

PEOPLE

Annual Land Trust event to protect lagoon draws 400

BY MARY SCHENKEL
Staff Writer

With its lushly landscaped paths and waterways, Rock City Gardens was the perfect backdrop for the Indian River Land Trust's annual fundraiser, Land Water Wildlife; Caring for our Lagoon. Roughly 400 guests attended last Thursday's event, presented by Stephanie and Orin Smith and co-chaired by Lee

Moore and Kathleen Schulke.

Jackets were quickly draped over chair-backs and ladies resigned themselves to wilting hair in a sultry evening more reminiscent of August than November, but the heat did nothing to stifle enthusiasm for the cause.

"My mother showed me through her actions the importance of preserving our green space and our lagoon. And now it's become ingrained in me," said

Lee Moore, referring to her mother, Toni Robinson, Director Emeritus and the Land Trust's first board president.

"I want to carry on her legacy by growing awareness going forward, with a focus on our generation and younger generations, as well as newcomers to Indian River County. I would also like to help the IRLT in its efforts to continue to amass properties of environmental significance, but my main goal for now

is to get this next generation more in tune with the importance of preserving this beautiful county. Otherwise, these amazing hammocks, estuaries, green space and pristine lands will disappear. As mom says, once it's gone, it's gone."

Guests enjoyed hors d'oeuvres and cocktails before dining on a delicious dinner buffet catered by Elizabeth Kennedy. Monti Jones, of Monti's Flower Market, added a whimsical touch with



Robert and Linda Williams, John and Linda Johnson, and Bill Beardslee.



PHOTOS BY LEAH DUBOIS



Carrie Trooboff, Faith Horton, Paula Knire and Emily Sherwood.

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Bob Puff, Virginia and Warren Schwerin and Louis Schacht.



Amy Patterson, Pam Harmond and Trude See.



Ken Grudens, Rhonda Lowe, Lee Moore and Kathleen Schulke.

table centerpieces featuring enchanting fish, birds and other animals made from fruits and vegetables, such as bright yellow lemon fish, watermelon sea turtles, and owls and parrots intricately carved from pineapples.

Attendees were also treated to a delightful performance by the Encores, an elite Sebastian River High School choral ensemble, and later danced to music from the Sunrise Party Band. And despite the heat some still braved the fire pit to toast marshmallows, unable to resist the gooey goodness of s'mores.

"It gets bigger and better every year; it's amazing," said Marilyn Higgs, sitting with husband George.

County Commission Chairman Wesley Davis presided over a paddle raise,



Carter Taylor, Helen Johnson, Toni Robinson and Tom Lowe.



Monti Jones and one of her carved centerpieces.

which raised close to \$100,000. Funds will enable the IRLT to begin work on the infrastructure of the Oyster Bay Marsh, a two-mile trail just north of Round Island, which will eventually be open to the public from dawn to dusk. "It's going to have an overlook and a boardwalk and a covered gazebo over the water. It's going to be a really nice spot. The views from Oyster Bay Marsh are completely unfettered — it's just beautiful," said Ann Allegra Taylor, director of marketing and philanthropy. As with many of the IRLT preservation areas, Oyster Bay Marsh is made up of a series of properties; a combination of gifted, access easements, land purchase and public-private partnership

with the county. "There are a number of priority properties that we're looking at," said Ken Grudens, IRLT executive director. "We would need to raise several more million dollars if they become available. Each of these properties is probably going to be a campaign in itself." The IRLT is collaborating with the Bonefish Tarpon Trust and Florida Institute of Technology to determine the scientific benefit of reconnecting the lagoon with the impounded Bee Gum Point property to improve the fish habitat, and work is also underway to rehabilitate and restore the Winter Beach Salt Marsh on the western side of the lagoon. ■



Tena Boehm, Carol Caruso, Cathy Walker and Charlotte Terry.