

## Jimmy Wohl joins the Highlands Soil and Water Conservation District team

When Charlie Filler resigned from the Highlands Soil and Water Conservation District after 16 years of loyal service, a void was left on the board. Fortunately, that void was filled by local businessman, Jimmy Wohl. As the newest addition to the District, Jimmy brings experience and a diverse background in many areas. With varied business interests in farming, ranching, land development, real estate, banking and conservation, he has a new and unique perspective on many of the issues and challenges that the board faces.

Even though Highlands County is definitely home to Jimmy and his family, he spent most of his childhood in Hollywood, Florida. After World War II, Jimmy's dad, a builder by trade, purchased land in Davie, Florida and bought some cows to try his hand at ranching. He had never farmed before and discovered that the land he had bought would be under water 6 months of the year. When he was approached by a buyer, he sold the land and moved the ranching operation to Okeechobee.

The Wohl family managed the Okeechobee ranch for the next 10 years and eventually sold out to the South Florida dairy industry and moved to Highlands County. Here he purchased a beautiful piece of property known today as Rafter T Ranch, which borders Arbuckle Creek.

Jimmy moved to Highlands County in 1973, after graduating with a degree in Food and Resource Economics from the University of Florida. He was then ready to manage the Wohl's family ranch, a job he is still passionate about today. While at the University, Jimmy met his wife, Jeri who went on to get her degree from Florida Southern in accounting. Together, they have 3 children, Casey, Thomas James (T.J.), and Marty. All 3 children reside in Highlands County.

It would be an understatement to say that Jimmy is a busy man. He not only manages Rafter T Ranch, but owns Heartland Real Estate Corporation, where he specializes in agricultural and commercial properties. He has served on the Highlands County Cattleman's Association, Highlands County Farm Bureau and the Highlands County Citrus Grower's Association and currently serves on the Natural Resources Advisory Commission, Keep Highlands County Beautiful and as a Board Supervisor on the Highlands Soil and Water Conservation District.

In his youth, Jimmy spent every summer at the ranch. As Jimmy noted, "I grew up loving the cattle business and learned how important it is to understand and work with nature to be successful." Jimmy is a true conservationist and has been successful in the management of the family ranch which earned him recognition in 1997 for "Excellence in restoring and conserving wetlands" from the National Wetlands Conservation Alliance.

In Jimmy's own words, "It is no accident that Rafter T Ranch has an abundance of wildlife. With over 50% of the acreage managed in its natural state the habitat conditions are excellent. We have participated with the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission for over 20 years in their antlerless deer harvest program. Retention of water for watershed management has resulted in a Florida sand hill crane rookery where, during certain times of the year, the daily count is in the thousands. This is in addition to many other species which include wood storks

and migratory water fowl. Other species found in abundance on the ranch include Sherman's fox squirrel, alligators, scrub jays, gopher tortoises, cara cara, indigo snakes, southeastern kestrel and many other species of plants and animals."

Jimmy has been recognized for his outstanding innovation and excellence in wetlands conservation. Conservation practices are fundamental in the management of Rafter T Ranch and he believes "promotion of environmental stewardship calls for using but not abusing the land." He has a great love for Highlands County and would like to see the rural qualities of the area kept intact as much as possible.

We are indeed fortunate to have Jimmy as part of the Highlands Soil and Water Conservation District team. With his leadership qualities, Jimmy will lead others to fully recognize and conserve the value of our wetlands and natural resources.