

UPDATE IN BRIEF

- The fishing pier now has benches and picnic tables.
- Retirement of Dan Nelson celebrated in November and December
- Friends Annual Meeting and Holiday Social held on December 12th
- Funding received for resurfacing Lester Finley Trail and upgrades to canoe launch
- Efforts with FWC to obtain more fish for Lake Osprey
- Funding approved for repaving roadways
- First Day Hike & Scavenger Hunt scheduled for Saturday, January 1st from 9 a.m. to 1 p.m.
- Florida Scrub-Jay Race scheduled for Saturday, January 21st.

Did you know...

The Gopher Tortoise is a species in decline and is protected Federally and by the State of Florida. One of the major reasons for its decline is its loss of habitat. Another is to predation of the eggs by raccoons, armadillos, and fire ants. Another contributor to their decline is non-native plants. With their dense canopies Brazilian Peppers and Carrot Wood Trees eliminate their food supply such as Gopher Apples and Wire Grass. A Gopher Tortoise's life revolves around its burrow which can be up to 40 feet in length and up to 10 feet deep. The width of the burrow is usually the same length as the tortoise, enabling it to turn around anywhere in the burrow. Gophers don't reach sexual maturity until 10-15 years. The female will lay 3-10 eggs in front of the burrow. After 70-90 days they will hatch out. Due to high predations the survival rate of the eggs is extremely low. Once they reach adulthood, they have few predators and are thought to live more than 40 years.

Not only is it important to protect the gopher tortoises for their own sake but many other animals depend on the burrows to escape the heat, fire, and cold that occurs in Florida. The burrows provide shelter for more than 360 species of animals. The Gopher Tortoise is very important, if we lose the tortoise, we lose a lot more. The Gopher Tortoises that can be seen throughout the park are often crossing the road or bike path. Please be on the lookout and watch your speed while traveling through.



Manager's Message



Matt Kruse

Hello Friends of Oscar Scherer Park

As always, I want to thank you for your continued support. Although the past few months have been challenging due to Hurricane Ian, park staff and volunteers have remained positive through storm cleanup. The storm caused large scale vegetation damage throughout Oscar Scherer. Tree branches and entire trees fell down, blocking roadways and paths. Large Florida Slash Pine and Live Oak trees took out power lines and damaged buildings. Severe winds caused roof damage while spreading wreckage around the park. Fortunately, Oscar Scherer did not have to wait long for assistance. Immediately Park staff began cleanup and recovery efforts. Several Hurricane Recovery Teams were dispatched from other parks throughout Florida to assist in the effort. Upon arrival recovery teams chain sawed their way through heavy vegetation gaining access to cut-off areas of the park. Staff, recovery teams, and contractors spent weeks cleaning, cutting, and moving debris to piles to be chipped and burned. Due to a team effort, the park was able to re-open for day use just 15 days after Hurricane Ian. The campground was re-opened a couple of weeks later. Several small storage sheds were declared a complete loss and were demolished and removed. The damaged sheds have been replaced with new and improved buildings. During hurricane cleanup The Friends of Oscar Scherer Park stepped in to provide staff and recovery teams with food, drinks, and snacks. The Friends also supplied much needed ice to the crews working out in the extreme heat, while having no electricity to keep food and drinks cold. **Thank you, Friends of Oscar Scherer.** Although we are not completely recovered from the storm, the park is fully functional and providing a full array of recreational activities.

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VOLUNTEER

Are you interested in helping out with the operations of a state park? We have many volunteer opportunities, day positions and residential positions.

Some examples of the volunteer opportunities are: Nature Center host, Ranger Station assistant, field worker, trail maintenance, butterfly gardening, park maintenance, campground hosts, specialty skills worker, and many others. Something for everyone; all skill levels and abilities are welcomed and encouraged.

We have a group of volunteers that work strictly on Mondays and/or Wednesdays from 8 am to noon on various different tasks. They split wood, work on trails, carpentry, mowing and trimming, and whatever else needs to be done for the day. Great way to meet new friends!

Did you know that, if you are a campground host, you can get a campsite for up to 4 months for no charge in exchange for your volunteering hours?

Cooler mornings seem to bring people out to the park earlier. The days are pleasant but can be unusually warm. Our winter volunteers have flocked in for the winter months. Interpretive programs are welcomed as well as some of the park's fun social programs. Most of the winter programs are provided by seasonal volunteers.

So... Get involved and meet new friends!

If you are interested in volunteering, please complete a volunteer application and submit to the park. You can obtain an application at <https://www.floridastateparks.org/get-involved/volunteer>.

If you would like more information on volunteer opportunities, please feel free to contact Diana Stinson, Park Service Specialist, at (941) 882-7219 or e-mail at Diana.Stinson@floridadep.gov.

"Volunteers are not paid – not because they are worthless, but because they are PRICELESS."

Thank you to all the wonderful volunteers for all you do at Oscar Scherer State Park!

PROGRAM AND EVENT CALENDAR

There is so much to offer at this time of year. The days are shorter and cooler, allowing visitors to see the park a bit easier and enjoy a longer hike maybe. There are over 15 miles of hiking trails to explore sections of the 1400-acre park we call Oscar Scherer. Much of the vegetation begins its dormant stage, but other wildflowers and migratory birds begin to emerge, usually showing off an array of color and beauty.

A wide variety of programs and events are available to choose from for almost everyone's interests.

Program & event details can be found on The Friends of Oscar Scherer website at <https://friendsofoscarscherer.com/>

Or the Oscar Scherer State Park website at <https://www.floridastateparks.org/parks-and-trails/oscar-scherer-state-park>

The majority of our programs are run by park volunteers or park staff. There is a program or activity offered every day of the week. Our new Pop-Up Ranger Program offers visitors a chance to chat with a ranger about one of their favorite topics on display. The Ranger Hike of The Week is not exactly a new program, but we changed the name of this long running Friday morning program which is not as popular. Our more popular programs include Camper Coffee or Pancake Breakfast, so come hungry. After your fill of pancakes join the Audubon Society for a Guided Bird Walk. Sarasota or Venice Area Audubon welcome visitors and are very knowledgeable about migratory birds and of course the parks resident Florida Scrub jay. You can also join in on the low impact co-ed exercise class during the week to help burn off those extra pancake calories. Some monthly programs include Watercolor Art Fellowship or a Campfire Program.

Program Brochures are available online on The Friends website.

Upcoming Event you don't want to miss.

January 1, 2023

First Day Hike & Scavenger Hunt

Start your New Year off on the right foot. Hike park trails and find the hidden signs. Scavenger clue sheets are available on the day of the hike from the Ranger Station or Nature Center Event Booth.

This event has been popular for the past few years with visitors getting out in the parks and on the trails. There is also an easy, accessible Scavenger Hunt set up around Lake Osprey.

January 21, 2023

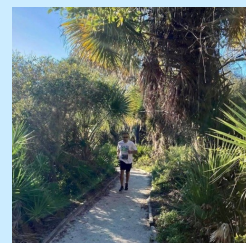
23rd Annual Scrub Jay 5K & Scramble 10K

This is the Friends of Oscar Scherer's second largest fundraiser event. Registration for this race is heating up.

Proceeds help to support the Florida Scrub Jay and the habitat necessary for this indigenous bird to exist in Florida and at Oscar Scherer. Last year we introduced the 10K Scramble and received some great feedback on the course. This is not for your regular runners. This is trail running with ups & downs, dips & tricks. Well not really any tricks but some great scenery along the way and narrow bridges to make your way across. This year we are leaving in the Virtual option for registration. So even if you can't attend the event to run in the park you can still participate. You can register for this event on <https://runsignup.com/Race/FL/Osprey/ScrubJay5K10>



A scavenger clue



A runner on the trail

Volunteer Spotlight

We are spotlighting two sets of volunteers this time. These 3 volunteers have been with Oscar Scherer for many years and are “retiring” at the end of the season. They and every other volunteer give back so much to Oscar Scherer with their dedication and hard work. They have provided excellent customer service over the years and will be greatly missed.

MEET DEBORAH KOLLMANN



I have been volunteering at Florida State Parks for seven years, or over 4,000 hours. After I retired, I wanted to do something where I could stay active, enjoy nature and give back to the community. My experience at Oscar Scherer has been a highlight of my life, and sadly I am ending this chapter and returning to family obligations in Virginia.

What I like the most about camp hosting are the relationships you build with the park staff and your fellow hosts. You also see campers who are returning every year to this beautiful park. Oscar Scherer is a gem, an oasis of the Real Florida, now surrounded by

MEET MIKE AND BARBARA WALKER

As told by Barbara - After retiring in March 2014, we applied to volunteer at Oscar Scherer State Park, as it was close to my parents' house in Sarasota. The first 2 years we were floaters in the campground. When an opening became available in maintenance, Mike's background allowed him to join the maintenance team. This allowed me to be part of the many programs that are available at OSSP. Pancake Breakfast, Camper Coffee and Jr. Ranger soon became very interesting to me.

Over the years these programs have been successful due to the Friends of Oscar Scherer, resident volunteers, camper volunteers and outside volunteers, ALL working together to serve the guests of the park. During our 9 years as volunteers we have made many wonderful friends. The good news is, our home is only 12 miles from the park, and we will be frequent visitors and outside volunteers for many years to come.

As told by Mike - Barb and I had just retired, knew we wanted to travel, and both have camped all our lives. Talked with a Ranger at Myakka State Park and she mentioned volunteering. Got an application, filled it out. Only listed Oscar as a choice because we own a home in Sarasota. We were in Washington State when we were contacted to come on down to Oscar for Dec. 14 till March 15.

So, after 9 years we have decided we would like to spend some time at our house here in Florida. This was a tough decision because of all the friends and activities we have enjoyed. During our time here at OSSP we have met and worked with so many people. I feel we have made a difference at OSSP and have helped in some small way for the park to be enjoyed by all our guest.

Don't think you are getting rid of me, I plan on becoming a curmudgeon and be in the park every Monday and Wednesday.



MEET FRIENDS DIRECTOR JOEL ROBBINS



Joel Robbins is a 10-year Floridian but was born a Buckeye, grew up a Hoosier and had a short stint as a Wildcat. He has been volunteering at Oscar Scherer State Park for almost a decade, primarily in the Nature Center. He focuses on interpretation for visitors, Critter Crafts, floral walks, display creation, and presentations for school groups, scouts, church groups and community clubs. He has loved volunteering locally as: a case manager for a homeless resource center, a Guardian ad Litem, a tutor of immigrants for the Literacy Council of Sarasota County, and a member of King's Gate Club, where he lives with wife Nancy. He's a retired English teacher and journalist with degrees from Ball State and Purdue universities. In his 60s, he served two and a half years in the Peace Corps as a consultant to libraries, colleges and universities in Azerbaijan and Liberia. Pictured above are Robbins and Severus the Snake (not the Harry Potter character Severus Snape) at the Nature Center. Come visit them most Saturdays. Joel has served as a member of the Board of Directors of the Friends of Oscar Scherer Park since 2017.

Manager's Message (continued from page 2)

Recently the park said farewell to our beloved Assistant Park Manager Daniel Nelson. Dan is now enjoying retirement after 12 years of service with the Florida Park Service at Oscar Scherer State Park. Dan's hard work ethic, integrity, and character will be impossible to replace. His dedication and contributions to the park will not be forgotten. We will miss Dan and wish him the best. **Thank you for everything Dan. It was a pleasure working with you.**

Park Management and The Friends of Oscar Scherer have finalized the Annual Program Plan for 2023. The plan details CSO park support through park enhancement, fund raising goals and lists potential programs, outreach, and special events. Park enhancement goals involve upgrades and improvements to the nature center, equipment repairs and replanting areas damaged by Hurricane Ian. Fundraising will consist of ongoing and new fundraising. During 2023, the focus will be to return programs and activities while recovering revenue lost due to Hurricane Ian. Additional focus will be on increasing membership through local outreach, publications, websites, and social media. Programs and events will consist of Haunted Trails, guided night paddles, Scrub-Jay 5K, Pancake Breakfasts, Earth Day Festival, Kiwanis Fish a Thon, and many more.

Have you heard? Oscar Scherer State Park just received a brand new (6) six seat golf cart. The golf cart was donated by the Florida State Park Foundation. The cart has all the bells and whistles, complete with a hydraulic ramp for wheelchair accessibility. The park has plans to provide tours for park visitors. The donated golf cart will provide additional recreational activities to park visitors while offering opportunities for people with disabilities. Please stop in and join us for an entertaining and educational activity. A detailed program list is available at the Ranger Station or visit the Friends of Oscar Scherer website <https://friendsofoscarscherer.com/>. Thank you for allowing me serve as your park manager. Hope to see you soon.

DAN NELSON RETIRES WITH CELEBRATIONS

Dan Nelson retired from the Florida Park Service last month.

Dan came to Florida from Western Pennsylvania in 1974 and has a background of experience in management within the service industry. He enjoys nature and especially enjoyed living in the park immersed in the environment.

Dan started his career in the Florida Park Service at Oscar Scherer Park in June 2008 as a volunteer. He staffed the Nature Center, greeting visitors and learning about the park. Dan quickly joined the CSO Friends of Oscar Scherer Park's Board and soon took over the treasurer position. He held the position for nearly three years. Dan was hired as an OPS ranger at Oscar Scherer in 2009 and became an FTE ranger in 2010. Dan became Assistant Park Manager in December of 2013. His latest accomplishment is obtaining his Burn Boss Certification.

Dan's last day was December 5th. The Friends sponsored a retirement party for him on November 30th, and on December 5th the park hosted a parade in his honor. We wish Dan a very happy retirement.



MEMBERS RE-ELECT BOARD AT ANNUAL MEETING

The Friends of Oscar Scherer Park, Inc., held our Annual Meeting of Members on Monday, December 12th at the park's Nature Center. With a good turnout, members re-elected the current directors, and the Board of Directors elected officers. The current officers and directors of the Friends are as follows:

Anne Heuer—President

Ron Newton—Vice President

Joyce Stone—Treasurer

Oliver Janney—Secretary

Carolyn Morgan—director

Joel Robbins—Director

President Anne Heuer hailed the completion of the Friends' major project for several years, the boardwalk or fishing pier on Lake Osprey, and mentioned the importance of the upcoming fund-raising events after Hurricane Ian forced cancellation of our largest fund raiser, Haunted Trails. She reported that Patty Harshbarger had resigned as Membership Director and called for a volunteer to take on the position. Our Park Manager, Matt Kruse, thanked the Friends for their contributions to the park this year and walked the members through the Friends Annual SCO Plan for 2023. Then all enjoyed a delicious dinner followed by door prizes.



Meet the Team

Park Manager – Matt Kruse

Administrative Assistant – Amber Shaw

Park Service Specialist – Jonathan Hunter

Park Ranger – Deanna Lamont

Park Ranger – Open

OPS Park Ranger—Mike Palella

OPS Park Ranger— Ben DeCosta

Assistant Park Manager – Open

Park Service Specialist – Diana Stinson

Park Ranger – Alyssa Rothstein

Park Ranger—Anthony Zacarolli

Park Ranger – Open

OPS Park Ranger – Jerry Bodnar

District ROAR AmeriCorps— Open

Super Star – Francis Folkers