

Our Swans

By Rusty Bradshaw

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Gliding smoothly across the water, swans have added to the ambiance of Viewpoint Lake for 40 years. Tended entirely by volunteers, the swans have ranged from the original three pairs purchased in 1975, to a high of 28 in 2002. Today, only three remain, and the swans may eventually disappear from the lake if caretakers do not step forward.

Lake resident Nadine Meis, who has been the “swan mom” since 2012, said help is needed to feed and care for the remaining birds, all females. It takes very intensive care, and no one wants to do it,” she said. “Most of the lake residents are seasonal, and the younger people moving in don’t seem to be interested.”

Ms. Meis and her husband, Don, built a small ramp from their backyard to the lack that allows the swans — two white and one black — to come in off the water and feed, rest or enjoy a little company. As Ms. Meis spreads handfulls of lettuce on the ramp for Ebony (all the swans were named), the swan honks a soft hello, then follows with another.

“She always tells me thank you,” Ms. Meis said.

The love and care offered to the birds has not wavered for the die-hards since 1975 when a group of lake residents brought in the swans as a way to celebrate the nation’s bi-centennial. They organized themselves into the Sun City Swan Club and, after some research, they pooled their money and purchased three pairs of 2-year-old mate swans from Michigan State University Wild Life Sanctuary for \$290 per pair.

The first birds were named for American historical figures — George and Martha Washington, John and Abigail Adams, Betsy Ross and Benjamin Franklin.

“All six were placed in Viewpoint Lake,” Ms. Meis wrote in a short history, based on copious records kept over the years. “Swans are very territorial and have a mind of their own, so the fun and problems begin.”

Thanks mostly to John and Abigail in the early years, the swan population grew. There were 12 surviving swans in 1983. Most of the cygnets were hatched on Robert and Kay Mac Clinchie’s property, according to Ms. Meis’s history. Pat Cropley took the lead in caring for the swans in 1990, continuing until her death in 2011 — eight years after her retirement from the swan club because no replacement was found.

To keep the swan population from overwhelming the lake, some youngsters were transported to other locations around Sun City and the Valley. These include golf course

ponds and nearby Dawn Lake, according to Ms. Meis. Records show some went as far away as Denver, Colorado,” Ms. Meis wrote in the history.

In 2003 the swan club offered, as a gift, the 19 swans swimming in golf course lakes, along with all associated equipment, to the Recreation Centers of Sun City Golf Operations division. But the gift was declined, and the swans on the golf courses began to thin out. Cropley also practiced some birth control by putting females swimming with females and males with males, according to Ms. Meis. No new birds have hatched since 2009.

Each swan has its wings clipped at birth so they cannot fly to other locations. We had a pair once whose wings weren’t clipped properly and they took off and headed toward the rec center (Lakeview),” Ms. Meis said. “We were afraid they were going to land in the pool, but they circled back to the lake.”

Continuing a swan program for Viewpoint Lake depends on two options, according to Ms. Meis. These include finding new volunteers or RCSC taking over care and finance of the program. No volunteers have stepped forward and offering it to the RCSC has not been attempted since 2003,” Ms. Meis said.

The Viewpoint Lake Homeowners Association has been financing the swans, and committed to do so until the remaining three birds no longer exist.

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