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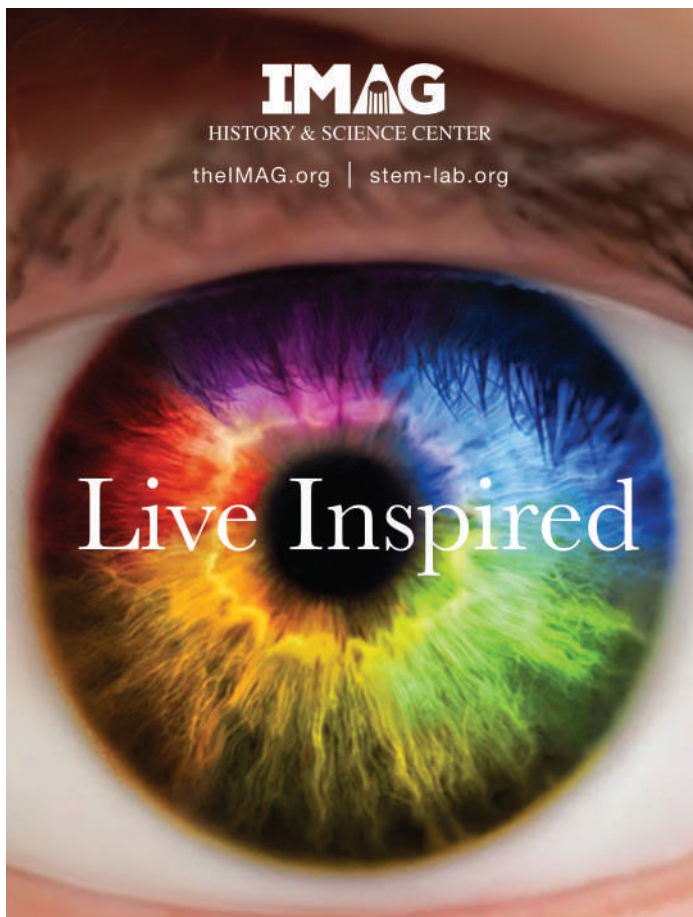
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2023 Newcomers Guide to Lee, Collier and Charlotte counties

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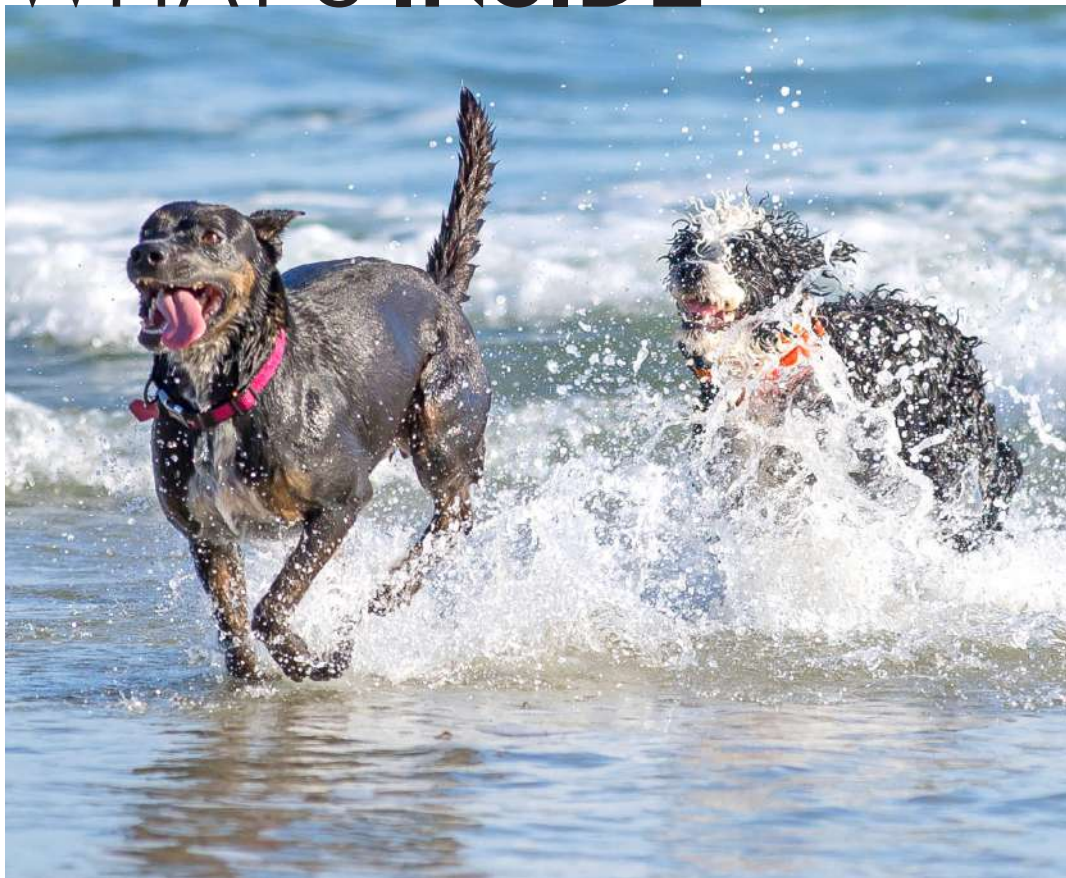
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WHAT'S INSIDE



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THE ARTFUL SIDE OF SWFL

■ Great places
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great art in SWFL



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Tiger Blue entertains the crowd under the Babcock Ranch bandshell.



ANNALEE HULL / FLORIDA WEEKLY

10 THINGS TO DO AND SEE FOR FREE

BY Nanci Theoret

Florida Weekly Correspondent

Admission to a theme park can be expensive. So, too, are visits to many of Florida's top attractions. The good news is that Southwest Florida offers plenty of activities and events that don't cost a thing while immersing you in local color.

■ Musical interludes

From Fisherman's Village in Punta

Gorda to Mercato in Naples and Stan's Idle Hour on Marco Island, shopping centers, restaurants and bars throughout the area offer free concerts and live entertainment performed alfresco practically every day of the week.

We're especially fond of the intimate venues of Cheers at Waterside Shops in Naples and The Center Bar at the Promenade in Bonita Springs, where it seems everybody knows your name.

Babcock Ranch in Charlotte County also serves up a hometown version of "American Bandstand" with Friday evening performances by Southwest Florida favorites. Babcock Bandstand concerts begin at 6 p.m. under the downtown bandshell. Food trucks line the road, and Slater's Goods & Provisions serves beer and cocktails at a patio bar.

■ Festival freebies

Southwest Florida loves a good festival and celebrates just about anything — music, movies, nature, art and otherwise — without a cover charge. Sure, the area hosts well-known and well-attended events like national art shows (see Arts for All), but it's things like the Everglades City Seafood Festival (Feb. 17-19) and LaBelle's annual Swamp Cabbage Festival that truly provide local flavor. This season's would have been the 86th annual Sanibel Shell Festival and the 64th annual Fort Myers Beach Shrimp Festival. We look forward to their return when their communities recover from Hurricane Ian.

Where else but LaBelle could pull off a celebration of the sabal palm and an ode to agriculture? The city's 57th annual

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Laura Hart and the Ark Tones perform at the last year's Rockabillaque Florida.



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Swamp Cabbage Festival — tagline: “Red, White and Moo” — is Feb. 25-26 and features a rodeo, armadillo races, a swamp queen and more.

For the granddaddy of all free festivals, head to Immokalee Jan. 21-22. That’s when the Seminole Casino Hotel, with Florida Weekly as the headline sponsor, presents the second annual Rockabillaque, with 20 musical acts, classic car and vintage bike shows, and mustache, pinup and tattoo contests honoring all things mid-century Americana.

■ To market, to market

Florida is one of the nation’s top states for agriculture, which you’ll discover while browsing the kaleidoscopic colors of just-harvested fruits and veggies at a local farmers market. From the Atlanta Braves market at CoolToday Park (the



The 2023 Sanibel Shell Festival has been cancelled.

Spring Training home of the World Series champions in Wellen Park) to the organic garden at Shangri-La Springs in Bonita and the cobblestoned sidewalks of Third Street South in Naples, Southwest Florida

offers a bounty of seasonal and year-round markets that are a veritable feast for the senses.

Equal parts shopping and social event, many markets also host live entertainment. The events attract homespun vendors selling kitschy crafts, handmade soaps, jewelry and more, so visiting is always a treasure hunt. New to the farmers market mix this year: Market Thyme every Saturday morning at the Calusa Nature Center & Planetarium off Ortiz Boulevard in Fort Myers.

■ Rum-pum-pum-pum

Mystical and borderline exotic, there’s something about a drum circle that sings to the spirit, the soul, spontaneity and self-expression. Perhaps it’s the freedom to play — or dance — to your own beat or the shared connection to community

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and culture over a methodical almost monotonal primal pulse. Hand drummers, hula hoopers and spectators are always welcome to experience these magical moments offered by the Southwest Florida Community Drum Circle biweekly at Cambier Park in Naples and the Fort Myers Drum Circle in downtown locales, including Centennial Park and the patio of the Fort Myers Regional Library.

Drum circles are even better when accompanied by water and setting sun. The Englewood Drum Circle meets every Sunday on Englewood Beach an hour before sunset.

Check Facebook for regularly scheduled events as well as pop-up locations.

■ Get on your bike and ride

See the sights on a bike with dozens of new friends. Southwest Florida Critical Mass, a cycling club for all ages, takes to the streets for monthly rides throughout the region. With more than 3,400 followers on Facebook, some outings are akin



COURTESY PHOTOS

to a Tour de France field — minus the mountains.

For those who prefer solo excursions or bicycle rides for two, Team Punta Gorda offers a fleet of 36 bright yellow bikes, including three trikes and a hand-pedaled cycle, all perfect for exploring the city's quiet streets and historic homes, down-

town restaurants and boutiques, waterfront parks and Fisherman's Village. The free loaners are available at Laishley Marina, Four Points Sheraton, the Bayfront Wellness Center and Springhill Suites. Simply check in with the host site, and provide ID and a credit card as a deposit (no charge when bike is returned). Helmet, lock, cable and map are provided.

■ A day with the dog

Sometimes, a dog just needs to run with the pack. Dog parks throughout Southwest Florida give Fido freedom to roam. Charlotte County offers Katherine Ariens Dog Park in Charlotte Harbor and Ann & Chuck Dever Regional Paw Park in Englewood. You'll find dog parks in Lee County at Buckingham Park, the Estero Park and Recreation Center, Judd Park in North Fort Myers, Veterans Park in Lehigh Acres, Bonita Springs Dog Park, and Wa-Ke Hatchee Park off Bass Road in Fort Myers. Collier County offers Rover Run at Veterans Community Park, Naples





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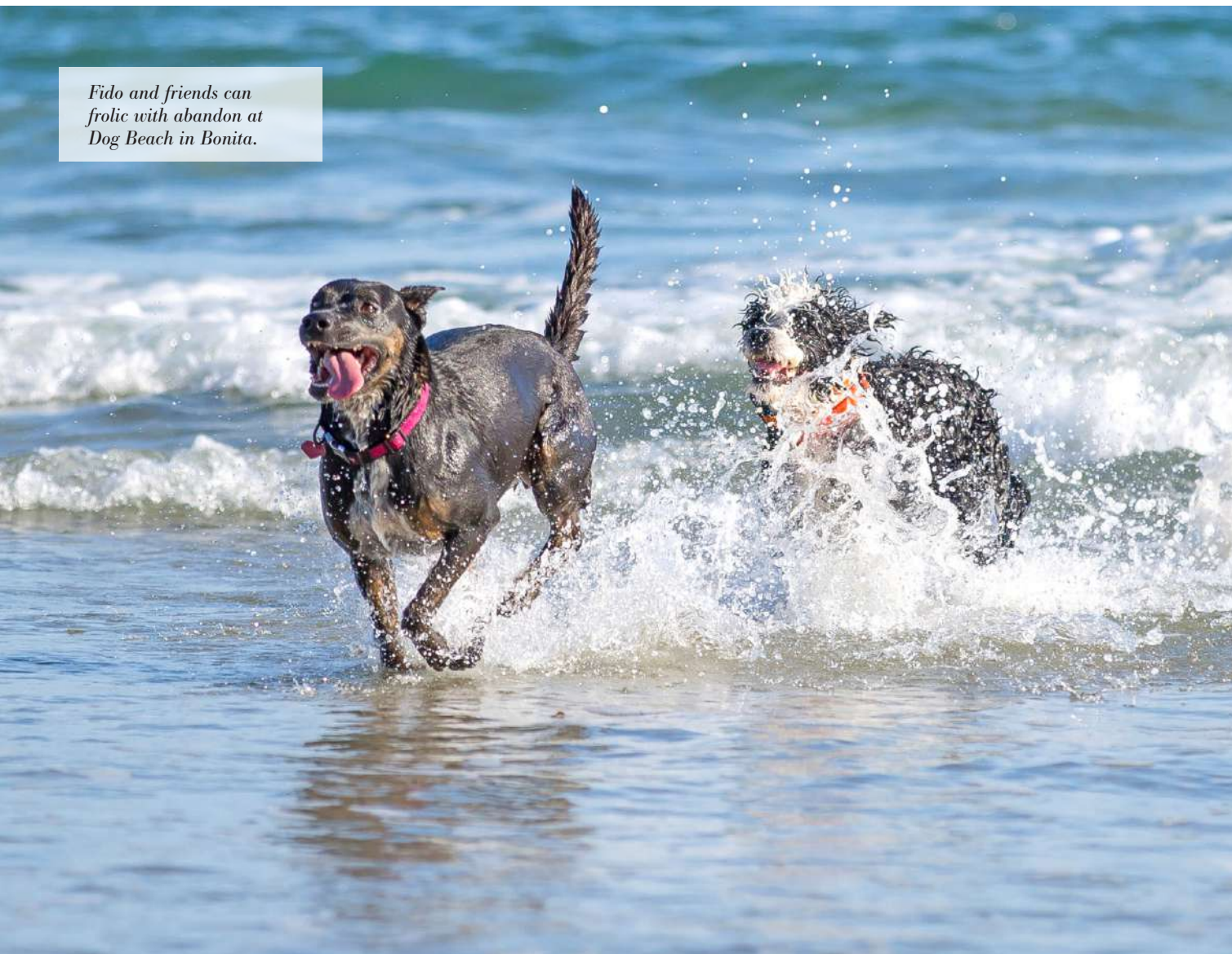


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Fido and friends can frolic with abandon at Dog Beach in Bonita.



Dog Park on Riverside Circle and Canine Cove Dog Park on Marco Island.

Even better? Spend a day at the beach with your furry friend. Dog Beach next to Lovers Key State Park in Bonita Springs is Southwest Florida's only Gulf of Mexico beach where dogs can run free, frolic in the sand and splash in the surf. Parking is free. Cue the wet-dog smell on the car ride home. *The state park was closed in the weeks after Hurricane Ian, so be sure to check the status before venturing out with Fido in tow.*

Many shopping centers have also gone to the dogs, offering dog-friendly destinations and outdoor dining.

■ The power of observation

Brush up on the latest fashion trends

without spending a dime. Fifth Avenue South and Third Street South — Naples' premier shopping districts — offer prime people-watching and window-shopping destinations beloved by the 1%. Covet-worthy couture is always on display, worn by passersby and shown in shops. Be sure to study the streetscape and parking areas, where Lamborghinis, Ferraris, Bentleys, Aston Martins and other exotic cars are more prolific than any domestic make or model.

■ Down on the farm

You don't have to put a lot of miles on the car or even venture east of the interstate to visit an honest-to-goodness working farm. Surrounded by upscale communities on Penzance Boulevard in

Fort Myers, Southern Fresh Farms carries on a nearly 50-year family tradition, growing hydroponic produce and flowers and tending to rescued barnyard animals, including cows, goats, a mini donkey,



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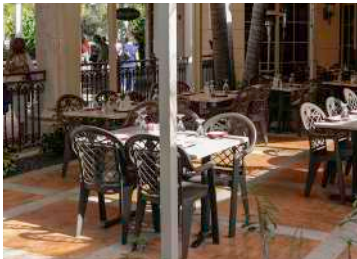
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chickens and a turkey. Its park-like setting offers a large playground, a swing facing a waterfall and even a microbrewery. Raw honey, produce and cut flowers are available seasonally.

Visitors to 31 Produce in Alva can roam the 80-acre farm, check out the butterfly garden and catfish pond, pan for precious stones and fossils, and pet a menagerie of miniature donkeys, Nigerian dwarf goats, as well as a pot belly pig, rabbits and guinea pigs. The petting zoo also has not-so-cuddly chickens and an African spur tortoise. While there, dine at the Cracker Shack Cafe, which specializes in farm-to-table dishes and country cooking, and consider reaping your own harvest. 31 Produce offers a cornucopia of seasonally available you-pick options at a fraction of grocery store prices, including beefsteak tomatoes, greens, squash, herbs, melons, strawberries and dragon fruit.

Farmer Mike's U-Pick in Bonita Springs is also a great adventure that shows the kids where their food comes from.

■ Art for all

Southwest Florida is home to many community art centers and galleries of national renown, and most offer free admission to view original works by local and international artists. True to its namesake, the Bob Rauschenberg Gallery on the campus of Florida South-Western State College in Fort Myers celebrates contemporary art with exhibits by major artists (no admission; however, donations are accepted). Florida Gulf Coast University offers three galleries and free artists' talks. The Visual Arts Center in downtown Punta Gorda features new exhibits every month. Shows by members, faculty and local student artists, plus national and international traveling exhibitions at the Centers for the Arts Bonita Springs are always free.

Explore working studios and watch demos from local arts during Art Alive! the first Wednesday, first Thursday and third Saturday of each month through April in the Naples Art District, tucked away in plain sight along Shirley Street

between J&C Boulevard and Pine Ridge Road. And don't miss the Marco Island Center for the Arts and the Arts Center Theatre.

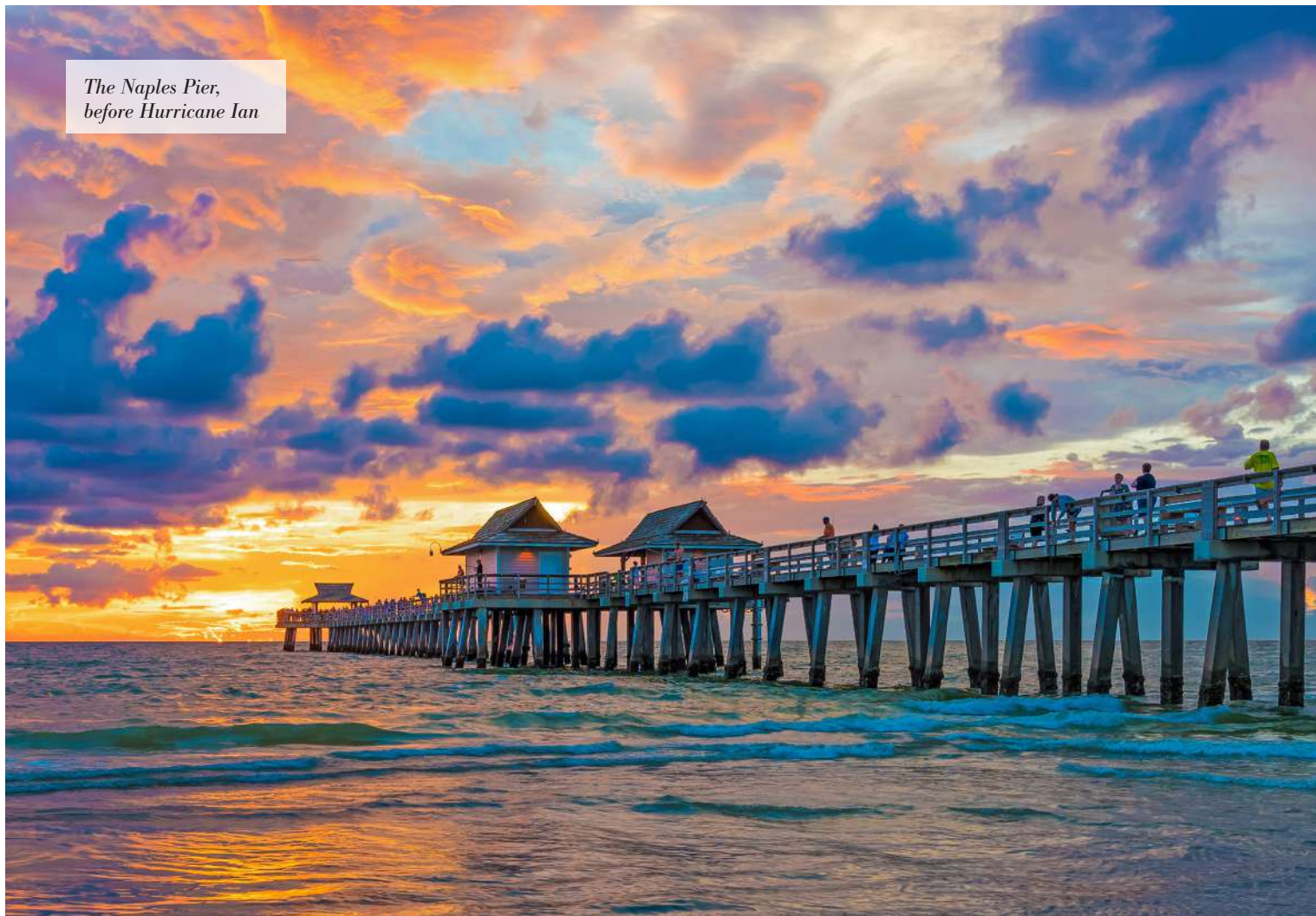
Some of the country's top-rated juried art shows happen right here, including the No. 2 Bonita Springs National Art Festivals (Jan. 14-15, Feb. 11-12 and March 4-5). ArtFest Fort Myers returns to downtown Feb. 4-5.

■ Pier one

Among the area's most beloved landmarks to be ravaged by Hurricane Ian are the iconic piers in Naples and on Fort Myers Beach, which for decades offered prime venues for peoplewatching, fishing and picturesque sunsets over the Gulf of Mexico.

The closest spot for similar experiences for the foreseeable future is the El Jobean Fishing Pier (en route from Port Charlotte to Englewood), which provides opportunities to snag snappers, speckled trout and snook and to marvel at a sunset over the Myakka River. ■

*The Naples Pier,
before Hurricane Ian*





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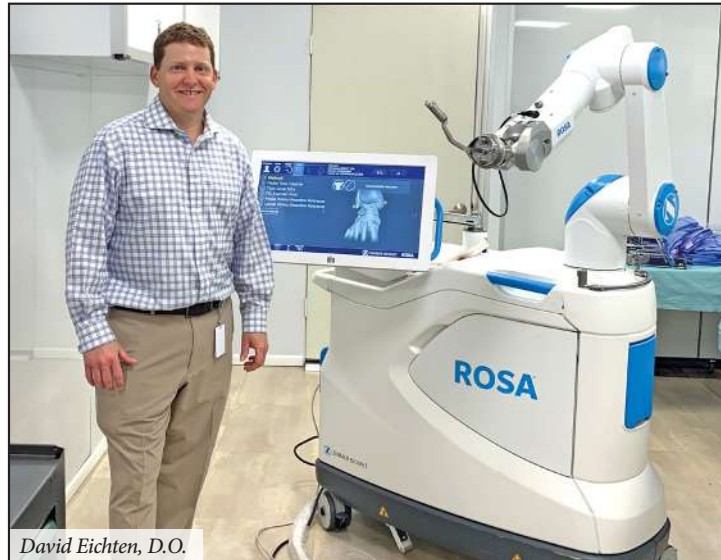


David Eichten D.O., specialist in joint replacement and arthroscopy of the hip, knee and shoulder

About Us

Dr. David Eichten grew up in Minnesota and graduated summa cum laude from the University of St. Thomas in 2001 with a degree in biology. He attended Kansas City University of Medicine and Biosciences where he graduated with a 4.0 GPA and earned the Gold Stethoscope Award for finishing first in his medical school class. He completed his orthopedic surgery residency through Ohio University at Grandview Medical Center in Dayton and went on for an additional year of training, completing a fellowship in adult reconstruction/ joint replacement of the hip, knee and shoulder at Joint Implant Surgeons of Florida. Dr. Eichten performs advanced techniques including minimally invasive joint replacement, robotic total knee, partial knee, anterior supine intramuscular total hip, reverse and total shoulder replacements.

At Joint Implant Surgeons of Florida, it is our mission to provide safe, effective surgical and non-surgical care, including arthroscopic procedures, Lipogems and platelet-rich plasma injections to restore independence and quality of life. Our accomplished surgeons are all fellowship trained in their subspecialty and provide expert level care for each body part,



David Eichten, D.O.

getting the best outcomes for our patients and community. Orthopedics is constantly changing, and Dr. Eichten continues to add technology and advanced techniques like robotic total knee replacements and anterior total hip replacements.

The Future is Here: Outpatient Total Joints

Dr. Eichten and Joint Implant Surgeons of Florida are excited to announce a partnership with HCA HealthCare at their state-of-the-art ambulatory surgery center. Performance Health

Surgery Center continues to provide convenient, efficient, and safe outpatient care to patients in Southwest Florida since 2019. Our highly specialized surgeons perform complex outpatient orthopedic and spine procedures that result in faster recovery, low complication and excellent patient outcome. Dr. Eichten can perform multiple outpatient minimally invasive surgeries, including robotic total knee replacement, partial knee replacement, anterior supine intramuscular total hip replacement, reverse and total shoulder replacement. Using minimally invasive techniques, combined with multimodal pain control, including nerve blocks, allows the patient to recover at home.

The surgery center was built with outpatient total joints in mind. There are four large operating room suites and two large hospital grade instrument sterilizers that allow for safe and efficient total joint procedures. After surgery, the patients are seen by a physical therapist to ensure a safe discharge to home. The surgery center is called Performance Health Surgery Center and is located centrally between both Joint Implant Surgeons of Florida Naples and Fort Myers offices, on Three Oaks Parkway north of Alico Road off Interstate 75.

Improving the Quality of Life.

Dr. Eichten is a Board Certified Orthopedic Surgeon, specializing in joint replacement of the hip, knee and shoulder. Dr. Eichten and his team are committed to providing personalized orthopedic care, and have helped thousands of patients using the most advanced techniques in orthopedic care.



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Upcoming Events!

SIGNATURE EVENTS

LEE COUNTY

■ The Caloosahatchee Celtic Festival

Jan. 27-28

The 20th annual festival celebrates the heritage, history, culture and traditions of the Celtic lands through music and dance.

— Centennial Park, Fort Myers
www.celticheritageproductions.com

■ The Southwest Florida Wine & Food Fest

TBA

The signature event of SWFL Children's Charities, which usually takes place in mid-January and consists of dinners in private homes followed by an afternoon tasting and auction, has been postponed.

— 239-433-4260
www.swflwinefest.org
info@swflwinefest.org

■ Bonita Springs National Art Festivals

Jan. 14-15, Feb. 11-12, March 4-5

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

— 10450 Reynolds St.
Bonita Springs
www.artcenterbonita.org

■ ArtFest Fort Myers

Feb. 4-5

Enjoy and purchase artwork in a variety of mediums and prices from more than 200 nationally recognized artists from across the country and around the world.

— Edwards Drive, Fort Myers
239-768-3602
www.artfestfortmyers.com

■ Coconut Point Art Festival

Feb. 18-19

Fine art, music and more fill the streets for all to enjoy.

— Coconut Point, Estero
www.artfestival.com/festivals/coconut-point-art-festival



The Fort Myers Film Festival

COURTESY PHOTO

■ The Edison Festival of Light Grand Parade

Feb. 18

One of the largest nighttime parades in the country pays tribute to celebrated Fort Myers winter resident Thomas Edison.

— Downtown Fort Myers
239-334-2999
www.edisonfestival.org

■ The Southwest Florida & Lee County Fair

Feb. 23-March 5

Making memories since 1924 with local agriculture, horticulture, home-baked goods, small farm animals and a horse show, plus dozens of carnival rides, games and food booths.

— Lee Civic Center
North Fort Myers
239-543-7469
www.swflcfair.com

■ Southwest Florida Reading Festival

March 4

Dozens of authors discuss their work and their process and celebrate books with readers of all ages.

— Fort Myers Regional Library
Downtown Fort Myers
www.readfest.org

■ The Fort Myers Film Festival

May 17-21

In-person screenings and discussions, with some content online, including YouTube. T.G.I.M. Monday night screenings leading up to the festival take place at the Sidney & Berne Davis Art Center downtown on Feb. 7 and March 7.

— 239-810-6323
www.fortmyersfilmfestival.com

COLLIER COUNTY

■ Rookery Bay Classic Car Show

Nov. 19

More than 100 antique, muscle and classic cars, plus food trucks and family fun for all ages.

— Rookery Bay Environmental Learning Center
300 Tower Road, Naples
Parking at the Walmart Super Center
www.rookerybay.org

■ Swamp Buggy Races at Florida Sports Park

Dec. 3-4, Jan. 28-29, March 4 and April 1

Get down and dirty —or just have fun watching others do so.

— 8520 Rattlesnake Hammock Road
Naples

SIGNATURE EVENTS

www.thefloridasportspark.com
www.swampbuggy.com

■ Cars on Fifth

Feb. 4

The Naples Chapter of the Ferrari Club of America hosts the 18th annual Cars on Fifth for owners and admirers of exotic cars of all kinds.

— Along Fifth Avenue South
Naples
239-692-8436
www.carsonfifth.com

■ Everglades Seafood Festival

Feb. 17-19

The 53rd annual festival celebrates country music, carnival rides, arts, crafts and, of course, fresh shrimp, fish and stone crab claws.

— 102 Copeland Ave. N.
Everglades City
239-695-3781

■ The Naples National Art Show

Feb. 25-26

Fine juried art along with great food and entertainment.

— Naples Art Association
Cambier Park and Eighth Street
Naples
www.naplesart.org

■ The Collier County Fair

March 16-26

Midway rides, 4-H competitions and favorite fair foods.

— Collier Fairgrounds
Naples
239-455-1444
www.colliercountyfair.com

■ The Naples St. Patrick's Day Parade

March 11

For more than 40 years, the largest privately run parade in the Sunshine State has livened up downtown Naples in celebration of Irish culture and heritage in America. The Naples St. Patrick Foundation keeps the tradition going,

— Fifth Avenue South
Naples
239-692-8436
www.naplesparade.com



■ The Naples Flower Show & Garden Market

March 17-18

A project of the Naples Garden Club, the largest juried flower show in Southwest Florida includes floral designs, exotic plants, educational displays and interactive demonstrations.

— Naples Botanical Garden
Naples
www.naplesgardenclub.org

CHARLOTTE COUNTY

■ Mindi Abair's "I Can't Wait for Christmas" Tour

Dec. 13

— Charlotte Harbor Event
& Conference Center
Punta Gorda
www.puntagordachamber.com

■ Charlotte County Fair

Jan. 27-Feb. 5

Amusement rides, animals, fair food and bull riding.

— 2333 El Jobean Road
Port Charlotte
941-629-4252
www.thecharlottecountyfair.com

■ Punta Gorda Pub Crawl & Food Drive

Feb. 25

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

— www.puntagordapubcrawl.com

■ Peace River National Art Festival

March 18-19

The 15th annual event features more than 70 booths of fine art and exquisite crafts complemented by art demonstrations, live music, food, wine and beer.

— Laishley Park
Punta Gorda
www.boulderbrook.net ■

— *Like many things, signature events are subject to rescheduling or cancellation. Be sure to call or check websites/social media for the latest information.*



COURTESY PHOTOS



SWFL ATTRACTIONS



COURTESY PHOTO

LEE COUNTY

■ The Bailey-Matthews National Shell Museum

This one-of-a-kind museum was closed in the aftermath of Hurricane Ian. Check the website for reopening updates.

Visitors learn about shells, mollusks and their natural environment through exhibits, educational programs, library services and publications.

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

■ Edison & Ford Winter Estates

The winter homes of Thomas A. Edison and Henry Ford, beautifully situated along the Caloosahatchee River, are among the greatest historic treasures in Southwest Florida. Visitors can take guided tours of the homes, gardens and laboratory.

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

■ Everglades Wonder Gardens

The Wonder Gardens are home to a diverse family of rescued, rehabilitated and nonreleasable Florida alligators and flamingos, macaws, pythons, turtles, tortoises and even Chinese golden pheasants. Add to that the park's vibrant botanical collection and there's something for everyone. A cornerstone of Old Florida, it tells the story of the past meeting the future, right in the middle of downtown

Bonita Springs. *The gardens were closed in the weeks following Hurricane Ian. Check the website for reopening updates.*

— 27180 Old 41 Road
Bonita Springs
239-992-2591
www.wondergardens.org

■ Gator Mike's Family Fun Park

Cape Coral's premier family adventure park has it all: go-cart tracks, miniature golf, batting cages, midway rides, a zipline and a 6,000-square-foot arcade.

— 35 N.E. Pine Island Road
Cape Coral
239-574-4386
<https://gatormikes.com>

■ IMAG History & Science Center

Fun for all ages to discover the wonders of science and history, IMAG has more than 60 hands-on exhibits. Feed a stingray, touch animals during live encounters, and visit the Living Lab to see turtles, snakes, frogs, a bearded dragon, and much more. Gaze at the native Florida and exotic fish in the 3,200-gallon aquarium and visit the original fort of Fort Myers in a 3-D virtual reality experience. Younger visitors will enjoy the Mini Museum early childhood area.

— 2000 Cranford Ave.
Fort Myers
239-243-0043
www.theimag.org

■ Southern Fresh Farms

Come get the freshest produce, local

honey and fresh-cut flowers. Take a stroll to see the hydroponic operation on your way to visit the barnyard animals at the petting farm. Let the kids explore the playground while you relax by the waterfall on a swing. If it's Friday, place your order from a different food truck every week. Guided tours available.

— 8500 Penzance Blvd., Fort Myers
239-633-7705
Southernfreshfarms@yahoo.com
www.southernfresh.farm

COLLIER COUNTY

■ The Baker Museum at Artis—Naples

Emphasizing modern and contemporary art.

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

■ C'mon, Golisano Children's Museum of Naples

Celebrate the natural curiosity of children in this dynamic space that encourages exploration and discovery.

— 15080 Livingston Road
Naples
239-514-0084
www.cmon.org

■ The Holocaust Museum & Education Center of Southwest Florida

The museum's mission is to promote

SWFL ATTRACTIONS

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 Blvd., Suite 108
Naples
239-263-9200
www.HMCEC.org

■ Naples Botanical Garden

The garden remained closed in the weeks following Hurricane Ian. Check the website for updates on repairs and reopening.

A world-class paradise that combines cultivated tropical gardens with beautifully restored natural habitats, the garden connects people and plants through displays, education, conservation and science.

— 4820 Bayshore Drive
Naples
239-643-7275
www.naplesgarden.org

■ Naples Fishing Pier

The pier must undergo extensive reconstruction in the wake of Hurricane Ian.

One of the most popular attractions in Naples, the pier was built in 1888 as a freight and passenger dock and now stands as a community landmark extending 1,000 feet into the Gulf of Mexico.

— 25 12th Ave. S.
Naples
239-213-3062
www.naplesgov.com

■ Naples Zoo at Caribbean Gardens

A paved path almost a mile in length winds past rare and wonderful animals residing within a tropical garden that was planted in 1919. Guests delight in seeing many of their favorite animals and also discover an array of rarely seen creatures such as the endangered Malagasy fossas, Red River hogs, and Asian deer that bark and eat meat.

— 1590 Goodlette-Frank Road
Naples
239-262-5409
www.napleszoo.com

■ REVS Institute

While extensive cleanup was required after Hurricane Ian, plans were to reopen the museum Nov. 17. Check the website

to confirm days and hours of operation.

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
www.revsinstitute.org

■ Rookery Bay Environmental Learning Center

On the way to Marco Island, find four research laboratories, classrooms, a 140-seat auditorium and a visitor center with a variety of hands-on experiences. Enjoy the 2,300-gallon aquarium and interactive exhibits about the research and stewardship efforts ongoing within the Rookery Bay National Estuarine Research Reserve.

— 300 Tower Road
Naples
239-530-5940
www.rookerybay.org

CHARLOTTE COUNTY

■ Babcock Ranch Eco-Tours

Immerse yourself in Old Florida's good nature, from swamp buggy tours to home cooking at the Gator Shack restaurant.

— 8000 State Road 31
Punta Gorda
800-500-5583
www.babcockranchecotours.com

■ Blanchard House Museum

The museum was closed in the weeks following Hurricane Ian. Check the website for updates on 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
www.blanchardhousemuseum.org

■ Charlotte Harbor Environmental Center

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

— Alligator Creek
10941 Burnt Store Road
Punta Gorda
941-575-5435
www.checflorida.org

■ The James and Barbara Moore Observatory

Open to the public on specific dates and typically beginning 30-45 minutes after it is dark enough to see stars, weather permitting. Call or check the website for scheduled dates.

Florida SouthWestern State College
Charlotte campus
26300 Airport Road
Punta Gorda
941-637-3518
fsw.edu/charlotte/observatory

■ The Military Heritage Museum

Home to artifacts and memorabilia representing most military conflicts in which the U.S. has participated.

— 900 W. Marion Ave.
Punta Gorda
941-575-9002
www.freedomisntfree.org

■ Octagon Wildlife Sanctuary

Pack a picnic lunch and spend a day at the sanctuary that provides recovery and living environments for abandoned and abused exotic wildlife.

— 41660 Horseshoe Road
Punta Gorda
239-543-1130
www.octagonwildlife.org

■ Redneck Mud Park

The largest off-road mud camp in the Sunshine State has an oval race track, mudding trails, camping, RV parking and mud holes.

— 44570 Bermont Road
Punta Gorda
239-691-8557
www.redneckmudpark.com ■



CULTURAL VENUES

CHARLOTTE COUNTY

■ Charlotte Harbor Event & Conference Center

Concerts, dancing, symphonies
75 Taylor St., Punta Gorda
941-833-5444
www.charlotteharborecc.com

■ Englewood Art Center

A division of Ringling College of Art and Design, the Englewood center focuses on education, exhibitions and events that serve as a catalyst for creativity and art appreciation in the community.
350 S. McCall Road, Englewood
941-474-5548
www.ringling.edu/EAC

■ Langdon Playhouse

A venue of the Charlotte Players
1182 Market Circle St., Murdock
941-625-4175, ext. 220
www.charlotteplayers.org

■ Lemon Bay Playhouse

Community theater
96 West Dearborn St.
Englewood
941-475-6756
www.lemonbayplayhouse.com

■ Military Heritage Museum

Home of the 247-seat Gulf Theater
900 W. Marion Ave., Punta Gorda
941-205-8545
www.gulftheater.org

■ The Charlotte Performing Arts Center

701 Carmalita St., Punta Gorda
info@thecpac.net
www.thecpac.net

■ Visual Arts Center

Galleries, art exhibits, classes
210 Maud St., Punta Gorda
941-639-8810
www.visualartcenter.org

COLLIER COUNTY

■ Artis—Naples

Philharmonic orchestra, lectures, concerts, art museum
5833 Pelican Bay Blvd., Naples
239-597-1900
www.artisnaples.org

■ Cambier Park bandshell

Outdoor concerts
755 Eighth Ave. S., Naples
239-213-3058
naplesgov.com



BIG ARTS,
Sanibel

COURTESY PHOTO

■ Gulfshore Playhouse

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The Norris Center
755 Eighth Ave. S., Naples
866-811-4111
www.gulfshoreplayhouse.org

■ Naples Art

Fine art, exhibits, classes
585 Park St., Naples
239-262-6517
www.naplesart.org

■ The Naples Players

Community theater
701 Fifth Ave. S., Naples
239-434-7340
www.naplesplayers.org

■ The Norris Center

Music, films, comedy, live performances
755 Eighth Ave. S., Naples
239-213-3058
www.naplesgov.com

■ TheatreZone

Professional theater at
Community School of Naples
13275 Livingston Road, Naples
888-966-3352
www.theatrezone-florida.com

LEE COUNTY

■ Alliance for the Arts

Theater, art exhibits, classes
10091 McGregor Blvd., Fort Myers
239-939-2787
www.artinlee.org

■ Barbara B. Mann Performing Arts Hall

13350 Edison Parkway, Fort Myers
239-48-4849
www.bbmpanpah.com

■ BIG ARTS

Music, dance, visual arts, lectures, film, live theater
900 Dunlop Road, Sanibel
239-395-0900
www.bigarts.org

■ Bob Rauschenberg Gallery at FSW

Fine art
8099 College Parkway, Fort Myers
239-489-9313
www.bobrauschenberggallery.com

■ Broadway Palm Dinner Theatre and Off Broadway Palm

Comedy, musicals
1380 College Parkway, Fort Myers
239-278-4422
www.broadwaypalm.com

■ Centers for the Arts Bonita Springs

Art exhibits, performances, classes
26100 Old 41 Road, Bonita Springs
239-495-8989
www.artcenterbonita.org

■ Cultural Park Theater

Community theater
528 Cultural Park Blvd., Cape Coral
239-772-5862
www.culturalparktheater.com

■ FGCU Bower School of Music

Faculty and student recitals
10501 FGCU Blvd., Fort Myers
239-590-1000
www.fgcu.edu/cas/bsm/concerts.html

■ Florida Repertory Theatre

Drama, comedy, musicals
2268 Bay St., Fort Myers
239-332-4488
www.floridarep.org

■ Gulf Coast Symphony

Performances at various locations in Lee County
239-277-1700
www.gulfcoastsymphony.org

■ Laboratory Theater of Florida

Contemporary, classic and experimental theater
1634 Woodford Ave., Fort Myers
239-218-0481
www.laboratorytheaterflorida.com

■ New Phoenix Theatre

Entertainment to enlighten and inspire
13211 McGregor Blvd., Fort Myers
239-284-5214
www.newphoenixtheatrefortmyers.org

■ Players Circle at the Shell Factory & Nature Park

Lee County's newest professional theater company
16554 N. Cleveland Ave.
North Fort Myers
239-800-3292
www.playerscircle.org

■ Seminole Casino Hotel Immokalee

506 South 1st St.
Immokalee
239-658-1313
www.seminoleimmokaleecasino.com

■ Sidney & Berne Davis Art Center

Art exhibits, music, theater, films
2301 First St., Fort Myers
239-333-1933
www.sbdac.com

■ Southwest Florida Symphony

Lee County's professional symphony
7500 College Parkway, Fort Myers
239-418-1500
www.swfiso.org

■ Theatre Conspiracy

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10091 McGregor Blvd., Fort Myers
239-936-3239
www.theatreconspiracy.org ■

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\$420,750

Year-over-year change: 23.6 percent

Naples-Immokalee-Marco Island MSA

\$755,000

Year-over-year change: 23.6 percent

Punta Gorda MSA

\$389,900

Year-over-year change: 29.7 percent

— Source: Florida Realtors



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LOCAL FLAVOR

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VANDY MAJOR / FLORIDA WEEKLY

THINK – AND SHOP – OUT OF THE BOX WHEN INTRIGUING FLAVORS ARE WHAT YOU CRAVE

BY KAREN FELDMAN

Florida Weekly Correspondent

If you're in a rut when it's time to cook dinner, the problem might be what you are bringing home.

There's no doubt that supermarkets and big-box stores offer one-stop convenience and lots of choices — although with the recent supply-chain problems that's not a given anymore — but if you want to give your culinary mojo a kick-start, consider exploring the many farmers markets, local shops and ethnic

stores that abound in the region. And then spend some time hunting and gathering — you know, the way people used to shop before the big boys cropped up on every corner.

Obviously, you won't buy your cleaning supplies, paper products and toothpaste at these establishments, but you are likely to find fresh, locally grown produce and meat, scratch-made baked and canned goods as well as exotic ingredients from abroad that will add depth and adventure to your repertoire and plate.

Like what, you ask?

How about ground elk burgers for dinner? Homemade mozzarella, locally grown tomatoes and basil plus intensely flavored (and lab tested for quality) extra virgin olive oil and balsamic vinegar for a spectacular caprese salad? Sticky rice with mangoes for dessert?

These and many other interesting dishes are possible if you take the time to gather the proper ingredients from specialty stores that offer them.

So let's start with that ground elk.

Carnivores will delight in the abun-



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LOCAL FLAVOR

dance of choices to be found inside the small storefront known as Jimmy P's Butcher Shop & Deli. Situated on U.S. 41 in Naples and on Bernwood Drive in Bonita Springs, this family owned and operated butcher shop sells an impressive variety of high-quality meat, including wagyu beef, heritage Berkshire pork, rabbit and the aforementioned ground elk. During one excursion to the Naples store, I spied packages of ground camel as well.

Jimmy P's makes its own smoked andouille, bratwurst, blood sausage, lamb merguez and pork bangers. They smoke their hams and make wagyu corned beef brisket. In search of lamb or chicken demi-glace? Yep, they've got that, too, along with black winter truffle butter.

While Circle C Farm in Bonita Springs might not have quite the range of meats that Jimmy P's does, it makes up for that with its humane approach to raising the meat it sells. It features grass-fed and grass-finished beef, pastured pork, along with bones, broth and soup made from the same sources. If you are looking for eggs and meat from humanely pasture-raised chickens, they do that, too.

They also sell fresh Gulf of Mexico



Various seasonings and sauces at Jimmy P's in Naples and Bonita

VANESSA ROGERS / FLORIDA WEEKLY

seafood, including spiny lobster and stone crabs, and some exceptional unfiltered avocado honey.

This is the source for exacting chefs like Harold Balink, who owns Harold's in Fort Myers, and Vincenzo Betulia, who serves Circle C's chicken and eggs in his French Brasserie Rustique, Osteria Tulia, and Bar Tulia in Naples. Melissa

Akin, executive chef at Cielo on Sanibel, is also a regular here.

Ms. Akin, whose island restaurant was not open in the weeks following Hurricane Ian, has some other favorites, too. "I would have to say any of the local fresh markets would be my choice for fresh ingredients," she says. "Farmer Mike's is a great one for local produce



Jimmy P's makes its own smoked andouille, bratwurst, blood sausage, lamb merguez and more.

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LOCAL FLAVOR

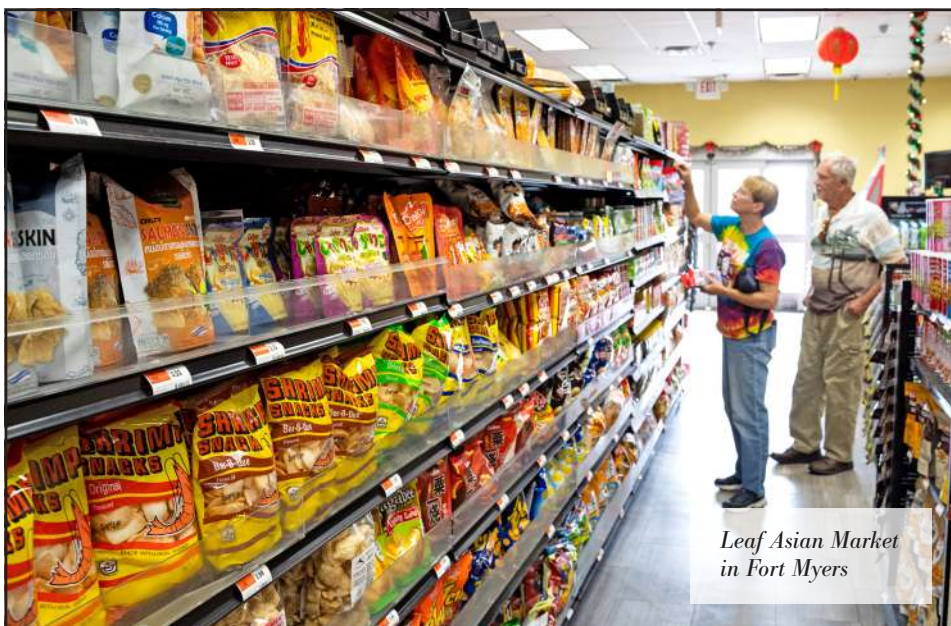
and fresh flowers. I also love Leaf Asian Market.”

Farmer Mike's in Bonita Springs is one of those places you should check out if you haven't. Almost every chef I talk to loves it, and for good reason. The vegetables are raised there, meaning they are fresh. You can pick some yourself or choose from those that are already harvested. And if you've never picked your own flowers, try it out at their pick-it-yourself garden, providing the finishing touch for a meal at home.

For something a touch fancier, check out DeRomo's Gourmet Market & Restaurant at the Promenade in Bonita Springs. Stock up on all sorts of things that you can cook — or use in place of cooking: fresh-baked bread; cheese, including fresh mozzarella made in the store; specialty grocery items such as truffle oils, pastas, marinades, seasonings; and an array of produce, meat and seafood.

Gloria Jordan, the peripatetic chef/owner of La Trattoria Cafe Napoli in Fort Myers, enjoys wandering the region for great ingredients for cooking in her home and her restaurant. Among her favorite spots: Lawhon's Grocery & Meat, an old-fashioned butcher, deli and grocery store in North Fort Myers.

“I love shopping for quality American meat in this store,” she says. “You can



*Leaf Asian Market
in Fort Myers*

also find great local pickles and preserves, country-style.”

For Asian products, Ms. Jordan heads to Leaf Asian Market on U.S. 41 in Fort Myers. “It has a great selection of Asian vegetables, spices, and fresh noodles,” she says.

Her other favorite spot for exotic ingredients is the Indian Grocery Store & Restaurant on U.S. 41 in Fort Myers. “I love this place,” she says. “They have

awesome products, including vegetables typical of India. You can also find fresh foods made by mom and pop.”

Punta Gorda home cook Lou Brancaccio is very picky about the ingredients he uses. The retired newspaper editor embraces his Italian heritage particularly in the kitchen, where he makes his own pizza, pasta, cioppino, lasagna — well, you get the idea.

So when it's time to stock up on bal-



*Lawhon's in
North Fort Myers*

LOCAL FLAVOR

samic vinegar and extra virgin olive oil, Mr. Brancaccio strolls down to nearby Fishermen's Village and into Bella Balsamic & the Pressed Olive. Unlike the balsamics and olive oils you find on most grocery store shelves, these are fresh and intensely flavored. The olive oils are extra virgin cold-pressed and are sent to a third-party lab for analysis to ensure their quality. Yes, they cost a bit more than the supermarket varieties, but Mr. Brancaccio offers this philosophy: "Not unlike special-occasion restaurants we might go to with a spouse or good friend, special-occasion olive oil is a thing for some of us. Bella Balsamic provides this."

"Think of the various notes one might find in a good wine and consider the same opportunity in olive oil. And remember: When cooking with olive oil and you're ready to plate, splash some of the good, fresh stuff on, right at the end."

Bon appetit!

Where to find

■ **Bella Balsamic & the Pressed Olive**, Fishermen's Village, 1200 Retta



VANESSA ROGERS / FLORIDA WEEKLY

Esplanade, Punta Gorda; 941-505-1707; www.bellabalsamic.net

■ **Circle C Farm Store**, 10441 Kentucky St., Bonita Springs; 239-776-5802; www.circlecfarmfl.com

■ **DeRomo's**, 26811 South Bay Drive, Bonita Springs; 239-325-3365; www.deromos.com

■ **Farmer Mike's U Pick Farm**, 26031 Morton Ave., Bonita Springs; 239-498-4576; www.farmermikesupick.com

■ **Indian Grocery Store & Restaurant**, 3853 Cleveland Ave., Fort Myers; 239-936-

2123; www.Indiangroceryfortmyers.com

■ **Jimmy P's Butcher Shop & Restaurant**, 1833 Tamiami Trail N., Naples; 866-998-8927; 25010 Bernwood Drive, Bonita Springs; 239-221-7428; www.jimmypsbutchershop.com

■ **Lawhon's Grocery & Meat**, 9491 Bayshore Road, North Fort Myers; 239-543-1255; www.lawhonsgrocery.com

■ **Leaf Asian Market**, 4300 Cleveland Ave., Fort Myers; 239-288-5368; on Facebook. ■

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SWFL SHOPPING



*Bell Tower,
Fort Myers*

COURTESY PHOTO

LEE COUNTY

■ Bell Tower

At this open-air lifestyle shopping center, you'll find everything from groceries and other everyday essentials to custom-made apparel and goods from local boutiques. Eateries and entertainment options at the recently renovated center make Bell Tower a place to connect before, during and after work. And with two adjoining hotels, it's a day-to-night destination for rediscovering the art of shopping and the delight of dining.

— U.S. 41 at Daniels Parkway
Fort Myers
11 a.m. to 7 p.m. Monday-Saturday
Noon to 5 p.m. Sunday
www.thebelltowershops.com

■ 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 and casual eateries

to please every appetite.

— 23106 Fashion Drive
Estero
10 a.m.-9 p.m.
Monday-Saturday
Noon-6 p.m. Sunday
239-992-4259
www.simon.com/mall/coconut-point

■ 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 Ave.
Fort Myers
10 a.m.-9 p.m. Monday-Saturday
11:30 a.m.-5:30 p.m. Sunday
239-939-1933
<https://shopedisonmall.com>

■ 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 St.
Fort Myers
10 a.m.-9 p.m.
Monday-Saturday
11 a.m.-6 p.m. Sunday
239-267-5107
www.gulfcoasttowncenter.com

■ Miromar Outlets

More than 140 designer and brand-name retailers here include Saks Fifth Avenue OFF FIFTH, Banana Republic, Nike, Hurley 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
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239-948-3766
<https://miromaroutlets.com>

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SWFL SHOPPING

■ Periwinkle Place

Once selected by the Lee County Visitor & Convention Bureau as Sanibel's top shopping destination, this gem suffered the wrath of Hurricane Ian along with every other retail establishment and restaurant on the island.

Locals and tourists alike look forward to getting back to the original Chico's, the award-winning Blue Giraffe Restaurant, Sanibel Day Spa, Naples Soap Company, Beach Daisy Boutique and Toys Ahoy, among many others.

— 2075 Periwinkle Way, Sanibel
<https://periwinkleplace.com>

■ Sanibel Outlets

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

— 20350 Summerlin Road
 Fort Myers
 239-454-1974; 888-471-3939
www.sanibeloutlets.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.

— South Bay Drive
 Bonita Springs
 Hours vary by business
<https://promenadeshops.com>

CHARLOTTE COUNTY

■ Port Charlotte Town Center

More than 100 specialty stores and places to grab a bite for every budget mark this Charlotte County institution, anchored by Macy's, JCPenney, Dillard's and Bealls. It boasts one of Florida's largest indoor food courts and the Regal Cinemas.

— 1441 Tamiami Trail
 Port Charlotte
 10 a.m.-9 p.m.
 Monday-Saturday
 Noon-6 p.m. Sunday
 941-624-4447
<https://portcharlottetowncenter.com>



■ Fishermen's Village

On the Punta Gorda waterfront of Charlotte Harbor, Fishermen's Village has become a stay-and-play destination. With more than 30 shops, restaurants and services, a resort and marina, plus frequent special events, it's a perfect place to come for a day of shopping or for an entire vacation.

— 1200 W. Retta Esplanade
 Punta Gorda
 Hours vary by business
 941-639-8721; 800-639-0020
www.fishermensvillage.com

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Hours vary by business
 239-692-8436
www.fifthavenuesouth.com

■ Third Street South

Delightful shopping and dining on historic Third Street South awaits amid courtyards, antique European fountains and colorful, cascading flowers.

— Concierge kiosk at Camargo Park,
 opposite the Fleischmann Fountain
 239-434-6533
<https://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 Blvd. N.
 Naples
 239-261-6100
www.venetianvillage.com

■ Waterside Shops

A collection of the finest 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, Louis Vuitton, Tiffany & Co., Van Cleef & Arpels, St. John, MaxMara, Anthropologie and Tesla. Shoppers wander past cascading waterfalls, lush flowering plants and dramatic architecture all under the canopy of towering royal palm trees.

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

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
 10 a.m.-9 p.m.
 Monday-Saturday
 Noon-6 p.m. Sunday
 239-262-2323
www.coastlandcenter.com

■ Mercato

Anchored by Whole Foods Market and Silverspot Cinema, Mercato offers more than 20 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
 10 a.m.-9 p.m.
 Monday-Saturday
 Noon-6 p.m. Sunday
 239-254-1080
www.mercatoshops.com

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SWFL FIVE WAYS



COURTESY PHOTO

FROM KAYAKS AND SWAMP BUGGIES TO MUSEUMS AND FOOD TRUCKS, DO IT SOUTHWEST FLORIDA-STYLE

BY CHELLE KOSTER WALTON
Florida Weekly Correspondent

How do I love you, Southwest Florida? Let me count the ways. Truth is, there are way too many ways to count, so we're starting for you. When your head goes dizzy with all the possibilities, take a breath and consider this handful of experiences to celebrate the day Southwest Florida-style.

Military Heritage Museum & Vietnam Wall of Southwest Florida **Punta Gorda**

From a cramped storefront at Fishermen's Village to a stunning, 17,000-square-foot complex about a block away, the Military Heritage Museum has grown, along with the region's support and fascination for the stories it tells. For stories are at the heart of this

two-floor museum that went state-of-the-art when it reopened in April 2019.

In addition to flight and ship simulators and virtual reality experiences, it boasts its 247-seat Gulf Theater, which hosts everything from military honor events to live musical concerts. Galleries cover military history from the American Indian Wars and War of 1812 to the present with signage, artifacts and tributes. Despite all the high-tech exhibits, perhaps the most moving is

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SWFL FIVE WAYS

a wall of framed letters from soldiers through the ages — telling stories.

While you're in town, complete your military salute pilgrimage with a visit to downtown's Vietnam Wall on the harbor front, built to half the scale of the one in Washington, D.C., and out of the same granite.

— www.militaryheritagemuseum.org

GAEA kayak tours

Throughout Lee County

What could be more iconic of a day of play in Southwest Florida than a good paddle? With water, water everywhere, the area begs for the mindful experience of gliding through the bay, river or estuary in charge of your own destination — and destiny.

If you are unfamiliar with local waters, however, or just want someone to narrate your wild kingdom experience, GAEA Guides offers a variety of specialty tours. Looking for manatees? Interested in our ancient paddlers, the mighty Calusa? Hoping for a mangrove forest canopy? Or just wishing for a relaxing sunset



*The Vietnam Wall
of Southwest Florida*

COURTESY PHOTO

excursion? Certified Florida naturalists guide GAEA eco-tours, and they know their stuff. They have been leading paddling tours in Lee County for 20 years. Group tours are kept small, to maintain that inherent intimacy you are looking for in a kayaking outing.

— www.gaeaguides.com

Bailey-Matthews National Shell Museum Sanibel Island

The shell museum was closed in the weeks following Hurricane Ian. Visit the website for a progress report on repairs and plans for reopening.

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SWFL FIVE WAYS

There's nothing else like it in the world, and it's right here in Southwest Florida. Built upon the island's reputation as the pre-eminent shelling destination in the U.S. — thanks to its east-west hook at its south end to scoop up shells in transit from southern seas — it explores all things shellacious.

Since 1984, the shell museum has taught visitors about the complex world of seashells: their historical and cultural importance, their role in art and science, their beauty. In 2020, it took education a step further when it opened its Beyond Shells: The Mysterious World of Mollusks galleries. Designed to inform visitors about the creatures that inhabit shells — or don't actually have a shell, but are related to those that do — the new aquariums and touch pools explore the lifestyles and importance of the mollusk. The star of the show, and an example of one species of mollusk sans shell, the giant Pacific octopus stars in its own online OctoCam.

— www.shellmuseum.org



TIM ATEN / FLORIDA WEEKLY

Food trucks Bonita Springs & Naples

Following a nationwide trend, Southwest Florida has been truckin' when it comes to the food and beverage indus-

try. Once just a staple of farmers markets and craft breweries, food trucks have become so popular that Naples has devoted its Celebration Park as a permanent home to food trucks, and



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SWFL FIVE WAYS

Bonita Springs plans to follow suit in months to come.

Celebration Park opened in 2018 to immediate popularity in East Naples' Bayshore District. You'll typically find about eight trucks selling everything from Greek cuisine to seafood and barbecue. Plus, a central tiki bar serves up craft brews and cocktails canal-side.

Bonita Springs moved toward food-truck friendly in 2020 when it changed a city ordinance limiting the number of trucks allowed around town. With its two new breweries downtown — Hop-sized and Ceremony — plus a food truck park of its own on the horizon, the mobile food scene in Bonita Springs also just keeps on, well, truckin'.

Airboat and swamp buggy tours Everglades City

If you are looking for something purely Florida in the great outdoors, take your travels aboard two modes invented right here in the Everglades by resourceful residents looking for the



COURTESY PHOTO

best ways to get around the wetlands and skinny waters. Early fishermen first started using boats powered by huge fans to blow them across the shallow River of Grass while hunting for the frogs they sold to local restaurants. Tourists started asking for rides on the odd-looking and loud (!) contraptions, and the airboat tour industry was born.

Head to Everglades City to shop from a number of airboat concessions to zip you into wildlife habitat on thrill rides. It's also the place to find swamp buggy tours. These big-tired monster mobiles are perfect for plowing through the marshes. The ride can get bumpy, but at least it's considerably quieter than an airboat ride — meaning it doesn't scare away

the gators, birds and other critters you're bound to see. Wooten's Everglades Airboat Tours in Ochopee offers both airboat and swamp buggy tours, with combination packages that include admission and shows in its Animal Sanctuary and jaw-some Alligator Park.

— www.wootenseverglades.com ■



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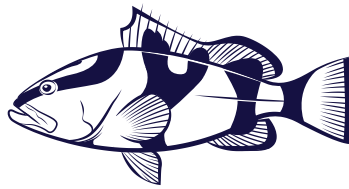
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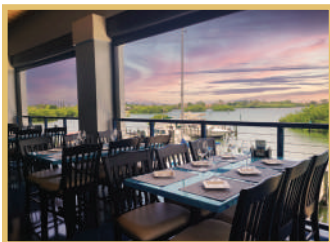


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SWFL COMMUNITIES



The Sanibel Lighthouse at Lighthouse Beach Park, before Hurricane Ian. The lighthouse remains standing, but the buildings around it are gone.

COURTESY PHOTO

HOME, SWEET HOME CAN BE ON A BEACH OR ISLAND, AROUND FARMLAND AND EVEN IN A SOLAR-POWERED CITY

■ 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 Cos., 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 Oratory.

■ Babcock Ranch

Babcock Ranch is a solar-powered city destined to have some 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 prepiest 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.

■ 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

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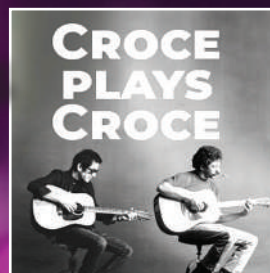
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opened in 1921 and has been revitalized in recent years to offer an organic garden and restaurant, fitness studio and spa, a gift shop and an event/wedding venue.

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 of 2,000; today, it's more than 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.

■ Englewood

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

So much can be found around its bustling, art-dis-



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tract 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

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The River District, Fort Myers

COURTESY PHOTO

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 Performing Arts Hall, Theatre Conspiracy and Laboratory Theater of Florida.

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Two Major League Baseball teams, the Boston Red Sox and Minnesota Twins, call Fort Myers their Spring Training home.

■ Fort Myers Beach

Fort Myers Beach on Estero Island was ground zero when Hurricane Ian battered Southwest Florida. Once a 7-mile-long playground of beaches, hotels, restaurants and shops, the kitschy beach community will be rebuilding and under repair/restoration for years to come.

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.

■ 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 San-

ibel-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 also 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.



Marco Island

SWFL COMMUNITIES

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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239-343-5000

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STATE AND NATIONAL PARKS



"Bocahenge" at Gasparilla Island State Park

COURTESY PHOTO

Hurricane Ian affected many of our region's treasured parks. Be sure to check websites before heading out on your nature adventures this season.

■ Charlotte Harbor Preserve State Park

12301 Burnt Store Road
Punta Gorda
941-575-5861

Charlotte Harbor Preserve State Park is comprised of 42,000 acres and protects 70 miles of shoreline along Charlotte Harbor in Charlotte and Lee counties.

Boating, canoeing and kayaking, fishing

■ Don Pedro Island State Park

8450 Placida Road, Placida
941-964-0375

Don Pedro, part of an extensive chain of barrier islands extending along Florida's Gulf Coast, 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

■ Cayo Costa State Park

880 Belcher Road, Boca Grande
941-964-0375

With 9 miles of beautiful beaches and acres of pine forests, oak-palm hammocks and mangrove swamps, this barrier island park is a Gulf Coast paradise.

Beaches, bicycling, boating, cabins, camping, canoeing and kayaking, fishing, hiking/nature trail, picnicking, swimming, wildlife viewing

■ Mound Key Archaeological State Park

Managed by Koreshan State Park
3800 Corkscrew Road, Estero
239-992-0311

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

■ Gasparilla Island State Park

880 Belcher Road
Boca Grande
941-964-0375

The centerpiece of Gasparilla is the restored Boca Grande Lighthouse built in 1890.

Beaches, bicycling, canoeing and kayaking, fishing, hiking/nature trail, picnicking, restrooms, swimming, wildlife viewing

■ Lovers Key State Park

8700 Estero Blvd.
Fort Myers Beach
239-463-4588

A haven for wildlife, the islands and their waters are home to West Indian manatees, bottlenose dolphins, roseate spoonbills, marsh rabbits and bald eagles. The 2-mile beach is accessible by boardwalk or tram.

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

■ Koreshan State Historic Site

3800 Corkscrew Road, Estero
239-992-0311

Visitors can fish, picnic, boat and hike where Cyrus Teed's visionaries, who came to Estero in 1894 to build New Jerusalem for his new faith, Koreshanity, once carried out survey experiments to prove the horizon on the beaches of Collier County curves upward.

Boat ramp, camping, canoeing and kayaking, hiking/nature trail, historic site, fishing, picnicking, playground, restrooms, wildlife viewing

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■ J.N. "Ding" Darling National Wildlife Refuge

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Sanibel
239-472-1100
fws.gov/dingdarling

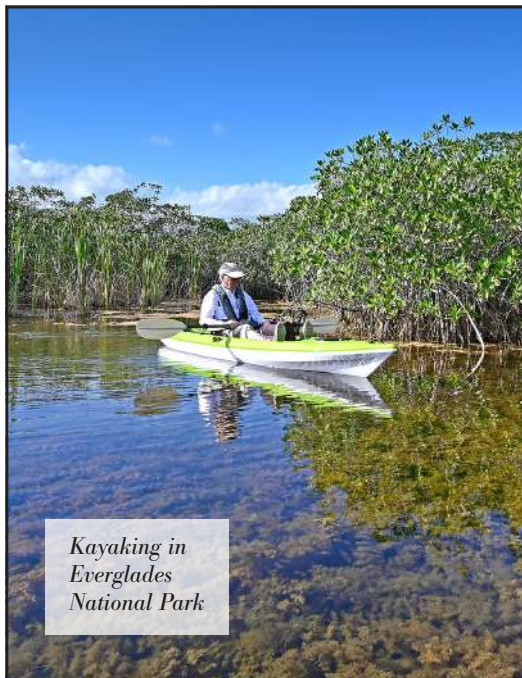
Part of the largest undeveloped mangrove ecosystem in the United States, the refuge is world famous for its spectacular migratory bird populations.

■ Big Cypress National Preserve Oasis Visitor Center

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*Kayaking in
Everglades
National Park*

COURTESY PHOTOS

■ Estero Bay Preserve State Park

Managed by Koreshan
State Park
3800 Corkscrew Road
Estero
239-992-0311

The first aquatic preserve established in Florida, this is one of the most productive estuaries in the state. The bay is home to a wide variety of wildlife, including the bald eagle.

Bicycling, boating, canoeing and kayaking, fishing, hiking/nature trail, restrooms, wildlife viewing

■ Delnor-Wiggins Pass State Park

11135 Gulfshore Drive
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■ Fakahatchee Strand Preserve State Park

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Roseate spoonbills at J.N. "Ding" Darling National Wildlife Refuge on Sanibel



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THERE'S NO SHORTAGE OF GREAT PLACES TO SEE AND MAKE GREAT ART

BY Nanci Theoret

Florida Weekly Correspondent

Whether your interest in art is merely passive appreciation or you're an active participant — you know: clay in the hair, paint on the dog — Southwest Florida offers oodles of adventure in art.

Art organizations throughout the region present homespun exhibitions featuring works by local artists as well as major international traveling shows. They also provide a plethora of single-night or multiweek classes to suit your schedule, skill level and location.

Oh, the places you'll go!

Alliance for the Arts

See: The alliance offers year-round exhibitions and full art immersion beginning right outside. The 25-foot "Caloosahatchee Water Wall" by artist Michael Singer was installed two years ago along Fort Myers' McGregor Boulevard as part of the Alliance ArtPark.

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THE ARTFUL SIDE OF SWFL

Inside, art lovers will find “Feedback Loop” (through Nov. 27), an exhibit for which visual artists Anne Stagg and Laura Tanner pull from their experiences growing up in the South. Ms. Stagg creates densely layered abstract works, while Ms. Tanner combines invented imagery derived from oral history together with images borrowed from wallpaper patterns, cookbooks and Americana advertisements.

Later in the season, all 65,758 square miles of the Sunshine State will be represented in the 37th annual all-Florida exhibit, a juried show covering the gamut of mediums from drawing and painting to metalsmithing, glass, textiles, digital media, video and printmaking.

Admission to alliance shows is free, although donations are always welcome.

Do: For budding and experienced artists, the alliance offers one-day and two-week classes throughout the year. Courses cover the basics of drawing, acrylic, oil and watercolor painting as well as alcohol ink, collage and mixed media, larger-than-life watercolor, and



“Caloosahatchee Water Wall” by Michael Singer, part of Alliance ArtPark

monthly “happy little” paintings a la beloved Bob Ross.

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

■ The Baker Museum

Work your way to the third floor of this museum on the Artis—Naples campus and don’t be surprised if patrons are



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THE ARTFUL SIDE OF SWFL

lying on the floor. Many say it's the optimal way to study the prisms of light cascading through the mesmerizing "Persian Seaform," the permanent ceiling installation by renowned glass artist Dale Chihuly. If you haven't been to Artis in the past year, go see the recently donated Chihuly "Red Reeds," an alfresco installation of 145 6- to 10-foot spikelike blown-glass forms in the Norris Garden.

With a permanent collection of more than 3,500 pieces, many of them representing 20th and 21st century American and Mexican modern movements, plus a 18,000-square-foot expansion in 2020, the Baker is considered the grand dame of Southwest Florida's arts scene.

See: Ongoing exhibitions include six surrealist paintings by Belgian artist Rene Magritte that haven't been viewed publicly for nearly 50 years, and "Dawn's Forest," a monumental sculpture by pre-eminent American artist Louise Nevelson that is one of the most iconic works in the museum's permanent collection. Through the 2022-23 season also see "Extension and Half Sphere," Jesus Rafael Soto's outdoor sculpture of aluminum and acrylic that dominates the north lawn.

Limited-run exhibits this season include Ran Hwang's "Becoming Again" (through Jan. 8). The largest presentation of the Korean artist's work to



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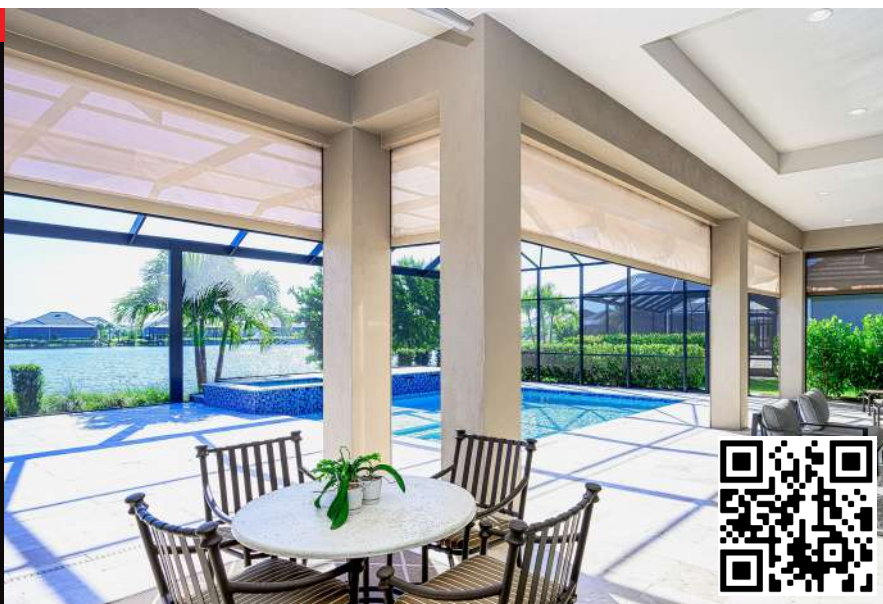
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THE ARTFUL SIDE OF SWFL

date in the Southeastern United States, it showcases her stunning multimedia installation as well as her iconic silhouettes of Buddhas and plum blossoms. “Love Stories” from the National Portrait Gallery in London (Feb. 4-May 7) presents works by Joshua Reynolds, Angelica Kaufmann, Man Ray, David Hockney and others.

The Baker Museum also celebrates the Sunshine State with “Florida Contemporary 2022-23.” The 10th annual exhibition highlights visual artists Edouard Duval-Carrie, Miami; Ya Levy La’ford, Tampa; and Robert Rivers, Maitland (through July 16).

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

■ BIG ARTS Sanibel

The arts are BIG on Sanibel and Captiva and so, too, is the islands’ main arts venue. BIG ARTS unveiled its newly renovated and expanded performance, gallery and classroom spaces in early 2020, just as COVID reared its ugly head. Two years later, the facility next to Sanibel City Hall is among the few buildings on the island that were not devastated by Hurricane Ian.

Check the website for updates on the 2022-23 season.

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

Centers for the Arts Bonita Springs

Do and do some more: With more than 50 different four- and five-week classes and multiple sessions offered each quarter at its two locations, the Centers for the Arts Bonita Springs are the holy grail for aspiring and practiced artists.

This season’s curriculum covers just about every medium, including stone-carving, coiled basketmaking, wax-to-bronze casting, metalworking, mosaics, stained glass and even “extreme functional pottery.” The center hosts single-night events (supplies included, BYOB) in glass and pottery arts, abstract painting, raku, mosaics and off-site glass-blowing. Its syllabus for teens and children is equally impressive with classes in the fine arts, dance and theater.

Some seasoned instructors are so popular, their classes sell out immediately. New classes are continually introduced,

including a figure study of everyday people who pose fully clothed — perfect for those who may be a little bashful when confronted with a nude model (hey, it happens). Classes are taught at the Visual Arts Center and the Performing Arts Center; the latter is the venue for in-demand dance classes. Center members save \$50 on classes.

See: The center’s exhibit schedule is also packed with plenty of artistic inspiration sans an admission fee. “Noteworthy” (through Dec. 1) is an open call exhibition that highlights a person, place, thing or thought considered noteworthy. Works by master artist and instructor Mary Parkman are also on display through November. “Black and White” (Dec. 9-Jan. 13) is an open call exhibition of works emphasizing texture, line and composition.

The center also hosts Monday Night Movies at the Moe throughout the season, screening documentaries, classics and art films and encouraging thoughtful discussion afterward.

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

Marco Island Center for the Arts

Do: The center offers an impressive array of two- and four-day classes, including more than two dozen dedicated to clay alone, among them: naked raku, totemic sculpture, a hand-building boot camp and throwing (you’ll take home goblets, a teapot or birdhouse with the latter). In addition to painting, drawing, stone sculpting and pastels, the organization offers specialty classes in alcohol ink painting, mosaics, stained glass jewelry and paper quilling, plus themed single-day watercolor workshops for those wanting to master palm trees, seascapes, golf courses and more. There are also monthly online oil painting classes. The annual Festival of Trees takes place Nov. 28-Dec. 1.

See: Exhibits at the center that celebrate Hispanic arts and culture include: a display of ethnic bags by Barbara Parisi (through Jan. 3), “Viva la Ceramica” (Dec. 5-Jan. 3) and a members-only show of works reflecting Dali, Kahlo, Picasso and Rivera (March 6-April 4).

Other exhibitions on tap include “Abstraction” (through Nov. 22), fea-

turing works by Cam Kowalski, Jean Campisano, Terry Carter, Cindy Colligan, Shawn Kelly, Maggie DeMarco, Ginny Mueller, Eric Streeter and Gary Scott Wheeler; works by members of the Pastel Society (Jan. 9-Feb. 28); “The Artist’s Question Answered in Fiber” (May 8-July 3), showcasing works by members of the Southern Art Quilters Association and “Sticks and Stones and I Painter” (July 10-Aug. 1), featuring works by Christine Noonan and Corey Craciun.

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

Naples Art

Do: Want to draw monsters and dragons, fairies, gnomes and their homes? Sorry, adults need not apply. Naples Art offers kid-centric classes featuring fantastical themes as well as introductory courses in clay, painting and head/face proportions for youngsters. There are also plenty of multiweek classes for older artists, including drawing, painting, portraiture, paint pouring and pottery wheel throwing as well as sessions delving into color theory and classes for painters interested in mastering Monet and emulating Vermeer. Members receive a \$50 discount.

See: Check the website for 2023 exhibitions. Previous exhibits include celebrations of Toulouse-Lautrec and Keith Haring, along with selections from the William Louis-Dreyfus Foundation.

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

Visual Art Center

Do: The downtown Punta Gorda center offers classes, art socials, open studios for members and children’s programs exploring everything from D-to-P — drawing and pottery, with glass, jewelry, painting and photography in between. VAC members get a discount.

See: “Off the Wall” (Nov. 30-Dec. 29) is a non-juried show with nothing priced higher than \$200. “New Beginnings” (Jan. 11-Feb. 9) is a nonthemed exhibit of 2-D and 3-D works. “Call of the Wild” (Feb. 15-March 9) calls for artists’ interpretations of wild (animal or otherwise). And “Fresh” (March 15-April 25) will showcase artists’ representations of fresh. “New Beginnings,” “Call of the Wild” and “Fresh” are juried shows.

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COURTESY PHOTO

PICK YOUR SPORT AND FIND YOUR COURT, COURSE, TRACK OR FIELD

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 go-karts and disc golf, traditional golf, mountain biking, tennis and pickleball plus spectator sports such as professional baseball and Division 1 collegiate basketball. There's also bocce ball and shuffleboard, swimming and tennis, softball and 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 also 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. 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 volleyball.

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



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SWFL SPORTS

■ FastTrax Electric Karting & Duckpin Bowling

FastTrax on Summerlin Road south of Fort Myers was closed in the weeks after Hurricane Ian. Check the website for reopening updates..

Until July 2021, it was a defunct place called Zoomers. But new owner Pat Ciniello knows about transforming concepts. He owns HeadPinz and other very 21st century bowling centers under the umbrella corporate name of Bowland.

Mr. Ciniello and the Bowland team know that what worked in a 1950s bowling alley won't work two decades into the 21st century, and they apply that knowledge to FastTrax.

"It's right in our wheelhouse," Mike Cannington, corporate marketing director for Bowland, says about turning the old Zoomers into the FastTrax of today.

The focus here is the Italian-made karts, which come in different sizes and at varying maximum speeds depending on the age of drivers. Duo karts are available so parents can take kids for a spin around the track.



Karting at FastTrax

COURTESY PHOTO

Then there's the bowling.

FastTrax bills its Duckpin bowling as the only such venue in Southwest Florida. In Duckpin, the ball and pins are smaller and competitors get three tries to knock down pins instead of two. FastTrax has seven

Duckpin lanes upstairs.

Stay tuned for more from FastTrax, Mr. Cannington advises. Some vacant land adjacent to FastTrax is owned by Bowland. "There is room for major expansion," he says.

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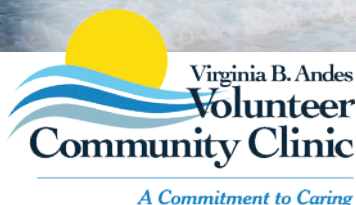
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■ Disc, not disco, golf

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.

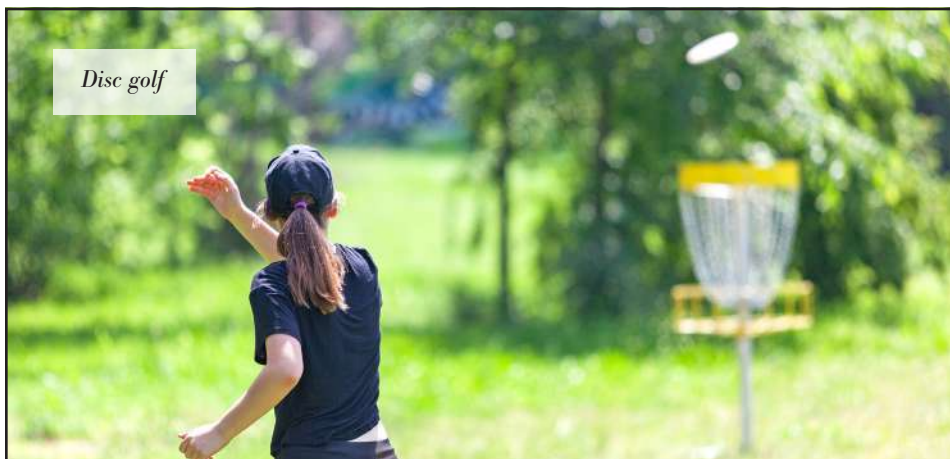
Fort Myers resident Tim Brown is a professional disc golfer and course designer who has played the game since 1988. He and his colleague Baxter Frost are redesigning and installing an updated disc golf course at North Fort Myers Community Park.

How many of these courses can be found in Southwest Florida?

"There's got to be at least 15," Mr. Brown says.

He expects the list to grow with the possibility of new disc golf courses in Cape Coral, Lemon Bay and Lehigh Acres.

Mr. Brown grew up playing the other form of golf but has over decades been an avid disc golf player. "I like it because it is a lot cheaper than ball golf," he says. Most



COURTESY PHOTO

Southwest Florida disc courses are free. Not only that, a Frisbee is a lot cheaper than a set of clubs and a package of balls.

And you can play a round of disc golf in about 90 minutes compared with five hours for the other version of golf.

Mr. Brown also points out disc golf is environmentally friendly. "There's no irrigation, no fertilization," he says.

And also fun, with or without disco music.

■ 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 any-

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TELEGRAPH

SWFL SPORTS



Pickleball

COURTESY PHOTOS

body 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.

■ 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 mem-



SWFL SPORTS

bers 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).

For more information, visit www.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 the nine decades since, many teams that have trained here have won the World Series.

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.

Teams arrive in February and play about 17 home games in what is called the Grapefruit League. Find out more about the 2023 Spring Training season at www.mlb.com. ■

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We know it may be hard to believe. An area that once was part of an old mine site near Mosaic's former Hooker's Prairie phosphate mine is now a thriving bird sanctuary. But that's exactly what happened. In the spring of 2021, Audubon Florida, a decades-long community partner of Mosaic's, confirmed an estimated 30-40 pairs of breeding Roseate Spoonbills had chosen to nest near the reclaimed habitat which features abundant food

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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■ **At Home** – Charlotte County's guide to everything about the home.

■ **Healthy Body** – Charlotte County's guide to your health.

■ **Destination Southwest Florida (January)** – Discover the great things about our Southwest Florida communities.

■ **Arts Preview (November and February)** – Our definitive guide to the Southwest Florida arts, theater and music.

■ **Spring training preview (February)** – Annual guide devoted to the Grapefruit League.

■ **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.

■ **Pet Lovers (July)** – A salute to our furry companions.

■ **Business Guide (September or October depending on market)** – Our nod to Southwest Florida's local business community.

■ **Southwest Florida Newcomers Guide (November)** – Everything you need to know to settle down in paradise.

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SWFL TOP 70 EMPLOYERS

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

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



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