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EAST LEE COUNTY NEWS | DANIELS CORRIDOR

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Change of Direction By Butch Swank



Photo: Butch Swank, President of Southwest Florida Business Alliance, goodladandswank.com

It seems to me that we're at a point in our culture where politics has replaced community and religion. That means many have chosen to look to politicians for moral guidance. Really? I'd rather we look to scary circus clowns for moral and spiritual guidance than politicians. When we decide to idolize people who are professionals at avoiding the truth and speaking in circles, then we are going to have problems. Guess what? We have problems! Before, when you belonged to a church or a gym and

you actually knew your neighbors, you could not help but have a sense of community, purpose, and belonging. These three things are now in rapid decline along with a lot of people's mental health. In today's environment, a sane person running for office talking about getting together with the "other side" and working things out has zero chance of being elected. We're actively creating a culture that rewards ignoring half of the population. Patrick Henry, one of our founding fathers, warned us about this by saying, "United we stand, divided we fall." We were warned, but we're going full throttle toward division anyhow.

Now, I prefer not to be a total Deb-

bie Downer, so let me share some good news. I love stats, and I'm sure you do, too. Who doesn't? (I am so much fun at parties!) Over the past two hundred years, we've gone from ninety percent of people living in extreme poverty all the way down to ten percent. Three hundred years ago, only fifteen percent of people could read, and now even that number is at ninety percent. Isn't that wonderful? If you're curious about these numbers, they are from Dr. Steven Pinker. He's a professor dedicated to proving that, despite what the news yells at us, things really have been getting better and better compared to days past. The question I ask is, why have they been getting better?

I say it's because of Western civilization in general and America in particular. For example, let's talk about the Scientific Method. What is that you say? It is a system that allows a scientist to develop an idea, and then ALL the other scientists are free to attack it. By attack it, I mean they study it and try to poke holes in it. If the scientist's idea is good, it stands up to the other scientists trying to disprove it, and we, as a society, advance because of this new knowledge. By scientists verifying and questioning each other's work, they can all feel comfortable knowing the work is rock solid and then build on it.

Continued on Page 2



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Continued from Page 1

Back to the current day. Science is no longer science – now it's The Science, and it, of course, has been politicized. That means no one is allowed to

question things anymore. I don't care if you're on the left or right – both sides do the same thing. "How dare you question my favorite scientist's opinion!" C'mon. Are we really to the point that we're at each other's throats because your nerdy scientist disagrees with my nerdy scientist? Keep in mind that this is coming from a nerdy insur-

ance agent. Heck, even insurance people disagree sometimes, but I certainly don't find it necessary for a politician to back me up. The big point here is that our whole culture is based on the concept that ideas are made to be questioned. Both left and right used to cherish freedom of speech in its purest form, which to me is: Everybody is free to share thoughts, and the best ideas win out while the bad ones fall by the wayside. People's feelings, of course, get hurt when wrong, but let's stop pretending that some of the best lessons learned in life do not come from failure and hurt feelings.

If we cannot question things, we have only one direction to go: backward. All the progress Dr. Pinker has demonstrated will go away if we stop being a free and open society. During the Cold War, Americans were truly united because we had a universal foe in the USSR. Now, we face another real threat, and it's ourselves, and for the first time since the Civil War, we are no longer united. President Reagan had a quote that I feel is appropriate to end things with: "Freedom is a fragile thing and is never more than one generation away from extinction."

I ask that we take half the ener-

gy we're currently spending to follow politics and invest that time in our community. Go to a Farmers Market on a Saturday instead of scrolling bad news on your phone. Go to a church on Sunday instead of watching the talking heads on the morning shows. Call and ask a school if they need help, and then go help them. All three of these are far more likely to make us appreciate how great and precious our country is than spending one more second paying attention to politics. We're so much better than this, and I firmly believe that if we break this grip of division, everything will look a whole lot sunnier. ❤️

Florida Gulf Coast Trail By Charles D. Hines, Esq

With help from partners across the state, Trust for Public Land is creating the Florida Gulf Coast Trail, a 336-mile long corridor traversing seven coastal counties (Hillsborough, Pinellas, Manatee, Sarasota, Charlotte, Lee, Collier). It's a trail that's packed with potential - and not just for those who might someday traverse its expanses. Having green space in your neighborhood allows for many possibilities - a quick jog before work, a picnic lunch break, or sending children out to play after school.

While segments currently exist, many gaps prevail. Trust for Public Land is coordinating a regional effort with local stakeholders to complete the omissions along the Florida Gulf Coast Trail and connect communities along the corridor. The following details why this project is so important:

BUILDING SAFER COMMUNITIES

Over 4 million people live in this region, which experiences one of the highest population growth rates in the state. However, pedestrian infrastructure is not evolving in pace

with our communities. In fact, three of the 10 deadliest places for pedestrians in the U.S. are metropolitan areas within Southwest Florida.

A DESTINATION TRAIL

Epic trails of this kind draw adventure seekers. These mighty 'destination trails' increase tourism, benefit lodging, the restaurant and retail industries, and the outdoor economy. In Florida, outdoor recreation generates \$58.6 billion annually, 485,000 jobs, and \$3.5 billion in state and local tax revenue. Outdoor tourism is essential to Florida's economy, and this trail will offer miles of fun for visitors.

STRENGTHENING CONNECTIONS

The Gulf Coast Trail will provide opportunity for people of all abilities to get outdoors near home. With convenient access, neighbors will connect through friendly encounters. Proximity to the trail enhances property values and desirability of more community. Trails also make communities attractive to businesses looking to relocate

because of amenities they offer for employees.

IMPROVING HEALTH OUTCOMES

Public health will improve by offering residents an easy way to walk out their doors and become active. Trails reduce vehicle use and mitigate air pollution. Close-to-home parks boost the well-being of the entire neighborhood. Walks like these encourage behavioral changes that reduce chronic diseases and improve overall quality of life.

WHERE TRUST FOR PUBLIC LAND COMES IN

- Branding and promoting the trail. Creating a common identity to inspire public and funding support.
- Creating digital and GIS tools for planners, advocates, and stakeholders to monitor trail progress and funding commitments.
- Convening an advisory board



Photo: Charles D. Hines, Esq Discussing The Trail At The Bonita Spring City Council Meeting

of partners to advocate for trail funding.

- Providing real estate acquisition services and assistance to complete the Gulf Coast Trail.
- Providing public finance technical assistance.

GET INVOLVED

This trail will serve as a vital component of daily life and a place where memories are made. It will be the safe and trusted route for commuters on their way to work and a place where parents first teach their children to ride a bike. Please, join us in the effort to make this vision reality. ❤️

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Top 10 HR Mistakes Businesses Make Virtual Seminar

By Karen Shepherd



Photo: Karen Shepherd, MSHR, SHRM-CP, founder of HR by Karen, LLC

Registration is open for the virtual seminar, "Top 10 HR Mistakes Businesses Make" on February 23, 2023 from 8 - 9:00 a.m. The virtual seminar is open to all businesses and individuals. The presenter is Karen Shepherd, MSHR, SHRM-CP, founder of HR by Karen, LLC, a human resources consulting company. Shepherd is also a Certified Professional through the Society for Human Resource Management and

immediate past president of SHRM-HR Collier.

Seminar participants will learn tactics for avoiding litigation or equal employment opportunity commission claims, get clarity on the classifications of employees, including the difference between an employee and independent contractor and more. Register for the seminar at hrbykaren.com.

During online registration, consider making a voluntary donation to support Taste of Immokalee, a student-created and student-run

social enterprise that aims to improve the lives of youths in our community by providing them with the foundational skills needed to be successful in their career paths.

ABOUT HR BY KAREN

HR by Karen is a human resources consulting company based in Naples, Fla., owned and operated by Karen Shepherd, MSHR, SHRM-CP. The firm's mission is to offer a unique quality experience by providing expert human resource services with compassion, empa-

thy, and heart; thereby, reducing administrative time for businesses and allowing them to focus on their growth, and improving employee relations. HR by Karen provides onsite, remote, and interim human resources solutions including recruitment, hiring, onboarding, compliance and audits, employee relations and termination, conflict resolution and workplace investigation, payroll, employment handbooks, policies and procedures and training and development. Learn more at hrbykaren.com. ❤️

Selling Your Home? To Update Or Not To Update, That Is The Question

By Amy Admire and Catherine Van Til



Photo: Amy Admire and Catherine Van Til, Southwest Florida Homes Team of Coldwell Banker - SouthwestFloridaHomesTeam.com

So, you're selling your home and you're teetering on whether you should do some updates or leave it as is. What is, "as is" any way? As is means you're selling the home as it is with no plans to update or repair anything. Now, that doesn't mean a buyer won't ask for repairs or concessions (money back at closing). Remember, everything is negotiable.

You've decided to leave the home as is. You have the money to do the updates, but you don't have the time and you really don't want the aggravation of lining up the contractors and dealing with all of that. You know that means you'll have to list it for less but the time and aggravation you're saving is worth it. So, you list it... and it sits. No activ-

ity. There are a few showings here and there but no real positive feedback... and no offers. You know the longer the home sits on the market, the more carrying costs you have-mortgage payments due, HOA fees are due, the electric bills keep coming, the water bill keeps coming in. If the home is vacant, writing those checks don't feel very good. It's kind of scary... How long will it take to sell?

You start thinking, maybe you should do a few things to make it more move in ready. More buyers prefer a move in ready home than one that needs updating. Maybe you will paint, and maybe update the lighting. That should do it. But then you start thinking, will that do it? If you're going to do it, do it. Make it truly move in ready. Replace the floors, paint (professionally) and update the lighting. Your buyer pool will be higher, and it will sell faster with less giving on the price- because it's move in ready.

So, what's the answer? There is no right answer. Sometimes we have to try different things to see what happens. The market calls for different things at different times. What we do know is, if a home isn't selling, you have to make a change. Whether that's a price change or changes to the home. If you have the availability to make changes to the home and you are able to recoup the money you're putting in, sometimes that's the best bet. If you're able to do these things before you list the home, that's even better- You will save time on the market this way. Some homeowners don't have the ability, financially to make changes to the home so a price reduction is more likely.

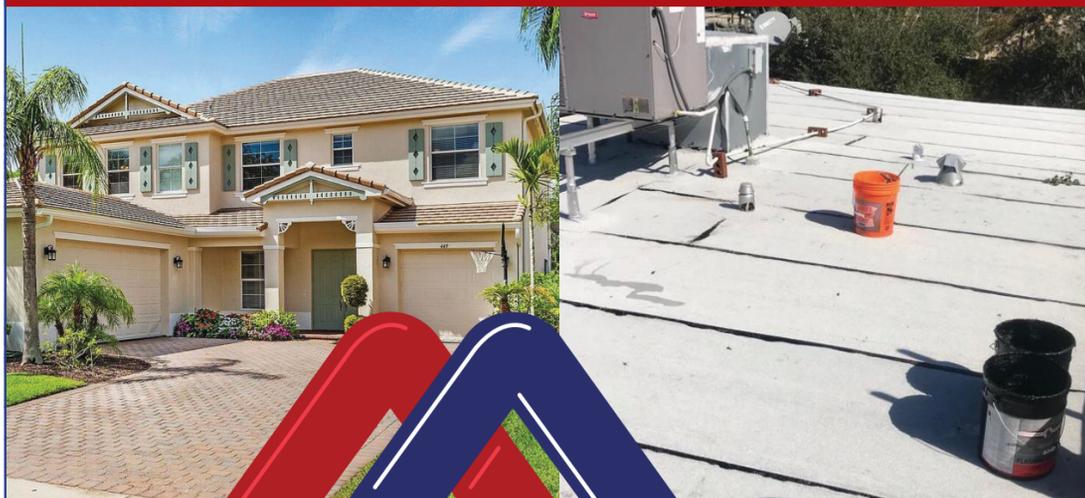


Photo: Young Couple Painting Walls

There are programs out there right now that will allow the homeowner to get the repairs and updates completed now and pay the bill when the home closes.

When it's time to list your home, call your Southwest Florida Homes Team girls. We will come up with a game plan that suits you and your needs. ❤️

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Pet Health: Dental Disease

By Dr. Veja Tillman, DVM

Does your pet's breath keep you from snuggling up? Chances are that bad breath from your furry friend could be the first signs of dental disease. Do not ignore this important part of your pet's overall health and wellness.

WHAT IS DENTAL DISEASE?

Dental disease is a painful infection of the teeth, gums and surrounding structures. This condition occurs when bacteria, plaque, and tartar build up on the teeth and get trapped beneath the gumline. It is the most common major health problem affecting dogs and cats. According to the American Dental Society, more than 80% of dogs and 70% of cats show signs of oral disease by the time they are 3 years old.

WHY SHOULD I CARE ABOUT MY PET'S TEETH?

Dental disease carries many risk factors for your pet's overall health. Bacteria can be absorbed into the bloodstream through the diseased tissue of the mouth and cause dam-

age and dysfunction of other major organs throughout the body. The lungs, heart, liver and the immune system, just to name a few, can all be seriously affected by dental disease. Most importantly, dental disease can decrease your pet's quality of life.

WHAT ARE THE SIGNS OF DENTAL DISEASE?

- Swollen, puffy or red gums
- Bad breath
- Loose teeth or teeth falling out
- Mouth or face pain
- Bleeding from the mouth
- Lethargy; Depression
- Poor grooming
- Excessive drooling
- Decreased or loss of appetite and weight loss
- Dropping food from mouth while eating
- Swelling of the face
- Discharge from the nose or eyes
- Pawing at the face

MANAGEMENT AND PREVENTION

Early detection of dental disease is vital. To detect dental disease before it negatively affects your pet's quality of life, regular dental evaluations at least every 6 to 12 months. This should be performed as part of your pet's regular preventive care exams. During this routine examination, your veterinarian will identify any problems or concerning areas in the mouth and of the teeth and recommend treatment.

Homecare is also an essential part of taking care of your pet's oral health. Brushing your cat or dog's teeth every day (or as often as you can) will promote good oral health and prevent potentially expensive surgeries down the road.

FEBRUARY IS NATIONAL PET DENTAL MONTH!

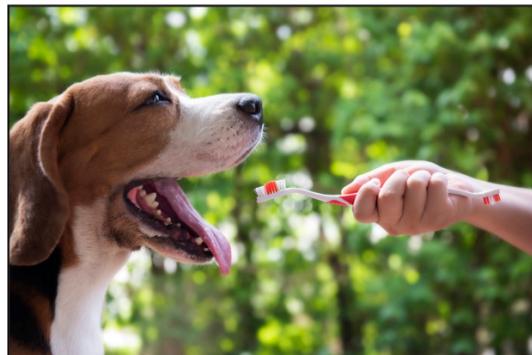


Photo: Dog to get his teeth brushed

Contact your veterinarian today to schedule a Complete Oral Health Assessment, Dental Cleaning and to discuss tooth brushing and dental products and diets.

ABOUT DR. VEJA TILLMAN, DVM

Dr. Tillman is a 2002 graduate of Tuskegee University School of Veterinary Medicine. Her veterinary practice and work experience focuses on health and wellness of pets. She is the owner of Just 4 Pets Wellness Center and can be reached at 239-270-5721. ❤️

The School District Of Lee County: Board Member Message

By Jada Langford Fleming



Photo: Jada Langford Fleming, District 6, Lee County School District Board Member

Happy New Year to all of our students, families, educators, and community. It has been encouraging to experience such a smooth transition to a new School board post-election. As we embark on a new year, we continue to celebrate successes, but also face some challenges ahead. While our community continues to rebuild from

the devastation of Hurricane Ian, we are celebrating the fact that our students and staff were back in the classrooms at record speed. However, our challenges remain far from over regarding decisions that must be made concerning our schools that were hit the hardest. The Lee County School Board is reviewing all aspects of the reopening of Fort Myers Beach Elementary School. These decisions will not be made without careful consideration of all possibilities. As an elected School Board member, it is my job to listen to the community and their concerns.

Safety is crucial to running a successful school district. The School Board has discussed the adoption of the Guardian Program in recent meetings. Students, parents, and staff should always feel safe when they are in school. The Guardian Program can add another layer of protection and we are currently examining what a design of this program may look like. Adding more School Resource Officers, implementing optional specialized training for staff members, and ensuring our schools are secure at all exits are just a few of the steps to this pro-

gram. I am a supporter of the Guardian Program and will not rest until I am assured all of our children and staff are safe. In the coming months, the School Board will also be looking closely at student achievement and graduation success rates. It is imperative that our children leave our school district knowing they are prepared for the next steps after graduation. As we embark on a new year and a new School Board, I am excited about working together to always put our children first. ❤️

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The Parking Lot Conversation That Saved My Life By Rachel Carter

In May of 2014, for the first time in years, I could stand on a bridge or a rooftop and not think about jumping off. It may sound dramatic, but it's true. For the first time in three years, I was dreaming about what the future could hold for me again. But now—miraculously—good things are happening. I got a new lease on life. I am now sharing my story with others as often as I can.

In the year 2000 I was diagnosed with Multiple Sclerosis (MS). In my fourteenth year of suffering this debilitating disease, I was cured using a hematopoietic stem cell transplant (HSCT), also known as a bone marrow transplant. This procedure is currently not available to most MS sufferers in the United States. MS affects an estimated 400,000 in the US, and more than 2.3 million people worldwide.

MS is a chronic condition that triggers the immune system to attack the myelin sheath of the brain and spinal cord. These attacks cause lesions that make the brain unable to communicate with the body, ultimately impairing the person's ability to control movement. When one has an exacerbation or "flair-up" it means part of the brain or spinal cord is literally being eaten away by one's own immune system. When the attack on the myelin stops, the person can be in remission for weeks, months or years. In the worst type of MS, a person never goes into remission. A person who does go into remission may recover some of the abilities they lost during the exacerbation, but they never know how much will be recovered.

MS is a terrifying disease. No two people have the same symptoms or experience the progression of the disease at the same rate. One could end up in a wheelchair within a year of diagnosis, or still be highly func-

tioning in 40 years.

When I was diagnosed, disease-modifying drugs were fairly new. (The first one was released in 1993). I immediately started on one. I know now that, despite appearances, none of them slowed the progress of my disease.

Because I had very few clinical symptoms (physical limitations that can be measured), I always felt fortunate that I was relatively unaffected by my disease. I got married, had three kids, worked full time, and worked out five days a week. I ran two full marathons and five half-marathons. Many times I told my doctor I was having an exacerbation, but because he was unable to measure significant weakness, he did not agree. I attribute his disbelief to my continued physical fitness. This cycle continued for over ten years.

In 2011, I started to decline—rapidly. This was when I shifted from being able to make choices about my life to merely surviving. Every day was filled with symptoms constraining what I could physically do. What energy I had went into survival activities – things I had to do, like feeding my kids. I could no longer make it through a full day's work; some days I was so fatigued I just stayed in bed. I definitely couldn't run; I couldn't even walk up a flight of stairs without resting halfway up. Cleaning the kitchen often lead to broken dishes—that is if I had the strength to lift a plate. I also had cognitive and emotional symptoms that were making it very hard to think or make decisions. I could no longer live a normal life. This all happened in the span of only two years.

The worst part of this period in my life was living in constant pain. The skin on my back felt like some-

one had poured a vat of boiling oil on me, my arms had a deep and constant ache and it felt like bugs were crawling under my skin. The only thing that could slightly help was a serious narcotic. I had to pop several pills every four hours just to be able to bear it.

My husband was struggling to work full time and take on most of the household duties. Seeing me take so many narcotics worried him greatly. My decline led to us asking for more help from family and friends. My older children went to live with relatives. I eventually went on disability because doing simple things like washing and feeding myself was so challenging.

As this steep decline began, my doctor of eight years said he felt he could no longer help me. He recommended that I go to Oregon Health and Science University (OHSU), considered a top hospital for specialties.

When I had my first MRI at OHSU, it turned out I had over 55 lesions and several "black holes" (spots in the brain where the matter is completely gone). I tried several new and dangerous disease-modifying drugs with very scary side effects—including death. It was clear I was losing the ability to live my life.

It all changed when I met another mother in the parking lot of my daughter's school who also had MS. She told me about a study in Chicago she was trying to get into offering the revolutionary treatment HSCT for MS. This radical treatment actually offered a cure. How had I not heard of this? I was being treated at one of the best research hospitals in the country, and I had to hear about a cure via word of mouth!

That very night, my husband and

I began our research. Even online, the only information available we found was from virtual "word-of-mouth" sources like blogs and Facebook pages. Still, the reported results coming out of the study in Chicago and countries like Italy and Russia were nothing short of miraculous.

The theory of HSCT curing MS is that if the compromised immune system is destroyed from high dose chemotherapy and regenerated using stem cells from the same individual, the new immune system will "reset" and not mistakenly attack the nerves.

HSCT is also a common treatment for several types of cancer, but is still considered experimental when used for MS. They are still conducting Phase 3 MS trials that have yet to be published in medical journals. It is reported to successfully cure MS in over 85 percent of cases, and the mortality rate is now less than one percent. My family knew immediately I had to pursue HSCT. This was my only option with hope.

HSCT treatment takes weeks or months in a hospital and then another year to reboot the immune system, followed by up to eight years to recover. This was not something my husband and I could pursue alone; we had to get a support team on board. I needed people to care for my children, I needed a caretaker with me during this treatment, and my husband had to continue to work. I found my family, church and friends were amazingly supportive.

I immediately made an appointment with my OHSU neurologist to discuss this treatment. She had never heard of a stem cell transplant being used for MS. She began to do

Continued on Page 7

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Continued from Page 6

her own research and was interested in possibly starting her own study at OHSU, but she and I agreed that I could not wait for that to come to fruition. Funding and establishing a medical study like this takes years, and the longer I waited for treatment the more disabled I would become.

Through additional weeks of research, we found that the treatment is being offered in a handful of states set up as studies, and several different countries including Russia, Italy, Germany, Sweden, Spain, Israel, South Africa, and India (this may not be a complete list). Our first choices were in the US, but once we found out that insurance would not likely cover the treatment, we started looking for a backup in other countries due to our family's economic limitations. For overseas possibilities we chose to restrict our search to Western Europe due to blood supply safety issues. After reviewing our choices, we applied to four very well-recognized programs, two in the US and two in

Europe. I did not meet the criteria for two studies, but was accepted in Seattle, WA and Florence, IT.

Eventually we zeroed in on the Seattle Cancer Care Alliance (SCCA), a program reputed to have done more stem cell transplants than any other facility in the world. After filing for insurance coverage, being denied, and losing all three appeals, we made the choice to pursue treatment in Italy. The price of treatment there was \$85,000 as opposed to \$400,000 at SCCA. My family came together to decide who would travel with me and who would watch the children. We had a plan!

While we were arranging for the treatment in Italy, my husband had been diligently working up the chain of command at his company, telling our story and advocating for a change of policy. One week before I was scheduled to leave for Italy, he got a call. His company's insurance had reversed the denial and was going to cover the cost of treatment in Seattle.

I finished HSCT treatment in Se-

attle in April of 2014, and just two months later I was nearly pain free. It took me eight years to recover completely, and nine to start running again. The process was frightening and often painful, but my pain is gone and I have my life back.

It is astonishing to me that a cure for MS exists, and yet American doctors who specialize in MS don't even know about it. I don't understand how this can be. If I had not met the right person at the right time, if I was still alive, I would still be living in constant pain and relying on relatives to help raise my children. As it is, I have the privilege of being able to say I will never take for granted how good it feels to live without pain. I will never complain about doing dishes or getting up in the morning.

HSCT is a very challenging treatment, but others with the disease must know there is a way to stop it. If sharing what happened to me can lift the medical veil of secrecy surrounding HSCT in the U.S., I'll know I'm using my reclaimed ability to make choices to help others,

and that my suffering wasn't in vain.

If you would like to read the whole story, buy my book *Enduring the Cure: My MS Journey to the Brink of Death and Back*. Available on Amazon in both paperback and kindle. ♥

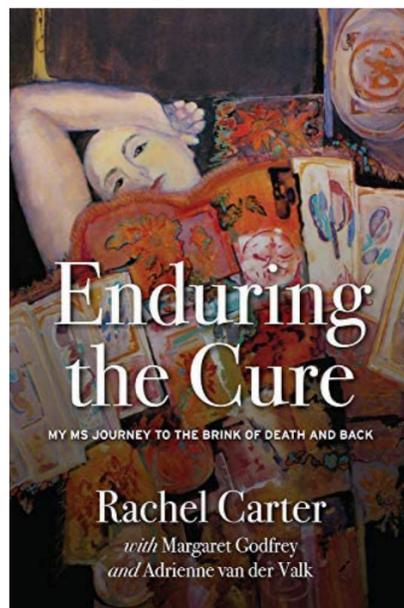


Photo: *Enduring the Cure: My MS Journey to the Brink of Death and Back* by Rachel Carter. Available on Amazon as a paperback or for kindle.

Continental Women's Club By Liz Paul

The Continental Women's Club will hold its monthly luncheon meeting on Thursday, February 2nd at 11:30 a.m. at The Hideaway Country Club.

Our program this month is a Jew-

elry Auction/Raffle Fundraiser for our Scholarship Program. CWC started awarding scholarships in 1998 and, to date, we have helped 53 High School Seniors by awarding over \$68,000 in scholarships. Please join us on February 2nd for a fun, re-

warding program.

Continental Women's Club is a social, cultural, and philanthropic organization established in 1975, and membership is open to women living in Lee County. Meetings are held

on the first Thursday of each month at 11:30 am at The Hideaway Country Club, 5670 Trailwinds Drive, Fort Myers 33907. The cost to attend the luncheon is \$25. Please call Liz Paul at 239-691-7561 for additional information or to make a reservation. ♥



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Taxpayers Should Collect All Required Info Before Going To A Tax Pro

Submitted By Markham Norton Mosteller Wright & Company, P.A.

Taxpayers using a professional tax preparer should make sure they have all their information readily available before their appointment. Collecting their information and getting copies of any missing documents before taxpayers sit down to prepare their return is critical to filing an accurate tax return. Having organized records and information in hand helps prevent filing errors and will likely create a smoother filing experience.

***This information is shared from the IRS COVID Tax Tip 2022-125*

Here's a list of information taxpayers may need. Not all information applies to all taxpayers.

- Social Security numbers of everyone listed on the tax return.
- Bank account and routing numbers for direct deposit

or information to make a tax payment.

- Forms W-2 from employer(s).
- Forms 1099 from banks, issuing agencies and other payers including unemployment compensation, dividends, distributions from a pension, annuity or retirement plan.
- Form 1099-K, 1099-MISC, W-2 or other income statement for workers in the gig economy.
- Form 1099-INT for interest received.
- Other income documents and records of virtual currency transactions.
- Form 1095-A, Health Insurance Marketplace Statement.
- Information to support claiming other credits or deductions, such as receipts for child or dependent care, college expenses or donations.

WHAT TAXPAYERS SHOULD DO IF THEY'RE MISSING OTHER DOCUMENTS

Taxpayers who didn't receive a W-2 or Form 1099 should contact the employer, payer or issuing agency and request the missing documents. This also applies for those who received an incorrect W-2 or Form 1099.

If they still can't get the forms, they can use Form 4852, Substitute for Form W-2, Wage and Tax Statement or Form 1099-R, Distributions From Pensions, Annuities, Retirement or Profit-Sharing Plans,



IRAs, Insurance Contracts, etc. If a taxpayer doesn't receive the missing or corrected form in time to file their tax return, they can estimate the wages or payments made to them, as well as any taxes withheld. They can use Form 4852 to report this information on their federal tax return. ♥

Montage Women's Club

By Rita Artwohl

The Montage Women's Club is a social and philanthropic club open to all women residing in Lee County. We meet on the fourth Thursday of each month at The Landings Yacht, Golf, and Tennis Club (community entry off McGregor Blvd between Cypress Lake Drive and College Pkwy). Meetings begin at 11:30 a.m. with a short social period followed by lunch at Noon and normally an informative speaker program. Within the organization are various interest groups for members' participation. Membership is open to both year-round and seasonal residents. We welcome you to visit Montage for a luncheon.

Our next meeting will be held on Thursday, February 23rd, and we are being joined by Linda Osika of Asian Jewelry, who will present a program on pearls. Additionally, Linda is organizing a fashion show with Montage member "models" displaying her jewelry and acces-

sories. All merchandise on display will be available for purchase. This should be an informative yet very fun meeting - who doesn't like to shop?

Luncheon fee is \$28.00 and the planned regular menu will be Caprese Salad with sliced Chicken Basil with olive oil reduction, vine ripened tomatoes, fresh Mozzarella, basil and Bermuda onion on baby spinach & romaine mix, and Chef's choice of dessert. The plant-based/vegan option entree will be crispy Panko Crust Tofu Steak with sweet chili glaze presented with Asian sauteed vegetable and jasmine rice, and fresh fruit for dessert.

If you would like to attend a Montage meeting, need further information, or would like to make a reservation, please call Rita Artwohl at (239) 703-7787. Reservations cut-off to attend this meeting is Noon, Thursday, February 16th. ♥

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The SWFL Business Network invites you to two of our Networking meals. Breakfast or Lunch, your choice!

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East Lee County Chamber Of Commerce Moves Offices

By Mike Welch



Photo: Mike Welch
Let Us Hear From You!
Contact Us At:
voicesoflehigh@gmail.com

The last part of January 2023 brought changes in the 50+ year history of the East Lee County Chamber of Commerce (formerly the Greater Lehigh Acres Chamber of Commerce). Today the East Lee County Chamber of Commerce includes the areas of Gateway, Alva and the eastern part of SR 80 (Palm Beach Blvd.) and the Babcock Ranch.

In the later part of 2022 the Board of Directors accepted the Board Chair's recommendation to move Chamber Offices to a more compact and efficient office set up and now has moved to the southern end of the Lehigh Town Centre next to Lehigh Showcase Properties located under the Centre's Clock Tower. The new address is:

East Lee County Chamber of Commerce
Lehigh Town Centre
25 Homestead Road North
SUITE 9
Lehigh Acres, FL 33936

Tel. 239-369-3322
 info@elccoc.org

The new offices are modern and answer the needs of today. An Open House is being planned in early March.

WE HEAR YOU!

A number of East Lee citizens have called the Chamber to express their concerns on increasing problems with traffic aggressiveness as well as dangerous drivers on our roads who now are the cause for daily accidents and tragedies. This is certainly a pri-

mary concern of law enforcement and we hope to have more information for you in the months ahead.

In the meantime Sheriff Marceno offers an article this month regarding the ongoing problem of car theft and the continued need for vigilance.

Wishing you a happy and safe 'season' ❤️



Lock It Or Lose It

By Sheriff Carmine Marceno



Photo: Sheriff Carmine Marceno, Lee County Sheriff

Using the Lee County Sheriff's Office social media platforms, speaking at numerous community gatherings and asking the media to share the message regarding locking your vehicles and securing valuables has somewhat reduced the number of vehicular burglaries in our county.

Still, each morning the calls for service regarding car and truck burglaries and thefts are received by our agency.

Despite the aforementioned pleas, which the Lee County Sheriff's Office has been issuing for years, the vast majority of reports that we receive involve unlocked vehicles. In some cases, vehicle fobs are left inside of these unlocked vehicles and result in the theft of the car or truck.

On occasion, reports are filed re-

garding stolen firearms that were left inside of the unlocked vehicle.

This is of enormous concern to me and it should be to you, as well. Stolen firearms pose an immense threat to everyone in the community...everyone.

At the very least, your unlocked vehicle will result in a sense of violation as you wake the following morning to find your glove box and center console torn open and your belongings strewn about your vehicle's interior and/or your driveway.

The very worst, should a firearm be removed from your vehicle, is that the stolen weapon is used to commit a violent crime, injure an innocent victim or result in the loss of life.

As we begin this new year, I am once again imploring Lee County residents and guests to remove all valuables from their vehicles, each and every evening, and to lock all vehicle doors. ❤️

Junior Achievement "Inspire" Event Will Unite Businesses And Students At SWFL's Largest Hands-On Career Expo To Date

Submitted By Josh Milton

Founded in 1994, Junior Achievement of Southwest Florida (JA) has been impacting the region's future workforce for over 28 years. One of its newest and exciting programs, JA Inspire, aims to launch 10,000 Lee and Collier County middle school students on an interactive career exploration on April 26 - 28, at FGCU's Alico Arena. This will be the largest career expo in Southwest Florida history, with thousands of students scheduled to connect and explore career opportunities with nearly 100 of the region's top employers and business professionals.

JA Inspire gives students real-world opportunities to envision future career options in Southwest Florida. The program includes in-classroom curriculum and a hands-on interactive career expo. Students will review career planning, skills, interests, and job outlooks and then engage with local businesses and learn skills that are in demand at the career fair. After the event, students and teachers

will debrief to discuss academic choices and career paths.

"This program is such a unique way for local businesses to engage and build their future talent pipeline with students from Southwest Florida," said Angela Fisher, president and CEO of Junior Achievement of Southwest Florida. "We are excited to host this event for the first time in-person and can't wait for businesses in our community to have the opportunity to inspire over 10,000 students from two school districts in person." Previously, this program was held virtually due to the pandemic.

Preparing young students with lessons that promote financial literacy and capability, work and career readiness, and entrepreneurship helps them better transition into adulthood. JA Inspire gets students one step closer to finding their passion, earning a college degree, and achieving career success.

Local business leaders across Southwest Florida are encouraged to participate. Expo booth space and sponsorship opportunities are available. Sponsorships are critical for Junior Achievement to continue providing life-changing programs to students in our community. You can make a difference in the lives of these students by emailing Stephanie Hoffman, Director of Operations at shoffman@jaswfl.org. To help support Junior Achievement of Southwest Florida and the future of local children, please visit www.JASWFL.org or call 239-225-2590.

ABOUT JUNIOR ACHIEVEMENT USA®

Junior Achievement is the world's largest organization dedicated to giving young people the knowledge and skills they need to own their economic success, plan for their future, and make smart academic and economic choices. JA programs are delivered by corporate and community volunteers, and provide

relevant, hands-on experiences that give students from kindergarten through high school knowledge and skills in financial literacy, work readiness, and entrepreneurship. Today, JA reaches more than 2.5 million students per year in 104 markets across the United States, with an additional 5.2 million students served by operations in 100 other countries worldwide. Junior Achievement USA is a member of JA Worldwide. For more information, visit www.ja.org.

Locally, Junior Achievement of Southwest Florida partnered with classroom business volunteers during the 2021-2022 school year to provide nearly 135,000 hours of instruction to nearly 14,800 students in 589 classes throughout Collier, Lee, and Charlotte counties. For more information on Junior Achievement of Southwest Florida, visit www.JASWFL.org, call (239) 225-2590 or email info@jaswfl.org. ❤️






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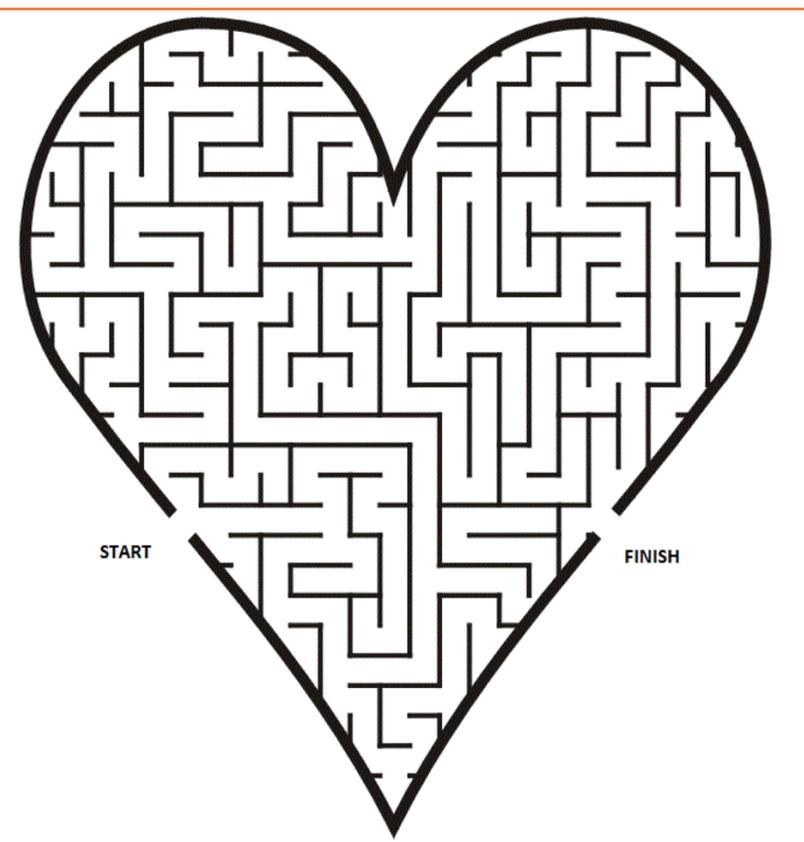
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February 6 National Chopsticks Day

Put away the forks and spoons, for today is National Chopsticks Day. They may or may not be new to you. But, for about 1/4 of the world's population, chopsticks are the eating utensils of choice for every meal. Chopsticks can be made of wood, bamboo, plastic, bone, fine china or metal. Chopsticks have been in use for over 5,000 years. They originated in China, and are used in virtually all Asian cultures. To participate in National Chopsticks Day, use chopsticks for all of your meals.

February 9 National Pizza Day

Why, this is an absolutely great day, as it is National Pizza Day. The vast majority of people, in America and around the world, love pizza and eat it on a regular basis. It is very versatile, with a huge assortment of things you can put on it, including meats, vegetables and fruits. And, don't forget the fish.. Anchovies! With all this variety, there is a pizza for just about everybody. It is very easy to enjoy National Pizza Day. Have some pizza today. To enjoy this day to the fullest, you need to make homemade pizza and have pizza for breakfast, lunch, dinner and as a snack.

February 11 Make a Friend Day

Do you have enough friends? The answer should be no. No matter how many friends we have, more of them increases our wealth. That's because friends are one of life's valuable assets. 'Ya just can't have too many friends. Make a Friend Day is a great opportunity to meet someone new, or do something to make a new friend. Making a new friend can be easier to do than you think. It often helps by smiling and just being friendly or helpful. Spend "Make a Friend Day" being just being friendly, and by doing special or nice things for others.

February 18 National Drink Wine Day

Now here's a day we all can enjoy, assuming you are 21 or older, of course. Today is National Drink Wine Day. Go down to the wine cellar, or the nearest liquor store, and select a very fine wine. Or, go rent a limo and go on a winery tour. Did you know wine bottles have been discovered dating back to 325A.D? Either way, pour a glass of wine and let's toast to National Drink Wine Day!

Important: Please drink responsibly. And, if you do drink, don't drive.

February 20 Cherry Pie Day

Cherry pie is America's second most popular pie, behind only apple pie in popularity. On Cherry Pie Day, celebrate today with a piece of pie, a cherry pie. If you really want to enjoy this day to the fullest, bake a cherry pie from scratch.

February 23 Play Tennis Day

Play Tennis Day is a great day to play tennis. After all, it's the objective of the day. Millions of Americans enjoy playing tennis. In addition to being a good sport, its good exercise, too. If the weather in your area keeps you from playing tennis today, then watching or reading about tennis is a great backup activity.

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

THE ROAR
 EAST LEE COUNTY NEWS

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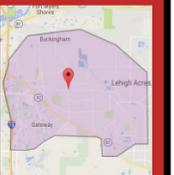


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