



Forest Lake Academy.

Photo courtesy of Forest Lake Academy archives.

# Forest Lake Academy

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Forest Lake Academy is a coeducational preparatory day school for secondary education serving grades nine to twelve, situated 11 miles northwest of Orlando, Florida, and four miles east of Apopka, Florida. The 250-acre campus adjacent to Mirror Lake includes an administration building, classroom buildings, gymnasium-auditorium, cafeteria, maintenance buildings, performing arts center, arts building, athletic field, and faculty homes. The academy is fully accredited by the Middle States Association of Schools and Colleges, the state of

Florida, and the SDA Board of Regents.

Forest Lake Academy had two forerunners.<sup>1</sup> The first Seventh-day Adventist secondary school in Florida was at Fort Ogden (1909-1912), called the Fort Ogden School, then the South Florida Intermediate School. In 1918, on the campus of the Florida Sanitarium and Hospital in Orlando, a new intermediate school called Winyah Lake School (later Academy) was established, and began its first year with an enrollment of about 50. This was a 10-grade school, which later became Forest Lake Academy.

In August 1925, a 160-acre tract was purchased for \$16,000 from the heirs of J.W. Emerson, and in 1925-1926 F. H. Parrish, his wife, and 12 young people moved to the new property. The nine-room farmhouse was used as the girls' dormitory, dining room, kitchen, and administration building. The boys camped in the barn. This school was known at first as the Florida Conference Academy, or simply Florida Academy. In 1926 it became known as Forest Lake Academy. One dormitory was built in 1926-1927, and a second dormitory the following year. A part of the administration building was erected in 1936-1937; the rest of the structure was added during J.M. Howell's administration (1942-1948). A camp meeting tabernacle was built about 1930, later enlarged, and finally used for youth sessions. A gymnasium-auditorium was built in 1954.

In 1932-1933 Forest Lake Academy graduated its first twelfth-grade class, 13 students in number. The *Reflector*, the school paper, was first published in 1929-1930, and the first yearbook, the *Mirror*, in 1945.

Under K.A. Wright's administration (1937-1938), the original acreage was more than doubled by the purchase of additional land. A part of this land was planted in citrus that was a source of income. In 1982 a killer frost obliterated most of the citrus trees, and in 1985 the land was sold to Post Lake Apartments.<sup>2</sup>

In 1962, due to the age of most of the school buildings, the Florida Conference voted to raise a million-dollar rebuilding fund over a five-year period. Under this program, directed by Florida Conference President H.H. Schmidt and school principal William Fuchs, a boys' dormitory, maintenance building, cafeteria, and bindery-press were constructed. A new girls' dormitory and administration building were completed soon after. The construction project was accelerated by a lightning strike that obliterated part of the old administration building in 1964.<sup>3</sup>

A new performing arts center was constructed and opened in 1968, later named the H.H. Schmidt Auditorium. At opening, the auditorium could hold up to 700 individuals, and contained a band room, practice rooms, and offices for members of the music department. In 2020 the auditorium was renovated to include a state-of-the-art lighting system and updated seating.<sup>4</sup>

An Industrial Arts building was opened in 1973, and contained well-equipped classrooms for courses such as auto mechanics, auto body, printing, drafting, welding, flight ground school, and construction technology. Later, this building was converted into a Creative Arts building with classes in ceramics, art, digital photography, and video production.<sup>5</sup>

In 1975 a pool was installed behind the gym. It served the school until 2021.<sup>6</sup> The school's commercial laundry business was closed in 1979 and sold off to Florida Hospital. Students continued to work for the laundry despite its changed ownership. In 2011, a new laundry building was constructed to accommodate Florida Hospital's (now called AdventHealth) growing healthcare network.<sup>7</sup>

In 1993 endowment money was used to begin a multi-year improvement plan for the campus, including beautification of the front entrance and renovation of the gym to include a new stage area, offices, and a large lobby with restrooms and air conditioning.<sup>8</sup> In 2004 Florida Conference's AE21 Distance Learning Program was shifted to Forest Lake Academy.<sup>9</sup>

By 2013, the campus had received a new welcome center, front gate, security system, hallway lockers, and resurfaced roads. In 2017 the Florida Conference and Forest Lake Academy established a groundbreaking robotics and STEM curriculum that made its home in the arts building. By 2020, the program, now known as the Innovation Lab, had expanded, and was relocated to the 599 building on campus. In 2019, the dormitories and distance learning program were both shut down due to economic concerns.<sup>10</sup>

In 2021 a major campus beautification and campus development initiative was implemented that included removal of the pool due to unrepairable maintenance concerns and cost issues, removal of the old landscaping building, and removal of old motel units to make way for a new athletic field, completed in 2022. The school also implemented a new data-driven approach to academics, including assessing student learning gaps, data and math boot camp days, and IXL student performance and OverGrad programs to inform and empower students to take personal ownership of their own academic development.<sup>11</sup>

Principals: F.H. Parrish, 1925-1927; D.C. Ludington, 1927-1929; W.E. McClure, 1929-1932; C.A. Schutt, 1932-1933; W.E. McClure, 1933-1937; K.A. Wright, 1937-1938; J.E. Whelpley, 1938; K.A. Wright, 1939-1942; J.M. Howell, 1942-1948; Harry M. Loge, 1949-1950; J.M. Ackerman, 1951-1953; R.L. Osmunson, 1954-1955; Dr. W.E. McClure, 1956-1958; L.C. Strickland, 1959-1960; H.H. Schmidt, 1961; Williams Fuchs, 1962-1965; Lester C. Stannard, 1966-1968; Stephen J. Yost, 1969-1971; Randall Fox, 1972-1974; John Wagner, 1975-1977; H.D. Kinsey, 1978-1983; Robert Caskey, 1984-1994; John Wheaton, 1995-2006; Gloria Becker, 2007-2012; David Denton, 2012-2016; Frank Jones, 2016-2019; Dr. Glen Baker, 2019-Present.

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## SOURCES

Florida Conference Office of Education Records, Florida Conference, Altamonte Springs, Florida.

Forest Lake Academy Board Minutes, appropriate dates. Forest Lake Academy Archive, Apopka, Florida.

Schmidt Auditorium Grand Reopening Encore Program, September 24, 2020. Forest Lake Academy Archive, Apopka, Florida.

*Seventh-day Adventist Encyclopedia*. Second revised edition. Hagerstown, MD: Review and Herald Publishing Association, 1996. S.v. "Forest Lake Academy."

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## NOTES

1. This article is a revision of *Seventh-day Adventist Encyclopedia*, 2nd rev. ed., s.v. "Forest Lake Academy." Revision by Dr. Glen Baker, principal, and Melissa Keller, development director, Forest Lake Academy.
2. Personal recollection of Forest Lake Academy Facilities director, Paul Lower, and [floridahistorynetwork.com](http://floridahistorynetwork.com).
3. Forest Lake Academy historical archives.
4. Schmidt Auditorium Grand Reopening Encore Program, September 24, 2020.
5. Personal recollection of A. Steven Patrick, Forest Lake Academy historian, September 27, 2021.
6. Ibid.
7. Florida Conference Property Records.
8. Forest Lake Academy historical archives.
9. Florida Conference Office of Education Records.
10. Forest Lake Academy Board Minutes, May 9, 2019.
11. Forest Lake Academy Board Minutes, February 25, 2021, and September 16, 2021.

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