

Dudley Farm Journal

SPECIAL EDITION

NOVEMBER 2008



Stephen Cotton, Jim Carty, and Hubert Davis by the Sugar Cane Mill, Preparing for Cane Day

Miss Myrtle's Birthday Party AKA CANE DAY

Most of us know that the first Saturday in December is our annual fundraiser known as "Cane Day". But did you know that this began as a celebration of Miss Myrtle Dudley's birthday which is Dec. 8? Gosh, the party has grown from just a few souls, to last year's record crowd of almost 2,000. We're hoping for the best weather ever this year and to increase that number substantially. We have some new vendors, demonstrators and musicians coming this year also.

If you haven't already done so, mark your calendars now for **December 6**. The event will run from 9-3. Due to the funding crisis [see the related article on closing the park] there will be a park admission charge of \$4/vehicle up to 8 people for this and the following years. That being said, if you are a member of the "Friends of Dudley Farm CSO" then you should remember that, by showing your membership card, you are admitted to the farm on the first Saturday of the month with no charge [now aren't you happy that the event's always on the first Saturday?]. Of course, if you want, you can still pay the \$4 as the park won't refuse it!

While the front gate will be opened a little prior to 9, no one will be admitted to the parking area until that time. After you enter the gate, just proceed along the road to the Visitors' Center until you meet one of the rangers who will be collecting the \$4.

In Memory of Buck Mitchell
March 9, 1947 - November 4, 2008

Buck Mitchell was raised in that central Florida belt of citrus country and vast ranchland prairies. A 6th generation Florida Cracker, Buck grew up in the small town of Lake Wales. His father was a grove foreman for the Alcoma Citrus Company, well-known throughout the area. My earliest memory of Buck was of a lean, freckled young man, friendly, mannerly. A true Florida Cracker, he grew up resourceful in a place where the lakes were abundant with fish; citrus ripened on the trees; there were plenty of hogs to fatten in what some would have considered a hard-scrabble existence.

Buck's friends shared his pure enjoyment of Florida's regional foods. We'd travel to Cedar Key to smell the salt air and enjoy fresh mullet and grits. We swapped okra pickle recipes in friendly competition. When he spoke longingly of his grandmother's guava cobbler, I would hunt up some guavas so we could try to make it again. Temple oranges, key lime pie, oyster roasts, pork and rice, good cuts of steak, perfectly cooked.....were all indelibly woven into the fabric of his family life and the sharing of good food and good friends around the large cedar tables and benches that were so often laden with the bounty of food for all.

Buck would serve in the Vietnam War along with many of his classmates from Lake Wales. He would suffer without complaint from effects of Agent Orange that would plague his fair skin for the rest of his life. Working in construction in Orlando after the war, Buck met his future wife, Peggy. Together through their marriage of 37 years, they have had a major impact in the communities where they lived, Newberry and Trenton, as well as throughout the tri-county area and the state. Besides doing a fine job of raising their four sons, Buck and Peggy also opened their home to the youth of the area. They were active in promoting local sports, scholarships, educational fund-raising; the "Beast Feast " and have always been available for "counseling" whenever anyone sought it...or sometimes when Buck deemed necessary!

Buck was elemental in the establishment of Dudley Farm, for he was the one to convince Myrtle Dudley to pursue a state agency as the steward of her Florida heritage pioneer farm. As the USDA agent who tested her cattle, he gained her trust and respect over many years. Buck helped re-establish the cane grindings on the farm; provided excellent regional cook-outs for the volunteers and became the first president of the Friends of Dudley Farm, of which he was a founding member. The first meeting is still a poignant memory: Buck informally presiding,,, as the new CSO Board members sat under the stars by the sugar cane mill planning for the future.....He was Dudley Farm's staunchest supporter: maintaining legislative and agricultural contacts that would help to establish and fund the new visitor center complex and infrastructure.

Buck was prominent in the Cracker Horse and Cracker Cattle Associations and hand-picked the Cracker cows from Kissimmee State Park that have become the "Dudley herd". He developed the cattle maintenance plan and then he and his sons helped maintain them! Just a month ago, he and Carlton Dudley gave an excellent program by the dip vat// cow pens; about Cracker Heritage and Livestock. Though Buck Mitchell's passing brings such a sense of loss, we are reminded of his gift of giving and his Florida Cracker legacy which will carry on.

Sally Morrison

Dudley Park Historic State Park Closure

Bill Dunk

No, this is not a misprint. Due to the present Florida budget constraints, Gov. Crist has asked that all state agencies reduce their budgets by 10%. To accomplish this, the Division of Recreation and Parks is preparing to temporarily close 19 state parks and a few other historic sites and museums to the public in 2009. Dudley Farm is on that list. As we look over this list however, we find that 16 of these parks are not even in the same category as ours. They are mostly nature trails and preserves. Of the 3 that are active -Dudley Farm, Cedar Key Museum, and Windy Key Fossil Reef - only Dudley receives such a large percentage of students from regional schools on educational field days, visiting an exceptional Florida history experience. These students will lose the educational advantage of the farm if the closing happens, as projected, in July 2009. This decision will be made by the state legislature in the next session and, if passed, will be signed by Governor Crist in May.

Again, the park will only be closed to the public; two full time employees will be sent to O'Leno State Park until Dudley reopens, leaving one full time employee in a "caretaker" position. Dudley will be held in "maintenance only" status until such time as the budget allows it to be reopened. The three "part time" staff members will be eliminated and the animals will probably be moved to Paynes Prairie and Rawlings. The heritage crops, flowers, etc. will be tended to as best can be but, without constant care, this writer feels that some of those will be lost after years of work.

Do not stand idly by and let this happen. To help change this, you need to write to Governor Crist, your state representatives and our local state senator at the following addresses:

Governor Charlie Crist
Office of the Governor
The Capitol
400 S. Monroe St.
Tallahassee, FL 32399;
Senator Steve Oelrich

14131 NW 28th Lane
Suite 4, Gainesville, FL 32606
(352) 375-3555.

Look up your local representative:

<http://www.myfloridahouse.gov/>

Go to the lower left side of the screen and put in your zip

Explain to him or her that you really understand the need to cut the budget 10% but that there is surely a way to allow Dudley Farm Historic State Park to stay open and functional during at least the school year so that thousands of students won't be denied the educational experience of seeing a living history early century farm which is on the National Register of Historic Places and is being considered for a National Historic Landmark designation. It is an important historical educational experience that these students will carry with them the rest of their lives. In a depressed economy, the public also needs inexpensive and restorative recreation opportunities. Also, much work over the past 10 years has allowed the cultivation of many heritage plants which, without proper care could be lost. The state probably thinks that volunteers will take up the slack but that remains to be seen and probably is a misconception. Also suggest that the Parks and Recreation Department be given budget flexibility that will enable them to use designated but limited resources to maintain the nationally recognized Florida State Park System

Please share this information with as many people as you can. The more constituent letters and phone calls our representatives receive, the better our chances are for a change in this proposed policy.

Answers to your questions and future updates may be obtained by writing to me at Wdunk@cox.net