

Lake Orienta



View of Lake Orienta at time of interview
(USF)



Pond off Lake Orienta where Roger lives
(USF)

The following narrative has been written from information gathered in an interview with Roger Stover in his home on Lake Orienta on April 19, 2002. Over the years, Roger and his wife Kathy have accumulated many memories, having lived on the lake for 26 years. The following story relates their experience of living on Lake Orienta.

Personal History

Roger Stover has lived in the vicinity of Lake Orienta his entire life, born and raised in the greater Orlando area just a few miles from where he lives now. After meeting at the local junior college and marrying, Roger and Kathy bought a home on Lake Orienta. This was in 1976 and they have been there ever since. The couple was not necessarily looking for waterfront property at the time, but rather attempting to find “a decent house in a nice neighborhood.” The home they chose just happened to be on a small off-shoot or pond that connects to Lake Orienta.

Although less so now than in the past, the couple has enjoyed numerous activities on the lake during the time they have lived there, including sailing, kayaking, hydro sliding, water skiing, and fishing. Roger said his 26 years at the lake have been good, with “great neighbors” and an ideal location. Roger reflected:

“When John [his neighbor] lived here, we stored all of our boats and water toys on his beach, where we would have a lot of cookouts and parties. Water-skiing and sail boarding consumed much of our time in the summer on the lake.”

Today, Roger enjoys semi-retirement, working part time at Nabisco and playing the stock market, while Kathy works full time as a corporate travel agent, although she taught elementary school for years before that.

History/Information

Lake Orienta is a 142-acre lake located in the Little Wekiva Watershed of Seminole County in Altamonte Springs, Florida. An aerial view of the water body shows more of a series of four connected lakes than one large open lake. On the east side of the largest lake is an island called Bird Island that Roger says is “covered with birds.” On the west of the lake is Lake Orienta Park, a public recreation area that has been closed for the past two years due to low water levels.



Low water levels at time of interview (USF)



Signage at park that is closed due to current low water levels (USF)



Low water levels at time of interview (USF)

According to Roger, water levels at Lake Orienta have gone up and down in the time he and his wife have lived there, but current levels are at an all-time low. However, Roger reported that at times, water levels are so high that the lake has to be drained to prevent the flooding of homes. About the water levels, Roger explained:

“I’ve seen it up into people’s backyards, up to their foundations when the lake was up so high. Then I’ve seen it a year or so ago when it was absolutely the lowest.... It’s been up and down, up and down.”

Water quality has also changed over the years. Roger describes the current water in Lake Orienta as the color of coffee. He attributes this to increasing road runoff and fertilizers coming into the lake, which is exacerbated by the fact that it is a fairly stagnant water body, according to Roger.

Although water levels are low and water quality is down, Roger says that Lake Orienta supports a great deal of wildlife and thinks the number of animals has actually increased over the years. He reported sighting various fowl, including blue herons, eagles, white pelicans, hawks, and occasionally a falcon. In the lake itself, there are turtles, carp, bass, brim, a few alligators, and numerous mallard and wood ducks. Roger said the white pelicans originated from Lake Apopka to escape pollution, which is located roughly 20 miles west of Lake Orienta. About the mallards, Roger shared:

“We have a lot of mallards in this development. There are a couple of houses that feed them. The people next door have a little girl and she feeds them little pieces of bread every afternoon. We’ve got some mallards that fly in during the winter, but then we have some that stay. They stay around. It’s a great deal. You [the ducks] get fed.”

Roger also reported a down side to the mallards occupying the Lake Orienta area:

“We have a few eagles that fly in. They used to roost down on the island or near the island and when the water levels got so low, they would just hang out and pick off the mallard ducks when they got hungry, and they’d take them out to the island and eat them.”

Roger says that the carp that are in Lake Orienta were intentionally released into the lake to eat the overgrown vegetation, but he feels they should have been removed once the problem was fixed. He explained:

“When we go out kayaking, you’d be paddling along and you’ll see these big swirls in front of you. If you get real close to the shore and you scare these carp, they’re like 25 pounds now. I remember when they were finger length. And now they’ve grown to be 25-30 pounds so they’re huge. They’ll scare the daylights out of you.”



View of Lake Orienta from Altamonte Springs Hotel between 1882-1887 (Florida State Archives)



View of Lake Orienta from Altamonte Springs Hotel between 1882-1887 (Florida State Archives)

Development

The development of the land around Lake Orienta dates back to the 1880s, when the Altamonte Hotel was built by the Altamonte Land, Hotel, and Navigation, Co. -- a group of Bostonians that would take winter vacations in it.¹ Active through the 1920s and 30s, the hotel was visited by U.S. President Grant and Thomas Edison.¹ It was destroyed by a fire in 1953 and on the vacant lot an assisted living facility has since been built. According to Roger a housing development for full-time residents was built in the 1950s and since then numerous homes have been built. Before the influx of residential development around Lake Orienta, however, the area consisted of many orange groves that Roger would visit as a child. He shared:

"This all used to be orange groves where we're sitting right now. We used to shoot doves and quail in this neighborhood years ago when it was just an orange grove. Close to the water, there were cabins for the farm workers. They used to have a pump station or pump house and they would pump water out of the lake for the orange trees, years and years ago."

In the years Roger has been around, development has increased greatly. When Roger and his wife first moved in, there was nothing but woods behind them that bordered a nursery. He explained:

"When we moved in here of course it wasn't a park. We had to chop down a lot of trees just to even see the water. There were a lot of shrubs and trees. And then a lot of the houses that were built over here when they built you could hardly even see the lake there were so many trees. They do still have one stand of trees that is indicative of what was around the lake years ago. It was almost like mangroves."

Today high occupancy apartments stand where the more natural fern nursery once was. According to rumor, Roger said those apartments might soon be torn down and replaced with office space. Roger explained:

"It's reached its saturation point right now. I don't think you can build anything else around this lake. There are no vacant lots around here. You get some resale homes, but you don't get any new building. There is hardly any more land in Altamonte anymore to build office space so there is a large conglomerate looking at maybe bulldozing these apartments and condos and turning that into office space, which will be great. We won't have the traffic and it would look a heck of a lot better than it does now."

Although, there have long been homes on Lake Orienta's shores, the number has certainly increased in the 26 years Roger has lived there.



Lake Orienta at time of interview (USF)

The Future

To Roger, the future of Lake Orienta is uncertain, although he is hopeful. In the years that Roger and Kathy have lived there, it seems that both the lake's quality and quantity have decreased. If Roger could change anything about the lake's condition, it would be to improve water quality and consistency. However, he is aware that this will take a collaborative effort. He explained:

"There might need to be a concerted effort put forth with the city or county to reclaim water quality. But as long as you've got run off from the roads, I don't see it ever coming back to what it was."

The deterioration of Lake Orienta saddens Roger, and he explained how if he ever moves near water again, he will make sure it was "some type of tide water where you have water changing all the time." Roger expressed how he feels:

"It's a real shame that it has evolved into what it is. I really don't know what the water quality is, but it's certainly not conducive to what I want to swim in or put my ears in."

Hopefully, those living close to this relatively large lake will soon take notice and employ the necessary steps to ensure it a positive and healthy future.

1. *Early Days of Seminole County, Florida* by Arthur E. Francke, Jr. Seminole County Historical Commission 1984.

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