

# COLUMN: Early days at Englewood's Overbrook Gardens

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- Mar 6, 2020



Clifford E. Kroh of Kansas City, Kansas, founded his real estate development company in 1910 by platting the old family farm into a development known as Kroh's Addititon.

He then came to Florida and expanded his business. He bought huge amounts of land in different parts of the state.

Eventually he met up with J.E. Bartlett, another man who owned a lot of property. In the 1940s, their paths crossed in Englewood where Bartlett already owned thousands of acres. Kroh's company purchased 5,000 acres from Bartlett, the property that is now Overbrook Gardens. It's on State Road 776 at the northern end of Englewood.

Kroh Brothers started their Englewood development of Overbrook Gardens in 1957. Between 1957 and 1958, the first eight homes were built. The ninth home to be built in 1958 was owned by Marge and David Foss.

“We were going down the highway approaching Englewood,” said Marge Foss. “It was May and it was very wet, but we were impressed that this area seemed to be higher ground. After looking at so many different areas of Florida we had become pretty savvy about Florida land buying — we knew things to look for, like higher ground and the quality of the drinking water.

Marge remembered, “Well, we stopped in front of a house in this new development and I just marched over and knocked on the door and asked the occupants, ‘How does your water taste?’ and ‘might I try it?’ It was real good. Later we became friends with the people that gave me the taste of water and we had a lot of laughs over our water inspection-meeting.

“To show how vacant the area was then, what a great time we had shooting skeet in the backyard when the boys were young. And, oh, the abundant wildlife was so enjoyed by all. We had lots of quail — button quail — and mallard ducks, lots of birds. There were large flocks of wild parakeets around here then. There were ‘coons, ‘possums, bobcats, foxes and an occasional large-size cottonmouth snake or rattler.

“When we had visitors from the north, they were always enthralled with the baby alligators in our canal. Forked Creek and the nearby canals were loaded with them in those days. We saw a lot of ‘gators then and we had a strict rule with our five children, and visitors, about not swimming in the canal behind our house.”

When the Fosses purchased their property, average lots were selling for about \$700. Choice waterfront lots might have been as high as \$2,200. The Fosses were told there were originally 494 buildable lots.

By 1966 there had been 100 homes built in Overbrook, 124 completed by 1970. In 1968, Florida Power & Light put in the first seven street lights, and by 1974 stop signs had been installed at intersections. The Fosses got a phone as soon as their house was finished, although in other parts of Englewood they were very difficult to obtain. But even more exciting, water was brought into Overbrook. No more wells with brownish sulfur-tasting water.

Most of the Overbrook residents shopped at the Publix in Venice, and sometimes at the smaller local Tate Store here in Englewood. Tate's was known for carrying excellent meat, said Marge. In 1980, an Overbrook Newsletter was first printed. The years 1994 and 1995 brought the construction of two school bus shelters, and a security patrol program was started. These occurrences didn't happen by themselves. It took endless hours of hard work by the Homeowners Association to see these improvements take form.

David Foss had been instrumental in helping to organize the original group, which became a reality April 5, 1962. Marge remembered one of the most important items that David helped with was, "getting the lien Humble Oil had off the waterfront property section of Overbrook." They were planning to drill for oil in that area. In 1967, Mobile Oil had erected an oil rig a few miles off of Stump Pass. Fortunately, for Englewood, no oil was found. Humble, however, never got around to drilling, which would not have been an attractive event for Overbrook

The Kroh Brothers development over the years has proven to be one of Englewood's most successful residential areas.

## DV PLATES

An interesting accomplishment of David Foss, not related to Overbrook Gardens, has to do with DV License Plates. David had been badly wounded in Germany during WW II. When applying for a disabled veterans license plate for the first time after moving to Florida he was told there was no such thing here. He immediately started on a campaign to correct this, even traveling to Tallahassee to talk to the right people. If you have a DV Plate remember an earlier Englewood resident, David Foss, was responsible for instigating the DV Plate system in Florida.