



WONDER BITS

Snippets of news you can use!

A Granny Shack Comeback

Roadside attractions like the Wonder Gardens were a phenomenon in the 1930s, driven by the expansion of the nation's highways. Homegrown entrepreneurs, hoping to nab a few dollars from passing motorists, thought up entertaining, educational, "see it to believe it" creations. Brothers Bill and Lester Piper were no exception.

In 1936, this dynamic duo established The Reptile Gardens along the newly-built Tamiami Trail, in Bonita Springs. They cleared the land they owned using machetes, axes, and hand-powered saws. They also constructed an entrance building — part gift shop, museum and living quarters — and small cages (now upgraded to animal habitats) to showcase SWFL's wildlife.

They added a second dwelling for their mother when their father died. In 1944, the brothers bought and moved a vacant cottage to the front of the property. Anna May Piper joined her sons in 1945, ruling over their proverbial roost, until her death in 1959.

Anna May's small space still stands in its original location. It is currently used for storage, though the intent is to renovate and repurpose. Future plans call for a wrap-around porch and upgrades to meet ADA requirements.

The interior is slated to house a new museum: historic documents and photographs, artifacts and biofacts (skulls), as well as live habitats for reptiles and amphibians. Interpretive exhibits will speak to historical context, the Piper's legacy, the transition in leadership, and the vision for the future.

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*No animals were harmed
creating this newsletter!*



Kiwi Matters

Meet Kiwi. A Yellow-Naped Amazon. A three-alarm cute emergency.

You'll find this "pretty girl" in the Lightner Parrots and Parasols habitat. Kiwi loves to interact with Wonder Gardens guests and will do so — just for fun. We know this by the way she initiates engagement, her body language, the song or words she selects, and the tone in her voice.

Mimicking language provides positive reinforcement. In this instance, it's attention.

Having said this, Kiwi does have interaction preferences. If too many people are speaking at once, for example, she may decide to nap or take a break. She might also retreat if a guest unknowingly causes confusion instead of reinforcement. She'll re-engage when she's ready.

Kiwi IS interacting less with the public and more with her keepers, lately. She's rewarded with treats and play during training sessions. She's also encouraged to use the songs, sounds and words she learned prior to coming to the Wonder Gardens.

Kiwi's favorite treat is anybody's guess. Her diet is varied. She's also prone to changing her mind. She does enjoy almonds and papaya, but even that depends on who is feeding her.

The Yellow-Naped Amazon is critically endangered due to the high level of trapping for the cagebird trade and habitat loss in Central America, its native range. [Read More!](#)



The Everglades Reptile Gardens opened in 1936. This name was later changed to Everglades Wonder Gardens as "reptiles" made some people squeamish. Wonder Gardens was adopted in 2020.



Animal Wellness Is Gaining Ground

Animal care is evolving at the Wonder Gardens.

The 2023 Enchanted Gala, "Whiskers on the River," raised a record-breaking \$468,000. Monies will be used to fund elements of the strategic master plan. Additional money has been raised to complete the expanded plans for the new animal care center.

This proposed facility calls for a veterinary care/hospital room, a designated holding area for new, injured, or stressed animals to shelter in place, as well as office space.

The design also features a much-needed kitchen where staff can better prepare for and monitor species specific diets.

Speaking of diets ... the tactical approach to wellness is also changing. Caregivers at the Wonder Gardens have expanded their health focus to include an animal's mental well-being. A rotating menu, for example, helps to maximize animal interest. As does a tweak to how that meal is served.

Scattering food encourages natural foraging behaviors. Putting edibles inside a puzzle-feeder spurs creativity and problem-solving skills. Favorite treats are reserved for engaging training sessions and used as rewards.

The goal of any enrichment practice is to stimulate the mind. Yet animals, like humans, do have preferences. Even if they don't have a positive reaction, THAT choice is theirs to make. Mission accomplished!

Many thanks Kaitlyn Henry, Director of Living Collections, for contributing!

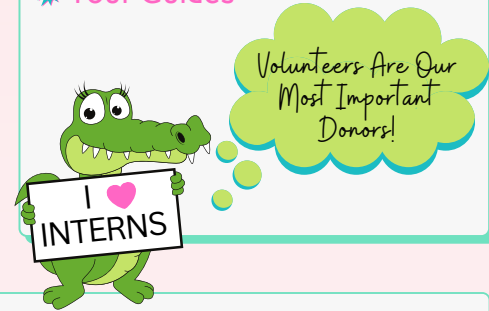
MOST WANTED

education@wondergardens.org

- ★ Encounter Leads
- ★ In-Park Interpreters (Tabling)
- ★ Interns: Animal care, education, or horticulture

Geared towards college students in environmental, biology, marine, education, integrated studies, or related majors

- ★ Tour Guides



The (Garden) Path To Excellence

Meet Neil Anderson. President, CEO, and "Master Planner In Charge."

The former Executive Director at NEW Zoo and Adventure Park in Green Bay, Wisconsin, Neil has both the experience and the passion to take the 87-year-old Wonder Gardens to the next level — an AZA-accredited zoological institution.

AZA accreditation is the highest professional achievement for zoos and aquariums, worldwide. Those seeking this recognition undergo a thorough evaluation of their ENTIRE operation.

They also adhere to rigorous care standards, grounded in science. These criteria place emphasis on physical health AND overall well-being — an animal's ability to display behaviors specific to its species.

Neil's predecessor, David Rahahē:tih Webb, thought the AZA was critical to the future of the Wonder Gardens and took the first steps. He believed being accredited sends a message to both staff and the community-at-large. Animal welfare is first and foremost.

Neil Anderson agrees.

When he joined the Wonder Gardens, in August of 2022, HIS vision was to put a comprehensive plan on paper. He sought and engaged an industry experienced consulting firm who has since helped him accomplish this goal.

Less than 10% of the 2,800 wildlife exhibitors licensed by the USDA under the Animal Welfare Act meet AZA standards.

Under Neil's leadership, the NEW Zoo achieved this status in four years versus the projected five.



"Being accredited is an outward statement to the community, as well as the staff, that we put animal welfare first, are committed to conservation, and value the inclusion of all." ~ Neil Anderson





Know The Ground Rules

Adopted to maintain an oasis for animals, people and plants!

- Be kind to ALL animals. Keep fingers away from habitats and their residents. Leave dropped feathers or sheds in place.
- Refrain from touching plants in habitats. Handle non-habitat plants with care, at your own risk. Leave fruits, nuts, sticks, etc. undisturbed.
- Enjoy food at benches and tables, or on the lawn. Eat away from habitats.
- Do not share food with ANY animal. Dispose of all litter. Alcohol at designated events ONLY. No smoking/vaping on premises.
- Respect habitat boundaries. Walk on pathways. Stay off railings. Refrain from climbing, swimming, or wading.
- Shoes and shirt required. Children under 14 require supervision. Be kind to staff, volunteers, and other guests.
- ONLY trained service dogs allowed. Service dogs must be checked in at front desk upon arrival.
- No glass or balloons. No biking, skating, or skateboarding. No balls or frisbees. Fireworks are not permitted.

JUST THE FACTS

The Association of Zoos and Aquariums (AZA) is a nonprofit organization dedicated to the advancement of conservation, education, science and recreation. *Read More!*

- The AZA represents some 235 facilities worldwide
- AZA accredited institutions provide best-in-class care to more than 800,000 animals around the globe
- Combined, these institutions draw more than 200 million visitors a year

Total Rule Breaker



In Otter News

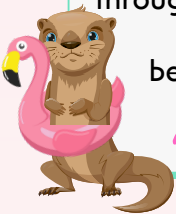
The first river otters arrived at the Wonder Gardens in 1941. As you'd expect from a roadside attraction, they were advertised as the "vagabonds of the swampland." The otters' pen was the last on a guided tour. There you'd find them standing upright, waiting to be hand-fed.

The Pipers closed their historic landmark in April 2013. The otters, like most animals, were relocated. When local photographer John Brady reopened the park, the emphasis was on the botanical collection.

The Robert & Deborah Bain "Otter Grotto" marks the return of the river otters to the Wonder Gardens. This \$250,000 open-air exhibit, modeled after an otter's natural habitat, is planned to include a riverbank with living plants and falling water. A thoughtful design provides unobstructed access to its rollicking residents through a viewing dome, a crawl tunnel, a window into their nesting space, and acrylic frontage.

Engineering consultation for construction is complete. A USDA inspection and permit will be required before the otters come to play. Otter Grotto will house up to three rescued, non-releasable river otters.

Fact: A female otter will push her pups into the water at 2-months-old to teach them to swim.



Buzz Words



"Non-releasable" wildlife is incapable of expressing species-specific behaviors due to a physical injury or psychological impairment. As such, there is no reasonable chance of survival in a natural environment. This includes the inability to hunt and forage or to recognize a potential threat. It also applies to those animals that have habituated to humans. It is illegal to keep non-releasable wildlife as a pet without a permit/license.

The nostalgic phrase "Old Florida" encapsulates the bygone days — a vast wilderness, endless citrus groves, close-knit communities, sleepy fishing villages, and pristine beaches. A time of simple pleasures, prior to high-rise condos, strip malls, and theme parks.

