

Myakka River: The Real Florida

Friends of Myakka hope to introduce the river through classes

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Staff Writer

Down on the Myakka River, there is the wild and tropical Florida that has been virtually untouched by man. It is because of this natural beauty that Owen Comora joined the non-profit group Friends of Myakka River.

This group of about 300 members began in 1993 by Dr. Mary Jelks to protect the wildlife of the Myakka State Park. Through fundraisers and volunteer work,



Participants will have an opportunity to meet an original Myakka resident, an alligator, during "Reptiles and Amphibians of Myakka" on March 25. The class will be a combined classroom-hiking-driving presentation led by Chris Becker, a Florida Park Service biologist.

the group works to bring enjoyment of wildlife to residents of Manatee and Sarasota County.

For Comora, it is a love a birds that brought him to the group. Since age 13, the 74-year-old retiree has had a passion for bird watching and identifying the different species.

"I got involved (with Friends of Myakka River) when I asked them if they had anyone who is a bird identifier," Comora said. "I thought it would be nice if someone who knew something about birds could

do so the visitors can see them and know what they are looking at."

Now 2,000 hours of volunteering later, Comora is helping to teach a course in the third annual "Myakka Friends Nature-Adventure Series" about the different birds that fly near the Myakka River. He is also looking forward to taking in a class himself on another passion: fly-fishing.

"Myakka's Fishing Hot Spots" is the first class in the 15 course series on Jan. 15 at 9 a.m. Dr. Jay Shroyer and Robert Dye, veteran fishermen, will share some fishing tips, including when and where to fish and what methods of fishing are best, in Myakka River and both the Upper and Lower Myakka Lakes.

The classes, which run through May,



Last year, the "Myakka's Fishing Hot Spots" class was very popular. This year, it will be taught by veteran fisherman Robert Dye and Dr. Jay Shroyer at 9 a.m. Jan. 15.



Courtesy of Friends of Myakka

Owen Comora will ride with a park ranger and class members to the Myakka prairie to see the elusive Backman's Sparrows nest in the "Seeking Backman's Sparrow" class April 21.

include topics such as identifying plant allergens, oil painting, canoeing and kayaking, astrology, tracking animals and much more.

The classes have been very popular with a wide range of people in the area, Comora says. Last year they offered 11 courses and had two run numerous sessions for several because of its popularity.

The money for the classes goes to the "Myakka Forever" endowment fund. But raising funds has not been the only success in the classes. Comora says the courses have helped to recruit new members to the cause, including about 15

new members last year.

"The main thing is to give people an idea of the beauty of the park," Comora said.

Comora says the course is open to everyone. Several weekend classes have been popular for parents and grandparents to enjoy with their children but the classes boast a wide range of people. Comora says the classes are best for "people who are looking for something different."

"There going to see what the real Florida was like and what it is still like in Myakka," Comora said. "And enjoy the outdoors."

What Comora likes best about the Friends of Myakka and the courses is the



One of award-winning artist Jean Blackburn's students works on an oil painting of a woodland area. Blackburn will teach "Plein Air Oil Painting Workshops" on Feb. 23 and Feb. 24.

chance to meet with others who enjoy wildlife. He says it is the draw to the "real Florida" that makes it a perfect fit. "There's something different every day," Comora said. "You never know what's going to be around the bend."

Year Starts with a Bang

New Year's is often time to ring in the New Year with close friends. But for many others it can be a time of wild parties, fireworks and letting loose all to see the old year out.

This year was no exception for residents of Manatee County. According to Manatee County Sheriff's Department reports, the festivities of some Manatee residents kept the deputies busy.

- Dec. 31 - 9:03 p.m. - While setting off fireworks at their southern Manatee County home, the complainant's vehicle caught on fire. According to the police report, none of the fireworks got inside the vehicle because the windows were up and the doors were locked. The complainant said that he put some dud fire works in the front seat of the vehicle and the back seat of the truck caught

fire by unknown means. The complainant attempted to put the fire out until South Manatee Fire and Rescue responded and put the fire out. SMFR inspector said the fire is undeterminable.

- Jan. 1 - 12:01 a.m. - Sometime through the night a bullet came through the victim's roof of her home in Bradenton. She saw some dirt on the floor, looked up and saw the hole. She found the bullet in a basket on top the fridge. There was approximately \$150 in roof damage.

- Jan. 1 - 12:10 a.m. - A short time after midnight on New Year's Day unknown person fired a bullet into the air. Police reports say the bullet came down through the victim's enclosed lanai roof of his Palmetto home. The bullet hit the tiled floor making a small nick in the tile. No

one was in the lanai when this occurred.

- Jan. 1 - 12:15 a.m. - The complainant told police he heard a noise around 12:15 a.m. in his home in Bradenton. When he got up this morning he noticed white particles on the hall floor. He looked up and saw a hole in the ceiling. He looked around and found a bullet on the floor. Repair cost for the hole in the roof is approximately \$100.

- Jan. 1 - 12:20 a.m. - While at a party in Manatee County, victim was hit by the suspect in the face with a broken bottle causing a large laceration on victim's face. Family members drove victim to the hospital. Police could not locate the suspect.

- Jan. 1 - 9:50 a.m. - Shortly after midnight on New Year's Day an unknown

person shot a round into the victim's master bedroom in his Palmetto home. The master bedroom is on the northwest side of the house. The bullet went through a window, lampshade and into a wall next to the bed. Deputies were unable to see the bullet inside the hole in the wall. The homeowner told police he had no idea who shot into the house and didn't think it was intentional. There were two young children and complainant's wife in the room when the bullet entered.

- Jan. 1 - 4:20 p.m. - Complainant stopped by the police station to report that a bullet come through his carport roof in Ellenton. The complainant told police he hear the round hit the roof last night at about one minute before midnight. Complainant could not locate the bullet.

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car chase that passed through Manatee County and then back again.

On Tuesday, Darrell Wayne Morton, 41, led Hillsborough County sheriff's deputies along I-75 from Hillsborough to Sarasota counties and then back to Hillsborough. The slow-speed chase ended when Morton pulled in to an unlikely place, a Hillsborough jail parking lot, and surrendered.

Morton was charged with grand theft auto and fleeing and eluding police.

Groundwork Digs Up Fears

The Tallevast community is outraged by several holes dug near a house under construction. The neighborhood advocacy group called the holes a safety and health hazard. Some of the holes measure up to eight feet across and contain standing water.

The holes restore fears in residents of the pollution-tainted community that digging in the area could release toxic vapors and dust from the underground pollution.

County officials say they are working

to ease citizens in the area by cordoning the area off and testing air, water and soil samples taken Wednesday.

A plumbing contractor apparently dug the holes on 17th St. Court E. where a single-family home is being built.

The concern of the community is that the digging could further expose residents to the pollution that covers about 130 acres surrounding the former beryllium plant on Tallevast Road.

Members of the community have been concerned with ground work done in the area since learning of the pollution

in 2003. Residents were angered last February when the county cleaned out a drainage ditch along Tallevast Road.

Three months later, the community members were outraged over a water main project in the intersection of Tallevast Road and 15th Street East. The county stopped the work but installed the line to the house under construction in late December. County officials say they took safety precautions, including vapor monitoring that was suggested by the Florida Department of Environment Protection.