

Saving the Wetlands Scenic Galveston & Evangeline Whorton

By Sue Mayfield Geiger



The next time you drive to Galveston on I-45, as you approach the Texas City Wye, take a look around you and admire the marshlands. They may seem like a natural phenomenon, inhabited by bird and marine life, waterfowl, reptiles and plant species. However, the Reddish Egret, Least Tern, Peregrine Falcon, Brown Pelican, Mottled duck and Piping plover (to name a few) owe their very lives to a group headed up by a woman who is bound and determined to keep their habitat intact.

Galveston resident, Evangeline Whorton, knows one thing for sure. She will continue her efforts to protect those wetlands and will continue to oppose anything that stands in the way of those efforts. Buying up 2,500 acres of land and raising almost five million dollars is one way of going about it, and thanks to the many volunteers of Scenic Galveston, Inc. (a non-profit conservation organization), the John M. O'Quinn I-45 Estuary Corridor in lower Galveston Bay is a reality.

Due to the tireless clean-up and restoration efforts, plus the subsequent planting of marsh-grass stems, the area between Bayou Vista and Tiki Island is once again teeming with fish and crabs. And while the nursery grounds are stabilized and flourishing, the 29 intrusive billboards are losing ground. "There are only 12 left," states Whorton. She also hopes the power lines crossing the marshlands will eventually be buried. In an area where 8.6 million acres of saltwater marshes once lined its bays and coast, only 610,000 acres remain. Whorton is adamant about protecting what's left.

Whorton has been named an environmental hero by the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, and has received two Sierra Club awards. But she gives credit to the many people who have worked hard toward her same goals. "The marshland is meant to be non-intrusively used," says Whorton. "Every citizen owns it, but so do the creatures." Whorton points out that there are only three things not allowed while visiting the area: Vehicular traffic, firearms and fireworks.

Not only did Whorton found Scenic Galveston, she created Dickens's Evening on The Strand, as well as the Annual Historic Homes Tour, has written detailed architectural histories of more than 300 Galveston structures for the Galveston Historical Foundation, and was appointed a Commissioner by the Governor for the Texas Historical Commission during the '80s.

Married with two grown daughters, Whorton is a sixth generation Texan, whose husband is on the faculty at UTMB. Lucky for Galveston, they arrived when they did. The Reddish Egret thanks her, the Least Tern thanks her and the Peregrine Falcon thanks her. And, of course, all of us who make the drive to Galveston thank her for keeping the view natural while protecting nature.