

VOLUNTEER



SPOTLIGHT

Karen Stiles & Michael Schaffer



County Park: Easter Lake Park

Favorite Plant Species: Oaks

Fun Fact: They got married underwater!

As retired educators, Karen and Mike have spent their lives dedicated to learning and passing down knowledge to their audiences whether in the classroom, in the field, or on the fly. Their drive to contribute to Polk County Conservation's mission lies in their passion for nature and outdoor recreation. They work tirelessly together to instill their values, which align with our mission statement, into their family and all those who learn from them.

Karen's involvement with Polk County Conservation began in the 1970's as a biologist where she gave presentations to middle school children. Together, Mike and Karen have worked with staff since 1998 to plant native species throughout the county as well as conduct invasive

plant removal. Recently, the couple has been hard at work at Easter Lake Park as Adopt-A-Garden volunteers. They put in an incredible amount of time and effort into planning and maintaining these native gardens as well as involvement in securing funds to make these public spaces as beautiful and diverse as possible for the benefit of both pollinators and people.

When asked what motivates them to give so much of their time, Karen and Mike replied, "we have been involved in restoration projects in other countries and other states. Now that we are retired, we want to help make a difference where we live. Polk County Conservation and Polk Soil and Water Conservation District have been working tirelessly to improve the water quality of Easter Lake and restore native habitats that support wildlife and increase biodiversity. As neighbors of Easter Lake, we want to be actively involved in those restoration efforts." Knowing that their contributions make an impact as well as having the opportunity to teach others is the driving force behind their support of Polk County Conservation and Easter Lake Park.

Mike and Karen's future goals at Easter Lake Park include establishing two large pollinator gardens, eradicating invasive plant species, developing interpretive signs for park visitors, and bringing back native insect species by planting and maintaining native gardens. Feel free to stop, introduce yourself, and ask questions if you see Karen and Mike out and about in the park!