

# The Florida State Parks Foundation Announces New Partnership to Honor Two Civil Rights Leaders

*Dr. Von D. Mizell – Eula Johnson State Park is an incredible natural oasis in an urban setting, and the park's inspiring history makes it that much more amazing*

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*Julia Gill Woodward*

Parks Foundation announced today that it has partnered with Athletic Brewing Company to honor two civil rights activists who helped desegregate South Florida beaches and are the namesakes of Dr. Von D. Mizell – Ms. Eula Johnson State Park in Hollywood.

The partnership will be used to create and implement an interpretive plan that will help guide efforts to share the park's story with all visitors. This plan will be created with involvement from local community members who are passionate about the park and its history.

“It is essential that Dr. Mizell and Ms. Johnson's legacies are remembered and that their courageous contributions to the advancement of civil rights in Broward County are honored,” said Julia Gill Woodward, Foundation CEO. “Dr. Von D. Mizell – Eula Johnson State Park is an incredible natural oasis in an urban setting, and the park's inspiring history makes it that much more amazing.”

Dr. Von D. Mizell was the second Black physician in Fort Lauderdale and helped to found the first NAACP chapter in South Florida. As a pioneer, he fearlessly confronted the racism he encountered, making momentous strides for Black citizens in medicine, education, politics, law enforcement, housing, and parks and recreation.

Dr. Mizell petitioned to create a beach for the area's Black population in 1946, a time when access to the area's public beaches was restricted to white people. Over the next seven years, he kept the pressure on until authorities finally relented and directed county attorney John U. Lloyd to find a location for the colored beach, which he did. The identified spot was a swampy, out-of-the-way site just south of Port Everglades. It was inaccessible by road and could only be reached

by ferryboat.

In 1954, the colored beach officially opened. Having won that battle, Dr. Mizell then spent another seven years pleading with authorities to build a road to the beach.

Eula Mae Gandy Johnson was the first woman president of the Fort Lauderdale NAACP. In this capacity, she filed lawsuits against public schools to seek equality for Black students. She also fought against the segregation of public spaces like drive-in theaters. On July 4, 1961, Johnson, along with Mizell and several NAACP members, began organizing “wade-in” protests at white-only beaches in the area.

The first wave of the historical “wade-in” demonstrations brought awareness to Black citizens’ lack of access to the county’s segregated beaches. Soon after, county officials agreed that a road to the colored beach in Hollywood needed to be built – presumably to discourage Black people from coming to Fort Lauderdale’s white-only beaches.

In an effort to end the wade-ins, the city of Fort Lauderdale sued Mrs. Johnson for being a “public nuisance.” However, that strategy backfired: The courts sided with the protester’s rights to use the beaches, and, in doing so, effectively integrated Broward County’s beaches.

In 1970, the beach Dr. Mizell and Ms. Johnson had fought so hard for was declared a part of the Florida park system and was named for Lloyd, the county attorney who had initially identified the location. Nearly 50 years later, on July 1, 2016, the park was officially renamed Dr. Von D. Mizell – Eula Johnson State Park to honor the two civil rights activists who helped desegregate South Florida beaches.

"At Athletic Brewing, we take immense pride in our Two for the Trails Program which donates 2% of each sale to protecting and restoring local trails," said Mike Shipp from Athletic Brewing. "Two for the Trails is the largest donation program of its kind in the outdoors space, and we donated \$1 million in 2021 to incredibly deserving grantees like the Florida State Parks Foundation who are making a massive impact in our local state parks. We're humbled to be able to support and partner with them to help fulfill their mission."

The Florida State Parks Foundation, founded in 1993 as Friends of Florida State Parks and renamed in 2018, is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit corporation whose mission is to support and help sustain the Florida Park Service, its 175 award-winning parks and trails, local Friends groups and more than 20,000 park volunteers.

It does this through programs that preserve and protect state parks, educate visitors about the value of state parks, encourage community engagement and active use of state parks, and advocacy. The volunteer Board of Directors represents private and public sectors as well as local and statewide interests. This project will be completed by the Florida State Parks Foundation Services LLC, which is a limited liability company affiliate of the Foundation.

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