



# Wekiva Wilderness Trust Newsletter

## June, 2023

### News

#### Queen Paula

On Tuesday, May 16, Park Manager Robert Brooks and Don Philpott collected our new \$46,999 shiny



wheelchair-accessible tram from Featherlite in Ocala. The photo below shows the tram with its roof down for the long drive home. The roof lifts up to accommodate passengers and the wheelchair ramp is stored at the front of the tram.



**Trams with roofs raised**



**Paula Russo**

The tram has been unofficially named ‘Queen Paula’ after Paula Russo, with the Florida

State Parks Foundation, who has long championed greater accessibility in our state parks.

“Over the years, many innovations have expanded access to the outdoors for people with disabilities, ensuring they may have positive, memorable experiences in Florida’s natural environment and award-winning state parks,” she said.

On Friday, May 26, more than 30 volunteers celebrated the tram's arrival with a hot dog supper in the Youth Camp followed by a ride in the new tram.



### **Kudos**

With so many volunteers gathered on May 26 to celebrate the tram's arrival, it was the perfect occasion to recognize two volunteers who were not able to attend the recent District 3 Volunteer Appreciation Awards.

### **Statewide Awards**

**Deborah Lafreniere** won the statewide Award for Adult Volunteer-Administration in special recognition for her tireless role in ensuring complete volunteer coverage of our Nature Center. Deborah is a former President of the Wekiva Wilderness Trust and has served with distinction for many years.



**Elaine Fisher** was the recipient of the statewide Award for Adult Volunteer for Protection. The citation recognized Elaine for serving as volunteer emergency personnel in situations such as prescribed fires and offering her services statewide during natural disasters.



Elaine volunteers to help with prescribed fires at the park, and as a retired paramedic, she shares her knowledge of medicine and safety with other team members. She puts emphasis on preventative measures like proper foot care and the importance of hydration. She also describes and demonstrates the many different uses of a cotton bandana that can be stored easily in fire helmets. Elaine provides thorough and detailed descriptions of how to address medical concerns or situations so all staff can be vigilant, thus highly augmenting the safety of all involved.

During a recent prescribed fire course, Elaine recognized the early signs of dehydration in a student and was able to provide them with quick and effective medical care, which allowed them to be able to safely continue participating in the course. Without her presence in trainings and her involvement as an extra crew member, several park personnel might have been unable to proceed.

In addition to her countless hours of volunteering during fires, Elaine has also served as medical person at the Engine Academy, a training course focused on wildland fire engines, when hosted at Wekiwa Springs State Park. She has even offered her services for strike teams throughout the entire state, making her an indispensable comrade.

### **National Recognition**

**Debbie LaFreniere, Joanne Boleman, Nancy Geffner, and Patty Geuder** are all recipients of The President's Volunteer Service Award's Gold Medal. (Photos of award presentations in the next newsletter.)

The award, which includes a certificate and letter from President Biden, is "in recognition and appreciation for their commitment to strengthen our nation and communities through volunteer service."

The President wrote "On behalf of the American people, I extend my heartfelt appreciation to you for your volunteer leadership, and I encourage you to continue to answer the call to serve. The country is counting on you."

The awards have been made since 2003 when the President's Council on Service and Civic Participation was founded and has continued under each new administration. The award honors individuals whose service positively impacts communities in every corner of the nation and inspires those around them to take action, too. The program is administered by AmeriCorps and Points of Light.

Many other volunteers also received awards and these will be featured in our next newsletter.

## **Junior Rangers Club**

The Junior Rangers Program continues to build in strength under the nurturing and enthusiastic eye of Val Hahn.

On Wednesday, May 10, the Club learned about Florida's black bears and Junior Rangers were able to earn a Natural Resources stamp. They and their parents learned a lot about Florida bears, their anatomy, diet, and habits.

Following the activities, the Junior Rangers and their parents helped with a park clean-up around the pavilion and parking areas.



**Junior Rangers at work**

If you are in the park on Thursday June 1, drop by the table near the springs and learn more about Florida black bears as it is National Black Bear Day. If you're a Junior Ranger, bring your passport book to receive a Natural Resources stamp.

Looking forward to Friday, July 7, we are anticipating a large gathering at the Sink Hole Pavilion to help celebrate the first anniversary of the Junior Rangers Club. Although the Junior Rangers program has been going on for many years it has traditionally been aimed at individuals who would work through the program by themselves. Wekiva Springs is the first Florida state park to form a Junior Ranger Club and hold regular monthly meetings. This has been so successful that several other parks have now followed suit. Wekiva now has more than 200 families enrolled in the program. Great job Val.

## **Ethel Update**

Ethel walks at Rock Springs continue to be popular and we are now working on a series of twelve interpretive panels that will be situated along the two-mile loop trail. Text for the panels has been approved and we are now working on the designs.

The Ethel History e-book available as a free download on the WWT website, has been completely revised thanks to a flood of new information and we will be shortly going to press to have hard copies printed. The aim is to donate copies of the book to every school and library in our tri-county area of Lake, Seminole and Orange.

A pavilion is to be constructed near the rest rooms at Rock Springs Run State Reserve Park, close to the Ethel walk trail head. We hope the pavilion will be used by visiting school groups coming to learn about the history of Ethel.

## Nature News

### Green Anole

#### *Anolis carolinensis*

##### A few facts:

1. Green anoles are not always green. They camouflage by turning brown when they are on a tree trunk or other brown support.
2. The males display a gorgeous pink dewlap, also known as a throat fan. The Cuban brown anole, also a beautiful lizard though not native, displays a striking orange dewlap. In both species, the dewlap is folded and not visible until they hyoid bone bows it out.
3. They eat small insects, and are prey to large skinks, snakes, cats, and birds.
4. Researchers say that they are staying higher in the trees since the invasive brown anole has become common, but they are also frequently seen on emergent vegetation such as pickerel weed and water hemlock.
5. They can shed their tails to escape a predator, and will soon grow another tail.
6. Their skin sheds, but in patches, not in one piece like a snake sheds. Also distinguishing them from snakes: their eyelids and their ear openings.
7. Their life expectancy is typically 2-3 years.



**Cuban Brown Anole (left) and Green Anole.  
Note the difference in the color of the dewlaps**

## Flower of the Month

### Adam's Needle

#### *Yucca filamentosa*

Adam's needle (*Yucca filamentosa*) is a perennial evergreen flowering plant of sandhills and dry forests. When it is not flowering the plant is about three feet tall and often surrounded and partially obscured by



the sandhill grasses, such as wiregrass. However, from spring to early summer, it sends up a flower stalk that reaches impressive heights, 8 to 10 feet or more. It presents a striking appearance with its sword-like leaves and dramatic flowerheads.

The flower stalks are leafless and topped by a cluster of large, drooping, bell-shaped, white to whitish-green flowers. The flower petals are rounded and sharp tipped.

Adam's needle does not have a trunk. The leaves form a basal rosette. Each leaf is rigid, thick and elongated with a hard sharp pointed tip and margins fraying into curly, filamentous threads.

Adam's needle provides cover for wildlife and attracts pollinators. It is pollinated by yucca moths and is a larval host plant for cofaqui giant skipper (*Megathymus cofaqui*) and yucca giant skipper (*Megathymus yuccae*) butterflies.

The fruits and flower petals are said to be edible. (Always use caution when trying wild foods.) The leaves, stems and roots of this plant have been used to stun fish.



In Wekiwa Springs State Park, look for Adam's needle in any dry sandy habitat, especially understory in longleaf pine forests. A prime area for viewing this lovely plant is on the south side of the main park road from the fork nearly to the Sand Lake parking lot.