the weeds and everything like that...And if we have a problem in between they also come and take care of that.”*

South Lake supports a population of diverse fish, including bass, blue gill, brim, sunfish and catfish. Of these, only the blue gill is stocked regularly. The South Lake Association also adds sterile carp to the lake to help keep the lake vegetation under control. According to Doug, the carp are added every two to three years.

Around the lake, the wildlife population includes herons, egrets, wood ducks, anhingas, ospreys, seagulls and pelicans. Bob said about the wildlife that visits the lake, “There's really a varied amount of wildlife that comes in here different times of the year.” Other animals that make South Lake their home include turtles and alligators.

## Development

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South Lake is one of Sun City Center's numerous man-made lakes. Prior to residential development of the area, the land was used for agriculture and cattle-raising. Development in the area had its beginnings in the early 1900s when the nearby community of Ruskin was founded and its agricultural production reached the Sun City Area.<sup>2</sup> In 1960, Del Webb visited the agricultural area and saw the potential for one of his planned retirement communities. He purchased the land in 1961, and began building houses.<sup>3</sup> South Lake was part of the original group of lakes dug to serve as retention ponds for street run-off. According to Shelba, the neighborhoods surrounding South Lake are built-out, with 99 homes around the lake. The greater Sun City Center area continues to grow, although the area around South Lake remains stable. Sun City Center is expected to be completely built-out by 2010 with a population of 20,000 people.<sup>4</sup>

# The Future

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South Lake in 2002 (USF)

South Lake has an active and committed group of residents looking out for its health. Additionally, it is not likely that any more houses will be built on the lake, as it has reached its maximum capacity. Doug said about the lake's likely future:

*"Well, you know, it's at its maturity now....It can't expand. It can't get any bigger; they can't build any more houses on it."*

Bob and Doug see the changes possibly affecting South Lake to be small, such as home improvements. Doug said about these possible changes:

*"So everybody's potentially all of the time upgrading their own properties. That's basically about the only thing that can happen to our lake, is each individual upgrading their docks [and] seawalls."*

With only minor changes expected in the future and a group of active residents, it is likely that South Lake will continue to remain cared for and enjoyed by those who live around it.

**Interview By: Ashley Spalding**

**Written By: Christiana Schumann**

## Endnotes

<sup>1</sup> Hillsborough County Watershed Atlas. <[www.hillsborough.wateratlas.org](http://www.hillsborough.wateratlas.org)>

<sup>2</sup> Village Profile Presents Sun City Center. <<http://www.villageprofile.com/florida/suncity/suncity.html#history>>

<sup>3</sup> John Bowker. A History of Sun City Center. <<http://web.tampabay.rr.com/sccinfo/schist1.htm>>

<sup>4</sup> Village Profile Presents Sun City Center. <<http://www.villageprofile.com/florida/suncity/suncity.html#history>>