

Newsletter of the
Friends of Brooker Creek Preserve

May - June 2011

Chairman's Message

By: Barb Hoffman

As we are descending from the high of Wildlife Safari, we are gearing up to meet the challenge of the ANCA consult. As you may remember from earlier newsletters, we were awarded with a reduced fee scholarship for an ANCA Peer Consult. It starts this Thursday, May 5, and will go through Saturday, May 7. Their letter contains a good summary of the consult:

The Association of Nature Center Administrators (ANCA) is an international non-profit organization that promotes leadership and quality management for nature and environmental learning centers. Among the services that ANCA offers to the profession are Peer Consults for nature centers and similar organizations that are seeking professional advice and perspectives from some of the profession's most experienced leaders. These ANCA consulting teams are composed of volunteers who donate their time to the consulting process, receiving reimbursement only for their actual expenses.

ANCA, the only U.S. professional association that specializes in supporting the nature center business, offers Consults to organizations that want a short but intensive review of some aspect of their operations. These are conducted by a team of nature center professionals whose members are selected for their expertise with the special issues of the client organization.

The county and the Friends are splitting the cost of the fees for the consult - the Friends

**Friends of Brooker Creek
New Mailing Address
3940 Keystone Road, Tarpon Springs,
FL 34688. Please use this on any
correspondence from this time on.**

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is paying the \$1,000 fee and supplying the team with food, and the county is paying travel expenses and allowing free board at the Brooker Creek Preserve Research Station - a win-win situation in every regard!

Many, many thanks to all who made Wildlife Safari possible! Cathie Foster and Allyn Childress were the team who planned the event,

then worked the event from start to finish. Phil Hirsch worked tirelessly for two solid days moving tables, tents, and chairs, transporting gallons of water from one place to another, providing transportation for people and wildlife, and a doing host of tedious jobs. Chuck Parsons began talking about tadpoles at 9:00 a.m. and was still talking tadpoles at 3:00 p.m.! Cynthia Wheeler was supposed to be our wildlife person with baby turkeys, but when the turkeys didn't hatch in time for the event, Cynthia performed a multitude of jobs all day and always with a big smile! And, of course, without our sponsors, we simply could not hold the event, so thank you, sponsors, for your financial generosity. Finally, a huge thank you to all the volunteers whose generosity comes in the form of time, a commodity that is precious beyond words.

Please look over the list of volunteer positions available at Brooker Creek Preserve, and see if one might spark your interest. If you truly care about Brooker, then you can show it in two ways, give money or give time. Both are truly needed and appreciated.

I hope to see you in the near future, if not working in the butterfly garden on the last Saturday of each month, then at our next *Off the Beaten Path* hike to see orchids, bromeliads, and ferns in the cypress swamp on June 26 (See page 3).

Barb

Breakfast with Butterflies: Call for Help

We will be continuing work on the Butterfly Garden, as well as developing a demonstration native shrub garden, on the last Saturday of each month. Everyone is welcome to join us. Please bring your own gloves and gardening tools! Call 934-2680 for questions or to join our work crew.

Preserve News

By: Steven J. Harper, PhD
Director, Environmental Lands Division

Brooker Creek Preserve provides numerous benefits to the citizens of Pinellas County and neighboring areas. Of course there are the miles of trails and award-winning education center, amenities that provide wonderful opportunities for learning and exploration to all who visit the preserve. But there are other, less obvious benefits that the preserve provides, many of which you may not have considered, referred to as "ecosystem services." Such services include storage of water that buffers against flooding, recharge of drinking water supplies, improvement of water quality and air quality, stabilization of temperature, provision of food and fiber, storage of carbon, protection of genetic diversity, and provision of space required by native plants and animals. Historically these benefits have been considered "free for the taking" in that they were considered to be external from our economic systems. In the past few decades, determining the true value of these services became the focus of economists and ecologists interested in quantifying replacement costs; one estimate indicated the value of ecosystem services provided by the Earth's natural systems was 1.8 times the global GNP! For a local example, the benefits of water storage afforded by Brooker Creek Preserve is apparent to anyone who has seen the costs required to engineer and maintain stormwater conveyance systems (not to mention the costs associated with flooding when such systems fail). To continue to reap these services, we must provide the stewardship necessary to maintain healthy and functional ecosystems. Enjoy your next hike or trip to the education center, but please take a minute to consider the many other subtle benefits the preserve is providing to you and your neighbors.

New Members

**Michelle Johnson, Ross and Cara Keller,
Kelly and Neil Brickfield**

Friends  of Brooker Creek Preserve

***Off the Beaten Path* Hike Series at Brooker Creek Preserve!**

Please join us for our nature-based fundraising hike series, *Off the Beaten Path!*

Description: This series of four hikes will take place in beautiful areas tucked away within Brooker Creek Preserve in sites that are closed to the public. Our guide, Dr. Craig Huegel, can identify everything, from the tiniest moss to the tallest tree including animal prints, bird calls, lichens, and more. He is full of stories and very patient in answering questions. The hikes will be not only educational, but a lot of fun as well! The hikes will begin at 9:00 a.m. and be about 3-4 hours long. Bring water and lunch.

Cost: \$80 donation for the series or \$25 donation per hike with a 10% discount for members of Friends of Brooker Creek Preserve

Sites Off the Beaten Path:

March 27 – Sandhills – The only true sandhills of Brooker Creek Preserve. This site is in the northern end of the preserve and will feature an abundance of spring wildflowers.

June 26 - Cypress Swamp – Located in the central part of the preserve, this site features orchids, ferns, and epiphytes. Plan to get wet, really wet, as we plunge into the depths of the swamp!

Sept. 25 - Pine Flatwoods Catesby's Lily Site – Located in the eastern part of the preserve, this site features the endangered Catesby's Lily in full bloom along with a profusion of other fall wildflowers.

Jan. 22, 2012 - Anclote Spur – this site was once part of the preserve but is now a preserve in itself. We will start in Brooker Creek Preserve, then traverse from woodlands into saltmarsh to a secluded spot along the beautiful Anclote River.

Reservations Required: Reserve your spot by emailing fobcp@tampabay.rr.com. Sign up early! Only 20 spots are open for these fabulous hikes *off the beaten path!* Questions? Email fobcp@tampabay.rr.com or call 727-934-2680.

The first annual Wildlife Safari was held Saturday, April 16, from 9:00 to 3:00. Nearly 400 people attended the event, and it was a fantastic success. This event was organized by the Friends of Brooker Creek Preserve and conducted solely by Friends and preserve volunteers. We all worked hard, but enjoyed a wonderful day of animals and nature!



The first stop was the classroom where the children could touch, feel, and play with animal skins and bones.



Ron and Barbara Schultz greeted the hundreds of guests to Wildlife Safari.

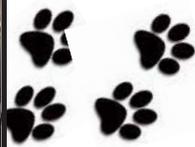


Wildlife Safari Success!

The first wildlife station was Leopard Frogs. Volunteer and Friends Board member, Chuck Parsons, gave interesting facts about the life history of frogs and tadpoles. The nearby pond provided a good place to spot adult leopard frogs.



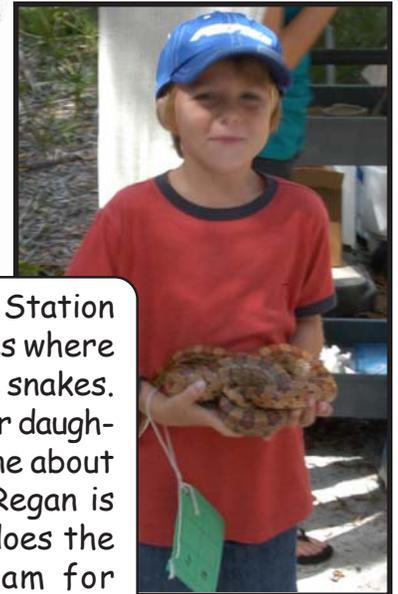
The second Wildlife Station started a baby alligator. Ranger Wells from the Florida Fish & Wildlife Commission talked about alligator natural history and how to be safe around them.



Dr. Gabe Vargo, a volunteer with Boyd Hill Nature Park, brought a screech owl for Wildlife Station 4. Because no one was allowed to touch the owl, Dr. Vargo also brought a live chicken, which didn't mind being handled by the children.



The third Wildlife Station was Red Rat Snakes where kids could hold live snakes. Kathy Regan and her daughter taught everyone about the snakes. Ms. Regan is the teacher who does the 4th grade program for Pinellas County Schools at Brooker Creek Preserve.



The children really enjoyed Wildlife Station 5, manned by Wildlife Haven, who brought baby raccoons and opossums.



At Wildlife Station 6, a volunteer from Boyd Hill Nature Park displayed a bat, giant scorpion, and a hissing cockroach.



The children had fun choosing an environmental toy from the Treasure Tent at the end of the Safari. Volunteer Laurie MacAdams awaits the first group.



Many thanks to the sponsors of Wildlife Safari! . . .

Pinellas County, UF IFAS, and Friends of Brooker Creek Preserve sponsored the leopard frogs
 Unbehagen Advisors and the Council of North County Neighborhoods sponsored the baby alligators
 East Lake Fire Commissioner Mark Weinkrantz sponsored the screech owl
 Rotary Club of East Lake Sunrise sponsored the baby raccoons and opossums
 Hoffman Architects sponsored the bat, scorpion, and hissing cockroach
 Progress Energy sponsored the red rat snakes



. . . And many thanks to the Wildlife Safari volunteers!

Toby Brandenburgh, Allyn Childress, Cathie Foster, High School Intern Alex, Phil Hirsch, Barb Hoffman, Karl Knichter, Kathleen Knichter, Jean Livingston, Laurie MacAdams, Patty McClosky, Carson Morrow, Chuck Parsons, Kim Parsons, Debbie Reker, Matt Reker, Barbara Schultz, Ron Schultz, Tom Trimmier, Julie Wade, Mark Yeager, Adam Zions

Volunteer Opportunities - Brooker Creek Preserve Needs You!

If you would like to volunteer for any of the following positions that are in the preserve but outside of the Education Center, please call **Grant Craig**, the North County Volunteer Coordinator at (727) 549-6137.

Fenceline Monitor - clear fenceline, especially small trees between fenceline and firebreaks

Firebreak Monitor - pull brush off firebreaks and trim brush adjacent to firebreaks

Trail Monitor - trim vegetation along trail, widen the trail in some areas, paint and stain trail identification markers

Exotic Plant Busters - remove exotic invasive plants

Plant Surveyor - conduct plant surveys at restoration sites

Barbed Wire Fence Busters - remove old barbwire fence in remote areas

Bluebird Nesting Surveyors

Gardener - help maintain butterfly garden at Field Station

Gardener - weed and mulch landscaped areas near picnic shelter

Geoweb Monitor - periodically rake gravel onto geoweb at channel crossings

If you would like to volunteer to be an Education Center Assistant, there are many assignments available to choose from. If you are interested, please the Ed Center Volunteer Coordinator, **Vestina F. Crayton**, Extension Specialist, (727) 453-6967 | vcrayton@pinellascounty.org

1. Assignment: Outreach

Duties: Promote Brooker Creek Preserve, one of our county's treasures. Assist with creating and updating presentations that give an overview of the history and highlights of the Preserve and Education Center. Identify outreach opportunities. Present off-site programs at schools and civic organizations at a minimum once per month. Available days and times are Tuesday-Saturday; 8:30 am - 4:00pm.

2. Assignment: Special Events

Duties: Assist with creating and staffing information booths at environmental events. Volunteers will be notified on an as needed basis. Events are generally one to three day events. Volunteers will be notified as soon as opportunities become available. Duties are shared and rotated with other volunteers.

3. Assignment: Front Desk

Duties: Greet visitors, answer visitor questions by phone or walk-in about the building and construction of the Center, the exhibits, the surrounding Preserve, exhibit gallery and programs. Register program participants in the online registration program Outbound. Maintain applicable inventory. Training will be provided. Times available: Thursday, Friday, Saturday; 8:15 am - 12:15 pm or 12:15 pm - 4:15 pm (Two shifts are available each day listed above).

4. Assignment: Training

Duties: Assist with creating presentations and applicable materials to train new volunteers and current volunteers on new programs and procedures. Maintain applicable inventory. Day and times are determined by need. Available days and times are Tuesday and Wednesday; 8:30 am - 4:00pm.

(Volunteer Opportunities: Education Center Assistant, continued)

5. Assignment: Clerical

Duties: Data entry, making copies for programs and filing. Day and times are determined by need. Maintain applicable inventory. Available days and times are Tuesday-Saturday; 8:30 am - 4:00pm.

6. Assignment: Building Maintenance

Duties: Basic maintenance on equipment and appliances located in the Education Center such as changing batteries, light bulbs and cleaning interpretive signs. Day and times are determined by need. Maintain applicable inventory. Available days and times are Tuesday-Saturday; 8:30 am - 4:00pm.

7. Assignment: School Groups

Assist school groups with completing paperwork and answering questions about the Preserve, the Exhibit gallery and/or accompany a group on a hike. Maintain applicable inventory. Day and times are determined by need. Training will be provided. Available days and times are Tuesday-Friday; 8:30 am - 4:00pm.

8. Assignment: Newsletter

Duties: Write articles on Preserve topics such as wildlife, flora & fauna, upcoming events, and volunteer spotlight. Deadlines and writing specifications will be provided.

9. Assignment Resource Room

Duties: Maintain, identify, order appropriate materials and maintain applicable inventory. Update the internal resource database. Two times per month, volunteer will staff the Resource Room, answer any visitor questions about resource materials, how to use the room, computer resources and other Preserve related questions. Duties can be shared by volunteers. Available days and times are Tuesday-Saturday; 8:30 am - 4:00pm.

10. Assignment: Marketing

Duties: Update quarterly program calendar in PowerPoint. Print calendar in the appropriate format, send out press releases and update signage along the boardwalk and in the designated rooms in the Education Center. Available days and times are Tuesday-Saturday; 8:30 am - 4:00pm.

11. Assignment: Youth Center

Duties: In coordination with the 4-H Youth Development Agent, create, update and maintain the youth corner. Identify brochures, activity sheets, educational materials, and maintain applicable inventory. Available days and times are Tuesday-Saturday; 8:30 am - 4:00pm.

12. Assignment: Education Displays

Duties: In coordination with the appropriate Extension Agent, identify, research, create, update, educational displays and maintain applicable inventory. Available days and times are Tuesday-Saturday; 8:30 am - 4:00pm. Saturday; 8:15 am - 12:15 pm or 12:15 pm - 4:15 pm (Two shifts are available each day listed above)

Help Wanted

Wanted! Member to manage the Friends Gift Shop at the Ed Center. About 2-3 hours per week at most. We really, really need someone! Please help! Contact the Friends via phone or email if you are interested or if you have questions.

Fox Squirrels

By: Craig Huegel

The other day, I received a phone call from someone excited by the presence of an unknown animal in front of her at a County natural area, hoping I might ID it from her description. It looked a bit like a squirrel, she said, but more like a "skinny raccoon." Of course, this mystery mammal was a Florida fox squirrel (*Sciurus niger*).

While we all are familiar with its ubiquitous cousin, the gray squirrel (*Sciurus carolinensis*), few in Pinellas routinely get a look at a fox squirrel. For one, they are fairly rare here. The Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission lists our subspecies (*Sciurus niger shermanii*) as "threatened"; a status due primarily to extensive habitat loss. For another, they are extremely habitat specific and do not fare well in typical developed landscapes or in areas dominated by oaks and maples. They require pinelands with open understories and widely spaced mature pines; conditions found in Pinellas only in a few large golf courses (e.g. Bardmoor and Innisbrook) and in a few locations in County natural areas; Brooker Creek Preserve, Wall Springs Park, and a few others. Most of the County's once suitable habitat is prime real estate and was developed decades ago.



Fox squirrels are found throughout much of eastern North America, but they are radically different animals in different geographic locations. In the Upper Midwest where I grew up, fox squirrels are nearly identical in size with gray squirrels and colored rusty red from head to tail. Our Florida fox squirrels are almost twice as large and often have a black mask with a distinct white nose and ear tips. In the Upper Midwest, fox squirrels favor oak/hickory forests. In Florida, they are confined almost exclusively to longleaf pine sandhill habitat.

General Ecology

Fox squirrels generally live to 7 or 8 years of age and produce two litters of young per year. Young arrive in early spring and in midsummer, for the most part, with each litter numbering 2-4 individuals. They build nests high in the canopy of trees. Although these structures are fairly robust, they can be surprisingly difficult to spot from the ground. And, of course, they spend a good part of the day foraging on the ground or in other trees so getting a look at them is sometimes difficult by only watching a nest. Several types of nests (or "drays" as they are sometimes called) are constructed, depending mostly on time of year. Winter, or primary, nests are constructed out of pine needles and can be quite elaborate - sort of like a pine needle basket. They are especially good at protecting the squirrels from wind, rain, and cold temperatures and they will use them for extended periods during tough winters. Summer, or secondary, nests are less elaborate and constructed with far less attention to detail. These are round conspicuous twig and leaf nests between 25 and 45 cm in diameter; often built in hardwood trees. They are waterproof and made of an outer layer of interwoven twigs with a softer inner lining consisting of moss, bark, leaves, fur, feathers, lichen or other similar material. Each fox squirrel may make multiple summer nests within their home range. Both types of nests are generally built in the upper 1/3 of the canopy and seldom in isolated trees. Fox squirrels depend mostly on pine seeds for

(Fox squirrel, continued)

food in the summer and on acorns during the remainder of the year. Both are significant to their diet. Of course, they are squirrels so they will also raid sunflower seeds from a bird feeder or become accustomed to taking peanuts from your hand if you so desire - much like a gray squirrel.

Fox squirrels are mostly confined to the higher elevation habitats of Brooker Creek Preserve north of Keystone Road. There are relatively few south of this road. The addition of the Wilde well field property was significant for protecting large numbers of these amazing animals. Keep a lookout and you may be fortunate enough to see one.



Brooker Creek Preserve Environmental Education Center Upcoming Events

Register at least 24 hours prior by visiting www.pinellascountyextension.org, clicking on the "Online Class Registration" button, then clicking on "Brooker Creek" tab. For more information about upcoming events call (727) 453-6800. For registration information, call (727) 582-2100. All programs are presented by Education Services Volunteers, unless noted.

Toad-ally Terrific Field Camp

The Friends of Brooker Creek Preserve is offering a one-week field camp for young adventurers. This science-based nature day camp is designed for children ages 9 - 11 with a strong interest in experiencing a hands-on, up close investigation of the various habitats that make up Brooker Creek Preserve. Each day we will venture outdoors to a different area of the preserve to uncover hidden secrets and piece together clues about living things and the ways they are connected. Every day provides a different adventure! Campers will make casts of animal tracks, scout out clues to animal activities, witness the habits of insects and aquatic creatures, and discover their own connection to these special places.

Dates: July 11-15

Time: 9:00 a.m. - 3:00 p.m.

Ages: children ages 9-11

Registration: \$150.00/camper

For more information or to register please call 727-934-2680.

May - June Guided Hikes

Most Saturdays (May 7, 14, 21, 28, June 4, 11, 18, 25), from 9:00 to 10:30 am, led by Education Services Volunteers, Environmental Lands Division. Join us for this 0.75-mile walk as we look at how the land has changed over time and discuss the ecological footprints left by those changes. Sturdy closed-toe shoes are a must; water and a hat are recommended. Please register by noon on the Friday before the hike by calling (727) 453-6800. Free. All ages welcome - **children younger than 6 may find this hike challenging.**

BCPEEC March Programs

Book Time at Brooker Creek

Thursdays, May 12 and 26, 10:30 - 11:15 am. This program is designed to introduce preschool children to the wonders of the natural world through stories and hands-on activities relating to the story that is read. Pre-registration is required. Free. Recommended **ages: 3 - 5.**

Pinellas Energy Efficiency Project

Sat., Mar. 7, 11:00 am to noon
Pinellas County Extension Sustainability Specialist, James Stevenson, will provide tips

and incentives to make homes more energy efficient, while still maintaining the same level of comfort. Comprehensive energy-saving kits will be provided to all participants. Pre-registration required. Free

Discovering Nature with Your Child

Sat., May 14, noon to 3:00 pm

Stop by our classroom anytime between 12:00 pm and 3:00 pm to participate in a variety of self-guided nature games and activities. A Brooker Creek Education Center volunteer will be available to answer your questions. Pre-registration is not required for this open activity. Free. **All ages.**

Lawn/Landscape Maintenance BMPs

May 24, 9:00 - 11:00 am **Cost: \$15**

This program is a required class for those doing work in the lawn and landscape maintenance industry such as mowing, pruning and landscape debris management. To obtain certification, you will need to pass a test. By passing the test, you will be awarded a certificate. This class is offered to Pinellas County employees at no cost. If you apply fertilizers, you will need to take the GI-BMP (fertilizer/pesticide BMP) class instead of this one. Online registration closes 24 hours before the program start time. Register at www.pinellascountyextension.org, clicking the Registration button, then the "Commercial Horticulture CEU" tab. You may also call (727) 582-2100 for more information

BCPEEC June Programs

Book Time at Brooker Creek

Thursday, June 9 and 23, 10:30 - 11:15 am.

This program is designed to connect pre-school children to the wonders of the natural world through stories and hands-on activities relating to the story that is read. Pre-registration is required. Free. Recommended **ages: 3 - 5.**

Lawn/Landscape Maintenance BMPs

June 14, 9:00 - 11:00 am **Cost: \$15**

This program is a required class for those doing work in the lawn and landscape maintenance

industry such as mowing, pruning and landscape debris management. To obtain certification, you will need to pass a test. By passing the test, you will be awarded a certificate. This class is offered to Pinellas County employees at no cost. If you apply fertilizers, you will need to take the GI-BMP (fertilizer/pesticide BMP) class instead of this one. Online registration closes 24 hours before the program start time. Register at www.pinellascountyextension.org, clicking the Registration button, then the "Commercial Horticulture CEU" tab. You may also call (727) 582-2100 for more information.

Lawn/Landscape BMPs

June 23, 2 classes: 9 to 11 a.m. **Cost: \$15**

This required class is for those doing work in the lawn and landscape maintenance industry such as mowing, pruning and landscape debris management. See info above.

Backyard Composting Workshop

June 25, 2011 9:30 am - 11 am

Do you think making compost out of your yard waste is complicated? Join us for this informative workshop to learn how easy it can be. Attendees will receive one compost bin per household, courtesy of Pinellas County Utilities Solid Waste Operations. Advance registration is required by noon on Friday, June 24, by visiting www.pinellascountyextension.org, clicking the Online Registration button then the Brooker Creek Preserve tab. Citizens may call (727) 582-2100 for more information. Please check in at the front desk.

Rain Barrel Harvesting

June 25, 2011 11:15 am - 12:15 pm

Learn how to save rainwater in a recycled plastic barrel for later use. All attendees will receive free set-up instructions and reference booklet. The class is free. Rain barrels may be purchased for \$30 plus tax. Advance registration for this class and payment for rain barrels is required. Your rain barrel will be available for pick up on the day of the class.

Friends of Brooker Creek Preserve - Mission Statement

The mission of the Friends of Brooker Creek Preserve is to provide public support for the Preserve through fund raising, volunteer programs, and education to ensure that the Preserve remains a natural wilderness for future generations.

Friends of Brooker Creek Preserve - Land Use Position Statement

The Friends of Brooker Creek Preserve support land uses within the boundaries of Brooker Creek Preserve which have a main purpose that furthers the preservation, conservation, restoration or protection of the land and resources of the Brooker Creek Preserve.

Current mission statement of the Parks Department - it is at least three years old and does not reflect the many changes in staffing and resources over that time. The newly formed Parks and Conservation Resources Department has not yet developed mission/vision statements.

The mission of the Pinellas County Park Department is to provide a continuing program of acquisition, development, maintenance, and protection of park areas for healthful outdoor activities.

Friends of Brooker Creek website:

www.FriendsOfBrookerCreekPreserve.org

To contact The Friends:

Email: fobcp@tampabay.rr.com

Phone: (727) 934-2680 (please leave a message and your phone number for a return call)

Brooker Creek Preserve:

Phone: (727) 453-6900

Website: www.brookercreekpreserve.org

The Brooker Creek Preserve Environmental Education Center is located at 3940 Keystone Road, Tarpon Springs, Florida, 34688.

Phone: (727) 453-6800

Center Hours: Thurs. - Sat. 9 am - 4 pm

Preserve Hiking Trails open 7 days a week (except for day after Thanksgiving and Dec. 25), 7:00 am to sunset.

Horse Trails open 7 days a week, all year, sunrise to sunset.

Friends Trail closed for bridge repairs.

Friends of Brooker Creek Officers

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Vice Chair: Allyn Childress

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Registration Info: FEID #59-3302182 tax-exempt, non-profit corporation

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