

PHOTO BY JUSTIN MEIN OF C3 STUDIOS

RNGR board members – front: Meghan Gyory, Jonathan Schwartz, Kathryn Dressler; back: Joshua Miller, Andrew Leshin, Sara Shake, Christi Lyn Rice, and Anthony Bruno Jr.



and experiencing the features hopefully coming soon.

Currently, according to Shake, there are more or less two categories that locals fall into. She says, "You encounter the local that has lived miles from the park, but has never been in it or the local that grew up going to the park, having their birthday parties there, riding through the trails, having field trips there, going to camp Live Oak for the summer. Everyone on the board has a tie back to the park."

Shake, Christi Lyn Rice, and Kathryn Dressler were the first to be recruited by Butler. Shake, who owns her own public relations firm, and Dressler, who works with the staffing organization Randstad, both remember going to the park as children.

Dressler says, "[My dad] would take my brother and me down different nature trails and he would give us a dollar for every tree that we could properly name or identify. I think he got that from his father. My grandfather was very interested in nature." Philip Dressler, her grandfather, served as the executor of the estate of Hugh Taylor Birch and defended Birch's wishes for the area to remain in its natural state all the way to the Supreme Court.

"It's kind of a legacy project for me and I just think that it's a great opportunity for me to leave my mark and impact on Fort Lauderdale, where I grew up," Dressler says.

Rice isn't a bona fide native, but she's been using the park since she moved here nine years ago. "None of my friends really went [to the park]. It was something I would just do on my own – ride my bike over there or just go for a quiet spot."

She first heard of the organized efforts to revamp the park at a Leadership Broward panel presentation. "[Gale Butler] was talking about all the plans to revitalize the park," she says. "This used to be a major tourist attraction in South Florida. There were about a million people coming every year and now there's like 300,000. And I think that's really sad because so many people drive by it everyday and have no idea that it's there."

Rice has a nonprofit background – she's been with Broward Center for the past year, but prior to that worked with Broward Partnership for the Homeless, Habitat for Humanity, and Women in Distress. The other board members form a microcosm of local professionals.

There is not an age requirement to belong to RNGR. "We want it to be a social group and we also want it to have an impact," Rice says. Efforts are concentrated on service and "friendraising," which is a focus on



membership and fundraising. Included in the former are quarterly volunteer projects, the first of which took place in November – RNGR's paddle board cleanup of the mangroves.

"Friendraising" will incorporate events that typically attract young professionals: music and exercise. RNGR will be working on their two flagship events of 2016, a music festival and their Birch Man race. Bircharoo, based on Bonaroo in Tennessee, will be an all day music event, most likely at the primitive campground within the boundaries of the park. A spinoff the Spartan obstacle course race, Birch Man will highlight the adventurous side of the park.

"I traveled a lot, especially this summer, to a number of different cities," Rice says. "New York has Central Park. You go to Chicago and there's Lincoln Park. I went to Vancouver and there's Stanley Park. Greenville, South Carolina has this beautiful, amazing park right in the middle of downtown that's a hub for the city, both for residents and visitors. That's what I would like to see [Birch State Park] become."

RNGR is looking to attract a new crop of attendees that will create an indelible legacy for the next generations. For more information, visit www.birchstatepark.org/rngr.GO