

PERPETUATING A NATURAL HERITAGE

by William D. Moriarty

Beach Park in Tampa contains a very special urban forest populated with moss draped Live Oaks, many of them centuries old, towering Slash Pines, Pignut Hickories with brilliant yellow fall foliage, Cabbage Palms dotted in yards engulfed by stands of virgin timber, lagoons and bayous lined with Red and Black Mangroves. This section of Tampa is typical of the warm-temperate to subtropic transition zone.

In an area of runaway growth, Beach Park offers two important virtues — a natural botanical heritage, and a man-made sociological heritage. Many of Tampa's oldest and finest homes and oldest and finest trees are here. The aesthetic and characteristic charm of the antebellum South seen in neighborhoods in Mobile, Charleston, and Savannah, hundreds of miles to the north, exists here.

When Beach Park began to feel the threat of development in the area, the homeowners' association, dormant for 25 years, was reestablished by new young residents. Beautification Committee Chairperson Melissa Mooser suggested reforesting the neighborhood, and called the Tampa Reforestation and Environmental Effort (T.R.E.E.) to help with an arbor day project.

Swann Circle Park, within Beach Park, is owned by the residents and not the City of Tampa. It is, however, maintained by the City of Tampa Parks Department, so any land planning of the parcel must meet with the city's approval. It was planted once before by T.R.E.E. in 1985. Neighbors kept the dogwoods and redbuds alive by supplying them with water through the 1985 drought, Tampa's worst on record.

William Moriarty, president of T.R.E.E.,



had spent part of his growing-up years in this section of town, and saw Melissa's offer to reforest Beach Park on a larger scale as a dream come true. Since most of the trees in Beach Park were left standing when the neighborhoods were developed, a number of them are dying of old age. This new project could unite residents and perpetuate the community's natural heritage into the next century and beyond.

Moriarty spent six months planning the event. After ten sets of designs and much negotiating between T.R.E.E., the City of Tampa Parks Dept., and the Beach Park Home Owners Association, Parks Dept. Director Ross J. Ferlita approved the project, and approved the donation of thirty 15-gallon cans of Live Oaks and Southern Magnolias. These two species were chosen as Beach Park's "theme" trees, to be planted throughout the three-mile area.

T.R.E.E. Secretary Greg Howe worked through the night just prior to the event to finish copies of *Arbor Bio*, T.R.E.E.'s newsletter for the volunteers.

One hundred and forty trees were ready for planting on November 14, 1987. City Parks Dept. Horticulturist

Bob Scheible set up a delivery schedule for trees the Parks Dept. donated, and his worker John Sklarsic delivered them. Suncoast FNPS President Pat Chellman contributed greatly to the project's success.

Over 100 volunteers showed up to help plant them. The weather was delightful, in the mid-seventies with blue skies. Young and old alike, shovels in hand, joined in beautifying their community with native trees.

Three-gallon Slash Pines were planted among aged Slash Pines and Live Oaks in Swann Circle Park, along with Southern Red Cedar, Sweetgum, and Florida Elm. Flowering Dogwood, Redbud, Tulip Poplar, and Southern Magnolia were planted sparingly in canopy understories, and Chickasaw Plums were used in medians and on frontage areas in Swann Circle Park where roads intersect.

After the work was done, lunch was served to the volunteers by Beach Park Homeowners Association.

A plaque was erected that day and a Southern Magnolia planted in honor of Milo Smith, Florida's first urban planner, who lived in Beach Park for 34 years before he died in 1984. Milo created the jogging path that traverses Swann Lake Park, and was steadfast in his opposition to the park's being developed for any purpose other than recreation.

Beach Park Homeowner's Association's Ron Schon called the Arbor Day project a "smashing success" in the Nov. 15 Tampa edition of the *St. Petersburg Times*. Not only has a new forest been planted, but botanical identity has been reestablished, and neighbors and strangers were drawn closer together by sharing in the planting.

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TREE President William Moriarty addressed close to 100 volunteers on the day of the planting.