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FLORIDA WEEKLY

2024 Newcomers

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SOUTHWEST FLORIDA

Publishers
Shelley Hobbs
shobbs@floridaweekly.com
Brandi Riede
brandi.riede@floridaweekly.com
Melissa Vogt
melissa.vogt@floridaweekly.com

Account Executives
Gail Dingee
gdingee@floridaweekly.com
Michele Foley
mfoley@floridaweekly.com
Mary Logan
mary.logan@floridaweekly.com

Nicole Ryan
nryan@floridaweekly.com
Kate Schmiedicke
kate@floridaweekly.com
Adam Schonberg
adam.schonberg@floridaweekly.com

April Swanson
april.swanson@floridaweekly.com

Special Sections Editor
Olivia Wild
olivia.wild@floridaweekly.com

Presentation Designer
Eric Raddatz

Graphic Designers
Lindi Daywalt-Feazel • Alex Hawkins
Caitlyn Newman • Scott Sleeper

Administrative Assistants
Maricela Hernandez
Ana Mueller

Assistant Production Manager
Alea Feeley

Circulation Manager
Michaelle Snider

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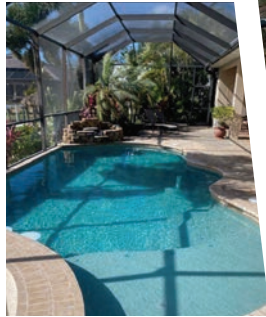
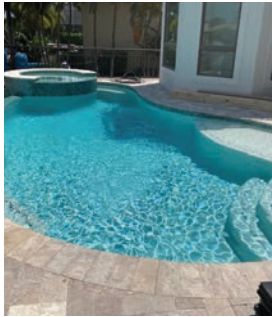
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**THE MORE
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Alligator Alley turned out to be a yellow brick road for Sara and John. They moved from Minneapolis for John's new job in Miami. But Miami wasn't their cup of tea. So they followed their dreams along I-75, and found Ave Maria. "It's perfect," Sarah says. She has a job she loves in the Town Center, and John works from home and goes in some. He's an avid golfer, and Sarah has a world of new activities she's exploring. She's taken up MahJong and gets John out on the pickleball courts.

They agree that you get more out of every minute in Ave Maria, a big kind of small town.



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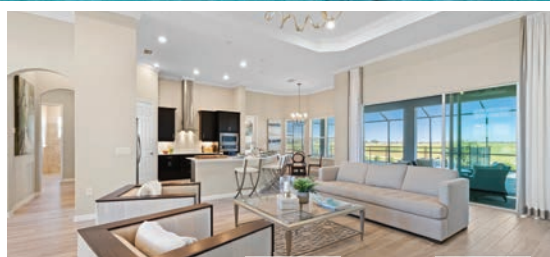
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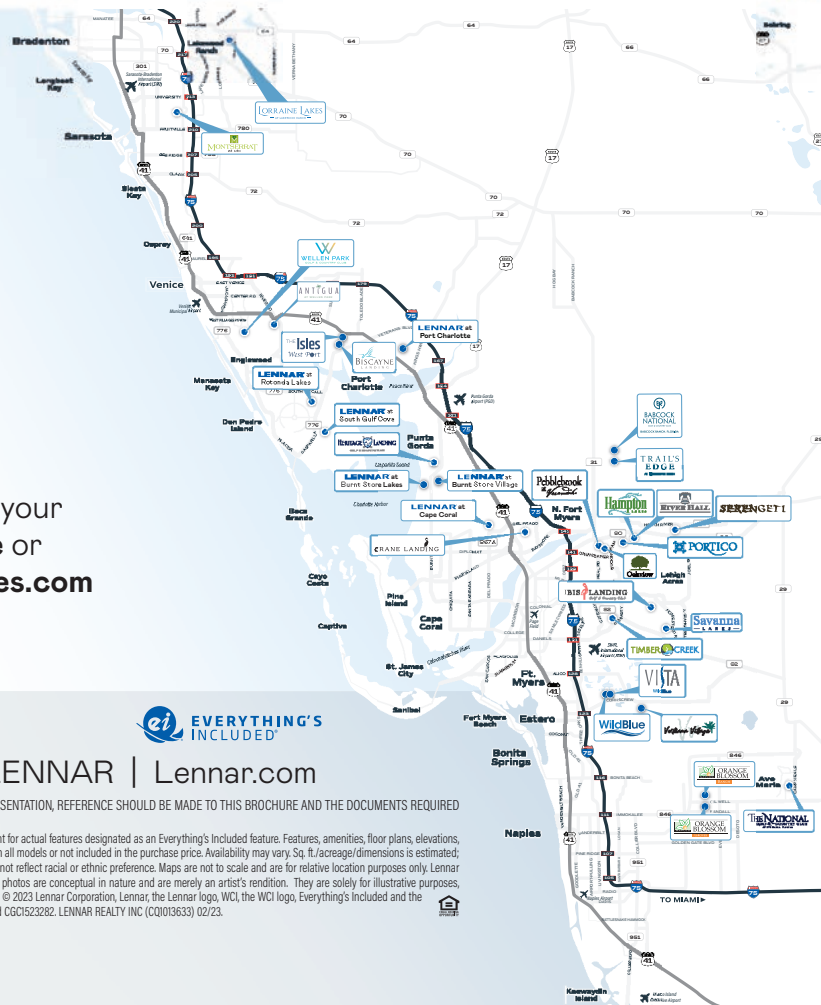


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LOCAL FLAVOR



SWFL ESTEEMED CHEFS DISH OUT THEIR FAVORITE BITES

BY CHELLE KOSTER WALTON

Florida Weekly Correspondent

Channeling their passion, expertise and countless hours into crafting culinary wonders over the roaring flames of gas stoves, these culinary enthusiasts showcase their devotion with each carefully crafted meal. The question arises: Where do these culinary virtuosos go when it's time for someone else to do the cooking? In a quest for answers, seven esteemed Southwest Florida chefs were engaged to share their dining preferences.

■ Burak Çakir

**Ephesus Mediterranean Grill
Port Charlotte**

Chef-owner Burak Çakir was 18 years old when he moved from Turkey in 2007

to accept a kitchen position at the Gasparilla Inn in Boca Grande. He met his wife, Michelle, in Florida and decided to stay.

In 2014, they opened Ephesus, serving authentic Turkish and Mediterranean cuisine made from age-old recipes dating back to the Ottoman Empire. Chef Çakir learned the recipes for shawarma, doner kebab, baklava and other traditional dishes from his mother.

The operation has grown, thanks to an appreciative fan base who has discovered the off-the-beaten path gem. Belly dancers and other live entertainment often add ambience to the ornate Turkish-decorated dining room and its bakery next door.

When the Çakirs head out for a special-occasion dinner, however, they target a different cultural flavor at Nicola's



Burak Çakir

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Italian Kitchen in Englewood.

“It’s owned and operated by an Italian family with amazing atmosphere,” said Chef Çakir. “You can almost forget that you are in America. My favorite dish is chicken marsala.”

For something more casual? Mango Bistro in Englewood Beach is his go-to. He lauds the owners’ care, their always fresh ingredients and flavor that is “out of this world.”

■ Jeanie Roland

The Perfect Caper Punta Gorda

Like most busy chef-owners, Jeanie Roland doesn’t find much time to dine out. “When I do go out, I am usually starving and want something good. I love supporting Chef Stephen at Italia and River City Grill,” said the frequently James Beard-nominated chef.

Besides the superlative cuisine, Italia at River City is close by her restaurant, and it’s open on the days The Perfect Caper is not (Monday and Tuesday), making it ultra-convenient. Chef Roland says a salad and some chicken parm, and she’s good to go.

She and her husband, James, opened The Perfect Caper in 2002 and immediately set a new standard downtown Punta Gorda. They debuted another restaurant in Westerly, Rhode Island, in 2012.

Since then, Chef Roland has published two cookbooks, the most recent during COVID lockdown, when everyone was at home cooking and looking for new recipes to try. Thus, “The Perfect Caper Home Cooking.”

Although a Culinary Institute of America grad who has sampled cuisines around the world, she’s a self-admitted fan of American diner cuisine. In Port Charlotte, she gets her fix at Little Good Times, a strip-mall joint where she she’s been going faithfully many years for breakfast and Mexican specialties.

■ Bob Boye

Liberty Fort Myers

“Over the past few years, I’ve been a lot pickier with my dining out spots, as going out to dinner has become quite expensive,” says chef-owner Bob Boye, who has evolved into a Fort Myers culinary



Jeanie Roland

COURTESY PHOTO

fixture starting with his run at Cru, where he began as a bartender and ended up as chef-owner six years later.

He bases his dining choices on quality and places that accommodate his busy schedule, especially chef-owned and -operated restaurants like his own. “I’ve been very surprised with some of the little spots I’ve found,” he says.

Known for his truly original, alternative style of small-plate cuisine at Liberty, Chef Boye admits a penchant for barbecue, and he counts off-the-beaten-path Big Nick’s Barbecue in Fort Myers among his favorites. In the pizza food-group, he picks Uncle Rico’s and Fine Folk Pizza & Restaurant, both in Fort Myers.

“But when we are celebrating some-

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LOCAL FLAVOR



STEPHANIE DAVIS / FLORIDA WEEKLY

thing, I usually get in touch with my friend and former co-worker Josh Zeman at Sea Salt in Naples and ask for a tasting menu,” he says. Otherwise, “date night” means a trip to Namba Ramen & Sushi, also in Naples, where “literally anything and everything” pleases his discerning palate.

■ **Adam Nardis**
Coldwater Oyster Market
Fort Myers

Chef-owner Adam Nardis has established himself as a chef of passion and extraordinary expertise in both Naples and Fort Myers. Not to mention Block Island

in Rhode Island: His six summers at The National Hotel sparked a love for northern seafood and the genesis of Coldwater Oyster Market.

In 2021, he realized his culinary dream by opening a restaurant alongside his wife, Erin and their four children. This achievement came on the heels of an im-



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Shah Hadjeji

LOCAL FLAVOR

pressive tenure as an executive chef at M Waterfront Grille (the sister restaurant of the National Hotel) and Crave Culinaire, both located in Naples.

That Block Island connection runs deep as cold water. Chef Nardis' loyalty to past colleagues makes Dos Sabores Restaurant, a Mexican experience in Estero, a favorite, but it also has to do with quality.

"I worked with Chef Ramiro Ruiz for years on Block Island and at M," he says. "His food is alive, honest and cooked with heart. He also understands proper seasoning and balance. The wet burrito there is the best I ever had."

When it comes to "the ultimate special occasion restaurant," he picks Wylds Café in Bonita Springs. It is, after all, where he proposed to Erin, and the Tenderloin Saga makes his top hits list. "The combination of rich bleu cheese fondue and frites!" he exclaims. "The tenderloin is, you know, tender. So, you don't get texture from the meat, but the rest adds just the perfect amount of texture." But then, again, there's that creme brulé to contend for favorite.

■ Brandon Schewe

**The Bohemian Restaurant
Downtown Coffee and Wine Company
Bonita Springs**

Chef-owner Brandon Schewe and his wife, Caitlin Emery-Schewe, have helped change the culinary landscape of downtown Bonita Springs. First came Downtown Coffee and Wine in 2019, followed in 2022 by The Bohemian, which has all Southwest Florida raving. To their kitchens, Chef Schewe brings the know-how learned in elite local restaurants such as Tulia, The French and BALEEN.

The Bohemian takes its name and theme from a menu that creatively wanders global cuisines. When the Schewes head out for a nice dinner, they prefer Passage to India nearby in Bonita Springs, which Brandon terms a chef-owned and -operated hidden gem. "Chef Boran makes every single meal himself," he says. "I have never had a bad meal there." His favorite dishes? Scallops mallee and sweet naan.

For a more impromptu dining experience, he returns to the scene of one of his former workplaces, downtown Naples'



Brandon Schewe

STEPHANIE DAVIS / FLORIDA WEEKLY

Bar Tulia, and often orders the lamb sausage pizza. "It has good vibes and good food galore," he raves about the establishment. "You can go there late night and still get the best food in town, sit back and enjoy friends and craft cocktails.

■ Tony Ridgway Ridgway Bar & Grill

**Tony's Off Third
Bayside Seafood Grill & Bar
Naples**

Often considered the "godfather" of the modern-day fine dining scene in Naples, Tony Ridgway capped off his 50-year restaurant career in 2019 with the publication of a cookbook — nay, a cook-tome of 500-plus pages titled "Kitchen Privileges."

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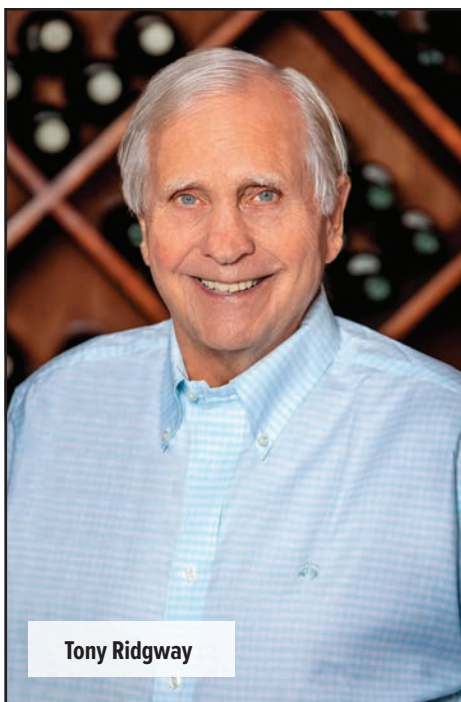
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LOCAL FLAVOR



Tony Ridgway

COURTESY PHOTO

Self-taught in the ways of kitchen wizardry, Chef Ridgway purchased his first Naples restaurant, Wurst Place, in 1971, then went on to raise the bar for Naples dining with Truffles Café and Ridgway Bar & Grill's predecessor, The Chef's Garden.

He knows a thing or two about fine dining, so when the occasion calls for pulling out all the stops, he reserves a table at Fuse Gastrobar in Naples.

"Fuse is a great example of a local restaurant that is beloved by its clientele. Co-owners Greg Scarlatos, who runs the kitchen, and Monika Czechowska, who runs the bar and front of house, know all their best customers, and they work hard to turn every new customer into a best customer," said Ridgway. "The menu is diverse and full of unique flavors. Monika's cocktail program is as good as it gets."

Another local favorite where he and his wife, Wynne, dine on a regular ba-

sis, Alexander's Garden Restaurant is not only close to their home, but serves consistently good food. The garden setting seals the deal for Chef Ridgway, who recommends the sauteed veal.

■ Todd Johnson

Nosh on Naples Bay Naples

"Every time I go to Barbatella, I tell myself I'm going to order something new," says Todd Johnson, chef-owner of Nosh since January 2022. But inevitably he ends up ordering the Rigatoni Alla Norma at the Third Street fixture, subtitled a "spirited Italian trattoria."

The pasta, the tomato sauce, the eggplant: He can't help himself! He's also a fan of the Artichoke La Plancha appetizer, served with parsley and garlic aioli. "I like the comfortable neighborhood vibe of Barbatella," he says.

Chef Johnson cut his culinary teeth at



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some of Naples' finest restaurants, including Chef's Garden and Bistro 821, and later made a name for himself at Fort Myers' Bistro 41 and most recently at his Rumrunners restaurant in Cape Coral for 18 years. Now back in his hometown, the Johnson & Wales University (North Miami) graduate lives out his love for small plates and creatively paired fine ingredients at Nosh.


Running their own restaurant leaves little time for Chef Johnson and his wife, Dana, to schedule in fine-dining nights out, but when they do manage to steal away, they often make The Cave Bistro & Wine Bar in Naples their destination.

"It's a little more intimate than most places - smaller and not as crazy," said Johnson. The Johnsons, known for their love of exploring culinary delights, savor the expansive array of wines and appetizers. As a standout choice for a main course, Johnson highly recommends the perfectly seared scallops. ■

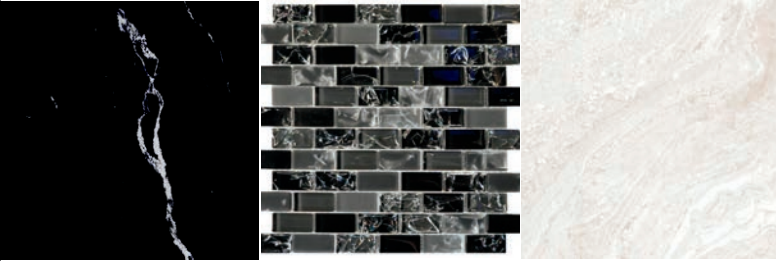


Todd Johnson

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 239-395-0900, bigarts.org

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239-489-9313,
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 239-278-4422, broadwaypalm.com

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— 26100 Old 41 Road, Bonita Springs
 239-495-8989, artcenterbonita.org

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— 528 Cultural Park Boulevard, Cape Coral
 239-772-5862, culturalparktheater.com

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 239-590-1000, fgcu.edu/cas/bsm/concerts

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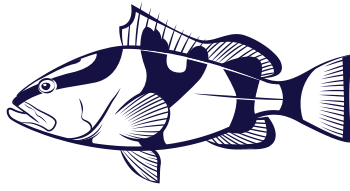
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— 350 S. McCall Road
941-474-5548, ringling.edu/EAC

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— 585 Park Street
239-262-6517, naplesart.org

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— 701 Fifth Avenue South
239-434-7340, naplesplayers.org

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The Visual Arts Center

ARTFUL SIDE

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BY NANCI THEORET

Florida Weekly Correspondent

Whatever your intentions for art – simply appreciating it from the sidelines or getting knee-deep in the hoopla – art organizations throughout Southwest Florida provide plenty of opportunities for art exploration, from exhibitions featuring local artists and late masters to single-night workshops and multiweek classes for all skill levels and preferred mediums.

■ Alliance for the Arts

A visual and performing arts center, the Alliance exuberantly embraces art in its myriad forms. Year-round, it hosts gallery exhibitions featuring both established and emerging artists, captivating theater and music performances (with a spotlight on bluegrass), lively art festivals, and an array of creative classes catering to all ages and interests. Representing a vast network of 50+ arts and cultural organizations, along with a membership of 1,200 artists, this non-profit organization thrives on curating unexpected communal experiences. From jazz to hula and belly dancing, seamlessly blending art and exercise, to vibrant greenmarkets and night markets held at its expansive 10-acre ArtsPark on McGregor Boulevard.

The 2023-24 theater season features “Clown Bar” (Nov. 9-26), “Which Way to the Stage” (Jan. 18-Feb. 3) and “The Women who Mapped the Stars,” a Feb. 8-18 fundraiser for the Calusa Nature Center & Planetarium at the Planetarium. As the Alliance’s signature juried show, the all-Florida exhibition (March 1-30), now in its 38th year, attracts artists throughout the Sunshine State and entries in drawing, painting, printmaking, video, photography, glass, textiles and digital media.

The Alliance also offers Fringe Fort Myers, a three-day non-juried lottery-drawn festival in late May, the greenmarket every Saturday and Sunday from 9 a.m.-1 p.m., and the night market



“The Face of Immokalee,” 2018-23, by Michelle Tricca

COURTESY PHOTOS



“Flowers,” 1970, by Andy Warhol from the exhibit *Andy Warhol: A Life in Pop | Works from the Bank of America Collection*

featuring local artist booths and openmic performances.

— 10091 McGregor Blvd., Fort Myers
239-939-2787, artinlee.org

■ The Baker Museum

Start your visit by exploring – and playing with – the museum’s 20 or so outdoor installations. Created by internationally renowned artists, including kinetic artists Yaacov Agam and George Rickey, glass artist Dale Chihuly, and



“Red Wood,” 2018, by Tamara Kostianovsky from *Tamara Kostianovsky: Botanical Revolution*

stripe-and-color-loving conceptual artist Daniel Buren, the large-scale sculptures represent the nation’s largest concentration of public art and are designed for an interactive, immersive experience that shifts with light, wind and the environment.

The Baker’s permanent 3,500-work collection emphasizes 20th and 21st century American and Mexican contemporary works – “Dawn’s Forest,” the museum’s iconic monumental sculpture by Louise Nevelson and selections from the



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ARTFUL SIDE

modern collection of Atlantic Records founder Ahmet Ertegun (on display Feb. 10 to June 16). Ongoing exhibits include “Chihuly Collection,” and “Magritte: Reflections of Another World” featuring six never-shown-in-North-America paintings by the artist known for his amusing surrealism.

Its 2023-24 show schedule also features Tamara Kostianovsky’s “Botanical Revolution” (through April 7), the annual “Florida Contemporary” exhibit (Oct. 14-June 30), American photographer “Frank Stewart’s Nexus” (Oct. 14-Jan. 7), “The Art of Food” (Nov. 18-March 10), the public art project “The Faces of Immokalee” (Nov. 18-April 28), “George Gershwin and Modern Art” (Feb. 10-June 16) and “Andy Warhol Portfolios” (April 6-Sept. 8).

— 5833 Pelican Bay Blvd., Naples
239-597-1111, artisnaples.org

■ BIG ARTS Sanibel

BIG ARTS, the hub of everything art on Sanibel and Captiva, returns to regular programming in December with a host of holiday events following an extended Hurricane Ian intermission. Its full calendar hits a high note in January with performances by Grammy award-winning vocalist Judith Hill, Metropolitan Opera soprano Susanna Phillips accompanied by clarinetist Anthony McGill and pianist Myra Huang of the New York Philharmonic, bluegrass groups Twisted Pine and Alan Bibey & Grasstowne, plus tributes to Neil Diamond and piano men Elton John, Billy Joel, Jerry Lee Lewis, et al. There’s also contemporary dance a la Bodytraffic, the comedic “Late Night Catechism – Sister’s Summer School” and spring concerts presented by BIG ARTS concert band and community chorus.

BIG ARTS is also the island destination for artistic pursuits, with one-day workshops in watercolors, fused glass, drawing and Zentangles, which resumed in October, and multi-week classes beginning in January.

Gallery exhibits now through Jan. 31 include Mariapia Malerba’s manatee mural “In the Blink of An Eye” and a retrospective of experimental artist Bea Pappas. The gallery also showcases paint-

ings by Dana Roes and poetry by Brandi George in “Involution” (Oct. 27-Dec. 10), the Sanibel-Captiva Art League’s 48th annual juried exhibit “Imaginary Lines” (Dec. 15-Jan. 28) and shows by Shah Hadjebi, Al Chailosky, Wendy Klemperer and students from Florida SouthWestern State College.

— 900 Dunlop Road, Sanibel
239-395-0900, bigarts.org

■ Arts Bonita

Find your happy place. Arts Bonita, formerly the Centers for the Arts Bonita Springs, offers a bevy of fine-art and fun art experiences. Over 50 multiweek classes and year-round sessions cover categories from coiled basketmaking, stone carving, metalwork, mosaics, mixed media, glass and jewelry as well as painting, pottery, pastels, drawing and sculpture. The Atelier program caters to serious students of the human form, following the time-honored academic traditions in cast drawing, figure study, anatomy and still life.

Arts Bonita also offers workshops, daylong mini-workshops and single evening BYOB-optional sessions – our kind of night class – and hosts exhibits showcasing the work of its students, faculty and members. This fall it features the exclusive “America’s Everglades: Through the Lens of Clyde Butcher” (Oct. 2-Dec. 29) highlighting the black-and-white photos of

internationally renowned local photographer Clyde Butcher. The show is so big it’s displayed at Arts Bonita’s Visual Arts Center on Old 41 Road and the Performing Arts Center on Bonita Beach Road.

The two locations also offer dance classes, PG-friendly open mic nights, documentaries, concerts, and plays.

— Visual Arts Center, 26100 Old 41 Road
Performing Arts Center, 10150 Bonita Beach Road,
Bonita Springs
239-495-8989, artcenterbonita.org

■ Marco Island Center for the Arts

Open studios and multiweek classes in clay, drawing, painting, pastels and stone channel creativity and artistic expression. The center’s popular clay curriculum covers the spectrum of tiny thrown teapots and cups, each produced from less than a pound of clay, plus wheel-throwing for neophytes, mold-making, sculpture, and themed instruction for crafting cookie jars, sea creatures and large hand-built figures. It also offers single-day specialty classes exploring collage, basketweaving, Chinese brush painting and batik, plus illustrated watercolor journaling during a plein-air session at the Naples Botanical Garden.

As part of ¡ARTE VIVA!, Collier County’s yearlong tribute to Hispanic arts and culture, the center’s La Petite Galerie features colorful “terra guitarra”



“America’s Everglades: Through the Lens of Clyde Butcher”



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ARTFUL SIDE

paintings by musician and guitarist Bruce Hecksel (Oct. 9-Nov.21) and “Just Another Canvas: Tattoos as Art” (Jan. 8-Feb. 27) with individual shows by Myriam Kriel and Margarita Angel. The gallery schedule also includes the Clay Guild’s “Shape Shifters” (Dec. 4-Jan. 2), the members show “Past and Present” (March 4-April 2) and student exhibits and the Collier County High School competition in April.

— 1010 Winterberry Drive, Marco Island
239-394-4221, marcoislandart.org

■ **Naples Art Institute**

The institute’s multiweek sessions and short-term workshops cater to aspiring adult and child artists with introductory sessions covering the basics of oils, acrylics, watercolors and drawing and classes in all mediums and art styles for advanced students – from abstract, trompe l’oeil and realism to artist-specific instruction for painting like Claude Monet, Georgia

O’Keeffe and Vincent Van Gogh. The organization also offers private lessons and a kid-centric Lego art studio and classes in comics, creative clay, drawing, collage, printmaking and college credit-earning portfolios for students pursuing the College Board’s AP Art & Design program.

The institute hosts the Naples Invitational, a biennial survey featuring local contemporary artists through Oct. 15. Coming exhibits include “Victor Vasarely: The Absolute Eye” (November through January), “The Power of Photography: Iconic Images from the Collection of Peter Fetterman” (February through April) and “Childhood Classics: 100 Years of Picture Book Illustration” (April through June).

— 585 Park St., Naples
239-262-6517, naplesart.org

■ **Visual Art Center**

Local art is the focus of the downtown Punta Gorda center, where open studios

and on-site classes cater to an array of artistic interests and exhibits in three galleries feature plenty of local flavor. Artistic expression runs the gamut from drawing, painting and portraits to fiber, jewelry, glass, pottery, photography and sculpture. The center’s youth program includes parent-and-child holiday-themed crafts for 5- to 7-year-olds, multimedia painting for 8 to 12 years, and landscape, faces and figures, color theory and still life for teens.

Local artists are well represented in annual and special exhibits: the holiday showcase featuring gifts and art under \$200, the 3D glass and pottery “Through the Fire” display (Jan. 9-Feb. 1), the National Art Exhibition (Feb. 16-April 12), Charlotte County student showcases in April and the member showcase (July 9-Aug. 23).

— 210 Maud St., Punta Gorda
941-639-8810, visualartcenter.org

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■ The Bailey-Matthews National Shell Museum

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— 3075 Sanibel-Captiva Road, Sanibel
239-395-2233, shellmuseum.org

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— 2350 McGregor Blvd., Fort Myers
239-334-7419, edisonfordwinterestates.org

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— 27180 Old 41 Road, Bonita Springs
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– 8500 Penzance Boulevard, Fort Myers
southernfreshfarms.com

COLLIER COUNTY

■ The Baker Museum at Artis—Naples

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– 5833 Pelican Bay Boulevard, Naples
239-597-1111, artisnaples.org



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239.643.7275, naplesgarden.org

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239-514-0084, cmon.org

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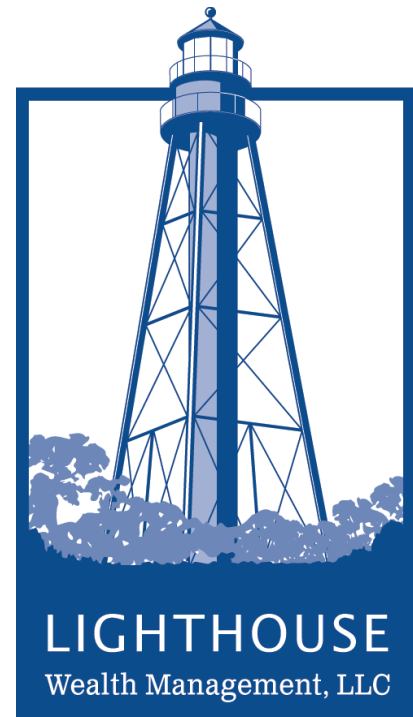




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— 1590 Goodlette-Frank Road, Naples
239-315-7626, napleszoo.org

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■ The Holocaust Museum & Education Center of Southwest Florida

The museum's mission is to promote respect and understanding by teaching the history and lessons of the Holocaust through artifacts that tell individual stories within the larger history of the Holocaust. Special events include touring exhibits and guest lecturers.

— 975 Imperial Golf Course Boulevard, Suite 108, Naples
239-263-9200, hmcec.org

■ REVS Institute

Recognized by Tripadvisor as one of the top Things-to-Do in Naples, REVS Institute is widely regarded as one of the top automotive museums in the world. Nearly every vehicle in the collection has been masterfully restored according to exacting historical standards and is maintained in peak operational condition. Tickets for admission must be purchased in advance.

— 2500 S. Horseshoe Drive, Naples
239-687-7387, revsinstitute.org

■ Rookery Bay Environmental Learning Center

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— 300 Tower Road, Naples
239-530-5972, rookerybay.org

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■ Babcock Ranch Eco-Tours

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— 8502 FL-31, Punta Gorda
800-500-5583, babcockranchecotours.com

■ Blanchard House Museum

Check the website for updates on Hurricane Ian repairs and plans for

reopening.

Built in 1925 as a home for Joseph Blanchard, a Black sea captain and key member of the early Punta Gorda business community, the museum is devoted to the procurement, preservation, study and display of materials related to the history, culture and contributions of African Americans in Charlotte County.

— 406 Martin Luther King Jr. Blvd., Punta Gorda
941-575-7518, blanchardhousemuseum.org

■ Charlotte Harbor Environmental Center

Visitors will find more than 20 educational programs and more than 8 miles of hiking trails and other recreational opportunities.

— 10941 Burnt Store Road, Punta Gorda
941-575-5435, checflorida.org

■ The James and Barbara Moore Observatory

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—Florida SouthWestern State College
941-637-3518, fsw.edu/charlotte/observatory

■ The Military Heritage Museum

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— 900 W. Marion Ave., Punta Gorda
941.575.9002, militaryheritagemuseum.org

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- **At Home** (monthly on the first Thursday) – Charlotte County's guide to everything about the home.
- **Healthy Body** (monthly on the third Thursday) – Charlotte County's guide to your health.
- **Best Doctors** (January) – A comprehensive guide to doctors and

- medical services in Southwest Florida.
- **Destination SWFL** (March) – All about the region's communities, attractions, shopping and events to make a visit the best it can be. We also share some insider secrets to help visitors and new residents experience SWFL like a local.
- **Arts Preview** (November and February) – Our definitive guide to what's coming up in theater, music, festivals and more.
- **Florida Weekly's Best** (May) – Florida Weekly's intrepid writers and editors scour South Florida looking for the best of everything and bestow dozens of Flamingo awards.
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— Donna McGinnis
President/CEO, Naples Botanical Garden

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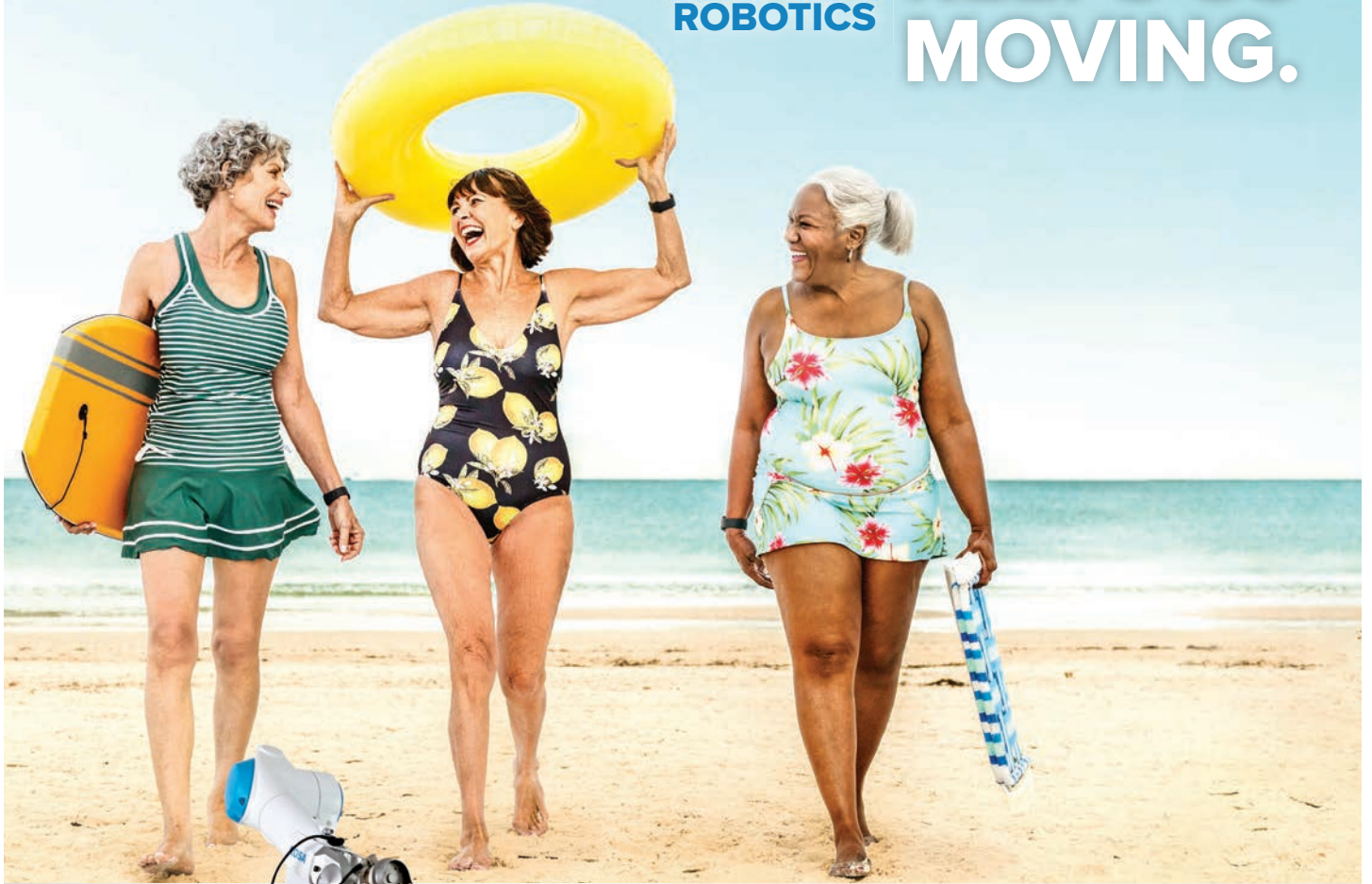


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Aerial view of
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Park on Boca Grande

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■ Alva

This rural, unincorporated swath of Lee County east of Fort Myers is a place of citrus groves, cattle, oak trees and woodland trails ideal for horseback riding.

An assumption many newcomers make is that the town must be named for Thomas Alva Edison, the inventor who owned a winter home in Fort Myers. Not so. Sea captain Peter Nelson chose the name for the small white flowers, called alvas, that he found here in the late 19th century.

Residents have been successful at preserving Alva's charms. No big condos, overpasses or shopping malls here. Alva was beautiful when Capt. Nelson first ventured up the river, and it remains much the same today.

■ Ave Maria

One of Southwest Florida's fastest growing areas is the town of Ave Maria.

About a half-hour drive east of Naples, it was founded in 2007 by Barron Collier Companies, the founding family of Collier County, and Tom Monaghan, the founder of Domino's Pizza.

Today's Ave Maria is home to thousands of residents and growing commercial businesses as well as private schools, including Ave Maria University. The focal point of the town center is the Ave Maria Catholic Church.

■ Babcock Ranch

Babcock Ranch is a solar-powered city destined to house around 50,000 residents at buildout. It's also a regional outdoor adventure destination, with walking/cycling trails and lakes stocked with bass, all among a mosaic of oak hammocks and dry prairie, palmetto flatwoods and cypress domes.

Start discovering Babcock at Woodlea

Hall in the town's Founder's Square. The civic and information hub of Babcock, it is perhaps the most important initial destination for first-time visitors, whether here to enjoy a day on the lake or to learn more about Babcock Neighborhood School (grades K-5) and Babcock High School (grades 6-11, with grade 12 coming in the next academic year).

■ Boca Grande

Called "the preppiest place on Earth" by The Wall Street Journal, this tony resort community on Gasparilla Island is an outpost of charm, grace and wealth. The town centerpiece is the grand and gracious Gasparilla Inn, circa 1911 and with three croquet lawns. It's not all about lawn bowling and the beach here, though. The village has a picturesque bicycle path and is home to the World's Richest Tarpon Tournament.

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SWFL COMMUNITIES

■ Bonita Springs

This golf mecca in southern Lee County is much more than tee boxes and greens. Indeed, there are numerous golf courses throughout the city's 39 or so square miles, but there's a whole lot more here, too.

The Centers for the Arts Bonita Springs is home for film festivals, art shows, performances and classes of all kinds for all ages. There's also Riverside Park, complete with a bandshell.

Everglades Wonder Gardens, a charming throwback to the days of Florida roadside attractions, has been right there along Old 41 Road since 1936. There's also Shangri-La Springs, a stately property that opened in 1921 and has been revitalized in recent years to offer an organic garden and restaurant, fitness studio and spa, a gift shop and an event/wedding venue.

Longtime residents know their city has come a long way in a short period of time. In 1970, the population was just a bit shy



Aerial photo of Cape Coral residence houses and canals.

of 2,000 and today, it's approximately 57,000.

■ Cape Coral

Back in the late 1950s, two visionary Baltimore businessmen, brothers Leonard and Jack Rosen, essentially created Cape Coral by buying a huge swath of land, bulldozing trees and digging one of the world's most extensive canal systems.

Then the people started coming. And they haven't stopped. Today, Cape Coral is the largest city in Southwest Florida in size and population, a community of almost 200,000 people spread over 120 square miles. Where early locals once hunted and fished in a vast expanse of pine trees and palmettos is now a place where people of all ages shop, dine, work, raise families and enjoy retirement.



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SWFL COMMUNITIES

■ Englewood

Englewood straddles two counties, Charlotte and Sarasota, but it's a singular place.

So much can be found around its bustling, art-district heart on West Dearborn Street. Just east of town, visitors can hike, camp and ride bikes in the Myakka State Forest. On the other side of Englewood is Manasota Key, a beautiful barrier island with restaurants and cottages overlooking the Gulf of Mexico.

■ Estero

Estero used to be little more than a wide spot on U.S. 41 between Fort Myers and Naples, an unincorporated place where folks grew oranges and fished the Estero River.

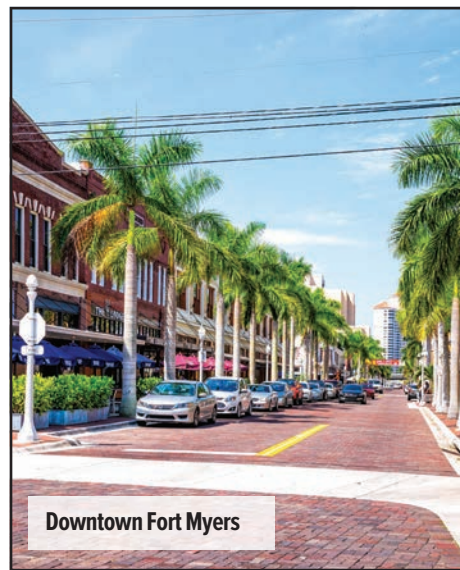
But since Dec. 31, 2014, it is the Village of Estero, Lee County's newest incorporated community, bustling beyond what anybody might have imagined even very late in the 20th century.

Bits of the past remain at the Koreshan State Historic Site, which preserves 11 buildings that provide a glimpse into the Koreshan Unity, a religious cult that moved here in 1894. The Koreshans are gone now, but a vibrant community where business mixes with pleasure remains.

■ Fort Myers

Fort Myers was incorporated in 1885 with a population of 349 and two years later became the county seat when Lee County was carved out of what was then Monroe County. Today the downtown area along the Caloosahatchee River is known as the River District, speckled with architectural gems such as the Sidney & Berne Davis Art Center, the Burroughs Home (built in 1901) and the Lee County Courthouse, which was constructed in 1915.

The city's diverse art scene includes Florida Repertory Theatre, the Broadway Palm Dinner Theatre, Barbara B. Mann



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SWFL COMMUNITIES

■ Fort Myers Beach

Fort Myers Beach on Estero Island, although heavily impacted by Hurricane Ian, stands resilient. Once a vibrant 7-mile-long haven of beaches, hotels, restaurants and shops, this beloved beach community is rallying together for an inspiring journey of rebuilding, restoration, and recovery that will showcase its strength and resilience in the years to come. The community's determination and spirit will reignite the island's charm, making it an even more remarkable destination.

Long before the first Europeans reached the area in the 1500s, the native Calusa resided on the island. Remnants of their time and culture are at the Mound House, an early 20th century cottage built atop one of the mounds the Calusa tucked away from the main road. While the structure survived the storm, the Mound House remained closed to the public weeks after the storm while officials ensured its stability.

■ Immokalee

Immokalee — “my home” in the Seminole language — has a connection to millions of Americans who likely have never even heard of it: About 90% of the nation's winter tomatoes come from farmland here. Cucumbers, bell peppers and citrus also are major crops.

But Immokalee is about more than farming. Seminole Casino Immokalee and its hotel stay abuzz with gaming, food and drink, special shows and concerts.

■ Lehigh Acres

In some ways, Lehigh Acres resembles Cape Coral. Both were created by visionary Northern businessmen in the 1950s and have grown beyond what anybody could have predicted 60 years ago.

But while Cape Coral long ago became an incorporated city, Lehigh Acres remains an unincorporated, 86-square-mile tract of eastern Lee County that about 120,000 people call home.

Known as a community where housing is affordable, its location just east of I-75 puts it within easy driving distance of downtown Fort Myers, Southwest Florida International Airport, Florida Gulf Coast University and the region's beaches and golf courses.



Golden sky over City Lights across Factory Bay in Marco Island.

■ Marco Island

The largest of the Ten Thousand Islands and about a four-hour boat ride from Key West, Marco is the perfect place for all sorts of water sports, from kayaking and standup paddleboarding to fishing and sailing.

Once you cross the SS Jolley Bridge from the mainland, you'll find everything you need for a good time: hotels, restaurants, shops, beaches, golf courses and plenty of ways to get out and enjoy the water, including 6 miles of beaches. Off the sand, there's the Marco Island Historic Museum and the Marco Island Art Center.

■ Pine Island

Along with Fort Myers Beach and Sanibel-Captiva Islands, this 18-mile-long stretch, Florida's largest island, bore the brunt of Hurricane Ian's devastating force.

Before the storm, Pine Island provided a pleasant glimpse into Florida's past, to a time before high-rise condos and five-star resorts. Its no-frills communities include Bokeelia to the north to St. James City to the south. Before driving onto the island, motorists go through Matlacha (“mat-la-SHAY”). Wiped out by Hurricane Ian but with a temporary road now in place, the once-walkable span connecting Matlacha and Pine Island proudly bore the nickname “The Fishingest Bridge in the World.”

■ Port Charlotte

When Forbes magazine in 2015 named the best 25 places to retire in America, Port Charlotte was on the list.

Forbes noted that the cost of living was 8% lower in Port Charlotte than the rest of the country and cited the unincorporated community for its above-average air quality and low rate of serious crime. It

also has great recreation, shopping and culture.

And just a short drive to airports in Punta Gorda, Sarasota and Fort Myers, Port Charlotte isn't just a great place to retire, as Forbes noted. It's a great place to live, period.

■ Punta Gorda

In Punta Gorda, time is divided between now and B.C., or Before Charley, the powerful hurricane that barreled through the city in 2004.

In the wake of the storm, Punta Gorda essentially reinvented itself.

Nestled along the water where the Peace River meets Charlotte Harbor, the city retains that old-time Florida feel with a historic district near a charming downtown. Although small, Punta Gorda offers much in the way of beauty, art and culture. One of the biggest post-Charley changes was the addition of the Charlotte Harbor & Event Center, a waterfront venue for all sorts of activities a short walk from downtown restaurants, shops and galleries.

■ Sanibel-Captiva

The reopening of the Sanibel Causeway linking these barrier islands to the Lee County mainland within two weeks of Hurricane Ian was an astonishing accomplishment by all measures. It was 1963 when the 3-mile-long span first made the islands accessible by car. Check for updates about public access to the islands.

Residents and visitors alike all look forward to the day when Sanibel and Captiva welcome beachcombers back to do the “Sanibel Stoop” in search of shells, to pedal miles of idyllic bike paths and to hike, bike or drive through the J.N. “Ding” Darling National Wildlife Refuge, where more than 220 species of birds come to roost. ■



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SWFL SPORTS

BEYOND THE SUN AND SAND: DELVING INTO AN ECLECTIC ATHLETIC LANDSCAPE

BY GLENN MILLER

Florida Weekly Correspondent

Any sport that doesn't require mountains or snow likely is played somewhere in Southwest Florida, a sun-splashed haven for nearly every sporting dream. Well, almost. We've got bocce and disc golf, traditional golf, mountain biking, tennis and pickleball plus spectator sports such as professional baseball and Division 1 collegiate basketball and one of the nation's finest junior college athletic programs.

There's also croquet and shuffleboard, swimming and tennis, softball and volleyball. That includes indoor and beach versions of volleyball.

Four Major League Baseball teams

make their Spring Training homes here: the Boston Red Sox and Minnesota Twins in Lee County, the Tampa Bay Rays in Charlotte County and the Atlanta Braves in North Port, which is in Sarasota County.

Southwest Florida is blessed with a division 1 collegiate athletic program at Florida Gulf Coast University and features a top-flight junior college athletic program at Florida SouthWestern State College. Both schools are in Lee County and have on-campus arenas for their basketball and volleyball teams as well as baseball diamonds.

In Collier County, Ave Maria University has a robust athletic program that includes men's baseball, basketball, football, golf, tennis and women's basketball, soccer,

lacrosse, softball, and beach and indoor volleyball.

The region has minor-league sports such as the Fort Myers Mighty Mussels baseball team and the Florida Everblades hockey team.

■ Bowling, Bocce and Croquet

Although Southwest Florida is blessed with 12 months of sunshine and warm weather and abundant outdoor sports opportunities for participants and spectators, indoor sports also abound.

Bowling alleys proliferate in the region, from north to south. A quick survey finds more than we can mention here but the list finds Bowland Beacon in Naples, Bowland Midpoint in Cape Coral and Bowland Port Charlotte in that



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SWFL SPORTS



community.

No list of local bowling facilities would likely be complete without a mention of Gator Lanes, a fixture in Fort Myers since 1978.

Bocce is another sport that includes rolling a ball but is typically played outdoors. In Southwest Florida, that means 12 months of outdoor bocce.

There are bocce courts available in community parks such as Veteran's Community Park and Cambier Park in

Naples and Veterans Park in Cape Coral.

Babcock Ranch offers bocce as well as a wide range of other sports options.

Bocce is immensely popular in many gated communities. There is a 12-team Naples Bocce League. It is comprised of teams from 12 communities such as Bentley Village The Quarry and Vineyards.

Another outdoor sport involving a ball is croquet, which also includes mallets. Croquet isn't as widely available as bocce

or bowling but croquet lawns are scattered about the region.

Babcock Ranch and the Naples Croquet & Lawn Bowling Club offer lawns as well as Wyndemere Country Club.

The oldest croquet in the area is likely the one on Useppa Island, which opened in 1978.

■ Disc, Not Disco, Golf

This variation of the traditional sport doesn't require as much space or money and the courses aren't as numerous around Southwest Florida. But we do have disc golf courses scattered around the region, from the Bird Bay Executive Course in Venice to courses in Collier County, Estero, North Fort Myers and Port Charlotte.

The Bonita Springs Recreation Center, Naples' Palm Springs Park Ave Maria's North Park all provide disc golf courses.

Wait! There are more!

A disc golf course is likely nearby no matter where one resides in Southwest Florida.

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For example: South Charlotte Regional Park and Fort Myers Riverside Church and Estero Disc Golf Course and one in North Fort Myers Community Church.

■ Pickling Away

The sport of pickleball didn't even exist when many of its most fervent players were born. The sport was created in 1965. The cross between badminton, table tennis, and court tennis has boomed beyond what anybody could likely have imagined half a century ago.

And today in Southwest Florida, pickleball courts are nearly as ubiquitous as chain drug stores.

East Naples Community Park has 64 courts and is the home of the U.S. Open Pickleball Championships.

But the sport is played all over the region, from the 16-court PicklePlex on the Charlotte County campus of Florida SouthWestern State College to courts in thriving new communities such as Babcock Ranch and some that have been converted from tennis courts at the venerable Fort Myers Racquet Club.

Courts can be found down south at the Marco Island Recreation Center and up north at the Venice Community Center and in between at Cape Coral parks.

Many gated communities now also sport pickle ball



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SWFL SPORTS

courts as well as community parks in places between Marco Island and Venice. Courts have sprouted up in YMCAs in Bonita Springs and Marco Island.

The Estero Recreation Center and Brooks Community Park in Fort Myers and Camelot Park in Cape Coral all boast pickle ball courts.

No matter where one resides a pickleball court is likely a short drive or even walk away. Courts can be found at the Harold Avenue Regional Park in Port Charlotte and Gilchrist Park in Punta Gorda.

The pickleball world has certainly changed and grown since 1965.

■ Mountain Biking

They're called the Florida Mudcutters, a band of mountain bikers who participate in their sport a very long way from the nearest mountain. Its 100-plus members in Collier, Lee, Hendry, southern Charlotte and southern Glades counties pedal trails from Fort Lauderdale to North Port, Gainesville

and Lakeland. Caloosahatchee Regional Park near Alva in east Lee County has 11.5 miles of trails that the Mudcutters website refers to as "single track."

Trails are typically open from mid-October to June or July, depending on the amount of rain that has fallen (most trails are made from clay-based dirt that becomes slippery when wet).

From the Mudcutters website: "Our goal at Mudcutters is to improve the cycling experience for new and advanced mountain bike riders, as well as to maintain and improve the bike trails at Caloosahatchee Regional Park."

For more information, visit mudcutters.org or send an email to florida.mudcutters@gmail.com.

■ Spring Training

MLB training has been a Southwest Florida fixture for nearly a century, dating back to 1924 when the New York Giants started training in Sarasota. In 1925, Fort Myers joined the spring training party when the Philadelphia A's

started training at Terry Park.

The first Southwest Florida World Series winners were the Philadelphia As, who won it all in 1929 and 1930. They trained at Terry Park in Fort Myers from 1925-1936.

Now four teams train in the region. The Boston Red Sox and Minnesota Twins call Fort Myers home. The Tampa Bay Rays' spring training home is the Charlotte Sports Park and the Atlanta Braves are in North Port.



The Twins, Rays and Braves all qualified for the 2023 playoffs.

Teams arrive in February and play about 17 home games in what is called the Grapefruit League. Find out more about the 2024 Spring Training season at mlb.com. ■

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NAME	EMPLOYEES	NAME	EMPLOYEES
1 Lee Health	14,028	42 Dillard's	764
2 Lee County School District	11,003	43 Gettel Automotive	760
3 Publix Super Market	9,768	44 Burger King	753
4 Lee County Local Government	9,142	45 U.S. Sugar	750
5 NCH Healthcare System	8,159	46 Hilton Brand	750
6 Walmart	7,286	47 Naples Grande Beach Resort	750
7 Collier County School District	5,756	48 Hendry County Local Government	710
8 Collier County Local Government	5,173	49 Herc Rentals	700
9 Arthrex	4,087	50 GenesisCare	699
10 Marriott International Inc.	3,620	51 Waterman Broadcasting	688
11 Bayfront Health	2,801	52 CVS	670
12 Charlotte County Local Government	2,614	53 TJX Cos.	659
13 McDonald's	2,613	54 RE/MAX Realty	650
14 Home Depot	2,497	55 Culver's	635
15 Charlotte County School District	2,152	56 Florida Cancer Specialists	620
16 Winn-Dixie	1,899	57 Perkins	612
17 Hope Hospice	1,838	58 Costco Wholesale	600
18 Chico's Fas Inc.	1,552	59 Downing Frye Realty	600
19 Florida Gulf Coast University	1,519	60 Wendy's	597
20 Bloomin' Brands Inc.	1,395	61 Bonita Bay Club	596
21 Realogy Holdings Corp.	1,381	62 Apollo Global Management	595
22 Darden Restaurants	1,380	63 Vi at Bentley Village	585
23 Target	1,300	64 Florida SouthWestern State College	559
24 Walgreens	1,170	65 Raymond Building Supply	554
25 Yum! Brands Inc.	1,141	66 IHG Hotels & Resorts	547
26 Lowe's Home Improvement	1,135	67 Dine Brands	526
27 Inspire Brands	1,133	68 Germain Cars	514
28 USPS	1,132	69 Cracker Barrel Old Country Store	505
29 Seminole Tribe of Florida	1,128	70 Gulf Bay Group of Companies	500
30 Hertz Inc.	1,073	71 South Seas Sanibel & Captiva	500
31 John R. Wood Properties	1,051	72 Chili's Grill & Bar	494
32 Vance Brothers	1,001	73 Farm-Op Inc.	480
33 Shell Point Retirement Community	1,000	74 Best Buy	470
34 Keller Williams Realty	989	75 JC Penney	458
35 Brookdale	985	76 Quick Lane	450
36 Moorings Park	924	77 News-Press	450
37 Hendry County School District	892	78 Hyatt	440
38 Berkshire Hathaway Inc.	841	79 Texas Roadhouse	439
39 YMCA	820	80 UPS Store	435
40 Pacific Tomato Growers	800	81 Life Care Centers of America	405
41 Bealls	773	82 Truist	405
		83 Pandera Bread	405
		84 Golden Gate Capital	401
		85 Naples Luxury Imports	401

SOURCE: REGIONAL ECONOMIC RESEARCH INSTITUTE, LAST UPDATED AUG. 4, 2021.



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Art Walk happens every first Friday evening, while Music Walk is every third Friday evening.

— myriverdistrict.com

Cape Coral Music & Arts Fusion Walk

Nov. 18, Feb. 17, March 16
Come out for an evening of live music, and vendors and support local businesses. This event will feature pop-up shops by local artists that showcase everything from handmade jewelry to paintings!

— SE 47th Terrace, Cape Coral
capecoral.gov

Bonita Springs Holiday of the Arts

Nov. 25-26

— 28001 Old 41 Road
paragonfestivals.com

Fort Myers Seafood & Music Festival

Jan. 5-7

— Downtown Fort Myers
paragonfestivals.com

Bonita Springs National Art Festivals

Jan. 13-14, Feb. 10-11, March 2-3

Enjoy the work of national and international artists in the quaint ambience of downtown



Edison Festival of Light Grand Parade

CHRIS TILLEY / FLORIDA WEEKLY

Bonita.

— Riverside Park
artcenterbonita.org

Myers winter resident Thomas Edison.

— Downtown Fort Myers
edisonfestival.org

Edison Festival of Light Grand Parade

Feb. 18

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Jan. 19-20

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— Downtown Fort Myers
artfestfortmyers.com

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swflcfair.com

Southwest Florida Reading Festival

March 2
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— Fort Myers Regional Library
readfest.org

ECHO's Global Food & Farm Festival

March 12-16
—17391 Durrance Road, Fort Myers
echonet.org

Fort Myers River District Music Festival

March 22-24
— Downtown Fort Myers
paragonfestivals.com

Sounds of Jazz & Blues

March 23
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— Coral Oaks Golf Course, Cape Coral
capeconcerts.com

Bonita Springs Festival of the Arts

May 11-12
— 28001 Old 41 Road
paragonfestivals.com

Fort Myers Film Festival

May 22-26
— Sidney & Berne Davis Art Center
fortmyersfilmfestival.com



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naplesgov.com

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—Fleischman Park, Naples
naplesart.org

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swampbuggy.com

Naples Artcrafters

Dec. 9, Jan. 13, Feb. 10, March 9 and April 13

— Cambier Park, Naples
naplesartcrafters.com

Marco Island Outdoor Art and Craft Show

Jan. 6-7, Feb. 10-11, March 23-24

marcoislandart.org

New Year's Art Fair

Jan. 6-7

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—Downtown Naples
naplesart.org

Everglades Seafood Festival

Feb. 2-4

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— 102 Copeland Ave. N., Everglades City
evergladesseafoodfestival.org

National Art Fair

Feb. 23-25

—Downtown Naples
naplesart.org

Art in the Park

March 2

— Cambier Park, Naples
naplesart.org

Naples St. Patrick's Day Parade

March 16

— 5th Ave S, Naples
naplesparade.com

Collier County Fair

March 21-31

—Collier Fairgrounds Naples
colliercountyfair.com

Gulf Coast Orchid Alliance's Orchid Show and Sale

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March 23-24

—naplesart.org

Naples Flower Show

April 5-6

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— Naples Botanical Garden
naplesgardenclub.org

Cars as Art

April 6

— Marco Island Center for the Arts
marcoislandart.org

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Festival

Nov. 25-26, Jan. 20-21, March 9-10

—331 Sullivan St, Punta Gorda
artfestival.com

Punta Gorda Seafood & Music Festival

Jan. 12-14

— Laishley Park
paragonfestivals.com

Charlotte County Fair

Jan. 26 - Feb. 4

— Charlotte County Fairgrounds
thecharlottecountyfair.com

Englewood Seafood & Music Festival

Feb. 2-4

—348 W Green St, Englewood
paragonfestivals.com

Babcock Ranch Seafood & Music Festival

Feb. 16-18

—42850 Crescent Loop, Punta Gorda
paragonfestivals.com

Punta Gorda Pub Crawl & Food Drive

Feb. 24

This sellout event draws a crowd to enjoy live music and vendors of all kinds all along Virginia Street, collect food for the Harry Chaplin Food Bank, and “crawl” from local pub to another.

—puntagordapubcrawl.com

Peace River National Art Festival

March 16-17

Experience an artistic celebration along the Peace River in historic Punta Gorda,

curated by the Visual Arts Center. Accomplished artists from across the nation will showcase their skills in diverse mediums like art glass, fiber arts, jewelry, leather goods, metalwork, oil paintings, photography, pottery, stone sculptures and watercolor.

— Laishley Park, Punta Gorda
boulderbrook.net

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April 19-20

— Charlotte County Fairgrounds
thecharlottecountyfair.com

— Events may be rescheduled or canceled. Check the official event website for the latest updates.

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SWFL INSIDER

EXPLORING SWFL'S SECRET DELIGHTS BEYOND THE TYPICAL TOURIST CIRCUIT

BY CHELLE KOSTER WALTON
Florida Weekly Correspondent

We have our share (and then some) of headlining attractions — from superlative beaches and golf courses to top-notch cultural attractions, shopping, restaurants and festivals. Instead, SWFL Insider takes you to our best local secrets, those hidden gems shy of the limelight.

Local history lessons

How were Punta Gorda's early Black population important to the settling of Charlotte County? What ancient discov-



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SWFL INSIDER



Williams Academy
Black History Museum,
Fort Myers

COURTESY PHOTO

eries on Marco Island deepened knowledge of Native American history? Who were the Baileys of Sanibel?

Small museums and historic sites reveal the untold stories of Southwest Florida. Blanchard House Museum in Punta Gorda, for instance, tells how African Americans settled the area and even signed the Punta Gorda charter.

In Fort Myers, the Williams Academy Black History Museum further explores African American contributions in a historic clapboard building, part of the first government-funded Black school serving the local three-county area.

The Marco Island Historical Museum delves into a different culture: Its life-size dioramas illustrate the lives and times of the ancient Calusa tribe, who built towering mounds and one of their major settlements on the island.

Other sites throughout the region concentrate on different periods and facets of local history. Naples Depot Museum

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(currently closed during hurricane recovery) focuses on how trains, planes, automobiles and other forms of transportation impacted the city's development. The nearby Historic Palm Cottage, Naples' oldest house, interprets the early days of settlement by the town's first snowbirds.

Stroll through the past al fresco at a number of novel historic experiences. Punta Gorda's Mural Trail, for instance, takes in more than 30 outdoor, larger-than-life paintings that revisit local scenes from marine creatures to early military aircraft.

The Punta Gorda History Park features a collection of historic structures including a cigar home, a jail and the town's oldest building. The Sanibel Historical Museum & Village gradually reopens after Hurricane Ian in 2022. It takes visitors on a trip into island by-gones, including, when fully reopened, 11 historic structures and a pioneer garden.



PUNTA GORDA HISTORICAL MURAL SOCIETY / COURTESY PHOTO

Film as art

Film is very much alive in Southwest Florida, despite rumors that streaming has stabbed it in the back like a ruthless murder-mystery villain.

The annual Naples International Film Festival has established



a reputation in these parts for deep appreciation of indie, mainstream, documentary, domestic and foreign film. It takes place in October at various Naples venues and is the gala culmination of Artis—Naples' popular seasonal film and lecture series called "Four

Harold's



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Harold's was founded in 2015 by Harold Balink, one of the most well-known chefs in Southwest Florida. This upscale restaurant features a rotating weekly menu which features dishes that show the Chef's sensibilities. All dishes are made from scratch and farm-sourced.

The restaurant space has a modern, but intimate atmosphere with a friendly staff. Featuring a full bar, semi-open kitchen, and new dining room, Harold's is a sleek, comfortable, nuanced dining experience for all ages.




SWFL INSIDER

O'clock at the Movies."

In its wake, other festivals and series have bolstered the region's film obsession. One of the most notable festivals takes place in Fort Myers during one week in May at the Sidney & Berne Davis Art Center. In its 14th year, FMFF spins off from a popular T.G.I.M. (Thank God It's Monday) monthly series that takes place in the months before the festival.

The long-running Fort Myers Beach International Film Festival airs independent short, full-length, student-produced and documentary films in September.

Punta Gorda hosts its one-day Short Film Festival each March at the Charlotte Harbor Event and Conference Center.

Bonita Springs, also hosts a Short Film Festival, but in May, and its Center for the Arts runs a seasonal Monday night film series in its Moe Auditorium & Film Center.



COURTESY PHOTO

Other film goings-on in the area fill different niches.

Three festivals, for instance, concentrate on Jewish films: the Sydney R. Hoffman Memorial Jewish Film Festival in Marco Island, the Jewish Film Festival of Southwest Florida presented by the Jewish Federation of Lee & Charlotte Counties in Fort Myers, and the Beth Tikvah Naples Jewish Film Festival.

Souvenir savvy

Skip the beach snow globes (does that even make any sense?) and alligator jaws. Look instead for creations made by local crafts-folk and artists. Watch for seasonal art fairs and markets for a well-rounded selection. Many year-round, specialized shops, galleries and boutiques also carry gifts that convey a sense of place.

You will find some of the best buys at attraction gift shops. Our favorites include Naples Botanical Garden and the Edison and Ford Winter Estates, where, besides live plants, you can find garden accessories and locally made gifts. The Refuge

Nature Store at J.N. "Ding" Darling National Wildlife Refuge devotes much of its space to local artisan wares.

Art facilities throughout Southwest Florida showcase the work of local creators. The Visual Arts Center in Punta Gorda houses an art supply shop and an expansive gift gallery featuring mediums from jewelry to pottery. Downtown Pun-



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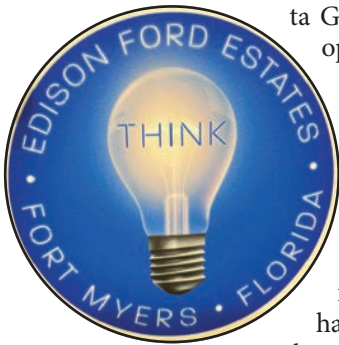
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ta Gorda's Artisan Atelier affords opportunities to meet and watch artists as they create. Besides exhibition art, Alliance for the Arts in Fort Myers sells one-of-a-kind, handmade pieces in its gift shop. Likewise, the visual arts component at Centers for the Arts Bonita Springs has fine arts and crafts for purchase in its galleries and gift shop.

Handcrafted keepsakes, wearable art and other gifts made locally fill the airy, glass-walled space at BIG ARTS on Sanibel Island.

In the literary arts genre, Southwest Florida boasts several local authors whose books make great reminders of time spent here. Most well-known, Randy Wayne White pens bestselling murder-mysteries, many with a local setting. Find his



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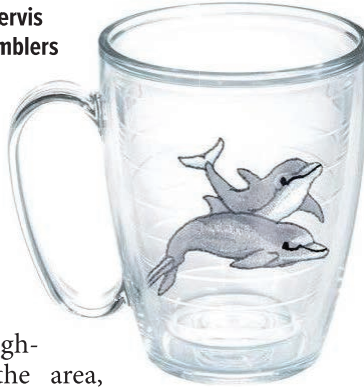
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books at Doc Ford's Sanibel Rum Bar & Grill, named for his leading protagonist, or at indie bookstores such as MacIntosh Books + Paper at Bell Tower Shops in Fort Myers) and Copperfish Books in Punta Gorda. The Edison and Ford Winter Estates gift shop also carries Mr. White's books.

Food and other products made right here in Southwest Florida also make nice souvenirs. Think Tervis Tumblers, the durable insulated drinkware available at various brand stores and other outlets

Tervis Tumblers



throughout the area, and Sun Harvest Citrus in Fort Myers for locally produced juices, honey, hot sauces and other culinary goodies.

Must-pause places for breakfast or lunch

Don't even think about going to these restaurants for dinner. They do breakfast, brunch and lunch so well, they simply shut down after that and call it a day.

Many serve breakfast until they close, affirming its importance in the meal-of-the-day hierarchy.

The eateries range from well-loved, all-American, hash-slinging institutions to specialized houses serving global fare and vegan/vegetarian offerings.

In the first category, Sweet's Diner in Port Charlotte lives in a strip mall, as many of this ilk do, and touts its Breakfast Pile Up, an apt description of its monumental layering of home fries, biscuits, meat, veggies and gravy.

Long-standing Marti's Family Dining has a faithful following in south Fort Myers on the way to Fort Myers Beach (go for its pork tenderloin sandwich), as does 35-year-old Oasis Restaurant in downtown Fort Myers.

Philly food fans should check out Old 41 Restaurant in Bonita Springs. Southern eats? The Rooster Food + Drink in Naples defines soul comfort food in a modern setting.



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Sweet's Diner, Port Charlotte



Old 41 Restaurant, Bonita Springs



Harvest & Wisdom at Shangri-La Springs in Bonita Springs

For something a bit different, Cape Coral's Café YOU dabbles in Australian and healthy fare plus yummy baked goods. Skinny Dogz Brunchery's scratch kitchen is all over the globe, but you can't beat its burgers. Harvest & Wisdom at Shangri-La Springs in Bonita Springs

draws from the property's organic gardens at brunch. For a taste of Europe in Naples, try Jane's Café on 3rd and The Café Kitchen & Juicery downtown or Café Crème de la Crème midtown for ooh-la-la crepes, pastries and sandwiches. ■


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239-489-1221, belltowerfl.com
Sunday-Wednesday, 11 a.m. - 9 p.m.
Thursday-Saturday, 11 a.m. - 10 p.m.

Coconut Point

This picturesque open-air mall has more than 140 stores, from Dillard's and Target to Lilly Pulitzer, Banana Republic and the Apple Store, plus a Regal Cinemas and a host of fine restaurants to please

every appetite.

— 23106 Fashion Drive, Estero
239-992-4259, simon.com/mall/coconut-point
Monday-Thursday, 10 a.m. - 7 p.m.
Friday-Saturday, 10 a.m. - 8 p.m.
Sunday, noon-6 p.m.

Edison Mall

The region's original indoor mall, which celebrated its 50th anniversary in 2015, is anchored by Macy's, JC Penney and Dillard's.

— 4125 Cleveland Avenue, Fort Myers
239-939-1933, shopedisonmall.com
Monday-Thursday, 11 a.m. - 7 p.m.
Friday-Saturday, 10 a.m. - 8 p.m.
Sunday, noon-6 p.m.

Gulf Coast Town Center

This outdoor mall continues to expand since its first phase opened more than 15



years ago just off Interstate 75 at Alico Road near Florida Gulf Coast University. The center features Bass Pro Shops, Belk, Best Buy, Costco, Dick's Sporting Goods, and Target as anchors. There's also a variety of dining options to suit every budget and taste.

— 9903 Gulf Coast Main Street, Fort Myers
239-267-5107, gulfcoasttowncenter.com

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Miromar Outlets

Miromar Outlets

More than 140 designer and brand-name retailers here include Saks Fifth Avenue OFF 5TH, Adidas, Lucky Brand, Brooks Brothers, Ecco Shoes, Coach and Columbia. There's a Norman Love Confections chocolate salon, too, and dining options from pretzels and pizza to Greek and burgers.

— 10801 Corkscrew Road, Estero
239-948-3766, miromaroutlets.com
Monday-Thursday, 10 a.m. - 7 p.m.
Friday-Saturday, 10 a.m. - 8 p.m.
Sunday, 11 a.m. - 6 p.m.

Periwinkle Place

Once selected by the Lee County Visitor and Convention Bureau as Sanibel's top

shopping destination, this gem on the island's Periwinkle Way suffered the wrath of Hurricane Ian and remained closed as of press time.

—2075 Periwinkle Way, Sanibel
239.395.1914, periwinkleplace.com

Promenade at Bonita Bay

With fashions for all ages, home decor and great gifts, salons, restaurants, a gourmet market and even a Saturday farmer's market, Promenade at Bonita Bay attracts both locals and visitors from around the world. This open-air center is Lee County's southernmost shopping, dining and entertainment destination.

— 26811 South Bay Drive, Bonita Springs
239.949.1573, promenadeshops.com
Oct. 15 - April 30
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Sunday, noon-5 p.m.
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Sanibel Outlets

Just east of the Lee Island Coast, Sanibel Outlets' 40-plus designer name shops and the play area for kids remains closed from the aftermath of Hurricane Ian. Be sure to check the status before venturing out.

— 20350 Summerlin Road, Fort Myers
dahlmannproperties.com/retail-properties/sanibel-outlets

COLLIER COUNTY

Coastland Center

Opened in 1976, Coastland Center is anchored by Macy's, JCPenney and Dillard's. In all, there are more than 130 places to shop and dine.

— 1900 Tamiami Trail N., Naples
239-262-2323, coastlandcenter.com
Monday-Thursday, 11 a.m. - 7 p.m.
Friday-Saturday, 11 a.m. - 8 p.m.
Sunday, noon - 6 p.m.
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Mercato

Anchored by Whole Foods Market and Silverspot Cinema, Mercato offers upscale retailers and luxury residential condominiums. The year-round event calendar includes live music, festivals and fairs, most of which are free.

— 9132 Strada Place, North Naples
239-254-1080, mercatoshops.com
Monday - Saturday, 10 a.m. - 9 p.m.
Sunday, noon - 6 p.m.

Fifth Avenue South

Naples' tony Fifth Avenue South is a timeless mix of glamour and laid-back ease for shopping, dining and entertainment. Historic and modern architecture blend in eclectic sophistication, and tropical blooms grace its pedestrian-friendly promenades.

—Fifth Avenue South, Naples
239-692-8436, fifthavenuesouth.com

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239-434-6533, thirdstreetsouth.com

The Village on Venetian Bay

Set on the waterfront of Venetian Bay, the village encompasses almost 50 shops and restaurants. Be sure to check out the special events calendar.

— 4200 Gulf Shore Boulevard North, Naples
239-261-6100, venetianvillage.com

Waterside Shops

A collection luxury brand retailers from around the world and elegant dining options in a tranquil, outdoor environment. Anchored by Saks Fifth Avenue, the center's 60-plus stores include Gucci, Johnny Was, Lilly Pulitzer, Lululemon, Tiffany & Co., Tory Burch, Van Cleef & Arpels, St. John and Tesla.

— 5415 Tamiami Trail N., Naples
239-598-1605, watersideshops.com

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— 1441 Tamiami Trail
 941-624-4833, portcharlottetowncenter.com
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— 1200 West Retta Esplanade
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BY CHELLE KOSTER WALTON

Florida Weekly Correspondent

Talk about character! Southwest Florida brims with neighborhoods and communities that defy pigeon-holing. From historic riverfront downtowns to up-and-coming shopping districts, you've got a lot of exploring to do.

South Cape

Three parallel roads — Cape Coral Parkway, SE 47th Terrace and Lafayette Street — define Cape Coral's downtown area, which has evolved over the past decade into a dining and entertainment mecca. Cape Coral Parkway, the main thoroughfare, takes motorists from the



South Cape

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Caloosahatchee River waterfront to the heart of the city, lined with fun and quirky dining establishments with names like Nevermind Awesome Bar & Eatery and Nice Guys Pizza.

Slip off the parkway in either direction to find more fun spots. To the west on Lafayette Street, you'll find Jungle Bird Authentic Tiki and the Monkey Bar Steak & Seafood. Head east to SE 47th Terrace and you'll land at a streetscaped pedestrian mall, where deciding on a place to eat and drink requires serious research (or determined barhopping). There's Cork Soakers Deck & Wine Bar, Front Porch Social, Sage on 47th, Fish Tale Grill, Dixie Live —the list goes on and on. Many establishments on Cape Coral Parkway are also accessible from the pedestrian walkway through their backdoors, giving them a speakeasy feel.

Downtown Cape Coral takes advantage of its abundant eat-and-sip options with trolley-hop events to celebrate everything from New Year's Eve and St. Patrick's Day

to bacon and martinis. Other downtown events include arts festivals, gay pride parades, farmers markets, bike nights, symphonies in the park and pub crawls.

South Cape's renewal got its jump start in 2019 with a \$13 million beautification project that added brick-paved pathways and pedestrian crossings, decorative streetlamps, a traffic roundabout and public Wi-fi. Today, the SE 47th Terrace promenade continues to buzz day and night with diners and clubbers looking for the heart of Cape Coral's social scene.

Downtown Bonita

Old 41 Road takes you to the historic heart of Bonita Springs. Dating back to the 1920s, downtown backslid for many decades as the action moved out to the new U.S. 41, or Tamiami Trail.

In the past handful of years, however, downtown Bonita has slowly but surely reverted to its glory days. Three historic hubs reflect the community's roots and glow today with restoration and

preservation efforts.

Since 1921, Shangri-La Hotel has graced the banks of the springs that gave the town its name. Since then, it has undergone several reincarnations, eventually as today's healthful asylum and spa with the organic garden-fed Harvest & Wisdom restaurant.

To the north, Wonder Gardens surfaced as a roadside wildlife attraction in 1936. Today's version keeps the gator appeal and adds sophistication with Victorian structures, a tearoom and animal encounters.

Riverside Park has returned as downtown's community center, where festivals, movie nights and other family-friendly gatherings happen among the amphitheater, mid-20th century Liles Hotel and fish houses turned retail shops and galleries. Rooftop at Riverside food truck park was scheduled to add to the excitement in October.

Interspersed between the relics of yesteryear, entertainment venues such

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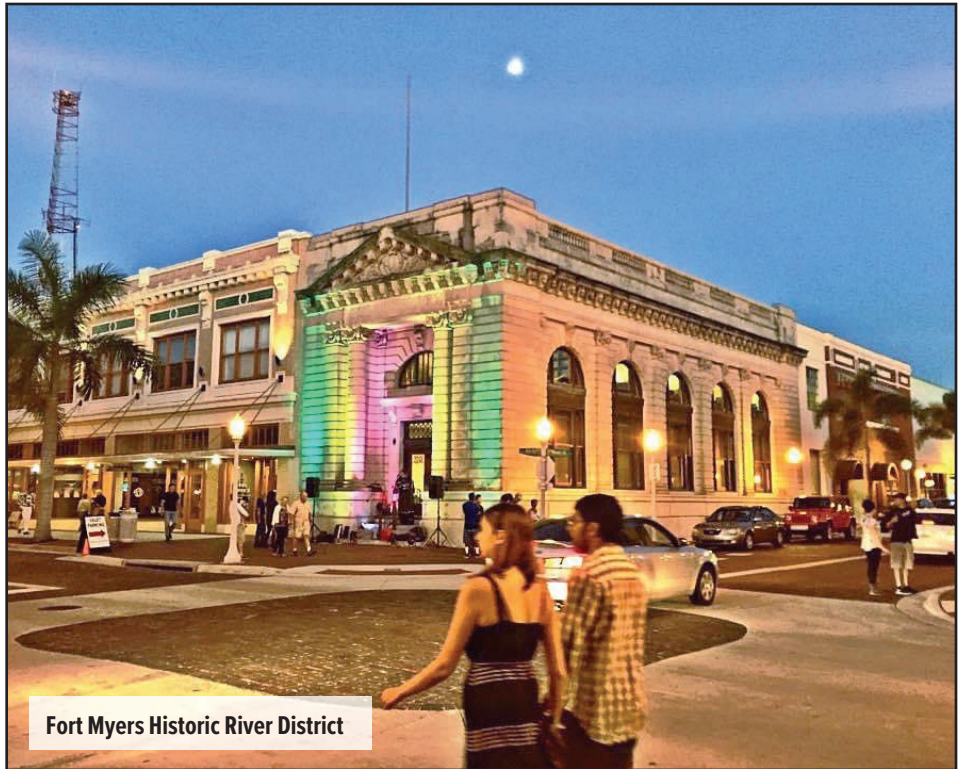
SWFL FIVE WAYS

as Chartreuse Craft Cocktail Lounge, Downtown Coffee and Wine, Ceremony Brewing and The Bohemian restaurant have blossomed among longtime favorites like Grandpa’s Pizza and Mexican-steeped Maria’s Restaurant. Also in October, The Causeway Bonita was set to open on the fringes of downtown- Southwest Florida’s first food hall with craft beers, three restaurants, and a bakery-ice creamery.

Fort Myers Historic River District

Like many downtowns of a certain age, there came a time for Fort Myers when urban sprawl left its core looking a little abandoned and forlorn. With all its historic gems, however, wiser heads prevailed to save the Historic River District from falling victim to trends and “out with the old” attitudes.

Thanks largely to the vigor of the Edison & Ford Winter Estates at its fringes, historic downtown renewed. An old, achingly handsome federal building



Fort Myers Historic River District

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Fort Myers Historic River District

became an art center; a circa-1915 vaudeville house, a theater. Stores and restaurants moved into buildings dating back to the late 18th century, as was the case with The Veranda, a gracious restaurant that lives in two pioneer homes.

Ambitious undertakings like the Franklin Shops turned one vintage structure into a crafty mall of sorts. Bars and lounges drew a young crowd to frenzied hangouts such as the Sky Bar and Cowboy Up.

The riverfront spruced up with the remastering of Centennial Park and the appearance of Luminary Hotel &

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SWFL FIVE WAYS

Co. with its modern good looks rooted in local history (named for Thomas Edison's glowing claim-to-fame). With it came another rooftop bar, a sports bar with a golf simulator and a smattering of other food and beverage hotspots.

The Historic River District continues to take full advantage of its waterfront beauty and bygones intrigue as more hotels move in and people of all ages come out for its monthly street parties and annual festivals.

Downtown Punta Gorda

Another downtown, a different river running through it, old Punta Gorda turns its face toward the Peace River, as it has since the late 19th century. It remembers the past in a series of larger-than-life murals throughout its streets. They recall railroad days, the area's fishing heritage, conquistadors, cattle drives and other highlights of the small town's heyday.

Marion Avenue constitutes the main drag for shoppers and diners, who find anything but cookie-cutter in art galleries,



gift boutiques and restaurants like The Perfect Caper at the high end and Celtic Ray Public House, a long-enduring Irish

pub filled with character and, typically, characters.

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SWFL FIVE WAYS



Downtown Punta Gorda

Taylor, and Olympia hold more gems begging to be explored. On the riverfront, Wyvern Hotel and its rooftop bar and Four Points by Sheraton and its TT's Tiki Bar keep the party going day long.

Laishley Park and its namesake crab house serve the salty crowd and families along the town's extensive system of bike trails skirting the river. Stately historic homes and Gilchrist Park on Retta Esplanade keep Punta Gorda rooted to its past.

Follow the river west to Charlotte Harbor and you reach another relic of the past: the old city docks remade into the entertainment, lodging and shopping center known as Fishermen's Village.

The new Military Heritage Museum next door is worth a visit. Its Gulf Theater hosts tribute bands and other live performances, while downtown's Charlotte Harbor Event and Conference Center books acts from concerts to expos.

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SWFL FIVE WAYS

Naples Design District

One of the most burgeoning retail neighborhoods of Southwest Florida has been around for decades, but only in the past few years has hit its stride. Just in time for Hurricane Ian to hit below the proverbial belt, but it has completely recovered.

Defined as a 12-block area northeast of famed Fifth Avenue South's tony eat-and-shop strip, the Naples Design District at the intersection of Central Avenue and Tamiami Trail started out as a shopping destination for working decorators and DIY home improvers.

More recently, art galleries, architect offices and food-and-drink venues joined antique shops and second-hand stores. The vibe turned youthful and lively, with a brand of chic between shabby and snobby. The future brightened with the recent opening of The Collective, a hub of design businesses. Warren American Whiskey Kitchen will be opening its doors



in November at the complex, joining other restaurants within the District, including Bodega Ole and Grappino. Riptide Brewing Company pours craft beers. A community sculpture park, in partnership with Naples Botanical Garden, opened in March to celebrate

the District's comeback from Hurricane Ian destruction and Naples' centennial. On the horizon, Gulfshore Playhouse's new and state-of-the-art facility plans to open in 2024 and boutique AC Hotel by Marriott Naples 5th Avenue by December 2023.

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STATE AND NATIONAL PARKS

Hurricane Ian had a notable impact on numerous beloved parks in the region. Before embarking on outdoor adventures this season, it's advisable for individuals to check the respective park websites at floridastateparks.org to stay informed about any updates or changes.

Charlotte Harbor Preserve State Park

Spanning an impressive 42,000 acres, Charlotte Harbor Preserve State Park safeguards an expansive 70-mile stretch of shoreline bordering Charlotte and Lee counties, tracing the picturesque expanse of Charlotte Harbor.

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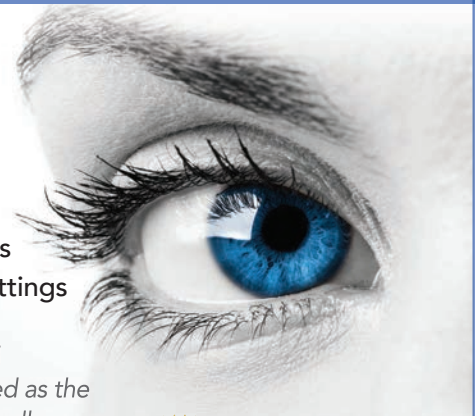
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STATE AND NATIONAL PARKS

Don Pedro Island State Park

A part of an extensive chain of barrier islands extending along Florida’s Gulf Coast, Don Pedro is accessible only by private boat or ferry. Boaters can tie up at the dock on the mangrove-lined bay side of the island.

Boating, canoeing and kayaking, hiking/nature trail, picnicking, fishing, restrooms, swimming, wildlife viewing
 Wednesday-Sunday, 8 a.m. to 5 p.m.
 Closed on Monday and Tuesday.
 8450 Placida Road, Placida
 941-964-0375

Cayo Costa State Park

Cayo Costa State Park is temporarily closed due to damages from Hurricane Ian. However, when the island reopens, it extends a warm welcome to visitors seeking the pristine beauty of untouched Florida. Nestled within the protective embrace of the Charlotte Harbor Estuary, this unspoiled Gulf Coast island is a sanctuary of wind-sculpted trees, inviting beaches,

and the freedom to explore. Accessible solely by boat or kayak, Cayo Costa Island unveils 9 miles of undeveloped shoreline, inviting adventures in swimming, snorkeling, shelling, fishing, and bird-watching. The island is a haven for diverse wildlife, from abundant shorebirds to occasional manatees, porpoises, and sea turtles gracing the offshore waters. When the park is accessible, secure your visit with an online single-use day pass and immerse yourself in the wonders of Cayo Costa.

4 Nautical Miles West of Pine Island (26.685789, -82.245381)
 941-964-0375

Mound Key Archaeological State Park

Prehistoric Native Americans are credited with creating this island’s complex of mounds with an accumulation of seashells, fish bones and pottery. Mound Key is believed to have been the ceremonial center of the Calusa Indians when the Spaniards first attempted to colonize

Southwest Florida.

Boating, fishing, hiking/nature trail, interpretive exhibit, restrooms, wildlife viewing
 Managed by Koreshan State Park
 3800 Corkscrew Road, Estero
 239-992-0311

Gasparilla Island State Park

Part of the Gulf Coast barrier islands, Gasparilla Island is adorned by the restored Port Boca Grande Lighthouse dating back to 1890. Activities like swimming, snorkeling, fishing, and shelling (best in winter) are enjoyed at the island’s five accessible parking lots. Picnics with scenic views are possible at Sandspur and Boca Grande Lighthouse parking lots, both featuring pavilions. The lighthouse also hosts a museum, open for public exploration. Accessible via the Boca Grande Causeway, this island sanctuary awaits at the south end of Gasparilla Island.

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STATE AND NATIONAL **PARKS**

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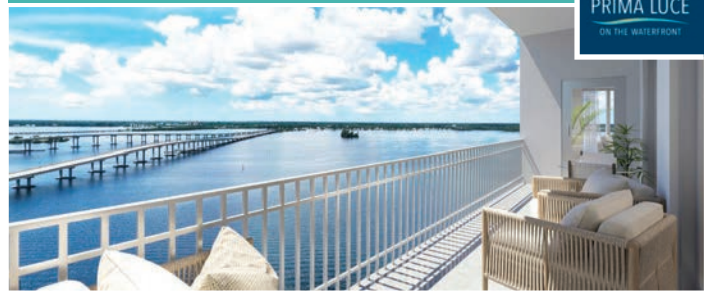
Nestled by the tranquil banks of the Estero River, Koreshan State Park unveils the compelling story of Florida pioneers. Once home to the Koreshans, a 19th-century religious sect led by Dr. Cyrus R. Teed, this place witnessed their unique beliefs in communal living and a universe inside the Earth. Immaculately restored historic buildings stand as a testament to their industrious lives, surrounded by lush gardens and ancient oaks. Amidst the peaceful ambiance of Fort Myers, this park offers a glimpse into a fascinating chapter of history and a chance to connect with nature's serenity.

Boat ramp, camping, canoeing and kayaking, hiking/nature trail, historic site, fishing, picnicking, playground, restrooms, wildlife viewing 3800
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STATE AND NATIONAL PARKS

exploring the last remaining Bay City Walking Dredge, a significant engineering landmark pivotal in constructing the Tamiami Trail Highway. The park offers comfortable campground sites and enriching park programs from December through March, featuring insightful presentations on flora, fauna and history. Traverse scenic trails, canoe down the Blackwater River, or utilize the boat ramp for a remarkable wilderness experience.

Bicycling, boat ramp, camping, canoeing and kayaking, fishing, hiking/nature trail, picnicking, playground, restrooms, showers, wildlife viewing
20200 Tamiami Trail East, Naples
239-394-3397



Lovers Key State Park

Lovers Key State Park

Now open for limited day-use activities, including tram services from 8 a.m. to sunset, providing transportation to within 800 feet of the 2-mile beach, accessible by boardwalk or tram. Paddling equipment, beach chairs and umbrellas are available for rent. The gift shop offers cold drinks

and some merchandise. The Discovery Center is open Wednesday to Friday, 10 a.m. to 1 p.m. The boat ramp is open with limited parking. Please follow posted signs and note that the park does not have electricity. This park is also a haven for wildlife, with the islands and their waters being home to West Indian manatees, bottlenose dolphins, roseate spoonbills,

marsh rabbits and bald eagles.

Beaches, bicycling, boat ramp, canoeing and kayaking, fishing, concession and restaurant, hiking/nature trail, picnicking, playground, restrooms, showers, swimming, tours, visitor center, wildlife viewing
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STATE AND NATIONAL PARKS

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Bicycling, canoeing and kayaking, hiking/nature trail, picnicking, visitor center, wildlife viewing
1 Wildlife Drive, Sanibel
239-472-1100

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sources and protection from would-be predators. That makes the site near Hooker's Prairie one of the largest Roseate Spoonbill breeding colonies in our region, second only to the Alafia Bank Bird Sanctuary. Going forward, Mosaic will partner with Audubon Florida to census the breeding birds at Hooker's Prairie and document the nesting effort by the spoonbills and the many other wading birds that nest there.


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STATE AND NATIONAL PARKS

Big Cypress National Preserve

Since its inception in 1916, Big Cypress has embraced the vital responsibility of safeguarding and preserving the nation's cherished natural landmarks. Drawing over 318 million visitors annually, this remarkable place offers an opportunity to explore and connect with the essence of the United States. Extending its reach beyond the park's confines, Big Cypress actively collaborates with tribes, local governments, nonprofits, businesses and individuals. This collaboration empowers communities to honor their unique histories, preserve their cultural heritage and maintain outdoor spaces, inviting families to relish and cherish these invaluable assets. Their mission is to safeguard the natural and cultural treasures of this land, ensuring their enduring presence for the benefit, education, and inspiration of both present and future generations.

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Big Cypress National Preserve

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STATE AND NATIONAL PARKS

Estero Bay Preserve State Park

Discover Estero Bay Preserve’s natural wonders through rugged trails, traversing diverse uplands and showcasing abundant wildlife and native plants. Ideal for hiking, ensure you have sturdy footwear, insect repellent, sunscreen, and ample water. The preserve is dog-friendly, requiring pets to be leashed. Dive into unique ecosystems at the Estero River Scrub access, home to mesic flatwoods, scrub, salt flats, and various wildlife. Convenient amenities like pavilions, restrooms, and benches enhance your experience. Explore this natural beauty on foot, embracing nature’s rich tapestry.

Bicycling, boating, canoeing and kayaking, fishing, hiking/nature trail, restrooms, wildlife viewing
 4940 Broadway West, Estero
 239-992-0311

Delnor-Wiggins Pass State Park

Delnor-Wiggins Pass State Park has reopened its doors for limited day use, welcoming visitors to enjoy the breathtaking mile-long stretch of pristine sugar sand beach—the jewel of this 166-acre tropical paradise. Renowned as one of the nation’s finest, the beach invites beachgoers, boaters, and divers to relish in its natural splendor. From sunbathing and paddling to hiking and bird-watching, this coastal haven offers an array of activities. Anglers can find designated spots in the northern park areas for a chance at trophy catches. Boaters will appreciate the easily accessible launch area into Turkey Bay, allowing exploration of the Cocohatchee River’s delicate estuaries leading to the expansive Gulf of Mexico. Delnor-Wiggins Pass State Park ensures a memorable coastal experience, providing beach wheelchairs upon reservation and offering a complimentary beach shuttle service from Conner Park, although parking is extremely limited within the park. It’s a destination that invites all to unwind in the embrace of nature’s beauty while adhering to posted guidelines and respecting any closed areas.

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STATE AND NATIONAL PARKS

Fakahatchee Strand Preserve State Park

Fakahatchee Strand Preserve State Park unfurls its welcome to all, beckoning visitors to delve into its unspoiled natural wilderness. With a steadfast commitment to preserving its inherent essence, the park meticulously restricts facilities and activities, preserving an authentic and immersive communion with nature. Segmented into four primary zones, the park offers a journey through the scenic Big Cypress Bend Boardwalk, the picturesque East River reachable by appointment-only canoe launch, the tranquil Jones Grade lakes and trail ideal for fishing and kayaking, and the expansive Janes Memorial Scenic Drive granting access to an array of hiking and biking trails. Traverse the pristine landscapes and vibrant ecosystems, immersing oneself in the heart of Fakahatchee's untamed allure.

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Everglades National Park

For inquiries, contact the Nathaniel P. Reed Visitor Center at 239-695-4758. Due to Hurricane Ian's impact, the Gulf Coast Visitor Center is temporarily closed, but the canoe and kayak launch, parking lot, and covered pavilion remain accessible with limited services. Drinking water is not available. Concession boat tours are currently not operational due to ongoing construction. Everglades National Park, spanning 1.5 million acres of wetland in south Florida, offers



diverse activities across its three separate entrances. Explore wildlife on the Anhinga Trail, savor panoramic views from Shark Valley's observation tower, or paddle through mangroves on Nine-Mile Pond. With myriad options, Everglades National Park is an adventurer's paradise

waiting to be explored.

Hiking, camping, fishing, canoe and kayak trails, boating, tours
Gulf Coast Visitor Center
815 Oyster Bar Lane, Everglades City
239-695-4758

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Source: SWFLA MLS by sales volume in Lee & Collier Counties combined from January 1, 2023 through June 30, 2023.