

FINLEY TRAIL SPEAKER BOX SCRIPT

STATION #1 ENTRANCE FIRST BUTTON

Welcome to the Lester Finley Nature Trail. This barrier-free trail meanders along South Creek through the shaded canopy on what used to be an old fishing trail.

After a loop, it returns back to this starting point. The round trip of about a half mile takes 20 minutes at a leisurely pace.

Plan to stop along the way. There are benches and picnic tables just for this purpose. Best seat in the house is the bench by the water where you can watch the heron's fishing. There's even a water fountain.

On your walk, you'll pass butterfly gardens, a fishing pier, a small waterfall, and a variety of plants. You might want to pick up the plant guide at the beginning of the trail. Please return it after you finish.

A word of caution! Poison ivy is abundant. It's best to stick to the trail.

This is John Roche Park Manager at Oscar Scherer State Park.

Remember: hike for the sheer delight of it!

For more press the button on the right. (60 seconds)

STATION # 1 ENTRANCE SECOND BUTTON

Wonder who Lester Finley was? A young horticultural student, Lester volunteered here even after he started going blind. He was killed by a hit and run driver. His family, local foundations, students, park personnel, and volunteers from the Friends of Oscar Scherer all helped to complete this trail project and make his dream a reality. Since completion of the project, the Friends have maintained the trail.

Notice the contrasts: the path is smooth and clean to accommodate wheelchairs, the sight impaired, or baby strollers. But on each side of the path is the "real" Florida – at least, as real as it can be in this former ranch once owned by Oscar Scherer, an industrialist.

Everything off trail is left in its natural state: trees remain where they fell during a storm, vines grow wild, and Spanish moss is everywhere. Volunteers maintain only the path, leaving the wildness just as it is.

Along the way, there are four more boxes with information.

(60 seconds)

STATION #2 SOUTH CREEK ONE BUTTON

On the left is the fishing and observation pier on South Creek. A tidal estuary, the creek is a blend of salt water from the Gulf of Mexico and fresh water from rain runoff. There's a variety of fish including snook, redfish and mullet. Next time you visit, bring a fishing rod!

Occasionally alligators turn up in the creek. Don't bother them and they won't bother you!

Many different birds live here. Herons, wood storks and great egrets feed on minnows and small crustaceans. You might even hear the rasping cry of the belted kingfisher as he flies by.

Cardinals, woodpeckers and other birds also live here. And check out the holes of dead tree trunks for owls basking in the sun.

Looking for Florida scrub jays? This habitat doesn't support them but you will find them in the scrubby oak areas off the trails near the Nature Center.

(60 seconds)

STATION #3 FIRST BUTTON BUTTERFLY GARDEN

This butterfly garden uses only plants found in the park. Native plants use less water and are best suited to this environment. Flowers grow here year round.

About 100 different species of butterfly can be found in Florida. Here you may see the bright yellow giant sulphur or the orange Gulf Fritillary.

Like birds, most butterflies migrate with the change of seasons. Many like the beautiful Monarch migrate through Florida but there are plenty of full time residents. The striking black and gold Zebra longwing is a year round resident.

Butterflies are solar powered. A successful garden is planted in full sun with their food preferences: nectar for the adults and larvae leaf food for their caterpillars. What looks to us like weeds, they consider to be a gourmet meal. No pesticides are used on these plants. Would you invite someone to dinner and give their food a shot of poison?

For more press the other red button. (60 seconds)

STATION #3 SECOND BUTTON

Butterflies seem to prefer plants with fanciful names like dotted horsemint, frog fruit, hog plum, frost weed and blue curls. You'll find all of these and more in the garden as you stroll through. Or just relax on the benches and watch the show.

Hummingbirds can also be found here. They prefer many of the same plants. Look for them in the fire bushes behind the benches.

There's a beautiful slash pine to the left of the butterfly garden. Pines were grown here for their turpentine and some trees in the park still have those slashes marks.

Next to the garden is a picnic table that is perfect for lunch or just enjoying the surroundings. If you're lucky, you may see a bobcat prowling about on the opposite shore or even an osprey or an eagle fishing in the creek.

(60 seconds)

STATION #4 BRIDGE ONE BUTTON

Just ahead, a bridge takes you over a small stream which carries water from the higher areas of Sarasota County into South Creek and down into the Gulf of Mexico. After a rain there's usually a small waterfall. The little blue heron loves to fish here.

You might hear pileated woodpeckers hammering on trees nearby.

Notice the sabal palms with their crosshatch trunks. For early settlers this "cabbage" palm was an important source of shelter and food.

Early and late in the day, you may hear armadillos rooting for ants or see rabbits coming and going. Occasionally possums and raccoons go down to the creek for a drink.

Watch overhead for eagles with their white heads and tails; you might even see vultures riding the thermals.

Beyond the bridge you'll find a second, smaller butterfly garden with benches, a picnic table and a water fountain. Spend some time in this delightfully quiet spot and take in the sights and sounds of Florida!

(60 seconds)

STATION # 5 ONE BUTTON

You've now reached the far end of the trail. This small peninsula extends into the creek. With the Gulf of Mexico less than a mile away, the grass flats and salt marshes indicate a heavy salt content in the water. Notice the mangrove trees lining the banks. Extremely important to the ecosystem, the mangroves resist erosion, provide cover for young aquatic life, and contribute to the beginnings of the food chain.

Across the way, the Sorrento East community is a reminder that the thirteen hundred eighty two acres of Oscar Scherer Park are an oasis of the real Florida.

As Henry David Thoreau said " ...Rest thee by many brooks ...without misgiving. Rise free from care before the dawn and seek adventure..."

We hope you enjoy your visit and that you'll return often to Oscar Scherer State Park.

(55 seconds)

The 2008 National Trails Awards presented by American Trails

We are nominating *The Friends of Oscar Scherer Park, Inc.* for your prestigious **Trails and the Arts Award**. This award recognizes outstanding public art projects, interpretive signs, or other creative structures associated with trail related improvements. Oscar Scherer State Park has almost 17 miles of trails that provide visitors, cyclists, hikers, runners, and wheelchair users an opportunity to see ...*the Real Florida*[™] in a great park.

The Friends of Oscar Scherer Park, Inc. is a non-profit, 501(c)(3) organization that since its inception has worked beside park management to enhance a cultural and natural resource that is a “must see” destination for visitors worldwide. *The Friends* have donated time and money for the conservation of the Florida scrub-jay and its habitat, details of which—to include comprehensive videos and exhibits—are professionally displayed in a Nature Center they have built, staff and maintain.

The Friends created one of the finest barrier-free nature trails in the country—THE LESTER FINLEY BARRIER-FREE NATURE TRAIL. They constructed and actively maintain this trail, one of the first (and, in my opinion, the best) ADA-accessible nature trails anywhere. This trail won state and national recognition when it opened, and it has recently gone through the Universal Trail Assessment Process (UTAP) by a team of park professionals to further enhance its value and usage.

THE LESTER FINLEY TRAIL (named for a young man who was an active park volunteer who happened to be sight-impaired and who was killed by a hit-and-run driver) has interpretation in many mediums that reach all the senses for anyone traversing its length. Speaker boxes, waterfalls (yes, in Florida!) scenic vistas, butterfly gardens, pamphlets, plant guides, self-guiding trail brochures, and interpretive signs; *The Friends* efforts to bring accessibility to our visitors are outstanding.

In addition, over the past two years they have improved the many miles of other trails in the park. They have constructed footbridges, purchased and added state-approved signage, updated the trail maps, and added numerous map boards with clear directions at every trailhead. Their most recent project was adapting our longest trail to intersect with and utilize part of a new “Rails-to-Trails” in Sarasota County—The Legacy Trail—which opened in April 2008.

The Friends of Oscar Scherer Park, Inc. has donated almost 25,000 hours of service and has spent more than \$20,000 for signage, maps, brochures, and materials for posts and benches. The value of their efforts is priceless, and the return will be tremendous. *The Friends* won the statewide “Project of the Year Award, 2006” for their work on the trails, and also won the statewide “Project of the Year Award, 2007” for the construction of a wheelchair accessible observation bench on the Yellow Trail overlooking Big Lake.

Respectfully submitted,
John J. Roche,
Park Manager, Oscar Scherer State Park