

The Pondhawk StoryWalk welcomed over 3,000 patrons of all ages in 2020.



Boca Raton Public Library staff members select books every two months for the StoryWalk program and display them in the library.

PHOTOS COURTESY OF CITY OF BOCA RATON

**CITY SPIRIT AWARD**

# Bringing the Library Outdoors

Boca Raton's StoryWalk provides safe literary programming

by Anne Marie Connolly  
City of Boca Raton



**M**arch 2020 marked the beginning of an unprecedented time that changed how all local governments do business and provide programs and services to their communities. Realizing the severity of the COVID-19 pandemic, especially in the South Florida region, the **City of Boca Raton**, a coastal community, sprang into action and quickly declared a state of emergency that closed city facilities, including libraries, parks and community centers.

Department and division leaders citywide started to have conversations about the future of doing business with the City and began implementing virtual services and programming. One of the City's facilities, the **Boca Raton Public Library**, has always been known for its in-person offerings available to residents. With a variety of courses, programs and initiatives, the library served all populations from children to seniors with books, take-home activities and more.

As Boca Raton continued to monitor the pandemic, the library staff members realized an important need within the community:

providing patrons the opportunity to enjoy city services while outside, especially considering most residents were taking advantage of the outdoors. After much consideration, they introduced the StoryWalk program, an innovative way for children and adults to enjoy reading and the outdoors.

"Given the number of families visiting the library for story-times and summer reading, we knew the StoryWalk program would be popular," said **Shilo Perlman, Library Assistant III**. "Once the pandemic closures started, and so many families had to struggle through online learning, it became more urgent to offer a healthy outdoor activity."

The program's location was selected as a result of a partnership between the library and **Palm Beach County Environmental Resources Management Department**. The Palm Beach County's Pondhawk Natural Area, a short walk away from the Spanish River Library, became the location of the first StoryWalk after it was approved through the County's Adopt-A-Natural-Area program.

The library staff worked diligently along with County staff and volunteers to install aluminum posts throughout the area. Library staff members then installed aluminum frames onto the posts generously donated by the **Friends of the Boca Raton Public Library**, a nonprofit volunteer and membership organization. They inserted the laminated pages from a children's book into each frame. The team also came up with fun facts and physical activities for each story page for children and parents to enjoy.

"The StoryWalk at Pondhawk Natural Area was the realization of a shared vision," said **Ellen Randolph, Manager of Library Services**. "This exciting project would not have been possible without our innovative partnerships with Palm Beach County Environmental Resource Management and our wonderful Friends of the Library group. They all loved the idea immediately and have been actively involved in every step of this initiative."

As the program progressed, the library staff made necessary changes to enhance the success of the program. Initially, staff decided to switch to a new book every three months; however, the Pondhawk StoryWalk was so popular, there became a demand to change the books every two months.

The StoryWalk program also created an opportunity to collaborate with other city facilities and departments to bring awareness to the different functionalities of local government and the work city staff members do daily. For example, the

**Gumbo Limbo Nature Center** sea turtle rehabilitation facility reworked their Sea Turtle Month celebration events to be virtual during the pandemic. The library worked with the Center to match the theme and provide a StoryWalk book related to sea turtles.

"By combining and leveraging resources, we were able to provide a new amenity and activity for Boca and Palm Beach Residents which accomplishes several positive outcomes for everyone involved," said **Michael Kalvort, Recreation Services Director**.

The Pondhawk StoryWalk became a local attraction welcoming over 3,000 patrons of all ages. With an enormous amount of recognition on social media as well as successful participation numbers, StoryWalk expanded to a second location. After scouting several places, the team decided on the Serenoa Glade Preserve inside George Snow Park. To date, hundreds of patrons participate in both StoryWalks each month.

"I could not be prouder of the Boca Raton Public Library and all of our City of Boca Raton departments and divisions, all of whom worked with such dedication to meet the increased needs of our residents during these unprecedented times," said **Mayor Scott Singer**. "The StoryWalk has provided an engaging, educational outlet that many people in our community continue to enjoy."

Anne Marie Connolly is the Communications and Marketing Manager for the City of Boca Raton. 



## Boca Raton Wins a Florida Municipal Achievement Award

The **City of Boca Raton** recently received the **Florida League of Cities City Spirit Award**.

The award recognizes a specific citywide effort that successfully addresses a local need. A collaborative effort between the **Boca Raton Public Library** and the **Palm Beach County Environmental Resources Management Department**, the StoryWalk Program places a children's book along a popular walking route in the community.



(From left) FLC Ambassador Shwanda Barnette presents the Municipal Achievement Award to Friends of the Boca Raton Library President Tracy Wasserman, Boca Raton Public Library Manager of Library Services Ellen Randolph, Boca Raton Recreation Services Director Michael Kalvort and Boca Raton Mayor Scott Singer.



Boca Raton Mayor Scott Singer (left) alongside city, county and library staff with the FLC's Municipal Achievement Award.

A bird's-eye view of the "Peace, Love, and Harmony" mural designed, painted and named by residents.



Storm drain mural painted by a resident.

PHOTOS COURTESY OF STEVEN HIRSCHFIELD, IONTB.COM (LEFT) AND CITY OF CLEARWATER

CITIZENSHIP AWARD

# Public Art Projects Engage Residents

Placemaking Program beautifies Clearwater while increasing civic awareness and education

by Jordan Morang  
City of Clearwater

The City of Clearwater's tagline, "Bright and Beautiful – Bay to Beach," encapsulates more than the City's beaches, recreational opportunities and the natural environment. It also captures the unique aesthetics and cultural amenities that are created through the City's Placemaking Program. Comprised of 10 individual project opportunities, the Placemaking Program encourages neighbors to work toward the common goal of infusing the built environment with public art. The opportunities within the program include:

- ▶ Paint the Pavement (Street Murals)
- ▶ Dumpster Murals
- ▶ Sidewalk Rain Art
- ▶ Signal Box Murals
- ▶ Little Free Libraries
- ▶ Storm Drain Murals
- ▶ Wall Murals
- ▶ Adopt-a-Park
- ▶ Adopt-a-Street
- ▶ Sidewalk Poetry.

Each of the 10 projects within the Placemaking Program is open to residents and Clearwater organizations. The City provides the materials and logistical support necessary to ensure each project is successful and produces something that volunteers will be proud of.



**CLEARWATER**  
Pinellas County  
Pop. 118,017

Over 100 examples of community art, designed and fabricated by neighbors, can now be found on Clearwater's sidewalks, streets, infrastructure and walls. The grassroots nature of the program motivates neighborhood residents to work together to create art that represents them and their experience in the City. The resulting artwork is diverse in color, subject matter and meaning.

Hundreds of volunteers and dozens of community organizations alongside city staff have collaborated to make Clearwater more beautiful and inviting through the Placemaking Program. A marked increase in social capital and togetherness has improved the community's resilience, especially amid the tumultuous COVID-19 pandemic.

**BEYOND BEAUTY: ACTIVATING THE BUILT ENVIRONMENT**

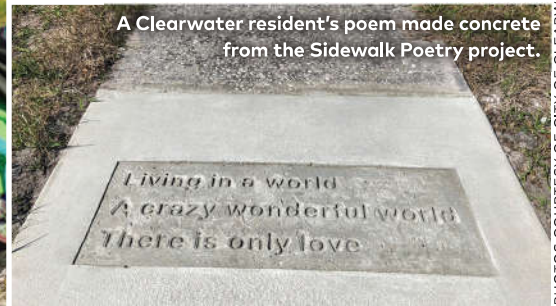
Pinellas County is the most densely populated county in Florida, and as a result, the City of Clearwater must be creative when developing public art initiatives. Fortunately, there are blank canvases ready to be splashed with color along every street, sidewalk and corner of Clearwater. By using the existing infrastructure – intersections, building walls, sidewalks, signal boxes and storm drains – the City can offer opportunities to all who wish to participate. Instead of a storm drain or signal box that fades into the background, residents have created active and eye-catching art pieces. This program makes the pedestrian environment safer



Residents paint an inspiring message on a dumpster at their local park.



Community members beautify a storm drain.



A Clearwater resident's poem made concrete from the Sidewalk Poetry project.

PHOTOS COURTESY OF CITY OF CLEARWATER

and more enjoyable for those who travel Clearwater's streets, sidewalks and trails.

The program also promotes education and environmental stewardship through the Little Free Library, Rain Art and Storm Drain Mural programs. On each painted drain is a short quote promoting environmental stewardship, such as encouraging neighbors to keep trash out of the waterways and only letting rain down the drain. These small reminders, along with the Adopt-a-Park and Adopt-a-Roadway, foster an understanding of ownership and the responsibility that each community member has in keeping Clearwater "bright and beautiful."

**SENSE OF PLACE**

While the community artwork is attractive, educational and inspiring, the driving force behind the program's inception proved greater than just the physical enhancements. The Placemaking Program acts as a catalyst for interaction and collaboration between neighbors, the City, community partners and local organizations. The sense of place created by residents and groups working side-by-side on the planning, design and execution of each project is deep and lasting.

One of the primary objectives is to ensure that the program is both equitably available and accessible to all neighborhoods so that residents – regardless of age, skill level, amount of free time or financial capacity – have the opportunity to put their stamp on the

community. **Allyson Leja**, an **art teacher** at a local high school who led a group of students beautifying storm drains, conveyed her appreciation of the opportunity for her students to express themselves artistically while also sharing an impactful and positive message.

Since the creation of the program, it has been an expressed goal to promote each placemaking opportunity in historically underinvested neighborhoods. Consequently, some of the most impactful projects have been the ones where the beautification became secondary to the improved sense of place and camaraderie in the community. At the Lake Belleview Paint the Pavement event, **Valerie Ingram Hinkley**, **President** of the **Lake Belleview Neighborhood Association**, discussed the impact the project had on her neighborhood and the commitment her community showed to improvement by coming together and giving their time, effort and artistic prowess to the intersection mural.

Creating these ties among residents – and among residents and city staff – has fostered relationships that continue long after the paint dries. These relationships will continue to promote thoughtful discourse and positive action throughout Clearwater and at City Hall. The City will continue expanding the program and offering residents innovative ways of beautifying and activating the often-overlooked parts of "bright and beautiful" Clearwater.

Jordan Morang is the Neighborhoods Coordinator for the City of Clearwater. **QC**

**Clearwater Wins a Florida Municipal Achievement Award**

The **City of Clearwater** recently received the **Florida League of Cities Florida Citizenship Award**.

The award recognizes a city project or program that increases civic awareness and education and promotes active participation in local government among residents. The Placemaking Program is a citywide initiative that engages the community in a series of public art projects while beautifying public spaces.



Photos submitted by residents who participated in the #CleanDarkFlat campaign.

**ENVIRONMENTAL STEWARDSHIP AWARD**

# Communitywide Partnership Protects Sea Turtles

Jacksonville Beach's #CleanDarkFlat campaign keeps beaches clean

by Jacob Board  
City of Jacksonville Beach

**JACKSONVILLE BEACH**  
Duval County  
Pop. 23,394



The City of Jacksonville Beach, home to a vast stretch of beaches, serves as the “playground” to the Jacksonville Metro area that encompasses a population of almost 1.6 million. Embodying their newly adopted vision statement, “a vibrant coastal community that embraces ‘the beach life,’” the City recently partnered with government organizations, nonprofits and local businesses to prioritize natural resources and the environment.

Florida’s coast is the world’s largest nesting area for endangered Northwest Atlantic Ocean Loggerheads. Not many get the opportunity to see these precious beach creatures hatch and scurry down to the ocean, but it is a sight to behold. The journey for these turtles, although exciting to witness, is not an easy one, and a thriving beach community doesn’t necessarily make it any easier. When a sea turtle hatches on coast, it immediately begins crawling toward the moon or morning sun to reach the ocean. House lights and public streetlights near the beach can confuse the turtles into crawling the wrong way and never making it to the water. Holes and sandcastles can also trap tiny turtles.

The #CleanDarkFlat public awareness campaign was launched in partnership with the City, Beaches Energy Services, Beaches Sea Turtle Patrol (BSTP) and several local coffee shops to protect sea turtles during the 2020 nesting season. The campaign’s objectives included raising awareness and educating residents on safety practices to protect nesting sea turtles, engaging local businesses to promote the campaign and actively engaging the community at large in efforts to protect these sea turtles.

Launched just before July 4, one of the largest beachgoing weekends in the community, the campaign featured a custom #CleanDarkFlat coffee mug/sticker pack sold in six partnering local coffee shops for \$10, with proceeds going to BSTP. The #CleanDarkFlat messaging reiterated the importance for the sea turtles to have the following:

- ▶ **Clean** – Keep the beaches free of litter and personal items.
- ▶ **Dark** – No lights at night for the safety of hatchlings.
- ▶ **Flat** – Fill in holes and knock down sandcastles that trap turtles, and do not disturb turtle nests.

Amid a global pandemic when so many residents were experiencing fear and uncertainty, the community was ready for a positive mission that brought them outside to support their favorite natural space: the beach. The mugs sold out within two months and had residents asking for more.

“The program was well-executed, beautifully produced and promoted and, most importantly, created positive results,” said **Mayor Chris Hoffman**. “In the 2020 sea turtle season, I’m ecstatic to share that there were ZERO sea turtle deaths on our beaches. This is, of course, not 100% because of the #CleanDarkFlat campaign, but it certainly made a large contribution to such a wonderful statistic.”

The campaign brought a new, exciting way for residents to support and learn about sea turtle safety and brought much-needed foot traffic to local businesses that had seen a significant decrease in customers due to previous stay-at-home mandates. The existing sea turtle preservation hashtag, #CleanDarkFlat, sounds reminiscent of a latte a barista would take pride in serving. It also provided a unique way to reintroduce the hashtag and build excitement in the community.

“I’m so proud of the City of Jacksonville Beach, Beaches Energy, the Beaches Sea Turtle Patrol and six of our local coffee shops partnering together to educate the public in an engaging, educating and fun way by starting the #CleanDarkFlat campaign,” said Hoffman.

The Jacksonville Beach community will continue to embrace the beach life by ensuring that our beaches remain clean, dark and flat!

Jacob Board is the Communications Manager for the City of Jacksonville Beach. 



Residents enjoy coffee in their #CleanDarkFlat mugs.




A BSTP outreach volunteer at the kickoff event.




A resident purchases two mugs at her local coffee shop.

**City of Jacksonville Beach & Beaches Energy  
#CleanDarkFlat Public Awareness Campaign**

**2021 Florida Municipal Achievement Awards**  
Category: Environmental Stewardship



**SUPPORTING MATERIALS**



PHOTOS COURTESY OF BEACHES SEA TURTLE PATROL, IMAGE COURTESY OF CITY OF JACKSONVILLE BEACH

## Jacksonville Beach Wins a Florida Municipal Achievement Award

The **City of Jacksonville Beach** recently received the **Florida League of Cities Environmental Stewardship Award**.

The Environmental Stewardship Award recognizes a city program that promotes conservation, improves and protects environmental conditions and/or provides environmental education and outreach programs. The #CleanDarkFlat public awareness campaign was aimed at protecting sea turtles during the 2020 nesting season. It highlighted the importance of keeping beaches clean of any litter or trash, dark without any light at night and flat without any holes.