

DOWNTOWN NEWS

Including Old Northeast and Snell Isle

Magazine

RUTH KIRBY - ED WRIGHT'S SECRETARY & LIFELONG COMPANION



Our last issue featured a story about Ed Wright, who at one time was the richest man in Pinellas and the owner of Sand Key. This issue features Wright's longtime secretary, personal assistant, companion, and eventual executor of his estate— Ruth Kirby.

Ruth Kirby worked with Wright for almost 40 years and understood his various businesses almost as well as he did. When he died, Wright owned approximately \$25 million of land in Pinellas (in 1969 dollars), plus land in 19 other Florida counties. He also had 51,000 shares of the Seaboard Coast Line stock.

When Wright hired Kirby in 1931 his office was filled with ringing phones - his phone bill alone was over \$1,000 per month - teletype machines spitting out stock prices, and Western Union machines clattering financial news. Wright picked her from a secretarial pool to do some filing; she was 18. Neither knew that the one day of work would turn into four decades and then some.

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Also in this Issue:

Florida Holocaust Museum's founder passes away.

The Museum was Walter Loebenberg's vision - [page 22](#)

Drownings

Over 40 states have less drownings than Pinellas County. Why? - [page 9](#)

Sugar Sands Returns to Clearwater Beach

The festival celebrating the beach is April 12 - 28. Come see what artists can do with more than 1,000 tons of white Clearwater Beach sand - [page 16](#)

St. Pete honors Ray Charles

He wrote and recorded "The St. Pete Florida Blues" - [page 19](#)





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ST. PETERSBURG DOWNTOWN NEWSLETTER

Inside, you will find articles and local information about the nearby area. We want it to be a Neighborhood Newsletter primarily about your neighborhood - Downtown, Snell Isle and Old Northeast. That is why when you have news or events, contact us.

This newsletter is printed every other month and mailed to every occupied area house, business & PO Box.

We hope you enjoy our newsletters. We want your news and input.

Did you like this issue? What suggestions do you have for future articles? Call or email us your comments, or take our survey at StPeteDowntownNewsletter.com.

Do you need another copy? Ask for them at the UPS Stores at 2nd St. and 2nd Ave S., 740 4th Street N. or 38th Avenue N. next to Publix.

Thank you for reading,

Bob & Becky Griffin, 727-430-8300
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HURRICANE SEASON, RAINY SEASON, EVERY SEASON BRINGS THE RISK FOR FLOODING

By Pinellas County Commissioner Karen Seel

We live in a beautiful place, with stunning white beaches and their foam-frosted waves to splash through on an afternoon walk, our sparkling blue lakes to romp and play on, dark and dense hardwood swamps to explore and hidden streams gurgling with the most relaxing sound to listen to from our porches at night. We're surrounded by beautiful water. It's our life blood here in Pinellas County.

Let's face it, though. Because of the beautiful water that surrounds us and the kind that falls from the sky in any season, we also live in a place that's susceptible to most every type of flooding.

There's low-lying area flooding from an afternoon thunderstorm, with its ability to fill your fenced-in backyard with rainwater so quickly you can't believe your eyes. There's riverine flooding, where that serene swamp or quiet trickling stream can fill with an unexpected heavy downpour and become a muddy rush headed straight for your home. And, there's flooding from a hurricane, with its unyielding rainfall and dangerous, powerful storm surge.

Do you think it can't happen to you? It did happen to the residents of the Panhandle last September.

You may not have seen the destruction left behind after Hurricane Michael, but I encourage you to read about the homes and businesses that were completely wiped away in Mexico Beach. It's this kind of devastation that flooding can create and that you need to prepare for.

Many in Mexico Beach now wish they had purchased low-cost, preferred-risk flood insurance policies which are available to property owners in designated low or moderate-risk flood zones. Homes just two blocks away from the beachfront qualified for these lower rate policies—currently \$480 per year—but, now, the homes are gone and the lives their owners led can never be recaptured. Only a street or the barest outline of a foundation is left to indicate they were ever there.

Could you financially recover from losing your home to storm surge or other flooding? Most can't.

This is why I am urging you to purchase flood insurance. Remember, homeowners insurance does not cover damage from floods. If you have a federally-backed mortgage and live in a high-risk area, known as a Special Flood Hazard Area, then you must carry a flood insurance policy.

Please take advantage of these preferred-rate policies if you live in a designated low or moderate-risk flood zone to protect yourself financially. Also, sign up for flood notifications from Alert Pinellas to protect yourself and your family. Visit www.pinellascounty.org/alertpinellas for more details.

Don't let a flood change your life here in beautiful Pinellas County.

As always, please send me any of your comments or concerns. You can email me at kseel@pinellascounty.org.

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Did You Know

LONGEST TABLE The 6th Annual Longest Table Epicurean Event is Thursday, April 11. This WUSF Public Media fund raiser will have 400 feet of tables stretching down the middle of Bayshore Drive from the Vinoy to the Fine Arts Museum. Over 1,000 diners will be served a four-course dinner with wine from a dozen of St Pete's finest restaurants including 400 Beach Seafood, Birch & Vine, Farm Table Cucina, Café L'Europe, and Parkshore Grill.



photo by -www.diamelphotography.com

Tickets are on sale and range from \$125-\$150 with VIP seating from \$200-\$250. This event normally sells out. Visit USFLongestTable.org or call 800-661-0823.

The Grand Toast is at 6:15pm; the feast follows at 6:30pm.

CITY HALL MOVES TEMPORARILY Once the City's Police Department moves into the new \$79 million Police Station this summer, all 97 City Hall employees will take up residence in the old Police Station, at 1300 1st Avenue North. That is because the 80-year old City Hall will undergo a \$6.1 million repair job, primarily to fix its ailing air conditioning system.

PRINCESS MARTHA Did you or someone you know get married at the Princess Martha Hotel? Did you ever stay there or have an interesting story about the hotel? If so, we would like to talk to you. We are preparing a feature story on the hotel and would like your input. If you have a story to tell, please call 727-430-8300 or e-mail us at Bob@GriffinDirectories.com.

EMERGENCY MEDICAL SERVICES AT ITS FINEST

The St. Petersburg Fire Rescue EMS team took first place against 20 teams in the 2019 JEMS Games! The JEMS Games is a challenging and educational clinical competition for emergency medical personnel,



highlighting cutting-edge simulation technology. The competition challenges teams to appropriately assess and provide efficient patient care during realistic high-pressure scenarios. This year's JEM's Games took place in National Harbor, MD at the EMS Today Conference & Expo. Over 4,600 EMS professionals from around the world attended this year's conference to learn about the most innovative products and services available to the EMS industry.

and More...



VOLUNTEERS NEEDED St. Anthony's Triathlon, which has been selected as the 2019 Southeast Olympic-Distance and Paratriathlon Regional Championship

Race, is calling for volunteers to help at the 36th annual St. Anthony's Triathlon weekend, to be held April 26-28, 2019. Approximately 1,000 volunteers are needed to assist the 3,500 athletes who will swim, bike, and run along St. Petersburg's waterfront course. Volunteers will assist at areas including: Athlete check-in, Meek & Mighty, bike check-in, finish-line duty, athlete body marking, water stations, transition areas, and merchandise sales.

Sign up online at satriathlon.com/volunteer-information/ where you can specify your desired task.

BLUES FESTIVAL RETURNS The Tampa Bay Blues Festival returns to Vinoy Waterfront Park on Friday, Saturday, & Sunday, April 12, 13, & 14. This internationally renowned, three day music festival has been staged for the past 24 years on the sunny shores of Tampa Bay and features spectacular waterfront views, a tropical atmosphere, and the finest in blues music. The event draws visitors from throughout the United States and Europe and is regarded as one of the best blues festivals in the world. In 2011, the Festival won the prestigious Blues Foundation's "Keeping the Blues Alive" award for best U.S. blues festival.

Tickets available online at www.tampabaybluesfest.com are Friday: \$50, Saturday: \$50, Sunday: \$40 or all three Days: \$115. Tickets will be available at the gate on the day of show (cash only). Tickets also available at select Tampa Bay Area Rally stores.

SUNCOASTERS DISBAND The members of The Suncoasters, a long time community organization, voted to terminate the non-profit in 2018. In the past they created and coordinated many local activities including the annual St. Petersburg Night Parades and other school related events.

EARTH DAY — APRIL 22 To celebrate, Sunken Gardens will be holding a Scavenger Hunt on April 20. Find items by exploring Sunken Gardens' winding paths, exotic birds, turtles, butterflies, and flowers on a self-guided scavenger hunt at your leisure. You may even win some Florida wildflower seeds to celebrate Earth Day all year long! For all ages. No pre-registration required. Free with paid admission or membership



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RUTH KIRBY, Continued

"He told me he could use a girl full time and hired me - at \$9 per week," Kirby recalled. "I was scared to death of him and the job."

Kirby's job included listening in on all those phone calls and taking notes. She soon started trading bonds and buying land; she proved to be as savvy an investor as her boss. Over the 40 years, the two never married, though they were said to be engaged.

Early on (in 1958), Wright gave Kirby the deed to Blue Springs, a beautiful piece of nature in Gilchrist County, west of Gainesville.

Kirby loved the place and turned it into an attraction with a dive platform. She charged swimmers, campers and canoeists 10¢ for a day's admission. Eventually, the property was passed on to her nephew.

Wright, 19 years older than Kirby, is said to have given her Blue Springs as a pre-wedding gift. But the two never married. Kirby once explained, "every time we discussed getting married, he got sick or something." So, she remained his employee, but also his lifelong companion.



Ruth Kirby and Ed Wright

Wright lived in Old Northeast with a sister, while Kirby lived nearby with her sister. She kept a stable of horses not far from downtown St. Petersburg and drove a large gold Cadillac—a gift from her boss.

In 1963, the City of Clearwater built a bridge at the north end of Sand Key, which was nothing but a big sandbar, across Clearwater Pass with a road connecting Clearwater Beach to the north end of Belleair Beach. Wright owned most of the island at the time. No one thought it suitable for development and Wright began the process of trying to sell it to a government entity who could turn it into a park, much like Ft. DeSoto.

Wright first approached the U.S. Government for inclusion in the "National

Seashore Program." Then, he approached the State, followed by the County to add Sand Key to their parks system. Finally, he offered it to the City of Clearwater - one report says for \$1 million. The City considered it but determined it would take another million to develop, plus there were the ongoing maintenance costs of another park - so they passed on the offer. Behind the scenes, Wright and City Manager Merrett Stierheim, who went to high school together, continued to talk. Merrett said he would find a way for the city to buy Sand Key. Wright died, before that happened.

In 1966, Wright donated 160 acres near 62nd Avenue NE, adjacent to 200 acres St. Petersburg already owned. Now, with 360 acres, Wright suggested the city build a "golf course, bridle trails, baseball and football fields, tennis courts, swimming pools, and a park with picnic areas." In tribute, the city named the complex, "Ed Wright Park."

At Wright's end, Kirby held a 21-day vigil at his hospital bedside, until he died on February 1, 1969. With 150 people in attendance, Kirby had a front row seat at his funeral. There were 55 honorary pallbearers at the graveside service, including Doc Webb, of Webb City fame, but it was Kirby who received all the media's attention.

Wright's will named Kirby the executor and a benefactor of his more than \$50 million estate. Overnight, Ruth Kirby became one of the most powerful, yet unknown, women in the state.

When she began to liquidate his enormous estate, it quickly became impossible to avoid the limelight. She negotiated each sale and haggled with the State of Florida, the Pinellas County Commission, U.S. Steel and many others who all tried to beat her down and get a better price on Wright's real estate.

Wright left \$6 million to eight different charities: First United Methodist Church, United Way, SPCA, Suncoast Heart Association, American Cancer Society, Infantile Paralysis Fund, St. Augustine Home for the Blind, and the Children's Home Society of Jacksonville.

Twenty beneficiaries, including his three siblings and some relatives, were to split 25% of the value of the estate when it was liquidated. The will allowed Kirby 20 years to sell everything and paid her \$90,000 a year during the process.

U.S. Steel, already building in the area, had been talking to Wright about buying the Sand Key property before his death.



Ruth Kirby shortly after Wright's death

Ruth Kirby continued those conversations. U.S. Steel first offered her \$5 million for the property; with a laugh, Kirby countered at \$18 million. Five months after Wright's death, they agreed on \$11 million—but for only half the island. The deal did not include the Sand Key Park land and some other parcels. Two years later, U.S. Steel sold the Sheraton site.

When asked about the Sand Key sale, Kirby explained, "I had to do some soul-searching before I let the property go to U.S. Steel. But I felt it was best for the community and the estate. It was necessary to cover the inheritance taxes."

Ed Wright's will made many land donations, all executed by Kirby - many still bear his name. Wright donated: 160 acres near Weedon Island for a park, 20 acres on Clearwater's MLK Jr. St. now named "Ed C. Wright Park," and 17 acres for Largo Middle School.

One of Kirby's biggest public fights was with the Pinellas County Commission. At the time, they were using a landfill called "Toy Town" and proposed building more above-ground garbage dumps. Kirby presented a petition with 4,000 signatures to stop new landfills. As a result, the county purchased land from the estate to build the Solid Waste Disposal site still in use today in the Gateway area.

In another fight, Kirby flew to Tallahassee to pressure the Governor into buying Weedon Island for a public park.

Five or six years after Wright's death, some charities and benefactors began complaining they wanted their money. Kirby tried to explain it takes time and well negotiated sales would yield more money. Finally, after seven years, close to 95% of the real estate had been sold.

Ruth Kirby continued to honor her companion's wishes until her death in 1989, at the age of 76. She died at home in St. Petersburg at 3301 Country Club Way South. ■

A YEAR INSIDE THE MOON

By Robert Hall

If you're middle-aged, newly divorced, and alone, rebuilding your life is a daunting task, at best. Like most Floridians I'm from another place. I grew up in Lexington, Kentucky, but I've lived in many other cities.

Thankfully, I landed in St. Petersburg a few years ago. If you have moved and traveled as much as I have, it's a blessing to write that this is my home. I think home is more than just a building, it's a feeling, a sensation that you're welcome here.

I think there are happy, sad, or unique dates in time from our lives that we will always remember. For example, every March on the anniversary date when a friend took her life, I light a candle to remember her. We remember living through Mother Nature's hurricanes by first names, Rita, Charley, or Irma.

In that spirit, I wrote my 4th novel, A Year Inside the Moon. I decided to fictionalize myself and I inhabited the main character, Rob.

The story follows Rob from September 11, 2016 to September 10th, 2017. Within a series of vignettes over the course of this year, Rob journeys to hang out at The Moon Under Water.

A recent divorcée, he's fled Houston to settle in St. Petersburg, Florida. Now, peering up at the mockingbird singing in a banyan tree, he wonders whether he could have done things differently.

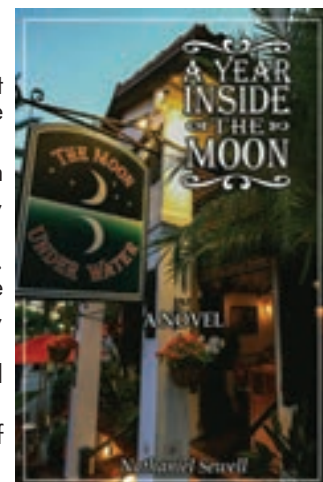
Across the road, The Moon looms. Week after week, as autumn fades into winter into spring, Rob finds himself sat at the cozy bar, watching locals and out-of-towners drift in and out, their spectral lives affording brief glimpses into other worlds.

Rob talks and listens—he meets UFO conspiracists, South African ship-builders, aging artists, college students, the ill, the mourning—while, out in the world, Houston is swallowed by floods, the #MeToo movement shakes America, and, beyond the Florida coast, Hurricane Irma grows ever closer.

Savoring each fleeting encounter, Rob ponders the changing world and his own place within it. By the time Irma hits, plunging Florida into chaos, he barely recognizes himself—and when the mockingbirds gather once more in the banyan tree, he realizes an even greater change is yet to come.

If you want to purchase the novel, it's also available on Amazon. And, I'll have signed copies available for purchase at The Moon Under Water.

If you like the story, I'd appreciate a positive review on Amazon. In this social media driven age, a positive review means everything to an artist. My author website is, nathanielsewell.com.



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DROWNINGS CAN HAPPEN IN AN INSTANT

By Rebecca Geiger

According to the World Health Organization (WHO) drowning is the third highest cause of death for children. While scary, this statistic is more than a little abstract. Let's bring it a little closer to home. In the US drowning has consistently been the #2 cause of



“preventable death” for children under the age of 15, and the number one cause of “unintentional death” for children under the age of 4 as reported by the National Safety Council. Still this seems like a nationwide problem more than a local one. After all, unfortunately children drown nationwide. Let's bring it a little closer.

In 2018 Florida had 21 pool and spa drownings involving children under the age of 15 from Memorial Day to Labor day. Notice that this is only statistics from a 3 month time period, and only reports on children who actually died from drowning. Statistics on drowning are notoriously hard to find due to the sensitive nature of the incident, possible criminal charges for parents or caregivers, tourism, and incidents where death does not occur are reported differently regardless of the extent of damage.

Still, Florida is a big state. Let's bring it even closer. In order to get the most comprehensive data we must go back to 2016. It is estimated that drowning is reportedly down 9%; however, as you can see the numbers are still staggering.

- Nationwide: 322 deaths
- Florida: 40 deaths
- Pinellas: 17 deaths - over 40 states have fewer pool/spa drownings than our county.

So why are our figures so high? There are a multitude of reasons, but the most logical is the sheer number of pools and spas we have in the area. While barriers are required by law, there are many locations whose pools are “grandfathered” in before barrier regulations. Many old barriers have gaps or holes. Another factor is children by nature are curious.

As we are in winter, it is common for people to think there is less danger than in the summer. After all, as adults we want nothing to do with cold water. However, statistics show that 74% of drownings occur at residential locations, and 70% of those occur during non-water related events.

It is imperative that caregivers have an active tangible way of knowing who is watching the children at all times. While this may sound like common sense, having a child of my own I can attest to how easy it is, especially at gatherings to think that a spouse, relative, or friend is watching when they think the same is being done by you. To remind you of whose turn it is to keep an eye on the kids, I offer free plastic cards on lanyards to anyone that would like one. I have heard of families using a stuffed animal, or really anything tangible that can be used to signify who is “Tagged In” at the time. Similar to the old game of “Tag you're it!” When you are tagged, it is up to you to be aware of where your little ones are. Then, when you want some adult time, make sure someone else knows they have been “Tagged.”

I am known as Miss Becca to my students and specialize in Drowning Prevention Education through lessons and group presentations to children and their adults. Please contact me at (813)363-9133.

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RUTH KIRBY, AS I REMEMBER HER

By Sandy Simpson

I worked and lived with Ruth from about 1966 to 1970. I was the bookkeeper for the Ed Wright Estate until it ended. I ran Pinewood Farms, which Ruth owned, on her property on 31st Street South.



Before Mr. Wright's death, I was occasionally their driver when he wanted to go visit his properties. Ruth was a very dedicated to Mr Wright and their work.

Ruth was a very private person, and even though she could afford to, she never bought anything extravagant, only necessities. She was very kind and loved animals, especially her horses. The horse pictured on the front of this magazine was really my horse, but she enjoyed riding him. I ran her stables where we boarded horses. We had about twenty at one time. Those were the good ol' days for sure!

Ruth was a very special person. The photo above was taken in 1971 at my wedding, after Mr. Wright's death.

Ruth developed Parkinson's disease, which is what eventually killed her... I wish she was still here.

Sandy Simpson, now 73, lives in Oxford, Florida.

DYNGUS DAY CELEBRATIONS

Dyngus Day is an unofficial holiday that falls on the Monday immediately after Easter Sunday - this year April 22. The day celebrating Polish culture, was started to let people blow off some steam after the restrictions imposed by the season of Lent. It is also an excuse to eat some good polish food, drink some beer, dance and have some fun.

The origin of the celebrations is uncertain, but may date to pagan times (before 1,000 AD). The tradition was brought to the U.S. by Polish immigrants. It continues to be celebrated in Europe (Poland and the Ukraine) and now in certain American cities.

Traditionally boys douse girls with buckets of water, squirt guns and wet towels and spank them with "pussy willow branches" (and girls can do the same to the boys).

The Polish American Society of St. Petersburg is once again holding a Dyngus Day celebration, because as they say - "Everybody's Polish on Dingus Day." Last year's event was a tremendous success with over 225 people attending and 170 Polish dinners served.

Their last three celebrations were so successful they are making this year's event bigger and better! It will feature a traditional, fun, Buffalo-style Dyngus Day with pussy willows, Polish food, great Polka music, Polka dance lessons, and dancing on our large, wooden dance floor. The Club will be beautifully decorated, and everyone is invited to wear white and red. All in attendance will receive white and red Dyngus beads.

Space is limited and last year was a sell out so purchase your tickets soon - \$10 at the door, \$8 in advance. Tickets can be purchased at the Club from Don Kohler, or by sending a check to the Club and held at the door. For information call Ken Jakubowski at (727) 360-4939 or email kmjak@verizon.net. The Club is located at 1343 Beach Drive SE · St. Petersburg.

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CALENDAR OF UPCOMING LOCAL EVENTS

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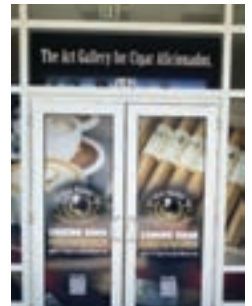
QUALITY CLEANERS A new dry-cleaning store opened downtown in the shopping center on 3rd Street South, next to Subway. Quality Plus offers the standard services, including cleaning men's and women's clothing, sweaters, suede and leather cleaning, fur, wedding gowns, bedspreads, comforters, pillow rejuvenation, and rugs. But, they also offer home or office pick-up. They are open six days (Monday-Saturday). Use their online coupons at QPCleaners.com. Give them a call at 771-7000.



MUST FOR WINE A new place to pick up a bottle of wine is coming to downtown. The Must Wine Loft will be located at 442 2nd Street North, near the Palladium Theatre. This small 700 square foot wine store should open this spring.

MEDICAL MARIJUANA STORE Surterra Wellness with locations all over Florida, has opened a store at 2001 4th Street North. "Our mission is to provide the safest, highest quality cannabis-based products to empower your health and enable you live well," says their brochure. They offer cannabis products in addition to medical marijuana. You can also order many of their products online at SurterraWellness.com. Call them direct at 295-0001.

CIGAR STORE If you enjoy a good cigar, you might want to check out this new place when it opens. The Art Gallery for Cigar Aficionados will be located at 400 Beach Drive, just south of 400 Beach Seafood and The Annex. Get more info at CigarParadiseRoyal.com.



DADDY KOOL MOVING Don't worry, Daddy Kool Records, a fixture on Central Avenue for 34 years is not closing, it is just moving. They are having a Going Away Sale March 23rd from 12-5 at their 666 Central Avenue location. The Grand Re-Opening party is planned for April 13th at the new location - 2430 Terminal Drive South near the Arts District. There, you will still be able to get your vinyl records and CDs.

CLOSED - BEING HOME FURNISHINGS at 1575 4th Street North. Owner Amy Bromley originally opened the same store in Baywalk Center and moved it to 4th Street North. She closed the design store the first of the year

BANK OF TAMPA EXPANDS The Bank of Tampa announced plans to open another office - this one in West Tampa. It is scheduled to open next summer at 4400 N. Armenia Avenue. "This is a long-term investment in the future of our bank and our employees," says David Moore, CEO of the Bank of Tampa. The bank first opened offices in 1984. They are one of the largest community banks in the Tampa Bay area. Find them downtown in the tower building at 200 Central Avenue. Scott Gault is the St Pete Market President.

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40TH AVENUE BRIDGE

The short 57 year old 40th Avenue N.E. bridge, that connects 4th Street N. to Snell Isle and Shore Acres was declared unsafe and temporarily closed a year ago. It was temporarily shored it up and reopened, but a replacement is needed.



To maintain safety, there have been large orange barriers in place for over a year and the north sidewalk and bike lane remains closed.

The bridge will close again in early April for repairs. The closure is expected to last approximately 45 days.

The design of the new bridge is underway, and area homeowners are hoping the new bridge will be taller, so that larger boats can pass under it. Construction, estimated to cost \$7.8 million, is not slated to begin until late 2020 and will take 18-24 months.

During the two years of construction, residents will have to use Shore Acres Blvd NE to go north to 62nd Avenue North or south through Snell Isle to 22nd Avenue N.

ST PETE TINY HOME FESTIVAL

They're as little as 100 square feet, but the local Tiny Home movement is huge. After last year's sold out St Pete Tiny Home festival, LocalShops1 wanted to give all the people who missed out an opportunity to explore dozens of tiny homes for themselves. LocalShops1's second annual St Pete Tiny Home Festival will be held 10am – 6pm March 23 & 24 at St Pete College Allstate Center, 3200 34th St S, St Petersburg.

LocalShops1's St. Pete Tiny Home Festival 2019 will showcase model homes by professional builders and custom-made homes, "skoolies" and van conversions built by talented enthusiasts who travel the country showing off their creations. Altogether, more than 30 Tiny Structures and 50 local food trucks, mobile boutiques, artists, home-related businesses and restaurants are expected at the festival.

Two dozen leading experts in the Tiny House movement will be on hand giving practical advice on living green, decluttering your current residence and building a Tiny Home.

For event information, visit www.tinyhomestpete.com or email ester@localshops1.com.

MAINSAIL MARKS 44TH YEAR

Visitors to the Mainsail Art Festival have an opportunity to experience a wide variety of visual and performing arts, when they visit the two-day show Saturday and Sunday, April 20-21. Mainsail takes place in waterfront Vinoy Park, located at 701 Bayshore Drive NE, offering beautiful views of the St. Petersburg downtown skyline. Admission is free. Show hours are 9 am. to 6 pm Saturday and 10 am to 5 pm Sunday.

The Mainsail Art Festival will mark 44 years as one of the Southeast's premier art shows, and in Sunshine Artist magazine, it was once again ranked by artists as one of the Top 35 "100 Best Fine Art Shows" in the nation. Artists will be exhibiting in 13 categories: ceramics, digital art, fiber, glass, graphic, jewelry, metal, mixed media, oil/acrylic, photography, sculpture, watercolor and wood.

For event information, visit www.mainsailart.org. For shuttle information visit looperrolley.com/mainsail-shuttle.

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Bar & Restaurant News

ALTO MARE FISH BAR ON BEACH DRIVE

This new Beach Drive restaurant, next door to Annata's Wine Bar



and is owned by Kurt Cuccaro the owner of Annata's. The menu includes many specialty drinks and seafood – in Italian, alto mare means deep sea - with a European flair. They offer a large variety on the raw bar and lots of small plates. There a few land lover entrees, including chicken, steaks and their Alto burger. Find them at 300 Beach Drive.

MINI DOUGHNUT FACTORY Closed just after Christmas, due to a legal issue, owners Patrick and Zezvara Ruddell reopened the first of February and once again are making donuts, sandwiches, and more. Find them at 730 Fourth Street North.

OUTBACK DELIVERS Many of the Outback Steakhouse and Carrabbas restaurants delivers their complete menu to your house or business, just like pizza places have been doing for years.

By the end of last year, 450 of their restaurants offered delivery. They hope to offer delivery in over 600 stores by the end of 2019. The two nearby stores delivering are Outback Steakhouse, 1900 4th Street N. (Phone: 898-2016) and Carrabba's Italian, 1951 4th Street N (Phone: 897-9375)

RENZO'S OPEN FOR LUNCH In our last issue we stated Renzo's Restaurant, a downtown newcomer, was closed for lunch. That was wrong. They are open for lunch Monday through Friday from 11am to 4pm with sandwiches and specials from \$6.99 to \$9.99. See RenzosGourmet.com for the complete menu and find them at 104 2nd Street South, next to the Signature Condos.

THE CANYON AT THE JAMES This popular restaurant and bar on the first level of the The James Museum of Western & Wildlife Art is open to the public without museum admission. The somewhat limited menu is good for small bites and offers a full liquor bar. They are open daily from 10am to 5pm, but on Tuesdays, they stay open until 8pm.

Check it out at 150 Central Avenue, across from ONE Condominiums.

GERMAN KNOODLE OPENS Located at 951 Central Avenue, they serve a variety of German foods including knoodles – little German dumplings. They are open for from 10am until 10pm, but Knoodles are served from 7am to Midnight. Call them at 631-2106.

FLATBREAD AND BUTTER Located at 497 7th Avenue N., this is the brainchild of owner Jesse Muire. He wanted to combine the coffee culture, with an amazing breakfast and plans to serve some flatbread pizza soon. Visit flatbreadandbutter.com for more information.

NEWS WANTED If you have news or suggestions appropriate for this newsletter, let us know by email to Bob@GriffinDirectories.com or call at 430-8300.

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Bar & Restaurant News



TEN YEARS LATER
 Gratzzi's Italian Restaurant has been at their present location for ten years. The restaurant originally opened in Bay Walk and when it closed, now owner Dominic D'angelo was the manager. In 2009, he bought the name and concept and reopened it at 2nd Street South as a family owned business. In 2010, it was named "Best Restaurant in Tampa Bay" by the St. Pete Times (now Tampa Bay Times).

"I am so fortunate to have so many St. Pete residents as repeat customers and to have

survived ten years in this tough restaurant business," Dominic says.

Gratzzi is open for every evening for dinner and Monday through Saturday for lunch at 11am.

View their menu at www.GratzziGrille.com and call 623-9037 for reservations, which are recommended.

CIDER PRESS GREEN CERTIFIED Ocean Allies, a grassroots community-led effort, based in Clearwater, has a primary mission of helping businesses and restaurants learn how to create a sustainability plan and ultimately be a "Green Certified" business. As of now, only one downtown St Pete restaurant is certified - Cider Press at 601 Central Avenue.

"We have been doing the things Ocean Allies and Surf Rider are recommending for years," says owner Roland. "We have gotten rid of all single use plastics, including bags and Styrofoam. We have no plastic straws. We have no bottled water. We compost almost all our waste. We recycle our cardboard. We use the smallest dumpster you can lease. We are happy to be the first downtown restaurant to be certified by Ocean Allies." Get information on Ocean Allies at www.OceanAllies.org or call 441-1790 (ext 235).

NEW WOODEN ROOSTER

The Wooden Rooster restaurant, located on 2nd Avenue North, opened a second location. Jeremy and Liset Ducult opened the new location inside Seminole Town Center, at the intersection of Park Blvd and 113th Street. The new store is three times larger than the downtown store, but they have a similar menu. The new store is open from 7am to 9pm, seven days a week. Get more info at www.TheWoodenRooster.com or call them at 954-5471.



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TONS OF "SANDY" FUN IN CLEARWATER BEACH

Plan to Enjoy the Upcoming Sugar Sands Festival - April 12-28

by Dan L. Hummel

This April, there will be plenty of opportunities to enjoy the shore, the sand, and the fabulous Gulf sunsets as the Pier 60 Sugar Sand Festival presented by Visit St. Pete Clearwater gets underway in Clearwater Beach. Running for an unprecedented 17 straight days this year from April 12 to April 28, the festival is a beach celebration packed full of family friendly activities. Because of the late Easter holiday, the event is being extended an extra seven days this year only.

Lisa Chandler, founder of the festival back in 2013, is in her seventh year of producing this mammoth event. According to Chandler, the festival's beach infrastructure takes over two weeks to build as more than 1,000 tons of white Clearwater Beach sand are collected directly from the Pier 60 area for the Sugar Sand activities.

One of the festival's highlights each year is the Sugar Sand Walk Exhibit where fourteen world renowned sculptors travel here from all parts of the world to create magnificent sand sculptures inside a 21,000 square foot tent. This year's theme for the sculptors is, "Sea the World...A Journey Around the Globe."

While the majority of the festival is free to the public, there is a charge to walk through the breathtaking sandscape exhibition. There you may well see some of the sculptors still creating additional smaller versions of their incredible art. Last year over 45,000 people purchased tickets to the exhibition. While tickets are available at the event, festival-goers can enjoy additional perks by purchasing tickets in advance at sugarsandfestival.com

Also, in a separate area called Camp Hyatt, kids can enjoy playing in the

world's biggest sandbox while parents lounge around on provided beach chairs and umbrellas. Sticking with the sand theme, and new this year, is a Pro-Am Sand Sculpting Competition on Saturday, April 20, and a family sand sculpting event on Easter Sunday.

After you shake the sand off, enjoy over a dozen street performers, called buskers, who rotate their shows all day and work for tips. Or, visit the area filled with 75 artisans and crafters whose work is all authentic, and must meet strict criteria in order to have their work at Sugar Sand.

Not exhausted yet? Then, stick around for the "Frenchy's Beach Concerts" that are staggered over the afternoon and evening hours during nine days of the festival. Featuring all types of music, the festival brings in mostly local and regional bands to perform. There are also free movies on the beach each Friday and Saturday night of the event. Bring your blankets and chairs, and enjoy great family friendly movies on America's number one beach.

You may also want to enjoy the Sugar Sand Corn Hole Tournament fueled by Monster Energy Drink, or get cooled off at one of the water slides. If you are thirsty, proceed immediately to the Shephard's Sand Bar where you can enjoy beer and wine while relaxing "on the beach." This year the bar will feature beers from the 3 Daughters Brewery in St. Petersburg, White Claw Hard Seltzer, and various selections of wine. Why not dig your toes into the sand, enjoy a beverage, and celebrate the beautiful Clearwater landscape and sunsets.

On the three Saturday nights of the festival, you can conclude your visit with a bang as Spectrum presents a fabulous fireworks show over the water

beginning at 9 pm.

Another new venture for the festival in 2019 is focused on helping kids in the area. For the first time, the local YMCA will feature their fundraising Fishing Rodeo Tournament on Pier 60 during the festival. All monies raised from the fishing tournament will help needy children be able to regularly visit the YMCA at no cost to their family. Chandler remarked, "This is an amazing opportunity to show our support and give back to our community by partnering with the YMCA. Our goal is to bring more awareness to their fishing tournament so that more children from our area can take advantage of the activities that the YMCA offers. It's a natural fit for our event, it's family friendly, and showcases our world famous fishing pier."

Crowd expectations for this year's extended festival are much higher than the 125,000 people who attended in 2018. Organizers are encouraging attendees to use the festival website and their Facebook page to gain valuable information about traffic, parking, and alternative transportation alternatives like the Jolley Trolley and the Clearwater Ferry.

While the producers of this event are extremely proud of its quality and diversity, there is also a great deal of gratification for its economic viability to the area. As a destination event, last year 56 percent of the attendees stayed overnight in Pinellas County accounting for an estimated 12,106 room nights. Additionally, the total economic impact of the out of county visitors soared to over \$20.5 million.

So, this year enjoy one or more days of the Sugar Sand Festival. No use burying your head in the sand...just you feet! ■

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Art & Museum News

SUNLIT FESTIVAL KICKOFF PARTY

Celebrate the kickoff of the 5th Annual SunLit Festival with beer/wine and hors d'oeuvres as you explore the Chihuly Collection of St. Pete at 720 Central Ave. See who receives the 2019 SunLit Award while you listen to music by Lounge Cat. The SunLit Festival brings together cultural organizations, writers, artists, and businesses for 18 days of "Litertainment." It runs April 11-28. Tickets - \$35 (includes 2 free drinks) available at m.bpt.me/event/4078305

JAMES MUSEUM OF WESTERN & WILDLIFE ART 892.4200
 150 Central Avenue thejamesmuseum.org

The Cultural Connections of Edward S. Curtis April 6 - July 21

In the first three decades of the 20th century, American photographer Edward S. Curtis traveled the country to document "vanishing" Native American cultures with his cameras, producing thousands of images. Step back in time to explore tribal traditions and early photographic processes through Curtis' lens, with premier images and masterworks on loan from the Robb and Susan Hough collection.

THE DALI MUSEUM 823-3767
 One Dali Blvd thedali.org

magritte & dali, now through May 19

A first-of-its-kind special exhibition, it is dedicated to the world's two most celebrated surrealists, Rene Magritte and Salvador Dali. Showcasing carefully curated, exemplary pieces from Magritte's and Dali's works, the exhibit pushes back the curtain to reveal what lies beyond the simple appearance of painted images. These two preeminent surrealists opened minds to an alternative view of the world, constantly challenging reality.

ST. PETERSBURG SECOND SATURDAY ARTWALK

Join them as 40 artists' studios and galleries open their doors. Shop local and support our arts community in a fun social setting. Download the map and list of participants to plan your festive art evening at www.stpeteartsalliance.org.

SPRING FOR THE ARTS

Creative Clay will host Spring for the Arts March 20, 6-9 p.m. at Imagine Museum. The public is invited to imagine, enjoy and fund raise for Creative Clay's arts programs, which serve individuals with disabilities and neuro-differences. Tickets are available for \$75 each at creativeclay.org or Eventbrite

FLORIDA CRAFTART 727-821-7391
 501 Central Ave. FloridaCraftArt.org

In honor of the Glass Art Society Conference (GAS) that will be held from March 29-31 in St. Petersburg, Duncan McClellan and Mary Childs are curating an exhibition of glass masters at Florida CraftArt. "QUEST: A Celebration of Glass" features artists from across North America who draw on mythological, cultural and personal imagery. Each work of art illustrates the artist's intimate and expansive journey of self-exploration and communication. Through April 20.

RED CLOUD INDIAN ARTS
 214 Beach Drive redcloudindianarts.com

Taos/Onkay/Owingehe Pueblo, Glass Artist Ira Lujan

Award winning Ira Lujan incorporates Native American themes and influences along with ancient techniques to form his blown glass creations. Meet the artist and view his Native American Expressions in Glass at the Artist reception Friday March 29, 2019, 5 to 10 pm. Ira will also be available Saturday 10 -5, Sunday Noon to 5pm. Additionally, on exhibit will be "Spirit Dreams" cast glass, by Susan Gott.

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TRANSMERICA WODKA PARC

ST. PETE HONORS THE LEGACY OF RAY CHARLES

He wrote and recorded "The St. Pete Florida Blues"

By Roy Peter Clark

Let's go back in time to 1948, a street scene in Tampa, Florida. A young man, R.C. Robinson, strides down the sidewalk, headed for the bus stop. He walks without hesitation, defying the fact that he is blind. He was not born blind, but lost his sight at the age of seven, leaving him with at least the memory of the way things look. On this day, he wears no dark glasses, carries no cane, has no dog to guide his way.

He's out to meet some musician friends. As usual, he's looking for a gig. He lives in a rooming house with a friendly family, but he hardly has spare change in his pocket.

Ray Charles. That's the name he would soon adopt. He would don a pair of dark glasses that would become a trademark and a universal sign of hipness. By his death in 2004, he was one of the most famous performers on the planet, uniting diverse audiences with his special ability to master musical forms: gospel, jazz, blues, soul, country, R&B, and rock 'n' roll.

Another famous piano player and singer, Billy Joel, would say: "This may sound like sacrilege, but I think Ray Charles was more important than Elvis Presley."

The voice of Ray Charles would be recorded countless times in studios and from live performances, in stadiums and small clubs, on his own and with countless other artists who marked a duet with Ray Charles as one of the honors of their professional lives.

Our young Ray Charles let's call him R.C., still in his teen years, was trying to find his own distinctive style. When he performed, he imitated the popular voices of his day: Nat "King" Cole, blues man Charles Brown, the great Louis Jordan, who was inventing rock 'n' roll in the late 1930s.

His rooming house in Tampa had a piano in the parlor. There was a piano at the union hall, and the budding genius would dominate playing time. He began to compose his own songs, still in the style of the ones he would listen to on records and the radio. He had enough money to buy a primitive "wire" recorder.

With his "toy" recorder – as he called it -- R.C. and three musician friends decided to record a few of his early songs. No one can say for sure exactly when this alpha session took place, and these rough recordings would be replaced by improved versions cut in Miami. The best guess is 1950.

Here he is in his autobiography: "I had written a song – hell, I can't even say that; I didn't consider it a composition, just a blues I made up. Called it "Found My Baby There." It was a nasty little number, and that day we worked it out – along with a

couple of other songs – with the recorder going. The sound quality was so bad it sounded like we were all locked in a closet."

Ray Charles was not fussy about titles, so that his early work can contain more than one title for a particular song. Take his song "Found My Baby There." Turns out, it had another more enduring title now formally enshrined in the musical history of Tampa Bay: "The St. Pete Florida Blues."

I have lived in St. Pete since 1977 and play some music now and then. Not long ago I picked up a copy of John Capouya's great book, "Florida Soul." The first chapter describes the legacy of Ray Charles, who was raised in the tiny Florida town of Greenville, east of Tallahassee. In his early years, he enjoyed the boogie woogie piano work of a local musician. His interest in music was cultivated at the Florida School for the Deaf and Blind in St. Augustine. As a liberated teen, he made his way to Jacksonville, Orlando, and then Tampa.

He fell in love with a girl from Tampa and wrote a song in her honor, one of the sweetest slow blues number you will ever hear. And he made a creative decision. In the song, the girl of his dreams would be not from Tampa, but from St. Pete.

"Down in St. Pete...Florida...I found my baby there."

There is a good chance that Ray Charles had never heard the sound of his own recorded voice until he and his friends played the cut from the wire recorder. Let that sink in for a moment. It's possible that the first time he heard the sound of his singing voice, he heard the words "Down in St. Pete, Florida...."

I guess you can say that, when it comes to historical competition between Florida's twin cities, Tampa got the airport, the university, and the NFL stadium. St. Pete got the song.

At the Times Festival of Reading in November I ran into Rick Kriseman, mayor of St. Petersburg. "Your Honor," I said in a mildly theatrical voice, "Did you know that in 1950 Ray Charles wrote and recorded a song called The St. Pete Florida Blues?"

His reaction matched that of hundreds of others: Eyes wide, jaw dropped, and then a prolonged "Whaaaaat!?"

Here's what's happened - The City of St. Petersburg proclaimed Feb. 15 "Ray Charles Day," although I prefer to think of it as the start of the Ray Charles Era. The City embraced Charles as an adopted son and his song as an official song. Musicians and presenters gathered for a



two-hour celebration of history and song at The Studio @620, featuring Alex Harris and 1970s soul singer Latimore, whose recording of "The St. Pete Florida Blues" can be enjoyed on YouTube.

It turns out that over the course of his career Ray Charles would have a rich connection to St. Pete. Archivist David Shedden has discovered old ads published in the "Negro News" section of the St. Pete Times (yes, the newspaper was segregated back then). Every year through the 1950s and beyond, Ray Charles would perform at the Manhattan Casino.

In the Jim Crow days, the St. Pete Coliseum catered to white audiences, so the likes of Louis Armstrong, Cab Calloway, Nat Cole, Duke Ellington, Sarah Vaughn, and, yes, Ray Charles would play at the Manhattan in the heart of the black community. Often, they stayed in the homes of residents there since many hotels in the South were segregated. In protest, some performers would not return.

There is a sense, though, in which Ray Charles was "color blind." I use that phrase with respect for the role he played on issues of both race and disability. He was born in 1930, during the Depression into the grinding poverty of the rural South. His younger brother drowned in a bathtub. His beloved mother died when he was just 14. The school he attended for blind children had separate programs for white and "colored" students. He was never blind to racial prejudice and social injustice.

That said he came to understand that his music was a bridge, not a wall. He performed with musicians of all races and ethnicities – rich and poor. He could play white music for white people with white musicians – like the Florida Playboys -- if it put cash in his pocket. He became one of the greatest country music artists of all time, for goodness sake.

Roy Peter Clark has taught writing at the Poynter Institute, which owns the Times, since 1979. He is the author of many books on writing and journalism. He has played keyboard in garage bands since 1964. You can reach him at rclark@poynter.org.

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Organizational News...

NORTHEAST LITTLE LEAGUE

They recently finished their 60th Anniversary Spring Season and would like to thank all the players, parents, friends and sponsors for making this Little League thrive. Get your kids involved in the next 60 years during Fall Ball. Registration is now open with tryouts set to begin the week of August 27th. For more information, visit www.northeastll.com.

ST. PETERSBURG WOMAN'S CLUB

Their Annual Spring Garden Tea is Sunday, April 7 from 2-4pm at the Woman's Club building. The cost is \$10. They will present "Through The Decades" with models dressed in costumes from the past along with a narrative of what was happening in our country and around the world during the past century. Refreshments include tea in dainty cups & silver tea services to relive the days and tasty sandwiches and finger sweets. Reservations are required by calling 822-6659 or email VJZAMA@Gmail.com.

The St. Petersburg Woman's Club belongs to the worldwide General Federation of Women's Clubs. General meetings are the second Friday of each month, at 1 pm. Evening programs, for working women are the second Tuesday- 7 pm. The Club has been active in the community since 1913 and provides "hands on" volunteer work on many projects & activities. Guests are welcome at all activities. To receive more information about the club or booking our facility, please call (727) 822-4982 or visit www.StPetersburgWomansClub.org.

HISTORIC OLD NORTHEAST NEIGHBORHOOD (HONNA)

They are sponsoring an area wide Yard Sale and shredding event on March 23rd.

Contact President Natalie DeVicente at 409-2891. To host a Porch Party, contact Susan Arsenault, SueAtcp@aol.com. Get more information at www.HONNA.org.

SNELL ISLE HOMEOWNERS ASSOCIATION

Bonnie Hargrett, new president for 2019, would like to thank Scott Youngblood for his many years of service as the former President.

They will sponsor an Easter Egg Hunt for the kids, Thursday, April 18 at the Woman's Club beginning at 6pm.


The Snell Isle HOA meets at the Women's Club, 40 Snell Isle Blvd NE. For more information, contact Bonnie Hargrett at BonnieHargrett@Gmail.com or visit www.EnjoySnellisle.com.

INFINITY, LEAGUE TO AID ABUSED CHILDREN & FAMILIES

They are hosting their third annual Designer Purse Bingo event Wednesday, April 10. This fun event features a cash bar, appetizer buffet, opportunity prizes and a fabulous accessory silent auction, as well as the chance to win designer purses. The event, held at the St. Pete Yacht Club from 5 to 8 pm, has sold out every single year. Tickets start at \$65 and can be purchased at www.infinitystpete.org. Sponsorship opportunities are available.

Infinity is a non-profit all volunteer organization with more than 170 philanthropic members committed to ending abuse in the St. Petersburg area. Since its inception almost 40 years ago, members have raised hundreds of thousands of dollars to further the missions of its three beneficiary agencies: CASA, Brookwood Florida Inc and Suncoast Center Inc. More importantly, our members are friends who enjoy gathering together both officially and socially to have fun while making a difference in our community. The group is warm and welcoming and always has their arms open to new members. For more information, e-mail Info@infinitystpete.org.

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Organizational News...

ST. PETERSBURG WOMEN'S CHAMBER OF COMMERCE

Their annual fundraising luncheon is March 21, 11 am at the Club at Treasure Island. The theme is "The Arts in St. Petersburg", with special guests from The Free Fall Theater, the Florida Orchestra, The Florida Opera, and the West Coast Dance Company. Tickets are \$75. Proceeds benefit The Downtown Waterfront Parks Foundation; Kind Mouse, which provides weekend foodbags to children; and Women with a Purpose, which aids cancer families with non-medical financial assistance. Their always popular silent auction baskets and a variety of items from locally owned boutiques will be available for purchase. Contact Sara Galiger, 727-460-1038 or Phyllis Powell 727-744-9114.

In 1929, a group of women inquired about joining the St Petersburg Chamber of Commerce and were told it was a men's club only, so they formed the St Petersburg Women's Chamber of Commerce. Now 89 years later, it is still going strong with the purpose of providing charitable and volunteer assistance to local 501(c)(3) organizations that provide consistent aid to our community and individuals. The Women's Chamber of www.wccstpete.com. at 727-744-9114.

SUNRISE ROTARY CLUB

April 27, they will hold their largest fund-raiser called Shuffle Brews and BBQ at the St Petersburg Shuffleboard Club, 559 Mirror Lake Drive North. Proceeds benefit their charity work listed below. Call Paul at 702-556-6546 to play, to donate a raffle prize or with any other questions.

They meet every Tuesday at 7:30 am at the St Petersburg Yacht Club. The club supports Wounded Warriors Meals/St Pete Free clinic Pac-a-Sac, Disabled Sailors Regatta, Brookwood Home for Girls, plus others. Email stpeterotary@gmail.com, or visit stpeterotary.com and [Facebook.com/SunriseRotaryStPete](https://www.facebook.com/SunriseRotaryStPete).

EXCHANGE CLUB OF ST PETERSBURG

They meet for lunch the first and third Thursdays at the St. Pete Yacht Club. To get involved, contact Cathy Duchow, Club Secretary, 727-623-4880 or Cduchow4551@Gmail.com

KIWANIS CLUB OF ST PETERSBURG

This club meets every Tuesday at Orange Blossom Catering from 12-1:15pm. Email Contact@SPKiwanis.org, call J.C. Russell, Secretary, 821-5518 or visit SPKiwanis.org, for information.

ST. PETERSBURG DOWNTOWN NEIGHBORHOOD ASSN.

The association will host the 2019 Tour of Homes Saturday, March 23rd from 11:30am-3:30pm. This year includes tours of units in Parkshore Plaza, The Salvador, The One, The Bayfront Tower, Walker Whitney Plaza, McNulty Lofts, The Sage, and Bliss. Tickets are \$20 for members and \$30 for non-members.

The organization, representing residents downtown from 5th Ave. N to 5th Ave. S including the Edge District, aims to build a stronger community by bringing neighbors together and serving as a collective voice for downtown issues. Quarterly meetings have guest speakers, and their popular quarterly Urban Porch Parties are held at various venues. The next meeting is Wednesday, April 9th at 7pm at The Cathedral Church of St. Peter - 140 4th St N. You can reach new President Karen Carmichael, at Sunny1015K@Verizon.net.

Membership and event tickets are available at stpetedna.org.

STAMP CLUB

Now in their 95th year, Morgan Fitzgerald has been elected President for the eighth year. Contact Robert Holmes for more information, 744-4106 or MercyStreet771@Gmail.com




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Contact StPeteRotary@gmail.com with questions or to donate a raffle prize.




TOUR OF HOMES

MARCH 23, 2019



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THE FLORIDA HOLOCAUST MUSEUM'S FOUNDER PASSES AWAY



The Florida Holocaust Museum (The FHM) is incredibly saddened to announce the passing of its founder, Walter P. Loebenberg. The FHM was established by Walter and his wife, Edie, with the help of businessmen and community leaders. The Museum is the result of Loebenberg's remarkable journey and vision.

"Walter Loebenberg was loved and highly respected by everyone he met and by the community. He was private and strong, but possessed a deep, abiding kindness and selflessness. His children and grandchildren adored him, his peers held him in high esteem, and the community was proud to call him its own," said Elizabeth Gelman, Executive Director of The Florida Holocaust Museum.

In 1989, Walter had a dream to provide quality Holocaust and human rights education to adults and students. In 1992, the Museum rented a space it would soon outgrow, on the grounds of the Jewish Community Center of Pinellas County in Madeira Beach, Florida. In 1998, The FHM relocated to its current location in the heart of downtown St. Petersburg, FL in a 27,000 square foot building specifically designed for visitor enrichment, artifact preservation, and educational purposes. In 2017, the Museum proudly celebrated its 25th Anniversary.

Walter Loebenberg was born in Wachterbacht, Germany and was raised with one sister. His family could trace their roots back to 1492 and the time of the Spanish Inquisition. Walter came from a prominent family that lived in a community with very few Jews. Walter's father owned a paint manufacturing company and was arrested in 1933 for slandering Hitler's name. His business then deteriorated due to antisemitism, and the family moved to Frankfurt in 1936.

At age fourteen, Walter became an apprentice in a bakery. On Kristallnacht, he arrived to work to find the bakery and a nearby synagogue burning to the ground. He was arrested and taken to the town square where Jews were being sent to concentration camps. He was released by SS officers, along with fourteen others, then to be chased by a mob of women. He escaped and made his way home. His mother immediately wrote for assistance to leave Germany.

Walter's family was scheduled to leave Europe on the ship the St. Louis, but the family's plans changed at the last minute. They came on another ship, and reached Ellis Island in 1939, where they remained for four months. Walter, then a teenager, was later drafted into the United States Army and became a U.S. citizen. While overseas, Walter was awarded with The Bronze Star Medal, presented to him by General Dwight D. Eisenhower, for his involvement with an interrogation that led to the information that saved the life of many American soldiers.



Walter at age 5 or 6 in Wachtersbach, Germany



Walter and Edie in the summer of 1947

After he returned to America, he met his wife Edith. Walter and Edith had three children, eight grandchildren, and four great-grandchildren. They were married for 62 years

Through his philanthropic efforts, Walter provided generously to several worthy organizations and private individuals. He has supported more than fifteen organizations in the Tampa Bay area, though he has typically given privately, sharing the details of his philanthropy only with his family.

Over the years, Walter has been nominated for multiple community philanthropic awards, and has received several in recognition of his philanthropic efforts within the community, including the Key to the City of St. Petersburg, the Tree of Life Award from the Jewish National Fund, the Humanitarian of the Year Award from the JCC, and the Tampa Bay Business Committee for the Arts Award.

The fortitude to survive his early years helped Walter achieve success, but he never forgot those who did not survive. Through his efforts, a living memorial to those who suffered and perished became today's The Florida Holocaust Museum. For over twenty-seven years, The FHM, thanks to Walter's dedication and vision, has used the lessons of the past to help create a better future for all.

The Florida Holocaust Museum is located at 55 5th Street S., St. Petersburg. Photos Courtesy of The Florida Holocaust Museum



Walter and Edie at a Museum event in 2006

TRENDSPOTTING: VIRTUAL HOME BUYING

Schedule pressures and lack of extra time continue to drive our need to shop on the go. Online grocery orders and delivery are now commonplace for many households. Online holiday retail sales continue to prevail versus visiting the mall. In this tech-driven world, a similar shift can be seen in today's real estate market.

Searching for a home has come a long way since For Sale classifieds in Sunday papers. We don't circle favorite listings with red marker anymore. Instead we get immediate online notifications of new listings and price reductions. Nowadays, the home search starts either on the couch while searching online listings or in the car with a home search app.



Given this new reality, Janelle Chmura, Realtor with Smith and Associates Real Estate, has tapped into the importance of connecting with buyers virtually. That's why she offers virtual shopping experiences with her listings using Matterport 3D walkthroughs. "Matterport allows buyers to virtually walk through my listings. They can travel upstairs. They can turn 360 degrees. They can even see the texture of the walls," she says. Janelle continues, "It also widens the exposure of the listing beyond local boundaries. The buyer pool grows exponentially with this type of online shopping experience. I'm always looking for ways to provide a competitive advantage for my listings and the sellers I represent. Matterport is an investment that proves itself time and time again."



Jason Slocum, owner of First Look 3D Imaging in Tampa, FL creates 3D walkthroughs for real estate as well as retail and car industries. "Matterport technology uses specialized cameras to create 3D visualization of physical spaces. This is similar to Google Street View on Google maps but with high-definition resolution." Jason explains that this allows the consumer to walk through the space on their own time, visit rooms repeatedly and travel in all directions to get the full experience. "It's a beneficial tool for consumers in making their purchasing decisions. For real estate, it helps agents by revealing buyers that are truly interested in the home. They've already had a showing online – by the time they step into the residence, it's essentially a second showing," states Jason.

For more information, and to see Matterport in action, visit www.TourWaterfrontHomes.com, contact Janelle Chmura 813-380-5465 or Jason Slocum at 813-382-4362.

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