



# CITYFacts 2.0

WINTER HAVEN  
The Chain of Lakes City

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## ONE CITY - ONE VISION

YOUR MONTHLY SOURCE FOR CITY OF WINTER HAVEN EMPLOYEE NEWS AND INFORMATION

## A Passion for Water

By Mike Britt

Ever since I was old enough to ride a bike near Jonesboro, Georgia I have spent time near or on the water. I remember riding to our neighborhood lake, along with my fishing rod and lunch, and spending most of the day either in the water or at the edge of the water. When the lake level was low, we would wade out to the island and set up camp. My mother never seemed to mind cooking the 4-5 inch bluegill (especially after I learned how to clean them), and I never seemed to get tired of eating them – skin included since they were too small to filet.

As I got a little older, I spent many summer days hiking in the swamp next to the Flint River. I remember leaving the house after breakfast and not getting back until dinner time. My friends and I used to cut 'pole vaults' from small trees so that we could vault from tree island to tree island to keep from wading in the knee deep bog. My parents never asked, and maybe it was because they never really wanted to know, but we used to hike along the river about five miles to the next upstream town and then back again, never really thinking of what might happen if we ran into trouble. I remember feeling like I was ready for anything as long as I had my 6" fixed blade knife strapped to my side.

I think this is one of the reasons I still love to canoe and camp along the Peace River. A few weekends ago, my uncle and I (he is only a few years older than I and was a Flint River bog partner many a day) paddled the 20 miles from Zolfo Springs to the little town of Gardner. The night we camped was one of the most beautiful I have ever seen. We caught fish, found fossils, saw more alligators than I have ever seen along the river, cooked over the campfire only 10 feet from the shore, and saw the moonrise over a tree lined landscape...I do not think there could be a more beautiful place on the planet.

Like many people, I have an emotional connection to water. I think this is one reason I love Winter Haven so much. Many stories I hear of people living near local lakes are the same stories I tell of my childhood.

I never realized how important this connection is until I participated in the Vision by Design process in the year 2000. I realized the community did not just need a Natural Resource Manager, they needed someone to be accountable for the water within their community. Suddenly, the professional and personal aspects of water came together in a big way, and I felt a heightened sense of purpose that is a source of motivation to this day.



Water is one of the most technically challenging and emotionally charged subjects we deal with as a community. There are volumes of information and complex reports about water, but the real answer to the value of water comes from those within the community who live here. There are not many people outside Winter Haven that can understand how much we value water as a community. This connection is incredibly strong in Winter Haven and it is one of the reasons I love the work I do.