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Experience "A Brush with Nature"



At The Arboretum



A By Janet Herrick

April is gearing up to be one of the most exciting months to date at the Jacksonville Arboretum & Gardens, Jacksonville's newest greenspace gem. On April 7-9, 2011, the Arboretum will host A Brush with Nature, a *plein air* painting event where thirty-seven of Florida's most accomplished landscape artists will gather for three days to paint *en plein air*, or out in the open air. For Gail Beveridge and Mirtly Hawkins, the event co-chairs, it will be the culmination of over a year's worth of work. Says Hawkins, "The Arboretum is a beautiful and unique treasure that we have right here in the midst of our city. This will be a fantastic way to showcase it."

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Above clockwise: *Atlantic Bluet Damselfly*;
National Champion Loblolly Bay tree;
leaves floating; *Elderberry flower*.
Far right: *Artist Marsha Hatcher painting*;
Cosmos flower with wasp; *unknown flower*.





From humble roots, a new park is born.

The approximately 120-acre natural preserve that makes up the Jacksonville Arboretum & Gardens is unique in that within its boundaries lie thirteen distinct and different ecosystems. From fresh water ravine to salt marsh, from oak hammock to upland sand hill, the park showcases an incredible variety of North Florida's flora and fauna and offers a bio-diversity matched by few other areas in Northeast Florida. However, the Arboretum's beautiful 120 acres were not always so beautiful.

"About thirty years ago this area looked like a moonscape," says Hawkins. "At one point there wasn't a single bit of vegetation here at all." From 1941 to 1961, the prop-

erty was part of the Humphries Gold Mining Company, which strip mined the area of zircon and the minerals used to make titanium. Without nutrients and organic matter, the soil became barren white sand known locally as the Arlington Dunes. In the 1970s, the City of Jacksonville acquired the property as a buffer to the nearby water reclamation facility, and for thirty years the property sat idle.

"This is when the land began to reclaim itself," Hawkins explains. "Left to its own devices, Mother Nature took root again to create what it is today—one of the most remarkably beautiful areas of our city."

"A group of citizens saw the property's potential as an arboretum," Beveridge adds, "and organized a non-profit

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organization, the Jacksonville Arboretum & Gardens, Inc., to develop and operate it. In 2006, the property was leased from the City of Jacksonville and work began by community volunteers to create an arboretum for all to enjoy. Our grand opening was in November of 2008.”

Staging the A Brush With Nature event here was an easy choice. The area is gorgeous and begs to be painted. The diversity offers the artist an unending array of stunning and enticing subjects to capture on canvas. The glint of sun on water, the early-morning mist-shrouded forest canopy, a fiddlehead fern just emerging from the ground near a babbling brook, an owl or a hawk perched on a limb above, and trees reaching towards the sky, all available for the artist’s interpretation.



Left top: *Sensitive brier; a gulf fritillary dines on lantana nectar*
 Above: *Barred owl, star attraction of the full moon Owl Prowls*

“We are so excited by the range of events offered for the weekend,” says Hawkins. “As these top artists from our region set up their easels to capture, on canvas, the essence of this beautiful natural park, visitors can stroll the grounds to watch the artists at work. On Saturday, there will be food, music, artists’ demonstrations, and a special art tent for children. Then on Saturday night, we’ll host a special gala reception and sale on the Plaza Level of the Gate Riverplace Tower. Proceeds of the sale will go to benefit both the artists and the Arboretum. Guests attending the Gala will have an opportunity to meet all the participating artists, and they will be entertained with music featuring Joe Williams, as well as treated to delicious food provided by Pastiche. It’s going to be a fantastic three days!”

Some of the thirty-seven featured artists include Jim Draper, Randy Pitts, Kristin Hosbein, and Lynn Whipple.

Draper’s work is a direct extension of his life’s philosophy and values. His motivation is to open windows to another world: “Art takes us through the gamut of emotions, and it’s in these emotions where genius happens,” Draper says. “Art is like a magic act. Art takes nothing and makes something out of it. It’s my vehicle for taking people out of the mundane to another place.”

Pitts comments, “Being outside and having all of my senses engaged with the environment while painting is a feeling like none other. I strive to communicate the connection I feel to others in my paintings.”

Kristin Hosbein is a notable emerging artist with a background in graphic design and marketing. Her paintings capture the essence of “life in the moment” with brushstrokes of color. And Whipple says, “I love, love, love to be outside. Since I was little, growing up in Winter Park, Florida, I have spent as much time as possible out of doors...That is why I feel such pleasure when *plein air* painting. It allows you to soak in nature while at the same time be engaged in the joy and challenge of making art. I love how hard it is, how fun it is, how

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crazy-fast the weather can shift and how much I enjoy the camaraderie of my fellow artists.”

Education and fun: The Arboretum's goal for everything they do.

Beyond the flurry of the *plein air* event, the Arboretum continues to move forward with their everyday goals which continually reach higher and higher. The mission of the Jacksonville Arboretum & Gardens is to educate Northeast Florida and its regional communities about native and cultivated plants, improve its beauty and atmosphere, engage in and promote the conservation and preservation of our natural resources, and provide public service. Conservation and research are key elements that support that mission, but central to every event they have is public education— whether it is featuring the work of beekeepers, providing information on the eradication of invasive species, or providing an outdoor laboratory for use by




Top clockwise: *Paint Out* event featured artist Randy Pitts; *Dunce cap* mushrooms; A *cicada* emerges to dry its wings after spending 7 years as larvae in the earth.


college faculty and students in botany, zoology, biology, and environmental studies departments. No matter the event or need, the Arboretum is a community partner and a unique and valuable academic resource and support facility for all.

So much of what they do in the name of education is just plain fun! Both Hawkins and Beveridge encourage visitors to check out the Arboretum before and after the A Brush With Nature event. Says Hawkins, “We have events going on all the time. In addition to the guided Walk and Talk lectures than can be scheduled anytime for any group, each month on or near the new moon, the Arboretum hosts

New Moon Owl Prowls beginning just after dusk. The Arboretum guides will identify the sounds you might hear at night and you will learn about the creatures that make them. All we recommended is that you wear sturdy footwear, bring a lawn chair, and refreshments.” Beveridge smiles and adds, “We also host Full Moon Campfires. Those are great fun, too, and there’s nothing quite like the forest under a full moon beside a warm and inviting campfire. There’s storytelling and sing-a-longs. Bring chairs and refreshments for that, as well, and don’t hesitate to bring your musical instrument and pitch in for





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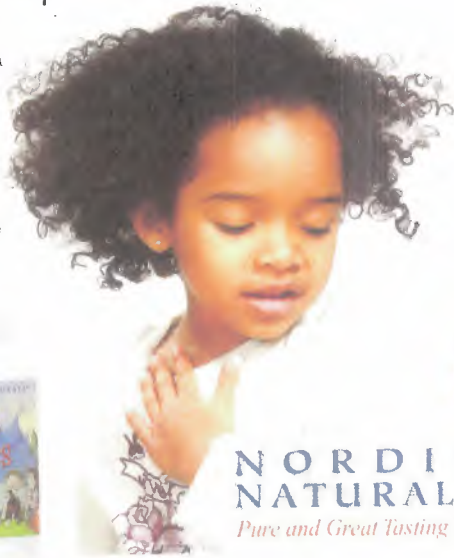
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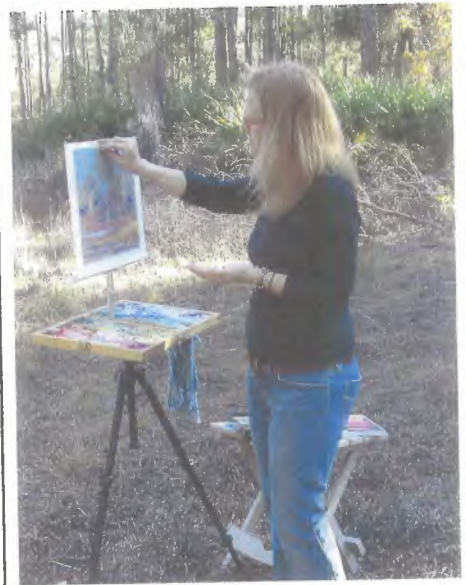


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Artist Lyn Asselta

an old-fashioned hootenanny! Best of all, the Owl Prowls and Full Moon Campfires are free and open for all ages, young and old.”

Not interested in howling at the moon? If someone is looking for a way to refresh and revive, the Arboretum features Yoga Under The Trees at 10 a.m. on the third Saturday morning of each month. Or you can bring your doggie for a great day on the trail. Yes, dogs are welcome, just be kind and pick up behind them. Or, if you need to unplug from the world, this is the place to stroll and enjoy some quiet time alone. With 120 acres and several miles of trails, there is a perfect place waiting for everyone at the Arboretum, and even if you come every day of the year the experience will be different each time. The buzz is building as this newest outdoor treasure in Jacksonville brings a whole new world of beauty and fun for all. Best of all, it's free. Visit and enjoy the glorious richness that is the Jacksonville Arboretum & Gardens. Paradise awaits you!



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