

EXTENSIONS OF REMARKS

RECOGNIZING THE GREECE ROTARY CLUB FOR 50 YEARS OF TREMENDOUS SERVICE TO THE TOWN OF GREECE

HON. CHRISTOPHER JOHN LEE

OF NEW YORK

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Wednesday, January 21, 2009

Mr. LEE of New York. Madam Speaker, it is with great pride that I rise today to commemorate the Greece Rotary Club for working for the betterment of the Greece community for 50 years.

The Greece Rotary is made up of more than 100 leaders from the community who volunteer their time and resources to help others and advance goodwill.

The Greece Rotary Club has undertaken many important volunteer projects, including giving out more than 1,600 dictionaries to help bolster children's interest in reading.

The impact of the Greece Rotary has been felt throughout the world as well. Last year, the Rotary worked in conjunction with Rotarians in Africa to complete two community service projects: donating books to Ethiopia and installing clean water systems for elementary schools in Nigeria.

Through its numerous good deeds and unselfish acts, the Greece Rotary has made good on Rotary International's mottos of "Service above self" and "They profit most who serve best." Rotary International works to bring business leaders together for humanitarian service projects and to build trust, goodwill and peace around the world.

Thus Madam Speaker, in recognition of 50 years of tremendous service to the Town of Greece, I ask that this Honorable Body join me in honoring the Greece Rotary Club.

PINELLAS COUNTY, FLORIDA VOLUNTEERS HONORED FOR THEIR WORK TO PROTECT ENVIRONMENTAL LANDS

HON. C. W. BILL YOUNG

OF FLORIDA

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Wednesday, January 21, 2009

Mr. YOUNG of Florida. Madam Speaker, I rise today to honor the more than 500 volunteers with the Pinellas County, Florida, Environmental Lands Division, which help manage and preserve Pinellas County's natural resources. These volunteers, whom I have the privilege to represent, are a diverse group that range from the age of 12 on up.

These volunteers make a vital contribution to the county's environmental protection efforts, ensuring that all citizens and visitors are able to enjoy Florida's native environment. They supplement the efforts of the Environmental Land Division's staff, helping to oversee the nearly 16,000 acres managed by the division. In the first half of 2008 alone, these

volunteers provided over 13,605 man hours in a wide range of activities.

The division's conservation efforts were recently honored both regionally and nationally. In April 2008, the National Association of Counties awarded the program with an Act of Caring Award for community improvement. Additionally, in March 2008, the Tampa Bay Regional Planning Council recognized the division for its community service, as well as environmental and public education efforts. Following my remarks, I will include for my colleagues the full story of the volunteer effort as reported by Mariana Minaya of The St. Petersburg Times as well as an editorial from the same paper.

Madam Speaker, the spirit of volunteerism and giving back to the community is alive and well in Pinellas County, Florida and I am honored to represent those who make such an invaluable contribution to the protection of Florida's natural resources. Their hard work and dedication allows the natural beauty of the land to be accessible to all visitors and I would ask my colleagues to join with me today in recognizing their outstanding achievements and to thank them for a job well done.

[From The St. Petersburg Times, July 30, 2008]

500 ENVIRONMENTAL GEMS

(By Mariana Minaya)

Thirty years ago, before development swallowed up swaths of Florida, Pinellas County had the foresight to begin setting aside thousands of acres of land for environmental protection.

Now, a robust corps of volunteers is striving to protect the county's natural resources. The Environmental Lands Division, which manages the county's preserves and other protected areas, has seen its ranks swell to more than 500 people. It is the fastest-growing sector of volunteerism in Pinellas County government.

The division's conservation efforts were recently honored both regionally and nationally. The volunteers are an "invaluable resource" to managing the nearly 16,000 acres under the department's care, said division director Dr. H. Bruce Rinker. Without the volunteers, the division's staff of 34 people would be seriously disadvantaged.

So far this year, volunteers have provided more than 13,605 man hours, equaling more than \$263,433. These numbers are up from the 1,387 hours of volunteer service in 1998, the year the division was founded within the department of Environmental Management.

The volunteers care for 30 different ecosystems. They staff educational centers at the Brooker Creek and Weedon Island preserves, maintain trails and grounds, survey flora and fauna, perform clerical work, lead hikes and help with research.

The sheer number of volunteers, the hours of labor they've donated, and the variety of duties they performed impressed judges of two awards programs this year. In April, the National Association of Counties recognized four counties from about two dozen entrants with an Acts of Caring Award for community improvement, said spokesman Bill Cramer.

In March, the Tampa Bay Regional Planning Council recognized the division for its

community service, as well as environmental and public education efforts. The division received a \$2,500 grant for its volunteer program from the Community Foundation of Tampa Bay.

Judges "were amazed . . . to have a program that has that many volunteers," said Wren Krahl, spokeswoman for the Tampa Bay Regional Planning Council. "The other thing they were impressed with is how much they've accomplished with the stringent budget that they've had."

Over two years, as the division's staff has shrank by 14 positions, the volunteers recognize that the need for them "is real, not feigned," Rinker said. The division wants to grow by 10 percent more volunteer hours each year to offset the effects of staff and budget cuts.

To keep the ranks full, the division keeps the red tape to a minimum, said Kristin O'Meara, the land division's volunteer site coordinator. Once a background check clears, volunteers are open to the wide range of activities. They accept anyone age 12 and up.

Interest appears to be as strong as ever from both young and old. About half the volunteers are retired. About 15 percent are under age 18. Some do it for school requirements; others have a passion for wildlife and nature.

"How can you resist being able to work in the great outdoors?" Rinker said. "Driving down our driveway is like going back in time is what I've heard from people."

That is the appeal for Bill Brown, 62, of East Lake, who lived in Groveland as a child, spending time at his grandmother's boarding house for orange grove workers, living off the land.

"I can remember eating things on the endangered species list," Brown said.

Volunteering gives Brown the freedom that 30 years of office work as an Army Corps of Engineers spokesman never afforded him.

"You don't have a timetable," he said. "They give us a job to do and then turn us loose, which I kind of like."

On Tuesday mornings, he spends about four hours with his buddy, Ty Miramonti, 65, of Tarpon Springs. As a former Navy man and firefighter, Miramonti is the more adventurous and the more experienced, having started in 1993. But once in a while, his wild streak has gotten him literally stuck in the mud, and his partner's caution adds some balance to the team, which has worked together for seven years.

Together, the pair cruises through the Brooker Creek Preserve on a four-wheel drive Ranger, clearing trails with machetes in hand. It's hard work for old men, Brown said, but it lets them stop to soak in the scenery or debate the identities of the critters crawling on them when they need a break.

"It's the type of thing you think an old man wouldn't be interested in doing, but it really is invigorating because you are totally immersed in the environment," Brown said. "It really is cathartic to get out there."

[From The St. Petersburg Times, Aug. 10, 2008]

PRESERVATION REQUIRES VOLUNTEERS

Without an army of volunteers, Pinellas County's environmental lands would become impenetrable jungles dominated by exotic, invasive species.

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