

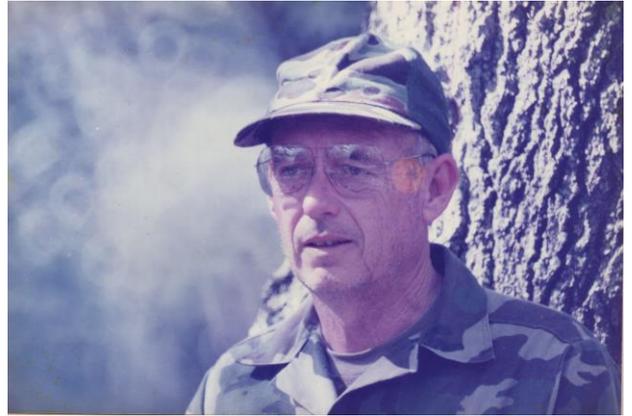
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**SARASOTA COUNTY WATER ATLAS  
ORAL HISTORY PROJECT  
NEW COLLEGE OF FLORIDA — FALL 2014**

**Interview with:** Boyce Blackmon

**Interviewer:** Kana Hummel

*Boyce Blackmon has lived in Florida his entire life and often visited Sarasota in his childhood. He permanently moved to Sarasota in the mid-1960s. He is a successful contractor, starting with Gulf Contracting in 1965, and is currently semiretired, living in Myakka in the Hidden River Aviation Community. He is well acquainted with Sarasota history, community, and wildlife, having owned and operated a cattle ranch for 28 years.*



**INTERVIEW 1 — November 05, 2014**

**Hummel:** We can start off with an introduction.

**Blackmon:** Okay, my name is Boyce Blackmon. I was born in Manatee County but I did not spend my entire life here. I did live in Florida for my entire life and was raised in Clewiston, Florida. Started grade school in Clewiston and spent my high school years in Auburndale, but I always had relatives in this area so we visited here a lot. So I have great memories like these other people who knew what Sarasota was like in the '40s and '50s.

I'm 76, but I was coming here when I was just a kid and we spent a lot of time here, a lot of vacation time and everything, and weekends. But I have very fond memories of picnicking on the causeway going over to Longboat Key, you know, which there was nothing of St. Armands at the time and there were Australian pines growing over along the causeway and we would set up camp, but calling it a camp—it was set up for all day, along the causeway there, and we would go pick up scallops out in the bay, a tub full of scallops. My cousins would catch mullet in cast nets under that little humpback bridge that used to be there and we would cut swamp cabbage on Longboat Key and cook it all up there along the side of the road. You never saw anybody. It was really isolated at the time. So I remember all of that and it would be nice to have it back, but you know, it will never return. That's all gone for good now. You could drive up and down Lido Beach and build a campfire there and people really enjoyed it in that way. Rodney Potter, in his interview, referred to the parties they use to have on Longboat Key and the cops

would come by and check to make sure they were alright but nobody bothered anybody. I do remember all these days, they were all really great. I was fortunate in when I came here after college I always knew that this was where I wanted to come, so as soon as I got out of college and spent my two years in the service and back to graduate school, I came to Sarasota and went to work for a small firm, Gulf Contracting, and we were doing just small stuff. Another fellow and I bought the company in '69. I started here in '65 and we bought the company out in '69 and grew it to a huge construction company. At that time, I was completely focused on my career and we grew the company to a \$65 million company by the early '70s. We had 700 employees and we were working in five states and one foreign country when I sold out in '77. It was a great opportunity for me. It was a wise decision to come here. It was a great, probably lucky decision. I never looked back and this has provided me with the opportunity to have a very satisfying career building over \$500 million worth of construction in my lifetime here in Sarasota and very few people can put a tag on anything like that.

I also had a ranch for 30 years, Cow Pen Ranch, which was located on Cow Pen Lane. I was the only one back in there at the time. Started the ranch in '71 and I sold out in '95, I believe it was. That was another great opportunity to be associated with the cattle industry in Sarasota. Which has great people, it was just a different lifestyle, completely different from my construction company. In construction the faster, harder you work the quicker you get something done but in agriculture it doesn't matter how hard you work. It takes X number of months to have a calf, X number of months to raise a calf, X number of months to raise whatever it is. So, it taught me patience in life. During that period, after I sold the construction company I bought the stockyard feed store, ran that for five years before I sold it. That was another experience that I am really thankful for because I got to meet an awful lot of people.

The other thing that probably influenced my life as much as anything else in Sarasota was access to the Carlton Reserve. In 1965, four other fellows and myself obtained the hunting lease, or recreation lease, on that 31,000 acres of land that used to be owned by John Ringling North. It was an undeveloped piece of land, and still is, that provided just a great opportunity to really enjoy the wildlife. We had a camp that we built out there, it was a small primitive camp. I could drive, if I had half an afternoon, I could just run out to the hunting camp, jump on the buggy, and ride around and just enjoy the afternoon. It was really a lot of fun. We had that lease for 30 years. The County bought 16,000 acres of it at some point, I forget when it was. So we were narrowed down in the amount of property we had access to but it was still next to the state park and it was still really a nice piece of about 10,000 acres. The Swiftmud [Southwest Florida Water Management District], the County, and everybody together bought the rest of the property in '95. That was the last year we were on the property as a tenant.

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Which brings me to the thing that I think that I want to emphasize that the other people that I saw interviewed have not really addressed too much, and that's the fact that Sarasota County has done a marvelous job of putting together some vast wilderness areas and preserving it for the future. I think this is the most important thing that's ever happened. Thank goodness, [with] this election yesterday we have guaranteed they are going to have money in the future to set aside more of these reserve lands, but Sarasota County has just done a fantastic job. We have the largest state park, which is the most visited of all the state parks. Great place. Very much like my property here where I live. Next to that we have the Carlton Reserve which in its entirety, including the Swiftmud property and everything, is 31,000 acres. So you have 29,000 acres in the state park, 31,000 acres of the Carlton enlarged properties, there is a 6,000 acre conservation set aside on the Carlton Ranch which is next to that, and Sarasota County has also picked up the Pineland Reserves and everything on the south side along the Myakka River which is another 8 or 10,000 acres, plus the Walden tract which was 6,000 acres where the landfill is. So there is 150,000 acres roughly, set aside area that is all contiguous and that allows for panthers and other animals which require huge habitats to survive. There were several of them that have been spotted. I've seen them myself. They have pictures of them, recently, on the trail-cams from the Carlton Preserve, so they do exist and there are more of them than the state would like for us to know.

Possibly the new constitutional amendment will help set aside even more of these areas to provide large, long corridors to connect the various ones. They're working on all of that. They've got the corridor running from Oscar Scherer Park now over to the Palmer and eventually into the Carlton Preserve. And again, this helps provide habitat for those animals which require larger than normal habitats to survive. One thing that I was instrumental in, or at least was able to participate in, was in formation of these Friends of Sarasota County Parks. I was on the original committee that met and formed the Friends of Sarasota County Parks and I am still a member of the Friends of the Carlton Reserve. I was president of the Friends of Sarasota County when we moved the Wilson house and we facilitated that. The County actually came to us and said, 'Look, you have the abilities as an organization to buy this house immediately and have it moved.' The County would have to set up funds and have meetings and put out bids, you know, all this stuff, and the developer who wanted to develop the property just didn't have that kind of time. He wanted it moved *now* so we were able to facilitate the moving of the house. There's a good article on that in that Sarasota Oral History interview about the Wilson house. It's quite interesting. I found out a lot more about it than I had known in the past.

One of the more disappointing things I think that I've witnessed in my lifetime is the destruction of a lot of things which were destroyed forever. They can't be restored, they can't be returned. I was fortunate enough to be able to see the Everglades in the '40s. We lived in Clewiston. When I started school I was 7 years old, and at that point in time my family probably got 30% of their subsistence off of hunting and fishing. I mean, we were—everybody was—poor at that time.

After the war [World War II] there was a real recession similar to the one we had here recently, only worse, because all these people were coming back from the war and there were no jobs and they were on the tail end of the big, Great Depression too. So I was fortunate enough to see that. Unfortunately, so much of it has been destroyed. I've seen land that was underwater 80% of the year, now, never sees water, never under water. Large tracts—I'm talking hundreds of thousands of acres which use to be flowing rivers of grass—which is no longer. Raising cattle on it and farming it and raising sugar cane and all that kind of stuff—it's been massive land drainage, waterway pollution, sprawling development, and unwise land use through my lifetime which has been unfortunate and nothing can be done to bring those things back. The Everglades Restoration Project, I have to laud them for their efforts but it will never be the same as it was.

I've got a pet peeve that I would like to talk about a little bit. It is the Carlton Preserve which I was on for 30 years and it was basically unimproved except for minor, minor drainage improvements that were made by the cattle people through the years and I remember this was in 1965, when I got in to that property and we got the lease and at that time there were ditches—not big ditches I'm talking just shallow little ditches—two feet deep, two feet wide, connecting every pond on that property and that sounds like a lot and it was. But they had been there so long that the palmettos had grown over the tops and you could not even see them unless you were just walking through the woods and happened to stumble across it. It did speed the drainage off of the property, probably, but very little. That's a huge tract and everything had to drain through Deer Prairie Slough. Deer Prairie Slough also had a ditch three to four feet wide, two feet deep, running down the middle which again speeds the water out of it, but you're talking about such a small thing compared to such a large piece of land. When the County bought the company, and I say this tongue and cheek, but the environmentalists decided that they were going to restore and preserve the property to the way that it had been hundreds of years before.

My contention is you can't preserve it the way it was a hundred years before cause it's already changed. You know you'd have to go back and change it again and that's basically what they wound up doing unknowingly. They went down to the bottom end of Deer Prairie Slough where it drained in toward the headwaters of the Myakka River and stopped the drainage, filled the ditches, filled it all in, and the last time I was in that area—it was a few years ago—they auctioned off a trip through the property which I hosted. I took them on a guided tour through the thing on a swamp buggy, and it was a lot of fun seeing it again, but it had changed so much. That drainage had flooded huge areas where they had stopped it up and big mesic hammocks—oak tree hammocks that supported huge amounts of turkey, deer, and other wildlife—were destroyed. I mean, it made my heart sick to see it because there were literally hundreds of acres that are now barren that were really beautiful. So, not all efforts to preserve and restore areas are successful. Some of them are absolutely devastating and that was one of them to me. Anyway, I had to get that off my chest. Not many people know about that one. You can't stop it [water] at one point

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and still allow it to be speeded up any other points and that's what happened. All that water backed up in the area of slough and now it never dries up so everything died.

So, in the past it was great and I remember a lot of things here. I really enjoyed growing up here, you know, and having my career here in Sarasota. I think the most important thing still is, is preserving as much as we can of the past. I think that programs introducing young people, and people who are interested in the wildlife and everything, like they are doing now in the parks, Friends of Sarasota County parks, with all the tours and the free educational programs on the Carlton and Red Bug Slough and all these other wildlife areas that they can educate people as to what they are, what their true purpose is, and try to preserve what we do have left for the future. And that's pretty much it I guess unless you have anything you want me to add.

**Hummel:** I really liked what you talked about earlier, about your house. If you want to explore that more...

**Blackmon:** Well, I built the house at the ranch—was my second house in Sarasota, third house actually in Sarasota. I built a house on my ranch that was similar to the one here, but it had porches all the way around and it was up on pilings. It was very similar in feeling to this house and I sold that in the late '90s to a doctor, took his house in trade in Cherokee Park. That was the first time I lived in town in quite some time so I was kind of like a fish out of water, but I remodeled that house, added on to it, sold it, and shortly thereafter my wife passed away and I just had to get back out in the country. I really missed the privacy. I think that's the one thing that's hard for people to relate to, is the fact that once you live out of sight and out of sound of other people for years and years and years, it's really difficult to acclimate to living in town. I think I would go crazy if I had to live in an apartment. You know, it would drive me nuts. So anyways, I hunted and hunted and hunted for a place and found this property which had been empty, this subdivision was developed in the early '60s and it's an airplane community, 7½-acre to 10-acre lots. And the people on this property had these two lots, so there were two that spread out to 19 acres, and it's two 10-acre lots, two 7- to 8-acre lots. They decided they wanted to sell it. They were too difficult to build on because it is a mesic hammock which is protected by Sarasota County ordinances and it's highly restricted as to what you can do to it. You can only clear enough for a house. You can only clear trails. You can't do mass destruction of the habitat. So they attempted to get a permit, and certainly a lot of people attempted to permit the thing, and were unable to do it easily. So it sat and sat and had been empty and on the market for some years, and I made an offer and they took it and I bought both lots, built a house, built this house myself.

It took over a little over a year. I designed it myself, letting the outdoors in. It's open, there's only four doors in the house, no window treatments. It's open, you can see from one end of the

house to the other. It's elevated. I'm way above existing ground out here for the main living floor. There is a first floor with a garage, workroom, laundry room, downstairs but the main living area is up here.

My wife is an artistic type. She likes to take pictures. I like to take photographs as well. So our walls are filled with photographs, and most all of them are done here on the site, on our property. The ones that weren't done here were done somewhere in the state, usually around here. There are some that we took in our travels, but the ones we are most proud of are the ones we took right here.

We really enjoy the outdoors here and our walks through the woods and we—I mentioned before—raised a crippled deer and brought him back to health, kept him wild. He never met anybody other than us and when it was time for him to go, he took off. He was a young buck. We never saw him again. He may have come back to eat. We feed them at night. We feed him a little bit of feed, just to keep him coming around, but that was quite an experience. You can't do any gardening or anything out here 'cause deer will eat everything you've got.

We do a lot of flowers and stuff like that. We do have, but everything here is native. I don't have anything in the yard that's not a native plant. Everything is native to the area. The house we feel is organic, fits in, it's not a "sidewalk looker" house. It's built for the elements here. I noticed that Bob Johnson was talking about his house as the best built one in Sarasota but I'd like to argue with him on that. If I was going to be in a hurricane I'd rather be here than any place I know. This house is built like a rock. And it is true most anybody that's a contractor builds their own house overdoes it. Almost always. So, it's probably overdone but it certainly is enjoyable. We just really love the place. Giving an idea when I cleared the spot of the house, I had to get a permit to remove 80 trees just to put the house in here. So that's how thick it is out here as far as tree growth is concerned: huge trees, big oak trees, old trees, and cabbage palms that are hundreds of years old.

There is something I'd like to clear up too. We're on the map as an Indian mound, this property right here, and I don't believe that's true. There is no mound or any evidence of a mound. They did find, during the construction of the roads and the subdivision here, shards and other evidence of Calusa Indians and I believe that this was a campsite. This is where the Calusas that lived on the coast and lived off of seafood, came in to get red meat and to get skins for their clothing and blankets and houses. So, we kind of feel fortunate in that way too, that we are on a Calusa Indian village site or campsite and where some artifacts have been found. We always like to think of the spirits that are here. I don't know whether they are or not but we like to think that anyway.

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## INTERVIEW 2 — November 19, 2014

**Hummel:** So, could you explain these photos for me?

**Blackmon:** Some of the pictures here are from the Carlton Reserve. I took a lot of pictures out there. And one of them, especially since you are interested in the water resources, is one from a series of three pictures I have from the Carlton. In the '60s and '70s there was a lot of water out there. A lot more than there is today, and a lot more than there has been since then, except for short periods. These pictures are of something we call curlews that were on a wetland out there. It was pretty typical. You drive up in a buggy or if you are walking through the woods and you come up on a pond you can hear these curlews out there, white ibises is what they are. They make these little grunting noises, like "er er er er." There would be thousands of them on this pond and when you walked up they would panic and fly up in the air about 10 feet and just hover. After things calm down, they would just settle right back down in the water.

One day, I walked up to a little pond and inside of a big hammock I could hear them from a long ways making their noises. When I got up there they kept making it in cycles and when I got up there I found out what it was. It was a pond about maybe twice as big as my house and it was surrounded by thick woods and there was a big hawk. He was up in the trees on one side and he would dive. When he would dive, they would all fly up in the air about five feet and hover till he got to the other side. Then they would go back down. And this went on, it was like a game, he kept going back and forth and they kept jumping up in the air. It was about a two- to three-minute cycle, over and over and over. I thought it was the most humorous thing. Some of the things like that you just wished you had it on video or something so you could show the world 'cause it's neat.

But the water resources have certainly dwindled in my lifetime. During the '60s and '70s I could really notice it on the Carlton because it is pretty much unaffected by surrounding development or anything. I mean, it's such a large tract of land and is protected on two sides by the Myakka State Park so it just doesn't have detrimental influences on it by development anywhere. I watched the water levels go from average to way down to nothing. We would catch five-pound bass in Deer Prairie Slough in the '60s and '70s. There has not been a fish in that thing now for probably 40 years because it dries up every year. That's long-term weather effects, that's not from development. Anyway, that was an interesting thing.

For mode of transportation, of course I had ATVs and swamp buggies at the ranch as well, and I was never a horse person so my ATV was my horse. I started out with three-wheelers then wound up with a four-wheel ATV. For the ranch work, as well as traveling through the Carlton, we used swamp buggies. My favorite was an old Volkswagen buggy that we had made out of a

Volkswagen bus. It was a little short thing, light weight, very quiet, easy to steer, very dependable, and we put a lot of miles on that thing, both at the ranch and at the Carlton.

This is an aerial picture that I took of the ranch which was 440 acres at Cow Pen Lane—the road was named after the ranch. I dug out a few pictures of some of the cattle. We started out in the commercial cattle business. We were working cows in that picture, in the cow pens.

And this is part of the commercial herd and I was just getting started into raising pure breed Brahman cattle. This is the Brahman, some of them are Brahman cows. This bull was one of the prized bulls that I raised. I showed him in several county fairs throughout the state. He never did do any great work and he never even could reproduce himself. I wound up selling him when he was about three or four years old.

These are just some of the calves that were gathering around the feeding troughs. The cattle business is, as I said in the first interview, one of the most gratifying parts of my life because I met so many nice people in the cattle business like Bus [Buster] Longino, Cy Bispham, and Jim Lanier, and many others. Just a lot of good people in that business. Mabry Carlton was another one. They were just salt-of-the-earth people. Everyone did business on a handshake and it was not like it is today. I'm sure that today they don't do it on a handshake as much as they did then. I think there is a lot of it in the agricultural business still, if people still do business that way. Honesty.

Anything else?

**Hummel:** Yeah. Well, I took some pictures of the photographs on the walls. Are they the ones that you have done? Just making sure.

**Blackmon:** The photography is done by my wife and myself, both of us. Both of us like to do flowers, I don't know if I could point them out everywhere like these irises were photographed here on the place. The dark picture up there is a palmetto frond or cabbage palm frond. It just happened to catch my eye and it's nothing fancy or anything. Then there are things we bought as well, like the butterfly picture up there. We bought it in an auction at the Myakka State Park where they had local artists, wildlife artists, do some things. We also bought that one over by the stairway of the wood storks. That was at that auction as well. A lot of them are of sunsets, hawks, woods, trees that look like people, orchids we have raised here. We have an alligator section downstairs. We've got a lot of gators because we have seen some big ones. There are a lot of big ones here on the river as well but the Carlton also has lots of them.

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We had hoped to do even more photography in our retirement but I don't know where we would put it if we take anymore. We don't have any more places to display stuff. Our house looks like a gallery as it is.

**Hummel:** So I have a question. You are contractor, right?

**Blackmon:** I'm a general contractor. I do commercial contracting only.

**Hummel:** So, how do you balance your work as a contractor with your passions for wildlife conservation?

**Blackmon:** There really isn't any conflict. You would think there would be but there really isn't much of a conflict. You have to live and let live. People want to move here and they are going to continue to move here. I don't care what you do, you can't build a fence and keep people from coming down here. You can't take that attitude: "While I'm here, I don't want anyone else here." So, with that in mind, you just have to promote proper planning and dense population where it doesn't do any harm. Of course, that is hard to find. But, the village concept which has been promoted here in the last few years, and things like Lakewood Ranch—I know it takes large quantities of land to produce those types of communities, but as long as you set aside the property like we have in Sarasota County in particular—and Manatee County has done a pretty good job as well. They have set aside quite a few acres as well. Not as much as we have. Sarasota is just fantastic when it comes to what we have set aside, counting the state park, you know of course that's still part of Sarasota. That's 29,000 acres, we've got 32,000 acres next to that, another 6,000 next to that, another 12,000, I mean it just goes on and on to where we've got close to 200,000 acres now, set aside property all contiguous, all unimproved. That allows you, then, to densify the other areas.

There was a lot of criticism back in the '50s, '60s, '70s, and '80s about limiting development in Sarasota County to areas west of [interstate highway] I-75 and everybody—not everybody, but the development community in particular, the housing people—really took exception to that, and the rural prairie people because it depressed their real-estate property values compared to those on the west side of I-75. There was lot of flak, but they did it. Now I think everybody is really appreciative of—at least I am—of the fact that they did limit development on the west side of I-75 in those days instead of just letting it sprawl all over the place.

Manatee County hasn't done quite as good a job of that. They are sprawling out east pretty far. They are providing infrastructure and the fact that they've got water and sewer pipes way out there but it still devours a lot of land. And they have got a lot of hopscotching, so they have a lot of undeveloped areas on the west side of I-75. Manatee County also has a lot of dense areas on

the east side. Again, I think Sarasota has done a fantastic job. We've recently been looking down toward Venice for various things and that is also a well-planned community that was done a long time ago which has developed really well.

But getting back to your question, I still have a real passion for the wildlife and conservation and everything but I don't feel that construction developments that I have done has done exceptional harm to anything, to the environment anyways.

**Hummel:** Based on the stories I've heard, your life seems pretty spontaneous. Do you agree with that?

**Blackmon:** It just kind of flows from one thing to the next. You know, I've still got one more phase to go. It's total retirement. We are trying to plan for that because nobody lives forever. So far, so good. There will be an end at some point, so we're planning on our next life which will be a much more compact, less intensive lifestyle. We really hate to leave this place. I mean this is, to me, this is paradise. I mean this is what it is all about, this is Old Florida. This is where the Indians chose to camp. My friend Rodney Potter says, "You live right next to heaven," and I believe that. But there hasn't been any real conflict and there really wasn't a sudden change in any of these things so we kind of just flow from one stage to the next.

**Hummel:** What inspired you to become part of the Friends of Sarasota County Parks?

**Blackmon:** As a matter of fact, John McCarthy who is—I don't know what his position is now, he keeps moving up. One time when the County first purchased the Carlton Reserve, John was the maintenance man out there; he drove a tractor. He became head of Parks and Recreation and he carried a passion for the Carlton with him. He was responsible for getting a meeting started. I don't remember how he and I first met but he asked me to lunch one day and asked me if I would be interested in attending a survey, a meeting of a group of people, about 30 of us I guess, environmentally-oriented people, and I being in the cattle business at that time I was part of that, and had a feed store as well. They started this group and they started discussing ways to help the County maintain these properties and keep them in the forefront of everyone's mind and the Friends of Sarasota Parks was born. It was, gosh I don't know, eight or ten of us at the time. We were floundering around trying to find a purpose and find a direction which way to go and things just kind of fell into place one piece at a time.

I think one of the things that really helped us was this deal with the Wilson house. It allowed us to do something for the County and for historical purposes that would have been very difficult for the county to do by themselves. Since we were a tax exempt organization but had the ability to move like any other corporation... It was not a cost thing, the developer put up the money to

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move the house, \$50,000, but the County could not just take that money and spend it because of the county rules and regulations. So they came to us and said, “Will you do it?” “Well, why sure.” So that’s how it happened. I think that really gave us a foothold. At that time, several other parks started Friends groups. So now you have 12 or 14, maybe more, Friends of the Red Bug Preserve, Friends of Caspersen Beach. The county has around 200 parks. It’s amazing. One of the biggest ones now is the Legacy Trail group and they’ve got hundreds of members and pretty good funds too to work with.

The only thing I have to criticize with that is the fact that the County in recession became solely dependent on Friends to maintain these facilities. For the last six or seven years, there have been no employees at the Carlton Reserve. It’s all been run by Friends of the Carlton. It’s great that we have that kind of volunteerism but I think that places a pretty big burden on those people to keep these facilities going. It’s a huge facility and it’s a big responsibility. I think we need a little more help in that regard, in operating these parks, instead of depending on these volunteers entirely. I think it’s a good bonus to have these people there but the County needs to take some responsibility for keeping these things maintained. I mean, the Friends of Carlton do all the mowing, they do all the trails, they maintain someone at the headquarters there, the educational parts of it, the hay-wagon rides, it goes on and on. They’ve got the Myakka River running down through there. You got hundreds of miles of trails. Again, it’s just a big responsibility and I think the County should take a little bit more active role in maintaining the thing.

**Hummel:** Do you think they are aware of that?

**Blackmon:** You’ve got to remember this is sort of recent. Prior to the great recession that we just got out of, they did have employees. They had a couple of employees. They had supervisors that also helped organize things. They were not full-time for that park but for several parks. In fact, they did have full-time employees at the Carlton, two or three. But, when the great recession came around and the funds were cut, everything got reorganized. Now, they are really dependent on the volunteers to take care of everything. It’s a bit of a burden for the volunteers to have to do it all.

**Hummel:** Going back to Myakka, what is your biggest connection to the waters of Sarasota?

**Blackmon:** I live right here on it. Well, I’ve been interested in the water supplies for many, many years because in the construction business I had a utility company that built water and sewer treatment plants. We built one of the largest ones in the world back in the ’70s down in Cape Coral. We built water and sewer treatment plants all over the country including Texas and South Carolina. In that regard, I’ve always had an interest in it. But, having the ranch and having the recreation lease on the Carlton certainly gave me insight into the water supplies and the water

shortages and all that kind of stuff and the natural cycle of things. I think part of the water shortages we are in are part of a cycle but it's certainly been accelerated by the amount of usage that's going on.

When I was in college, I did a report for a thesis in my senior year that had to do with water treatment and the intrusion of salt water because of pumping. I got a lot of my source information from California, which was already being impacted heavily because of the pumping, because of huge population growth, and the lack of runoff water so they had to get a lot of water from underground at that time and the salt water intrusion was moving inland at about 300 feet a year. It was quite interesting how they were handling it at that time, which was early 1960s. They were, at that time, already infusing treated sewage back into ground to try to create a wall of fresh water between the population and the ocean. It was only moderately successful. Of course I lost track of it for a few years but then when I came to Sarasota that same discussion was being held. They started putting in some infusion wells and whatnot. I'm not a fan of that. At the time I did my report in 1961 or 1962 there were over 40,000 uncapped wells in Sarasota-Manatee County. At that time, the water table was high enough that those wells would actually flow during the wet season naturally without any pumping. Of course, that drained the underground resources just as much as it would if you were pumping it out. Not quite as fast, but it still drained it. So a big program started in the '50s, '60s, '70s, and Swiftmud has been responsible for capping all of these wells as much as they can. They actually come in and cap the well for you. Plug it, seal it off permanently, at no cost to the landowner. So that has helped to stem some of those unkept wells.

You have problems with unkept wells not only because of water leaching out of the ground but because these wells are not cased, in other words not lined, water can transfer from one layer to another layer so that you get poor quality water mixing with good quality water. It's just a bad thing. So capping wells have been a good thing that has happened. Along with treatment of runoff. People talked about new communities creating runoff problems but that is not the case. Since the '70s, Swiftmud has controlled development, and again this is part of my lack of a problem between developing and being an environmental person or naturalist, the treatment that was put in place in the '70s and '80s by water management districts has cleaned up our runoff. All of the pollution runoff we get today is from the subdivisions that were built in the '50s and '60s. Not from the stuff that was built in the '80s and '90s. So the problem is trying to clean up those old things and that is very difficult to do. Today's subdivisions and developments really do create very little pollution. I mean they've got retention ponds, well designed retention ponds. You've got mitigated wetlands where it cleans up the water before it runs off. And they work, they really work.

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**Hummel:** One last thing, do you have any particular stories from your childhood visiting Sarasota that you are particularly fond of?

**Blackmon:** Probably the most predominant thing in my mind, I guess, visiting here from when I was a kid, was again our picnics along the causeway going out to Longboat Key and getting all the scallops and everything and having a family of forty or fifty people along the causeway there all day long, cooking swamp cabbage and frying fish and the kids playing in the water, that type of thing. That's without a doubt one of the most interesting things I remember about this area from my childhood. Fishing, we did mostly freshwater fishing but we did do some saltwater fishing, but we didn't have a boat so we had to fish off a bridge or something like that. I remember oysters and scallops and everything—of course that's what the Indians lived off of too. That's the biggest thing I remember as a kid here.

As far as hunting and stuff like that, that was later on in the '60s and '70s but it was still so different. I remember taking some guys out to the Carlton at the end of the rainy season in August in the mid-'60s and fishing on Deer Prairie Slough. There is a little inland creek running down through there and we caught 40 bass in just a couple hours. We threw most of them back but, I mean, it was just the game and fish were so plentiful. Wildlife was so plentiful in those days. It has decreased, there's no question about that. A lot of that is because of changes in the water patterns. When it dries up every year you are not going to get that kind of fish population.

The saltwater fishing, they are trying to stabilize it, they have done a pretty good job at bringing back the snook, mullet, and other species that were so overfished. That is working to a great degree, but I am hoping that it will continue to improve because it's still nothing like it was even in the '60s. Before that, I'm sure that it was a hell of a lot better.

Oh yeah, and camping on the beach. We used to do that. You could just go down and build a fire on the beach and camp out. We had tents, and of course mosquitos were a problem. That's still a problem.

**Hummel:** Oh, yeah.

**Blackmon:** It's been a good ride. I wouldn't want to change anything. I never looked back when I came here and I certainly wouldn't change anything now.