This publication is dedicated to the memory of
Lou Kellenberger

Early member of the St. Marks Refuge Association
First Life Member of the Association
Founding Member of the St. Marks NWR Photo Club
Quintessential Refuge Ambassador
Created the St. Marks Refuge Association Endowment Fund
Served on the Association Board of Directors

Lou and his wife Betsy, both accomplished nature photographers, have drawn thousand of visitors to St. Marks NWR through the iconic images they've generously provided for presentations, publications, and websites that promote the Refuge.

This page showcases some of Lou’s great images.

Front and back cover photos by Betsy Kellenberger.
Thanks so much for your continued support of the Friends of St. Marks Wildlife Refuge. As you are about to see for yourself, it’s been a busy year!

Along with our ongoing support of vital Refuge activities—such as endangered species preservation, habitat restoration, environmental education, and visitor experience enhancement—your membership dollars and other Friends support have been busy expanding Refuge boundaries and, in partnership with the Florida Division of Historical Resources, saving a historic icon: the St. Marks Lighthouse.

I am very proud to report that all of these activities resulted in us receiving the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service “Friends Group of the Year Award” for the Southeast Region. Past-president Betty Hamilton traveled to Atlanta last December to accept this honor for making extraordinary contributions to the conservation of natural resources.

As this report will show you, there is a lot going on both at the Refuge and in the Friends group that supports it. If you’ve been thinking about getting more involved with the Refuge there has never been a better time. We are always delighted to talk about what we are doing and how we could use your time and talents.

We hope this Report conveys our gratitude for what your support makes possible and makes you proud to be part of these accomplishments.

See you at the Refuge!

Mary

photo credit: Lou Kellenberger
How Friends Support Refuge Programs

The Friends support Refuge programs in three primary ways: direct financial support, grant management, and volunteer effort.

Environmental Education, Interpretation, and Outreach

The Refuge offers programs for all ages, from “Tots on Trails” for toddlers, “Junior Ranger Camp” with sessions for kindergarteners through 6th grade, and “Families in Nature”—as well as outreach programs targeting college students, the general public, and older adults in nursing homes. The Friends provided direct support to these efforts by funding the following:

- 25 pairs of binoculars for education and outreach programs
- 3 new bows for the archery programs
- Digital magnifier for Nature’s Classroom
- Prizes for wildlife art contest
- Food for animals in Nature’s Classroom
- Snacks and supplies for Junior Ranger Camp participants (fishing poles, t-shirts, etc.)
- Exhibit displays for Nature’s Classroom and outreach programs
- LEEF (League of Environmental Educators in Florida) membership
- Bus transportation scholarships for schools so students can attend Refuge field trips
- Miscellaneous education supplies

Monarch Milkweed Initiative at St. Marks

Program Update from Rangers Scott Davis & Gail Fishman

The U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service strengthened their commitment to milkweed and monarch conservation by awarding two grants to St. Marks National Wildlife Refuge. This money has funded two workshops and a milkweed nursery coordinated by Ranger Scott Davis and volunteers, and beginning research on growing milkweeds. We are grateful to the Friends of St. Marks Wildlife Refuge for managing the grant money. The Friends are providing even more support in FY 2016-17 by funding an internship to continue research on milkweed ecology, outreach, and conservation, as well as money for supplies.
Wildlife and Habitat Conservation

These projects focus mainly on threatened and endangered species as well as preservation of the diverse environments of the Refuge. Friends support of these efforts included funding for:

- Equipment and supplies to outfit trailer as Salamander Workshop—used to tag and study the threatened frosted flatwoods salamanders
- Supplies for restoration of longleaf pine habitat (supports the reintroduction of endangered red-cockaded woodpeckers (RCWs) to the Refuge)
- Materials to build capture nets for red-cockaded woodpecker translocation
- On-site training on installation of artificial cavity boxes for red-cockaded woodpeckers
- Refuge biologist to attend 2-day Gopher Tortoise Conference

Visitor Services

Visitor Services aims to create a quality experience for every person who comes to the Refuge. Friends support of Visitor Services included:

- Printing The Eagle’s Eye newsletter and Refuge brochures and passes
- Supporting the Monarch and WHO (Wildlife, Heritage and Outdoor) Festivals with money for supplies and lots of volunteers
- Funding Refuge volunteer recognition lunches and awards
- Supporting First Sunday events with money for refreshments and other incidental costs
The St. Marks Lighthouse Project

Friends efforts to secure state funding for preservation of the St. Marks Lighthouse (technically Lightstation) bore fruit in the past year when two proposals submitted to the Florida Division of Historical Resources were highly ranked by the Florida Historical Commission. A tremendous show of support from the community during public hearings was key to awards of $50,000 to repair the deteriorating lantern room and $500,000 to repair the tower and keepers’ quarters.

Though the Lighthouse looked great on the outside, the lantern room was in a critical state of deterioration due to years of salt air intrusion and condensation. Emergency weatherproofing to seal leaks, removal and refurbishing of the 1860’s vintage Fresnel lens (now on display in the Visitor Center), and completion of architectural plans to insure all restoration work complied with National Register of Historic Places requirements set the stage for significant restoration work to begin in mid-2016. The newly refurbished lantern room—with completely restored metalwork, a new roof, new safety glass with NO cracks, and a high-tech breathable coat of paint to prevent condensation—was completed in August 2016.

State funding for the lantern room and associated repairs came to $50,000. But the total bills for all the highly skilled labor required to refurbish the 180-year-old landmark totaled over $110,000. To fill this gap required an enthusiastic effort from the Lighthouse Fundraising Committee consisting of Dr. Richard Chichetti, Kim Williams, Chuck Shields, and Bartow Rainey. Led by Friends Board Member Tom Baird, this group put together the resources needed to complete the project. Besides securing substantial individual contributions the group garnered a generous grant from the Duke Energy Foundation and launched a crowd-funding campaign on Indiegogo that netted $10,000.

But wait—we’re not finished. Proposals have been submitted for additional funds to complete the anticipated $1.6 million preservation project that will include more work on the keepers’ quarters, including handicapped access and state-of-the-art museum exhibits that tell the fascinating story of the 2nd oldest lighthouse in Florida.

It’s taken years, but construction fencing is finally up around the lighthouse and repairs to protect and preserve this historic treasure are, at long last, underway.

To be continued . . .
Developing the Future

The National Wildlife Refuge System is chronically underfunded. This is reflected at St. Marks in maintenance backlogs, understaffing, and constant challenges to save endangered species, maintain and restore habitat, and expand conservation areas. The Development Committee addresses these challenges by practicing “the gentle art of teaching the joy of giving.” Here are examples of how caring individuals have chosen to protect, conserve, and restore the ecological integrity of the Refuge.

**Byrd Hammock Archeological Site.** This 160-acre National Historic Place was acquired by the Friends in May 2015 through the generosity of the Byrd family who had protected the site since 1858. It officially became part of the Refuge in December and the transfer was honored in 2016 by the Florida Trust for Historic Preservation as an “Outstanding Achievement in Historic Preservation.” A plaque commemorating this generous donation was installed in March 2016 and plans are underway for an on-site educational outreach component.

**Dr. Ed and Hilda Carney Internships.** In November 2015, the Friends group again received a generous $10,000 gift from Dr. Ed and Hilda Carney to support four interns working on wildlife conservation projects. According to Refuge Biologist Joe Reinman, “The Carney Internships have been the biggest boost to the Refuge’s biological program in my 36 years at St. Marks.”

**Long Leaf Pine Habitat Restoration.** A key to reintroduction of the endangered red-cockaded woodpecker, restoration continues on the 9 acres sponsored by Dr. Bud Bailey, with actual tree planting anticipated by fall 2016.

**Protection for Nesting Shore Birds.** As our fiscal year ended, the Development Committee, aided by a substantial individual gift, is actively pursuing an acquisition that will protect an important bird rookery near the Refuge.

**Protecting the Refuge’s Future.**

*The Friends of St. Marks Wildlife Refuge Endowment Fund* — The Refuge’s Friends group will be 30 years old next year, and we have been thinking about our organization’s ability to help the Refuge over the long term. A big step was taken in 2012, when we created the Endowment Fund, which today holds more than $40,000. Funds deposited in the Endowment Fund are managed conservatively by the Community Foundation of North Florida. While the deposits themselves can never be withdrawn, the earnings (4% per year max) may be withdrawn to support Refuge programs. We have yet to withdraw any earnings, nor do we expect to before our fund grows to six figures.

**Planned Giving** — Another component of our long term financial plan involves encouraging Refuge friends to include a bequest to the Friends of St. Marks Wildlife Refuge in their will. Last year we produced a Planned Giving brochure. Since then we learned of five members who have made a planned gift to the Refuge through the Friends. If you are considering a legacy gift you can email development@stmarksrefuge.org for information on bequests or other forms of planned giving. All discussions and decisions are confidential.
The Nature Store

The Nature Store, operated by the Friends of St. Marks Wildlife Refuge, experienced phenomenal growth this year. Under the able direction of volunteer store manager Joanne Harrington, annual sales topped $105,000—a record! Net proceeds from the Nature Store represented 39 percent of the total income of the Friends. And ALL profits benefit the Refuge.

The Nature Store, located in the Visitor Center, operates under guidelines of the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service. It carries a wide variety of merchandise designed to educate and reinforce the mission of the Refuge. In that modest space, visitors can find books and field guides and maps and hats and t-shirts and vests and water bottles and work by artists in our area...as well as binoculars and coffee mugs and local honey and original photo cards by members of the St. Marks NWR Photo Club and representational jewelry and many unique items to foster children’s interest in nature and outdoor activities.

As our visitors will tell you, the Nature Store is a great place to shop!

“We find the perfect gifts for our grandkids every year when we come to visit.”

“This place has the best selection of t-shirts in the area.”

“We always stop here for earrings whenever we come to St. Marks.”

“I had no idea all this was here. I’m going to the car to get my wallet!”

Members of the Friends group receive a 10 percent discount on merchandise.
Friends Finances Remain Solid in FY 2015-16
Allowing Expanded Refuge Program Support

NOTE: Since the Lighthouse Preservation Project is now underway, its estimated $1.6 million budget financially overwhelms other Friends projects in both revenue and expenses. To keep Friends support of our more traditional Refuge projects in perspective, the Lighthouse project is treated as a separate entity for this report.

Annual Revenue — $90,688
As a glance at the charts will show, profits from operation of the Nature Store continue to be the Friends’ leading source of funds ($35,749). The next largest source is Membership and Unrestricted Contributions ($17,246), followed by the Monarch/Milkweed grant ($15,000). In preparation for applying for nearly $1 million in state funding for Lighthouse preservation, the board voted in June to use Friends reserves to acquire a computerized accounting system. This project included a review of all Friends financial procedures, software set-up, training, and ongoing technical support.

Annual Expenses — $77,888
Refuge program support made up the majority of Friends expenditures in FY 2015-16 at $57,761 (74.2%). The Friends Board made several strategic decisions this past year to strengthen our fundraising and member outreach efforts. This was in response to the need for expanding program support, and the plan to proceed with a major capital project—Lighthouse preservation. Expenses for accounting conversion, increased membership outreach & support (like this Annual Report), and development reflect this emphasis. The net of annual revenue and expense was $12,780, almost all of which will be carried forward due to grant or donor restriction.

Friends Reserves — $140,798
Friends reserves take two forms: 1) board designated funds, which are held for specific needs and 2) permanently restricted funds (the Friends Endowment), which allow only the interest to be spent. The board designates funds for: self-insurance since insurance is not available for the Nature Store; capital operations of the Nature Store; emergency program operations; and a special project contingency fund. The total of these funds at the end of FY 2015-16 was $98,014.35. The Friends Endowment, which is administered by the Community Foundation of North Florida, totaled $42,784.33 at year end. The board decided not to begin spending from endowment interest until the fund is increased.

Lighthouse Preservation
FY 2015-16 was a “ramping up” year for the Lighthouse project. The Lighthouse fundraising campaign began FY 2015-16 with a balance of $38,107, raised an additional $34,170 in donations, received a Duke Energy grant for $7,500, and spent $11,475 for architectural services. The campaign began FY 2016-17 with a balance of $79,778 and anticipates spending over $600,000 as state grants become available. See p.6 for more on the Lighthouse Project.
Membership

Membership has steadily increased, now exceeding 525 Friends, and last Fall we reached a milestone of 100 Life Members. In order to provide more support to Refuge programs, we have revised and expanded our membership categories.

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Membership Level</th>
<th>Cost</th>
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<tr>
<td>Student</td>
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<tr>
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<tr>
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<td>Eagle Club—Lifetime</td>
<td>$500</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Patron</td>
<td>$1000</td>
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There have been lots of other significant achievements. Susan Cason led the Membership Committee in creating a lively new Friends booth to be used at festivals (see picture). They also developed several brochures promoting the Friends group and encouraging membership.

The Membership Committee also organized the Annual Business Meeting on May 14th, which drew about 50 attendees. Several members were recognized for their special efforts in the past year, and the meeting ended with a wonderful presentation by naturalist Don Morrow.

Finally, new volunteer Yvonne Zola joined longtime volunteer Helen Stewart in managing our Giftworks database used to keep track of members and member support. Big thanks to Helen and Yvonne!

Communications

The Board’s Communications Committee became more active with the addition of new talent, experience and leadership. Building on the solid foundation created by Paul Hamilton over his many years managing our Friends communications efforts, the new Committee is working to improve our connection with members by:

- Transitioning the Friends’ website maintenance and the email newsletter (Reflections) to the present editor, Phillip Pollock, who also designed the new Friends logo seen on page 11 and on the front cover of this report.
- Working to update and keep current the information on the Friends’ website.
- Assisting with the creation of a new member brochure, designed by Susan Cason of the Membership Committee.
- Promoting the successful crowdfunding campaign to help fund the Lighthouse lantern room preservation using media releases and social media postings.
- Managing social media postings of current events and issues of interest to Friends members.
Incorporated 30 years ago as the St. Marks Refuge Association, the **Friends of St. Marks Wildlife Refuge** is a nonprofit 501(c)(3) corporation governed by our bylaws and a formal agreement with the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service. We are one of many volunteer support groups around the country working to enhance National Wildlife Refuges. The Friends are led by an unpaid, volunteer board of directors who are elected to 3-year terms at our Annual Meeting.

Besides the elected board, the Friends rely on a number of other volunteers to keep things running smoothly. Things like the Nature Store, our publications, our fundraising efforts, and maintaining our membership/donor rolls simply couldn’t happen without the commitment of all our volunteers. Though we can never thank them enough, we want to gratefully acknowledge the amazing number of volunteer hours they so generously contribute.

### Committees

The real work of the Board is done through our Standing Committees that include board members and other Friends members who volunteer to serve in some capacity. Take a look at the list below and see if there might be a way for you to get involved with your Refuge.

**Membership** – recruit and maintain active Friends members, maintain membership database, organize member invitation-only events, organize service opportunities for members

**Development** – annual and long-term fundraising to support refuge projects, solicit major gifts, encourage planned gifts, maintain donor records, create donor appreciation programs

**Communications** – promote Refuge and Friends activities/projects/events to members and the general public via monthly e-updates, the website, social media, and traditional media

**Lighthouse** – work in partnership with USFWS to plan and fund efforts to preserve the lighthouse and create a compelling visitor experience

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**Note:** For further information about members of the board and its committees, visit:  
[www.stmarksrefuge.org/boardinfo.htm](http://www.stmarksrefuge.org/boardinfo.htm)

The Friends Bylaws are available at:  
[www.stmarksrefuge.org/PDF/bylaws.pdf](http://www.stmarksrefuge.org/PDF/bylaws.pdf)
We want to extend our deepest thanks to the following individuals and companies who have made extraordinary efforts on behalf of the refuge we all love:

Secretary of State Ken Detzner
Dr. Ed and Hilda Carney
Rev. Lila Byrd Brown and Family
Chuck and Pam Shields
Kim Williams
Dr. and Mrs. Richard Chichetti
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John Roberts
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Wakulla Tourist Development Council
Duke Energy Foundation
Wilderness Graphics
Shields Marina