

Neapolitan

HEALTH & CLASSIFIED

SECTION D



PHOTOS BY DOROTHY EDWARDS/NAPLES DAILY NEWS

Participants are led in a group meditation at Audubon's Corkscrew Swamp Sanctuary. This is the first summer for the monthly guided meditations given by Bethanny Gonzalez.

stillness *Steeped in*

Ancient forest provides serene backdrop to meditation in Corkscrew Swamp Sanctuary

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Among the Corkscrew Swamp Sanctuary's chirping, buzzing, crawling critters, I discovered my higher self.

Distant thunder rolled through the cypress tree growth, and insects hummed their cadence, rising and falling like the steady breath through my lungs. The glassy swamp floor cast a reflection of the foliage shooting up above us.

Our spiritual coach, Bethanny Gonzalez, told us to walk with our spiritual guide.

And so I did.

I tried my hand at meditation Saturday with a group of fellow seekers hoping to decompress through a monthly class, which started earlier this year

at the sanctuary and will continue through season.

But as a first-timer, serenity wasn't such a snap.

Participants gathered at the entrance to the swamp — which spans 13,000 protected acres — to apply all-natural bug repellent, a concoction Gonzalez blended with peppermint essential oils. Armed with my yoga mat and pillow, the real treat was the boardwalk stroll to the outdoor amphitheater.

Wet from a morning rain, the wooden boardwalk emitted its musty smell. A 5-foot alligator passed beneath us. Creatures skittered along the paths: a

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Edna Woods, of Naples, joins in a group meditation.

"We draw lots of birders and photographers, but we also draw and attract people who are seeking serenity."

BETH PREDDY, CORKSCREW SWAMP SANCTUARY

If you go

What: Corkscrew Swamp meditation

When: 9 a.m. Sept. 3 (first Saturday of each month)

Cost: \$20; \$10 for Corkscrew members; includes admission into the swamp

Register: Eventbrite.com and pay when you arrive at the visitor center.

More information: Roswitha Marold at 239-348-9151 or cssnaturestore@audubon.org

Details: Bring a mat or pillow to sit on, and bug spray.

Effects of CTE brain injury on young football players



MEMORY MINUTE
BILL E. BECKWITH

As football season has arrived, it may be a good time to consider the issue of concussion and chronic traumatic encephalopathy (CTE). An estimated

4 million athletes in the United States experience sports-related concussions each year, and the incidence of sub-concussive trauma is far more extensive. One study reported that high school football players average 652 blows to the head each year. CTE pa-

thology has been found in athletes as young as 17.

The possible long-term effects concussion was discussed as far back as 1928 when Dr. Harrison Stanford Martland (Journal of the American Medical Association) used the term "punch drunk" to describe boxers who experienced long-lasting consequences of repeated blows to the head. Subsequently, the condition was named traumatic encephalopathy of pugilists, traumatic encephalitis, cumulative encephalopathy of boxers, chronic boxer's

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What to look for

There appear to be five basic clinical patterns that mark the first signs of chronic traumatic encephalopathy:

1. Behavior that is marked by explosiveness, verbal and physical violence, impulsiveness, aggressive rage and being out of control.
2. Mood that is marked by depression, anxiety, hopelessness, suicidal thoughts, apathy, fearfulness, fatigue and irritability.
3. Mixed mood and behavior.
4. Cognition that is marked by memory impairment, executive dysfunction, poor attention and concentration, poor insight, perseveration, language dysfunction and visuospatial difficulties. This subtype may be most likely to progress into dementia.
5. Motor. Parkinson's features occur in less than 1/3 of cases so far observed.



RICARDO ROLON/USA TODAY NETWORK FLORIDA
The Cypress Lake High School football team held its first practice last week in Fort Myers.



DOROTHY EDWARDS/NAPLES DAILY NEWS

Participants are led in a group meditation at Corkscrew Swamp Sanctuary. Spiritual coach Bethanny Gonzalez's classes began as a new way to appreciate the swamp.

Meditation

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snake, fish, lizards.

Seated within the amphitheater — set off from the main boardwalk so we wouldn't hear any passing visitors — we rubbed essential oils on our hands. Mine was cinnamon-infused and promised harmony and balance. We closed our eyes as Gonzalez began.

She coaxed us into our own personal sanctuary, perhaps a sacred temple or a lush garden, and to depart our physical bodies to reach our higher selves. As we fly, watching our physical beings

from above, we are greeted by an animal guide. Mine was a white, wild horse. They helped us to release pain, stress or disappointment, and gave us "information" on how to help overcome difficulties in life.

Gonzalez explained that a wild horse guided me perhaps because I'm about to embark on an unexpected adventure and will have to call upon my reserves of strength to overcome. I'm more powerful than I think, she said.

Because the horse was untamed, I don't fall into conformity and I follow my own path.

Because the horse was white, I value personal freedom.

The challenge, though, was calming my monkey brain, a common obstacle

for meditation newbies. Passing airplanes, a woodpecker and splashes in the water would pull me back: "Did the gator catch some prey? Let me peer around."

Still, our surroundings helped pull me further into that transient state — the patter of light rain, the pulse of the cicadas, being surrounded by new and old growth cypress trees, some dating back 700 years.

Hoping to re-frame the Corkscrew Swamp Sanctuary's perception as only a place to see wildlife, like a zoo, organizers focused instead on education. Gonzalez's meditation classes began as a way to appreciate the swamp in a new way.

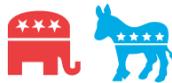
"We draw lots of birders and photog-

rappers, but we also draw and attract people who are seeking serenity," sanctuary spokeswoman Beth Preddy said.

After about 20 minutes of meditation, Gonzalez prompted us to return to our physical selves. When I opened my eyes, I was astounded by the clarity of the colors around me — perhaps looking with a new lens.

I can't imagine meditating anywhere else in the world except for in such an inspiring, healing space. I left the amphitheater and the swamp's winding boardwalk feeling a new sense of spirituality.

"You can meditate on the mat in an air-conditioned studio," Preddy said, "but there's nothing like meditating in the middle of an ancient forest."



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