

INSPIRING LEADERSHIP VALUES FOR ALL GENERATIONS

# COUNTRY CLUB LIVING

## *Palm Beach North*

DECEMBER 2025

Get involved  
and support our mission.

Learn more at [www.friendsofmanateelagoon.org](http://www.friendsofmanateelagoon.org)

### FRIENDS OF MANATEE LAGOON

Dedicated to educating the community about the challenges manatees encounter in Florida by raising funds for inspiring exhibits, leading educational programs, and marine conservation efforts. Invite you to support our mission and help us protect manatees - their habitats and their primary food source, seagrass. To learn more, visit [FriendsOfManateeLagoon.org](http://FriendsOfManateeLagoon.org)



### PROFILES OF LEADERSHIP

# *Sarah Marmion*

*Executive Director - Friends of Manatee Lagoon*

**PAUL CULLEN:**

*From Rock Star to Rockin' Chef*

*P. 10*

POWERED BY



Photo by Neil Cohen Photography

COVER FEATURE

PROFILES OF LEADERSHIP

# Sarah Marmion

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR - FRIENDS OF MANATEE LAGOON



- By Dan Hauser -

- Photos by Neil Cohen Photography -

*"This is the future of our community, giving back and inspiring Florida's next generation."*

When Sarah Marmion talks about Friends of Manatee Lagoon, her passion for education and conservation is unmistakable. A longtime communications and outreach leader, she has built her career around connecting people with purpose. Now, as Executive Director of the Riviera Beach, Florida-based nonprofit, she channels that same energy into protecting one of Florida's most beloved species.

"For me, it's about leaning in—seeing where you can help," Marmion said. "When I'm involved in a project, I always want to take it to the next level."

This new career adventure is to lead the mission of Friends of Manatee Lagoon, which is steeped in educating the public about manatees and creating community partnerships that support protecting their habitat and specifically their primary food source, seagrass.

"The role of Friends of Manatee Lagoon extends beyond the campus at Manatee Lagoon - An FPL Eco-Discovery Center, and we are focused on strategic partnerships that help take our story and initiatives out into the community."

"We work very closely with like-minded organizations," she added. "Save the Manatee, for instance, Loggerhead Marinelife Center - we're part of this community and we are all certainly more powerful together."

Marmion has spent her career helping organizations engage the public around complex topics such as energy, sustainability, and now marine conservation. At Friends of Manatee Lagoon, she will be responsible for creating initiatives that will bring the story to as many people as possible.

"For instance, we are planning to work with the Palm Beach County Environmental Resources Management to assist with a water quality monitoring program in the Lake Worth Lagoon so we can track the overall health of the

water, which has a direct impact on seagrass viability."

Those reasons for caring about seagrass are critical: seagrass is the primary food source for manatees, which suffered devastating losses during recent "unusual mortality events."

"About a quarter of the total Florida manatee population starved," Marmion added. "It was terrible."

To raise awareness, Friends of Manatee Lagoon hosts educational exhibits, presents at large public gatherings, and looks for opportunities to support research and projects. Every year, the organization hosts its annual Soiree for Seagrass fundraiser each November to raise funds for outreach and education.

"We try to tell people, if you're out on a boat, be careful. If you're in a manatee no-wake zone, pay attention. Watch where you anchor. A lot of people are new boaters who didn't grow up here, so our education focuses on that and the importance of protecting seagrass. Our ecosystem is amazing, but it is vulnerable and it needs to be protected."

Over ten years ago, when Manatee Lagoon was being designed and built, Sarah led the team responsible for the effort. The environmental education center is separately managed by FPL, and Friends of Manatee Lagoon is an independent entity. What is noteworthy, however, is that the facility exists because of an unlikely partnership between nature and industry. The warm water outflow from the Florida Power & Light Company (FPL) power plant next door is released into Lake Worth Lagoon, which attracts manatees during cooler months. Manatee Lagoon is poised right across from the plant, providing a unique view of the manatees when they head there to get warm during the winter to get warm.

"When manatees are babies, they learn from their mothers where to go when the water temperature drops," Sarah explained. "It's just sort of wired into their species now. They know where they can go to get warm."

For decades, locals gathered in grassy lots to watch the manatees surface in the winter. But after 9/11, the area was closed for security reasons.

"When the plant was modernized and converted from oil to natural gas,



there was talk about reopening the viewing center," Marmion recalled. "It all came together, and that's what led to Manatee Lagoon."

She smiles, remembering the early days.

"It's a lot more than it ever was. All the locals knew you could see manatees here long before this building existed."

Education is central to both Marmion's leadership and to the organization's purpose.

"Education needs help and support," she said. "This is the future of our community, giving back and inspiring Florida's next generation."

The nonprofit also works with organizations like ANGARI Foundation to study water currents and pollution in the lagoon.

"They track debris, and we help by throwing biodegradable wood postcards into the water," Sarah added. "Then they see where the postcards travel, and it shows how everything connects. You don't realize that what you pour down the drain in your neighborhood comes right out here into the water."

It's these hands-on, visual lessons that bring the message home.

"There are pipes along the seawalls that can be seen up and down Lake Worth Lagoon where runoff comes out," Marmion said. "You can literally see piles of garbage sitting out in the water where the pipes drain their contents. So we try to help people understand how what

they do on land affects what happens in the water."

Marmion credits many mentors and conservation leaders who've influenced her work, including environmental pioneers Amber Howell of FWC and the late James "Buddy" Powell.

"Amber leads the Manatee effort for this part of Florida," Sarah said. "She's a rock star. I've seen her personally rescue and release dozens of manatees."

Powell, who helped design Manatee Lagoon, left a lasting impression as well.

"He was probably the preeminent expert on manatees in the world," she recalled. "He worked for FPL for years, did aerial counts, wrote books—his whole life was dedicated to manatees."

When it comes to leadership and life, Marmion's advice is simple but powerful.

"Leadership is a journey, not a destination. Be patient, stay humble, and never underestimate the power of your voice. No matter where you are, you have a distinct point of view. The environment needs passionate young leaders now more than ever."

In fact, as Sarah puts it, leadership and conservation go hand in hand.

"We're powerful together," she said. "Whether it's restoring seagrass, educating a classroom, or saving a single manatee, it all matters."

And, under her guidance, Friends of Manatee Lagoon continues to bring people closer to nature—one visitor, one student, and one story at a time.