

NEIGHBORHOOD NEWS

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Magazine

A War That Would Not End: Florida and the Seminole Wars

By Bob Griffin, Local Historian

The Seminole Wars were three major military conflicts between the United States and the Seminole people, spanning roughly from 1817 to 1858. Throughout the first half of the 19th century, the Seminole Nation and the federal government clashed repeatedly as U.S. expansion pressed deeper into Florida.

The First Seminole War in 1817 lasted barely two and a half months. When General Andrew Jackson declared victory, few realized that the conflict had only just begun.

After Florida became a state and James K. Polk assumed the presidency, a fragile peace followed. Seminoles lived largely within reservation boundaries and traded with settlers at authorized posts. To reduce tensions, Polk established a 20-mile buffer zone around the reservation where white homestead claims were prohibited.

Second Seminole War (1836–1854)

Pressure for complete Indian removal continued. Congress passed the Indian Removal Act of 1830, which sought to resolve what officials called the "Indian problem" by relocating tribes to Indian Territory in present-day Oklahoma. Though labeled "voluntary," an estimated 60,000 Southeastern Native Americans were displaced. Approximately 15,000 died along the way, a tragedy remembered as the Trail of Tears. In Central Florida, Seminoles were taken to Tampa or Fort Myers, placed on ships, and transported to New Orleans. Forced removals continued through 1850.



Osceola, Seminole warrior

- Continued on Page 6

Also in this Issue:



New Residents at the Aquarium

Clearwater Marine Aquarium welcomes harbor seals Ocean, Scallop, and Pharoah.

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New Florida Laws

Several new laws took effect on January 1st. Read about the new regulations and the effects they may have.

- page 17

Sugar Sand Festival Returns

The beach at Pier 60 will be transformed into a magical display celebrating sports and spirit for the 11th annual event.

- page 16



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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 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,

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CALENDAR OF HOLIDAYS & EVENTS

As always, this is subject to change. Please verify dates and times.

MARCH

Copperhead Cup at Innisbrook 1-3
Clearwater Library Comicon 7
Daylight Savings Time Ends 8
Strawberry Festival Ends 8
Municipal Election 10
Reggae Rise Up Music Fest 12-15
Shamrock N'Run Largo 14
Indian Rocks Rotary Runs the Beach 14
Pinellas Schools Spring Beak 16-20
St. Patrick's Day 17
O'Keefe's Pub Irishfest Clearwater 17
PGA Valspar at Innisbrook 17-22
98 Rockfest at the Sound 20
First Day of Spring 20
Letter Carrier's Food Drive 20
IRB Greenfest 21
Rotary Pancake Breakfast 21
City Commission Meeting 25
Pier 60 Sugar Sand Festival Begins 27
IRBHome Easter Egg Hunt Kolb Park 28

Public Schools Closed 3
Easter Sunday 5
Dyngus Day at Crabby Bill's 6
PGA Masters 9-12
Dunedin Highland Games 11
Palm Sunday 13
Taxes Due 15
Foreigner at the Sound 18
Patriot's Day 20
Earth Day 22
Administrative Assistant Day 22
Arbor Day 24
Bucs Beach Bash St. Pete Beach 25
Public Schools Closed 27
Taste of IRB 26

MAY

APRIL

April Fools' Day 1
Passover Begins 1
Good Friday 3

May Day 1
Cinco de Mayo 5
Teacher Appreciation Day 5
Mother's Day 10
Armed Forces Day 16
Sunshine Open Water Swim 16
Safe Boating Week 17-23
Memorial Day 25
Public Schools Closed 25

More details for items highlighted in red can be found in the Did You Know? Bar/ Restaurant News, Business Briefs, Community News or Holiday Events Sections



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Did You Know



SUGAR SAND FESTIVAL RETURNS Tickets are on sale for the 2026 Pier 60 Sugar Sand Festival presented by Visit St. Pete-Clearwater. More than 1,000 tons of Clearwater Beach sand will be transformed into a stunning sand sculpture museum featuring the theme, "United in Sand: Celebrating Sports & Spirit!" The Pier 60 Sugar Sand Festival returns to Clearwater Beach March 27th - April 12th. For more information, visit SugarSandFestival.com.

FLORIDA #2 IN GROWTH Florida ranked second among U.S. growth states in the 2025 U-Haul Growth Index, which analyzes one-way customer moves during the year. Texas reclaimed the top spot for the seventh time in the past decade, climbing one position after finishing behind South Carolina in 2024. South Carolina, last year's leading growth state, slipped four places in the latest rankings. Florida, North Carolina, and Tennessee followed Texas as top destinations for movers. Although the order shifted, the top five states remained the same as in both 2024 and 2023. California ranked last for the sixth consecutive year, recording the nation's highest level of out-migration. Massachusetts, New York, New Jersey, and Illinois rounded out the bottom five states on the index.

The U-Haul Growth Index ranks states based on the net gain or loss of customers who rented one-way trucks, trailers, or U-Box® moving containers, picking up equipment in one state and dropping it off in another. The rankings are compiled from more than 2.5 million one-way transactions conducted annually across the U.S. and Canada.

PICKLEBALL WITHOUT THE SUNBURN Pickleball Kingdom opened in January in Pinellas Park, offering players all the fun of pickleball in an indoor, climate-controlled environment. The 40,125 square foot facility features 14 professional-grade courts. Hours of operation are 7am-11pm Monday – Saturday and 7am-10pm on Sunday.

There are several membership options offering perks like unlimited open play, free daily locker use, no court fees, and discounts on the ball machine. The facility is located at 7300 US Highway 19 N. For more information, visit PickleballKingdom.com.

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BEACH RENOURISHMENT COMPLETION The Pinellas County beach renourishment project is set to be completed this month. The \$126 million project began last September to repair the erosion left by the massive flooding and storm surge brought by the 2024 hurricanes.

The project brought sand from John’s Pass, Pass-a-Grille, Blind Pass, and Egmont Shoal. It was mixed with seawater, then pumped onto the beach from Sand Key to Treasure Island. The process is generally done every five years and was scheduled for 2024, but a dispute with the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers over easements caused a delay.

SPECIALTY PLATES Over two million Florida drivers have a specialty license plate, celebrating everything from their alma mater to their favorite sports team or commemorating their military service.

The big picture: Here are the top five most popular specialty plates in Florida as of October 1st, according to the Department of Highway Safety and Motor Vehicles.

- Endless Summer (142,999)
- Helping Sea Turtles Survive (112,996)
- University of Florida (93,347)
- Miami Heat (88,805)
- Florida State University (69,407)

Tampa Bay’s popular plates:

- The Tampa Bay Buccaneers-themed plate is number one across our eight counties, with nearly 40,000 registered. Endless Summer (34,905) is second
- Helping Sea Turtles Survive (26,055) is third
- University of Florida (20,639) is fourth
- Save the Manatee (16,724) is fifth

HURRICANE RECOVERY Pinellas County is reaching out to people who may have been impacted by Hurricanes Idalia, Helene, and/or Milton, and previously applied for disaster assistance.

If you still have unmet recovery needs like home repairs or financial losses from the storm, Pinellas County’s People First Hurricane Recovery Programs may be able to help — even if you already applied for FEMA assistance, SBA assistance, or received insurance proceeds.

The U.S. Government approved Pinellas County for \$813 million in recovery grant funds and we’re using most of this grant to provide direct assistance to eligible homeowners, renters and landlords of small rental properties. You may qualify for grants funds to rebuild your home above flood code, recoup repair costs, be reimbursed for storm-related expenses, and buy a new home.

You can apply for Pinellas County’s People First Hurricane Recovery Programs online or in-person. Learn more about income eligibility and see how much you could qualify for by visiting Recover.Pinellas.gov or by calling (727) 606-3307, Monday - Friday, 8am-5pm.

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The Seminole Wars, Continued

In 1846, Captain John Sprague was appointed to oversee Indian affairs. Seminole leaders distrusted him—understandably, given the long history of chiefs being seized under flags of truce. Sprague estimated that only 360 Seminoles remained: 120 warriors and 240 women and children.

A Seminole trading post opened on Payne's Creek near the Peace River. Against Florida law, free whiskey was initially distributed to encourage trade. When the new manager, George Payne, ended the practice, tensions escalated, as this was the Seminoles' only reliable source of whiskey.

Violence followed. Attacks occurred near Fort Pierce, a government employee was killed at James Russell's home, and finally Payne's Creek was attacked after Payne again refused whiskey. Payne and his assistant, Dempsey Whidden, were murdered, and the trading post was looted and burned.

Chief Billy Bowlegs surrendered several warriors responsible for recent attacks, expecting peace. Instead, General David Twiggs announced that all Seminoles would be removed from Florida.

Two companies of U.S. troops sent from Fort Brooke (Tampa) to reinforce Fort King (Ocala) never arrived. They were ambushed by a small Seminole force, and the 108 soldiers were killed.

Federal forces were unprepared for renewed war. Twiggs increased troop levels, relying heavily on mounted volunteers, as conflicts spread as far south as Miami and the Florida Keys.

By 1841, only about 300 Seminole warriors remained. Some had surrendered to avoid starvation; others were captured when they approached forts to negotiate. The war became deeply unpopular with the American public, press, and government. It devolved into a costly war of attrition and quietly faded away without formal resolution.

In 1850, the government offered another \$50,000 to encourage relocation. Seventy-four more Seminoles were shipped west, but resistance continued. Chiefs were taken to Washington, signed agreements under pressure, and repudiated them upon returning. Leadership changed frequently, and resentment deepened.

In 1854, Secretary of War Jefferson Davis imposed a hardline policy, including trade embargoes and opening Seminole lands to white settlement. Another conflict became inevitable.

The Third Seminole War (1855–1858)

By late 1855, more than 700 U.S. troops were stationed in Florida. Seminole leaders met near Taylor Creek, where some favored resistance while others urged caution.

On December 20, 1855, Billy Bowlegs led an attack on Lt. George Hartsuff's surveying party near Fort Myers. Four soldiers were killed, Hartsuff was wounded, and supplies were destroyed, formally igniting the Third Seminole War.

Militias formed statewide as federal forces surged. Raids spread across southern Florida, including near Fort Dallas and Key Biscayne. Retaliatory attacks followed, sometimes involving mutilation of bodies.

Brigadier General William Harney returned to Florida, establishing a line of forts and introducing flatboats for Everglades patrols. His campaign achieved little, and by early 1857 he was reassigned.

Colonel Gustavus Loomis replaced him and created the "Everglades Navy" using shallow-draft, metal "alligator boats." The boats, thirty feet long, were pointed at both ends and only drew two to three feet of water. They could carry up to sixteen men into the swamps, capturing primarily women and children and destroying villages and crops. Abner Doubleday, the Union major general credited with firing the first shot in defense of Fort Sumter, served in this unit.

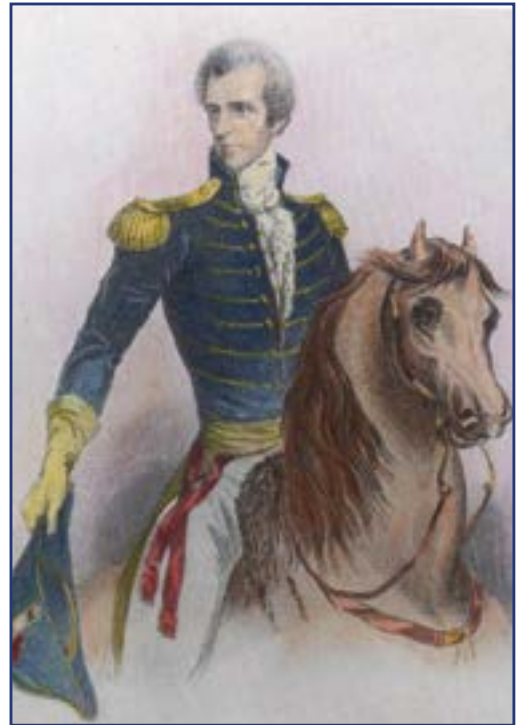
Beginning January 1, 1858, U.S. troops swept through the Big Cypress region, burning settlements and destroying remaining food supplies.

Negotiations resumed with Billy Bowlegs, who was offered a separate reservation in Indian Territory. Payments were standardized at \$500 per warrior and \$100 per woman.

In May 1858, 163 Seminoles departed from Punta Rassa near Fort Myers for New Orleans. On May 8, Loomis declared the Third Seminole War officially over.

Officials believed roughly 100 Seminoles remained in Florida, though this was likely an undercount. Groups led by Sam Jones and Chipco remained hidden in the Everglades and near Lake Okeechobee.

During the Civil War, Seminoles remained neutral. Florida's 1868 Constitution granted them legislative representation, though no seats were filled. Later constitutions removed those



Andrew Jackson, President (1829-1837)

provisions and imposed voter restrictions that remained in place until 1968.

A small number of Seminoles continued living in isolation near Lake Okeechobee and the Everglades through the early 20th century. By the mid-20th century, Seminoles consolidated on reservations. Federal recognition followed in 1957 for the Seminole Tribe of Florida and in 1962 for the Miccosukee Tribe.

By the 1940s, Seminoles began consolidating on reservations. In 1957, the Seminole Tribe of Florida gained federal recognition. The Miccosukee Tribe received recognition in 1962 were granted the Miccosukee Indian Reservation along the northern border of Everglades National Park, about 45 miles west of Miami.

In the 1970s, Seminoles began pioneered high stakes bingo, later expanding into full casino operations. In 2007, they purchased Hard Rock International, adding the Las Vegas Hard Rock Hotel & Casino in 2020.

The Miccosukee Tribe, maintaining a more traditional lifestyle, became known for cultural tourism, alligator wrestling, crafts, and eco-tours.

Today, both tribes preserve their cultural traditions while operating successful modern enterprises across Florida.



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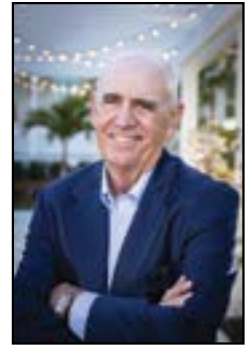
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FIVE WAYS OF KEEPING YOUR WEALTH

by Ray Ferrara, ProVise Management Group



We spend much of our working years trying to accumulate wealth to help us reach our financial goal of retirement. We take various degrees of risk to achieve this goal because it adds potential value to our life. But if we have enough that taking risk no longer adds value, then why continue taking the same level of risk? We can't avoid risk altogether, but we can manage it.

Taxes are a risk and they can destroy the best laid plans. You want to diversify sources of income by using taxable (stocks, bonds, and cash), tax free (municipal bonds, Roth IRA) and deferred (retirement plans and annuities). Given the negative financial position of the Federal government and many states, very few expect tax rates to go down.

Always make sure that you have ample liquidity. If you have everything in the market and you are forced to sell securities when they are down, it is a double whammy. Keep enough cash or cash equivalents to weather an economic storm. Think the Great Recession. Don't continue to tie up your money up in long term investments like private equity or non-income producing real estate.

While debt can be a good thing when using it to buy things that are likely to go up in value over time, it can be another destroyer of wealth. Pay off those credit cards every month. While in many cases it doesn't make sense to pay off a mortgage, it may make you feel more comfortable doing so. So do it. The best financial decision isn't necessarily always the right decision.

Simplify, simplify, simplify. Get rid of the things you no longer use along with the adult toys. You may love your silverware that you haven't used in decades, but the kids don't want them, so sell it. That goes for other collectibles like art, coins, stamps, etc.

Family can also be a great risk. We all want to help family members, especially our lineage, but if they come to expect help from mom and dad, it can quickly drain resources that either will delay retirement or keep mom and dad from enjoying the lifestyle to which they have become accustomed. Don't let them inherit the money early, they will get it soon enough.

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Bar & Restaurant News

DOUBLE NICKELS FOR PAJANO'S

Last month, Pajano's Pizza & Subs, located 1305 Gulf Blvd, celebrated its 55th anniversary, making it the oldest operating restaurant in Indian Rocks Beach. It opened in February 1971. When Nick Faraone bought the business for \$5,000, it was located inside the Red Lion Pub building (now Hurricane Eddie's), before there was a Red Lion. He operated out of that 15th Avenue location for three years before moving to today's location. He picked the new spot to be closer to the Indian Rocks Pier, at 12th Avenue. As luck would have it, the Pier collapsed the next year during Hurricane Elena.



Nick passed away and today his son Mike and wife Amanda own and operate the restaurant. Pajano's still serves the area's favorite pizza, steak and cheese subs, and more. They have a sister store, Pajano's Pizza and Taphouse NRB, at 17307 Gulf Blvd on North Redington Beach. For more information, visit PajanosPizzaAndSubs.com or follow them on Facebook.

TWO RESTAURANTS CELEBRATING FIVE YEARS Beach Waves Grill, at 2300 Gulf Blvd, took the place of Thai Pan Alley five years ago and is thriving. They are a fun, casual beach restaurant steps away from the white sands of Indian Rocks Beach. They specialize in fresh seafood, and their fare is made in-house daily. To view their menu, visit BeachWavesGrill.com. For more information on specials, follow them on Facebook or call (727) 593-3663.

VIP Mexican American Cuisine, at 213 Gulf Blvd, is also celebrating five years in Indian Rocks Beach. The original VIP, located in Treasure Island, has been in existence since the 1970s. They offer authentic Mexican dishes, Tex-Mex style dishes, traditional American favorites, and items that are a blend of influences. They are open seven days a week until 10pm (opening hours vary). Saturday breakfast had been put on hold but is now back. For more information, visit Viplounge-Fla.com or call (727) 270-7215.

DYNGUS DAY AT CRABBY BILL'S The annual post-Lenten Polish celebration will be held at the Original Crabby Bill's on Monday, April 6th starting at 11:30am. They will serve traditional Polish fare including pierogies, kielbasa and potato pancakes. Jasiu's Polka All Stars will be on stage performing polka music and a splash zone will be set up with water guns and balloons for the necessary water fight ritual. Drink specials will include a "Fuzzy Dupa" vodka cocktail. There is no cover charge for the event which will run throughout the day. Call (727) 281-2193 for more information.

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.

Bar & Restaurant News



THE END OF AN ERA AT PALM PAVILION For over 60 years the Hamilton family has owned the Palm Pavilion, located at 10 Bay Esplanade on North Clearwater Beach. Since their father retired, it has been co-owned by the four brothers: Ken, Dale, Hoyt, and Wade. Now, at or near retirement age, they have decided it is time to step back from the hustle and bustle of the restaurant world and spend more time with family and friends.

Over the years, the Hamilton family has been approached by many companies looking to purchase the land and business but never got an accepted offer.

During the four and a half months they were closed for repairs after the 2024 hurricanes, they had a chance to reflect and decided it was time to sell. The family still intends to take an active role in the Palm Pavilion's 100-year celebration on May 31st.

The family would like to thank their many management teams, staff, friends, long-time patrons, and fans. They want to leave everyone with one last toast - "There is no place like this place, anywhere near this place, so this must be the place."

Beachside Hospitality Group, the managers of Crabby's Dockside, The Salty Crab, Salty's Islan Bar and Grille, and others have taken over the Pavilion and intend to "keep the party going on Clearwater Beach." It is now named Crabby's Beachside Pavilion.

BELLA VINO TURNS 20 Seeing a void in the Belleair area for premium wine and cheese, Cheryl and Brian Franzese opened Bella Vino Wine and Cheese Market in 2005. Cheryl's entrepreneurial and marketing background helped jumpstart the new business and Brian's twenty years in the wholesale wine industry brought a wealth of knowledge and experience. Twenty years later, many wine shops have opened and closed in the area but Bella Vino emerged as the place where Belleair, Belleair Bluffs, and the local beach community go to purchase wine and cheese.



Bella Vino has evolved into a cozy wine bar, known for properly served premium wines by the glass, as well as artisan cheese and charcuterie plates, delicious sandwiches, homemade meatballs, flatbreads, and gluten free pizza.

Bella Vino is located at 100 Indian Rocks Road in The Plaza. For more information, visit BellaVinoWineMarket.com or call (727) 584-5552. Follow them on Facebook for upcoming events and specials.

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Business Briefs

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FIVE STARS Congratulations to 2Shea Fishing and Dive Center, located at 198 Seminole Street north of downtown Clearwater, on recently being accredited as a Professional Association of Diving Instructors (PADI) Five Star Dive Center. A PADI 5-Star rating signifies a top-tier dive center, that offers a full range of PADI programs, high-quality facilities and equipment, strong customer service, a focus on environmental responsibility, and commitment to safety and education.



Owner and Captain TJ Shea started 2Shea Fishing and Diving Charters over twenty years ago with a single engine 24-ft center console boat. From there he grew his passion and now offers fishing, diving, spearfishing, and sunset cruise experiences on five boats. For more information or to book online, visit 2SheaCharters.com.

PETS AND PORTRAITS Blue Merle Photography, is excited to introduce something new to their collections - a modern digital option that owner and photographer Yamile Haibi has been developing for months. Clients will receive a beautifully designed digital photo frame, preloaded with all the images from their session. The frame automatically adjusts between portrait and landscape, offers generous storage, and makes it easy to upload additional photos, create albums, and share images with family and friends through a simple phone app or desktop access.

For those who love the timeless feel of printed artwork, rest assured - wall art, canvasses, albums, and framed prints will continue to be available as optional add-ons. This new offering simply adds a flexible, contemporary way for clients to enjoy their favorite memories every day at home. For more information visit BlueMerlePhoto.com.

FULL SERVICE Smart Building Construction LLC is a licensed Florida general contractor serving the Tampa Bay area. The company specializes in residential remodels, additions, custom homes, and light commercial projects. From permitting through completion, Smart Building Construction provides hands-on project management, code-compliant construction, and quality craftsmanship tailored to Florida's unique building requirements.

Smart Heating & Cooling LLC and Smart Home Electric LLC provide full-service HVAC and electrical solutions throughout the Tampa Bay area. Together, the companies deliver air conditioning installation and replacement, maintenance programs, indoor air quality systems, electrical panel upgrades, EV charger installations, generator systems, and lighting solutions. Focused on safety, energy efficiency, and long-term performance, the team supports both residential and light commercial clients with reliable service and code-compliant installations tailored to Florida's climate and infrastructure needs. Visit SmartBuild-Florida.com, SmartHomeElectricalServices.com, or SmartHeatandCool.com for more information.

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Business Briefs

PAIN-FREE DENTAL CARE

Pinellas County native and University of Florida graduate Dr. Christopher Wujick and Boulevard Dental have been taking care of patients' teeth for more than 20 years. He focuses on taking the time to teach patients about their oral health in a relaxed environment, so patients feel less stressed about being at the dentist.



Dr. Wujick offers crowns that can be started and finished the same day. In conjunction with their Seminole office a few miles away, they provide CBCT scanning for 3D imaging and placing implants and a laser that performs fillings without the need for needles. The laser also helps reduce snoring in a very non-invasive and painless 30-minute procedure.

Boulevard Dental is open Monday-Thursday in Belleair at 1016 Ponce de Leon Blvd. Suite 4 and is available on Fridays for emergencies in Seminole at 8475 Seminole Blvd. For more information or to book an appointment, visit Boulevard-Dental.com or call (727) 315-1515.

NEW HOTEL DOWNTOWN CLEARWATER In 2019, Clearwater demolished the Harborview Center, which was home to a department store, a restaurant, trade shows, conventions, weddings, high school proms and more, before it was abandoned in 2009. In 2022, Clearwater voters approved the sale of the property for \$9.3 million for a redevelopment project.

The 158-room Ballard Hotel will provide accommodations for those attending downtown events, meetings, and conferences. The property, next to Coachman Park, will also offer 169 parking spaces, a rooftop bar and about 21,000 square feet of retail space. The Ballard and restaurant are expected to open mid-2027.

JOIN THE WINE CLUB Belleair Market, at 510 Indian Rocks Road, has started a "Wine Club." Members pay \$75 a month and receive a free bottle of wine (up to \$50) every month and 10% off wine and drinks at Belleair Hideaway, 10% off all wine at Belleair Market - Your Corner Store, 10% off and first notice for reservations for all Wine Dinners, 10% off wine, Bloody Mary's, and Mimosas at Belleair Cafe. They will also be starting "Monthly WINE 101 Nights" at Belleair Hideaway for Wine Club Members only.

Call (727) 584-3697 or visit BelleairMarket.com for more information. New members will receive a welcome gift. Sign up now, memberships are limited.

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WHAT MAKES YOUR FIRE DISTRICT SPECIAL

By Chief Ken Grimes, PSFRD

Because we are part of something bigger.

Here is my opinion up front. The Pinellas Suncoast Fire Resuce District is strong because it does not operate alone. We are part of one of the most integrated Fire and EMS systems in the country. That is not a slogan. It is how we respond every single day.

One system. Many departments. One mission.

Fire departments and EMS agencies across Pinellas County operate as one coordinated system. It is the seventh largest Fire and EMS system in the United States. When a call comes in anywhere in the county, the closest appropriate units respond based on real time vehicle location. Not boundaries. Not logos on the door. Just who can get there fastest.



For routine calls, a single department may handle the incident. For a serious emergency like a structure fire, the system automatically scales up.

A typical structure fire response includes three engines, two ladder trucks, a rescue unit, a squad, ambulances, an ambulance supervisor, a rehabilitation unit, and two district chiefs for command and safety.

For a small department, staffing for that worst case scenario alone would be financially impossible. In Pinellas County, it happens seamlessly because everyone operates under the same procedures, training standards, and command structure.

Recently in our District, units worked side by side from Largo Fire Rescue, Madeira Beach Fire Department, Seminole Fire Rescue, and Sunstar Paramedics. No friction. No confusion. Just professionals doing their jobs together.

Is this efficient? Absolutely.

This model gives residents the strength of a large metropolitan fire department with the accountability and responsiveness of a local district. If every agency had to independently staff for major emergencies, costs would skyrocket. Instead, we share resources and capacity. That is smart government.

EMS. One authority. One plan.

Emergency medical services are structured just as deliberately. Pinellas County operates a single EMS Authority that pays fire agencies for first response, contracts with an ambulance provider for transport, and funds the system through an ad valorem tax while billing for ambulance transport. The result is an approximately 150-million-dollar system that is both effective and resilient.

During a recent hurricane evacuation, a nursing home needed to relocate 250 patients. The system flexed, deployed roughly 50 ambulances, and completed the evacuation within hours without disrupting countywide response. That is what scale and coordination look like. Average response times across most of the county remain under seven minutes.

Why your Special District matters.

Your Special Fire District is a sole purpose district with locally elected commissioners focused on one mission. Fire and life safety. At the same time, we operate as a full partner in a larger countywide system. Local control paired with regional strength is rare.

That is what makes your Special District special.

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NEW ADDITIONS AT THE AQUARIUM

Last month, Clearwater Marine Aquarium welcomed three harbor seals — Scallop, Pharaoh and Ocean—marking both a brand-new species and a newly-renovated seal habitat for CMA. The arrival of harbor seals expands CMA’s animal care family and reinforces its mission to inspire human connection to marine life through meaningful, conservation-based stories.



The new harbor seal habitat is part of CMA’s broader plan to incorporate pinnipeds - marine mammals that have front and rear flippers - including harbor seals and California sea lions, into its overall animal care. The exhibit supports CMA’s mission while broadening educational messaging beyond Florida to address marine conservation challenges not just in Florida, but around the world.

“It’s important to understand that rescue can take many forms and isn’t always limited to direct intervention in the ocean,” said Joe Handy, CEO of Clearwater Marine Aquarium. “Some of the most meaningful rescue work happens through rehabilitation and long-term care, that helps prevent harm before it occurs. Our mission of rescue, rehabilitation, release, and research remains steady, and each part plays a vital role in protecting marine life.”

The harbor seals were welcomed from The Miami Seaquarium. The three seals are considered non-releasable to the wild, as they were born under managed care and do not possess the life skills necessary to survive in their natural environment. The move was approved by the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA).

In summer 2026, CMA plans to welcome additional pinnipeds — sea lions — who will move into a new sea lion habitat currently in development and scheduled to open this summer. The refurbished habitat is being funded by a \$6 million grant from the Tourism Development Council, approved by the Pinellas County Board of County Commissioners.

Harbor seals (*Phoca vitulina*) are found across coastal waters of Alaska, New England, the Mid-Atlantic, Southeast and West Coast of the United States, as well as the northern coasts of Europe and Asia.

They typically live 20–30 years in the wild and can live up to 50 years under human care. Adults can reach up to 300 pounds and measure five to six feet long. Each seal has a unique pattern of spots—much like a fingerprint—and is easily identified by their rounded heads, V-shaped nostrils, large eyes, lack of external ear flaps, and distinctive claws used for grooming, gripping, and efficient movement on land and in water.

Pinnipeds face threats including pollution, toxins, habitat loss, vessel strikes, harassment, and prey loss due to overfishing. While harbor seals are currently listed as a Species of Least Concern overall, some populations are endangered in certain regions, making education and conservation awareness critical.

With the addition of harbor seals, Clearwater Marine Aquarium continues to evolve as a trusted source for marine conservation, inspiring guests to care about the health of oceans. For more information, visit CMAquarium.org.

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THE SUGAR SAND FESTIVAL - "UNITED IN SAND"

The Pier 60 Sugar Sand Festival returns to bright and beautiful Clearwater Beach March 27th - April 12th. This year, the festival celebrates sports and spirit during its biggest and best year yet with the theme, "United in Sand: Celebrating Sports and Spirit!" This year's theme celebrates teamwork, a strong sense of American pride, and the defining stories that shape our nation.

This year, the Sugar Sand Walk Exhibit expands to an impressive 24,000 square feet, featuring an exciting, augmented reality experience that serves as a tribute to the 250th anniversary of the signing of the Declaration of Independence and as an ode to this historic celebration.

From architectural masterpieces created from Clearwater's famous sugar sand to concerts, performers and daily entertainment, the Pier 60 Sugar Sand Festival Presented by Visit St. Pete Clearwater is an annual event attracting visitors from around the world. This year's festival will stretch for 17 days, which allows people more time to attend and gives those visiting for the Easter holiday a chance to see this incredible and affordable festival.

General admission to the sculpture exhibit will be \$14 per person plus tax, and free for children 3 years old and younger. Discounted tickets for military personnel, police officers, firefighters, teachers and healthcare workers can be purchased for \$10 each on "Frontline Fridays," which are March 27, April 3, and April 10, 2026. These discounted tickets will be available at the gate only with proper identification. All other tickets can be purchased online at SugarSandFestival.com.



Visitors may also enjoy "Timeless Tuesdays" where individuals aged 60 and older can enjoy a discounted ticket price of \$12 each plus tax on Tuesdays: March 31st and April 7th.

The Sugar Sand Festival is proud to partner with Tampa Bay Sandsculpting Co., which will once again build this year's exhibit and offer free sand-sculpting classes during the festival.

Each year, the Pier 60 Sugar Sand Festival continues to grow in popularity and garner national attention. The 2025 event drew more than 130,000 visitors throughout its 17-day run. The festival continues to attract visitors from around the world.

About the Pier 60 Sugar Sand Festival

Eighteen world-class artists craft elaborate sand sculptures from Clearwater's internationally famous sugar sand. The works of art are on display in a 24,000-square-foot structure. More than 1,000 tons of Clearwater sand takes on a new life, bringing visitors on a unique and special adventure. The festival is a joint effort between Sunsets at Pier 60 Daily Festival, a 501(c)3 organization and the city of Clearwater.







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NEW FLORIDA LAWS FOR 2026

Several new laws took effect on January 1st, addressing issues from animal cruelty to medical refunds. Below is a summary of the new regulations.

1. SB 1808 - Faster medical refunds

- This law establishes a maximum limit of 30 days for medical professionals to refund any excess payment to patients.
- Those who do not comply with the law can face a fine of up to \$500 per incident. This law looks to protect patients' money and streamline transparency in payments.

2. HB 255 - "Dexter's Law,"

- A public database has been created with the names of all residents charged with animal cruelty.
- This law was brought forth after the tragic case of Dexter, a refugee dog that was decapitated after being adopted a day earlier. The objective is to avoid the adoption or purchase of an animal by a person with a history of animal cruelty.



3. SB 158 - No more copayment for breast examinations

- Copayments for diagnostic and supplemental breast examinations have been eliminated for state government employees.
- This law looks to facilitate the access to crucial examinations for the early detection and follow-up for state government employees.

4. HB 655 - Pet insurance regulation

- HB 655 changes the way consumers demand transparency from insurance companies. It modifies the legal framework to protect consumers by requiring greater transparency from insurers, allowing a 30-day review period for policy refunds, and prohibiting certain practices, such as requiring wellness programs to obtain insurance.
- This law requires insurers to provide customers with clear information about claims payment formulas, required medical examinations, and policy exclusions, such as those for pre-existing conditions.
- Insurance agents must receive specific training on pet insurance, including details on pre-existing conditions and waiting periods.

5. SB 944 - Reducing overpayment claims for psychologists

- This law will reduce the time that insurance companies present overpayment claims for psychologists from 30 months to 12 months. The objective is to streamline the process of claims and payments to mental health professionals.

Florida's pending legislation for 2026 covers key areas like healthcare (breast cancer screening coverage, patient refunds for overpayments), housing (affordable housing programs, rent control provisions), animal welfare (abuse database, pet insurance rules), and transportation (electric vehicle cleanup, booster seat age). Lawmakers are also considering significant issues like marijuana legalization (via amendment), social media restrictions for minors, and property tax/utility profit caps, with many bills filed for the 2026 session.

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Saturday, March 21, 2026



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BREATHING EASY IN PINELLAS COUNTY: HOW RESIDENTS ARE TRACKING AIR QUALITY THEMSELVES

By Karen Donoghue & Craig Newell

As temperatures drop and Tampa residents light their fireplaces, that warm, cozy smell of wood smoke carries an invisible threat. Particulate matter in smoke can penetrate deep into the lungs, aggravating asthma and other respiratory conditions, and enter the bloodstream, affecting the entire body. But keeping warm in front of the fire is just one piece of a larger air quality puzzle affecting Pinellas County.

Air quality was once thought to be a “solved” problem with the adoption of the Clean Air Act in the 1970’s, but in recent years it is once again becoming an issue, as highlighted by wildfire smoke from as far away as the West Coast and Canada now regularly drifting over Florida. Air quality is not just regional; it is also highly localized, such as when air pollution from local sources is trapped in the overnight coastal fog. This pollution could be from New Year’s fireworks, open burning of yard waste, land clearing, or people simply enjoying an outdoor fire pit. Other sources, such as traffic pollution and industrial emissions, have more regional impacts, adding to the mix and further degrading the air that people in Pinellas County breathe.



Pinellas County residents are installing sensors outside their homes to track pollution in real time via low-cost monitors (Local Haze app)



The health risks are serious. Breathing polluted air damages your body in ways that build up over the years. It causes lung cancer, increases your chances of heart attacks and strokes, and raises your risk of developing Alzheimer’s and dementia as you age. Children are hit especially hard - their growing brains and lungs make them far more vulnerable than adults. But air pollution also harms people immediately: it can trigger asthma attacks and dangerous flare-ups in people with COPD. Seniors face particular danger from day-to-day changes in air quality that most of us don’t even notice or think about.

The challenge? The combination of many harmful pollutants being completely invisible and the highly local nature of much air pollution makes it impossible to determine when the air is unsafe without proper monitoring. The few public air quality monitors in the Tampa Bay area that focus on long-term pollution exposure have created an environment in which many air quality issues go unreported, and no alerts are sent.

The good news? You don’t need to be a scientist to monitor the air quality in your neighborhood. A growing network of citizen scientists is taking air quality monitoring into their own hands, using low-cost air quality monitors to track pollution in real time in their local area, and the data is freely available to anyone with a smartphone. Using affordable monitors from companies like PurpleAir and AirGradient, Pinellas County residents are installing sensors outside their windows and in their backyards to track pollution in real time, building their own real-time air-quality monitoring networks. For

under \$250, anyone in Florida can now purchase and install an air-quality monitor. Some, like AirGradient’s Open Air kits, even encourage DIY assembly, making them a popular choice for schools and community groups.

The data from these devices can be viewed in real time and shared publicly via websites such as fire.airnow.gov and map.purpleair.com, and via mobile apps such as Local Haze, which also offers customizable alerts.

Residents can take simple protective steps: check air quality before exercising outdoors, keep windows closed during pollution spikes, use air purifiers when needed, and share information with vulnerable neighbors. By staying informed and taking basic precautions, Pinellas County residents can protect their health while continuing to enjoy paradise.

Local Haze is a free mobile app available for iPhone and Apple Watch. To learn more, visit LocalHaze.HumanLogic.com.



Michael Perez

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Community News

ACTION 2000 IRB (A2K)

Submitted by Daryl Frahn

Exciting Project Update: 10th Avenue Walkway Restoration

With our community finding its footing after the storm, we're excited to share that we are moving full steam ahead! Our next signature project is the complete restoration of the 10th Avenue walkway along Gulf Boulevard in front of the Nature Preserve—an area that took a significant hit but is now ready for renewal.

Working closely with the City of Indian Rocks Beach, we are coordinating our efforts with the ongoing electrical undergrounding project to ensure a seamless and lasting improvement. We look forward to welcoming the community to a refreshed and more beautiful pathway in early June—a space we can all once again enjoy and be proud of.

About IRB Action 2000 (A2K)

IRB Action 2000 is a nonprofit community organization that has proudly served Indian Rocks Beach for over 25 years. Our mission is to preserve the unique small-town character of IRB while enhancing and beautifying our public spaces for everyone to enjoy.

Projects like the 10th Avenue Walkway restoration are made possible through the incredible support of our community, especially Oktoberfest, our single largest annual fundraiser. This beloved event provides the critical funding that allows A2K to take on major improvement projects that make a lasting impact on our town.

We also host monthly public meetings, offer hands-on volunteer opportunities, and bring the community together through fun, meaningful events throughout the year.

Volunteerism and community pride are the heart of everything we do at A2K—and we'd love for you to be part of it. When you volunteer with A2K, you're not just giving your time; you're helping shape the town you love. Whether you thrive on connecting with others or prefer to contribute behind the scenes, there's a meaningful role for everyone.

Volunteering with A2K comes with some great benefits:

- Making a visible, lasting impact on Indian Rocks Beach
- Building friendships and connections with people who care about this community
- Strengthening a true sense of belonging and shared pride
- Adding purpose, fun, and energy to your life
- And yes—it simply feels good to give back

IRBHome & the City of Indian Rocks Beach Present...



Taste of IRB

Indian Rocks Beach, Florida

Saturday April 25th from 3 to 9pm

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Community News

FRIENDS OF THE IRB LIBRARY

Submitted by Diane Daniel

Welcome back to your IRB library! We're happy to report that we are fully back in action after a joyous grand reopening celebration and ribbon cutting in January. The doors are open Monday-Friday 10am-4pm.

Please visit our fabulous new layout, children's area, computer workspace and of course our popular second-hand bookstore. The enhanced children's area is thanks to a \$15,000 donation from the Rotary Club of IRB. The new monthly Florida Explorer's Storytime series combining children's books and nature themes, is off to a great start. The next two are on Saturday, March 28th (flamingos and seabirds), and Saturday April 11th (sharks), starting at 11am in the pavilion across from the library. Attendance is free but advance registration through the library website or by phone is encouraged.

The Friends of IRB annual meeting will be held on April 20th at 6pm inside the library. Friends membership is \$10 a year or \$100 for a lifetime. The Friends can be reached at FriendsOfIRBLibrary@gmail.com. Contact the library at Indian-Rocks-Beach.com/our-community/irb-library or (727) 596-1822.

VACATION DONATIONS

Submitted by Diane Daniel

Condos/apartment complexes with vacation rentals and shops with tourists, we'd love to put one of our donation bins on your property during high visitation season. We do all the work!! Our newest bin is now up at Indian Rocks Café. Visitors, if you have leftover food you can't take home with you, please consider donating it to locals in need. To donate directly to these pantries, visit VacationDonations.org/food for details.

When possible, Vacation Donations will pick up food at your rental. We accept unopened food and beverages, both perishables (fresh) and nonperishables, such as canned and boxed goods. You can also donate open containers of food if they have casings, such as eggs, individually wrapped cheese singles, etc. Donations will go to Beach Community Food Pantry in IRB, and occasionally Lifeline Ministries at St. Jerome Catholic Church and Christ the King Lutheran Ministries in Largo. For pickup, bin signup or volunteering, email VacationDonations@gmail.com or call or text Diane at (727) 201-2333.



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For Powell Learning Center

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SATURDAY

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Community News

IRBHOME

IRBHome, in partnership with the City of Indian Rocks Beach, proudly presents the 19th Annual Taste of IRB on Saturday, April 26th, from 3-9pm at Chic-a-SI Park. Join thousands of locals and visitors alike for this beloved community tradition, featuring over 30 local restaurants and businesses offering their signature dishes, handcrafted gifts, beach-themed art, and unique finds from local artisans.

Live Entertainment: Dance the night away with live music by North to South.

Delicious Bites: Sample the best flavors from top IRB eateries and food vendors.

Raffles Galore: Win amazing prizes including gift baskets from local business owners like Leaders Furniture, \$1000+ in restaurant gift certificates, and a 65-inch TV, generously donated by TopQuote Insurance.

Admission is FREE! Bring your beach chairs or blankets and enjoy an afternoon in the sun/evening under the stars-rain or shine. A limited number of chairs will also be available, courtesy of IRB Chairs.

Beer & Wine will be available for purchase from IRBHome. Soda & Water will be sold by Beach Community Food Pantry, sponsored by Plumlee Gulf Beach Realty.

For more information, visit IRBHome.com/tasteofirb.

INDIAN ROCKS HISTORICAL MUSEUM

Submitted by Nan Jensen

The Museum is Open - hours of operation are 10am-2pm Wednesday - Saturday. We are located at 203 4th Avenue across from the post office.

Save the Date for the Spring Luncheon - The museum will host a covered dish luncheon on March 28th, beginning at noon. We can guarantee delicious food and an engaging speaker, Michael Roger Shea, the administrator of the Facebook page Ghosts of Indian Rocks Beach. Mike's experiences in the 70's as a teenage Gulf Blvd restaurant worker (and sometimes underage bartender), led him to create the popular Facebook page, Ghosts of Indian Rocks Beach, which remembers the legendary restaurants, bars, and personalities from yesteryear in Pinellas County. Mike will share stories and photos from popular nightlife venues in Indian Rocks and nearby areas from days gone by. We ask those who want to attend the luncheon to bring a dish to share with the group.

On the Lookout for volunteers - The museum is seeking volunteers to serve as hosts during our opening hours. Training will be provided. Contact Carol McGlaughlin at (727) 420-8662 if you are interested in becoming a volunteer.

WELCOME NEWCOMERS CLUB

This club is open to the women of Pinellas County; all are welcome to come and socialize. Luncheons are held the first Tuesday of each month at Belleair Country Club. There is always a guest speaker or other entertainment with cards following for those interested. Please contact Mary at (727) 240-5372 with any questions.



DUNEDIN HIGHLAND GAMES

Submitted by Eric MacNeill

The 58th Dunedin Highland Games & Festival are set for April. The festivities begin on Friday, April 10th in Downtown Dunedin. 4:30-8pm. We'll have Live music at John R. Lawrence Pioneer Park starting at 5pm, a parade of pipe bands and Clans through downtown stepping off at 6:30pm, with more live music to follow until 8pm. Beer, wine, and food vendors will be onsite, as well as packet pick-up for the Kilted 5k Trail ace that takes place Saturday morning. The park is at 420 Main Street.

On Saturday, April 11th, the Games take place at Highlander Park, 903 Michigan Blvd. Gates open at 8am with the event wrapping up by 6:30pm. All parking is off-site, with complimentary shuttle service. We have a variety of Celtic Merchandise and food vendors this year and lots of activities for all ages all day long.

Enjoy Piping & Drumming Competitions, Pipe Bands, opening ceremonies, and a parade of Clans at noon. Scottish Clans will be at Societies Village, along with Highland Dancing Championships, live Celtic Music throughout the day, and historical reenactment displays, Whiskey tasting master classes, Scottish Heavy Athletics competitions, Scottish Country Dancing demonstrations, 5k Kilted Trail race, and more.

More information and tickets can be found at DunedinHighlandGames.com

General admission tickets and VIP tickets are now available. VIP tickets will sell out in Advance of the event. General Admission pre-sale tickets are \$20 and will be available for \$25 at the gate.

This event is organized by the Dunedin Scottish Arts Foundation and provides a fantastic cultural event for the Dunedin Community, while also serving as a major fundraiser for the arts education programs in Dunedin; Directly supporting the Dunedin High School band, Dunedin Middle School band, City of Dunedin Pipe Band, and others.

Community News

CHURCH OF THE ISLES AND IRB GREENFEST

Submitted by Daryl Frahn

While you may see construction activity on site, please know that we are open and active, with many opportunities for worship, service, and community connection. We continue our 10am Sunday worship, Bible Study, offer Midweek Prayer @ Noon on Wednesdays, and our Beach Community Thrift Store is open Fridays and Saturdays. We also have a full Holy Week schedule planned, and IRB Greenfest is just around the corner.

In February, we began a midweek prayer gathering held every Wednesday at 12pm throughout Lent. These brief services offer a moment of quiet reflection, shared prayer, and community support in the midst of busy weeks. All are welcome to join us.

IRB Greenfest, held Saturday, March 21st from 11am–5pm, is a free, family-friendly community event featuring live music, great food and beverages, eco-friendly vendors, and local nonprofits sharing important causes. This year's Learning Labs include presentations on recycling, microplastics, shelling, and birds of prey, led by local environmental organizations.

Holy Week at Church of the Isles begins on Palm Sunday, March 29th, with a 10am choral cantata during worship. On Maundy Thursday, April 2nd, Church of the Isles will participate in a joint United Church of Christ service hosted at Pilgrim UCC in St. Petersburg. Good Friday, April 3rd, includes a guided Stations of the Cross service at 7pm.

Easter Sunday features a 7am sunrise service on the beach at the 25th Avenue Beach Access in Indian Rocks Beach, followed by an 8:15am community pancake breakfast and a 10am traditional sanctuary service.

Church of the Isles is an open and affirming congregation of the United Church of Christ, serving the Indian Rocks Beach community and west Pinellas County for more than 70 years. For up-to-date information on IRB Greenfest, Holy Week, and ongoing activities, please visit churchoftheisles.org.



ROTARY CLUB OF INDIAN ROCKS BEACH

Submitted by David Kline

The Rotary Club of Indian Rocks Beach is presenting its annual Lou Gregor Memorial Pancake Breakfast which will take place on Saturday, March 21st from 7:30-11am. The event will be held at Calvary Episcopal Church, 1615 1st Street.

Lou Gregor, a charter member of IRB Rotary and the creator of the Pancake Breakfast many years ago, had a vision for a fundraiser to be used to award scholarships to graduating high school seniors who wished to further their education in the trade industry. Lou was the owner of Gregor Marine in Largo and had a passion for the marine industry. Although Lou passed away a few years ago, his legacy continues with the Pancake Breakfast.

We invite the community to join us for an all-you-can-eat, tasty breakfast of fresh-made pancakes, sausage, orange juice, and coffee.

Tickets are available by visiting Michael at German Imports, 14286 Walsingham Road, Largo (727-596-1374) or from any IRB Rotarian. Tickets purchased in advance are \$8 each. Tickets will also be available at the door for \$10.

The Rotary Club of Indian Rocks Beach is also excited to announce that the 7th annual Rotary Runs the Beach will take place on beautiful Indian Rocks Beach on Saturday, March 14th. This fun and unique, family-friendly event will begin at 8am at 1700 Gulf Blvd at the Indian Rocks Beach Access. This is a scenic 5K race and 1 mile walk/run along the beautiful shoreline of Indian Rocks Beach. The 5K race will be timed and medals will be awarded to winners by age groups (10-year increments).

Once again, the main sponsor is Crabby Bill's, the iconic beach vibe restaurant. Numerous other local and national organizations are also joining in to sponsor this family-friendly fundraiser. Sponsors and local vendors will be on hand with their products and services on the beach. A raffle will also be available. A post-race after-party will take place at Guilty Sea.

Proceeds from Rotary Runs The Beach will benefit the Indian Rocks Rotary Foundation, Inc. which supports numerous community service and charitable programs, including Rotary's Polio Plus initiative to eradicate polio from the globe; promoting peace; clean water and sanitation; protecting the environment; scholarships for local high school students, donations to local food banks, and many other local and international causes.

Last year, the event was temporarily renamed Rotary Rescues the Beach to support local recovery efforts following Hurricanes Helene and Milton. Proceeds helped restore the Indian Rocks Beach Library, the Beach Art Center, and several heavily damaged churches.

This year, the race takes on a deeply personal purpose. Event organizer Cliff Koch was recently diagnosed with prostate cancer, a moment that reshaped the event's mission. Additionally, after losing a beloved longtime Rotary member to the disease, the race committee unanimously selected the Moffitt Cancer Center Foundation as one of the charitable beneficiaries.

To learn more about Rotary Runs The Beach, or to register, visit IndianRocksRotary.org/



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