

NEIGHBORHOOD NEWS

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Magazine

THE REAL PIRATES OF FLORIDA



By Pete Magnani

As Gasparilla approaches, the folklore surrounding Jose Gaspar begins to resurface despite a lack of evidence that the legendary pirate ever existed. Literature frequently associates the golden age of piracy with the Caribbean Sea and its islands. New Providence, Kingston, Port Royal, and Tortuga are among the infamous pirate strongholds that history and Hollywood have enshrined. However, Florida and the entire Gulf Coast saw their share of seafaring marauders.

Ponce de Leon landed on the east coast of Florida in 1513 and claimed it for Spain. St. Augustine was established as a resupply port for Spanish merchant ships, and their valuable cargo brought pirates to the Atlantic coast. Additionally,

England, Spain, and France sent privateer ships to finance war efforts. They operated almost identically to the pirates roaming the Atlantic and Caribbean, except they did so under the authority of their sovereign. Privateers used decommissioned naval ships or repurposed cargo vessels to seize merchant ships laden with riches. These "prizes" were then brought to a port where the ship and goods were sold. Profits were divided among the ship's owner, captain, and crew. Privateers also sent a share to the government that sanctioned them.

Continued on page 6

Also in this Issue:



Karen Seel Returns to Private Life

County Commissioner, Seel finished her last term on the Commission after serving 23 years. - page 30

Beach Art Center Staple Retires

Art teacher Charlotte DiGennaro is coming to the end of her second thirty-year career cultivating young artists. - page 19

Next Generation of Marine Biologists

SCUBAnauts International is teaching kids to love science and marine preservation through a program based on underwater exploration.

- page 16



Memorial for Winter

Clearwater Marine Aquarium announced a planned memorial garden on the anniversary of the much-loved dolphin's passing. -page 23

CREDITS



This newsletter is published by Magriff Productions, LLC. and is mailed to every occupied residence in Indian Rocks Beach's zip code 33785. We are not associated with the City of Indian Rocks Beach.

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INDIAN ROCKS BEACH NEIGHBORHOOD NEWSLETTER

Inside, you will find articles and local information about the nearby area. We call it Neighborhood News because it is primarily about our neighborhood, Indian Rocks Beach. This newsletter is printed every other month and mailed to every occupied house in the city.

Do you need another copy? Ask for them at USA Grocers, CVS Drug Store, Beach Welcome Center, City Hall, and Indian Rocks Beach Library.

We hope you enjoyed our magazine. We want your input. Did you like this issue? What suggestions do you have for future articles? Call or email us..

Keep up to date with your local news; follow us on Facebook at Neighborhood News Magazine.

Thank you for reading,

Lora & Pete Magnani 813-239-6862
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SEE YOU AGAIN IN MARCH!



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Anna Paulina Luna 202-225-5961
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St Petersburg, FL 33742

CALENDAR OF HOLIDAYS & EVENTS

As always, this is subject to change.

JANUARY

- New Year's Day 1
- Caddy's Pub Indian Shores 5k 1
- ReliaQuest Bowl Game Tampa 2
- Tarpon Springs Epiphany 6
- Home Show State Fairgrounds 6-8
- Heritage Village Roc Day for Spinners 7
- Downtown Dunedin Art Show 7-8
- Peace Memorial Church Concert 8
- Bucs Final Regular Season Game 8
- NCAA Football Finals 9
- Girl Scout Cookies Online Only 9
- Public Schools Reopen 9
- City Commission Meeting 10
- Art and Meditation at Dali Museum 11
- Dunedin Int'l Film Festival 12-15
- Johns Pass Seafood Festival 13-15
- Martin Luther King Jr. Day 16
- Public Schools Closed 16
- Florida's Arbor Day 20
- Gasparilla Children's Parade 21
- In The Water Boat Show St. Pete 19-22
- Chinese New Year 22
- St Pete Shrimp and Music Fest 27
- Gasparilla Invasion 28
- Tiny Bubbles Fundraiser 28

FEBRUARY

- Groundhog Day 2
- St. Jerome Choir Festival 3
- Florida State Fair Opens 9
- Sant' Yago Knight Parade 11
- Super Bowl LVII 12
- Lincoln's Birthday 12
- Valentine's Day 14
- City Commission Meeting 14
- Susan B Anthony Day 15
- Winterfest on the Rocks 18
- Florida State Fair Closes 20
- President's Day 20
- Mardi Gras 21
- Ash Wednesday / Lent Begins 22
- Spring Training Begins 24
- African American Heritage Festival 25
- Tampa Home Show Coliseum 25-26

MARCH

- Boots and Brushes Beach Art Center 4
- St Pete Grand Prix 3-5
- Daylight Savings Begins 12
- Pinellas Schools Spring Break 13-17
- Municipal Elections 14
- St Patrick's Day 17
- Rotary Runs the Beach 18



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Did You Know



NEW NAME SAME GAME The Outback Bowl has a new sponsor and name - "ReliaQuest Bowl." It will have that name for at least the next four years. ReliaQuest is a Tampa based tech company.

Once known as the Hall of Fame Bowl, the game became the Outback Bowl in the 1990s, when Outback Steakhouse became the sponsor. Outback Steakhouse was the longest running NCAA football bowl sponsor, until now.

Not much else will change besides the name and logo. The bowl game will be on New Year's Day game, except this next game, which will be January 2nd. January 1, 2023 is a Sunday and the Buccaneers will be playing in the stadium.

CITY PARKING PERMITS The 2023-25 Indian Rocks Beach resident parking decals will be available Monday, January 16. There will be a grace period until Monday, March 13.

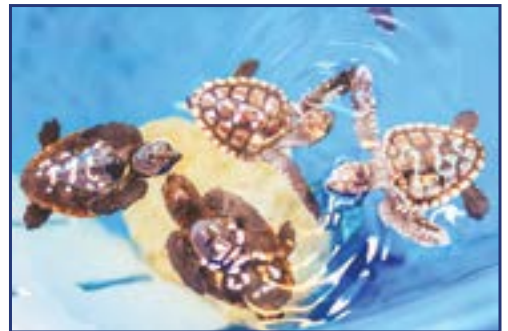
IRB property owners or residential lessees with at least a one-year lease may obtain (2) decals per property.

All issued decals must be permanently attached to the rear exterior of the vehicle matching the vehicle registration on file with the City of Indian Rocks Beach.

Residents may stop by the City Hall, located at 1507 Bay Palm Boulevard, Monday through Friday, between 8 am and 3:30 pm to obtain a parking decal. For documentation requirements visit Indian-Rocks-Beach.com

SEA TURTLE NESTING RECAP The Clearwater Marine Aquarium observed 313 sea turtle nests during the 2022 nesting season, up from 281 last year and 222 in 2020. The majority of the nests belonged to loggerhead turtles. 487 hatchlings received treatment from the aquarium's medical staff with 403 successfully released.

"Disorientation event" is the term used to describe when hatchlings follow artificial light instead of celestial light, causing them to be found in places like hotel pools and parking lots. Simple acts like knocking down sand castles, filling in holes at the beach and using wildlife-friendly bulbs can all help save sea turtles and make a positive impact on the loggerhead population.



CITY COMMISSION SEATS UP FOR MARCH ELECTION

Municipal elections will be held March 4, 2023. There are two Indian Rocks Beach City Commissioner seats up for re-election. Only registered Indian Rocks Beach voters are eligible to run. Denise Houseberg, Don House, Lan Vaughn and Preston Smith are on the ballot. Mail-in voting deadlines are January 28 for military/overseas voters and February 9 for domestic ballots.

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and More...

PINELLAS COUNTY COMMISSION ELECTS CHAIR, VICE CHAIR FOR 2023 The Pinellas County Board of County Commissioners on Tuesday unanimously elected commissioners Janet C. Long and Kathleen Peters as Chair and Vice Chair, respectively, for 2023. The election took place in the final Board meeting for the current year.

Long is the current Vice Chair and served as Chair in 2017. A former member of the Florida Legislature and Seminole City Council, she was elected to the Board countywide in 2012, 2016 and 2020. Long represents at-large District 1.

Peters was elected Vice-Chair. Also a former member of the Florida Legislature, Peters was elected to the Board in 2018 and re-elected in November. She represents single-member District 6.

RECYCLE YOUR FLAG PROPERLY

The U.S. Flag Code outlines the proper etiquette for disposing of an American flag that is worn and no longer serviceable. VFW Post 10094 has a flag disposal box where residents can drop off their aged and weathered flags for the veterans to retire. The ceremony involves a color guard presentation, a chaplain's prayer, and salutes, after which the flags are dipped in kerosene and respectfully burned. The post is located at 14450 Walsingham RD.



CHRISTMAS TREE DISPOSAL

Christmas trees will be collected at the curbside with yard waste on Wednesdays. Trees should be free of decorations, hooks, lights, garland tinsel and stands. For more information, call (727) 595-6889.

REBATES AVAILABLE FOR SEWER PIPE REPLACEMENTS

In December, Pinellas County Utilities announced that eligible sewer customers who own single-family homes can apply for rebates to inspect and rehabilitate or replace their private sewer lateral. Eligible customers can receive 100% of the inspection cost up to \$350 and 50% of replacement or rehabilitation cost up to \$3,500. For eligibility information, visit privatesewer.pinellas.gov.

RECYCLING PROGRAM EXTENDED FOR TWO YEARS

The City of Indian Rocks Beach authorized a two-year extension of the curbside recycling program. The contract was set to expire on December 31. The program will continue as it is currently, however at a slightly higher cost. The negotiated deal will result in a \$36 annual increase per residence.

SOBERUARY? More and more people are getting on the trend of drinking less after the holidays. Dry January has been growing in popularity for several years. 35% of consumers took part in 2022, up from 21% in 2019. Of those who intended to abstain from alcohol in 2019, 74% claim to have been successful compared to the average 10% of consumers who claim to stick to their New Year's resolutions.

OUR NEXT ISSUE IS IN MARCH If you need another copy of this newsletter, you may pick one up at Beach Art Center, Library, Beach Welcome Center, USA Grocer, or CVS. Find us online at BeachNewsletters.com.

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GULF PIRATES, Continued

During the 16th and 17th centuries, Spanish colonials mined gold, silver, and precious gems in Mexico and Peru. They shipped these valuables back to Europe with the first leg of the journey bringing them across the Gulf of Mexico and through the Straits of Florida. The largely ungoverned islands of the Antilles and West Indies made convenient hideaways for pirate fleets, and the waters of the Caribbean and Atlantic made prime hunting grounds. The Spanish, British, and French also battled each other over territory and religion during this time, and all three governments commissioned privateers to fund those efforts.

In the early 1700s, efforts began to combat piracy in the Caribbean. The British government passed the Transportation Act of 1717, which included a provision concerning suppression of piracy and affirming capital punishment upon conviction. Previously, the crime was considered a relatively minor offense, with pirates only facing punishment if they were caught and returned to Europe to face trial. The British Parliament established commissioners in the colonies with the ability to bring pirates to trial, resulting in the execution of nearly six hundred buccaneers between 1716 and 1726. This crackdown pushed the pirates out of the Caribbean and into safer waters.

Louis Michel-Aury served on privateer ships under the banner of France during the early 1800s. Eventually, he assumed command of his own ship and fought under Venezuelan

authority in the Spanish American Wars for Independence. In 1816, he was appointed the Governor of Galveston where he established a privateering base for attacking Spanish ships in the Gulf of Mexico. Aury left Galveston in 1817 on an expedition to Mexico, and in his absence, Galveston and much of the northern Gulf Coast fell into new hands.

Upon his return, Aury discovered he was unwelcome in Galveston, and briefly established a new base at Fernandina on Amelia Island. The U.S. intended to annex Florida, and on December 23, 1817, a U.S. Navy fleet took control of the island. Aury headed south and continued plundering and privateering until 1821, when he passed away at 33, reportedly striking his head after a fall from his horse.

Brothers Pierre and Jean Lafitte came to the New World from France around 1800, settling in New Orleans. They established legitimate businesses, but also operated as pirates in the Gulf. The United States Congress passed the Embargo Act in 1807, effectively banning trade with other countries. The Lafitte brothers saw an opportunity set up a smuggling network to bring foreign goods into the U.S.

As displaced Caribbean pirates moved their operations into the Gulf of Mexico, they needed strongholds to offload their spoils along the coasts of Florida, Louisiana, and Texas. One such location was Baratavia Bay in southeastern Louisiana between Grand



Portrait of Jean Lafitte

Isle and Grand Terre. The Lafitte network was a perfect means for the marauders to fence their prizes. They fortified Baratavia and it was mainstay for pirates until it was taken by the U.S. Navy in 1814.

The brothers functioned as spies for Spain during the Mexican War of Independence beginning around 1815. It was in this capacity that Jean Lafitte was sent to Galveston in 1817. During Aury's absence, Lafitte took control and fortified the island. His operation ran successfully until one of his captains attacked an American merchant ship. A U.S. Navy schooner was dispatched to Galveston, and Lafitte abandoned the island. He continued taking prizes in the Gulf and the Caribbean until he was fatally wounded in battle with two Spanish warships off the coast of Honduras.

The 1830s brought the beginning of a sharp decline in piracy in the Gulf of Mexico. The U.S. and other nations realized the revenue losses associated with the trade and focused naval efforts to combat it. Despite fading into folklore and foreign news broadcasts during the 20th century, the 2000s saw a resurgence in piracy in the Gulf of Mexico. Hundreds of raids occurred in the Gulf between 2015 and 2020 to both merchant ships and oil platforms. Instead of plundering precious metals and gems, modern-day pirates steal oil barrels and hold ships for ransom. Cooperative efforts between the Navies and Coast Guards of the U.S. and Mexico seem to be stemming the tide. Pirates still exist, and not only during Gasparilla. ■



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NO FINANCIAL PLAN IS A PLAN

by Ray Ferrara, ProVise Management Group

No plan is a plan, but certainly not the best alternative. Without a written plan it is hard to stay focused on what success looks like. Life is complicated with moving parts that can easily distract us away from our goals and objectives. What should be in a financial plan?

Begin by developing a Net Worth Statement. It should be divided into Current Assets (checking, savings, CDs, life insurance), Long Term Assets (investments, retirement accounts, business interests, rental real estate), and Personal Use Assets (home, auto, personal property). Liabilities should be divided into short- and long-term.

Next, develop a budget and cash flow analysis. You will likely find you are spending more than you realize.

What is your tolerance for risk? Are you okay with rolling the dice, or are you super conservative? Is your risk tolerance consistent with meeting your goals? Even though you may be willing to take risk, do you really need to do so to have a successful plan? Taking too much risk is just as bad as taking too little.

Now analyze your investments. Is the portfolio reflective of your risk tolerance given the asset allocation? Do you have the investments saved in the most tax efficient manner? Should you use individual securities, mutual funds, exchanged traded funds, alternatives, etc.? Are there better investments than the ones you own?

Will the saving and investments grow sufficiently to meet your short- and long-term goals? Education planning for children/grandchildren? A new residence or second home? Big vacation? Start your own business? Retirement?

Do you have an asset protection plan? What about an estate plan – will, living trust, power of attorney, health care surrogate, and living will? When did you last update it? What about your insurance for vehicles, home, real estate, personal liability, umbrella, health, disability, and life? Is the plan properly integrated? Have you had them professionally reviewed?

Financial planning is not a one and done. It is a continuous process. But only you can start the process. People spend more time planning for a vacation than they do for financial planning. With the new year upon us why not start fresh. Take advantage of our complimentary one-hour consultation to learn more about a personal financial plan. We offer a money back guarantee – if unhappy with the plan, just return it and we will refund your money.

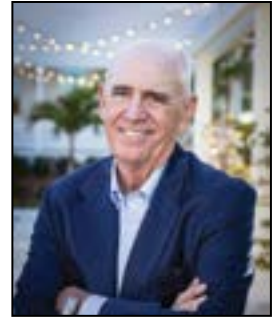
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VALENTINE'S DAY



Valentine's Day has become a Hallmark holiday, but the historical origins of the festival vary by account. The consensus attributes the day to the Feast of St. Valentine; however, it is uncertain who Valentine actually was. There were several Christian martyrs who bore that name and the record has become intertwined with folklore as to their histories.

One account describes Roman priest Valentinus, who was condemned to death for his faith. While awaiting execution, he restored sight to the blind daughter of his jailer. Another narrative details Roman emperor Claudius forbidding marriage under the impression that married soldiers would be less effective due to their concern for their wives and children. Valentine, a Roman priest, continued to marry couples in secret and was eventually beheaded for his treason.

The Catholic Church recognizes St. Valentine of Rome as the Patron Saint of engaged couples, young people, beekeepers, and epilepsy. The modern celebration generally involves greeting cards and gift giving. According to Bustle.com, the most popular gifts are chocolates, flowers, and jewelry. Dining out is another staple of the day with steak being the most popular fare followed by lobster, and French or Italian cuisine. Restaurants are usually at capacity for dinner on Valentine's, and OpenTable.com reports nationwide, most reservations are made eleven days before the holiday.

On average, six million couples worldwide get engaged on Valentine's Day, with Hawaii being the most popular location for proposals. Las Vegas averages 600 weddings on the holiday, and for the last fifteen years, the Pinellas County Clerk of the Court has hosted a Valentine's Day



Wedding Ceremony. Each year, the event is held at the Florida Botanical Gardens and provides a wedding ceremony for twenty couples as well as a vow renewal for another twenty. The newlyweds receive a special commemorative marriage certificate and the Clerk waives licensing fees.

Valentine's Day certainly seems to be a romantic date for marriage, however a university of Melbourne study shows that couples married on Valentine's are 45% less likely to be married on their third anniversary than those married on any other day of the year. According to a YouGov.com survey one in fourteen U.S. adults say they have had a relationship end on Valentine's and 12% have broken up shortly before or shortly after.



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Bar & Restaurant News

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GUILTY SEA OPEN FOR BUSINESS The latest addition to the Original Crabby Bill's Family Brands opened for business in December. The sports-themed bar features over twenty televisions, pool tables, and dart boards. The pub offers a diverse menu featuring "smash" burgers, entrees, salads and wings, among other dishes. Guilty Sea Sports pub is located at 301 Gulf BL and is open Mon-Sun from 11am to 2 am.

INDIAN ROCKS CAFE EXPANDS This small cafe in Indian Rocks Beach is expanding into what was the produce store next door and it won't be small anymore. By adding the larger space next door, they will be able to have more seats and a large deli display area. Their existing space will become their kitchen where they prepare the food. They are open throughout the construction.

"Once again, we want to thank the people of Indian Rocks and Belleair Beach for supporting us through our first year in business," says co-owner Jean.

Find them at 1401 Gulf Blvd, next to Groupers. See their menu online at www.IndianRocksCafe.com. Call ahead for take-out orders at 475-9949.

HURRICANE EDDIE'S TURNS ONE Hurricane Eddie's celebrated their one year anniversary on Indian Rocks Beach with a champagne toast on New Year's Day. The bar is the second in the Hurricane Eddie's line and expects to start serving food in the near future.

CONSTRUCTION CONTINUES AT COCO'S The construction of the second Coco's Crush Bar and Grill is now moving full steam ahead. They have completed most of the outside with new landscaping, and new driveways. The construction is on schedule to be completed soon. The only holdup may be permits and licenses. Those will determine the actual opening day. The Indian Rocks Beach location is being built in the previous location of 18 On The Rocks at 2405 Gulf Blvd.




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Bar & Restaurant News



NEW LOOK AT SLYCE The restaurant recently completed renovations including new carpeting and furniture both inside the dining room and out on the patio. Also, the Slyce Wyne Bar will be opening soon. Guest will have the option of ordering from the Wyne Bar menu or from Slyce.

VIP GOLF TOURNEY A SUCCESS VIP Mexican American Restaurant and Lounge hosted its annual golf tournament in November after a two-year hiatus due to COVID. The charity event raised \$22,000 for John’s Hopkins All Children’s Hospital.

VIP is also serving brunch on Sundays at their Indian Rocks Beach location. The menu includes chilaquiles, huevos benedictos, and breakfast burritos.



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BREAKFAST AROUND THE BEACH

Breakfast is the most important meal of the day. With season on the way, we will be seeing a lot of new faces out looking for places to eat. After the quarantine, the restaurant world went through many changes. Some became larger by adding outdoor dining, some changed the hours and days they were open due to staffing shortages, and some just did not reopen. This has left people wondering, "What's open for breakfast?"

For a full, sit down, might need a nap after eating breakfast restaurants, here is what we came up with: South of Walsingham bridge: Jimmy Guana's, JD's Restaurant & Grill, and V.I.P. Mexican American Cuisine IRB (on Sundays). North of the Walsingham bridge: Café de Paris and Sandy's Restaurant. East of the Walsingham bridge: Savory Restaurant, Village Inn, SpEGGtacular, and Proino Breakfast Club. East of the Belleair Causeway: Maggie Mae's on the Bluff at 2961 W Bay Dr.

If you are looking for something a little bit lighter that you can grab and go with there are other smaller pastry and coffee shops sprinkled about as well: On the beach, try Pipo-N-Betty's Bakery and the IRB Café. Largo has St. Pete Bagel, Haus Coffee Shop & Wine Bar, and The Coffee Mill. In Belleair, try the Belleair Café, Le Merle Coffee Bar & Bakery, or Panera Bread.

Whether you are craving crepes and mimosas or just a cup of java and a flaky croissant the Indian Rocks Beach food scene has something for everyone. Just remember to check days and times because they do vary from place to place. Bon Appetit!

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RESOLUTIONS FOR A SAFER NEW YEAR

From the Desk of Sheriff Bob Gualtieri

The New Year is a perfect time for a fresh start. While plenty of people make – and sometimes even keep – resolutions about their health, most people don't think about making resolutions to improve their safety. Here are a few things you can do in the coming year to keep you and your family safe. Much like drinking more water or exercising daily, once you make these things a habit they will become second nature.



Vehicle Burglary and Theft: It sounds so simple but locking your car door every time you exit your vehicle prevents Pinellas County's most common crime. A majority of vehicle burglaries and thefts occur to unlocked vehicles. Don't make your vehicle a target by leaving valuables in plain sight. Take them out of the car when you can or keep them out of sight in the trunk. Never leave a firearm in your vehicle.

Online security: Criminals are always finding new methods to part you from your hard-earned money and one of the most common ways they attack your finances is online. Create strong passwords and don't use the same password for all accounts. Don't respond to any text or email that asks you for personal information and never click on a link included in a text or email from someone you don't know.

Scammers: The best advice I can give you to avoid a scam is to take your time and think before you act. Scammers create a sense of urgency. They may call, email, or text pretending to be from companies like Amazon, eBay, or a utility company and say you owe money or are about to have your power turned off if you don't send money right away. Scammers often demand payments in cryptocurrency or gift cards – no legitimate company will ever do this. Don't send money or give personal information. Instead, look up the company's main website and contact them to find out if you really owe money.

Driving safety: The rules of the road are there for a reason: to keep you and other drivers safe. Don't think that you're the exception to the rules. Keep to the speed limit and obey traffic control devices. Always wear your seatbelt and resist the temptation to use your phone. Texting and driving is against the law and distracted driving is a leading cause of accidents.

Personal Safety: It's easy to be complacent, but in this day and age you should never let your guard down completely. Being alert to potential danger will give you a chance to avoid it. Don't be a target – walk with confidence, keep your hands free, watch for anyone entering your personal space, and don't be afraid to get loud if you feel threatened. Criminals don't want to be noticed so if you shout stop! get back! they might decide you're not worth the trouble. Pay attention to exits wherever you go and always have an escape plan. Above all, trust your intuition. If a person or situation makes you feel uncomfortable, get away fast.

Keeping these simple things in mind can help you have a safer year. I wish you and your family a happy and safe 2023!

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Local Students Learning to Make a Difference Underwater



SCUBAnauts International began in 2001 as Scuba Scouts USA with a group of six newly certified teen divers led by Captain David Olson, who wanted to use SCUBA as a means to teach kids about the marine environment. The science-based nature of the group distinguished it from other dive clubs, and Olson developed partnerships with several marine research scientists to introduce the young divers to informal science education through underwater exploration. Interest in the program grew, and today SCUBAnauts consists of six chapters in Florida and Georgia.

Katie Cooper became involved with SCUBAnauts in 2013 while working as a SCUBA instructor. At that time, there were two branches of the program in Tarpon Springs and St. Petersburg. She began teaching science classes to the students, then helped to start a new chapter in Tampa. She currently serves as the organization's Chief Operations and Dive Safety Officer.

"Our mission is to build character and leadership skills through scientific diving and other water-based research activities," said Cooper. Each chapter meets monthly for lessons on science and oceanography, dive safety instruction, and student-led presentations. Dives take place throughout the year with students participating in reef surveys, fish counts, and coral restoration.

In addition to obtaining their Open Water SCUBA, First Aid and CPR certifications, students are required to complete the American Academy of Underwater Sciences' (AAUS) Scientific Diver course. This intensive 100-hour training program teaches dive theory, physics, and emergency accident management, as well as scientific data-

gathering methodologies. Students participate in classroom and in-water learning, then complete written tests and check-out dives.

In 2006, the program became an organizational member of the AAUS, giving them increased credibility in the scientific community. "When you approach National Marine Sanctuaries and say you have a fleet of divers willing to do research for free, they say 'Great!'" said Cooper. "Then you tell them they're teenagers and they say 'Oh, never mind.' Having that backing and showing that our students have gone through that rigorous training gives us the validity and strength to make those partnerships." The certification also gives a benefit to students who intend to pursue a career in marine sciences after graduation.

The culmination of the SCUBAnauts annual efforts are the summer expeditions where the students and mentors embark on a week-long mission to destinations that have included the Bahamas, Belize, Jamaica and Hawaii. They identify a science project, then outline a trip and a dive plan to suit it." In 2020, the group traveled to Thunder Bay in Michigan, which is a National Marine Sanctuary.



"There's an ongoing project to make 3-D maps of the shipwrecks within the sanctuary," said Cooper. "We were able to do some imaging and give that over to the researchers to assist in their modeling."

Another summer mission brought the SCUBAnauts to much warmer waters, Cayos Cochinos is a group of fifteen small islands located approximately twenty miles off the northern coast of Honduras. The islands are part of a Marine Protected Area which includes part of the world's second-largest coral reef system, the Mesoamerican Barrier Reef. The sanctuary is managed by the Honduras Coral Reef Foundation, an organization that works with the Honduran government to preserve the reef. The foundation makes conservation decisions based on biannual surveys of a few sites, which offer a limited data set. Since the survey methodology used by the foundation is one that SCUBAnauts also utilize, the students were invited to Honduras for a week of underwater research. "We were able to add two sites to their long-term dataset," said Cooper. "That allows them to do a little bit better decision making in terms of what are and are not permitted in the protected area."

The staff of SCUBAnauts is an all-volunteer group of SCUBA instructors/divemaster, licensed boat captains, scientists, and educators and is always in need of additional help. The program relies on donations for funding as well as sponsorships with local dive operations and businesses. For further information on participation as a student, volunteer, or sponsor visit scbanautsintl.org.

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Business Briefs



PUBLIX, ROTARY, AND PCSO PARTNER TO PROVIDE HOLIDAY MEALS A partnership between the Rotary Club of Indian Rocks Beach, the Beach Community Food Pantry, Publix and the Pinellas County Sheriff's Office have, once again, sponsored the distribution of over 50 prepared meals to needy families in the community.

For many years, the PCSO has selected families in the central county area who need support during the Thanksgiving, Christmas, and Easter holidays. Publix assembles, prepares, and boxes a multi-course meal for over 50 families. The Rotary Club of IRB provides the financial support for the Thanksgiving and Christmas meals and the Beach Community Food Pantry provides the financial support for the Easter meals.

PROPERTY INSURANCE CHANGES PASSED The Florida legislature passed sweeping changes to the state's property insurance laws in December. The legislation eliminated requirements that insurers pay attorney fees of homeowners that win lawsuits over property insurance claims, along with other measures aimed at curbing lawsuits against insurers. It also provides for a \$1 billion taxpayer-funded aid program for insurance companies.

GULF TOWERS CLOSED The perennial budget beachfront resort is closed and has been sold. As of this writing, it is unconfirmed what the future holds for the building located at 404 Gulf Blvd.



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ART INSTRUCTOR CHARLOTTE DIGENNARO RETIRES

by Patricia Thomas

Retiring from a job of 30 years may not seem unusual, but Charlotte DiGennaro is doing it for the second time! Charlotte had a full career teaching art in public schools for over thirty years before retiring to Florida with her husband Sam. Soon after arriving in our beautiful community, she began to teach again at the Beach Art Center, which was the start of another thirty-year career. Charlotte started teaching at the Center in 1992 alongside founder George King.

When Charlotte talks about her students – be they past or present, she beams while sharing what it was like to experience their creativity. Charlotte is not an instructor that tells you what to create or specifically how to do it, she teaches you how to feel, how to let yourself go and how to be creative.

Charlotte grew up in the Finger Lakes Region of New York State. She pursued a career as an art teacher, graduating first from college in Buffalo, NY before going on to earn a master’s degree in Education from the University of Wisconsin at Madison. Charlotte’s education focused on realism and detail, using pen and pencil to achieve a life-like resemblance. Charlotte says she found her current creative and free style as a teacher through her students.

Starting out as a high school teacher, Charlotte says she “did what was expected of me,” and instructed her students as she had been taught, to achieve realism. Later in her career, she taught in junior high and at elementary levels. When asked how and when she developed her signature, creative, happy style, Charlotte credits the children. “My style developed by teaching the elementary kids, they were so free,” she says. “They taught me the fun side of art...and that

was everything.” Never afraid to make a stand, Charlotte refused when asked to give her elementary students a grade in art. She was teaching the children to find their voice and creativity and she did not feel this should be ranked.

Charlotte has inspired countless students and artists at the Beach Art Center in her 30 years. In her current “Water Media” class, there is a vast array of students working on interesting projects, all learning from each other and from Charlotte. “Make a stroke on a paper and it will talk to you,” she says. “There are no rules in art, do what you like doing.” At age 90, Charlotte has so much to offer as a teacher but says she continues to learn from her students every day. Charlotte plans to continue to offer her signature “Water Media”



class at the Beach Art Center on Tuesday afternoons through March 2023. She will then move closer to her roots and family. Her creativity will continue with her involvement in the Arts Center of Yates County in Penn Yan, New York. If you asked Charlotte how to find the fountain of youth, she would likely direct you to the business end of a paint brush.

The Beach Art Center will be holding a special show featuring the works of Charlotte DiGennaro and her students. The show is called “Reflections,” is open to the public and will run from January 9 to February 10. There will be an Opening Reception on Friday, January 13 from 6:00 – 8:00 PM. Visit beachartcenter.org for more information.

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Community News

INDIAN ROCKS BEACH LITTLE LEAGUE

Submitted by Troy Saanders



Welcome back, Indian Rocks Beach Little League! In 1954, Joe Campalongo coached the first youth baseball team on our field. That team was named 'Indian Rocks'. So now we return to the roots of our field, our neighborhood and our league. After 20 years being known as "West Pinellas", we are now proud to be named "Indian Rocks Beach Little League!"

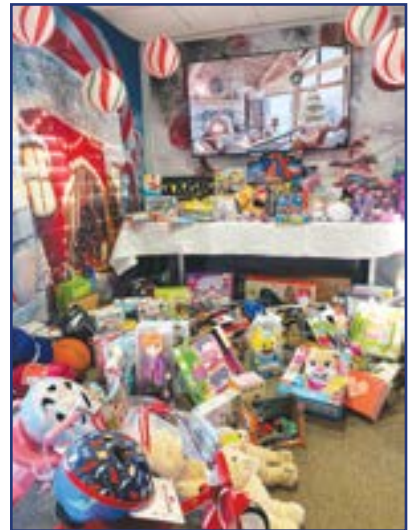
Spring 2023 Registration is NOW OPEN! Ages 4-12 are welcome to play. Our season runs from mid-February to mid-May. Please visit IRLittleLeague.org and sign up today!

BLUFFS BUSINESS ASSOCIATION

The Bluffs Business Association organizes a business after hours mixer at a different member business the 2nd Thursday of the month from 5:30 to 6:30pm. Sue Melendy Real Estate at 100 Indian Rocks Road, Belleair Bluffs will be the host on Thursday, January 12. Carrie White Art Gallery at 100 Indian Rocks Road, Belleair Bluffs will host on February 9. All businesses are invited to attend and enjoy making new business connections in a fun, casual atmosphere. Bring a door prize and give a quick commercial about your business. For membership information, visit www.BBAstrong.com or call Alanna Karaosmani of Valley Bank at (727) 686-5807.

INDIAN ROCKS HOLIDAY TOY DRIVE

For 16 years this community has proven that the Holiday Season is more about giving than receiving. Every year Century 21 Beggins, the IRB HOA, and local restaurant partners look for ways to help more people, especially as needs grow. The 16th Annual IRB Holiday Toy Drive was promoted as a "Joy Drive." Beneficiaries were expanded this year and included local low-income families, children, and seniors through Silver Santas, Healthy Starts Coalition, Pineapple Projects, Miracle by the Bay, Shepherd's Village, and the Beach Community Food Pantry. Thank you all for your donations and time spent over the years. We are so grateful this community continues to support local organizations and families who need a little help meeting basic needs and spreading joy for the Holidays.





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Community News

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BELLEAIR WOMENS REPUBLICAN CLUB

The club will hold its "Pearls and Republican Girls" fundraiser on January 24 from 6 to 9 pm at the Clearwater Yacht Club. The event contribution is \$60 per person. There will be a cash bar, dinner buffet, and music by the Mike Twitty Band. Checks can be made payable to BWRPC and must be mailed to Carol Shea at 2903 Sunrise DR Clearwater, FL 33759 no later than January 20.

The club will meet on Friday, February 3 from 11:30 am until 1 pm at the Belleair Country Club, One Country Club Lane, Belleair. Our speaker will be Mike Twitty, Pinellas County Property Appraiser, who has served in that capacity since 2017. Having over thirty years of experience in the valuation of a wide variety of property types within Pinellas County, he is a life-long Pinellas County resident, presently residing in Largo with his wife, Michele, and their two sons.

A mailed check for \$35 for the luncheon will reserve a seat if received by January 27th. Please also remit annual dues of \$25 for the calendar year. Send to: BWRC Treasurer Robin Schenck, 301 Belleview Blvd., Belleair, FL 33756. Please respect the policy of no walkups, as they cannot be accommodated.

FLORIDA BOTANICAL GARDENS



The Pinellas African American Heritage Celebration will return this year, Showcasing Black history and culture. The event is scheduled for Saturday, February 25 10 am-4 pm at Pinewood: Florida Botanical Gardens, Heritage Village, and Creative Pinellas. Enjoy live performances, historical presentations, art exhibits, a mini-market of Black-owned businesses, and food trucks. Admission and parking are free. 12211 Walsingham Road, Largo, FL 33778. Visit pinellasafricanamericanheritagecelebration.org for details.

The Florida Native Plant Symposium will be held Saturday, March 25 from 9:30 am - 4:30 pm at the Florida Botanical Gardens at 12211 Walsingham Road, Largo. Enjoy keynote presentations from prominent and engaging speakers, choose your own breakout session led by a UF/IFAS Specialist or a Master Naturalist, and browse display tables along our Eco-Alley. Includes a boxed picnic lunch in the gardens. Advanced Registration Required: \$75 General Admission, \$50 FBGF Members. For more information visit flbgfoundation.org/fnpsymposium.

MEMORIAL GARDEN FOR WINTER THE DOLPHIN

On the 1-year anniversary of her death, CMA reveals rendering for Winter's Memorial Garden

On the one-year anniversary of Winter the Dolphin's passing, Clearwater Marine Aquarium released plans for a memorial garden in honor of the late Dolphin Tale star.



Winter's Memorial Garden will be located outside the main front entrance to CMA for public access. "It was important that we create an inviting space that is accessible to all who may need a quiet moment of reflection," said COO Lisa Oliver.

The garden and winding pathway will feature a statue of Winter as she emerges from a water fountain. Surrounded by sustainable Florida landscaping, the calming pathway invites guests along its pavers towards CMA's entrance or to sit upon the benches flanking the statue and water feature.

Winter is woven into the fabric of Clearwater Marine Aquarium," said CEO Joe Handy. "We are so thankful for the lives she's changed, both human and marine mammal. Her legacy will live on as we continue to support animals in need. Like Izzy and Apollo, our most recent additions to the CMA family. This Memorial Garden is a tribute to Winter and her admirers who continue to inspire us each day."

The Garden is planned for completion by the Spring of 2023. Winter commemorative merchandise is available for purchase at the CMA. All proceeds fund their mission to rescue, rehabilitate, and release. Your support allows them to give the gift of a second chance.

Winter the Dolphin passed away at the age of 16 on November 11, 2021 due to a gastrointestinal abnormality. At just 2-months-old, she was found alone with crab trap rope bound so tightly around her tail flukes that they eventually fell off during rehabilitation due to a lack of blood flow. Orphaned at such a young age and with her life-changing injury, Winter was deemed unable to survive in the wild and placed at Clearwater Marine Aquarium for managed care. Without her tail flukes, Winter taught herself a new way to swim causing her to develop degenerative changes in her spine such as scoliosis.

The team at Hanger Clinic heard of Winter's condition and developed a prosthetic and prosthetic liners, called WintersGel, specific to her needs. Her story become a Blockbuster movie, Dolphin Tale (2011) and Dolphin Tale 2 (2014), reaching and inspiring millions all over the world. Dolphin Tale not only brought awareness to Clearwater Marine Aquarium, the exposure gained from both movies resulted in a \$2 billion economic impact to Pinellas County. According to Tourism Economics and a forecast study performed by the University of South Florida St. Petersburg College of Business, 2.2 million room nights were booked and over 44,000 jobs were supported over a four-year period from 2012-2015.

Her impact to veterans, adults, and children experiencing limb loss as well as anyone fighting through their own life challenges continues through CMA's Inspire Program. Learn more at www.cmaaquarium.org.

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Community News

BEACH ART CENTER

Submitted by Patricia Thomas

Please join us for our annual community celebration on Saturday, March 4th. Our "Boots and Brushes Country Gala" was so much fun, we decided to do it again! This community "street party" will take place in front of our building on Bay Palm Blvd and include a delicious BBQ spread, live Country music with the Logan Brothers Band, live auction, raffles, beer, wine and whiskey bar, and dancing in the streets!

Not only is this an opportunity for gaiety and diversion, but it's also a chance to demonstrate your indulgence for the ongoing efforts to support local art in your community. The Beach Art Center has been "Bringing Us Together with Art" since 1978. Visit BeachArtCenter.org/gala for more information

In addition to attending the event, this year we ask that you or your business consider becoming a sponsor of our Gala. As expenses continue to rise, we find we need your help more than ever. The Beach Art Center is a 501c3 not for profit. Fundraisers are a critical part of our annual budget and without generous sponsors like you, we would not be able to continue to serve this community. We have many sponsorship opportunities available to fit your budget. Let's work together to support one another!

ST. JEROME CATHOLIC CHURCH

The 2023 St. Jerome's Choir Festival will be held on Friday, February 3rd at 7pm. Choirs from several area churches will sing individual selections, then come together wit over 300 voices to sing the "Hallelujah Chorus. St. Jerome's is located at 10895 Hamlin Blvd in Largo. The parish office number is (727) 595-4610.

SAVE THE DATE FOR WINTERFEST

The Calvary Episcopal Church will present its 18th annual fundraising festival on Saturday, February 18 from 10am-4pm. The Church is located at 1615 First Street, Indian Rocks Beach and all are invited to attend.

This event will be held inside and outside Calvary Episcopal Church and will also feature a patriotic pet contest with prizes. There will be beer, wine, soft drink



vendors, clowns, face painting, an old-fashioned bake sale, "Southern Hospitality" pulled pork sandwich, and an "All American" hot dog prepared by Church volunteers. Children will find activities including a "build and sail your own toy sailboat" area. Additional games have been added this year as well as returning music and entertainment.

A silent auction displaying many treasures will be located in "The Meeting Place" inside the Church and there will be a special grand prize drawing for an electric bicycle. For further information, call the Church at 595-2374 or visit calvaryirb.org/winterfest.



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A2K / ACTION 2000

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www.IRBAction2000.com

BEACH ART CENTER

1515 Palm BL
Andrea Harms (727) 596-4331
Andrea@BeachArtCenter.org
www.BeachArtCenter.org

BEACHES FOOD PANTRY

1615 First ST (727) 595-2374
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and Thursdays 5pm-7pm
www.CalvaryIRB.org

BEACH WELCOME CENTER

105 Fifth AV N (727) 595-4575
Corner of Walsingham and Gulf Blvd
BeachWelcomeCenter.com
contact@BeachWelcomeCenter.com

FRIENDS OF THE LIBRARY

Jean Scott (727) 517-1895
www.PinellasCounty.org

GREEN TOWN KIDS

Local Environmental Youth Group
Allie DeVore (727) 480-3907
www.GreenTownKids.org
GreentownKids@gmail.com

HOMEOWNER'S ASSOCIATION

Marybeth Dunn, Pres. (727) 272-5251
www.IRBHOME.com
IRBHomeOwners@gmail.com

HISTORICAL SOCIETY & MUSEUM

205 4th AV (727) 593-3861
Carol McGlaughlin, (727) 595-9741
www.IRBMuseum.com

PUBLIC LIBRARY

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Open Mon-Fr 10-4

ROTARY CLUB OF INDIAN ROCKS

Meets Wednesday Mornings 7:15 am
Crabby Bill's
David Kline, Pres. (727) 418-1673
www.IndianRocksRotary.org

SENIOR SOFTBALL

Softball for those over 55.
Gordon Obarski (727) 480-4665
irbssl.com

THIS NEWS MAGAZINE

IRB Neighborhood News Magazine
Lora Magnani (813) 361-7376
Lora@MagriffProductions.com
BeachNewsletters.com

THRIFT CENTER

210 25th AV (727) 444-0339
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VFW POST 10094

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(727)596-8959
VFWPost10094.com

WEST PINELLAS LITTLE LEAGUE

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Community News

GREENTOWN KIDS

Submitted by Allie DeVore

Happy New Year! We hope it finds you and your family well. GreenTown Kids is going into our 6th year of keeping IRB green and providing opportunities for kids, families, and our community to learn about and help the environment. Become an active or supporting member to help further our cause.



Mark your calendars for our 2023 events:

- 2023 GTK Community Project - Install 2 Mini Reefs & underwater night light at Keegan Clair Docks, IRB
- Jan. 29th - Clean Beach, Clean Slate Beach Cleanup 12-2pm, 18th Ave. Beach Access
- Feb. 26th - Community Bee Presentation & spring garden planting - Afternoon, IRB Community Garden
- March - Greenfest

GreenTown Kids is a volunteer-run 501(c)(3) nonprofit serving Indian Rocks Beach and the surrounding schools. Visit greentownkids.org to get monthly newsletters, become a member, volunteer, and donate. Email us at greentownkids@gmail.com. Follow @GreenTown Kids on Facebook & Instagram. School volunteer hours available!

INDIAN ROCKS BEACH SENIOR SOFTBALL LEAGUE

Submitted by Rick Burdick

Congratulations to Coach Kenny and the Orange Crush for winning the Indian Rocks Beach Senior Softball Fall Season Championship over the runner-up Jaugernauts. The Senior Softball League is a fun, friendly and competitive Group of men aged 55+ and women 45+ who enjoy playing the game we all have loved since our younger days. Visit our website at IRBSSL.com for schedules and more information.



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Community News

ACTION 2000

Submitted by Daryl Frahn

Oktoberfest on the Beach 2022 a Success! What a great celebration! A2K hosted a social hour before our monthly November meeting to recognize our awesome Oktoberfest sponsors and dedicated volunteers for an incredibly successful event. Joining us in the festivities were neighbors and friends who came to learn more about A2K. We are delighted to welcome four new members to the A2K team!



A2K volunteers donned elves hats to support the IRB Annual Christmas tree lighting. What fun to celebrate the holiday and community spirit handing out hot cocoa and freshly popped popcorn. The fun continued with our participation in the Holiday Street Parade.

Now that the holidays are behind us, A2K will get back to work. The January meeting will focus on identifying our 2023 key priorities, resources needed for execution, timing, roles, and desired results. Want to be a part of it? We welcome you to join us at our monthly meetings the second Monday of the month, at 6:30 pm at IRB City Hall Auditorium.

Take a stroll and learn more about the history and stories of Indian Rocks Beach. Walk Indian Rocks Beach is a free self-guided audio app designed to be downloaded to a smart phone or tablet. The app will take you on a narrated, self-guided tour of fourteen stops with historical images and music. Whether you're a local or a visitor, you can experience - on your own time and pace - the charming cottages and rich heritage that makes our small town truly special. The app was created by A2K and the IRB Historical Museum in collaboration with the Florida Humanities Council. To learn more and get the link to the app, visit walkindianrocksbeach.com

IRB Action 2000 is a nonprofit community organization dedicated to the preservation and beautification of our unique small town. For more information about A2K and Oktoberfest, please visit our website irbaction2000.com, facebook.com/action2000IRB or e-mail us at info@irbaction2000.com.

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Community News

ROTARY CLUB OF INDIAN ROCKS BEACH

Submitted by Claire English

The Rotary Club of Indian Rocks Beach had our big game drawing party this weekend where we drew the ticket for all our prize winners. Congratulations to all the winners and thank you to everyone who participated this year. More information can be found on our website.

Our next big event is the 4th annual "Rotary Runs the Beach" taking place on Indian Rocks Beach March 18 with a 5K timed/chipped race, one mile family fun run or a virtual run this year. Running on the beach is as beautiful as ever!

A special thanks to our main sponsor The Original Crabby Bill's restaurant! Proceeds will benefit the Rotary Club of Indian Rocks projects that support both local and international causes and our mission of "Service Above Self."

The 5K race begins at 8 am and the 1 miler begins 8:05 am at the Indian Rocks Beach Access located at 1700 Gulf Blvd on Indian Rocks Beach. The race is chipped and the course is "out and back." This is a great event for competitors as well as beginners. Register at runsignup.com/Race/FL/IndianRocksBeach/RotaryRunsTheBeach.

Interested in learning about Rotary or getting involved with the Rotary Club of Indian Rocks Beach? Check out our website at indianrocksr Rotary.org, contact Club President David Kline at Kline22@tampabay.rr.com or call 418-1673.

CLEARWATER YACHT CLUB

The Club is one of the oldest Yacht Clubs in the country, continuing the long-standing tradition the world over. You don't need a boat to join in the fun at CYC in Clearwater Beach. Many members don't have boats. Their social activities center around parties in their restaurant or at their Tiki Bar.

Their Winter Membership program runs through March 31. It has no initiation fee and monthly dues are \$250, with no food minimum Winter members can use the pool, tiki bar, dining room and other amenities, including participating in weekly parties. Best of all, you can meet new people. You can end your membership whenever you wish, or convert to a permanent member in the Spring. They are creating Cruisers Landing with the Commodore's Walk. Buy a Brick engraved with your name and the year you joined CYC to cement it in history forever. The bricks are \$100. Additional bricks are available for \$75 to highlight your boat and its name, which will be located next to your name. Call the Yacht Club's office, 447-6000. Learn more at ClearwaterYachtClub.org, or e-mail Office@ClearwaterYachtClub.org.

WELCOME NEWCOMERS CLUB

This club is open to the women of Pinellas County; all are welcome to come and socialize. They meet at local country clubs or restaurants on the first Tuesday of each month with programs, activities or speakers of interest. Please contact Judy at 512-789-5686 for the location of the next event.



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KAREN SEEL RETIRES AFTER 23 YEARS AS A COUNTY COMMISSIONER

By Bob Griffin

When you are a County Commissioner, the job owns you. You plan weeks in advance to have a day off or dinner with friends. Karen Seel has lived that for twenty-three years. Now that she has officially retired, she can relax and enjoy life with family and friends.

To list everything Seel has accomplished during her time in public office and on the boards she has lead or served on would fill this entire magazine.

For twenty three years, Seel represented you, District 5, on the Pinellas County Commission, which is most of the upper and middle county from the Bay to the beaches including Belleair Beach, Belleair, Clearwater, and Clearwater Beach.

In today's political world, twenty three years is almost unheard of. She spent twenty-six years, in serving in office because prior to the County Commission, she on the Clearwater City Council for three years. She comes to public service naturally as her father, Don Williams, a well-known local architect, had previously served eight years on the Clearwater City Council.

Seel was born Karen Williams at Morton Plant Hospital, and was raised in Clearwater. She attended Clearwater High School (1976), the University of Florida (1979), where she received a Master's Degree with honors in Business Administration, and the Thunderbird School of Global Management in Glendale, Arizona (1981). She also studied at the University of Oxford, England and La Universidad Autonoma de Guadalajara, Mexico.

After finishing her education, Seel worked a variety of jobs that took her from Houston, Texas to Saudi Arabia and managed her father's architectural firm as its controller. Eventually she returned to this area and 38 years ago married her husband Ron Seel. They settled in Clearwater's Countryside area.

She got involved in many local groups: Girl Scouts, PTA, Libraries and women's groups, but she wanted more. In 1996, she ran for a seat on the Clearwater City Council—and won. While serving, Governor Jeb Bush tapped her to fill an open seat on the Pinellas County Commission in 1999.

The next year, she ran for her seat and was elected to a four-year term. What followed was four more terms, for a total of twenty-three years. (1999 to 2022). Twenty-three years—in a high-profile, sometimes difficult job. She served as Chairman of the Commission four times. She considers US19 her most rewarding and notable achievement. She saw the need for better traffic flow on US 19,

which connects the north and south ends of Pinellas County to more smoother. She wanted to cut travel time between Tarpon Springs and the Skyway Bridge. She worked on improving that important highway practically every week of her twenty-three years. Because of that project, many associates nicknamed her "The Queen of US 19."

"I do not recall the first time Karen and I met and started working together, but obviously it would have been when she was first on the Clearwater City Commission and I worked for Congressman Bill Young," says George Cretekos, former Mayor of Clearwater. "She was instrumental in directing the US 19 project, for which Congressman Young and former North County Representative Dick Kelly helped to securing state and federal funding."

"As an elected official in Clearwater and Pinellas County, Karen Seel's integrity, character, and perseverance is praiseworthy. She put the public's interest first, and we are a better community because of her service and dedication."

Another of her major achievements is the Gateway/Roosevelt Connector. While not complete, she pushed to get that project started. When finished, it will connect U.S. 19 and the Bayside Bridge with I-275. The goal is to reduce commuter traffic on Pinellas' busiest roads.

"Penny For Pinellas" was the beginning of decades of contributing and adding many millions of dollars to Pinellas's infrastructure. Seel was involved in creating the concept and helping get it approved by the voters.

Seel served on the Tourist Development Council chairing it four times. She helped to create the Bed Tax tourists pay. Originally, the tax was one percent and was only used for Pinellas County's tourism marketing. Today, the tax is six percent and pays for a wide variety of infrastructure projects and tourism venues such as the Clearwater Marine Aquarium and beach renourishment.

Other achievements she is proud of include storm water and future resilient planning, health and human services, transportation, and beach renourishment.

In her mind though, there are many projects left unfinished. There are more US 19 over-passes to build, transit issues to solve, the High Point Community Park, 2-1-1, Community Gardens in our many parks, the Pinewood Cultural Center, which includes Creative Pinellas, Florida Botanical Gardens, and Heritage Village.

"Pinellas County owes so much of our progress, especially in youth services,



Karen Seel and family at her first Investiture in 2000

mental health, housing, transportation and economic growth, to her leadership, incredible vision and courage, says St. Petersburg Mayor and previous County Commissioner Ken Welch. "For two decades, I've admired her courageous and informed approach to problem-solving. She never hesitated to take on some of the most difficult issues and worked to create impactful and inclusive progress for Pinellas County. She is a model of public service."

Karen has been married 38 years to her husband Ron Seel. They have two adult sons and now two granddaughters. They moved to the Town of Belleair in 2013.

As Seel describes it, "If I had to reflect on my time on the Commission, and my role, I think of myself as 'Community Connector.' I got to know a lot of people in many different roles and places. I was always good at bringing those people together and getting things done. I have tried to live by the Golden Rule—do unto others, as you would have them do unto you."

Seel's last day on the Commission was November 21st. Former State Representative Chris Latvala has assumed her seat. He ran unopposed.

While preparing to leave, and cleaning out her office, she realized a lot of history was walking out the door. "I had files and binders and so many papers and pictures," Seel recalls. "Thank goodness we have an archives department at Heritage Village to preserve it." That too is something she helped to develop.

"Karen Seel has contributed an article to almost every single issue of this News Magazine since it began," says Publisher Bob Griffin. "That is 100 articles over 17 years. We want to thank her for her contributions to our publication and to Pinellas County."

Seel's favorite past times are taking walks, reading and traveling. She and her husband own a second home in the Sanoma area of California. She is hoping now she will find more time to do those things.

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