

Lutz Lake Narrative



Bill Collier on the shore of Lutz Lake in July 2000. (USF)

The following narrative is based on an interview with Lutz Lake resident, Bill Collier, in his home on July 17, 2000. The interview provided interesting stories about the historical development of the area, as well as information about current activities to keep the lake healthy.

Family History

Bill Collier and his family have been living on Lutz Lake since 1990, when they moved from Tampa in search of a lakeside home. The home that Bill found was one that has played an important role in Lutz's history. Built at the turn of the century, the house has not only been a family home, but also the site of a few of Lutz's businesses. It has served as a hardware store and a florist's shop. When Bill purchased the house over ten years ago, many repairs were needed. Rather than demolish the house and build a new one on the property, Bill refurbished it on his own, allowing for a piece of Lutz history to remain standing.



Bill Collier's home that was originally built in the early 1900s. (USF)

Bill is very happy with his decision to move to Lutz Lake. He sees many advantages with living near a lake.

“Well, once somebody lives on a lake, you realize what it’s like to be able to go down and just walk out the door and go boating, or walk out the back door and fish, or just walk out the back door and sit out there. That’s just what Florida is about. I mean, the rest of the people in Florida have to get into a car and drive somewhere to a park and enjoy it. I can just walk down there with a cup of coffee in the morning.”

During the summer, the Collier family comes together to go swimming in the lake once a week. Over the years lake residents have encouraged outdoor recreation by installing a freestanding diving board area, as well as a dock in the middle of the lake with a slide and diving board. One summer day a few years ago, Bill's wife and son decided to go swimming in the lake together. On their way to the dock, they realized that an alligator was following them. As Bill tells the story, the two of them swam like crazy to get across the lake. Once they made it safely to shore, they let the neighbors know about the alligator and then walked home barefooted over gravel. The alligator was never seen again and Bill says that alligators have not been a problem since.

Bill is an active member and the former president of the Lutz Lake Owner's Association. He has been involved with the Association since moving to the lake, and served as the president from 1991 to 2000. The Lake Owner's Association has been very involved in keeping the lake healthy and clean.

Lake History

Lutz Lake, also known as Little Hobbs Lake, is located in northern Hillsborough County. The lake has a surface area of 6.6 acres and reaches a maximum depth of 18.4 feet.



A view of Lutz Lake.
(USF)

At the beginning of the 20th Century, the area surrounding the lake was used by the citrus and lumber industries. A railroad line was built near Lutz Lake to help transport the citrus and lumber products. The original depot was recently rebuilt through community efforts. (See: "[Depot Effort Rides Gravy Train of Nostalgia](#)" by Bill Coats in the St. Petersburg Times, published June 30, 2000.

These industries helped to generate the development of the town of Lutz. According to Bill, his home was part of the plan that the early Lutz developers had for the area.

"They knew what they were going to do. They were going to make this the center of town, the train station, and the community center. Actually, this building was part of the train station at one time. Then they used this house to store hardware in as they systematically built all the other houses on this street."

The city of Lutz had grown into a larger city by the 1950s, and citrus continued to be an important industry. During this time, citrus was being hauled from Lutz to nearby processing plants, and there was an increasing need for trucks and drivers. This need was met by Mr. William Thomas when he built a mechanic's shop and a trucking line office across the street from Bill's house. Mr. Thomas also built Lutz's first volunteer fire truck. Bill says that the fire truck is still running and is the highlight of Lutz's Fourth of July Parade.



A replica of Lutz's original train depot. The original structure was built in 1907 and the new depot was rebuilt in 2000.
(USF)

Many of the older homes around Lutz Lake that were built early in the 20th Century have now been torn down because they had not been kept up. Currently, the area around the lake is residential. The Lutz Lake Owner's Association has been very active in keeping the lake healthy and the area livable. Bill describes the water in Lake Lutz as being very clear. This, no doubt, is thanks in part to the Association's work. The Association has been working with Florida LAKEWATCH for a number of years now, which has given them an opportunity to better understand their lake's health.

Over the years, the Lake Owner's Association has been involved in many events to protect Lutz Lake's environmental health. One activity is augmentation of the lake, which maintains the water level and ensures it will not dry up. The water used for augmentation comes from a well that was originally built to water citrus groves. The current drought conditions are affecting the lake's water level, as well as the nearby pumping stations owned by Pinellas County. When these pumps are used, Bill sees the water levels in Lutz Lake go down.

The Lake Owner's Association was also instrumental in getting the lake's overflow pipe re-built after it had been dug up during nearby road construction. The overflow pipe runs from Lutz Lake into a nearby swamp. Without the overflow pipe, the lakeside residents had to contend with flooding. Working together as a group, members of the Association were able to contact the right officials and successfully convince them to re-build the overflow pipe.

The environment in and surrounding Lutz Lake continues to support a variety of

wildlife according to Bill. He states that over the last few years the lake has begun growing grass, creating a habitat where bass have been thriving and there are now plenty of bass. Around the lake, and in his yard, Bill has seen armadillos, turtles, raccoons, opossums, hawks, and eagles. Bill says that the armadillos have been the friendliest animals. They have taken up residence under his front porch and play with his cat and dogs. Bill has also seen a young bald eagle flying over the Lutz Lake. This is how Bill describes the experience,



Some of the vegetation near Lutz Lake. (USF)

*“As far as the look of it, it flew over the lake and grabbed a fish out of the **lake and flew off.** Its whole head, all the way down to the shoulders, was gold. It was huge. **It looked like it had a four-foot wing spread. It was this giant beautiful bird with a gold head.**”*

Development



The first structure built in a Lutz - a former boarding house for workers. (USF)

As Bill tells the history of development around Lutz Lake, the very first structure was a boarding house for workers that was built in the early 20th Century. Shortly thereafter the train station was built, followed by the rest of the houses on the street. There were not any homes built around the lake again until the 1950s. At that time a nearby swamp was filled in and houses were built on it. The houses that were built during the first half of the 20th Century were right on the road with big back yards facing the lake. Bill feels that this type of design encouraged the growth of strong community ties.

“You’re right here on the sidewalk, people walk by and here’s the front porch, people walk up and down the sidewalk and it’s a sense of community. You look out your house and there’s the neighbor’s house. And then everyone had these big back yards. You would sit on your back porch and look to the left or right to see all this lake. You could see the whole lake from your backporch. So every house was equal with lake-view.”

Development was inactive around the lake until the 1980s when three new houses were built. In the mid-1990s another eight houses were built. Four of the houses were built right on the lake, and the other four were built in a subdivision across the street from Lutz Lake. There are currently between twenty-five and thirty homes on or in the near vicinity of the lake. Bill’s opinion is that the new people moving in are not necessarily aware of the environmental issues facing Lutz Lake. Many of the newer residents want to create beaches, which could be detrimental to the lake’s health. He also says that although most of the new residents around the lake financially support the Lake Association, few actively participate in the group’s activities to maintain the health of the lake.

Future

Lutz Lake has played an important role in the development of the town of Lutz. Over the past century people have moved to the area to build homes and businesses. During the beginning of the 21st Century, Lutz Lake continues to attract people who want to build homes there. Although this new influx of people could pose a danger to the sustainability and health of the lake and surrounding area, the active concern of longtime residents

will hopefully stop any large problems from arising. As long as residents and the Lake Owner's Association remain observant, active, and vocal, the needs of Lutz Lake will be met.

Interview completed by John Primo.

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