

Who Are the Conquistadors? - What Do They Do?

In 1979 a group of business and professional men met with a common goal: to do something to perpetuate the Spanish heritage of the Charlotte County area. Juan Ponce de Leon landed in the Charlotte Harbor area in 1521 and contributed to the first settlements in the area. Yet, there was little here to commemorate his discovery and actions. Thus the "Royal Order of Ponce de Leon Conquistadors" was founded.

Originally, the primary mission was purely social. As time passed, the scope of activities expanded, and the Club began to promote Charlotte County, both at home and in nearby communities. The Conquistadors participated in local and area parades, wearing authentic period costumes aboard their parade "ship" (float), Palencia, which soon became a familiar sight as it "sailed" locally.

During the last several years, members have spread the history of Ponce de Leon and his accomplishments to area schools. Dressed in full battle regalia, members have visited with literally hundreds of schoolchildren, all of whom have enjoyed the recounting of the early history of Florida. The Club has also joined with other area organizations in sponsoring sail boat races, golf and shuffleboard tournaments and treasure hunts, all for the enjoyment of the Charlotte County populace. With the help of community donations and sales of commemorative bricks, the Conquistadors were responsible for the Ponce de Leon statue in Gilchrist Park, Punta Gorda.

Early on, the Conquistadors established the tradition of reenacting Ponce de Leon's landing on the shores of Charlotte Harbor. This event is faithfully carried out annually with the accompaniment of a flotilla of escort vessels, music, entertainment, pageantry and cannon fire, much to the pleasure of the County's youth of all ages. In past years the mayor of Palencia, Spain, and the Consul General of Spain have brought messages from Ponce's native land.

The Conquistador membership continues to enjoy many social activities throughout the year. In addition, members enjoy trips throughout the State, fishing and boating excursions, as well as golf outings. "Sister City" relations have been established with Palencia, Spain (Ponce's birthplace) and San Juan, Puerto Rico (where Ponce served as Governor). The Club has sponsored trips to both locales during which local dignitaries have ensured memorable experiences for all. Future trips are planned to these and other locations.

We encourage you to consider membership in this unique group.

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<http://conquistadors-florida.com/index.htm>