Boca Raton Library StoryWalk Program
City Spirit Award Nomination Packet
In March 2020, the grim realization of the COVID-19 pandemic and the kind of impact it would have on our community started to settle in. That month, the City of Boca Raton issued a Stay Home, Stay Safe Order in accordance with the County and State to limit nonessential travel. This forced City facilities including libraries, parks and community centers to close. Departments and Divisions city-wide started to have conversations about what the future of programs and services could potentially look like for our residents, one department being the Boca Raton Public Library. The team quickly understood the need for activities for families outdoors while trying to continue the educational programming they were always known for. The result was the Storywalk Program – an innovative way for children, and adults, to enjoy reading and the outdoors at the same time.
THE CHALLENGE

March 2020 marked the beginning of an unprecedented time that changed the way all local governments do business and provide programs and services to the community. Realizing the severity of the COVID-19 pandemic, especially in the South Florida region, the City of Boca Raton quickly sprang into action, taking direction from Palm Beach County and the State of Florida. On March 28, 2020, the City issued a “Stay Home, Stay Safe” executive order in accordance with County and State orders to limit nonessential travel within the community. This forced City facilities including libraries, beaches, parks and community centers to be closed to the public.

Departments and Divisions city-wide started to have conversations about what the future of doing business with the City would potentially look like for our residents and began to implement virtual services and programming. One of the City’s facilities, the Boca Raton Public Library (BRPL), has always been known for their in-person offerings that were made available to residents. With a variety of courses, programs and initiatives, BRPL served all populations from children to seniors with books, take home activities and more.

As we continued to monitor the pandemic, the BRPL staff realized a need within the community – providing patrons the opportunity to enjoy City services while outside 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. Laminated pages from a children’s book are secured between planes of plexiglass inside of an aluminum frame, attached to an aluminum post, which are installed along an outdoor path.

**OBJECTIVES**

The objectives of the StoryWalk program were to:

- Meet the needs of our residents who wanted to participate in outdoor activities in a safe space
- Continue educational programming that benefited the City's youth, especially with the lack of in-person learning
- Provide the same level of service to our taxpayers but in a manner that adhered to CDC safety guidelines

Just like in all areas of the country, people needed an outlet to help maintain some sort of normalcy and distractions from the pandemic. The Boca Raton Public Library did an excellent job of recognizing that need and provided virtual programming, take home activities and initiatives like the StoryWalk that benefitted our community for the long run. After the initial launch of the program, BRPL was recognized for their efforts and were able to fully invest into the program to make it the successful initiative it still is today.

**IMPLEMENTATION & OUTCOMES**

The StoryWalk started as a partnership between the Boca Raton Public Library and Palm Beach County (PBC) Environmental Resources Management Department. Through the County’s Adopt-A-Natural Area Program, the StoryWalk initiative was
approved to be placed at the PBC Pondhawk Natural Area, a short walk away from the Spanish River Library. The team worked diligently along with PBC staff and volunteers to dig holes and cement aluminum posts into the ground throughout the area. BRPL staff then installed the aluminum frames onto the posts and Inserted the laminated pages from a children's book into each one. The team also came up with little fun facts and/or physical activities for each page of the story for children and parents to enjoy together. The Friends of the Boca Raton Public Library partnered with BRPL and agreed to fund $2,500 toward aluminum and plexiglass book page holders for the StoryWalk. The StoryWalk was up and running starting July 2020.
The first book's pages were original to the physical book and were laminated. Due to the bright Florida sun, the colored illustrations on the pages faded quickly and were hard to see. Since then, the BRPL staff has been working with the publishers of each featured book to obtain permission to reproduce the book pages, print the pages on special paper with UV ink and have them laminated with thicker lamination. This drastically improved the durability of the story pages. As the program progressed, the BRPL staff made necessary changes to enhance the success of the program. Some patrons who had never walked the nature trail, were unsure how to get to the StoryWalk from the parking lot so sidewalk decal arrows were made leading from the parking lot to the entrance of the StoryWalk. Initially, BRPL 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 BRPL staff also used this as a way to support other city initiatives – for example, Gumbo Limbo Nature and turtle rehabilitation center, re-worked their Sea Turtle Month
celebration events to be virtual during the pandemic. BRPL worked with the Center to match the theme and provide a StoryWalk book related to sea turtles. As a result, 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 the successful participation numbers, BRPL decided to include another StoryWalk location. After scouting several locations, the team decided on Serenoa Glade Preserve location inside George Snow Park, a city park that includes a playground, basketball court and tennis court. Seeing that the Serenoa Glade Preserve trail was shorter, the StoryWalk would be geared toward an even younger demographic. A few months later, the Boca Raton Park Maintenance staff dug holes and cemented the aluminum posts to build out the story walk. To date, hundreds of patrons participate in both StoryWalks each month. Additionally, the StoryWalk was featured in local publications such as the Boca Raton Tribune, Boca Magazine, Sun Sentinel, Patch.com and a local mommy blogger, Local Mom Scoop.

INNOVATIVE

The StoryWalk program is innovative for many reasons. It addressed a local need to provide an outdoor activity used to educate children while exploring nature trails throughout the City. It also created an opportunity to collaborate with other City facilities and departments to bring awareness to the different functionalities of local government and some of the work our staff members do on a daily basis. Additionally, it was strategically built to adhere to all CDC guidelines to encourage residents to enjoy the outdoors while maintaining a safe space. Lastly, it took a City
program that was no longer offered at the time and provided it to patrons with even more engagement and interactivity. As the program continued, the BRPL staff adapted to the changing environment not only of the pandemic but to the needs and wants of our residents.

ADAPTABILITY
The StoryWalk program is a model that can be incorporated in any community with outside green space. Even though the initial set up and idea came at a higher cost than expected, the success of the program invited organizations like the Friends of the Library to donate funds toward the initiative. Additionally, the partnerships between the City, the County and other departments are partnerships that can be cultivated anywhere for the greater good of the community.
VISIT THE BOCA RATON PUBLIC LIBRARY

STORYWALK®

AT THE PONDHAWK NATURAL AREA
BY SPANISH RIVER LIBRARY

FEATURING THE BOOK

Where Should Turtle Be?

The StoryWalk Project was created by Anne Ferguson of Montpelier, VT, and developed in collaboration with the Kellogg-Hubbard Library. StoryWalk is a registered service mark owned by Ms. Ferguson.

StoryWalk is a fun, educational activity that places a children’s storybook along a popular walking route in the community. It was created as a way for people of all ages to combine physical activity with books and to help build children’s interest in reading while encouraging a healthy activity for all!

PARK IN THE WEST PARKING LOT OF THE
SPANISH RIVER LIBRARY:
1501 NW SPANISH RIVER BLVD. BOCA RATON
VISIT THE BOCA RATON PUBLIC LIBRARY

STORYWALK®

AT THE SERENOA GLADE PRESERVE IN GEORGE SNOW PARK

FEATURING THE BOOK

Dancing Feet!

The StoryWalk Project was created by Anna Ferguson of Montpelier, VT, and developed in collaboration with the Kellogg-Hubbard Library. StoryWalk is a registered service mark owned by Ms. Ferguson.

StoryWalk is a fun, educational activity that places a children's storybook along a popular walking route in the community. It was created as a way for people of all ages to combine physical activity with books and to help build children's interest in reading while encouraging a healthy activity for all!
Have you heard the news? The Spanish River Library in the City of Boca Raton, FL, Government now features a beautiful StoryWalk in the Palm Beach County Pondhawk Natural Area adjacent to the library. It's a great place to bring the family to enjoy the gorgeous scenery, get some exercise, and read a story together!

A big thank-you to the Friends of the Boca Raton Public Library, Inc. and the Boca Raton Recreation Department for also supporting this wonderful new family-friend... See More

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We just installed a new book at our StoryWalk in Serenoa Glade Preserve by George Snow Park in Boca Raton! We found adorable Ivy and her dad exploring the trail today. Why not follow their lead and take your family to StoryWalk for a nature-filled walk and read the wonderful book, "Lola Plants a Garden," by Anna McQuinn, published by Charlesbridge Publishing. In this story, book-loving Lola is inspired by a collection of garden poems that she reads with her mommy. She wan... See More

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Palm Beach County

DYK that families can combine reading, exercise & nature while visiting a PBC natural area? Thanks to a partnership with Friends of Boca Raton Public Library &... See More

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Write a comment...

Press Enter to post.

Brooke Dooley
I have walked the story walk with my two kids and it is delightful! We all enjoyed it so much. So well done!

Like · Reply · 27m

Brianna Marie
Bob Seiger

Like · Reply · 27m

Veronika Levine
Chuck Szachta

Like · Reply · 27m

Angela Gavagni
Jeffrey J Adams

Like · Reply · 27m

Write a comment...

Boca Raton Public Library

Read all about it! Our StoryWalk next to the Spanish River Library has been featured by SunSentinel! Read the article here: [https://miami.com/2022/04/11/storywalk-in-boca-raton.html](https://miami.com/2022/04/11/storywalk-in-boca-raton.html)

Read the children's story as you enjoy the beautiful surroundings.

Thanks to Friends of the Boca Raton Public Library, Inc., the Boca Raton Recreation Department and the Palm Beach County Department of Environmental Resources Management for partnering with us to bring StoryWalk to Boca Raton.

Like · Reply · 1w

Anna McQuinn
Oh guys! This is so amazing! What a fantastic project. I'm sure Rosalind Beardshaw (who did the amazing illustrations) will also be delighted to see it.

Like · Reply · 1w

View 1 more comment

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Write a comment...

Press Enter to post.
Looking for something fun and outdoors-y to do with your family or visitors this week? Visit StoryWalk next to the Spanish River Library!

Palm Beach County Department of Environmental Resources Management
November 24, 2020
Did you know that families can combine reading, exercise and exploring nature while visiting a Palm Beach County natural area? Thanks to the staff at Boca Ratón... See More

Boca Raton Public Library posted a video to playlist More to Enjoy.
November 4, 2020
Join Mr. Marlon from the Boca Raton Public Library as he shares history and fun facts about the City of Boca Raton, FL Government for Florida City Government Week. How do you pronounce Boca Raton? Where was the first City Hall located? Where did the land for FAU and the airport come from? When was there a theme park in Boca Raton? Who were the Barefoot Mailmen? Learn all this fascinating history and more! Florida City Government Week is a time for municipalities to... See More

Boca Raton Public Library posted a video to playlist More to Enjoy.

Alexandra McLaughlin
What a fantastic idea! Thank you!
Like Reply 22h
Alexandra McLaughlin
Boca Raton Moms
Like Reply 23h

Melanie Herrin
This is really a great idea! Nice Job Boca Library!
Like Reply 22h
Odilia Friedman
Such a great idea!
Like Reply 22h

Boca Raton Public Library
March 15 at 12:09 PM
Looking for something fun to do with the kids during Spring Break? Visit one of our StoryWalks! The StoryWalk at Pondhawk Natural Area next to Spanish River Library has a new book, Where Should Turtle Be? by Susan Ring, published by Arbordale Kids. We picked this adorable book about a little turtle who needs help finding his way home, because we’re celebrating Sea Turtle Month with Quetzal Leslie Nature Center, Inc. Our other StoryWalk, at Serenoa Glade Preserve in George Sn... See More
Boca Raton Public Library Unveils StoryWalk at Pondhawk Natural Area

Boca Raton, FL – In celebration of National Park and Recreation Month, the first StoryWalk in Boca Raton has opened at the Pondhawk Natural Area next to the Spanish River branch of the Boca Raton Public Library. StoryWalk is a fun, educational activity that places a children’s storybook along a popular walking route in the community.

The Pondhawk StoryWalk’s first book is called *The Swamp Where Gator Hides*, by Marianne Berkes. Through beautiful art and poetic verse, young readers will learn about the swamp ecosystem and see that wild Florida can be found as close as our nearest park! Different books will be displayed throughout the year to keep the StoryWalk experience fresh and promote future learning.

StoryWalk was brought to Boca Raton through a four-way partnership between the Boca Raton Public Library, the Palm Beach County Department of Environmental Resources Management, the Friends of Boca Raton Public Library, and the City of Boca Raton Department of Recreation Services as a way to combine physical activity with books to help build children’s interest in reading while encouraging healthy activity for all.

National Park and Recreation Month has been celebrated in the United States in July since 1985. During this month, Parks and Recreation departments, organizations and individuals promote the benefits of local parks and recreation centers. StoryWalk is the perfect place for the whole family to get outside, explore a local landmark, and enjoy outdoor activities. It is easily accessible for people of all ages from the Spanish River Library parking lot at 1501 NW Spanish River Blvd., Boca Raton.
A new chapter: Storytime moves outdoors for a nature walk

For the Vandemark and Koch families, a recent visit to the Pondhawk Natural Area in Boca Raton provided more than some much-needed quality time outdoors in these challenging times.

As the three children from each family walked along the trail through a portion of the 79-acre savannah marsh on Spanish River Boulevard, they were able to read, learn and enjoy fun facts about nature and the ecosystem through the new StoryWalk exhibit.

Pondhawk Natural Area, situated near the Boca Raton Public Library branch at 1501 NW Spanish River Blvd., features a vast showcase of scrub habitats and wetlands that are home to some of the tallest palm apple trees in Florida. That makes it a perfect setting for the StoryWalk learning experience, according to Boca Raton Public Library Assistant III Shelia Perlman.

Perlman, one of those behind the StoryWalk endeavor becoming a reality, explained that as children and their parents walk along a paved trail, they come upon the book pages that are each in an enclosure and mounted on a post.

"We're excited that (StoryWalk) will encourage people of all ages to engage in physical activity, explore nature and encourage children to keep reading over the summer," she said.

Perlman explained that StoryWalk provides pages of children's books on mountings that young learners can stop and read to learn about the wildlife and habitat that isfiguratively in their own backyard. Each mounting follows a progression similar to reaching a new chapter in a book.

Berkes' book will be on display for three months, after which another title and author will be featured on the mountings. Perlman noted that the plan is to have four books per year to keep the StoryWalk experience fresh and promote learning in a fun way.

There are 16 mountings to keep children engaged as part of the StoryWalk exhibit. The book experience begins with an introductory cover page, followed by 14 "chapters" or progressions to the story. It concludes with a page devoted to background information about the author and the illustrator.

"They are situated throughout Pondhawk, so after they walk a (short distance) they have another part of the story to read, and then another and so on," Perlman said. "After walking the complete trail they will have read the entire book."

Through colorful pictures and the type of writing that appeals to young readers, those visiting StoryWalk learn about the swamp ecosystem and its importance to the South Florida landscape.

As is the case with most inquisitive 8-year-olds, Finn Vandemark had many questions about his surroundings, including its name.

"I didn't know what a pondhawk was," said the soon-to-be fourth-grader at J.D. Spady Elementary School in Delray Beach. "I learned that a pondhawk is a (type of) dragonfly!"

Finn and his brother Lenan, 11, and Rays, 9, were not only intrigued by all the sights and sounds within Pondhawk but also fascinated by StoryWalk's first book offering titled "The Swamp Where Gators Hide" by author Marianne Berkas.

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Boca Raton Public Library Unveils New StoryWalk At Serenoa Glade Preserve

StoryWalk is a fun, educational activity that places a children's storybook along a popular walking route in the community.

Press Release Date: News Partner
Posted Tue, Feb 2, 2021 at 6:21 pm ET

From the Boca Chamber:

February 2, 2021

The Boca Raton Public Library is pleased to announce the addition of a StoryWalk to the Serenoa Glade Preserve at George Snow Park in Boca Raton. StoryWalk is a fun, educational activity that places a children's storybook along a popular walking route in the community. The Serenoa StoryWalk will highlight books at easily viewable heights for young children up to 5 years old. This is the second StoryWalk in the City of Boca Raton. The first StoryWalk opened in July 2020 at the Pondhawk Natural Area adjacent to the Spanish River Library. A different book will be displayed at each StoryWalk every two months to keep both StoryWalk learning experiences fresh and exciting.

The first book at the Serenoa Glade Preserve StoryWalk is called Dancing Feet! by Lindsey Craig, with illustrations by Marc Brown. Craig’s rollicking text features funny sound words (Tipity! Creepyty! Stomptity! Thumpity!), dancing animals, and a singsong beat, while Brown’s artwork is bright, textured, and joyful, a collage of simple shapes for kids to find and name.

StoryWalk was brought to Boca Raton through funding from Friends of the Boca Raton Public Library to help build children’s interest in reading while encouraging healthy activity. The Friends is a non-profit volunteer and membership organization dedicated to supporting the Boca Raton Public Library’s literacy programs and to increasing awareness of the Library’s educational and recreational contributions to the local community. The national StoryWalk Project was created by Anne Ferguson of Montpelier, Vermont, and developed in collaboration with the Kellogg-Hubbard Library.

StoryWalk is the perfect place for the whole family to explore a local landmark and enjoy outdoor activities. The StoryWalk at Serenoa Glade Preserve is easily accessible for people of all ages from the George Snow Park parking lot at 1101 NW 15th Street, Boca Raton.

This press release was produced by the Boca Chamber. The views expressed are the author’s own.
Five Great Ways to Keep Your Boca Kids Busy This August

By Michelle Olson Bogran - July 21, 2020

Boca Raton Public Library Unveils New StoryWalk® at Serenosa Glade Preserve in Boca Raton

WHAT: The Boca Raton Public Library is pleased to announce the addition of a StoryWalk to the Serenosa Glade Preserve at George Snow Park in Boca Raton. StoryWalk is a fun, educational activity that places a children’s storybook along a popular walking route in the community.

The Serenosa StoryWalk will highlight books at easily viewable heights for young children up to 3 years old. This is the second StoryWalk in the City of Boca Raton. The first StoryWalk opened in July 2010 at the Pondhawk Natural Area adjacent to the Spanish River Library. A different book will be displayed at each StoryWalk every two months to keep the StoryWalk learning experiences fresh and exciting.

WHERE: StoryWalk is the perfect place for the whole family to explore a local landmark and enjoy outdoor activities. The StoryWalk at Serenosa Glade Preserve is easily accessible for people of all ages from the George Snow Park parking lot at 1101 NW 14th Street, Boca Raton.

(561) 393-7832
www.bocapubliclibrary.org

StoryWalk at Pondhawk Natural Area

In celebration of National Park and Recreation Month, the first StoryWalk in Boca Raton has opened at the Pondhawk Natural Area next to the Spanish River branch of the Boca Raton Public Library. StoryWalk is a fun, educational activity that places a children’s storybook along a popular walking route in the community.

August’s book is called The Swamp Where Gator Hides, by Marianne Berkes. Through beautiful art and poetic verse, young readers will learn about the swamp ecosystem and see that wild Florida can be found as close as our nearest park! Different books will be displayed throughout the year to keep the StoryWalk experience fresh too!

Five Great Ways to Keep Your Boca Kids Busy This August

Local Mom Scoop - South Florida Lifestyle Blog