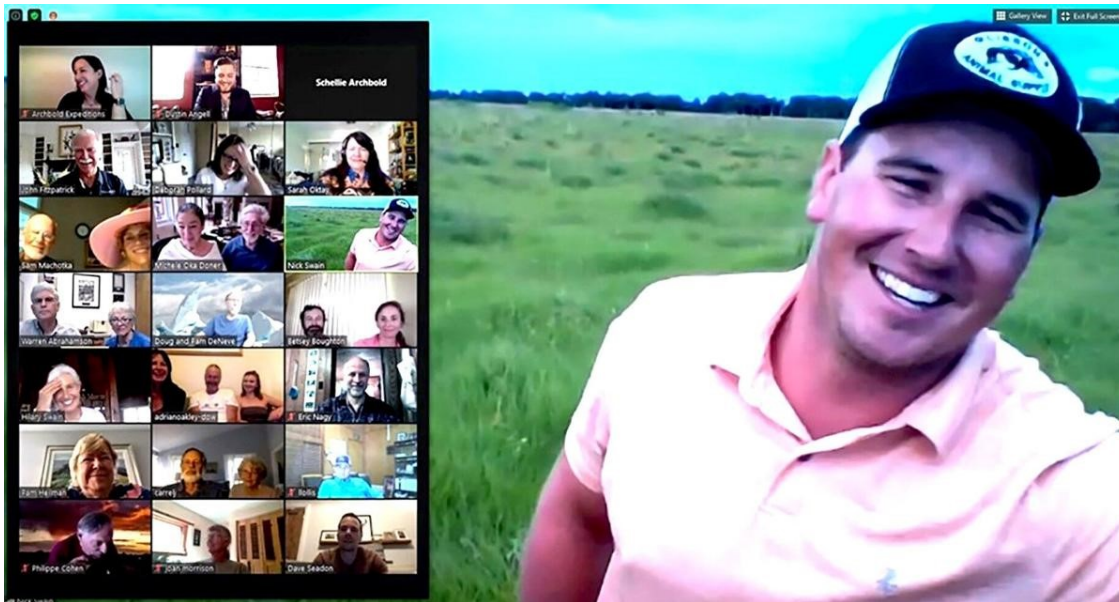


https://www.midfloridanewspapers.com/highlands_news-sun/around_town/dr-hilary-swain---25-years-at-the-helm/article_36db1444-d5ab-11ea-ba38-fb38448d30b0.html

Dr. Hilary Swain - 25 years at the helm

Archbold Biological Station
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Colleagues, friends, and family members gather online to honor Dr. Hilary Swain as her son, Nicholas offers congratulations.
DUSTIN ANGELL PHOTO

July 31 marked Dr. Hilary Swain's 25th anniversary as the executive director of Archbold Biological Station. Given this momentous milestone, Archbold Board members, Archbold supporters, staff, colleagues, friends and family from across Europe, recently surprised Hilary with a virtual Zoom celebration to reflect on and celebrate Hilary's achievements over the years.

Schellie Archbold, one of Archbold's Board Members, started out the festivities with a toast, "To Hilary, someone extraordinary and beloved to us all."

Swain fell in love with field stations in the mid-1970s while working on a project on limpets, or marine snails, for her Zoology class at the Marine Biological Station in Millport, Scotland. However, she never would have envisaged that her dream job would be as the executive director of Archbold Biological Station in Florida.

After nearly 10 years in a faculty position at the Florida Institute of Technology, Swain decided to apply for the executive director opening at Archbold Biological Station in 1995.

Dr. Mark Deyrup, Emeritus Entomologist, recalls one of the lines in her letter of application. Swain wrote, "I value among my accomplishments the number of acres of natural habitat protected as much as the number of scientific papers published." True to her word, in 25 years, Swain has worked to bring Archbold's conservation footprint from 5,000 to 20,000 acres.

In addition, Swain has helped neighbors and state agencies establish 53,000 acres of contiguous conservation lands around Archbold Biological Station, with more acres targeted for the future. One of her strategic priorities is that “Connected conservation lands are important for the protection of species of conservation concern, like the Florida Scrub-Jay and the Florida Black Bear. Linking Archbold’s lands with other conservation lands, public and private, is critical to maintaining the integrity of the Station and conserving it and surrounding areas for future generations.”

Archbold Chairman of the Board, Dr. Mary Hufty, reflected on the first time she met Swain.

“I knew you were amazing when you showed up to your interview with two small children. Your attitude was that you could do it all. You could make great research happen and inspire others to be creative. Your unending optimism and energy have transformed my life and certainly Archbold.”

Since Swain arrived at Archbold, there have been more than 1,300 scientific papers published, 353 grants awarded and 383 college classes hosted.

For these past 25 years, Swain and Hufty have both been deeply involved in the Organization for Biological Field Stations (OBFS), an umbrella network that represents more than 200 field stations around the world. Friends from OBFS joined the virtual event to congratulate Swain and share how much Swain’s leadership and contributions meant to OBFS.

Sarah Oktay from the University of California-Davis shared, “Hilary has done an amazing job with her team and the Board, and Archbold is a shining example of what a field station can be.” When asked about what a job at a field station entails, Swain, a self-proclaimed “jack-of-all-trades,” explains, “When you work at a field station, all life’s experiences count. No amount of training and experience can truly prepare one for the spectrum of responsibilities.

A field station can carry a daunting combination of roles: research and teaching campus, nature preserve, environmental education center, a small museum, lodging and conference facilities and in Archbold’s case, a 3,000-head working cattle ranch.

There is no substitute for the practical skills that often don’t appear on a resume: it helps if one knows how to drive a boat or 4WD vehicle, operate a winch, read a building plan, and barbecue for 50 people. Those who were raised on a farm, restored old homes, potted around boats or served as an apprentice mechanic have an advantage.”

Archbold’s Emeritus Librarian Fred Lohrer, who worked at the Station for 40 years, congratulated Swain on her accomplishments that span from adding acreage to new infrastructure and new programs for Archbold, all in the context of hurricanes, droughts, a recession and now a pandemic.

Many staff commented on how much Hilary’s leadership and friendship meant over the years. Buck Island Ranch Manager Gene Lollis said, “Many things come to mind, but one of the most important is your friendship.”

At the end of the celebration, Swain, who had been completely taken by surprise, thanked everyone for their memories and kind words. Here are some of the things she said: “Working at Archbold has been a privilege. It has lifted me up much more than I’ve lifted Archbold. I don’t think you understand that when I help you, that helps me. I’ve always felt that whatever I’ve contributed, I’ve learned more from contributing. It is all of you that made me, not that I’ve made Archbold over the last 25 years. I want you to know how you helped me do this, not what I have done myself.”

Here’s to Hilary! Her passion for science, conservation, and education at Archbold has inspired everyone. Archbold looks forward to many more years.