



The bog before it was cleared of weeds and non-native plants and trees. Volunteers clearing out Boone Park South.



Replanting native plants at Boone Park South.



The new native growth a month after the bog was cleared.

PHOTOGRAPHY: TORINZEL

# Eliminating Invasive Plantlife Allows Boone Park South to Flourish

BY MICHELE LEIVAS

Friends of Boone Park South is a local neighborhood advocacy group many in the Riverside Avondale area might recognize for their clean-up events and tree renourishment and replacement programs that keep this beloved neighborhood park green and flourishing.

Recently, however, they hit pause on planting trees and started thinking about removing some – specifically, invasive plant species that were encroaching on and choking out the native plants.

“There’s a cypress tree in the park that you couldn’t see because of all the growth around it,” said Friends of Boone Park South Board Member Melanie Dobbins. “I’ve lived in the neighborhood my whole life and never really noticed this tree till one day.”

Dobbins and the rest of the Boone Park South group discussed and researched it, and they realized most of the growth surrounding the cypress tree was from invasive species.

From there, Pamela Telis, leader of the park advocacy group, connected with the Ixia Chapter of the Florida Native Plant Society (FNPS) for a walk-through of the park, which led to a large-scale plan to remove what they could of the invasive species “not just with hand snippers,” Dobbins said, and a call for help to the community was made.

“Everything just fell beautifully into place,” Dobbins said. “People who had a love of taking care of things in nature, and understanding that the good couldn’t be there if the bad was, helped us remove all the things that shouldn’t be there.”

Telis founded Friends of Boone Park South a decade ago once it became clear to her that the park would find itself with a severe lack of trees once the older, aging trees began to come down without enough new trees getting planted to replace them. According to Telis, the park was losing an estimated five to seven trees per year. Since

the Friends group was founded, it has planted more than 120 new trees at Boone Park South. The Friends group also provides a small stipend to pick up trash several times a week to keep the park clean in between work done by the city.

“The city just doesn’t have the staff to do that level of maintenance and care,” she said.

Following several years of tree planting, the board turned its attention to (invasive) plant removal and, with the aid of FNPS’s Ixia Chapter, serving Clay, Duval and Nassau counties, was able to begin identifying plants for removal.

“Along our western edge, we have a lot of invasive plants and little trees,” Telis said.

The group has hosted multiple volunteer opportunities for people to come help keep the park vibrant and remove the encroaching invasive species. This past February, more than 30 volunteers came out to continue the removal efforts.

Explaining the dangers of invasive plant species, Telis said, “They will take over areas and then outcompete native plants, which all of our birds and pollinators are not adapted to, and they just don’t have the same wildlife benefits as native plants.”

The group has also gone back in and planted native species to replace the invasive ones that had been removed.

Now that the overarching, large-scale removal effort has been completed, Telis said it’s more of a maintenance program, for which the group is still establishing a protocol to incorporate alongside its tree planting efforts and annual tree adopting event.

“The removal of those invasives that we did over the past two years is going to be a benefit to the park for a decade or so,” said Dobbins. “So, we’re not necessarily doing it for the next generation; we’re also doing it for the following generation.”