



# THE CAPE CORAL SUN

Celebrating the Past, Present, & Future of Southwest Florida's Largest City!



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## Lee Health Opens Outpatient Facility At Bimini Square In Cape Coral To Enhance Access To High-Quality Healthcare For The Community City Growth Fuels Major Healthcare Expansion With Incentives For New Development

As one of the fastest-growing cities in the nation, Cape Coral continues to attract innovative development across key sectors, especially healthcare. Lee Health proudly announced the opening of its state-of-the-art outpatient facility at Bimini Square, which began operations in late October 2025 and marks a major step forward in healthcare accessibility for the city's expanding population.

### Healthcare: A Targeted Sector For Cape Coral's Growth

Recognized for its vibrant economy and strong quality of life, Cape Coral has designated healthcare as a priority for economic expansion. By supporting new facilities like Lee Health's Bimini Square campus, the city actively seeks to attract healthcare providers and associated industries to serve the needs of current and future residents.

### City Development Incentives

The City of Cape Coral offers an attractive slate of incentives designed to foster development and accelerate job creation. These include tax incentives for qualifying healthcare projects, infrastructure grants to support new construction, and job creation grants to encourage local hiring. These incentives ensure Cape Coral remains competitive as a destination for leading healthcare providers and innovative medical companies.

### Comprehensive Services For A Growing Community

Located at 414 Cape Coral Parkway East at Palm Tree Boulevard, the new two-story medical campus delivers a full range of services, including adult primary care, cardiology, breast health, and pediatric behavioral



health, with advanced diagnostic capabilities under one roof. Through the Golisano Pediatric Behavioral Health program, children and teens ages 5 to 21 receive expert care for emotional, cognitive, and behavioral conditions, underscoring Lee Health's commitment to the community's evolving healthcare needs for all ages and families.

### Strategic Location And Integrated Lifestyle

Bimini Square is a \$100 million six-acre, mixed-use waterfront destination in downtown Cape Coral, featuring 218 luxury residences, on-site waterfront dining, marina amenities, and now, premium medical services. The Lee Health campus enhances the area's appeal, giving

residents convenient, local access to comprehensive care in tandem with lifestyle and wellness amenities.

### City Leaders On Community Impact

"Cape Coral's growth, along with our targeted support for healthcare expansion, ensures residents have access to outstanding services at every stage of life," said city officials. "The incentives we provide reflect our commitment to keeping Cape Coral competitive and fostering major developments that create new jobs and opportunities for our community."

*Lee Health Opens Outpatient Facility on page 3*

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# Rynski Report: Where Did All This Stuff Come From? —

By Ryn Gargulinski

If you ever want a good look at how much useless stuff is in your life, all you need to do is pack up to move. Yep. I'm heading West, young man, back to the land of cactus and javelina. Good ole Arizona.

And while I purged a ton before moving to Cape Coral five years back, this Florida house is nice and roomy. It has a double-car garage and shed. I'm a sucker for yard art and plants.

All those things translate to more stuff, stuff, stuff I wish I could just stuff in a big bag and have Waste-Pro (or Calgon) take it away. But the truth is, there is no bag in the universe big enough.

The dream scenario for any move is to just leave everything behind and start fresh. But then you'd have to pay another \$5,000 to replace the high-end treadmill you're not taking; at least \$8,462 for the plasma cutter, welder and art supplies you'd need to replace; and a good \$2,984 or more for your beloved, L-shaped wooden desk – provided you can even find a desk made out of real wood these days.

In our age of disposable everything, most furniture is crafted out of something like cardboard stuck together with moth spit. My desk research even led me to one with drawers made out of fabric that collapsed inward when you tried to load it with anything heavier than a paperclip. Not kidding.



And then there's the memory-laden irreplaceable stuff. My original velvet painting of soulmate dog Sawyer chasing demons out of heaven. The two hand-painted stained-glass window inserts. Boxes of family photographs. Grandma's vintage music box. One-of-a-kind crystals. The well-loved copy of the collected poems of Baudelaire.



Well, if you're taking those things, why not a few more things? And then a few more. And a few more... until you're back with the burning question that exploded your brain in the first place: How the heck did I end up with so much stuff?

There are several reasons we feel the compelling need to accumulate things. For starters, our digital age ensures we can't get away from ads screaming at us to buy, buy, buy. The average person sees an estimated 4,000 to 10,000 ads per day across their digital devices.

Mere mortals can only withstand so much before they break, hitting that "Buy Now" button to send another piece of made-in-China junk scurrying to their doorstep. But that's okay, says the churning world of marketing, the more you own, the more important you are.

Our inner peanut gallery chimes in, telling us the more we own, the more secure, worthy, successful and happier we are, right?

In my current sea of 10 million half-packed boxes stuffed with useless stuff, I am here to tell you – no! – that is absolutely not true. There comes a point where we stop owning things and things begin to own us.

It's also been said that we spend the first half of our lives accumulating things – and the second half getting rid of them. This applies to everything we've gathered: faulty beliefs, detrimental habits, rampant character defects, insane patterns of thinking – along with all the material junk.

So what's the solution? Release. Release. Release. The more I'm giving away, the happier I am. The less I'm attached to a sundress just because I bought it in Paris 500 years ago but have not worn it since, the happier I am. The more I can let go, be it materially, mentally, emotionally or spiritually – the happier I am.

That's not to say I'm not taking my kick-butt treadmill and velvet Sawyer painting on my next adventure. But it is to say I can become much more discerning on what can stay and what can go – and what I want to bring into my life going forward so I can much more freely enjoy the ride.

Ryn Gargulinski [Rynski] is an award-winning author, artist, speaker and transformational doula who helps people see themselves and the world around them through the eyes of Love. With 10-plus published books and multiple awards, she also holds a BFA in Creative Writing, an MA in English literature, minister ordination, and certifications in coaching, Reiki and other forms of energy healing. Founder of RynskiLove.com, Rynski lived in Cape Coral before being called back to Arizona's Sonoran Desert. More at RynskiLife.com. Contact: Rynski@RynskiLife.com.

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*Lee Health Opens Outpatient Facility from page 1*

## About Lee Health

Lee Health has been a cornerstone of health care in Southwest Florida since opening its first hospital in 1916. As a nonprofit, integrated health system, Lee Health is dedicated to providing high-quality, compassionate care to everyone, regardless of their ability to pay. With a strong commitment to community health and wellness, Lee Health commits to evolving with the growing and changing needs

of the region. The system offers comprehensive services through four acute care hospitals, Golisano Children's Hospital, three skilled nursing locations, outpatient facilities, urgent care centers, and a wide network of primary care and specialty practices. Lee Health supports every step of the health journey, from preventive care to advanced treatment for every member of our community. Learn more at [www.LeeHealth.org](http://www.LeeHealth.org).

For more information contact Ashley Anderson, Attraction Specialist, Office of Economic and Business Development City of Cape Coral, 1015 Cultural Park Blvd., Cape Coral, FL 33990, (239) 242-3579, [aanderson@capecoral.gov](mailto:aanderson@capecoral.gov).



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# Lee County Residents Can Enhance Landscapes With Florida-Friendly Plants

When it comes to landscaping, there's more to it than just sun, water and weather. In Florida, a multitude of considerations should be taken into account when making plant selections, like climate conditions, soil type and pH. Another important consideration is the types of plants you use and how they interact with the environment you live in. Florida-friendly plants are eco-friendly plants that adapt and thrive in Florida's environmental conditions. While not all Florida-friendly plants are native to the Sunshine State, all native plants are Florida-friendly and bring many benefits to Southwest Florida's ecosystem, including:

- Water conservation: Because they are drought-friendly, Florida-friendly plants do not require frequent watering.
- No more pesticides: Many Florida-friendly plants are pest resistant, eliminating the need for pesticides and

reducing the risk of sending unwanted chemicals into the waterways.

- Less fertilizer: Native plants do not require fertilizer, and Florida-friendly plants that are placed in the right soil and pH require little to no fertilizer, resulting in fewer negative environmental impacts.

Fertilize Smart is a Lee County Government initiative to protect local waterways, the quality of life and the economy through community education on correct fertilization procedures and the harmful effects of improper and unnecessary fertilization. Though the fertilizer ban is in effect during the summer months of June through September, Lee County residents and professional landscapers are encouraged to practice sustainable gardening and lawn care practices year-round to protect our waterways.

- Instead of rinsing with a hose, sweep spilled granules to protect our waterways.

- Do not fertilize within 10 feet of bodies of water and keep it off hard surfaces like driveways or sidewalks.

- Avoid fertilizing if rain is forecasted.

Do your research on your home's conditions when planning your landscaping. When the right plants are selected, maintenance and negative environmental impacts can be minimal. For a full list of Florida-friendly plants, visit [fl.ifas.ufl.edu/apps/plants](http://fl.ifas.ufl.edu/apps/plants). For more information on how to fertilize smart, visit [FertilizeSmart.com](http://FertilizeSmart.com).

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# Book Review: *Nash Falls* By David Baldacci

By Lillian Till, *Flutterby Books and More*

When mild-mannered investment banker Walter Nash steps into the unfamiliar world of espionage and vengeance, his life – and sense of self – unravels in ways he never could have predicted. That's the hard-hitting premise behind *Nash Falls*, a thriller from prolific

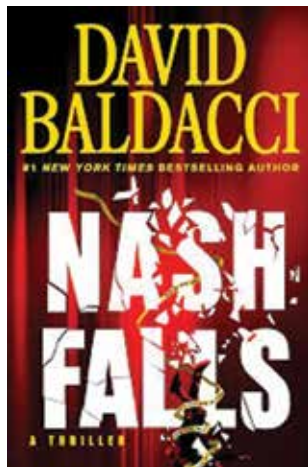


suspense author David Baldacci that launches a bold new series for readers who enjoy crime, danger, and downward moral spirals.

*Nash* has it all: a high-powered job at a prestigious firm, a loving wife, and a teenage daughter. His world is orderly – predictable. But after his estranged father's funeral, the FBI shows up with a proposition that will shatter everything he knows. They want Nash to infiltrate his own company because the firm's CEO is allegedly laundering money for a ruthless criminal mastermind named Victoria Steers. Nash reluctantly agrees to go undercover, flattered by the chance to do something heroic – though fully warned that the personal and professional risks are enormous.

Of course – the fit is hardly perfect. Nash has never lifted a weight, fired a weapon, or survived the traumas most thriller protagonists endure. He's an everyman. And that's what makes his descent so compelling. When his cover is blown, the consequences come fast and brutal: betrayal, public disgrace, a family torn apart, and the kidnapping of his daughter. The world he built collapses – and with it, his identity.

It's then that Nash begins a transformation – one that feels as chilling as it is necessary. Guided by the only person he can trust, his late father's war buddy-turned-mentor, Nash sheds his former self entirely. The mild-mannered financier becomes something else: stronger, darker, focused – a man reshaped



by loss and driven by vengeance. The change feels earned, not cheap, and the emotional and psychological weight of his choices keeps the story from ever veering into "just another action romp."

Baldacci doesn't pull punches – the novel is at times brutal, grim, unforgiving. But that intensity serves a purpose. *Nash Falls* isn't about escapist heroics. It's about what happens when someone completely ordinary is pushed beyond their limits, when desperation forces reinvention, and when the quest for justice becomes a path to moral ambiguity. The pacing is relentless and cinematic; chapters hit hard and fast, and each twist propels Nash – and the reader – deeper into murky ethical territory.

True to classic thriller fashion, the ending doesn't wrap up neatly. Instead, it sets the stage for what lies ahead, hinting at deeper conspiracies and even darker turns. For fans of suspense, that sense of unresolved danger only adds to the lingering tension after the final page.

In short: *Nash Falls* is a brutal, emotionally charged ride – one that turns your expectations inside-out and asks what you'd do if everything you loved was ripped away. For readers who like their thrillers with grit, moral complexity, and no safety nets, this launch of a new series is one of the strongest starts Baldacci has delivered. If your shelf (or nightstand) is whispering for your next read – this one belongs at the top.

For the past two years, Lillian Till and her golden retriever Finnigan have welcomed book lovers to *Flutterby Books and More*, a cozy spot for new and used book treasures. Our December Book Club pick is *The Silent Patient* by Alex Michaelides – join us for a lively discussion on Tuesday, Dec. 30 at 5:30 p.m. Come for the conversation, stay for Finn's friendly tail wags!

## THE CAPE CORAL SUN

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# In-Office Cataract Surgery Is Game-Changing

When it comes to restoring clear vision through cataract surgery, you have more options than ever before. Diagnostic testing is more sophisticated. Lens implants offer a range of vision options. And one of the most exciting advancements is the shift from hospital and ambulatory surgery centers (ASC) to in-office surgical suites. This evolution in ophthalmic care is more than just a trend—it’s a patient-centered innovation that offers unparalleled benefits in terms of safety, cost, and convenience.

## The Patient Advantage: Safety, Convenience and Cost-Savings

In-office cataract surgery is designed with patient safety and comfort in mind. Unlike hospital or day-surgery centers that require fasting, IV sedation, and complex scheduling requirements, in-office surgery simplifies the process. “Patients appreciate the seamless journey from consultation to post-op care, all in one familiar, trusted environment,” says Dr. Yasi Rodriguez, medical director and surgeon at Elmquist Eye Group.



## Technology That Puts Patients First

Advances in ophthalmic technology have made in-office surgery not only possible but exceptionally safe and preferred. The use of femtosecond lasers and advanced phacoemulsification equipment ensures surgical precision and rapid recovery. “The technology we have today was unimaginable just a few years ago,” notes Dr. Rodriguez. “We can achieve remarkable outcomes with less downtime, allowing patients to return to their daily lives faster.”

## Accessible, Affordable, Advanced Care

Cost is often a concern when considering surgery, but in-office procedures are typically more affordable due to lower facility fees. Elmquist Eye Group accepts most major insurance plans, including Medicare, and offers transparent pricing for patients opting for presbyopic, astigmatism-correcting and standard IOL implants.

## Ready to See Clearly Again?

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*For over 30 years, Elmquist Eye Group has provided expert eye care anchored in excellent service. Our combination of experience, compassionate care and proven results is unparalleled. If you’d like to schedule an appointment with Yasi Rodriguez, M.D.; Kate Wagner, O.D.; or Nina Burt, O.D., please call (239) 350-4696 or visit Elmquist.com.*



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# The Cape Coral Chamber Of Commerce Holiday Festival Of Lights



# Breaking News: FDA Lifts Black Box Warning On Hormone Therapy – A Historic Win For Women’s Health

By Kristin Gustin, APRN, Functional Medicine Provider



For the first time in over two decades, the U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA) has officially removed the black box warning from many hormone replacement therapy (HRT) medications used for menopause and hormone balance.

This monumental change signals a new era for women’s health – one based on current science, individualized care, and empowerment rather than fear.

## A Look Back: How We Got Here

The black box warning – the most serious label the FDA can assign – was added to hormone therapy products in the early 2000s following results from the Women’s Health Initiative (WHI) study. That research suggested an increased risk of breast cancer, heart disease, and stroke among women taking hormone therapy.

But there was a major flaw: the average age of women in the WHI study was 63 years old—often more than a decade past menopause. Many were also using older, synthetic hormone formulations that are very different from the bioidentical hormones commonly prescribed today.

For years, the results were misinterpreted and overgeneralized, leading millions of women and even healthcare providers to avoid HRT altogether. The stigma that followed left many women suffering through debilitating menopause symptoms – hot flashes, sleep loss, fatigue, anxiety, mood swings, and loss of libido – believing hormone therapy was too risky to consider.

## The Science Has Evolved—And So Has The FDA

Fast-forward two decades, and the research looks very different. Modern studies have consistently shown that hormone therapy is not only safe but can also be highly beneficial.

The FDA reviewed this extensive new evidence and, in November 2025, announced the removal of the black box warning from systemic estrogen and estrogen-plus-progestin therapies.

This means the FDA now recognizes that the broad, fear-based warning was outdated and overly restrictive.

In other words, the science finally caught up to what many progressive providers have known for years: when used appropriately, HRT supports health, vitality, and longevity.

## Why This Is Such A Big Deal

This change is more than regulatory – it’s revolutionary for women’s healthcare.

By lifting the black box warning, the FDA is effectively restoring confidence in HRT and empowering women to explore therapies that can dramatically improve quality of life.

## The Benefits Of Hormone Therapy Include:

- Relief from hot flashes, night sweats, and mood swings
- Improved focus, clarity, and memory
- Support for cardiovascular and metabolic health
- Enhanced energy, motivation, and sexual wellness
- Protection for bone strength and density
- Better sleep, emotional balance, and sense of well-being

In short, hormone therapy can help women feel like themselves again – confident, vibrant, and in control.

## From Fear To Freedom: Why This Decision Matters

For decades, misinformation about hormone therapy left women suffering unnecessarily. The outdated black box warning fueled fear, confusion, and guilt – as if wanting to feel good again was dangerous or indulgent.

Now, that narrative is changing. With the FDA’s action, women and healthcare providers can approach HRT with clarity and confidence, focusing on evidence-based, individualized treatment instead of blanket restrictions.

At Thrive by K, we see this as a massive step forward – one that validates what we’ve witnessed firsthand: When hormones are balanced safely and thoughtfully, women thrive.

## Thrive by K: Leading The Way In Advanced Hormone Options

At Thrive by K, we offer a variety of personalized hormone replacement therapy options to fit each woman’s lifestyle, goals, and medical needs. From topical creams and troches to injections and pellet therapy, every plan is designed with precision and care.

One of our most popular and effective treatments is

Evexias Bioidentical Hormone pellets—my personal favorite. Evexias is recognized as one of the most advanced and trusted hormone replacement companies in the United States, offering pharmaceutical-grade, bioidentical hormones that deliver steady, consistent results.

Pellet therapy provides continuous hormone delivery for months at a time – no daily dosing, no roller-coaster symptoms, just balance and sustained energy. Women who choose Evexias pellet therapy often report improved mood, focus, libido, and overall vitality – feeling truly like themselves again.

## The Future Of Women’s Health Is Here

This announcement represents more than a policy shift – it’s a cultural one.

It acknowledges that women’s health deserves nuance, attention, and the latest science. It allows providers like us to educate without fear, to treat with precision, and to help women age vibrantly, not passively.

At Thrive by K, we celebrate this FDA decision as a victory for every woman who has ever been told to “just deal with it.” You no longer have to.

## The Takeaway

The removal of the black box warning on hormone therapy is more than a policy update – it’s a long-overdue acknowledgment that women deserve safe, effective, and empowering care.

It’s time to rewrite the story around menopause, vitality, and aging well.

If you’ve been hesitant to explore hormone therapy because of old warnings or misconceptions, now is the perfect time to revisit the conversation.

Thrive by K is here to help you understand your options, evaluate your labs, and create a personalized plan to help you feel your best – naturally and safely.

Call (239) 984-6707 or visit Thrive by K Wellness Clinic in Cape Coral or St. James City to schedule your consultation today.

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# Roman Roofing: Cape Coral's Trusted Leader In Quality, Craftsmanship, And Community Commitment

In Southwest Florida, where weather conditions can shift from sunshine to storms in an instant, homeowners and businesses need a roofing partner they can depend on. Roman Roofing Inc., headquartered in Cape Coral, has earned that trust through years of outstanding workmanship, exceptional service, and a steadfast commitment to the community. More than just a roofing company, Roman Roofing is a team of dedicated professionals who bring integrity, precision, and heart to every project.



## A Workplace Defined By Excellence

Behind every shingle, tile, and metal panel installed by Roman Roofing lies a workforce driven by pride and purpose. The company has built a reputation not only for its high-quality roofing services but also as an exceptional place to work. Employees are empowered, trained to excel, and embraced as part of a company-wide family.

The Customer Care and Internal Sales Teams exemplify this strong workplace culture. Known for their professionalism, knowledge, and compassion, they serve as the first point of contact for homeowners and businesses seeking guidance. Their dedication ensures every customer receives clear communication and support throughout the roofing process, reinforcing the company's customer-first philosophy.

Roman Roofing invests heavily in its people through regular training sessions, educational opportunities, and team-building events. Leadership prioritizes open communication, competitive benefits, and a healthy work-life balance. This supportive environment enables employees to grow, innovate, and deliver exceptional service to the community.

## Production Team: Precision In Action

Just as vital to Roman Roofing's success is its talented production team. Their hands-on approach ensures that every roofing project meets the highest standards of craftsmanship and safety. The company utilizes job site supervisors and a dedicated team of skilled W-2 craftsmen, setting them apart from many competitors who rely solely on subcontractors. This structure provides accountability, consistency, and superior results.

Each roof is installed with meticulous care, using premium materials engineered to withstand Florida's severe weather conditions – from scorching sun to hurricane-force winds. The production team also prioritizes homeowner comfort, taking extra steps to make the installation or repair process smooth, transparent, and stress-free.

## Full-Service Expertise For Every Roofing Need

Roman Roofing has grown into one of Cape Coral's most respected roofing contractors due to its comprehensive lineup of services, including:

- **New Roof Installations:** Built with durable materials for long-term protection
- **Roof Repairs:** Skilled solutions for leaks, storm damage, and wear
- **Roof Replacements:** Customized options for aging or compromised systems
- **Commercial Roofing:** Scalable, reliable systems for businesses and facilities
- **Free Inspections and Estimates:** Providing clear, trusted evaluations

Whether working with tile, metal, or shingle roofing systems, Roman Roofing approaches each job with the same level of care and expertise.



## Prepared For Florida's Toughest Weather

Living in Southwest Florida means staying vigilant about roof health year-round. Roman Roofing emphasizes the importance of regular maintenance to safeguard homes from intense sun exposure, heavy rainfall, and seasonal storms. By staying proactive, homeowners can extend the life of their roofing system and prevent small issues from becoming costly challenges.

The company's thorough inspections and detailed reporting help homeowners understand their roof's condition and make informed decisions about repairs, maintenance, or replacement.

## Locally Rooted, Community Focused

Roman Roofing is deeply committed to the Cape Coral

community. As a locally owned and operated business, it supports neighborhood initiatives, participates in charitable programs, and sponsors local events. This dedication reflects the company's philosophy that strong businesses help build strong communities.

## A Legacy Of Integrity And Trust

What truly elevates Roman Roofing is its unwavering focus on honesty, transparency, and customer satisfaction. From detailed estimates to proactive communication, homeowners always know what to expect. The company is known for delivering on its promises with no hidden costs or surprises.

Roman Roofing's mission is simple: exceed expectations through top-quality craftsmanship, clear communication, and dependable service. With comprehensive training, strong leadership, and a culture built on respect and integrity, the company continues to raise the standard in the regional roofing industry.

For homeowners or businesses seeking reliable roofing solutions backed by professionalism and long-standing community trust, Roman Roofing Inc. remains the premier choice in Cape Coral and the surrounding region.

**Roman Roofing Inc., 921 NE 27th Ln., Cape Coral, FL 33909, (239) 458-7663, www.romanroofing.com.**

## LCEC In The Community: Giving Back All Year Long

By Shannon Williamson, APR – LCEC Public Relations Director

The holidays are a time for giving, at LCEC, that spirit lasts all year!

As a not-for-profit electric cooperative, LCEC strives to provide reliable, affordable power while reinvesting in programs that strengthen the community every day.

LCEC channels resources into:

- **Community Support Initiatives:** Sponsorships, charitable donations, and volunteer programs that make a lasting impact.
- **Educational Outreach:** Scholarships, energy education, and safety programs for schools and families.



• **Environmental Stewardship:** Conservation projects and sustainability efforts to protect Southwest Florida's natural resources.



LCEC is proud to be one of the largest contributors to United Way, helping fund vital services for those in need. This commitment reflects our cooperative principles, concern for community and member focus, ensuring that every dollar spent serves the people, not profit.

Shannon Williamson, APR, is the Public Relations Supervisor for LCEC and has been part of the team since 2019. A Cape Coral native and proud Florida Gulf Coast University (FGCU) graduate, Shannon is actively involved in the community as a member of the Cape Coral Chamber of Commerce and currently serves as President of the Florida Public Relations Association.



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# Business Spotlight

## Stella Marie's Italian Market & Deli

By Ryn Gargulinski

When capicola is meant to come to the Cape, fate has a way of stepping in. Such was the case for Stella Marie's, an Italian market and deli with a Boston twist that took about seven years to happen.

Those who have already delighted in the delicacies since the Oct. 18 opening would be quick to say it was worth the wait. Owner Bianca Bertolino and mom Lisa Balzotti grew up in their Italian grandmothers' kitchens, and it shows.

Their menu features a smattering of sandwiches, salads, wraps and prepared foods, made fresh daily from the highest-quality ingredients. Catering options are available, as is online ordering.

Best-sellers already topping the list include the chicken, broccoli and ziti dish, along with the Stella Marie. This signature sandwich combines homemade chicken cutlets with prosciutto, fresh mozzarella, tomato and basil topped with extra virgin olive oil and balsamic glaze.

The shop's own line of olive oils and vinegars has also been selling pretty well, and Bianca even makes her own breadcrumbs that are used in the recipes and sold instore.

"It doesn't get any fresher than that," the 34-year-old notes. Homemade goodness is perhaps Stella Marie's ultimate claim to fame. But it's not the only one.

Convenience tops the list in the prepared food section, where everything is grab-and-go. "You don't have to wait in line to get macaroni salad, tuna salad ... or any prepared foods." Everything is already packaged, ready and waiting for you.

Value is another big plus. "Our sandwiches are huge and filling for a great price," Bianca said, "and we only use high-quality ingredients."

So, with all the goodness bursting from the menu and scrumptiously stocked shelves, what was the holdup in opening Stella Marie's in the first place? Timing played a huge role.

Fifty-eight-year-old Lisa started visiting Cape Coral from Massachusetts in 2018 – and immediately began asking her daughter to come open an Italian market and deli.

But Bianca said no because she was taking care of her grandmother Marie.

"When Gram passed away last September, mom told me now is the time to move and start a new journey," Bianca said. "I declined again." Bianca and mom had been discussing the idea on a Sunday night, with Bianca even



envisioning what they would name the place and what they would sell. But she still said no.

"The next day the company I worked for had a layoff and I was one of them," Bianca said. "I called my mom and told her if she was 100% all in, I'm 100% all in."

Since they were bringing their grandmothers' traditional home cooking to the Cape, they decided the place needed to carry their grandmothers' names. Stella was Lisa's grandmother, or Bianca's great-grandmother. Marie was Lisa's mom.

Their opening on Oct. 18 also happened to be Stella's birthday.

While fate feels like it played a huge part of the business coming into being, so does the family background.

Bianca worked in an Italian market growing up and loved it. She ran her dad's Marblehead, Mass., grocery store for about 10 years, adding catering, pizza, sandwiches and prepared foods to his shop. Dad sold the shop to go back to the other family company – Bertolino Foods in Peabody, Mass.

Bertolino Foods was born when the family merged several meat-packing companies they owned, including Boston-based Bertolino Beef started by Bianca's grandfather in 1961. The steak tips and shaved steak at Stella Marie's are shipped from Bertolino Foods.

"I got to help my dad up north and now my mother and I are in this together," Bianca said. "It's nice to have the help and support of family by my side." Bianca also enjoys the amazing team at the shop as well as getting to know the customers.

"We already have many regulars, and I like to know everyone's name so when they walk in it feels like home for them," she said.



"For us, Italian food is more than just ingredients – it's the core of our identity, rooted in family and generations of tradition. We wanted to bring that entire experience, that genuine piece of our heritage, right here to Cape Coral. When you walk into Stella Marie's, you are walking into our family's story.

"You will be greeted by old photographs lining the walls – pictures of our grandparents and great-grandparents, each one telling a unique story of where we came from and who we are. This market is our tribute to them. It is where their recipes and their passion for authentic, quality food lives on."





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# Culinary Adventurist

## Hacienda Jalisco

By Ed Estes

Born and raised in San Diego can be another way of saying born and raised on Mexican food. We love it, and we often eat it for breakfast, lunch and dinner. It can be heavy, so understandably it is more popular for dinner, but huevos ranchos for breakfast has always been a brunch favorite of mine. Recently I asked our neighbor, Canadian snowbird and good friend, Peter, if he would like to join me for lunch at Hacienda Jalisco. As we expected, the lunch crowd was a bit light, but again, we both agreed that Mexican restaurants tend to be busier in the evening.



For those of you foodies who might remember “Slates,” Hacienda Jalisco occupies the same building, but you would hardly recognize it now. The owners have done a marvelous job redecorating it into a Spanish style venue. And while the

outside is nice with white stucco walls, deep orange/red trim, and tiled mansard roof, it was the inside décor that really impressed me. Walking in, you are met with a large bubbling water fountain, brick and tile flooring, deep golden walls accented with heavy dark brown lacquered wooden furniture. Tables grace the center of the dining rooms with booths along the side. Despite the heavy Spanish styled furniture, the interior is bright and airy, giving you a refreshing feeling as you walk in.



The restaurant was not too busy, which allowed our waiter to spend a little extra time with us reviewing the menu. I had some stuff to do in the afternoon, so I decided to go with iced tea (which was very good, and I am an avid drinker and connoisseur of iced tea – unsweet) rather than a beer or margarita. However, for those of you looking for something a bit stronger, they do have a full bar ... which will not escape me on my next evening visit. The menu is extensive with Mexican favorites: An array of appetizers, tacos, enchiladas, burritos, chimichangas as well as several combination plates (on the back page of the menu). They are happy to switch out or allow you to select your protein for your entrée and have an extensive list of meat items to choose as well as numerous side dishes. Their seafood entree selection is also very nice.

My friend elected to go with a combination plate, and I decided to order an old favorite: A wet burrito, filled with steak, topped with the verde (green) sauce, lettuce, tomatoes and sour cream (you can also get it with a rojo or red sauce). I am one of those diners who does not enjoy well-done meat, so when I do order a steak (or carne asada) burrito, I always ask for the meat to be cooked on the rare side. I am not always successful in my request, but being the eternal optimist, I always ask anyway. But wow, was I ever impressed with

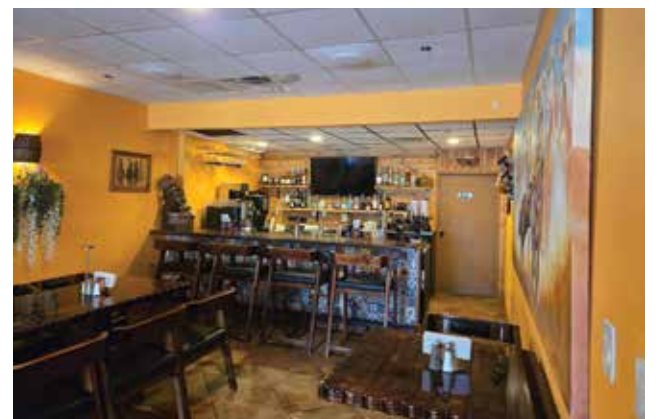


my entrée! The meat was perfectly prepared and deliciously seasoned, the verde sauce delicious and tomatoes fresh and flavorful. I honestly could not have imagined a better tasting burrito and again, being from San Diego, I have consumed a lot of burritos. My neighbor also enjoyed his meal so this place will be a keeper.

Service was good and our waiter was very helpful in explaining the menu to us (don't forget to look for the combination plates on the back). Payment is made easier as you can pay with the waiter or scan the QR code on your bill with your phone if you want to pay remotely. I like this feature as you don't have to wait for the waiter to take your credit card up and bring it back or wait for change if you are paying cash, particularly if the restaurant is busy.

Hacienda Jalisco is open seven days a week, Sunday through Thursday, from 11 a.m. to 10 p.m. and Friday and Saturday, from 11 a.m. to 11 p.m. They are located at 4820 Candia Street, again, the old Slates location, at the corner of Lafayette Street in the South Cape.

*Ed Estes is a retired author, lawyer, professor and real estate broker who enjoys writing for the Sun to legitimize his dining at Cape Coral restaurants. If you'd like Ed to visit your restaurant for a future publication you can contact him at edestesjr@gmail.com.*



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## Heal To Connect Bringing Heart And Healing To Mental Health Care In Cape Coral

Cape Coral residents now have a new home for compassionate, personalized mental health care. Heal to Connect | Integrative Psychiatric & Behavioral Health, founded by Daniela Duran Cintra, PMHNP-BC, is dedicated to helping individuals and families build emotional wellness through connection, understanding, and evidence-based care.



Located at 836 Lafayette St., Unit 2, Heal to Connect provides psychiatric evaluations, medication management, and integrative treatment for children, adolescents, and adults. The practice takes pride in offering both in-person and telehealth appointments, ensuring accessibility for every patient.

Our mission is simple: We want each person who walks through our doors, or joins us virtually, to feel truly heard, supported, and empowered in their journey toward healing.

At Heal to Connect, patients receive more than medication management, they gain a trusted partner in their mental health journey. The practice collaborates closely with therapists, pediatricians, schools, and families to create a well-rounded, team-based approach to care. Services are also offered in English and Spanish, making mental health support more inclusive for Cape Coral's diverse community.

### Services Offered

- Psychiatric Evaluations and Medication Management
- Integrative Treatment for Anxiety, Depression, OCD, ADHD, and Adjustment Disorders
- Comprehensive Diagnostic Evaluations
- Collaborative Care for Children, Teens, and Adults
- Bilingual (English/Spanish) Support
- Telehealth and In-Person Visits

Heal to Connect is also passionate about community partnerships and professional development, serving as a preceptor site for nurse practitioner students and collaborating with local healthcare providers to expand mental health awareness across Southwest Florida.



HEAL TO CONNECT

Heal to Connect, 836 Lafayette St., Unit 2, Cape Coral, FL 33904, (239) 284-5604, [www.healtoconnect.com](http://www.healtoconnect.com).

# Cape Coral Celebrates Adopt-A-Road Volunteers Keeping The City Beautiful

## Ribbon Cuttings Highlight Community Commitment To A Cleaner, Greener Cape Coral

By Jennifer Downes, Education Specialist, Keep Lee County Beautiful

Keep Lee County Beautiful (KLCB), in partnership with the City of Cape Coral, is proud to celebrate the success of its Adopt-A-Road Program, which brings together local businesses, civic groups, schools, and residents dedicated to keeping Cape Coral's roadways clean and litter-free.

KLCB is currently hosting a series of ribbon-cutting ceremonies to honor the groups who have officially adopted road segments across the city. These celebrations recognize the volunteers' ongoing dedication to protecting Cape Coral's

environment, enhancing neighborhood pride, and inspiring others to take part in keeping the community green.

"Our Adopt-A-Road partners are the heart of what we do," said Jenn Downes, Education Specialist for Keep Lee County Beautiful. "Each cleanup makes a visible difference. These volunteers are taking ownership of their community and showing that small acts of care can have a big environmental impact."

The Adopt-A-Road Program invites groups to adopt a designated stretch of roadway and commit to conducting regular litter cleanups throughout the year. In return, participants are recognized with official signage along their adopted road and through public acknowledgments at ribbon-cutting events.



Cape Coral Rotary



Cape Coral Youth Council and Sam Yaffey Realtor



George A. Sand II, P.A., Realtor

Participants include a wide range of community members – from local schools and scout troops to small businesses and neighborhood associations – all sharing the common goal of preserving the natural beauty of Cape Coral.

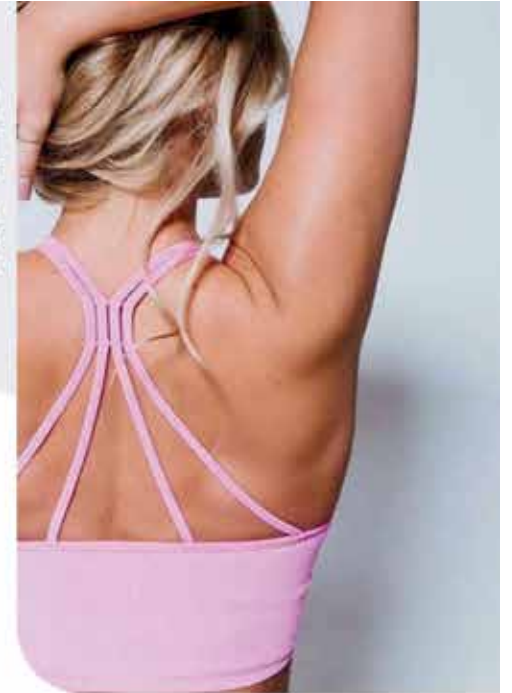
Keep Lee County Beautiful encourages more groups to join the movement and help expand the impact of the program. To learn more about adopting a road or joining a cleanup event, visit [www.klcb.org](http://www.klcb.org) or email [jenn@klcb.org](mailto:jenn@klcb.org).

### About Keep Lee County Beautiful, Inc.

Keep Lee County Beautiful, Inc., established in 1989, is the county's largest volunteer-based community action and education organization. This local nonprofit forms public-private partnerships and programs that engage individuals to take greater responsibility for improving their community environments. For more information, call (239) 334-3488 or visit [www.klcb.org](http://www.klcb.org). Follow us on Facebook @KLCBInc or Instagram [keepleebeautiful](https://www.instagram.com/keepleebeautiful/).

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#### STEP 2

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#### STEP 3

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#### STEP 4

Begin a healthy treatment regimen based on your personalized plan and start thriving.

# Real Estate Corner

## A Half-Century Home Loan: Innovation ... Or Invitation To Trouble?

By Kirstin Moll



The housing world has been buzzing louder than a Florida cicada ever since two big shifts hit the national conversation: President Donald Trump publicly championing a 50-year mortgage, and Fannie Mae dropping its minimum credit score requirement for certain loans. For many Americans, especially first-time buyers, these headlines read like a golden ticket. Lower monthly payments! Looser credit! A chance to finally step inside the gates of homeownership!

And yet ... whenever something sounds too good to be true, my inner wanna-be attorney starts tapping her pen, whispering, "Okay, but what's the catch?"

Because yes, on paper these changes appear to widen the doorway for thousands of renters still waiting for their moment. But beneath the promise is a complicated truth, and the long-term cost may be hiding in the fine print.

### The Allure Of The 50-Year Mortgage

Let's start with the big one. A 50-year loan stretches your mortgage over half a century, lowering monthly payments which, let's be honest, sign me up. In the short term, that feels perfect. Like, "Finally, we can afford something."

For families squeezed by rising home prices, this could be a real lifeline. Lower payments mean more access. More access means more homeowners. In practice, it sounds like the kind of policy shift that levels the playing field and brings the dream a little closer. But here's where the melody shifts.

Unlike a traditional 30-year mortgage, a 50-year loan spends a huge portion of its early life paying almost nothing toward the principal. One analysis found that after 10 years, a borrower on a 50-year loan would have built only \$11,000 in equity ... a tiny fraction of what a typical 30-year loan would produce in the same timeframe.

In other words, instead of owning more of your home each year, you're essentially renting it ... from your bank ... for decades. The house is yours in name, perhaps, but not in equity. And equity is the whole point of owning and of long-term financial stability.

### What Happens If The Market Turns?

Housing markets, like hurricanes, do not ask permission before changing direction. If home values dip, and at some point, they always do because it's a cycle, the borrower holding a 50-year mortgage sits in a uniquely vulnerable position. When equity is slow to build, it takes only a modest price correction to land a person upside-down on their loan.

Owe more than your home is worth? That's a financial and emotional sinkhole. Jobs change. Families grow. Life doesn't always sync with the market cycle. If you have to sell in a downturn, that negative equity becomes a very real problem.



## Sudoku

		5			1	7		6
	2	3			9		5	
			6	4	5		8	3
			3	7				5
7	1			5			3	9
3				6	8			
4	3		7	2	6			
		2		1		3	7	
1		7	5			6		

Answer in this issue

### The Second Breaking Story: Fannie Mae Drops Credit Score Minimum

The other major headline is Fannie Mae's decision to eliminate minimum credit score requirements for certain loans, expanding the door for buyers who have steady income and strong rental histories but imperfect credit files.

On its face, this is huge. It means renters who've done all the right things, but don't have traditional credit history, might finally get their shot. As a real estate agent, I know firsthand how many hard-working families would be homeowners today if only the system measured financial responsibility more fairly.

But loosening credit standards has a downside, too. We've been here before, and the 2008 housing crisis still lingers in the nation's collective memory. Opening the door wider is beautiful, as long as the people walking through it are truly prepared for what's on the other side. Looser credit can help, yes, but it can also place already stretched households into mortgages they are not yet ready to carry.

### A Delicate Balancing Act

As someone who helps families finally cross the threshold into homeownership, I want opportunity to expand. I want the system to be fair, accessible, and forward-thinking. Ask any real estate professional: we cheer whenever a buyer gets keys who never thought they would.

But we also want those opportunities to last.

Policies like these could redefine affordability in America. The question is: will they redefine it for better ... or simply make ownership feel easier upfront while increasing long-term financial strain?

### Looking Abroad: Are We Catching Up Or Falling Behind?

Here's where things get interesting.

Japan has offered 50-year, and even 100-year mortgages, for over two decades. Multi-generational home loans are common there, passed down like heirlooms. The United

Kingdom has tested its own version and is considering widening access. So, while these ideas may feel radical in the United States, they're not unheard of globally. They reflect a shift toward long-term affordability models in nations where housing is perpetually scarce and expensive.

But America isn't Japan. Our market, culture, and economic landscape are different. What works elsewhere doesn't always translate cleanly.

### So, What Do You Think?

This conversation is unfolding in real time, and the ripple effects could be historic. Are ultra-long mortgages a visionary solution or a slow-burn risk? Are looser credit requirements a new path to fairness or a familiar warning sign dressed in optimism? One thing is clear: Change is coming.

And before you go: here are the stats on the real estate market in Cape Coral this month:

- Median sold price: \$363,000. -8.1% YoY.
- Number of homes sold: 487. Up 20% YoY.
- Average sale-to-list price ratio: 96.1%, down 0.83% YoY.
- Average days on market: 92 Days.

Until next month, Kirstin Moll

*Kirstin made the move from Missouri to the sunny shores of Southwest Florida in 2015 and has been proud to call it home ever since. Before stepping into the world of real estate, she honed her skills as a marketing director for a real estate company and then moved on to be a creative director, designing campaigns for some of the top companies in the country. Kirstin's background in marketing and design gives her a unique edge in showcasing properties in their best light. Kirstin is passionate about providing a full-service luxury experience for every client, whether buying or selling. From the initial consultation to closing, she ensures that every detail is meticulously handled, delivering a seamless and elevated process tailored to meet each client's needs. Please contact Kirstin at (573) 450-3181 or email with any questions to realestate@kirstinmoll.com.*

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# Holiday Toy Safety In The Age Of Artificial Intelligence

## What Parents Should Know Before Wrapping This Year's Smart Gifts

As the holiday season approaches and shelves fill with interactive robots, talking dolls, and "smart" learning companions, many parents are asking an important question: Are these high-tech toys safe? Technology has transformed playtime, but it has also introduced new risks – especially when artificial intelligence is involved. This year, experts urge families to take a closer look before purchasing connected toys.

### AI Toys Are More Common Than Ever

AI-powered toys are expected to be among the most popular Christmas gifts. These gadgets can answer questions, personalize responses, learn behavior patterns, and even help teach language or early STEM concepts. While they can be fun and educational, they often include features such as microphones, cameras, wireless connectivity, and cloud-based storage – tools that require extra caution from parents.

### Data Privacy: The Biggest Issue

The primary concern with AI toys is data privacy. Many collect information about a child's voice, habits, behavior, and play preferences. Some even record audio or store personal details like age or approximate location. If manufacturers lack strong security protections, that information could be accessed by hackers or misused by third parties.

Parents should look for toys that clearly explain what data is collected, how it's used, and whether it can be deleted. Brands that follow strict privacy laws such as COPPA (the Children's Online Privacy Protection Act) are generally safer choices. Also consider toys that work without requiring constant internet access, since offline play limits data sharing.

### Classic Safety Concerns Still Apply

Even the smartest toy must meet traditional safety standards. Parents shouldn't overlook basics such as:

- **Choking hazards** from batteries or small parts
- **Electrical safety**, including sealed battery compartments
- **Durability**, ensuring the toy can withstand real-world play
- **Age recommendations**, especially when younger children may not use tech appropriately

Some AI toys include sensors or activation buttons that can break easily. If anything appears fragile or detachable, it's worth reconsidering.

### Screen Time And Development

Many AI toys link to apps or require tablets or phones for full functionality. While digital learning can be beneficial, experts still warn against excessive screen time. Set limits, choose educational content, and balance digital play with plenty of unplugged activities. AI toys should enhance imagination – not replace it.

### The Risks Of "Always Listening" Toys

Some connected toys use microphones that stay on continuously to detect when a child speaks. While convenient, this feature raises privacy concerns.

Before buying, parents should check whether the toy:

- Allows the microphone to be turned off
- Uploads audio recordings to the cloud
- Stores information locally rather than online

If a toy connects to a smartphone app, review the app's permissions as well.

### Tips For Choosing Safe AI Toys This Christmas

To keep holiday gifting worry-free, consider these safety steps:

1. **Research the brand** and its track record with children's products.
2. **Check reviews** from other parents, especially those mentioning privacy or set-up issues.
3. **Look for recalls** involving smart toys – some have been removed from the market for privacy violations.
4. **Set up the toy yourself**, entering as little personal information as possible.
5. **Use strong passwords** and keep home Wi-Fi secure.



### A Balanced Approach

AI toys can offer educational and entertaining experiences when used thoughtfully. By staying informed and taking basic precautions, parents can give children the fun of modern technology without unnecessary risks. This season, the safest gifts are those that protect children's privacy while delivering holiday joy.



## PLAN. PREPARE. PATIENCE.

LCEC works year-round to harden the system and prepare for storm season. Utility customers are encouraged to prepare with a plan that includes special needs, evacuation, and a storm kit.

### The plan

LCEC has a tried and true plan that is updated and practiced annually. The electric grid is built to be resilient. Resources and relationships are cultivated in case they are needed.

### Preparation is key

LCEC has comprehensive vegetation management, inspection, and maintenance plans to mitigate the potential for outages. When power is interrupted, the LCEC team is prepared to respond as quickly and safely as possible.

### When the lights are out, we are on!

Since 1940, LCEC employees, contractors, and vendors have been there to respond to every major event with a sense of urgency. We know our members depend on electricity to power their lives and we are committed to meeting the needs of our community 24/7/365.

Visit the [lcec.net](http://lcec.net) Storm Center for more information about Storm Preparedness.

## HOW LCEC RESTORES POWER

### Safety is the priority

During disaster response, and every day, safety is everyone's responsibility. While LCEC and all of our responding partners are laser-focused on restoring power as quickly as possible, safety is always the priority.

- Stay clear of downed power lines, as they may be energized.
- Puddles of water contacting downed lines are dangerous.
- Keep LCEC phone lines clear for emergency calls by only calling to report safety threats.



## AFTER A MAJOR EVENT... HERE'S HOW THE RESTORATION PROCESS WORKS



### STEP 1. DAMAGE ASSESSMENT

Includes physical inspection of our facilities. Once damage assessments have been made, LCEC begins repairs.



### STEP 2. CRITICAL REPAIRS

We repair main circuits and restore critical facilities such as hospitals, police, and fire stations.



### STEP 3. QUICKLY & SAFELY

Repair lines that get the greatest number of customers on as soon as possible.



### STEP 4. REMAINING OUTAGES

Restoring power to those small pockets or individuals still without power.

[www.lcec.net](http://www.lcec.net)



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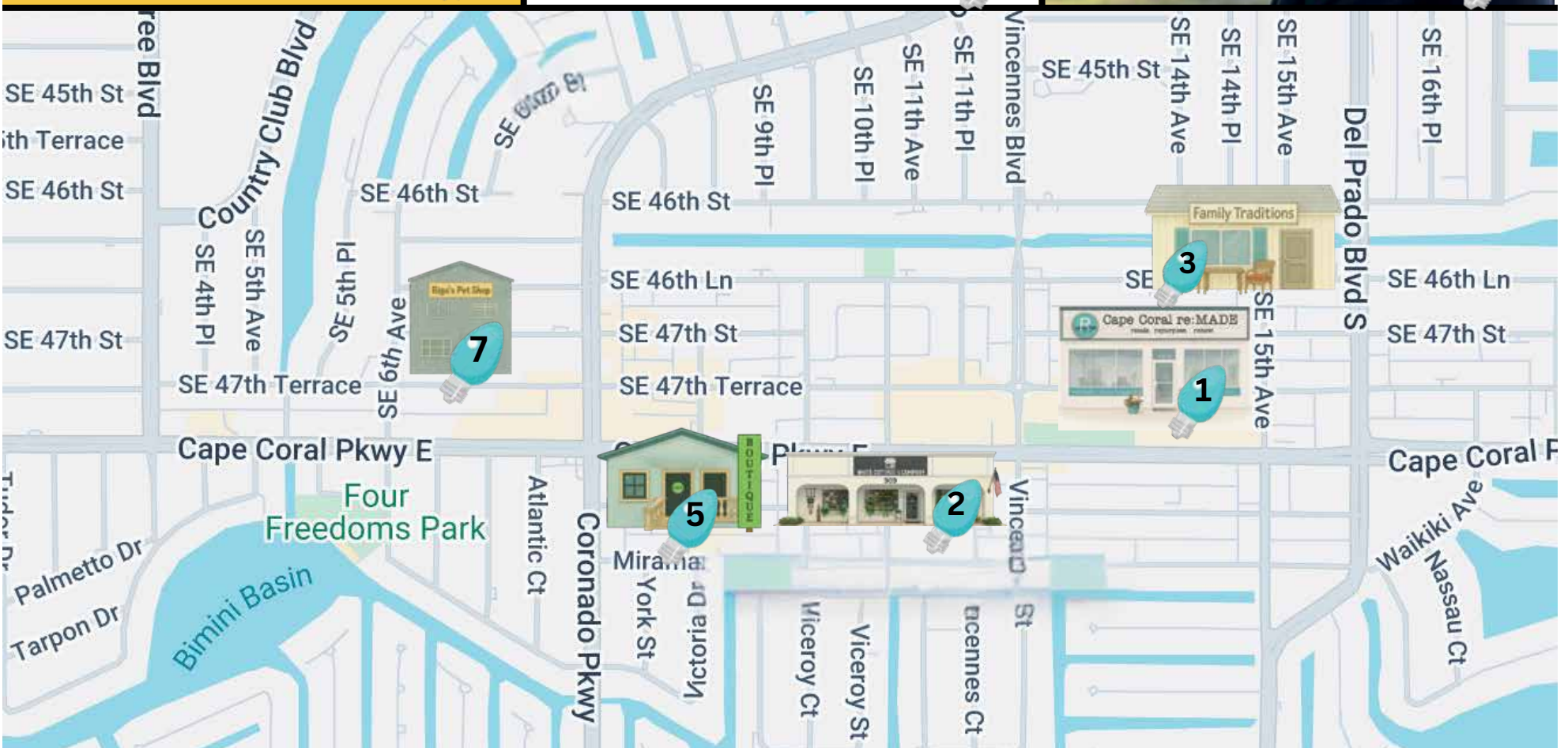


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# 24 Years And Counting ... FOS Furniture Hosts Annual Chamber Of Commerce Business After Hours Honoring Local First Responders



Members of the Cape Coral Fire Department, The Lee County Sheriff's Office, and The Cape Coral Police Department were recognized for their outstanding service to the community at last month's Cape Coral Chamber of Commerce After Hours event. Sponsored by FOS Furniture, the annual awards presentation is now in its 24 consecutive year.



"It's really hard to believe it's been 24 years," FOS Furniture owner Pat Corlew said. "We're honored to recognize these individuals who help keep our city and country safe. We want them to know how much the business community appreciates all they do. We look forward to this event every year and we hope to continue with it well into the future."

*Here are the award winners chosen by their respective departments:*

## Cape Coral Police Department Officer Of The Year – Michael Lasalandra

The Cape Coral Police Department is proud to announce Detective Michael Lasalandra as our 2025 Officer of the Year.



With more than 30 years of law enforcement experience, including decades of dedicated service to Cape Coral's Violent Crimes Unit, Detective Lasalandra embodies professionalism, perseverance, and commitment to justice. Known for his trademark phrase – "Pile it on" – he tackles even the most complex cases without hesitation, demonstrating an unmatched work ethic and relentless drive to serve the community.

Detective Lasalandra's investigative skill, attention to detail, and problem-solving ability have been instrumental in bringing closure to victims and families. His tireless efforts and unwavering dedication make him a true asset to the department and a role model for others in the profession.

## Cape Coral Fire Department Firefighter Of The Year – Brandon Petkus

The Cape Coral Fire Department (CCFD) has recognized Fire Engineer/Driver Brandon Petkus as Firefighter of the year.



Brandon demonstrates extraordinary dedication by taking every opportunity to improve himself and others. He pursued advanced training, taught at a local academy, earned the designation of the CCFD's only certified burn master, became a Fire Field Training Officer, and was promoted to Fire Engineer/Driver.

His most significant contribution is his leadership in facilitating the department's new hire classes. His passion and pride are evident in the high standards he upholds while teaching and mentoring other recruits. His influence ensures that new firefighters are prepared for the job and understand the values and expectations of the CCFD.

Engineer Petkus's journey with the CCFD reflects a level of perseverance and dedication that inspires those around him and strengthens the entire department.

## Lee County Sheriff's Law Enforcement Deputy Of The Year – Paul Nader

On Tuesday, Feb. 6, 2024, the Lee County Sheriff's Office received a call from Bank of America reporting a robbery in process at their South Cleveland Ave., location.



The suspect, later identified as Sterling Alavanche, entered the bank lobby yelling, "This is a robbery! This isn't a joke! I have a bomb!" He jumped over the teller counter and ordered employees Gustavo Rengifo and Kimberly Doyle to empty the teller drawers. As Lee County Sheriff's Office Patrol units began to arrive on the scene, Alavanche grabbed Rengifo and Doyle, taking them hostage by threat of force. Patrol units, assisted by the Hostage Negotiation Team, attempted to keep Alavanche calm and negotiate the unharmed release of the hostages.

As the situation progressed, Lieutenant Paul Nader was called into action. Lt. Nader is a Special Operations Unit Sniper with over 25 years of law enforcement experience and a member of the Lee County Sheriff's Office Special Operations Unit for over 15 years. Nader recognized that the situation was becoming increasingly more likely that Alavanche planned to harm the hostages. Sheriff Carmine Marceno was also on the scene and observed the situation devolving, authorizing the use of deadly force, confirming to Lt. Nader to shoot the hostage taker as soon as circumstances permitted.

With little time to prepare, Lt. Nader grabbed SOU Operator Matt Ansell and instructed him to remain solidly still. Lt. Nader placed his sniper rifle on Sgt. Ansell's shoulder and began to make the necessary calculations to eliminate the threat. He stood ready as Alavanche continued to belligerently rant, refusing to release either hostage. Alavanche then violently grabbed Doyle, placing her in a headlock. He presented a box cutter and began to go for Doyle's neck and throat area.

Lt. Nader, without hesitation, knew Doyle's life was about to be taken. With only a portion of Alavanche's face visible, obscured by a flat screen computer monitor and Doyle's face now pressed against the left cheek of Alavanche, Lt. Nader fired one round, striking Alavanche just below the left eye, killing him instantly.

SOU Operators immediately rushed the teller counter and evacuated Rengifo and Doyle away from the scene as quickly as possible. Due to the action of Lt. Nader, Rengifo and Doyle were successfully rescued unharmed.

Sheriff Marceno is extremely proud of Captain Nader's courage, confidence and dedication to his craft that saved the lives of Kimberly Doyle and Gustavo Rengifo.



# Broadway Palm Welcomes Award-Winning Music Director Drew Scott

Broadway Palm Dinner Theatre is thrilled to announce the appointment of Drew Scott as its new musical director. An award-winning music director, pianist, and producer, Drew brings over two decades of global experience spanning New York City, South Africa, Dubai, London, and now Fort Myers.



Drew's accolades include South Africa's leading theatrical award for Best Musical Director for *Into the Woods*, with two additional nominations for *Loving You*. His work can also be heard in the PBS documentary

*Hal Prince: A Director's Life*. He has collaborated with leading artists from Broadway and the West End, and with major clients including Sony Music and the BBC.

Notable theatrical highlights include the world tour of *Evita* (Prince's original production), *Joseph ... Dreamcoat*, *Phantom of the Opera*, and *Cats* (Royal Caribbean), in addition to numerous productions across the United States, Southern Africa, and the Middle East.

As an educator, Drew spent three years on faculty at the Sharjah Performing Arts Academy, helping develop a world-class B.A. Musical Theatre program. He has mentored pre-professional artists at Stagedoor Manor and Long Lake Camp for the Arts and advised numerous theatre programs on industry preparation.

Drew's extensive experience as an audition pianist in New York, working with companies including Selladour, Showtime Management, GWB, David Ian, and PTP, has

also led him to assist in casting world tours for shows such as *We Will Rock You*, *Phantom of the Opera*, *Matilda*, *School of Rock*, and *Evita*.

As a producer, his company &CO won Best Production for Young Audiences for the international premiere of *Polkadots: The Cool Kids Musical*. Additionally, as executive producer for his streaming company &SCENE, Drew has collaborated with artists including Marc Shaiman, Anthony Rapp, Amra-Faye Wright, Suanne Braun, Amanda Tapping, and stars of *Stargate*.

A Colorado native, Drew has traveled to 56 countries and now calls Oxfordshire home with his partner Alan and their beloved dog, Clarence. Broadway Palm is excited to bring Drew's wealth of experience, creativity, and global perspective to its productions and audiences.

# From The Desk Of Sheriff Carmine Marceno

## Thoughts For Vacationers

The year has certainly flown by! Holiday time ... and vacation time ... is here, once again.



While our focus is on family gatherings, purchasing airline tickets and reserving hotel rooms, please include home security as a component of your planning.

Before we address residential security practices, it would be prudent to take a moment to discuss the sharing of vacation plans on social media prior to leaving, as well as the posting of photos and narratives while out of town.

These practices alert wrongdoers of the fact that your residence will be or is vacant and vulnerable. Consider postponing social media posts until after you return. Use past-

tense verbiage to ensure that those monitoring your posts are aware that you are no longer away from home.

Prior to leaving your home, take a few extra moments to ensure that all windows and sliding doors are both closed and locked. Cooler mornings have prompted many of us to unlock and open windows for increased air circulation. While you may have remembered to close these windows, ensure that they have been locked, as well.

Consider adding motion-activated lighting and security cameras. A first line of defense against burglary, lights and visible cameras are deterrents to would-be thieves.

Home security systems, now being wireless, are easily installed and are available in a range of price points. Implementing 24/7 central station monitoring will ensure a quick response during emergency circumstances.

Utilizing timers and/or Bluetooth smart plugs/outlets to activate lighting and electronics make it appear that you are at home. Vary the times and the lighting that you select to operate.

Blinds, curtains and shutters should be closed making it difficult for potential intruders to look into your home.

Remove your garage door opener/remote from any vehicle that will be unattended during your time away. Ensure that valuables, including firearms, are removed from these vehicles and secured within your home.

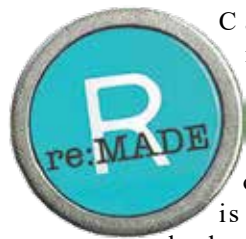
Never leave spare keys hidden on your property. Experienced criminals can locate "faux rocks" and sprinkler head lookalikes, will look inside of and beneath lawn statues, potted plants and outdoor electrical outlet boxes/covers, beneath and inside birdhouses and under door mats ... you name it.

Accumulated mail notifies would-be burglars that your home is vacant. Consider asking a neighbor to retrieve your mail or take advantage of the United States Postal Service "Hold Mail Service." Additional information, regarding this postal program, can be found at [www.usps.com/manage/hold-mail.htm](http://www.usps.com/manage/hold-mail.htm).

The Lee County Sheriff's Office offers vacant house checks. Visit our website or call (239) 477-1000 for additional information.

Let's all take proactive measures to protect our homes and property while enjoying our time on vacation!

# Cape Coral re:MADE Leadership Team Brings Creativity, Community, And Purpose Together



Cape Coral re:MADE, a nonprofit 501(c)(3) and 100% volunteer-run organization, is powered by a leadership team whose passion for creativity, sustainability, and entrepreneurship shines through in everything they do. This close group works side by side to support local makers and create a positive, welcoming space for the entire community.

Leading the way is **Pam**, executive director, who guides the mission of re:MADE with heart and vision. Her dedication ensures the organization continues to uplift entrepreneurs and encourages creative reuse.

**Sig**, the creative director, brings artistic energy to the store through imaginative displays and inspiring design ideas. Her creativity helps set the tone for the re:MADE experience.

As volunteer coordinator, **Vikki** connects people with meaningful ways to give back. Her friendly, encouraging style ensures every volunteer feels appreciated and valued.

The store is supported by three talented managers. **Michelle**, who also serves as class coordinator, organizes hands-on learning opportunities to help makers build their skills. **Jan**, known for her furniture painting talent and display expertise, keeps the shop looking beautiful and full of inspiration. **Monica**, store manager and creative project developer, brings fresh ideas and innovative projects to life.

Together, this leadership team shares a deep commitment to sustainable practices, creative community building, and supporting local entrepreneurship. Their teamwork and passion fuel Cape Coral re:MADE's mission every single day, making it a place where creativity grows and community thrives. Visit us at 1327 Cape Coral Pkwy., E., Cape Coral, Tuesday through Friday, 10 a.m. to 5:30 p.m.



1327 Cape Coral Parkway E., Suite A, Cape Coral, FL 33904, (239) 233-3555, [www.creative@capecoralremade.com](http://www.creative@capecoralremade.com)



## Sudoku Answers

8	4	5	2	3	1	7	9	6
6	2	3	8	9	7	5	1	4
9	7	1	6	4	5	2	8	3
2	8	4	3	7	9	1	6	5
7	1	6	4	5	2	8	3	9
3	5	9	1	6	8	4	2	7
4	3	8	7	2	6	9	5	1
5	6	2	9	1	4	3	7	8
1	9	7	5	8	3	6	4	2

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# Cape Coral Art League

## Open Painting

Enjoy the company of fellow artists. Just drop by and bring your own art project and supplies. Enjoy some yummy snacks and enjoyable music too! No registration required! (Adults only, please).



Every Wednesday (September through July) from 1 to 4 p.m. Open to the public. \$3 for members, \$6 for nonmembers (Pay at the door).

## Student Sundays – Teaching Young People Art (October Through June)

Exposing young people to the visual arts can help in the development of motor skills, language skills, social skills, teamwork, decision-making, risk-taking, and, of course, inventiveness. At the Cape Coral Art League, we strive to teach the next generation about drawing, color, layout, perspective, and balance – skills that can benefit them in their academic work as well as expand their creativity. And they have fun while learning!

Ages 6 to 14 (no younger, please). 1 to 4 p.m. Fee: \$20. All materials provided. Cash or check at the door only. Please arrive 15 minutes early to register – no pre-sign-ups. No reservations required. New lesson every week. Check our Facebook page or our website for updates.

## January Shows and Events

Gallery 1: Sunseekers

Studio 1: Leadership Show

## February Shows and Events

Gallery 1: Wild About Wildlife

Studio 1: Black and White Art/Black History Month

## 2025-2026 Classes

Beginning Acrylic – Mondays, 10 a.m. to noon

Intermediate Acrylic Painting – Mondays, 12:30 to 3:30 p.m.

Learn to Draw – Tuesdays, 9 a.m. to noon

Ceramic Hand Building – Tuesdays, 9 a.m. to noon

Pastel Painting for Beginners – Tuesdays, 12:30 to 3:30 p.m.

The Art of Zentangle – Tuesdays, 1 to 3 p.m.

Oil Painting for All Levels –

Wednesdays, 9 a.m. to noon

Digital Photography and Graphics

(Adults 16-plus) – Wednesdays, 2 to

4 p.m.

Intermediate and Advanced Pastel

Painting – 9 a.m. to noon

Hooked on Watercolor – Intermediate – Thursdays – 9

a.m. to noon

Scan the QR code for the schedule.



## Workshops 2025-2026

Please see CapeCoralArtLeague.org or call (239) 772-5657 for details and to register.

Jan. 24 – Pastels and Pirouettes – In the Style of Degas

Jan. 30 and 31 – Working with Value and Color in Abstract Work

Feb. 20 and 27 – Introduction to the World of Digital Art

April 10 – Koreshan State Park

## Gallery Shows 2025-2026

For artists planning projects for upcoming exhibits, the schedule for the 2025-2026 season:

March – Purple Reigns/Class Act

April – Celebrating Color/Season Highlights

May – Florida Life/Members Month

The prospectus for an upcoming show can be found in the show description on CapeCoralArtLeague.org. The public receptions celebrating the opening of shows are on the first Thursday of the month.

## Unique Gifts At Reasonable Prices!

The gift shop is located inside the Cape Coral Art League and showcases talent within the League.

Come browse the creativity of local artists. Thinking of a gift for someone special? You will find it here among the unique and treasured. Artistic expression is found here – come in and experience it. Don't forget to pick up a **mini** – small originals made by our members – they are a perfect gift!

Speaking of gifts ....

Give a gift that keeps them creating! The Cape Coral Art League gift certificates are available in any amount. They can be redeemed toward a variety of classes and workshops for adults and children.

Office, gallery and gift shop hours are Monday through Thursday, September to June: 11 a.m. to 4 p.m.

**Cape Coral Art League, 516 Cultural Park Blvd., Cape Coral, FL 33990, (239) 772-5657, www.capecoralartleague.org.**

# Introducing Orchid Cove By Maronda Homes

Maronda Homes is proud to introduce Orchid Cove, the lowest price for a brand-new townhome in Bokeelia, on Pine Island, Florida. Orchid Cove offers buyers a unique opportunity to experience island-style living – with the sunshine, water, and laid-back coastal lifestyle of Florida.



Orchid Cove is ideal for those looking to lounge by the community pool and soak up the beautiful Florida sun while enjoying a new, low-maintenance lifestyle, and it can also serve as a great investment opportunity.

## The Community

• **Prime location on Pine Island** – Orchid Cove is just 2 minutes from Matlacha Pass and about 10 minutes to Cape Coral, offering both an island retreat and easy access to city conveniences.

• **Affordable new homes** – Orchid Cove features the lowest-priced new-construction townhomes currently available in Bokeelia.

• **Maintenance-free lifestyle** – Residents enjoy lock-and-leave townhome living with lawn care, landscaping, and exterior maintenance included.

• **Amenities designed for leisure** – A community pool and cabana make it easy to enjoy Florida's outdoor lifestyle without leaving home.

• **Homesites with scenic views** – Some homesites offer pond or preserve views, ideal for buyers seeking natural beauty.

## The St. Lucia Townhome

The cornerstone of Orchid Cove is the St. Lucia Townhome, designed for comfort and modern living.

- 1,639–1,684 square feet of open-concept living space
- Three bedrooms, 2½ baths
- Luxury Master Suite with private bath and walk-in closet
- Option of 1 or 2-car garages
- Interior finishes: tile flooring, granite countertops,

and stainless-steel appliances

- Exterior finishes: coastal-style facades, metal roofs, impact windows – built to suit the island environment
- Smart Home Package and New Home Warranty included

## Make The Switch To Island Living

With rising demand for affordable, quality homes in scenic Florida locations – combined with the growing desire for more relaxed, maintenance-free living – Orchid Cove represents a rare opportunity: brand-new homes in a coastal community, without the premium price tag.

For those seeking a residence that blends comfort, value, and island charm – whether it's a full-time home, a seasonal getaway, or a lock-and-leave investment – Orchid Cove offers an ideal solution.

## About Maronda Homes

Since 1972, Maronda Homes has been building value-driven, quality homes across multiple states. The company was founded on the principle of offering superior homes at unbeatable prices – and Orchid Cove is the latest example of that legacy in action.

## Get In Touch

Prospective residents are encouraged to Join The List on our Website to get early access to pricing, homesite selection, and community updates before the public opening date.

Reach out to our team today to get started at (863) 591-5670

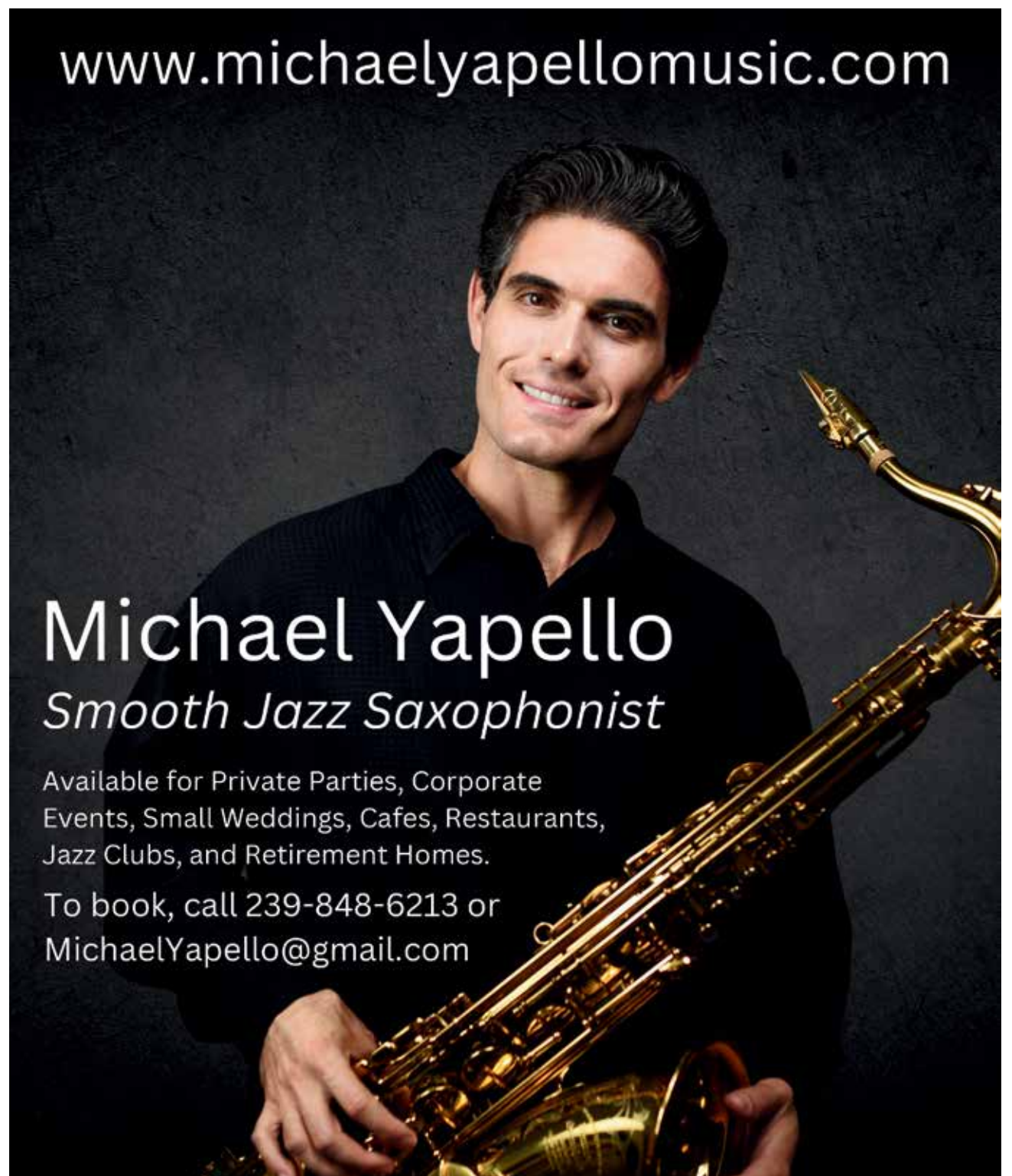
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# Nonprofit Spotlight

## Cape Coral's Thrive Expands Into Guiding Grace Family Support Network

By Ryn Gargulinski

Life may not come with a how-to manual, but local families will soon find it comes with something even better – Guiding Grace Family Support Network. This nonprofit has been serving families in Nebraska since its 2024 launch and has now merged with Cape Coral's Thrive.

A total rebirth of the longstanding Thrive is underway, which comes with a massive expansion in its reach. While Thrive was solely focused on helping pregnant women, Guiding Grace adds other family members and family configurations into the equation.

Single moms and dads are welcome, as are foster parents, grandparents raising grandchildren, and families at every stage.

Its Family Support Program provides everything from parenting classes to financial education, personalized case management to mental health assessments, counseling and recovery support groups to employment and career development support.

Help with household and material supplies is also in the mix, with Guiding Grace Giving Days starting in February on the second Thursday of every month.

In short, Guiding Grace serves up a full slate of professional services, along with a supportive community and a solid pathway for individuals to follow to create their own success.

Cape Coral Executive Director Meghan DeLuca says this extraordinary transformation is not only exciting, but it's also a much-needed change that has been coming for quite some time.

Originally founded 30 years ago as a maternity home for teenage unwed mothers, Thrive was established at a time when the main aim was to hide the teens away throughout their pregnancies while setting up adoptions for their babies.

The teens were then expected to return to their families as if nothing had happened. As the stigma surrounding teenage pregnancies fell away and the needs of the community changed, Thrive changed right along with them – to an extent.

It began serving pregnant women who were homeless, victims of domestic violence or struggling through other circumstances, but it remained a residential facility focused on single mothers.

While that's all well and good, what was not well and good were the situations into which the single mothers would often return once they left the residential facility. Putting an individual back into an unstable environment is openly inviting all the chaos to return.

It's not necessarily addressing other family members who have an impact on the health and well-being of the whole – or the underlying causes, conditions or mental health issues that don't magically go away on their own.

"Some people have a semi-truckload of baggage that is dangerous, fearful, hard and terrifying – all the things they desperately need help with," Meghan said. "What do you do? Running wrecked cars against wrecked cars is what was happening."

As Thrive was trying to pivot, Meghan knew there had to be a program that had mastered this set of circumstances and



Gina Tomes, Founder and Executive Director, Nebraska and Meghan DeLuca, Executive Director, Florida



knew how to best provide support in a non-residential environment. She found it with Guiding Grace.

She made the call. The acquisition and merging went down in the fall. Services in Cape Coral will start rolling out early next year.

"What needs to be achieved is true sustainability," Meghan explained, which is what the Family Support Program is all about. It delivers essential services and ongoing mental, emotional and spiritual support – all in a dignified and loving way.

While the organization is strongly based on faith, there is no need for participants to adopt any type of beliefs to benefit from their services. All they need is the willingness to learn a new way of living, one that automatically restores hope.

Meghan saw this firsthand when she and Cape Coral Administrative Director Phyllis Virno paid a visit to Guiding Grace founder Gina Tomes in Omaha. Gina had invited a couple of clients for a chance to share their stories.

She said she wasn't sure if anyone would show up, but they did. In droves. More than 40 people came with their children, moms, dads, grandmothers and grandchildren – all different versions of families that had benefited from the organization.

"Hope was alive in them, you could just see it," Meghan said, noting that some had only been part of the Guiding Grace community for a few weeks.



Florida/Nebraska Team (partial) – From left to right: Phyllis Virno, Administrative Director, Florida; Gina Tomes, Founder and Executive Director, Nebraska; Meghan DeLuca, Executive Director, Florida; Abby Skradski, Administrative Director, Nebraska.

### The Guiding Grace Family Support Program Includes:

- Personalized case management
- Housing Navigation
- Parenting classes from newborn care to teen years
- Pre- and post-natal education and support
- Birth, breast feeding, and maternal wellness coaching
- Mental health and chemical dependency assessments
- Counseling and recovery support groups (AA, NA, grief and loss, abortion healing)
- Financial education (National Model Curriculum)
- Employment and career development support
- GED, college, and vocational training connections
- Children's programming and activities
- Nutrition education
- Faith-formation, community encouragement
- Adoption information, referrals, education and counseling
- Family activities, retreats, holiday gatherings and celebrations
- Material and household supply assistance

A young man raised his hand to share, pulling three sheets of paper from his back pocket. It was his whole life story, one that hit a crisis point when his 6-year-old daughter had looked him in the eye during their darkest times and said, "It has to be better, dad."

And now it was. After providing immediate support with food, Guiding Grace had helped him find his way to a solid job, a place to live near the job, and an entirely new way of being. He had known he had to change his entire life to change his daughter's life, Meghan noted. So, he did.

"He was grinning ear to ear," Meghan said, "while his daughter was running around laughing and playing, her hair streaming behind her like in a movie. There wasn't a dry eye in the room."

"The emotion and rawness and just how committed he was to his future and his daughter's future. That's why we're doing what we're doing. They deserve that chance, that ability, that place to go to start again."



Founder and Nebraska executive director hugs Florida executive director Meghan DeLuca.



### Guiding Grace Family Support Network (formerly Thrive)

907 SE 5th Ave., Cape Coral, FL 33990,  
(239) 242-7238

[www.GuidingGraceNetwork.org](http://www.GuidingGraceNetwork.org)



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## Coming Up In The Cape

### MGA League At Coral Oaks Golf Course Every Wednesday – 8 a.m. to 12:30 p.m.

Coral Oaks Golf Course hosts an 18-hole Men's Golf Association (MGA) event every Wednesday with an 8 a.m. "shotgun" start. This means every golfer starts at 8 a.m., with each four-man group on a different hole. Groups are drawn by the Coral Oaks Pro shop.

MGA annual dues are \$50, and each Wednesday, every golfer pays for golf plus \$6 into the prize money pool, which is given as credit to be spent at Coral Oaks, either in the Pro Shop or the restaurant (golfer's choice).

There are also MGA events offered on Mondays, Fridays, and Saturdays, starting at 7 a.m. These are typically smaller groups, with every foursome starting in succession on hole No. 1.

For more information on the MGA League, Contact Dave Kenney at fsaltbass@gmail.com or Coral Oaks Golf Course at (239) 573-3100.

### Cape Coral Farmers Market At Club Square Every Saturday – 8 a.m. to 1 p.m.

Presented by the Cape Coral Chamber of Commerce, a Farmers Market is held every Saturday from 8 a.m. to 1 p.m., downtown Cape Coral at Club Square (intersection of SE 47th Terrace and SE 10th Place).

## Cape Coral Social Club

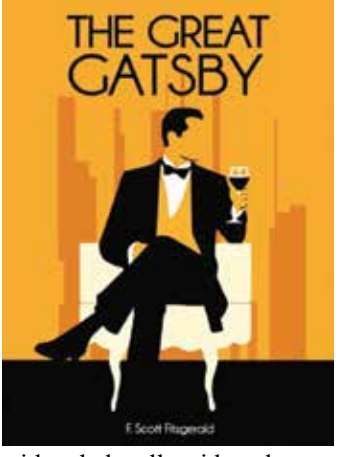
### Friends, Fun, Community

The Cape Coral Social Club provides members with the opportunity to make new friends while enjoying the camaraderie of current friendships in a warm and congenial atmosphere. Members are encouraged to have fun and participate in the club's various offerings that include monthly general meetings featuring informative and entertaining speakers and monthly dinner dances with great food, music and dancing. We also offer organized day trips, cruises, games, boating and much, much more.

To find out more about the Cape Coral Social Club you can attend our monthly meetings as a guest. Monthly meetings are held every fourth Thursday of the month at the German American Social Club (we rent space there). Sign in and light refreshments start at 9:30 a.m. and the general meeting with the guest speaker starting at 10 a.m. The address is 2101 SW Pine Island Road, Cape Coral, FL 33991.

### January Dinner Dance

Join Cape Coral Social Club members and guests for a Great Gatsby themed dinner dance on Saturday, Jan. 3, 2026. We welcome everyone. Sign up by Dec. 30 by phone (239) 699-0123 or on the website at [www.capecoralsocialclub.org/monthlydance](http://www.capecoralsocialclub.org/monthlydance). For \$40 you get a choice of three entrees with salad, rolls, sides, dessert and soft drinks. Dance music will be provided by Jay Smith. Dress for the theme or not, just have a good time.



The Cape Coral Farmers Market is always overflowing with fresh, local, and healthy produce, fruits, and foods, along with melt-in-your-mouth baked goods, made-on-site guacamole, salsas, homemade jams and jellies, pickles and olive mixes, cheeses, take home foods and much more.

For more information, visit [www.capecoralfarmersmarket.com](http://www.capecoralfarmersmarket.com).

### Christmas Village At Cape Christian – Dec. 5 to 23

Step into a holiday wonderland filled with lights, laughter, and magic for the whole family! Meet Santa in front of his workshop and visit Mrs. Claus's life-sized gingerbread house for crafts, cookie decorating, and writing letters to the North Pole. Don't forget your camera, there are plenty of free photo

opportunities with Santa, Mrs. Claus, cheerful elves, and maybe even a few surprise guests. You might even catch a few snow flurries drifting through the night!

Hop on a holiday-themed hayride with your family (\$5 per family) or climb aboard the Christmas Train for just \$5 per child. Warm up by the campfire with hot cocoa and s'mores from our café, and treat yourself to funnel cakes, cotton candy, fresh-squeezed lemonade, snow cones, kettle corn, corn dogs, and more!

Enjoy plenty of free activities like our 20-foot snow slide, reindeer games, and snowball fights, then cozy up for movies

*Coming Up In The Cape on page 21*

## Holiday Trivia

Happy Holidays! Starting with the first day of the month, right on through to the last day, there are a variety of happenings going on, including the winter solstice, Christmas Eve, Christmas Day, Hanukkah, Kwanzaa, New Year's Eve, and New Year's Day, just to name a few. There is also Saint Nicolas Day celebrated on Dec. 6 by many Western countries, and Bodhi Day, celebrated by Buddhists on Dec. 8, Boxing Day, celebrated in some countries on Dec. 26 as is the Day of Goodwill, which is celebrated in South Africa.

1. In what decade did Coca-Cola start using Santa Claus in advertisements?
2. The French word "Noël" is often used around Christmas, but what was its original meaning in Latin?
3. How many towns in America are named "Christmas"?
4. True or False: Santa Claus is based on a real person.
5. In total, how many gifts were given in the "Twelve Days of Christmas"?
6. What does the name "Hanukkah" translate to?
7. What is the name of the spinning top that children play with?
8. What is the name of the helper candle used to light the others?
9. In what year was Kwanzaa created?
10. What is the meaning of the name Kwanzaa, which is derived from a Swahili phrase?

*Answers:  
1. The 1920s. 2. Birth. 3. Two (Christmas, Mich. and  
Christmas, Fla.). 4. True. The legend of Santa Claus  
can be traced back hundreds of years to a monk  
named St. Nicholas. 5. 364. 6. Dedication. 7. Dreidel.  
8. Shamash. 9. 1966. 10. First fruits or first harvest.*

## Cape Coral Welcomes 2026 With Music, Fireworks, And Family Fun

As 2025 draws to a close, Downtown Cape Coral is gearing up for yet another festive turn: the annual Cape Coral New Year's Eve Celebration. Organized by the city and held along SE 47th Terrace (between SE 9th Place and SE 11th Place), the event offers a lively, family-friendly night out – free and open to all ages.

### What To Expect

From 6 p.m. until midnight, the street will be closed to traffic and transformed into a bustling celebration zone. The evening kicks off with live music, DJ sets, and entertainment for all ages. Food vendors, shopping stalls, and games for children help set the scene.

A highlight: there are two ball drops – one at 8 p.m. so families with young children can join earlier and another at midnight for those staying to ring in the new year. Both are followed by a synchronized fireworks display.

### Vibe And Entertainment

Expect a festive, upbeat atmosphere. In recent years, the celebration has featured national-level acts and are scheduled to perform at the 2025/2026 event, backed by support from local DJs and performers.

Kids and families can enjoy activities like face-painting, games, and other interactive fun while waiting for the countdown.

**DECEMBER 31**  
**SE 47TH TERRACE**

6:00 PM • VENDOR VILLAGE & DJ RIFIK  
8:00 PM • KIDS BALL DROP  
8:30 PM • DEB & THE DYNAMICS  
10:30 PM • POP 2000 TOUR WITH CHRIS KIRKPATRICK OF BSYNC, O-TOWN, RYAN CABRERA, & LFO  
MIDNIGHT • MAIN BALL DROP



FOR MORE INFORMATION, VISIT  
[CAPECORALNYE.COM](http://CAPECORALNYE.COM)

### Why It Matters To Cape Coral

This celebration is more than a party – it's part of Cape Coral's growing tradition of community events aimed at bringing residents together. Since its launch in recent years, the New Year's Eve Celebration has quickly become a cornerstone holiday gathering.

Especially appealing is its inclusivity: whether you come with young kids, friends, or a group of adults, there's something for everyone. The dual-ball drop makes sure no one misses out – whether heading to bed early or partying past midnight.

For more information, visit [www.capecoralnye.com](http://www.capecoralnye.com).

# Thirteen Bizarre Christmas Laws You Never Knew Actually Existed

## 1. The “War On Christmas” Is Actually A Thing

Christmas celebrates the birth of Christ, which one might think would make it a hands-down joyous occasion. Nope. Christmas has been a source of controversy in the United States since the earliest colonial days. In fact, in 1659, the Puritan government of the Massachusetts Bay Colony went so far as to outlaw Christmas in order to discourage “disorderly” behavior that might be “offensive to God.” Anyone who failed to show up for work or participated in feasting would be fined five shillings. The Christmas ban lasted until 1681, and Massachusetts didn’t make Christmas an official holiday until 1856.

## 2. The English Were The First To Ban Christmas

Massachusetts wasn’t the first place to ban Christmas. Back in 1643, England passed an ordinance “encouraging” citizens to treat Christmas as a solemn holiday, rather than a celebratory feast. By the next year, Christmas had been banned altogether. Christmas remained illegal in England until 1660 (one year after Massachusetts banned Christmas).

## 3. Paying Off Debts

In sharp contrast to the New England law against recognizing Christmas, Arkansas passed a law in 1838 making debt that would otherwise be payable on Christmas, payable one day earlier, aka Christmas Eve. In other words, if a debt you owed was to come due on Christmas, you’d have one less day to pay it. Likewise, if a debt owed to you was payable on Christmas, your debtor would be required to pay it one day early, thus depriving you of one day’s worth of interest. Official score in Arkansas: Debtor=0, Creditor=0.

## 4. A Grace Period For Paying A Debt

Unlike Arkansas, Louisiana adopted a law in 1837 that made Christmas Day a grace period with regard to bill paying. In other words, if a debtor had a debt come due on Christmas Day, they would have until December 26, also known as Boxing Day, to

pay it. Accordingly, debtors would have one more day with their money, interest-free, while creditors would lose a day of interest. Official score in Louisiana: Debtor=1, Creditor=0.

## 5. The Christmas Bonus Law

“Aguinaldo” refers to an annual Christmas bonus that businesses in Mexico are required by law to pay to their employees, according to Investopedia. Payment must be made by Dec. 20, and companies that fail to do so lay themselves open to significant fines (as much as 315 times the legal daily minimum wage). Costa Rica has a similar law.

## 6. The War On Christmas Trees?

In New York City, there is a law prohibiting the display of natural (non-artificial) Christmas trees in retail stores. In Philadelphia, there is a law prohibiting natural trees in high-rise buildings and any other dwellings that are designed to house more than two families. In both cases, the reason is it’s considered a fire hazard.

## 7. Christmas Tree Tax

Since 2011, a 15¢ tax has been assessed on the sale of every Christmas tree in the United States. The purpose of the tax is to fund a marketing program to improve the image of Christmas trees (similar to “Got Milk?” and “The Incredible Edible Egg” campaigns). Don’t believe it? Snopes confirms it, although they say it’s not truly accurate to call it a “tax,” and it’s only levied on wholesalers. Nevertheless, it’s likely that wholesalers pass the levy onto retail customers.

## 8. Yes, To The Tree; No, To The Cross

In 2016 in Knightstown, Ind., it became illegal to have a cross on top of a Christmas tree in a public display. “The cross is not a Christmas symbol,” said a representative of the American Civil Liberties Union. “The cross is the pre-eminent symbol of Christianity, and it reminds Christians not of the secular trappings of Christmas but of the crucifixion and the resurrection of Jesus.”

## 9. Don’t Lose That Receipt

In Michigan, if you like having a freshly cut Christmas tree, be prepared to retain the receipt. That’s because it’s illegal there for anyone to transport a Christmas tree without having proof of the sale of the same.

## 10. The Ban On Candy Canes

In Nebraska in 2018, an elementary school principal banned candy canes in the school because “historically, the shape [of the candy cane] is a ‘J’ for Jesus. The red is for the blood of Christ, and the white is a symbol of his resurrection.” Also banned: anything suggestive of the religious holiday of Christmas (including reindeer, Elf on the Shelf, and anything red and green).

## 11. No Booze In The Eggnog In Arkansas

In Arkansas, the sale of alcoholic beverages is prohibited on Christmas Day. Period. End of story. That’s not to say one can’t drink alcohol in the privacy of one’s own home on Christmas, but if you want to do so, you’ll have to make sure you’re stocked before Christmas arrives.

## 12. Laws Against Being Lax About Taking Down Your Christmas Lights

Many states and municipalities in the United States have laws regulating how long you’re allowed to keep your Christmas lights up after Christmas. In San Diego, you have until Feb. 2. Scofflaws face cash fines of \$250. In Maine, fines may be levied any time after Jan. 15.

## 13. Laws Against “Light Trespass”

Your Christmas lights can be guilty of “trespass” under “light trespass” laws, which prohibit such things as “misdirected” or “excessive” artificial light caused by “inappropriate” or “misaligned” lights that produce “unnecessary” glowing. New Jersey, in particular, is known for its light trespass laws. You may be better off with a visit to one of the 20 best small towns for Christmas lights.

## Coming Up In The Cape from page 20

at the park, featuring your favorite Christmas classics on a 40-foot movie screen every night at 6 p.m. Bring your chairs or blankets, and get ready for a night full of Christmas cheer!

From festive treats to family fun, Christmas Village has something for everyone. Come make memories, share laughter, and celebrate the joy of the season with us!

## Garden Talk Series At Cape Coral Community Garden Wednesday, Dec. 17 – 9 to 10 a.m.

Join us at the Cape Coral Community Garden, 726 SE 10th St, Cape Coral, and deep dive into the amazing world of horticulture! This series is for those seeking to learn more about gardening and how to nurture your own garden. From seed to harvest and more! Free to join and no experience necessary. RSVP by calling (239) 549-4606.

## Mid-Week Bingo At Lake Kennedy Center Thursday, Dec 18 – 12:30 to 2 p.m.

Take a mid-week break with an afternoon of bingo at Lake Kennedy Center, 400 Santa Barbara Blvd., on Thursday, Dec. 18 from 12:30 to 2 p.m. Doors open at 12:15 p.m.

Bingo begins at 12:30 p.m. Enjoy 10 rounds of bingo! Prepay \$12 prepay / \$15 pay at the door. Prepay deadline is the day before by 4:30 p.m.

Participants are welcome to BYOB and food.

For more information and to reserve your spot, call Lake Kennedy Center at (239) 574-0575.

## Mercola Market Winter Fest – Saturday, Dec. 20

Celebrate the magic of the season at Winter Fest, a festive family event taking place from 9 a.m. to 2 p.m. at Mercola Market of Cape Coral, 125 SW 3rd Place, Cape Coral.

Guests of all ages are invited to enjoy a day filled with winter

cheer, community spirit, and holiday excitement. The celebration features live music, photos with Santa, bounce houses, games, a delicious food truck, and a variety of local vendors offering unique holiday gifts and treats.

## Holiday Boat-A-Long At Four Freedoms Park Saturday, Dec. 20 – 4 to 9 p.m.

Don’t miss Santa Claus and his elves spreading holiday cheer along the Bimini Basin at Four Freedoms Park, 4818 Tarpon Ct., Cape Coral, FL 33904! This free, family-friendly event features stage entertainment, local food trucks, crafts, a visit from Santa Claus, and the boat parade. For those interested in having their boat in the parade, please register with Sea Tow by calling (239) 945-4820.

Following the boat parade there will be a free Movie in the Park. Be sure to bring your lawn chairs and blankets to enjoy the festivities!

## New Year’s Eve Celebration And Ball Drop – SE 47th Terrace (between SE 9th Place And SE 11th Place) Tuesday, Dec. 31 – 6 p.m. to midnight

Help us ring in 2026 with not one but two great opportunities to welcome in the new year! This free community-wide event is open to all ages.

The streets of downtown Cape Coral will be closed off to traffic as thousands of attendees enjoy free live music, entertainment, countdown fireworks, and more!

For those too excited to wait until midnight, there are separate ball drops at both 8 p.m. and midnight. This large, family-friendly street festival will include shopping, food vendors and games and activities for children while waiting for the countdown to 2026!

For more information, visit [www.capecoralnye.com](http://www.capecoralnye.com).

## LCEC 5K Run/Walk To Benefit United Way At Jim Jeffers Park

Saturday, Jan. 3, 2026 – 7:30 to 9:30 a.m.

Join the fun on Saturday, Jan. 3, 2026, at Jim Jeffers Park, 2817 SW 3rd Lane, Cape Coral, for the annual LCEC 5K Run/Walk! from 7:30 to 9:30 a.m. Runners and walkers of all ages are invited to participate in this community event supporting United Way. Lace up, enjoy the beautiful park setting, and help make a positive impact in our community.

For more information or to register, please visit <https://runsignup.com/Race/FL/CapeCoral/LCEC5K>.

## Tour De Cape

Friday, Jan. 23 to 25

The Cape Coral Parks and Recreation Department is proud to host the 35th Anniversary of Tour De Cape! The event includes a 5K, a Mini Kids Ride, and 15-30-62-100 mile bike tours in the northwest and southwest regions of Cape Coral.

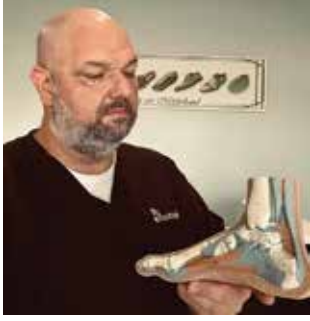
The weekend will begin with a kick-off celebration on Friday from 4 to 7 p.m. Participants can pick up packets, maps and T-shirts!

For more information or to register, please visit [www.tourdecape.net](http://www.tourdecape.net).

234 Santa Barbara Blvd Cape Coral FL 33991

## Ask The Foot Pro

By Chris Hoppenworth  
Chris Hoppenworth is a certified and licensed pedorthist with over 30 years of experience in custom orthopedic footwear and insoles. His workshop in Southwest Florida provides custom-made diabetic insoles and footwear modifications for improved comfort and mobility and is enrolled with Medicare.



### Today's Topic: Splayfoot: Why Your Feet Feel Wider – And What You Can Do About It

Have your feet started to feel wider over the years? Do your shoes suddenly feel tight in the front, or do the balls of your feet ache by the end of the day? You may be dealing with a very common condition called splayfoot.

Splayfoot happens when the metatarsal bones – the long bones behind your toes – spread out more than they should. As the front of the foot widens, pressure builds under the ball of the foot, leading to burning, pinching, or sharp pain. Many people first notice it when calluses begin to form or when their favorite shoes suddenly become uncomfortable.

As a pedorthist, my job is to help rebalance the pressure under your feet and support your foot structure so you can stay comfortable and active. Splayfoot is one of the conditions where the right support can make a world of difference.

#### Here's How I Can Help

##### Custom Insoles To Support The Forefoot

A properly designed insole can gently lift and realign the metatarsal bones. This reduces pressure on the nerves and soft tissues that get irritated when the foot spreads out. A small feature called a metatarsal pad or metatarsal dome is often the key – it gives the forefoot just enough support to bring everything back into a more natural, less painful position.

##### Shoe Adjustments And Proper Fit

Shoes with a wider toe box help prevent the forefoot from being squeezed, which is especially important if bunions or hammertoes are starting to form. Sometimes, even a great shoe needs a slight modification – extra cushioning, stretching, or adjusting the insole placement inside the shoe.

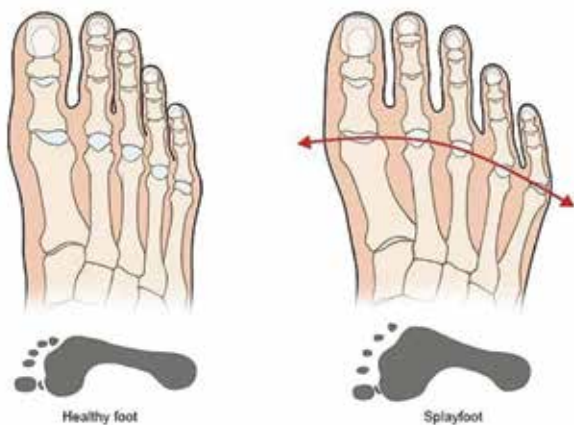
A rocker sole can also help reduce pressure on the front of the foot by allowing you to roll forward more smoothly with each step.

##### Preventing Further Problems

Splayfoot often goes hand-in-hand with other foot issues like metatarsalgia, bunions, or nerve pain. By addressing it early with proper support, many of these problems can be slowed down or avoided altogether.

The most important thing to remember is this: Every pair of feet is unique. That's why custom solutions work so well. By looking closely at your foot structure, your gait, and your shoes, I can create a setup that brings comfort back into your daily life.

If you've noticed a widening forefoot, pain under the ball of your foot, or shoes that just don't feel right anymore, it's worth getting it checked. With the right orthotics and footwear adjustments, splayfoot can be managed very effectively – often with immediate relief.



Footopic Inc., 1112 SE 47th Ter., Unit B, Cape Coral, FL, (239) 257-1379, www.footopic.com

## Cape Coral Police Department Introduces "Sharewear" Program

By Mercedes Simonds

The Cape Coral Police Department is pleased to announce the addition of a new safety initiative, Sharewear, made possible through grant funding. Sharewear provides an additional tool to help protect members of our community who may be vulnerable to wandering. This would include those children and adults who have been diagnosed with autism, alzheimer's and dementia.



Sharewear bracelets feature a technology that allows a smartphone to tap or scan the bracelet and quickly access important information about the wearer, such as emergency contacts or medical details. The bracelets are waterproof, require no charging or batteries, and have been introduced to officers who are trained to recognize and scan them when

responding to emergencies. The bracelets also feature add-on "PopIns" with important information, including phrases like "I am non-verbal" or a puzzle piece symbol, which is the most widely recognize symbol for autism.

This initiative is not intended to replace any existing programs, such as Project Lifesaver, but rather to serve as another available resource for families and caregivers seeking additional safety options.

The Cape Coral Police Department remains committed to expanding programs that enhance public safety and provide peace of mind for our residents.

If you have questions about the Sharewear program or would like to learn more about our screening process, please contact our Victim Assistance Coordinator, Christine Seymour, at cseymour@capecoral.gov and include a good contact number.

A special thank you to the Lee County Injury Prevention Coalition for this assistance in receiving this grant.

## Cape Coral For The Children Celebrated Among Top Volunteer Organizations

Excellence in Nonprofit Performance (ENPY) held its yearly luncheon on Dec. 2 at The DoubleTree in Fort Myers. We, Cape Coral For the Children, were honored to be one of the many volunteer organizations recognized and nominated for an ENPY Award. Representatives from numerous



programs, including Gulf Coast Partnership, Cape Coral Caring Center, Hearts & Homes for Veterans, PACE Center for Girls Lee County, and many more, joined them.

Although Cape Coral For the Children did not win an award this year, we continue our work in Cape Coral with the school system, Thrive, Foster Village, and others. We are looking forward to another successful year, thanks to the support of our community.

For more information on our organization, please visit our website at [www.capecoralforthechildren.org](http://www.capecoralforthechildren.org).

# Family Traditions

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# Chamber Of Commerce Of Cape Coral

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## Ribbon Cuttings



**Easy Mortgage, LLC**, Mortgages, 618 SW 3rd St., Suite 160, Cape Coral, FL 33991, [www.easymtgs.com](http://www.easymtgs.com), (239) 333-5431 and **Easy Title and Escrow LLC**, Title Insurance, 618 SW 3rd St., Suite 170, Cape Coral, FL 33991, [www.easytitleandescrow.com](http://www.easytitleandescrow.com), (239) 471-7579.



**Refresh Medspa**, Medical Spa, 407 Cape Coral Pkwy., Cape Coral, FL 33914, [www.refreshmedspafl.com](http://www.refreshmedspafl.com), (239) 321-5050.



**Maronda Homes - Orchid Cove**, Real Estate, 10490 Orchid Cove Blvd., Bokeelia, FL 33922, [www.marondahomes.com](http://www.marondahomes.com), (941) 286-4011.



**Kiwanis Thrift Store North**, Consignment Store, 652 Del Prado Blvd., N., Cape Coral, FL 33909, [www.capecoralkiwanis.org/kiwanis-thrift-stores](http://www.capecoralkiwanis.org/kiwanis-thrift-stores), (239) 574-1560.



**Isles of Porto Vista**, Apartment Rentals, 3990 Porta Rossa Loop, Cape Coral, FL, 33909, [www.rentipv.com](http://www.rentipv.com), (239) 424-8820.



**Enchanted Florist of Cape Coral**, Florist, 1616 Cape Coral Pkwy., W., Unit 114, Cape Coral, FL 33914, [www.capecoralenchantedflorist.com](http://www.capecoralenchantedflorist.com), (239) 540-3353.



**Levine Orthodontics**, Orthodontics, 407 Cape Coral Pkwy., W., Suite A, Cape Coral, FL 33914, [www.bracesfl.com/orthodontist-cape-coral-fl](http://www.bracesfl.com/orthodontist-cape-coral-fl), (239) 310-0000.



**Advance Solar & Spa**, Solar Power, 2431 Crystal Drive, Fort Myers, FL 33907, [www.advancesolar.com](http://www.advancesolar.com), (239) 939-7446.

# Friends Of The Cape Coral Library

## General Meeting – All Are Welcome

All are invited to the Friends of the Cape Coral Library (FOCCL) general meeting on Saturday, Jan. 17. The morning will begin at 9:30 a.m. with social time, coffee, tea and light refreshments. The business portion of the meeting will start at 10 a.m. The presentation (described below) will follow. FOCCL General Meetings, which take place in the large meeting room of the Cape Coral Library at 921 SW 39th Ter., are free and open to the public. You're very welcome to bring a guest or two. For more information on Friends of the Cape Coral Library: visit [www.capefriends.org](http://www.capefriends.org) and follow us on Facebook.

## About The Presentation For The January FOCCL General Meeting

A presentation by the Scientist's Society of Southwest Florida will include guest speakers Jacquelin Collins, the current president of the society; Trudy Sampson, liaison for funded programs and scholarship chair; and Dave Sampson, Science Fair judge coordinator. In addition, students who participate in funded STEM activities will be on hand to explain how the programs have impacted them. The presentation will include information about the society's mission, the need for continued STEM education in schools, and how people can help.

The Scientists' Society of Southwest Florida was established in 1976. It is dedicated to engaging in outreach, education and science communication efforts by encouraging careers in Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics (STEM). Society members judge Science Fair projects throughout Lee County during the academic year, provide teachers with mini grants to support curriculum needs, and recognize students for their achievements at an annual dinner in April each year.

The society provides funding for endeavors such as Wildlife on Wheels (WOW) which serves Title 1 schools, STEM summer camps such as Girls in Engineering and Math (GEMS), Edison/Ford STEM programs, local LEGO and First Robotics Teams, and the Cape Coral Solar Car Club. The society also offers scholarships to high school students in the STEM field. Of the funds raised through donations and members, 100% go directly to support STEM programs in Lee County.

Friends of the Cape Coral Library look forward to seeing you at our Jan. 17 meeting, where you will hear updates about our own upcoming activities and events. We also know that you will find the guest speakers' presentation to be very informative.

## North Fort Myers Arts Association (NFMAA) To Exhibit At Cape Coral Library, Jan. 6 through Feb. 26

We look forward to the first exhibition of 2026 in the spacious art gallery of the Cape Coral Library, when work by talented members of the North Fort Myers Arts Association (NFMAA) will grace all the walls and the three illuminated display cases. The Library is located at 921



Artwork by Jasmine of NFMAA



NFMAA Artist Jasmine working on a painting



Painting by Sunny Lee of NFMAA

SW 39th Terrace, off of Mohawk Parkway, and the exhibit will be open for viewing during business hours from Jan. 6 through Feb. 26.

The stated mission of North Fort Myers Arts Association (NFMAA) is "to engage area residents in a wide variety of arts activities through learning opportunities, networking and an appreciation of all types of arts." The goal is to help their members grow, learn and find their creative voice. Whether a beginner or a professional, all are welcome to join NFMAA in making the area a vibrant, artistic community. The nonprofit arts organization has over 100 paid members and belongs to various civic groups. The North Fort Myers Arts Association also has a wonderful partnership with Gulf Coast Village, where artists exhibit their work, and that includes the "Art House" located on Gulf Coast Village grounds at 120 SE 13th St., in Cape Coral.

Visit [www.nfmaa.org](http://www.nfmaa.org) for information about the arts organization, their events, classes, workshops, meeting dates and more.

Changing exhibits in the library's gallery are sponsored by the Friends of the Cape Coral Library and are designed to afford local artists and artisans the opportunity to share their work in this public forum.

For information contact Monica Rahman, Art Gallery Chairperson, at [gallery@capefriends.org](mailto:gallery@capefriends.org) or visit [www.capefriends.org](http://www.capefriends.org). Follow "Friends of the Cape Coral Library" on Facebook.

## Friends Of The Cape Coral Library Recapping Recent Events

It's been a busy year! As it comes to an end, here's a recap of some recent events sponsored by the Friends of the Cape Coral Library.

- Our Fall Book Sale fundraiser in November was a success because of everyone in the community who donated books, our many wonderful members who volunteered at the sale as well as throughout the year, our local media who helped get the word out, and all the book lovers who came to shop. Thank you to all!

- We had a good turnout for our Nov. 15 general meeting (approximately 40 people in attendance) that included two new members and several other



Presenter Ande Garlanger at November FOCCL meeting



Ande Garlanger described how to care for air plants.



Volunteer Lynne V. sorting children's books.



Lots of shoppers at Fall Book Sale

people who dropped in later to hear the interesting presentation about air plants by Ande Garlanger of the Cape Coral Garden Club. It was obvious by the way that Ande spoke about her own plants that she truly loves these unique garden "inhabitants."



- If you haven't yet viewed the current exhibit in the library art gallery,

you still have an opportunity to enjoy it, but only through Dec. 29! On the walls are beautiful paintings by artist Elaine Weissborn and incredible photographs by Ron Lindensmith. On display in the three illuminated cases are small paintings and 3-D artwork in a variety of media by a talented group of individuals who refer to themselves as the "Displaced Artists of Matlacha." You'll be very happy that you came to visit the gallery.



Everyone can enjoy sitting in the butterfly garden at the Cape Coral Library

- And here's one reminder. The lovely outdoor Butterfly Garden at the Cape Coral Library may be one of the local area's best kept secrets! The Butterfly Garden can be accessed through the glass door just beyond and to the right of the circulation desk. It's open to the public during library hours of operation. You'll find a paved patio with benches and picnic tables under umbrellas where visitors can relax amidst trees, bushes and flowering vines that have been specially chosen to attract many different kinds of butterflies. While the Garden Club of Cape Coral provides the expertise and maintains the plants, Friends of the Cape Coral Library purchased all the outdoor furnishings and provides on-going funds for garden supplies. Several FOCCL members who are avid gardeners as well as book lovers belong to both groups. So, it's a wonderful collaboration all around!



Book craft table



Lots of volunteers are waiting for the truck with books for the sale.

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# Catch The Action

## December On The Water

By Capt. Bill Russell

December is the month we make the transition away from baitfish, and shrimp becomes the primary diet for most fish. Apart from mullet (a pure vegetarian), there are not any fish I can think of in our coastal waters that won't eat shrimp. When the water temperature drops to the point that baitfish leave our local waters, then shrimp becomes the go-to bait.

Cooler weather gives a big boost for catching sheepsheads as the larger ones move inshore and over nearshore reefs. Fish for them around structure, including dock and bridge pilings, rock jetties along the beach, oyster bars, and most nearshore artificial reefs and hard bottom in the gulf within sight of land. Seasoned anglers fish shrimp on a jig head or a small, very sharp hook with just enough weight to reach the bottom. If you don't mind fishing in the cold, this is



your fish. The colder the better for sheepsheads. Unlike sheepshead from the northern states, ours are excellent on the table. Sheepsheads are great bait stealers; bring more bait than you think you will need. Nothing is worse than running out in the middle of a hot bite.

Pompano are similar to sheepsheads, in the fact that they do not eat any baitfish, they feed primarily on small crustaceans, including shrimp, crabs, sand fleas, small crustaceans and mollusk. Small nylon jigs tipped with a piece of shrimp are deadly for pompano when slowly bounced over a hard or sand bottom. Pompano, Silly Willy, or Crazy style jigs are a popular choice with great results. Favorite colors are white, pink, chartreuse, and yellow. Sheepsheads and pompano have small mouths, so it is important to use a small hook. If you are unsure of the size, stop in at your local tackle shop and let them hook you up and give you some pointers.

Sea trout are moving off the shallow grass flats to deeper protected areas as temperatures drop with arriving cold fronts. Deep areas around oyster bars, creeks, canals, and potholes are good areas to target. During mild or warmer stretches, trout move back over shallower areas to feed. Live shrimp and DOA shrimp under popping corks are deadly drifted over flats.

Redfish are located around oyster bars, deeper creeks, hard bottom shorelines, and structure such as dock pilings. Larger reds can be sight fished on the lower tides over shallow flats adjacent to deeper water. This is best done wade fishing, from a kayak, canoe, or a shallow water skiff. Again, shrimp is the best bait, either the real thing or artificial and fly imitations.

Offshore, we can expect hookups with a mix of species around nearshore reefs, ledges, and hard bottom. Bottom dwellers like sheepsheads, snapper, flounder, grouper, grunts, pompano, and permit are a good possibility. Also, Spanish and king mackerel, bonito or false albacore, barracuda, sharks, and cobia are likely to make their presence at any time. Always keep an eye out for tripletail hanging just under the surface around floating debris and objects. They usually lay on their side and resemble a piece of cardboard. A properly placed live shrimp is seldom turned down.

We should see days with great weather and fishing opportunities between cold fronts to close out the year. I hope everyone gets a chance to spend time on the water during the holiday season. Wishing all of you that take the time to read this column a Merry Christmas and Happy New Year!

Stay up to date with fishing regulations by visiting Florida Fish and Wildlife Commission at: [www.myfwc.com](http://www.myfwc.com). Also, the free Fish Rules app. It has current regulations with pictures to help identify fish.

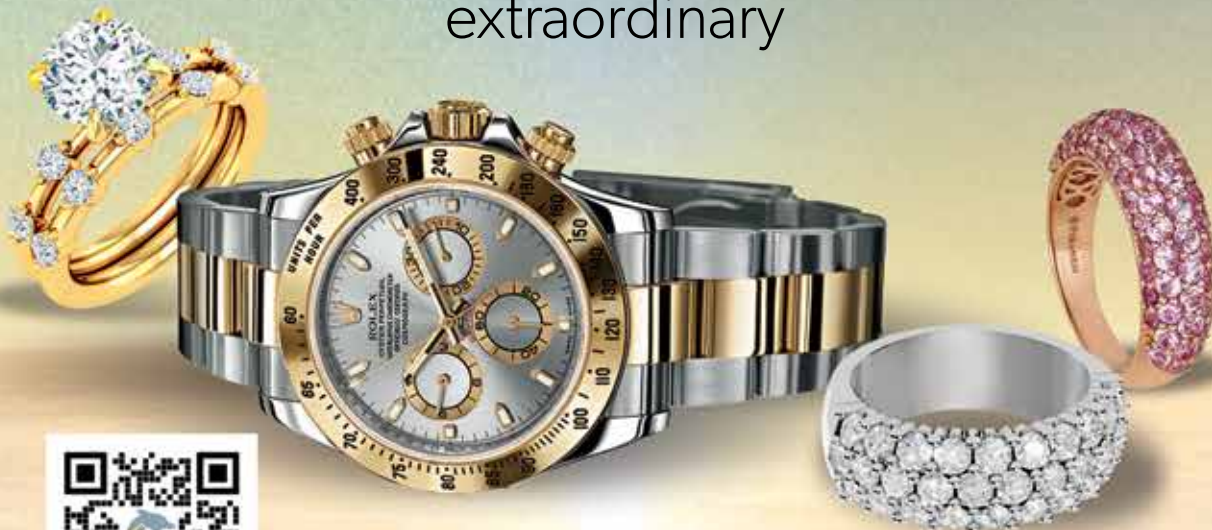
For charter information, please contact us at Gulf Coast Guide Service and "Catch the Action" with Capt. Bill Russell, call or text (239) 410-8576, website: [www.fishpineisland.com](http://www.fishpineisland.com), email: [gcl2fish@live.com](mailto:gcl2fish@live.com).

Capt. Bill Russell is a native and lifelong resident of Pine Island who has spent his entire life fishing the waters surrounding Pine Island and Southwest Florida. For the past 29 years, Bill has been a professional fishing guide who takes pride in customizing each trip to ensure everyone on board has a great time and will return again. Come join us and "Catch the Action."



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# Broadway Palm Presents The Holiday Classic:

## *A Christmas Story*

Broadway Palm is spreading holiday cheer with the timeless family favorite *A Christmas Story*, playing Nov. 21 through Dec. 28. Based on the beloved 1983 film, this laugh-out-loud musical captures all the warmth, nostalgia, and hilarity of Ralphie Parker's unforgettable childhood Christmas.



Set in 1940s Indiana, young Ralphie dreams of only one thing for Christmas – an official Red Ryder® Carbine-Action 200-Shot Range Model Air Rifle. Audiences will delight as they follow Ralphie's quest, encountering all the iconic



moments along the way: the infamous leg lamp, the pink bunny pajamas, the cranky department store Santa, and of course, the triple-dog dare!

Filled with lively music, clever choreography, and heartwarming humor, *A Christmas Story* is a holiday treat for the whole family. Whether it's your first time experiencing the tale or it's a cherished tradition, this production will leave you smiling and full of Christmas spirit.



Performance times are Tuesday through Sunday evenings with selected matinees. Tickets are on sale now and can be reserved by calling (239) 278-4422, by visiting BroadwayPalm.com, or by stopping by the box office at 1380 Colonial Boulevard in Fort Myers.

Bring the entire family and make *A Christmas Story* part of your holiday tradition at Broadway Palm!



## Pre-Registration Available Now For The 2026-2027 School Year

The School District of Lee County is excited to announce that students entering the District in August 2026 can enroll now. This advanced registration period is open to any incoming student who is:

- Entering kindergarten for the 2026-2027 school year.
- Moving from a private or charter school to a Lee County Public School for the 2026-2027 school year.
- Previously enrolled students moving back to Lee County for the 2026-2027 school year.
- Relocating to Lee County from another county or state and will be attending a Lee County Public School for the 2026-2027 school year.

Parents enrolling and re-enrolling now will be notified in January when it is time to submit a School Choice Application to Student Enrollment. Enrolling now enables the School District to preplace siblings, with both a common parent and common address, in the same school for the 2026-2027 school year.

The enrollment process can be completed entirely online through the FOCUS Parent Portal. (<https://lee.focusschoolsoftware.com/focus/>). Simple step-by-step instructions are on the School District's website at [www.leeschools.net/student\\_enrollment](http://www.leeschools.net/student_enrollment). Parents with children

already in the district can use their existing FOCUS account to upload the necessary documents. Parents new to the School District can create a FOCUS Parent Portal to complete the registration process.

The documents required to pre-register include:

- Copy of parent photo ID
- Copy of birth certificate
- Health examination (physical). The exam must be dated within 12 months prior to registration. A physical is required for kindergarten registration.
- DH680-Florida Certificate of Immunization. The form can be obtained free by taking immunization record to the Lee County Health Department, 3920 Michigan Ave., Fort Myers. Appointment is required please call (239) 461-6100.

- Social Security card (optional)
- Custody documents (if applicable)
- Proof of address
- Transcript (high school students only)

Parents needing further assistance can email [studentenrollment@leeschools.net](mailto:studentenrollment@leeschools.net) or make an appointment to visit the Student Enrollment Office in person through QLESS. (<https://www.leeschools.net/cms/One.aspx?portalId=676305&pageId=90802379>). Scan the QR code for easier access.

## United Way VITA Program Seeking Volunteers

### Become An IRS Certified Tax Preparer

United Way of Lee, Hendry, and Glades are seeking residents of Southwest Florida eager to volunteer their time making a real difference in the community. The organization's VITA (Volunteer Income Tax Assistance) program is in need of people to prepare taxes for underserved households in the area.

VITA assists households earning \$70,000 or less by preparing and e-filing federal tax returns free of charge, ensuring maximum refunds through tax credits, such as the Earned Income Tax Credit, Child Tax Credit, and American Opportunity Tax Credit. For many families, these refunds mean the difference between making ends meet and facing financial hardship.

United Way will provide volunteers with free training, certification, and all the support needed to become a confident IRS certified tax preparer. Preparers will help hardworking families get the refunds they deserve while gaining valuable experience in finance, customer service, and community engagement. Plus, tax professionals can earn continuing education credits while making a difference.

Flexible hours are available from January through April every tax season. To register, visit [UnitedWayLee.org/VITA-Volunteer](http://UnitedWayLee.org/VITA-Volunteer), or contact [Vita@UnitedWayLee.org](mailto:Vita@UnitedWayLee.org) or (239) 333-4580 for additional information.

#### About United Way

United Way of Lee, Hendry, and Glades have raised and distributed more than \$243 million since its establishment in 1957, with all funds staying local to support a vast network of partner agencies and community programs. Together, we serve the community by nurturing youth, strengthening families, helping the elderly and disabled live independently, and empowering neighborhoods by delivering essential health and human services. Visit [UnitedWayLee.org](http://UnitedWayLee.org) to learn more.



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# Concur Or Object: Differing Viewpoints From Diverse Attorneys

*Goodbye 2025 – Hello 2026*

## 2025: Finding Hope In The Hardest Year

By Kara B. Rogers, Esq.

What a year. For me, 2025 has truly been a mix of everything, delivering moments of success right alongside profound challenges.

For me, the year started with heart-wrenching loss. I suffered two miscarriages in January and July which brought a deep sense of grief I had never known before.



Yet, even as I navigated that personal devastation, I was simultaneously taking on a monumental amount of professional work. I filed and began campaigning for mayor while managing my growing law firm as we expanded our offices and welcomed a new attorney, all while serving as president of the Lee County Association for Women Lawyers and attending the Cape Coral Chamber of Commerce’s Leadership Class of 2025 (best class ever!).

Honestly, the stress of constantly juggling these fierce demands has often been overwhelming. There were many days when it felt impossible to balance everything. But here is the unexpected silver lining: These challenges have yielded amazing rewards. Running for mayor forced me out of my comfort zone, introducing me to countless community members who have become incredible new connections and staunch supporters. Squeezing in the Cape Coral Leadership Class was exhausting, but it connected me with a remarkable group of people I now count as true friends. And even the miscarriages, while devastating, allowed me to deepen bonds with friends and family whose support became a necessary lifeline.

In sum, 2025 has been memorable, demanding, and ultimately, deeply inspiring. While some days were incredibly difficult, I find myself ending the year filled with immense hope for the future. So, for anyone reading this, I hope you all have a very happy holiday season, and that your New Year is as bright and promising as I know mine will be.

## 2026: Ready For The Next Chapter of Growth

By Robson D.C. Powers, Esq.

As this year comes to a close, my focus is squarely on 2026.

When we first launched Powers & Rogers, we didn’t know if we would make it. Now, as we approach our two-year anniversary, I am honestly astonished by how far we have come. The anxiety about just surviving is gone, replaced by an exciting new focus on how we want to grow the firm. Our goal for the new year is ambitious: we plan to add another new attorney to the team.

This sense of expanding possibility within our firm mirrors the incredible energy I see transforming Cape Coral. From the highly anticipated Bimini Basin development to the future Seven Islands project, I am thrilled to witness and be an active part of our community’s rapid growth.

To match this upward momentum, I have clear goals for the new year. We will continue to be active members of the Cape Coral Chamber of Commerce, an organization

that has been instrumental in helping us develop and grow. We also plan to expand our presence further in the community, participating in more local events like the Salute to Service and Holiday Festival of Lights. And we will be supporting my partner, Kara Rogers, as she goes on the campaign trail to win your vote for mayor of Cape Coral.

Furthermore, as our business thrives, so must our community impact. This year, we are giving back by collecting and donating canned goods to the Cape Coral Caring Center and by adopting angels from the Salvation Army Angel Tree. In 2026, we aim to do the same and more.

The future for Powers & Rogers, and for Cape Coral as a whole, looks incredibly bright. This success is a testament to the hard work of our employees, the trust of our current and future clients who put their faith in us to fight their legal battles, and the support of every citizen here.

From our team to yours, we want to wish you a very Merry Christmas and a happy, successful New Year.

*Robson D.C. Powers, Esq. and Kara B. Rogers, Esq. are the founders of Powers & Rogers, PLLC located at 615 Cape Coral Pkwy. W., Suite 206, Cape Coral, FL. Both have been selected as Rising Stars by Super Lawyers, a recognition bestowed on only 2.5% of attorneys in the state. They practice in civil litigation including business, real estate, construction, and probate litigation.*

*Disclaimer: Nothing contained herein should be construed as legal advice. You should always consult an attorney for any legal questions.*



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