

NEIGHBORHOOD NEWS

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Magazine

FROM FARM TO WHITE HOUSE AND YOUR HOUSE

By Becky Griffin, Local Author

Christmas trees are grown in various regions around the country, but most trees sold in Florida come from a small six county area in Western North Carolina. Just like you, this year the White House Christmas tree was grown in that area – specifically, Avery County, North Carolina.

The North Carolina Christmas Tree Industry is ranked second in the nation for the number of trees harvested, and it produces twenty-two percent of the real Christmas trees grown in the United States. Annually, over three million trees are harvested in North Carolina and ninety-six percent are North Carolina Fraser Fir trees.

The Fraser Fir is native to the Western Appalachian Mountains. Its sturdy branches that can hold heavy ornaments make it very popular. It also retains its needles longer, meaning the trees can be harvested earlier, and ship better. North Carolina's 940 Christmas Tree growers have approximately fifty-three million trees growing on over 33,000 acres. Close to ten percent of those trees are harvested each year.

Every two years, the National Christmas Tree Association hosts a national tree contest, at which growers, industry experts and consumers vote to select the Christmas Tree grower who will provide the official White House Christmas Tree. To qualify, growers must first win their state or regional competitions, so being named National Grand Champion is quite an achievement.



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Also in this Issue:



Well Deserved Retirement

Pinellas County Commissioner Janet Long has retired after fifty-two years of dedicated service.

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Twenty-Five Years of Service

Joe Gillespie has been donating his time to the Indian Rocks Beach Library for a quarter of a century.

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Remembering Mr. Manager

For more than half a century, Merrett Stierheim set the standard for ethics in public service from Clearwater to South Florida.

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CREDITS



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INDIAN ROCKS BEACH NEIGHBORHOOD NEWS

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 magazine 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 JANUARY!



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CALENDAR OF HOLIDAYS & EVENTS

As always, this is subject to change.



NOVEMBER

Dunedin Celtic Festival 23

Thanksgiving 28

Clearwater Turkey Trot 28

Holiday Lights and Rides Largo Begins 28

Black Friday 29

Holiday Lights in the Gardens Begins 29

DECEMBER

City Recycling Begins Again 1

Cyber Monday 2

Christmas Tree Lighting 6

Winter Wonderland Clearwater 7

97X Next Big Thing at The Sound 7

Pearl Harbor Remembrance Day 7

Christmas Street Parade 8

City Commission Meeting 10

Christmas Parade Clearwater Beach 10

Century 21 Toy Drive Holiday Party 12

Polar Express Experience at The Sound 13

Clearwater Yacht Club Boat Parade 14

Bret Michaels at The Sound 14

Kenny G at The Sound 17

Indian Rocks Lighted Boat Parade 21

Pinellas School Winter Holiday Begins 21

Winter Solstice 21

Christmas Day 25

Hanukah Begins 25

ReliaQuest Bowl Beach Day 29

Holiday Lights and Rides Largo Ends 29

ReliaQuest Bowl 31

JANUARY

New Year's Day 1

Holiday Lights in the Gardens Ends 4

Dunedin Art Festival 4-5

Pinellas School Winter Holiday Ends 5

Epiphany 6

Creative Pinellas Fundraiser 7

City Commission Meeting 14

St. Pete Boat Show 16-19

Gasparilla Children's Parade 18

John's Pass Seafood Festival 17

Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. Day 20

Public Schools Closed 20

Gasparilla Pirate Fest 25

Pinellas Park TacoFest 28



FROM THE PUBLISHERS

In the aftermath of the unprecedented storms, Lora and I want to express our sympathy to all who were affected. Although the damage was immeasurable, the residents and businesses of Indian Rocks Beach showed their sense of community in the aftermath, helping each other through these tough times. These images are only a few examples of neighbors assisting neighbors. We are confident that the city will rebound and come back stronger for it.




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Did You Know

OPEN SEASONS Stone crab season runs from October 15th to May 1st. Only claws may be harvested with a minimum size of 2 7/8 inches and a daily bag limit of one gallon per person or two gallons per vessel, whichever is less. Stone crab claws can be served hot or cold and are usually accompanied by mustard sauce or drawn butter and lemon.



The recreational harvest season for snook began September 1st in most West Coast Management regions, including Tampa Bay, and will remain open through November 30th. The northern coastal boundary of the Tampa Bay region is Fred Howard Park, near the border of Pasco and Pinellas counties and extends south to State Road 64 in Manatee County. It includes all waters of the Alafia, Braden, Manatee, and Hillsborough rivers and their tributaries. It does not include the waters of Palma Sola Bay and all waters of the Anclote River and its tributaries. The bag limit is one fish per person per day with a slot limit of 28-33 inches total length.

HONORING AN ICON It has been one year since the passing of The Chief Parrothead and Florida legend Jimmy Buffett. The "Son-Of-A-Son of a Sailor" singer was memorialized in three ways this year. In June, a specialty license plate was approved honoring Buffett. Fees from the sale of the plate will benefit Singing for a Change, a non-profit founded by Buffett. State Road A1A was designated "Jimmy Buffett Memorial Highway" through several counties, and August 30th was officially designated "Jimmy Buffett Day" in Florida.

HAPPY BIRTHDAY

The National Guard turns 388 years old on December 13th. The state-based military reserve force is activated for service upon declaration of emergency by the governor of the state or territory where they serve and can be mobilized for federal



active duty during times of war or national emergency. Over 11,000 Florida National Guard soldiers and airmen were deployed across after Hurricanes Helene and Milton. Some were also sent to North Carolina to assist in relief efforts. Most National Guard members hold full-time civilian jobs and serve the Guard part-time. There are more than 430,000 National Guard soldiers nationwide.

OUR NEXT ISSUE IS IN JANUARY Read this issue, and others, online at BeachNewsletters.com and follow us on Facebook at Neighborhood News Magazines for ongoing local news updates.

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FISHY ART The Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission (FWC), in partnership with Wildlife Forever, is hosting the 2024-2025 Art of Conservation Fish Art Contest. The annual program invites youth from around the world to connect with nature and learn about fish and aquatic habitats while exploring creative art and writing.

The free contest is accessible to students from K-12th grade. Each year, thousands of entries are received from across the globe, reflecting the program's widespread appeal and impact. Florida students can submit their artwork to Wildlife Forever using the Florida Fish Art Contest entry form page.

One first place winner and one runner up will be selected for each grade bracket (K-third grade, fourth-sixth grade, seventh-ninth grade, and tenth-twelfth grade), one for illustrating the best freshwater fish species and one for the best saltwater fish species. Visit MyFWC.com/FishArt for more information on state prizing. The painting above is by Hannah Wang.

NEW NAME, SAME RACE The Clearwater Turkey Trot is a family-friendly race event that takes place in Clearwater annually on Thanksgiving morning, which is November 28th this year. Previously called Tampa Bay Turkey Trot, the race has been renamed due to confusion with other Turkey Trots in the area.

There are two races this year - the 5K Zaniboni Group Wingding for \$30 at 7am and the one-mile Abe's Gobbler for \$25 beginning at 8:30am. Prices will increase after November 23rd. Proceeds from this year's race support local charities and college scholarships for Seniors at Pinellas County high schools.

This year's event will feature the same courses as previous years. Visit RunSignUp.com/ClearwaterTurkeyTrot to view the routes and register online. The top 125 male and top 125 female finishers for the 5K will receive coffee mugs. Stay tuned for this year's T-shirt design.

LAST LOOP The Scorpion roller coaster at Busch Gardens of Tampa made its final run on Labor Day. The orange steel roller coaster debuted in 1980, four years after Busch Gardens first rollercoaster, the yellow and brown Python in 1976. The Scorpion was 60.7 feet tall, clocked in at 41 miles per hour, had a length of 1,817.6 feet, and a 360-degree vertical loop. It was said to be the last stationery, sit down roller coaster of its kind in the world.

Busch Gardens has plans for new attractions in its place but has yet to reveal them.



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The White House Christmas Tree, Continued

Participating growers entered up to four trees at the National Christmas Tree and Wreath Contest held at rotating locations throughout the country. Each grower is responsible for cutting, transporting (in a refrigerated truck) and displaying their trees. The Grand Champion provides the eighteen-and-a-half-foot tall tree on display in the White House's Blue Room. The contest is held every two years, so two Champions are chosen, one for this year and one for next.

The Carter Christmas Tree Farm in Newland, NC was chosen to provide this year's White House Christmas tree. In late October, White House personnel visited the farm and traveled to the top of a mountain where they had four trees to choose from. Sam Cartner, one of the owners of Cartner Christmas Tree Farm, is responsible for delivering it to the White House. Shortly before Thanksgiving, hoping it isn't foggy, icy, or snowing, his crew will cut the twenty-five-year-old tree and using a crane, load it on a trailer to bring it down the mountain, where it will be baled and shipped in a refrigerated truck to Washington D.C. This is the fifty-eighth year the National Christmas Tree Association has provided the White House tree. The North Carolina Fraser Fir is a sixteen-time winner, more than any other state and tree species in the nation. This year's tree is named "Tremendous."

Sam Cartner, along with his brothers Jim and David, grew up on the Cartner Christmas tree farm his parents founded in 1959 and together they manage the farm. David, a lawyer with a practice in Asheville, NC, is responsible for shipping logistics. Jim, owner of a veterinarian clinic in Statesville, NC visits throughout the year and assists with order loading during harvest. Sam, a retired veterinarian and former Director of the Animal Resources Program at the University of Alabama at Birmingham, oversees operations and visits customers throughout the year.

Owning a Christmas tree farm is a lot more complicated than planting some trees. The seedlings come from a local grower. Cartner participates in a seed orchard that has been perfecting seeds for the last twenty years. A bushel of cones, harvested from the tops of forty-foot-tall trees, yields 2 or 3 pounds of seed (optimally, that is 60,000 seeds or trees per pound). A good cone crop only happens every 5 to 7 years, so after being properly cleaned and dried, the seeds can be frozen for years.

When the six-inch-tall seedlings arrive on the Cartner farm, they are already five years old. After they are manually planted, the trees will grow about a foot a year. That means your seven-foot-tall tree is eleven to twelve years old. A late frost will kill the tips and add a year to the growing schedule. After planting, the trees are regularly trimmed, hand-sheared for shaping, and fertilized. The ground cover must be managed to avoid choking the new trees. Pest are also a problem, and the trees are routinely inspected and treated for fungus. Sam estimates each tree is touched about 150 times before it is harvested. A field manager oversees the daily work performed by experienced crews.

Earlier this fall, the trees were inspected, measured and tagged. In early November, the harvest began. The tagged trees are being cut, baled and carried from the mountain fields to a storage area, to be sorted by size and watered daily as they await shipping. The tree stumps and roots left in the field will quickly decompose and the nutrients return to the soil.

The Carner farm provides Christmas Trees primarily to independent garden centers and non-profit organizations throughout Florida. Each truck that leaves the farm contains multiple orders, requiring it to be carefully loaded separating each order. Wreaths, made by hand on site are also included with the orders. When they are done, eighty truckloads of trees will leave their farm - only about ten percent of their planted trees.



Like many local farms, the Cartner Christmas Tree Farm offers a "Choose and Cut" option for those that want to pick their very own tree in the field. It is a small, but popular portion of their business and nearly 1000 people drive two or three hours just to pick that perfect tree.

With the easy availability of artificial trees, why buy a real tree? While they're growing, the trees absorb carbon dioxide and other gases and emit fresh oxygen. A harvested six-to-eight-foot tree contains approximately sixty pounds of carbon absorbed from the air. Yearly, an acre of trees produces the same amount of oxygen used by twenty people use each year. In addition, the trees stabilize the soil, while providing refuge for wildlife. In many cases, the trees are grown in soil that does not support other crops. Just like any other agricultural crop, they are replanted each year. To ensure a constant supply, growers plant one to three seedlings for every tree harvested. The best part is that real trees are biodegradable; they can easily be recycled for mulch and other purposes.

The Cartner family has been invited to the unveiling of the Blue Room Christmas tree. Unfortunately, it is in the middle of their harvest. They hope to be able to see their tree fully decorated and on display at some point before Christmas.

As you probably know, Western North Carolina was also hit by the devastating Hurricane Helene on September 27. The storm dumped 20-30 inches of rain over twenty-four hours with 50 mph winds. Creeks and rivers quickly overflowed taking people, animals, land, homes and buildings with them.

The community, government, and people throughout the U.S. quickly came together creating a response exceeding anything imaginable. The Cartners were spared, only losing some small Christmas trees. Many harvest roads were damaged by the mud slides which caused gullies, washed-out culverts, and downed hardwoods. Through the hard work of their team, they are now harvesting and will be able to ship all the trees needed to fill existing orders, including the White House's tree. Sam Cartner wants all to know, "our devoted temporary workers from Mexico, who return year after year, are as much our heroes as the first responders, and community volunteers." For more information on the Cartner Farm, visit www.CarolinaFraserFir.com.

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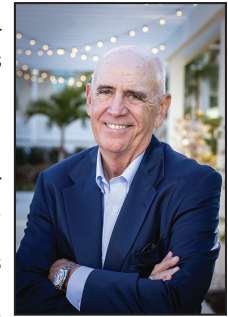


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SIX BIG MISTAKES IN RETIREMENT - PART ONE

by Ray Ferrara, ProVise Management Group

Most articles about retirement planning explain what you should do. We thought it might be worthwhile to list six BIG mistakes to avoid.



MISTAKE #1 - TAKING MORE RISK THAN NECESSARY

While working, we accumulate money for future financial needs and wants. Hopefully, we have saved diligently and invested wisely. When younger, we have time to take risks because there is time to recover, but once in retirement there are more years behind than in front of us.

Suppose you have \$1 million saved and you believe that you need to draw \$40,000 each year in addition to Social Security and maybe a pension. Over the past fifty years according to Standard & Poor's, the 500 Index produced an average annualized return of 11.1 percent through 12/31/23 with lots of volatility; that keeps you up at night.

That worked great while working but who wants to stay awake at night in retirement? If your plan works with "only" a projected 6 percent return, why not reduce the risk? Think of it this way - if the additional risk brings no additional value, why take the risk?

MISTAKE #2 - TAKING LESS RISK THAN REQUIRED

Too often retirees are not willing to take enough risk to get the return necessary to support their lifestyle. Turning to guaranteed investments like CDs is not likely to achieve a high enough return, especially in light of inflation. Guarantees come at cost- usually a lower return. It is difficult to look 10, 20, 30 years into the future and see the devastating effects that come with not enough risk.

MISTAKE #3 - NOT UNDERSTANDING THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN ACCUMULATION AND DECUMULATION

While working we are accumulating money – values go up. Of course, there are times when the value goes down, but we feel confident that over time there will be more pluses than minuses. But when you are withdrawing (decumulating) and investments decline, it is harder to recover. It is a triple whammy. For example, if you retired at the beginning of 2021 (up about 27 percent) as opposed to 2022 (down about 19 percent) the amount you would have at the end of the first year would be quite different. This is known as "sequence of return risk."

These three mistakes have strategies to mitigate or eliminate them. Take advantage of our one-hour complimentary consultation in our Clearwater office, or by Zoom.

V. Raymond Ferrara, CFP®, Chair and CEO
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Investment Advisory Services may be offered through ProVise Management Group, LLC.

ABOUT TOWN: JOE GILLESPIE KEEPS HIS HEAD IN THE BOOKS

EDITOR'S NOTE: Flooding from Hurricane Helene damaged the library. It is currently under renovation and is expected to reopen in 2025.

By Diane Daniel

If you've visited the Indian Rocks Beach Library, there's a good chance you've encountered Joe Gillespie. He's the longest-running volunteer, having been at his post 25 years -- half of the library's lifespan. (It turns 50 on Nov. 16, 2024.)

In 1988, when Joe was still a chemistry teacher at Eden High School, outside of Buffalo, N.Y., he decided to look for an investment property. During a research visit to the area, he stayed at the Reef Club condo complex. While there, he noticed a sign for an open house on the fourth floor. He checked it out, made an offer and the search was over. Joe would visit occasionally when he wasn't teaching, coaching boys' volleyball or running summer volleyball camps.

Ten years later, Joe retired after 35 years of teaching and headed south. For more than a decade, he divided his time between Smith Mountain Lake, Virginia, and IRB, then put roots in Florida. He loved the beach and had good friends and neighbors. He was immediately recruited to serve on the condo board, where he served until selling his condo two years ago. (He now lives on higher, less-crowded ground in Largo.)

Wanting to give back to the community and fill his days with activities he enjoyed, Joe, an avid reader, decided to volunteer at the library, starting in 1999. Before long, he'd been recruited to serve on the board of the Friends of the IRB Library, a nonprofit organization that supports the library.

Since Joe has been at the library, he's seen a doubling in size, three remodels, the hiring of the library's first paid librarian

(and then three more), and many upgrades - several partially funded by the Friends, including computers and furnishings.

He's had a few occasions where visitors from Buffalo have ventured into the library and recognized him and is also friends with a few former students living in the area.

Joe loves having his pick from a steady stream of new books. He reads two to three books a week, usually in the evening. He has a special affinity for detective mysteries and legal thrillers, but also reads literary fiction. He enjoys giving recommendations to library patrons and chatting with them in general.

"The people who come in are all so friendly and appreciative, and it just makes you feel good," he said. "They're always surprised to see how many books we have and how comfortable it is."

Joe was devastated to see the flood damage done by Hurricane Helene. But he's eager to volunteer again as soon as the library is up and running.

"I expect our library to come back fully and continue to be a vital asset to our community -- for at least another 50 years!"

Diane Daniel, founder of www.vacationdonations.org, is a lifetime IRB library member and Friends board member.



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"MR. MANAGER" LEAVES A LEGACY OF ETHICS, ACCOUNTABILITY, AND GOOD GOVERNMENT



By Pete Magnani, Publisher

Merrett R. Stierheim, who served as City Manager for the City of Clearwater and Pinellas County Administrator during a career in public service spanning fifty-four years, passed away on July 7th at the age of 90. Known as "Mr. Manager" for his ability to transition seamlessly between governments, improving each as he did, his skill in turning around failing bureaucracies was the cornerstone of his decades of dedicated service.

Stierheim was born in New York on September 25th, 1933, to Synneva Catherine Barron and Merrett

Hatheral Stierheim. He entered the United States Air Force in 1953 and served as a First Lieutenant Navigator until 1957. Stierheim attended Bucknell University where he earned a Bachelor of Science in Commerce and Finance, then completed a Master's in Governmental Administration, graduating third in his class from the Wharton School of Pennsylvania.

Stierheim began his career in public service in 1959 as Assistant City Manager in Miami, a position he held until 1967, when he was appointed City Manager of the City of Clearwater. During his six-year tenure, Stierheim implemented a management culture focused on inclusiveness, empowerment, and responsiveness. With his recommendation, a public referendum was approved securing bonds for parks, fire stations, and a new police headquarters. Stierheim also enacted an ordinance aimed at protecting and preserving the city's oak trees.

During this time, Stierheim was offered the job of Pinellas County Administrator. Since the average tenure for county administrators at that time was only about a year, he turned down the offer until a unanimous county commission vote guaranteed a three-year contract. He took the position in 1973, and quickly found his work cut out for him. Shortly after accepting the post, three of five county commissioners were sent to prison for zoning payoffs that had occurred prior to Stierheim's appointment. Along with the remaining commissioners, he set about restoring the public's trust in county government.

Stierheim adopted an independent budget and separate property tax framework for unincorporated areas, eliminating double taxations for residents of the county's municipalities. He implemented a widely acclaimed plan to rein in runaway growth, including a countywide building moratorium. He was also instrumental in the county's purchase of the 95-acre Sand Key Park, which opened to the public in 1984.

In 1976, Stierheim became County Manager of Miami-Dade County. In his ten-year term there, he supervised historic public works improvements including the construction of the Miami Zoo, the county's mass transit system and government buildings. He also dealt with monumental crises including the 1980 Mariel Boatlift and civil unrest in Miami.

Stierheim was hired as President and CEO of the Women's Tennis Association in 1986. During his three-year tenure, he oversaw the creation of a pension plan for players, doubling of prizes, and development of a three-tiered feeder system of professional tournaments.

In 1990, Stierheim became President and CEO of the non-profit Greater Miami Convention and Visitors Bureau (GMCVB). He established the Visitor Industry Human Resource Development Council which provided hospitality scholarships to African Americans to increase their access to management opportunities in the tourist industry. In 1996, Stierheim was awarded the 1996 Tourism Professional of the Year Award.

After the indictment of several top Miami officials in a scandal involving kickbacks, the GMCVB loaned Stierheim and services to the city. As interim City Manager, he discovered a \$68 million budget shortfall and spearheaded the city's financial recovery plan before returning to the GMCVB. In 1998, his skill at municipal bureaucracy was needed again. He was hired again as County Manager during a dark time in Miami-Dade, serving until 2001.

Stierheim later served as interim Town Manager for the Town of Miami Lakes and the City of Doral, and Superintendent of Miami-Dade County Public Schools. He was involved with several civic associations and served on the board of directors for more than thirty organizations. He received one of the 2003 National Public Service Awards, which recognize outstanding practitioners who have spent most of their careers in public service.



The Stierheim Family-Mia, Cathryn, Paula, Merrett, Judy, Laurey

Besides his well-publicized political career, Stierheim had another, equally important role – husband to his wife of forty-two years Judy Cannon Stierheim and father of four daughters, Laurey, Cathy, Mia, and Paula. The family lived in Clearwater and later Miami, frequently visiting Indian Rocks Beach.

"My father, known as a great public servant, was a visionary and an iconic inspirational leader," remembers Mia. ". He earned a reputation as a turnaround specialist in fixing governments and organizations, he loved challenges and often was called upon to come to the rescue. He also raised four daughters who shared a more personal side. He taught and led with love."

Dr. Peter Cruise, Founding Executive Director of the LeRoy Collins Public Ethics Academy at Florida Atlantic University, remembered the administrator as an exemplar of the ethics befitting a public servant. "Merrett Stierheim was a one-of-a-kind public servant upon whose shoulders those elected and working in the public sector should always aspire to stand," said Cruise. "To quote Shakespeare, 'He was a man, take him for all in all, I shall not look upon his like again.'"



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Bar & Restaurant News

THANKS FOR THE MEMORIES

After thirteen years, SLYCE Indian Rocks Beach has decided not to reopen. The damage from Hurricane Helene was simply too great to overcome. SLYCE was not just a great pizza joint, it held many community events and fundraisers for the Indian Rocks Beach Community such as toy drives and IRBHome mix and mingles. Two other locations are open, SLYCE Maderia is located at 662 150th Avenue in Maderia Beach and SLYCE St. Pete Beach is located at 6340 Gulf Blvd. _



HURRICANE EDDIES ADDS ANOTHER RESTAURANT

Look out Clearwater Beach, Hurricane Eddie's is now open on North Beach. Tom George, owner of Eddie's Bar & Grill, STIX, and Hurricane Eddie's, has taken over the location previously occupied by Salt House Social and the Brown Boxer North in the Pelican Plaza. This is the fourth Hurricane Eddie's in Pinellas County. The first opened on the Dunedin Causeway in 2017 and has grown to include Gulfport, Indian Rocks Beach and now Clearwater Beach. Hurricane Eddie's have a laid back, beachy-fun atmosphere with full liquor bars, darts, pool tables, and other bar games. There are plenty of TVs for locals and tourists to watch their favorite sports teams and are only a short walk to the water. For more information, follow them on Facebook or call (727) 441-6000.

NEW SPORTS BAR COMING TO BELLEAIR BLUFFS

Cody's Original Roadhouse, at 2890 West Bay, closed at the beginning of March and residents have been wondering what would move into the location - the answer is finally here. Tavern in the Bluffs, a new sports bar and tavern thatr is coming soon. Remodeling has begun and owners hope for an early 2025 opening. The Pappas family, also owners of Backwaters on Sand Key, say they are excited and looking forward to being a part of the Belleair Bluffs community and bringing something the residents can be proud of to the area.

TOY DRIVE Jimmy Guana's Waterside Restaurant at the Holiday Inn Harbourside is having a toy drive for the Marine Corp Toys for Tots. They ask that you bring in a new unwrapped toy worth \$20 for local boys and girls from the ages of babies to 12 years old. With your donation, Jimmy's will give you a free dessert or holiday drink special. They are accepting donations through Tuesday, December 17th. For more information, call (727) 595-8356 or send an email to Lisa@HlHarbourside.com.

COMING SOON, AGAIN The Turkish Flame Mediterranean Restaurant opened at the beginning of September in the space previously occupied by Casa Italia, but that new restaurant feeling was cut short by Hurricane Helene. After being completely flooded, owners Borah Caliskan and Melis Sinoglu, had to start from scratch. With a lot of hard work, they plan to be up and running by Thanksgiving. In the meantime, customers can enjoy their cuisine their sister restaurants, Mio's of Sand Key at 1261 Gulf Blvd in the Shoppes of Sand Key and Mio's of Downtown St. Pete at 119 2nd St. N.

RESTAURANT NEWS WANTED If your restaurant has news or an upcoming event we can include in this News Magazine, please e-mail Lora@MagriffProductions.com or call (813) 361-7376.

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RECOVERING FROM TWO HURRICANES

From the Desk of Sheriff Bob Gualtieri

We went through the unimaginable – two hurricanes in two weeks – and as we work to rebuild, I want to say how proud I am of the way the people of Pinellas County have come together to survive and begin to recover. As I worked throughout the county in the immediate aftermath of both storms, I saw neighbors helping neighbors, and strangers stepping up. You opened your homes to friends in evacuation zones, brought food and water to people in need, and cleared debris from the yards of the elderly.



I'm also proud of the hard work that all members of the Pinellas County Sheriff's Office (PCSO) did before, during, and after the hurricanes. As the storms approached, we prepared equipment and notified people in evacuation zones. We responded to people's calls for help as long as we could as the winds grew fiercer, and as soon as the storm passed our deputies jumped into action, rescuing people from flooded homes, clearing trees from roads, and helping traffic flow despite broken traffic signals. Civilian and sworn members alike performed essential tasks like keeping the jail running smoothly and safely and protecting stored property and evidence. The Public Relations Bureau stayed on top of messaging, putting out valuable, potentially life-saving information even in the middle of the hurricanes.

Tragically, lives were lost in both of the storms. In most cases those deaths were preventable. People drowned, were electrocuted, or had medical emergencies when first responders couldn't come to help them – all of which could have been avoided if they had evacuated. While any storm can bring the unexpected in the form of tornadoes, falling trees, or unanticipated flooding, you can mitigate the risk by evacuating when the order comes out.

After the storms, closures helped keep people safer, giving officials time to assess the damage. After Helene passed, we kept the barrier islands shut for a few days. After Milton ravaged Pinellas, the entire county was closed for a while. Many roads were impassable because of fallen trees, traffic lights were out at many major intersections, and more than half of the county was without power. Bridges were closed, and deputies blocked land access to Pinellas until crews had a chance to assess the major hazards. Access resumed by midday, but the area was full of hazards for a long time afterward.

For all the generosity and public-spiritedness of so many people in the county, there are plenty of people who want to take advantage of our disaster. We increased patrol to combat looters. Scammers also flocked to the area, posing as contractors or FEMA or insurance agents. Don't let yourself be scammed – don't make hasty decisions, don't pay upfront, or pay by non-traditional means like Venmo, gift cards, or crypto, don't give out your personal information, and be wary of any offer that seems too good to be true.

Pinellas County is strong, we are resilient, and we will emerge stronger and safer than ever.

NEW FACILITY FOR MANATEES

Clearwater Marina Aquarium (CMA) recently opened a new Manatee Rehabilitation Center. The facility will help accommodate a recent surge in manatees requiring care. CMA will provide assistance to sick, injured, or orphaned manatees including individuals affected by habitat loss, boat strike wounds, ingestion of foreign objects, entanglements and cold stress syndrome.

Manatees, the official state marine mammal of Florida, may grow to over thirteen feet long and weigh more than 1,000 pounds. They face many threats, including cold weather, watercraft accidents, pollution, entanglements, and starvation. The Florida Manatee Sanctuary Act of 1978 established broad protections for manatees and essentially made Florida a sanctuary state for the mammals. Despite these protections, manatee rescues are increasing, with 80 taking place in 2023 in west central Florida.

The state-of-the-art rehabilitation facility at CMA consists of an 80,000-gallon pool that features a movable bottom, giving staff the ability to raise the manatees out of the water without having to use more stressful means to give them treatment or take measurements. The pool also has two doors, allowing it to be compartmentalized if patients need to be separated for their care.

CMA's first two manatee patients, Yeti and Zamboni, were transported from ZooTampa at Lowry Park, which like CMA, is a member of the Manatee Rescue & Rehabilitation Partnership (MRP). In February, Yeti was rescued by the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission (FWC), ZooTampa, and U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service in Citrus County after suffering cold stress. Unlike other marine mammals, manatees lack a layer of blubber, and water temperatures below sixty-eight degrees can cause cold stress or hypothermia.



Zamboni was rescued in January for cold stress by FWC from Placido Bayou in Pinellas County. Both manatees were brought to ZooTampa for critical care, then transported to CMA in July for continuing care. They are being monitored while undergoing an acclimation period and are expected to be returned to their environment.

Yeti and Zamboni are juveniles, and care at this age is vital. "These two are basically toddlers," said Dr. James "Buddy" Powell, Chief Zoological Officer and Executive Director at CMA. "The first year or two years of life are critical to the manatee. They will remain at the facility until they reach about 600 pounds and are cleared to be released."

ZooTampa, along with SeaWorld Orlando and Jacksonville Zoo and Gardens are critical care facilities for manatee rehabilitation. Two of those facilities have at least 20 manatees currently receiving care, so their transfer to CMA helps alleviate the critical care bed space. CMA will be moving toward accepting critical care cases in the near future after its surgical suite is renovated, enlarged, and equipped to allow for manatee surgical needs.

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Business Briefs

THE REEL DEAL Local residents Steve and Heather Hunsucker, owners of Reel Deal Sportfishing based in the Clearwater Marina, are celebrating the one-year anniversary of The Reel Deal Outpost store, located at 1890 West Bay Drive in Largo.



Over the past year, the shop has experienced remarkable growth, not only expanding its in-store merchandise but also significantly boosting online sales. They recently hosted a successful small business mixer for women in the area focused on strategies for growth, effective use of social media, and overcoming common entrepreneurial challenges.

After Hurricane Helene, the Reel Deal family got to work. Heather, Steve, and her sister Jen Houghtaling started collecting clothing donations for those who lost everything. They received an overwhelming amount of donations that filled their shop to capacity and two tents in the parking lot. After they did their final "Restock Your Closet" event, all the extra clothes were donated to local supply drives, nursing homes, halfway houses, and women's shelters.

Reel Deal Sportfishing recently won Best of Florida Hunting & Fishing Service, the AMPLIFY Clearwater Business Excellence award for 0-5 employees, and won as a Top 3 finalist in Best of the Bay 2024 for Best Boat Charter.

Upcoming events include small business workshops and additional pop-up parties, which will be featured on their Instagram and Facebook pages. Reel Deal Outpost invites the community to join them in celebrating their success and to stay tuned for future events. For more information, visit ReelDealOutpost.com.

THE PLAZA CELEBRATES CHRISTMAS Join the Shops at The Plaza at their annual *Christmas at The Plaza* musical holiday event. Local brass quintet *Fresh Brass of Belleair* will be performing, along with Largo High School's *Madrigal Singers*, who will be strolling The Plaza while caroling. Refreshments will be served, and the shops will be open for this event. This year, the event will be held on Thursday, December 5th from 6-8pm at 100 Indian Rocks Road in Belleair Bluffs.

DOGGIE DAY CARE RELOCATED Originally located at the corner of Belleview Blvd and S. Fort Harrison in Clearwater, Fluffy Puppies of Pinellas recently moved to 14219 Walsingham Road in the Walsingham Village plaza in Largo. A small, woman-owned business, it has been caring for dogs for 18 years.

The staff is highly trained and knowledgeable in grooming and pet nutrition. They offer dog grooming Monday - Saturday by appointment only. Fluffy Puppies Doggy Day Care is exclusively for dogs 35 pounds and under that are up to date on vaccines, including rabies and Bordetella. Dogs must be spayed or neutered, and flea prevention is required.

They offer a wide variety of natural and holistic pet food and are trained to deal with finicky pets and those with allergies. The retail store carries a broad selection of pet supplies and accessories such as collars and harnesses with matching leashes, shampoos, brushes, and combs. For more information, call (727) 446-7999 or follow them on Facebook.



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Explanation of FEMA Housing Challenges

So many families on the Pinellas barrier islands have experienced decades of enjoyment, living in one of America's great beach communities. Most of these homes were constructed 60–70 years ago, well before FEMA established home elevation rules to help avoid flooding and hurricane destruction. Very unfortunately, 2 hurricanes within 12 days caught up with us, flooding many homes beyond acceptable repair.

Classic Florida Dream Homes does not have crews for remodeling existing flooded homes. As such, the information below is not an attempt to secure remodeling contracts, just information on FEMA's 50% Rule.

Pinellas County is required to conform with the federal **50% FEMA Rule**. If Pinellas County determines that the home "structure" will cost more than 50% to remodel, by law, the home will have to conform to the very stringent "Substantial Improvement" procedure, or be replaced. To determine your home "structure" value, go to the Pinellas County Tax Assessor web site (www.PCPAO.com), and open the link **FEMA/WLM**. You will see the letter stating the dollar amount of your home structure only. If your remodel expenses are more than 50% of that amount, the home will not be habitable. If you are considering remodeling, go to the website www.Pinellas.gov/construction-in-a-floodplain for further information. The 13 pages, "Application for Construction in a Floodplain" and "Floodplain Substantial Improvement Package" documents have to be filled out, signed and sealed by a registered architect, and be approved by a Certified Floodplain Manager (CFM). The remodeled home will have to be brought up to all current codes, *including elevating the home*, and then remodeled to conform to all current Florida Building Codes. This includes 150mph structural codes (walls, roof, windows, doors, etc.) and all mechanical components (electric, plumbing, A/C). Extremely expensive, most often much more costly than constructing a new elevated home on your property.

At Classic Florida Dream Homes, we are receiving a great deal of calls requesting information on demoing their home, and building an elevated replacement home to all 2024 codes. As one solution to the housing problem, **CFDH has designed new more affordable elevated homes, starting at only \$650,000**. Hopefully the majority of a new home construction cost would be paid from the FEMA or homeowners insurance policy. Also available from the federal government are possible ICC funds (Increased Cost of Compliance). That allows up to \$30,000 to demo your existing home. As Classic Florida Dream Homes is a Design/Build Contractor, this price is turn key, including the new elevated home (**4' above** FEMA requirements!) and sitework, including the architect, engineering, permitting, construction, etc., right up to the Certificate of Occupancy. We also build large custom homes for families that desire that option. Check out our website at www.ClassicFloridaDreamHomes.com, or call us at (727) 404-1347 for additional information.

We hope this information was helpful, and feel free to call with any questions you may have about solutions or options.



JANET LONG - SERVING THE PUBLIC FOR OVER 50 YEARS



By Bob Griffin, Contributing Writer

Janet Long is Pinellas County's longest serving member of Board of County Commissioners (BOCC). She has been on the BOCC for 12 years, first elected in 2012 but has been in public service since 1972 – a total of 52 years. Her three children are also public service servants. Long retired on November 5th.

Prior to being elected, Long was an assistant to the Mayor of Seminole, and Legislative Aide to former Representative Roger Wilson throughout the mid to late 1970s. She was also the Administrative support for the Pinellas Legislative Delegation.

In 1987, Insurance Commissioner Bill Gunter appointed Long as Deputy Insurance Commissioner for the region encompassing all the coastal counties on the west coast of Florida. She was reappointed by Tom Gallagher and again by Bill Nelson.

Long's first elected position was to the Seminole City Council in 2002 where she was reelected in 2004. In 2006 she was elected to the Florida House of Representatives and again in 2008. In 2012, she was elected to the Pinellas County Commission, where she has remained. Now, she plans to

retire in November. From 2010 to 2021, she also worked at Clearwater Central Catholic High School as the as the Director of Advancement and Communications.

Long's involvement with the BOCC is lengthy and covers dozens of boards and committees. She has been dedicated to advancing and strengthening Pinellas County and the Tampa Bay region's commitment to resiliency and sustainability to preserve and improve the quality of life for residents now—and in the future. One her many priorities has been to ensure smarter forward thinking on public transportation opportunities for our entire region.

In 2018, she worked with Sheriff Gualtieri to form Mental Health for Heroes (MHFH), whose sole mission is to provide mental health services for Law Enforcement and First Responders. The 501-C-3 non-profit provides help and mental services for first responders and law enforcement officers, many of whom need help to deal with the pressures of their job. MHFH provides services to those that serve us—our frontline heroes. (See www.MHforHeroes.com for more information.)

"We've been fortunate to have someone on the county commission like Janet Long who understands what it takes

to keep our community safe," explains Sheriff Bob Gualtieri. "She and I have enjoyed a great working relationship. She has always been an advocate for the Pinellas County Sheriff's Office and all law enforcement officers throughout the county. Janet's passion for ensuring the well-being of our first responders is evident through her work in establishing Mental Health for Heroes (MHFH), which is a non-profit organization that funds counseling services for those first responders in need," Gualtieri continues. "Since 2021, MHFH has been giving back to those that have given so much to their community and Janet has been the driving force behind it. I'm grateful for her passion and commitment to our first responder community and I look forward to continuing to support her efforts."

As Chair of the Regional Planning Council, she formed a compact with 24 regional governments to focus on sustainability and resiliency and to study the intensity and frequency of our changing weather patterns and how it would affect the extreme heat and rising seas. The model was recognized at the World Water Conference in Amsterdam, the Netherlands, and at the United Nations. The Regional Planning Council now has 30 regional governments that focus on sustainability and resiliency. The Regional Resiliency Summit currently holds an annual conference with speakers from around the world.

Former County Commissioner Karen Seel worked alongside Long for many years. "It's been a pleasure to serve with Janet Long over our many years of service," Seel says. "I look forward to having her continued friendship. Janet is full of wit and wisdom and has been a steward for future generations. She has always been looking at climate change and sustainability to provide for future generations. She has provided leadership for Pinellas County - we have EV vehicles, charging stations through Duke Energy and many other sustainable and environmental policies due to her," Seel explains. "Her mantra has been to plan for our children and our grandchildren. Janet will leave a legacy for all of us. I'm personally grateful to her."

Long, now 79, lives in Seminole and has three grown children, five grandchildren, and one great-grandson. Her husband, Richard, retired as an officer with the Seminole Fire Department. They have been married 46 years. "When I retire, I have a long list of plans," says Long. "Some of these include spending more time with my husband, my children, my grandchildren, my great-grandson, and my soon-to-arrive second great-grandchild. I also look forward to traveling with my family."



A message to the community I love:



NATALIE SCOTT
TEAM

COMPASS

Dear neighbors & friends, I am in this with you.

During this unprecedented and difficult time it has been amazing to see what a wonderful community we have here in Pinellas County. Everyone has come together and I have no doubt that we will rebuild and be Better Than Before.

As I am rebuilding my home, I also want to support those around me. I am here to answer any questions about home values and have a team assembled to restore your home.

I have never been more proud to be an Indian Rocks Beach resident and am here to help our community move forward.



Natalie Scott

813.310.8982

Natalie.Scott@Compass.com



Community News

BEACH ART CENTER

Submitted by Jeni Bond

Hurricanes Helene and Milton had a significant impact on our beloved Beach Art Center. As many in our community know, the center sustained severe damage, resulting in the closure of its doors until at least spring/summer of 2025.

The Beach Art Center has always been a vital hub for creativity, education, and community engagement, offering fine arts classes, children's camps, and unique events like "Art on the Rocks." We are committed to coming back stronger and more vibrant than ever, but we need your support to make this happen.

We are currently organizing a GoFundMe campaign, alongside other fundraising initiatives such as calendar sales and T-shirt sales. You can find all the details on our website. Every contribution, no matter how small, will help us rebuild and continue providing invaluable artistic experiences for our community.

In addition, we are excited to announce that we are working towards launching remote classes starting in December to ensure that art remains accessible during this challenging time.

We appreciate your support and urge everyone to stay connected with us through our website and social media for updates. Together, we can ensure that the Beach Art Center continues to thrive and inspire the Gulf Beaches community.

CREATIVE PINELLAS

Submitted by Roman Black

Due to the two recent historic hurricanes, Creative Pinellas has transformed our Arts Annual Fundraiser into the Arts Annual Hurricane Relief Fundraiser, now rescheduled for Saturday, December 7. This year, our arts community needs support more than ever.

Through ticket sales, sponsorships, donations, and art sales, Creative Pinellas will distribute 80% of net proceeds to Pinellas County artists and arts organizations to aid in their recovery.

The Arts Annual 2024 exhibition will be on view from November 29 through January 4 along with our first-ever Arts Annual Pop-Up Gift Shop.

Creative Pinellas is located at 12211 Walsingham Road in Largo. Visit CreativePinellas.org for more information.

CLEARWATER YACHT CLUB

Submitted by Holly Shuga

Come and celebrate half a century of maritime holiday magic at Clearwater Yacht Club's 50th Anniversary Holiday Lighted Boat Parade on Saturday, December 14th. This lighted, nautical event celebrates the spirit of the holidays and raises funds for sailing scholarships at the Clearwater Community Sailing Center for youth in the Boys and Girls Club of the Suncoast. Laura Moody of Fox13 Tampa Bay will once again be our 2024 Grand Marshal. Cash and prizes will be awarded in several categories.

Both individual and commercial entries of all types and sizes in holiday décor are encouraged. There is no registration fee for the event. Participants must register for a boat number for the parade to be eligible for prizes. For sponsorship opportunities, email Julie@floridabeachbusiness.com. The proceeds of the 50th Annual Holiday Lighted Boat Parade will foster youth sailing programs in the Clearwater area. For boat registration and further information please visit ClearwaterYachtClub.org/boat-parade.

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Community News

ROTARY CLUB OF INDIAN ROCKS BEACH

Submitted by David Kline

The Rotary Club of Indian Rocks Beach will be teaming up with Fluff's Mobile Hibachi (www.fluffysmobilehibachi.com) and Calvary Episcopal Church (www.calvaryirb.org) to offer hot meals to those in our local community who have been adversely affected by hurricanes Helene and Milton. This event provides an opportunity for those impacted by the recent storms to take a few moments from their recovery efforts to partake of a tasty hibachi meal, share stories with their community neighbors and take their minds off the events of the last few weeks. There will be no charge for your meal. All that we ask is that you share good will and encouraging words to your neighbors.

Meals will be served on Wednesday, December 4th and Wednesday, December 18th from 4-8pm at Calvary Episcopal Church, 1615 First St.

Join the Big Game Raffle!

The NFL season is in full swing, and excitement is in the air! Will your favorite NFL team make it to the "Big Game?" For the 22nd consecutive year, IRB Rotary will be sponsoring our annual 'Big Game Raffle', in support of the many charitable and humanitarian projects throughout our community and the world. This year we will be focusing a portion of our fundraising efforts on helping those who have been adversely affected by the recent Helene and Milton hurricanes.

This year's Big Game will be played at Caesars Superdome in New Orleans, on Sunday, February 9th, 2025. The city known as the 'Big Easy' is guaranteed to put on a top-notch time for those in attendance.

The Big Game Raffle will award the lucky Grand Prize winner two tickets to the 59th edition of the Big Game, four nights lodging in New Orleans and \$1000. Second prize is \$1000, third prize is \$500, fourth prize is \$300, and fifth prize is \$200.

Once again, the Grand Prize and secondary prizes will be drawn at our BGR Drawing Party at a location to be determined. Please check our Facebook page "Rotary Club of Indian Rocks Beach" for more updates on the location of this fun event. The drawing will take place at 5:30pm. Tickets are five chances for \$20 and are now available from any IRB Rotarian or by contacting ticket chairperson David Kline at (727) 418-1673 or DavidKline92@gmail.com.

GFWC CLEARWATER COMMUNITY WOMAN'S CLUB

GFWC Clearwater Community Woman's Club's signature initiative for 2024-2025 is to combat food insecurity for children and families in Pinellas County by establishing new school food pantries.

One in four children in our area is food insecure. Food is the most basic of human needs and hunger has been associated with academic and behavioral impairments in school going children. Families rely on school meals and food pantries to provide nutritious food.

GFWC Clearwater Community Woman's Club's goal is to create or support two new school pantries for needy families. No donation is too small, visit CCWCFlorida.org for information.

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Buyer represented by Aimee Smith



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