



Butterflies Are Free

The Art and Conservancy Behind the Monarch Initiative

BY JULIA TILFORD

Full Sail University, alongside The Nature Conservancy, recently launched an environment-focused community engagement and sustainability project called The Monarch Initiative. And Central Florida residents could not be more thrilled to pitch in. Casey Tanous, Full Sail's public relations director, pins a great deal of the credit for this enthusiasm on the university's president, Garry Jones, whom she states "led the effort" of getting businesses, politicians and individuals all over the area involved. "Since he started asking people for help, we haven't gotten one no."

“We believe public art is an incredibly important aspect of all of our communities.”

Jane Kim, Ink Dwell studio

Although Full Sail has had a green initiative for several years, President Jones says he has been hoping to do more for quite some time. When Jones and The Nature Conservancy began considering ways to reach a broader audience, the idea of the monarch butterfly as a poster child was born.

“The monarch is in essence a canary in a coal mine,” Jones says. “The species has been imperiled because of habitat loss and food-source loss. If a pollinator is in trouble, the rest of the food chain should be concerned.”

Thus, the Monarch Initiative was born, and community partners like the Dr. Phillips Center for the Performing Arts, Foxtail Coffee Co., and Harry P. Leu Gardens began to join in. Rollins College, University of Central Florida and Valencia College jumped onboard as well. The cities of Winter Park and Orlando also became involved, and Mayor Dyer himself posted on Twitter that he was “thrilled” to be part of the project. Additional partners include Audubon Park Garden District, Dommerich Elementary and Monarch Learning Academy.

Migrating Murals

One of the biggest ways in which the Monarch Initiative is bringing awareness to the cause is through the Migrating Mural series created by artist Jane Kim of Ink Dwell studio, an art studio that focuses on public art.

“We believe public art is an incredibly important aspect of all of our communities,” says Kim. “We’re showing that the particular subject is important. It also brings pride to the people who get to work and live around these murals every day.”

There are currently two mural installations in Central Florida, and the initiative has received considerable attention and awareness because of them.

“Both Winter Park and Orlando champion the arts,” Tanous explains. “We wanted to tie this initiative in with where we live, work and play in order to make a huge impact for everyone.”

The Monarch Initiative’s first event occurred on April 19 as a way to officially launch the program. Members of the press and Central Florida residents were invited as President Jones, Temperance Morgan of The Nature Conservancy, and representatives from the cities of Orlando and Winter Park gathered for an official ribbon cutting in front of the premier mural, *Milkweed Galaxy*, which is located at 3150 University Blvd., Winter Park.

“This mural is meant to prompt people to take a closer look at milkweeds, an important food source



COURTESY FULL SAIL UNIVERSITY (3)

for the monarch,” explains Kim. “The title came from standing next to the gigantic image of the milkweed — when you see how much life there is on just one plant, you can envision a whole galaxy inside it.”

After the ribbon cutting, the group traveled to the second mural, *Midnight Dream*, which is painted across the rear wall of 520 South Magnolia Ave., facing Orange Avenue. According to Tanous, visitors are “able to truly migrate along this path” and consider the monarch through the power of art.

“Art can elevate the human condition, but it is also making a difference in the monarch’s chances of survival,” says Jones.

Also, an installation in Miami is possible, and another installation is already in place on an air traffic control tower at the airport in Springdale, Arkansas. For Ink Dwell, “The Migrating Mural project is ongoing,” says Kim. “We want to take it international from Canada to Mexico.”

While these large artistic installations are grabbing attention, Jones still feels “huge undertakings such as this aren’t the only way to make a difference in the survival of the monarch and other species on



Monarch butterflies only lay their eggs on milkweed, which is the only thing monarch caterpillars eat. Milkweed contains toxins that monarchs ingest, making them poisonous to predators. The *Milkweed Galaxy* mural at Full Sail features swamp milkweed and serves as a reminder that these microhabitats are wonderful worlds unto themselves.

Earth.” Tanous and Jones invite those who want to become involved to check out themonarchinitiative.org to learn more about the fun and artistic ways they too can help protect the monarch. The website includes coloring sheets to use with children, instructions on how to plant milkweed, and ideas for building and painting a garden box. Full Sail will also offer several box-building events this summer and throughout the year.

“One box doesn’t make a difference,” says Jones, “but hundreds of these small efforts suddenly become a collective that will help us protect and preserve nature for the future.” [OAM](#)

Julia Tilford is an author, freelancer and regular contributor to Orlando Arts Magazine.



Guests attend the April 19 ribbon cutting at the *Milkweed Galaxy* mural. Located on the front façade of Full Sail Live 3 building on University Boulevard, the mural is highly visible to the busy boulevard’s some 40,000 passersby each day.