

Lake New Ryan Narrative

The following narrative is based on a January 25, 1999 interview with Jeff and Jan Means and Mr. Fernandez. The interview participants combined to present a comprehensive source of information about the lake.

Jeff and Jan Means



Jeff and Jan Means,
LakeWatch volunteers
and Lake New Ryan
residents.

The Means have been Lake New Ryan residents for 4 years. When they were married in 1995, Jan was still living in Thonotosassa and the couple decided they wanted to live in the country, preferably on a river. They spent time combing Pasco County in search of the perfect spot and ran across Lake New Ryan. The ambling nature of the lake combined with the rural atmosphere appealed to Jeff and Jan and they bought a property on the North shore of the lake and settled in.

Lake living presented more of a commitment than the Means' originally anticipated. Jan comments, "I think it entails a lot of responsibility that I didn't realize. I never thought about leaving a buffer zone for fertilization...I am very conscious of the environment but I didn't know what it took to keep a lake healthy and there is a lot of responsibility there."



The shoreline of the
Means' property
reflects the
cognizance of the
benefits of indigenous
vegetation.

Jeff and Jan rose admirably to the challenge, seeking to educate themselves as to the needs of the lake and beneficial behaviors they could provide. Their education entailed, "...a lot of reading and of course...we saw a notice about a [Lakewatch] meeting and we wanted to find out about our lake. What we found out is that it didn't have a name or anybody to monitor it. No-one knew anything about it."

They became the Lakewatch monitors and during the first training session with Jim Griffin, had to come up with a name for the lake. Jan combined the names of the two main roads around the lake, Newburger and Ryan Circle and came up with Lake New Ryan. She comments about feedback on the name, "The people we have told the name of it are very pleased with it. They say, 'That's a good name'."



The Means' are members of the Audubon Society and appreciate the bird-life supported by the lake.
photo by Jeff and Jan Means

The Means strive to maximize on their relationship with the lake. They are members of the Audubon Society and reap much satisfaction from watching the bird shows and other wildlife the lake supports. Jan comments, "Our bedroom is facing the lake. It is wonderful to wake up in the morning and see the water birds coming in...the wood storks, anhingas, grebes, kingfishers, and once in awhile you see an osprey dive..."

Perhaps most of all, the Means appreciate the solitude, the calm and the privacy the lake provides. This feeling is echoed by other residents including Mr. Fernandez.

Mr. Fernandez

The Fernandez family has lived on Lake New Ryan for 21 years and was among the first residents on the lake. When asked what was his motivation for buying lakefront property, he commented that he was looking for land and for privacy. They wanted a big lot and a lot of room. Ryan Circle, on the east side of Lake New Ryan was platted early and is deed restricted. Houses are required to be 40 feet apart, so they knew they would be at least 40 feet from their neighbors.

He comments, "People on the lake tend to like privacy...I haven't actually met [many of] my neighbors [not] like I've met you...They stick to themselves and like their space." While the lure of privacy may have been the selling point that initially brought people to the lake, the lake itself has served as the commonality to bring the residents together.

Lake New Ryan



Lake New Ryan is approximately 15-acres and is located in the Hillsborough River Basin. Historically the lake was much smaller and was referred to as Runoff Pond, receiving the outflow from Hog Island Lake. The contemporary look of Lake New Ryan was achieved through dredging in the 1970's to create a meandering waterway interspersed with islands of vegetation and rimmed with well-spaced residential development and wetlands. The dredging efforts produced a deep lake, ranging from 24 to 8 feet.

The level of the lake, like many in Hillsborough County, has experienced a good

deal of fluctuation because of the El Nino rains of 1997. Jeff comments, "When we got here, the water was down probably a foot and a half, two feet compared to today. It went up probably four feet with El Nino...and stayed up there for a year..." The level of the lake is still high augmented by pumping from Hog Island Lake, but more striking than level fluctuation is the change in types of vegetation that level fluctuation has evoked.



This photo of Lake New Ryan in 1995 illustrates the type of vegetation previously supported by the lake.
photo by Jeff and Jan Means

Jan and Jeff have pictures taken in 1995 and then pictures of the same area in 1998. Jan comments, "There were tallow trees, maple trees, buttonwood, cardinal flower...all of this looked more like a wooded area. About two years later the water table started coming up...I think it was the water that killed these trees. They're just gone...Now there are cattails, they survived and thrived ..." In addition, the lake is home to torpedo grass, which the Means have had treated for two years, resulting in its reduction, which has made way for other, more desirable aquatic plants such as bullrush.



The same area photographed in 1999 illustrates the decline in woody vegetation and the increase of cattails.

Nearly the entire shore of the lake is rimmed by cattails, but they pose little threat to the health of the lake, rather providing nesting ground for birds and cover for other animals and fish. The lake has historically been home to a thriving fish population. Mr. Fernandez comments, "...When we bought the property, I didn't even know there were big fish in the lake. A couple of friends came out to fish. They were out for an hour and caught 15-20 bass. That got me interested in fishing." Fishing is no longer a major past time for Mr. Fernandez, and the majority of residents on the lake

seem to enjoy the lake for the setting it provides rather than the activity.

Mr. Fernandez makes other observations about historic trends in the animal population of the area. Otters, bullfrogs, and an occasional bobcat are all examples of species that have disappeared or have been significantly reduced in number. Mr. Fernandez relates an anecdote about a perceived decline in the alligator population, "I got into an argument with a neighbor who was shooting one. He was a good friend but we had a pretty heated debate about it...I didn't think the alligator was hurting anyone...and he had a 30/30 rifle and sometimes at the right angle, a bullet can skim the water and I didn't want him to hurt someone. He shot two gators, I haven't seen any recently..." But Jeff and Jan assure us that they are still thriving in their lake environment.



Florida kingsnake on the shore of Lake New
Ryan.
photo by Jeff and Jan Means

The quality of the water is an important issue to the residents on Lake New Ryan. Mr. Fernandez comments when asked about swimming in the lake that he did not, "...I am very aware of the impurities in the water. I know the well water out here is contaminated...with bacteria. I don't drink my well water." The Means have addressed issues concerning their well water and have recently had to sink a new well to rid their water supply of contaminants.

Development



Example of residential development on Lake New Ryan.

The location of Lake New Ryan in Northeast Lutz, close to the Pasco county line, allows the residents of the lake to enjoy a semi-rural atmosphere, but one that is changing like many environments in the metro Tampa area. Newburger Road, one of the main roads near Lake New Ryan has experienced an increase in traffic. The Means comment, "When we first moved out here, a traffic jam was three cars an hour...Now people have discovered it as an east-west road. It is very narrow. When you meet a dump-truck or a school bus or a garbage truck, you have to pull off the road." The low capacity of the road to handle traffic has not served as a deterrent to development and new building peppers the stretch between Livingston and Highway 41.

The lake itself is presently the setting for 13 homes, many of which, including those on Ryan Circle were built in the 1970's. The land around the lake excepting Ryan Circle was zoned for agriculture and much of the land was under citrus production. The agricultural designation is presently changing and land directly on the lake is being developed. For example, the Eagle's Nest development which is located on the southwest shore of the lake on land that used to be nesting grounds for sandhill cranes. The Means have been very concerned about the new development and have attempted to find out more on the nature of the proposed building and the developer. Jan comments, "The only person we could find to talk to was the realtor who was having an open house...We went to introduce ourselves and said that we sure hoped the people who moved in were environmentally conscious, as it was a wetland and we are very careful about the lake...The person was very responsive. She said that the person who bought the lot [one of the few sold] was very much environmentally conscious and that they bought this place because it was natural looking and that we didn't have anything to worry about there..."

Regardless, the Means still worry every time a "for sale" sign goes up. They have been lucky thus far; the majority of the residents have an outlook that supports a healthy lake, but the profile of the average resident seems to be changing,

growing younger with families who are more activity oriented. Jan comments, "When we first moved in the were mostly people who liked the country atmosphere. Now every one of these houses have been sold to families with children and dogs ...and a light in the back yard that lights up this whole side of the lake..."

The Future



Maintaining the water quality of Lake New Ryan is a goal of the lake's residents.

Highway 41 has expanded from two lanes to six lanes, opening the Lutz area to a flood of development that necessitates change in the natural environment. The residents of Lake New Ryan apprehensively view the changes. Mr. Fernandez recognizes the validity of an organization to deal with issues arising in the area. He relates a story about the nature of the built environment, "We had a neighbor...he put in for a variance to build a trailer...everybody was against it but nobody would go out on a limb. In a situation like that, a community would have more clout." Like Mr. Fernandez, the Means recognize the importance of proactivity and don't want to be unprepared when troubles start to arise. Jeff comments, "I would love to see some sort of organization...that is sort of our long-term goal to ensure the quality of this area."

The interest in maintaining the health of the lake exists for many of the lake's residents. Jan comments, "I believe from observing the people that live on this lake, that if the lake were threatened that we would have people come forward. Everybody seems to appreciate it. You can see canoes out here and rowboats and you don't see a lot of pollution. We see people fertilizing lawns they don't come right up to the lake...We think that people just have really busy lifestyles and that it is not at the top of their agenda and they just don't have the time."

Organizing on a grassroots level entails a good deal of commitment from the involved citizens and often it takes a threat to motivate people to organize. The residents of Lake New Ryan are already considering the values of an organization, and the lake can only benefit from this proactive stance.