



Habi-Chat

Newsletter of the Merritt Island Wildlife Association

Volume 20 Number 2

Fall 2014

Refuge Update

September is a transition month on the refuge as we move from summer into fall. Although not marked with the brilliant changes in leaf colors that our northern friends experience, the change has more to do with preparing for the migration of wintering birds and visitors. Waterfowl hunting season also starts this month with the opening of teal season on September 20. Due to the heavy summer rains we received this year, the refuge staff will be repairing several refuge roads this month including Peacocks Pocket, Catfish Creek Loop and Gator Creek roads, requiring road closures. Black Point Wildlife Drive will also be repaired once we finish with the Peacocks Pocket road network. Please monitor our refuge Facebook page or website (<http://www.fws.gov/merrittisland/>) for updates on road closures.



Hunters using decoys and a duck blind they created at Peacock's Pocket.

Photo by: Tom Dunkerton

As I mentioned in the last Habi-Chat, the Fish and Wildlife Service is under hiring restrictions due to the sequestration. We currently are awaiting approval to fill the Deputy Refuge Manager (vacant since April) and Equipment Operator (vacant since November 2013) positions.

Additionally, Lance Koch, Refuge Manager at Lake Woodruff NWR (part of the Merritt Island refuge complex) accepted the Project Leader position at Neal Smith NWR in Iowa and will be leaving this month. Work duties are being shifted within the staff to compensate for the vacancies. Supervisory Law Enforcement Officer Jane Whaley will be acting Deputy Refuge Manager for the next three months. The duties of the vacant Equipment Operator are being shared by the maintenance and fire staff. Refuge Operations Specialist Candice Stevenson will be acting Refuge Manager at Lake Woodruff from October to January, followed by Wildlife Biologist Stan Howarter as acting Refuge Manager from February to May. These personnel shifts will impact many facets of our programs including law enforcement, maintenance, administration and habitat management. Hopefully, we will be able to fill current vacancies within a few months.

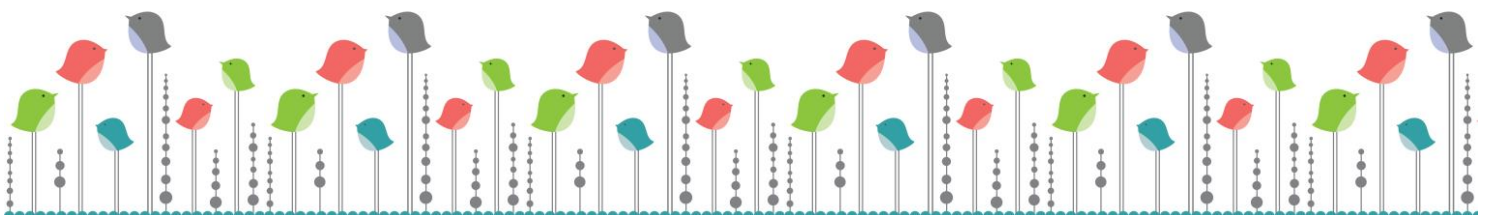
Space Florida and the Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) continue to move forward with the Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) for the proposed Shiloh Launch Complex on the northern portion of the refuge. Currently FAA is finalizing the wildlife survey plan and consulting with various agencies and organizations concerning historical and cultural resource impacts from the proposed project.

Over the next year, the refuge will continue to face challenges with budget, staffing, and workload. The Merritt Island Wildlife Association and our refuge volunteers assist us every day as we strive to meet our mission of protecting and conserving refuge wildlife and habitat and providing compatible recreational opportunities to over 1 million visitors each year. Thank you for your support and passion! We couldn't do it without you!

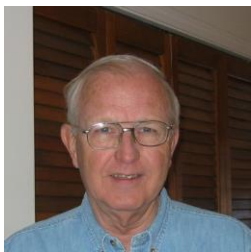
Layne Hamilton, Refuge Manager

Call for Silent Auction Donations

It's that time of year again! MIWA is requesting donation items for our upcoming annual meeting fundraiser. Gift certificates, artwork, handmade items and anything with a nature theme are needed. All donations are tax deductible and will be displayed with your name or company name. Donations can be dropped off or mailed to the MIWA office at the Refuge Visitor Center. The deadline for donations is October 17th. Contact Connie Cranston at 321-861-2377 for more information.



President's Message



Dan Click, MIWA President
File Photo

Greetings from the Refuge –

The Annual Meeting is approaching and we again have a wonderful evening in store for you. You'll find the specifics elsewhere in this issue. Among the agenda items is a proposal for some amendments to our corporate documents for your consideration. These will help us keep those documents in line with our changing mission and the new operating agreement with the USFWS which is now being developed. We have been asked to assist Lake Woodruff NWR activities occasionally since its Friends Group has dissolved. It's part of the MINWR "Complex", a beautiful place just outside DeLeon Springs – please plan to visit.

For those of you who are birders - mark your calendar for the next Christmas Bird Count scheduled for December 15. Contact Ned Steel if you would like to participate. Fall migration is now underway and the waterfowl will soon be here in numbers. Refuge staff reports that the heavy summer rains have dropped the impoundment salinity levels sufficiently to create an excellent food crop this winter. It should be a good year for ducks!

MIWA submitted comments in July on the proposed Programmatic Environmental Impact Statement for the new KSC Master Plan. Information on the Master Plan can be found on the KSC and MINWR web sites, and the MIWA comment letter will be posted on our website.

We continue to monitor the progress of the EIS for the Shiloh Launch Complex which has been proposed by Space Florida. Most recently Board member Charlie Venuto attended and spoke at a meeting of the Volusia County Historic Preservation Board where the proposed facility's potential impact on nearby cultural and archeological sites was discussed.

As always – I hope to see you at the Refuge...and at Lake Woodruff as well.

Dan Click, MIWA President



The purpose of the Merritt Island Wildlife Association is to promote conservation, awareness, and appreciation of the Merritt Island National Wildlife Refuge and to provide assistance to Refuge programs.

President	Dan Click
Vice President	Craig George
Treasurer	Al McKinley
Secretary	Jim Tulley
President Emeritus	George English

Board Members

Tom Altif, Thad Altman, Jim Butts, Warren Camp, Bob Champaigne, James Clark, Ginger Davis, Chris Fairey, Eric Gardze, Darleen Hunt, Robert Hutchison, Truman Scarborough, Lee Solid, Ned Steel, Diane Stees, Laurilee Thompson and Charlie Venuto

Refuge Manager Layne Hamilton **USFWS Liaison** Sandy Mickey
NASA Liaison John Shaffer

The Merritt Island Wildlife Association (MIWA) is a nonprofit, cooperating association for the Merritt Island National Wildlife Refuge. The *Habi-Chat* is published quarterly. For MIWA information, call **321-861-2377**.

Newsletter Editor Jenny Golyer & Lindsay Hobart
Technical Consultant Cheri Ehrhardt
Habi-Chat **Committee** Connie Cranston & Sandy Mickey

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URS at KSC

THE MERRITT ISLAND WILDLIFE ASSOCIATION (REGISTRATION #CH29759) HAS COMPLIED WITH THE REGISTRATION REQUIREMENTS OF CHAPTER 496, FLORIDA STATUTES, SOLICITATION OF CONTRIBUTIONS ACT. A COPY OF THE OFFICIAL REGISTRATION AND FINANCIAL INFORMATION MAY BE OBTAINED FROM THE DIVISION OF CONSUMER SERVICES BY CALLING TOLL-FREE (800-435-7352) WITHIN THE STATE. REGISTRATION DOES NOT IMPLY ENDORSEMENT, APPROVAL, OR RECOMMENDATION BY THE STATE.

Proposed Amendments of the MIWA By-Laws and Articles of Incorporation

The Board of Directors proposes amendments of the MIWA By-Laws and Articles of Incorporation for consideration at the Annual Meeting. These Amendments will:

- allow the Association to provide support to the entire MINWR Complex which currently includes the St. Johns NWR and the Lake Woodruff NWR. The Lake Woodruff friends group has recently dissolved and that Refuge has need of occasional assistance from MIWA.
- establish the authority to have members vote for future changes of corporate governance documents by mail or electronically at times other than the Annual Meeting. This is expected to be useful in 2015 when significant revisions of some of these documents become necessary to comply with the terms of the new USFWS “Friends Policy” operating agreements, now being developed. Mail or electronic voting will avoid the need to call a special meeting.

Deletions from the current language are indicated by strikethroughs; additions are underscored.

By-Laws: Article II - Purpose

The purpose of the Merritt Island Wildlife Association is to promote conservation, awareness, and appreciation of the Merritt Island National Wildlife Refuge Complex and to provide assistance to ~~Refuge~~ its programs. This will be accomplished by entering into an agreement with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service to:

A. Produce and make available to ~~Refuge~~ Complex visitors, by sales or free distribution, suitable:

1. Interpretive and educational materials to increase the visitors understanding of the ~~Refuge~~ Complex facilities, wildlife, and the environment ~~of the central Florida coastal area~~.
2. Special materials, memorabilia and events of the ~~Refuge~~ Complex and the MIWA that will enhance visitor enjoyment.

By-Laws: Article IX – Amendments

Amendments to these By-Laws or the Articles of Incorporation may be proposed by submitting them to the Secretary in writing and signed by at least three members in good standing. Amendments may be enacted at the annual meeting, or (1) at a special meeting called for that purpose, or (2) by electronic or mail ballot distributed to all members in good standing; if approved by two-thirds of those members present or responding and voting, provided that the members have received the proposed amendment in writing at least thirty (30) days prior to such meeting.

Articles of Incorporation: Article IV – Purpose(s)

The purposes for which the corporation is to be formed are for scientific, educational, and charitable purposes within the meaning of Section 501(c)(3) of the Internal Revenue Code of 1954 and in this connection to:

1. Actively work with the Department of the Interior, Fish and Wildlife Service at the Merritt Island National Wildlife Refuge Complex, and others, to preserve, protect and enhance the outstanding natural, scenic, scientific, ecological and historical values of ~~certain~~ its lands, shorelines and waters of the Merritt Island National Wildlife Refuge Complex facilities ~~located within Brevard County, Florida~~, to provide for the public outdoor recreational use and enjoyment of same.
2. To encourage and facilitate private and public financial contributions in order to enhance the Merritt Island National Wildlife Refuge Complex ~~within Brevard County, Florida~~.

Notes from the Field

Sea turtle nesting season is ending. Although not a record-breaking year like last year, this year was still notable. We have had 1,114 Loggerhead nests (refuge average = 1,250), 85 Green sea turtle nests (2013 = 254), and a record 14 Leatherback nests. Unfortunately, 12% of the turtle nests suffered depredation, primarily from wild hogs (135 nests).

After a long stretch of drought, the rains have finally returned to Merritt Island. Regular afternoon thunderstorms began in mid-June and have continued most of the summer. Fresh water has filled most of the impoundments north of the NASA security area. Careful management of water control structures has allowed us to move water across the landscape, flowing water from the upper watershed into impoundments where salt had built up from years of drought. Recent improvements have allowed multiple impoundments to be managed as interconnected units. This has allowed excess water to flow out of the impoundments all summer. This not only purges the impoundment of accumulated salt but



A hunter searches for ducks on Bio-Lab Road.
Photo by: Tom Dunkerton

retains a connection to the lagoon, allowing aquatic species to move in and out of the impoundment. The abundance of rainwater has allowed us to capture and hold water in the Cruickshank impoundment for the first time since 2007.

The Cruickshank impoundment is located on Black Point Wildlife Drive and has a five mile hiking trail along the levee. It is essentially an island of marsh jutting out into the lagoon. It has no natural watershed and relies on either direct rainfall or a manmade connection to the impoundments for fresh water. Due to its location in the lagoon and protection from disturbance, it can be a very productive impoundment for waterfowl and wading birds.

Waterfowl food production has been excellent and most impoundments are now filled with desirable submerged aquatic vegetation. The table is set and we are now awaiting the migrants from the breeding grounds. Look for an abundance of pintail and widgeon along the wildlife drive this winter. Please remember that the birds along the wildlife drive are habituated to vehicles but are still wary of humans wandering about or bicycling. Your car is the best blind for observations and photography. By staying inside we can minimize disturbance and better prepare the birds for the upcoming breeding season.



Flock of Teal.
Photo By: Tom Dunkerton

marsh surface will be built up to historic surface level and then planted with appropriate salt marsh plant species. The project will begin in a few months in impoundment T-10-D, located north of Pump House Road.

FWS Biologist Stan Howarter and Steve Trull

The Refuge, Brevard County Mosquito Control District, St. Johns River Water Management District, and NASA entered into an agreement to conduct groundbreaking research on salt marsh subsidence and reversing the loss of salt marsh vegetation. The project will test three different methods of restoration: placing sand in the impoundment from an outside source, pumping muck from an interior pond, or mixing pumped muck with imported sand. For each of the three methods, the

Hello to...



Richard Harris
Photo by: Lindsay Hobart

...**Richard Harris** –I came to US Fish and Wildlife Service in Titusville Florida to work as a volunteer because I like Florida and I have a sister in Orlando and one in Tampa. I love to work for here to give some time back to the government. I was in the US Army for 13 years as a Mechanic, Motor SGT, and Instructor at NCO Academy. I spent 29 years working for Anniston Army Depot as a Mechanic, Inspector, and Supervisor. I also spent 20 years in the National Guard. I am just proud to be here.

Goodbye to...



...**Corey Lloyd and Tess Beckwith**- Their internships on the refuge have come to an end. We thank you for all of your hard work and research concerning the Red Imported Fire Ant impact on the marsh.

Planning Update

We have multiple planning projects underway these days, most notably: the Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) for the proposed Shiloh Launch Complex, the Kennedy Space Center (KSC) Master Plan, and the Merritt Island National Wildlife Refuge (NWR, Refuge) Hunt Plan.



Feral hogs on refuge.
Photo By: Bill Nunn

Space Florida, the State of Florida's aerospace economic development agency, has proposed a commercial launch facility on KSC and the Refuge in the Shiloh area through the proposal to the FAA for a launch site operator license. Several agencies are designated cooperating agencies on FAA's EIS, including: U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA), U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, National Park Service, and State Historic Preservation Office (Florida Department of State). The FAA conducted public scoping meetings in February 2014. The contractor for the FAA is

currently preparing a draft EIS to evaluate the proposal. For more information please visit:

http://www.faa.gov/about/office_org/headquarters_offices/ast/environmental/nepa_docs/review/documents_progress/shiloh_launch_statement/. Or you may go to: <http://www.fws.gov/merrittisland/Shiloh.html>.

Completely separate, NASA is preparing a programmatic EIS for Center-wide operations for KSC for a 20-year planning horizon. Several agencies are designated cooperating agencies on the NASA EIS for the KSC Master Plan, including: FAA, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, and National Park Service. NASA conducted public scoping meetings in June 2014. The Master Plan is posted online at: <http://masterplan.ksc.nasa.gov/>. For more information: <http://environmental.ksc.nasa.gov/projects/peis.htm>. Or visit <http://www.fws.gov/merrittisland/KSCmasterplan.html>.

The Merritt Island NWR Hunt Plan would implement the upland hunting outlined in the Refuge's 2007 Comprehensive Conservation Plan, which would add hunting of white-tailed deer and feral hog to about 6,000 acres of the Refuge north of Haulover Canal on the east and west sides of SR 3. The next step in the planning process will be Federal Register notices in 2015 in advance of the 2015-2016 hunting season. Barring any unforeseen circumstances, the Refuge would implement the upland hunt for the 2015-2016 hunting season. For more information please visit: <http://www.fws.gov/merrittisland> or Candice_Stevenson@fws.gov or 321.861.2352.

Cheri Ehrhardt, AICP, Natural Resource Planner, FWS

Visitor Services Update

A few months ago, the US Fish and Wildlife Service designated approximately \$1.2 million for a new visitor center for us in fiscal year 2015 (which starts October, 2014). Unfortunately this amount is significantly lower than the cost of a new facility. Recognizing the large gap between what was appropriated and what we think it would cost, we collaborated with our regional office to push the date of our new facility back about two years. This will give us time to complete a conceptual plan this fall that will determine site placement, square footage, environmental requirements, etc. that will generate an estimated cost of the new building. This estimate can then be used to justify a higher amount from our agency that is in line with actual cost. This extra time will also give MIWA more time to fundraise, as there are certain expenses for the new visitor center that we anticipate the government funding will not cover, such as interpretive exhibits. MIWA will begin their fundraising campaign this fall and winter.



The Visitor Center.
Photo by: Bill Powell

Because it will likely be three years before a new visitor center is open, we are doing more small improvements to the existing building. Work began this summer to create a fee office where the refuge daily and annual passes will be sold. This will remove the refuge register from the front desk (the MIWA register will stay there) to provide more room for guests and volunteers to interact, and improve safety procedures for the refuge's monetary procedures. We will also be installing 2-3 more picnic tables and a security system.

Our wonderful volunteers and refuge staff have also developed several new programs and activities for this coming year, including a Jr. Ranger booklet, new kiosks for the Haulover Canal area, new waterfowl hunting maps, and so much more. In addition, the 50th Anniversary video the refuge and NASA's Kennedy Space Center (KSC) produced last year is now available to view in our auditorium upon request, and we hope to have it loaded to YouTube this fall for anyone and everyone to enjoy. Thank you for your continued support. We look forward to seeing you at the refuge!

Sandy K Mickey, Supervisory Park Ranger

Adopt an Area Program, Still Striving to Keep the Refuge Clean

The Adopt an Area program initiated several years ago by volunteer Kathy Eichinger is still doing its job of engaging citizens in supporting the refuge's anti-litter campaign. Currently, there are 19 active groups with the most recent addition, the North Brevard Sportsman Association (NBSA). The NBSA adopted the Patillo Creek area located on the north side of the refuge, and during their first clean-up they picked up 50 bags of trash. Groups, individual, families, and businesses can adopt an area on the refuge. The agreement requires the participants to clean their adopted area four times per year.

After the first clean-up is completed, an Adopt an Area sign with the volunteer's name or organization written on it will be placed at the site. For more information on the program, please contact Ranger Nancy Corona at 321-861-0668 or by email at: Nancy_Corona@fws.gov.

Nancy Corona, Refuge Ranger

A Day Away Kayak
Anglers for Conservation
Astronaut High School Environmental Club
Clay and Sally Hutchinson
Deborah Huba
Florida Fly Fishing Association
Internet Shrimpers & Anglers Association (ISSA, Inc.)

Thank you to all of our dedicated Adopt an Area Groups:

Jim and Nancy Escoffier	Sarah Fraser
Kayaks by Bo	Scottsmoor Yacht Club
Mid Coast Fly Fishers	Space Coast Audubon Society
Orlando Kayak Fishing Club	Space Coast Sams, Chapter 10
Phyllis Mansfield	Steve AB Allen
Patricia Thomas-Arnold	
Rosalie Wolf and Tom Quinn	



NBSA Clean-up at Patillo Creek
Photo By: Jodi Smith

★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ Save the Date! ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★

Celebrate **National Wildlife Refuge Week** on *Saturday October 11, 2014*. The family event is free to all! Please contact the Refuge for more information at 321-861-5601.

Join MIWA for our **Annual Meeting & Silent Auction Fund Raiser** on *Saturday October 25, 2014*. The event begins at 6:00 pm and includes dinner, a presentation from guest speaker Dr. Bob Bonde and our silent auction. Items up for bid include an amazing Kayak from Kayaks by Bo, Florida theme parks tickets, Eagle Optics binoculars, dinner gift certificates from local restaurants and eateries, beautiful handcrafted items, nature photography and much, much more! Please contact the MIWA office at 321-861-2377 for more information regarding purchasing tickets or donations for the silent auction.

Stop by and visit the MIWA booth at the **18th Annual Space Coast Birding & Wildlife Festival** on *January 21 -26, 2015*. We always love this event and can't wait to see you there! For more information please visit www.spacecoastbirdingandwildlifefestival.org/. Look for further details also in the winter edition of the Habi-Chat.

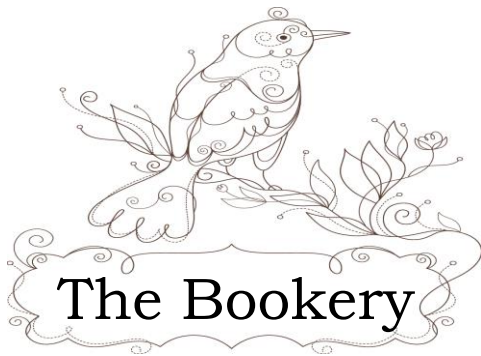
Merritt Island NWR Hosts **6th Annual Florida Scrub-Jay Festival** on *Saturday February 28, 2015 from 10:00 am to 3:00 pm*. The event celebrates the endangered scrub habitat and Florida Scrub-Jay, a threatened species found only in Florida. The event and all activities are free. The festival will offer live music, nature tours, live animal displays along with children activities and games. Please call 321-861-5601 for information.

Thank You...

The Downtown Gallery for their generous donation of \$727. Heidi and Jeff have been huge supporters of MIWA and the Refuge and we cannot say enough great things about their wonderful gallery and giving spirits! *Thank You!*

Melodi Roberts, a local Central Florida photographer gave a donation of \$450 to the Refuge. *Thank You* Melodi for your generosity and love of the Refuge!

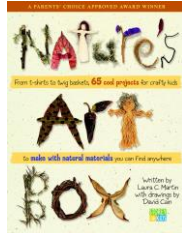
Also a big *Thank You* to all our MIWA members who donate to the Refuge not only financially but also through volunteered time, love and endless support of the Refuge. We could not do this without you!



The Bookery

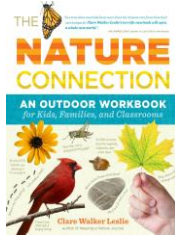
Nature's Art Box
By Laura C. Martin

.....\$16.95
Kids will enjoy 65 fun projects they can make using materials they can find in nature. They will also learn to be good stewards of nature's resources.



The Nature Connection
By Clare Walker Leslie

..... \$14.95
An interactive workbook designed to engage the entire family in outdoor fun and nature activities.



For retail information, call the MIWA Office at 321-861-2377

Merritt Island Wildlife Association

Supporting the Merritt Island National Wildlife Refuge

Joining is simple. Just fill out this form and mail it to the Merritt Island Wildlife Association at: P.O. Box 2683, Titusville, FL 32781 or join online at www.MerrittIslandWildlifeAssociation.org

Name _____

Address _____

City _____ State _____ Zip _____

Phone Number _____

Email _____

Type of Membership:

- Seniors and Students – \$10
- Individual – \$15
- Senior Couples – \$15
- Family Membership – \$20
- Supporting Membership – \$50
- Senior Couple Supporting – \$75
- Life Membership – \$250
- Patron – \$1000
- Optional – Donation \$ _____

Total Enclosed _____

Make checks payable to MIWA. For credit card payments please call the MIWA office at 321-861-2377.



Visitor Information Center Hours

Monday - Saturday
9:00 am – 4:00 pm

Closed Sundays

The Refuge is open daily from
sunrise – sunset.

Don't forget.....

We will reopen on Sundays for
the season starting on
November 2, 2014!





Habi-Chat has e-mail!

If you would like to be on our mailing list to receive MIWA announcements, please add us to your safe senders list and send a request to:
habichat@merrittislandwildlifeassociation.org

Gifts in remembrance were donated by...

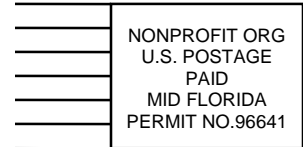
Warren and Betty Camp



*Donations in remembrance of loved ones and friends
can be sent to:
MIWA P.O. Box 2683, Titusville, FL 32781*



Merritt Island Wildlife Association
P.O. Box 2683
Titusville, FL 32781
www.MerrittIslandWildlifeAssociation.org



Coming this
Winter...
...a **FULL COLOR**
edition of the
Habi-Chat!



You're Invited to the
2014 Annual Meeting & Silent Auction Fund raiser of the

Merritt Island Wildlife Association

Join us for an evening of fun, while helping support the Refuge!

Guest Speaker: Dr. Bob Bonde
"The Florida Manatee: Biology and Conservation"

When: 6:00pm Saturday, October 25, 2014

Where: The Debus Center at the Kennedy Space Center Visitor Complex

Cost: \$25 per Person (includes dinner)
Corporate Tables, Cash Bar and Silent Auction Available



Please call the MIWA office at
(321) 861-2377

for more information.