

## HISTORY OF FFGC WEKIVA YOUTH CAMP

FFGC's first "junior Nature Camp" was founded in July 1959 when Mable "Petunia" Miller, a member of Bartow Garden Club, organized garden club members – nature and craft leaders, a nurse, a waterfront person and a cook – and a group of first 12 boys and then 12 girls – at Camp Kiwanis on Mill Dam Lake. "Petunia" loved her native state and had a fervent desire to instill in youngsters that over, concern, and desire to protect the flora and fauna of our beautiful state of Florida.

As the years passed, and as FFGC Presidents and Camp Chairmen changed, FFGC continued sponsoring a youth camp annually in rented facilities. The dream of owning our own Camp was ever present throughout those years.

In 1972, Jean Villareal spearheaded a gargantuan fund drive and obtained matching funds to build ffgc's Wekiva Youth Camp in its present location – in the midst of Wekiwa Springs State Park, in Apopka, Florida. Ground was broken in 1973, 13 cabins were built, all named for Florida Indians, along with a pavilion, dining hall, office/infirmarary/craft hall, and 3 staff cabins. In June 1974, FFGC's Wekiva Youth Camp gates were opened wide as the first crop of 104 eager youngsters were welcomed to camp. Our Dream had become a reality. Since 1974, garden clubs and friends have built a nature teaching facility, staff cabins, and a beautiful swimming pool. A separate canteen was built in 1995, and an extension (porch) to the seventh/eighth grade leader cabin was built in 1997.

Each week for 6 weeks, over 100 campers, grades 3-8, come to FFGC's Wekiva Youth Camp. At Wekiva we are dedicated to providing each and every camper in our care a unique living/learning experience. Our volunteer staff are "guiding stars" in the lives of these young people.

Over the years the curriculum and programs have been enhanced and improved. A powerful, unified, graded nature program and manual was written to enable volunteers to better instruct the campers. In 2002, "Critter Camp," a mini-camp experience presently open to youngsters completing 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> grades was introduced. It proved to be highly successful and has become a part of the regular camp program. In 2001, a Leadership Training Program (LIT), for 9<sup>th</sup> grade was initiated. Campers who have successfully completed the 8<sup>th</sup> grade Programs are invited to participate in this program. It has been well received and graduates may be invited to become Counselors in Training (CIT) the following year. Thus we are training our leaders for the future.

Our goal – that every camper takes home memories of Wekiva Youth Camp which will be treasured throughout their lifetimes.

Our motto: **Wekiva Youth Campers today – Environmental Leaders Tomorrow!**

Without exception, Florida Federation of Garden Clubs, Inc. welcomes participation of all youngsters, grades 3 through 8 in its Wekiva Youth Camp Program.