

Lake Grady Narrative

The following narrative was derived from an interview with Rob Hoffman at his home on the northwest shore of Lake Grady, on May 17, 2000. Rob's story provides Atlas readers with insight into the motivations of those who move to lakeside environments and offers a view of issues facing suburban and rural residents today.

Family History



Rob Hoffman on his front porch overlooking the lake.

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Rob Hoffman and his family are relative newcomers to the Lake Grady area. Nevertheless, he harbors a strong interest in the lake's welfare and is a lake monitor for the University of Florida's **LAKEWATCH** program, taking monthly measurements of various lake characteristics, such as clarity and water level.

Just like many suburbanites, in 1993 Rob moved from an urban area to a more rural locale, Riverview in the southern third of Hillsborough County. His home is in the subdivision of Shadow Run in what is now ironically, a rapidly suburbanizing area of Hillsborough County. Rob explains his decision to move:

"My wife and I used to live in north Tampa and grew tired of the traffic and congestion. We decided to look for a house in the country. We found this place and it was exactly what we were looking for. I am an outdoor person and enjoy nature. What I like most about the area is that it is peaceful, quiet and there is no traffic, and yet it is only a twenty-five minute drive to downtown Tampa."

It is obvious that the combination of Shadow Run's lakeside setting and its proximity to Hillsborough County's urban hub were important qualities when Rob and his wife elected to buy a home in the area.

Rob enjoys the beauty of the natural setting around his home, and is an avid gardener, however his responsibilities do not always permit him to spend as much time as he would like in his yard. The following passage relays these sentiments and also reveals Rob's understanding and respect for the area's ecosystem:

"I haven't had much time to work in the yard recently. I have been experimenting in the yard. I am trying to get rid of the grass on the hillside and plant it with low maintenance, drought tolerant plants. I am finding a few plants that do well out there. Eventually, I am going to plant the entire hillside, so I don't have to mow it."

Rob also enjoys spending time on the lake. In fact, part of his rationale for becoming a lake monitor was to have a reason to go on to the lake regularly. He comments:

"I was on the Hillsborough County web site and saw something about the Lake Atlas web site. I saw that they were looking for Lakewatch volunteers. I had owned a canoe for over a year and had never taken it out on the lake. Being a Lakewatch volunteer gives me a reason to get out on the lake, at least once a month to keep track of the water quality."

On balmy days such as the day of the interview, Rob takes advantage of the beautiful view of the lake from his home, while relaxing in the comfortable confines of one of several rocking chairs on his front porch.



The Hoffman home, as seen from Shadow Run Boulevard, is insulated from the heating effects of the sun by the shade of numerous trees. USF

Lake History

Lake Grady is located in south central Hillsborough County and is a 200-acre lake in the Alafia River Basin. The lake was created in the "mid 1970s" when the developers of the surrounding subdivision, Shadow Run, erected a dam to enable the connection of Shadow Run Road with Boyette Road. Eventually the dam "washed out," draining the lake and forcing the closing of the road. Hillsborough County started litigation against the original developers, citing that they had never received a permit for the dam. This action led to a series of counter actions, which took place over more than a decade, involving local residents, the developers, the County and other government agencies. During this contentious affair the developer had gone bankrupt and failed to pay taxes. The County was ultimately awarded a settlement comprised of "approximately fifty lots" in lieu of the back taxes.

"The County decided they would sell these lots and give the money to the home owners to rebuild the dam." Out of this tumultuous legal mess rose the Lake Grady Road and Bridge District, a special taxing district created by local residents to support the resurrection of the dam and lake restoration.

Rob tells the story of how reparations were garnered by local residents from the developer and builder of the subdivision and used to restore the lake. He states:



This walkway runs over the dam that created Lake Grady. USF

"The developer and builder were sued by the Lake Grady Road and Bridge District. The LGRBD, after years of trying they finally reached a settlement. They are now in the process of rebuilding the dam. Construction started late last summer and they started refilling the lake last November. The plan is to create a park setting on the dam itself."

The flora and fauna in the lake area seem to be thriving. Rob mentions that the fish population is "fairly good . . . just about everything that lives in Florida." He mentions several different kinds of fish such as, catfish, brim, bluegill, speckled perch, and gar. Rob also notes that there are quite a few alligators on the lake. He says, "The biggest one that I have seen is probably eleven or twelve feet long. There are several that are five to six feet long." According to Rob, the area's bird population is large and fairly diverse. He comments:

"There are flocks of white ibis that roost in the willows, that grow on the lake. There are many wading birds, waterfowl and red shouldered hawks. Occasionally I see red tailed hawks, and usually in the spring and sometimes in the fall a bald eagle hangs around for a week or two, and roosts in a pine tree on the south side of the lake."

When asked about the amount of recreational use the lake receives Rob implies that recreational use is slowly increasing since the lake was refilled in the fall of last year. "Yeah, people use it," he says. "People put canoes in. The little sailboats, the catamaran sailboats I see out there occasionally. It's not heavily used at least so far. I like it that way."



This island in the western end of the lake is a favorite resting spot for the area's birds at dusk. USF

Development

Rob asserts that much of the area surrounding Lake Grady was historically used as pasture land, particularly to the east of the lake.



This overflow reservoir lies north of Lake Grady and flows into Bell Creek. USF

He recalls seeing historic photos of cattle-drives across Bell Creek, which runs into Lake Grady from the northeast. The pastoral activities and landscape that once characterized the area have been greatly reduced. This is no doubt due in part to the gradual increase in the number of homes in the area. Rob estimates that out of the 300 lots which comprise the Shadow Run subdivision, "eighty percent" of them have been residentially developed.

Lake Grady is sparsely populated by homes on the east side, and more densely populated on the west side. The dam dominates the north side of the lake. Rob thinks that development may be mitigated due to the creation of a large tract of ELAPP* land on the lake's south side. One tactic used by the government to regulate growth is the trading of one piece of property for another with a developer, allowing development on one lot but not on the other. It was in this manner that the ELAPP property on the south side of Lake Grady was created. Rob describes the scenario in the following passage:

"Several years ago, the ELAPP property that is north of the lake was owned by a developer. The developer also owned property in northern Hillsborough County that it wanted to develop, but its development had been rejected by the county because it would destroy wetlands. The county acquired this property from that developer in exchange for the right to develop the property in the northern part of the county."



The northwest shore of Lake Grady is the most developed on the lake, with several large homes. USF



Rob believes that traffic at the intersection of Boyette Road and McMullen Road has steadily worsened since he has lived in the area. USF

Rob mentions one problem that is all too commonly associated with the development of suburban subdivisions, "**traffic.**" However, he believes that since he has lived in Shadow Run traffic congestion has not increased greatly in the immediate area around his home. He asserts that this is due to the existence of only one entrance into Shadow Run. Rob does note that Boyette Road, the main road that connects his subdivision and the general area just outside his subdivision with I-75, has undergone "*a tremendous increase in traffic.*" He fears that with the impending rise of "*Fish Hook,*" a huge subdivision not far from Shadow Run and the commercialization of Boyette Road, that traffic will only become more congested in the area.

Future

When Rob was asked if he fears losing the rural feel which he sought when he moved to Shadow Run seven years ago, he stated,

"I would hate for it to lose the rural feel. I think that we are fairly isolated here in Shadow Run and the ELAPP properties provide a buffer to the growth that is beginning in the surrounding area."

Rob does comment that he would "*like to see . . . [the lake] left alone, no development around it.*" He believes that if Hillsborough County decided to develop the ELAPP property to the south of the lake, the area would be dramatically affected.

When asked if he thinks his fellow community members are concerned about the health of the lake he comments, "*As far as the health of the lake, I am not so sure about that. Most of them seem to be more concerned with its affect on property values than the actual health of the lake.*"

On a closing note, Rob offers his ethic in regard to development and the protection of the ecosystem, implying that there needs to be a balance between the two, and thus hinting at a more environmentally sustainable development.

"I am not a fan of development. I see it as a necessary evil, but I think it should be controlled. We need to learn to live within nature. We shouldn't knock down all of the trees and fill all of the wetlands every time we develop a property. There will be impact any time land is developed, but we should minimize that impact."

Rob's call to "*minimize the impact*" of development is something that needs to be at the forefront of any decisions made by policy makers and planners. For it is only with a sustainable development that future generations will be able to enjoy a lifestyle similar to ours.

*The Environmental Lands Acquisition and Protection Program (ELAPP) was established for the purpose of acquiring, preserving, and protecting endangered and environmentally sensitive lands, beaches, parks, and recreational lands in Hillsborough County. The purpose of acquiring such lands will be for resource protection; however, all lands shall be open for public use and enjoyment to the extent that the County finds such use compatible with the preservation and protection of these lands. To date, approximately 20,000 acres of land have been protected through the program.