

# Pear Pearls

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[www.pearassoc.org](http://www.pearassoc.org)

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Situated at the top of Pear Mountain is this gazebo. A popular place to enjoy the great outdoors of Lake County, Florida. Pear Park has several other gazebos situated on the hiking trail and a bird blind. Each are additions to Pear Park since its conception in the late 1990's.

Today's edition presents a timeline of the largest Regional Park in Lake County. Pear Association takes pride in our participation; encouraging and supporting the Lake County Board of County Commissioners and the Parks and Trails development of this facility.

1929 – 1996. The Leesburg Field Laboratory, Central Florida Research & Education Center (CFREC) was the primary site (263 acres) for research of diseases and insect problems of watermelon and grape. In 1958 the University of Florida Institute of Food and Agricultural Sciences continued this work in Leesburg. In 1996 the organization transferred their research to Apopka.

The Leesburg facility was just dormant land – at a time when developers were anxious to provide housing and commercial uses to the area.

1998 – 1999. Every important accomplishment in our society has movers and shakers. An individual stepped forward and presented the challenge for a new facility in Lake County. Dr. Shirl Joseph Stephany, Supervisor for the Lake County Soil and Water Conservation District presented a conceptual master plan to a small group (the Pear Committee). In early 2001, Pear Association became a 501C3 non-profit corporation. The goals presented to that small group became a working plan.

Was this a legal action? **Yes**, the 263 acres were; and continue to be owned by the state of Florida. The Lake County Board of County Commissioners signed a 50 Year lease with the Florida Department of Environmental Protection, Bureau of Public Lands. This legal step was in 2001.

Pear Association called on the Florida Trails, Highlander Chapter to assist us in developing a 1.3-mile trail on the Palatlahaha River border of our land. This was completed and dedicated in March 2003 as a tribute to Dr. Stephany. His death in February 2002 still fresh in the minds and hearts of many.

Pear Park had a second mover and shaker – a retiree living in the area, Dr. Ronald Plakke. Ron presented a recommendation for restoring and developing the Pear Park facility. His dedication and efforts served as an inspiration to our Pear Association workers.

Restoration began with planting of 298 trees in November 2002. Fifty-six volunteers accomplished this in under 4 hours. In the Spring of 2003, the National Tree Trust provided 500 seedlings. We were underway! November 2003 marked a second planting – 289 trees in the ground and 1,000 seedlings potted.

Our neighbors in the area had an interest in a facility not of agricultural concern. In September 2003, the Dog Park (2 acres) was opened just inside the University Avenue entrance. An instant success! Records list 140 dogs registered in February 2004.

But there was a problem. The 263 acres had no access from Lake County’s Scenic Highway – SR 27. The conceptual plan in 1998 showed a 50-acre parcel, nearly 2500 foot frontage on SR 27. The owner of this land wanted to sell and had approached the City of Leesburg for authorization of 25 acres of commercial development and 25 acres of high-density homes and townhouses. The Pear Association feared we would lose out on obtaining this land. The owner was agreeable to sell this highway frontage to Lake County for \$3 million. With much hard work by Lake County personnel, a PEAR Park Gateway conceptual plan was devised and application to the Florida Communities Trust for funding to purchase this land. In April 2004, Pear Park became a 313-acre facility.

Lake County has placed recreational facilities in this 50-acre parcel. Baseball, Tennis, Pickle Ball, Exercise equipment, parking area, rest-room facility, access to a 6+ mile perimeter trail, and yes, gazebos. Pear Park today is a complete Regional Park in Lake County’s system. Pear Association has served the public in this accomplishment. G. Wolf

<b>Pear Association Inc 2023 Membership/Renewal Application</b>	Name _____
	City _____ State _____ Zip _____
	opp. email _____
	Membership type Enclosed
	Single \$ 10
	Family \$ 15
	Support Organization \$40
	Special interests and concerns _____
	Skills & talents you offer _____
	By signing this document I affirm that I am in agreement with the mission and purposes of Pear Association. Signed _____

Pear Association, Inc. is a 501C3 non-profit corporation registered in the state of Florida. Our Board of Directors are:

- President: Gary Salzman
- Vice-President. Gene Bouley
- Secretary. George Wolf
- Directors at Large. Hal Urban, Peg Urban

Lake Parks & Trails Events Office. (352) 253-4950  
Parks & Trails Wendy Poag. (352) 742-3867

## Peak Season

At Pear, late October and early November is the peak time for fall blooming grasses and wildflowers before winter dormancy sets in. It's the time of the year when we can enjoy the fruits of our volunteer labor, and appreciate that last burst of color, (mainly red, purple and yellow), as well as observe the final flights of the butterflies.

Best places for viewing are the Butterfly Garden Pavilion, Meadow Trail, and Overlook Gardens.

In addition, the Heritage Memorial Grove is a great place to observe Florida native trees as they approach dormancy as well, and you may even glimpse a hint of fall color in the leaves of a few species-yes, even in Florida! You will also observe the white blossoms of the Saltbush or Groundsel tree, aka "Florida Snow" found growing near the wetland areas. They live up to their nickname as their fluffy white seeds blow in the wind and fill the air with "snow"

So, take the time to enjoy the autumn beauty of Pear Park.

Peg Urban

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