

# Native Parks Receive Prestigious Award



Riverside Avondale Preservation Parks Committee Chair Pamela Telis with Ixia Chapter of the Florida Native Plant Society member Bonnie Sinatro, society president Jody Willis and secretary Walter Bryant

Native Parks I and II were awarded the Florida-Friendly Landscaping (FFL) Program Natural Recognition, a first for Duval County, by the University of Florida Institute of Food and Agricultural Sciences.

Stephanie Means, Florida-Friendly landscaping program coordinator at the Duval County Extension Office, presented the award at a ceremony last month. These parks are the first landscapes in the county to receive “natural-level recognition.” This accolade was given in recognition of the parks’ caretakers – the Ixia Chapter of the Florida Native Plant Society and Florida Master Gardener Program master gardeners – fulfillment of a comprehensive criteria list in these parks, including utilizing a minimum of 75% of native plant species, removing and managing any invasive or prohibited species, fostering diverse wildlife habitats and avoiding supplemental fertilizers or irrigation. All of this helps conserve Florida’s natural resources and water.

“Ixia is thrilled to be the first park to receive this award,” said Ixia Chapter President Jody Willis.

At the ceremony, Willis reiterated that the park serves the community as an educational source for Master Gardener volunteers and all Florida friendly gardeners.

More than a century old, Native Park I was first established by the Avondale Garden Circle in 1923 in a small plot of land on Park Street set aside by the city. It was formally dedicated in 1932. Its mission was etched into a brass plaque embedded in stone: to “study Florida Plant life” to increase awareness of the wisdom of landscaping with plants indigenous to Florida.

In the 1980s, after years of decline, Florida Native Plant Society member Dr. Robert Ragland began caring for the park until it was finally adopted in 2010 as part of the “Friends of the Park” program of the Ixia Chapter of the Florida Native Plant Society. Members and volunteers returned the park to order and presently have more than 150 diverse native plant species in Native Park I with labels showing botanical and common names.

*Resident News  
February 2025*