



GICIA volunteers to lead tours of Mercabo Preserve

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The Gasparilla Island Conservation and Improvement Association (GICIA) is excited to have successfully launched a volunteer tour leader program in February 2019. This program was initiated in an effort to allow GICIA members and supporters the opportunity to tour the site while learning about the purchase history, the initial upland restoration and the soon-to-begin Mercabo Cove project.

Five dedicated GICIA members and island residents have completed over 20 hours of training to become officially recognized volunteer tour leaders of The Preserve at Mercabo. These island residents have all exhibited an interest in and understanding of native plants and local ecology. Their volunteer training focused on the mission of the GICIA, the Preserve's purchase story, GICIA's vision for the site, the upland restoration efforts and the restoration plan for Mercabo Cove.

Between February and April of this year, these dedicated individuals logged more than 120 hours of volunteer time and conducted four tours of the site.

With the inaugural season under our belt, our original five outstanding volunteers – Binney Fouts, Mary and Mark Hoffman, Gilda McGarry and Susan Wilson – are ready to kick into high gear and lead a total of nine tours of the site this season.

These tours, which will focus on the GICIA's efforts to preserve and restore the 30-acre Preserve site, will be limited to 15 guests per tour.

The dates are set for November 21, January 6 and 23, February 3 and 20, March 9 and 26 and April 2 and 13. Tours will begin at 9 a.m., and reservations are required. GICIA members and donors to Mercabo Preserve will be given priority when booking these limited tours. To sign up for a tour or contribute to this exciting project, please contact the GICIA office at (941) 964-2667.

Based on the success of the first season and our desire to increase the number of tours, we are pleased to announce that we are currently accepting applications for two additional volunteers. These two positions will begin training, which will include classroom instruction as well as time in the field with the current volunteers as they conduct tours of the site.

Initially we expect a commitment of approximately 10 hours per week as the volunteers are oriented and trained. The new volunteers will also be expected to attend at least eight of the nine scheduled tours for this season.

The qualifications of the ideal GICIA volunteer tour leader are as follows: an island resident with a deep familiarity with the GICIA, Gasparilla Island, Boca Grande and the surrounding areas; a passion for nature and conservancy; education, experience or mastery in natural sciences a plus; strong customer service skills; and general knowledge of email to facilitate scheduling.

Applications will be accepted through November 22, and interviews will be conducted through November 29. If you are interested in becoming a GICIA volunteer, email Misty at gicia@embarqmail.com to request an application.

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**POSTED BY MARCY
SHORTUSE**

Marcy Shortuse is the editor of the Boca Beacon, and has been with the paper since 2007. She is also editor of the Boca Beacon's sister publication, Gasparilla Magazine. She has more than 20 years of experience writing and editing local newspapers and is originally from the Chicago area.

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