



ON THE RECORD

Submitted by Shannon Neveaux, President of Friends of Palmetto Island State Park, Inc.

You may have seen the article on the front page of the Abbeville Meridional's Friday, December 29 edition featuring Palmetto Island State Park called "*Palmetto State Park preparing*". We'd like to thank the Meridional for highlighting the park and sharing parts of the article that were published in a Baton Rouge paper about the budget cuts to State Parks. I can't and won't comment on how or if the budget cuts will impact Palmetto Island State Park, because we (Friends') just don't know. The state doesn't share that kind of info with us. A lot of times, we find out the same way you do.

Alison Miller, director of the Vermilion Parish Tourist Commission, says "The park is an important economic driver for the parish." Think about it, when someone goes camping or decides to spend the day outdoors, supplies are necessary. Palmetto Island State Park is important to Vermilion Parish in many ways. Food and fuel probably make the top of the list. James Menard, who volunteers to maintain the grounds at the park, has told me often that he picks up trash as he mows and finds A LOT of receipts for local grocery stores, restaurants and fuel. I think that it's important recreationally and culturally too, giving patrons an inside view of the swamp habitat and the Cajun hospitality that keeps people returning to this part of the world. I've met visitors from all over the world at the park.

Let's talk about **Friends of Palmetto Island's part in all this**. Most of you know the story of the opening of Palmetto Island State Park and the founding of Friends of Palmetto seven years ago. I'd like for you to know that Friends was founded *'to create greater visibility of community support and in hope that such support, will protect and or mitigate against unnecessary budget reductions that may result in the closing of Palmetto Island State Park'*. Back then the future of Palmetto Island was really uncertain and slowly progressed from 'open', to 'open for 3 months', to 'open for a year', to finally 'open in the same standing as all other parks'. "Community support" was one of the 3 components that the state told us they considered when keeping a park open. So myself and 6 other people founded Friends of Palmetto Island State Park, Inc.

What we really do...Our mission is to generate and create additional resources, through gifts of time, money or in kind, all in support for and in the best interest of the park.

- We sponsor events, programs or activities that are designed to promote public interest in or attract people to the park...like the annual Cracklin' Cooking Demo or Halloween.
- We promote the park at off site events and promote public events held at the park sponsored by other groups like Latanier Cookers and Louisiana Bird Observatory.
- We volunteer at the park and at programs. Yep...We're all volunteers. None of us work for the park.

- We have 2 large fundraisers each year... a plate lunch sale and a festival.
- We have enhanced the park with a variety of items, projects or amenities, like a playground, kiosks, book cases, informational brochures, bike racks, BBQ pits and so much more. The largest 2017 amenity project was running waterlines to all of the pavilions. This amenity has been requested by patrons for years and it will also allow the staff to keep the cement pads cleaner.
- Over the past 7 years we have purchased and donated items to the park: radios for the Ranger's vehicles, uniform shirts; a welding machine and torch so that repairs could be made onsite; a small tiller to maintain tent pads; new composite decking to resurface the board walk and much more.
- While our priority has never been 'maintenance' at the park, some of our donations seem to fit into that category. A few of things we have provided over the years are parts to repair mowers, replaced a hot water heater and the pump that runs the splash pad, provide a load of rocks to help with pot holes and shore up the weir to the river, a washing machine to maintain cabin linens, etc.

Choosing Projects for funding... We get ideas and suggestions from park staff and patrons. Our board of directors considers everything proposed. Some suggestions can be quickly acted upon, others require a lot of investigating and planning. You have to remember that the park is State property and everything must be approved through them. Somethings may be unrealistic, too large, beyond our means, don't seem like a good fit for the park or have been ruled out by the state and can be quickly and easily ruled out. But when the park staff makes a request, it's exactly that, 'a request'...And, Yes, we do ask park staff if they have any requests, cause that's what friends do. Even then, we don't guarantee funding for just anything. The state cannot mandate how we spend the funds that we raise. We have never given the money we raise to LA Office of State Parks. We do not pay for any of the operating cost or salaries.

Looking ahead... We don't know how the new budget cuts will affect our favorite park. We have never taken the park's 'OPEN' status for granted. We have worked like it could close at anytime and will continue to do so. At this time, only a portion of the funds we hold are completely or permanently dedicated to any particular projects or areas of support. Friends of Palmetto has always been fluid and flexible with their support. We're 'OPEN'. I think it's what has made us one of the most active and successful friends groups in the state. Will the park request more help with projects that could be considered "maintenance"? They might. If the budget cuts are too bad, I can see the possibility of more requests heading in that direction. I think we'll have to see what position Office of State Parks puts the park in.

You are invited to visit with us any time. We do our best to keep you connected and informed. By attending our monthly board meetings you'll get a better idea of how we "support" the park. Our passion for Palmetto Island is strong. We have no agenda other than the best interest of the park and we thank you for helping us make so many wonderful things possible at Palmetto Island State Park.