

### Where Are We? By Butch Swank - butch@goodladandswank.com



Photo: Butch Swank, President of Southwest Florida Business Alliance; Owner of Goodlad & Swank Insurance, LLC

If someone asks where you live and they're not very familiar with Florida, you say Fort Myers, right? Mentioning places like Bonita, Estero, or Lehigh usually gets you a blank stare. In these times when people argue over everything, I imagine one thing we can all agree on is that over the past twenty years, the city of Fort Myers and Southwest Florida, in general, have grown tremendously. After all, this place is pretty danged awesome, and that's exactly why we live here, right?

In sports, we've all heard the term momentum used by commentators. It's when your team can do nothing right or, if they have good momentum, they can do no wrong. It's so much fun when that happens and downright painful when your team doesn't have it. I am a fan of the Gators and Buccaneers and am far, far too familiar these days with the bummer side of momentum. Did you know that governments can have momentum, too? I took a second to look up some interesting numbers, and as I mentioned earlier, Southwest Florida is a huge place, so I focused my research only on the City of Fort Myers proper. In 1900, Fort Myers had a population of 943 and

grew to 51,971 by 2000. From 2000 to 2022, the City of Fort Myers added 40,274 people, making a grand total of 92,245, and that number is increasing rapidly. So, in twenty-two years, this one community within all of Southwest Florida added nearly as many people as it took to gain during the previous 100 years. That's astonishing growth!

Here's the part where you say, "Why is Butch giving me a math and history lesson while I'm supposed to be pleasantly enjoying my increasingly rare free time?" Great question! I am so glad you asked! I frequently write about different government departments, and my current favor-

ites are the Lee County Commission and the School District because I and many, many others see a big gap between what we want to see being done and what is actually being done. After seeing those recent population numbers, I had this moment where it became clear to me that what I'll call "Fort Myers" is stuck with the exact same momentum they've had for 100 years. To be fair, it certainly worked well for that period. Now, in the past 20ish years, they're falling behind, and I don't see a ton of evidence they intend to change anytime soon. The old saying "If it ain't broke, don't fix it" might be the most charitable way to characterize today's

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**Continued From Page 01:  
Where Are We? by Butch Swank**

approach by our elected officials responsible for managing this great place.

Traffic is probably the most obvious pain point. Still, there are others like over-development, lack of police in certain areas, chronically understaffed and poorly equipped schools, too few schools where they're most needed, bussing kids all over the county, which also adds to traffic, different organizations (like water utilities) doing the same jobs and bickering over the few resources they have, post-hurricane repair progress of traffic lights, etc, etc, etc.

Here's a specific example to highlight the challenge we face. The Lee County School District plans to build an Innovation School on Treeline Avenue. If you're unfamiliar, Treeline is a street just East of I-75 between Daniels and Colonial. Who lives on Treeline mostly? Affluent older people without kids. Why put a school focused on educating children for future technical careers in a place with so few kids? Fun fact time: Did you know that in Lehigh Acres, 71 out of 100 households have school-age kids, and for reference, in Estero, only 8 out of 100 homes have school-age kids? The obvious question is, why build an Innovation School in an area with so few kids and then make traffic even worse by bussing them from an area with kids to a place without kids? It makes even less sense when you learn the School District already owns multiple pieces of vacant land in Lehigh

Acres. Why would they not reconsider putting that school in Lehigh?

I think the answer is simple. The squeaky wheel gets the grease, and we aren't squeaking. Time is a luxury, and I certainly get how busy our lives are. We all also deal with a massive amount of distractions daily. Hey, you get zero judgment from me. I am guilty as charged there, too! But I want better for our community, and I believe you do too. How can you help? Again, I am so glad you asked! I propose you pick one thing that really chaps your hide. Do a five-minute Google search to find out what government entity is responsible for it and how to get in touch. Here comes the hard part: call them. I prefer a phone call because I can have a back-and-forth, which usually means I learn more and better understand how to make my voice heard. Everyone I've spoken with so far has been kind, very professional, and, most importantly, willing to help me with my issue. Imagine if thousands of us gave feedback on the things that bug us. Many voices saying the same thing is impossible to ignore, and if enough of us reach out, we can address almost every issue currently making this beautiful place less than it could be.

Together, we can change our local momentum for the better, so let's get after it!

We have two important upcoming events I want to share with you. A grassroots effort to incorporate Lehigh Acres is hosting a meeting to discuss the pros and cons of incorporation at 6:30 p.m., Tuesday, September 12, at the East Lee Li-

brary. They want to hear your voice, for or against, and have invited government officials who will attend. The other item is the Southwest Florida Business Alliance, where I serve as President, is having a meeting on Monday, September 25th. John Talmage, the Director of the Lee County Economic Development Office, will discuss the exciting growth coming to the East Lee area along with Nita Whaley, who has been responsible for a ton of the development Cape Coral has recently enjoyed. This luncheon will be held from 11:30 a.m. to 1:00 p.m. at the Plantation County Club on, you guessed it, Treeline! I'm thrilled to say we need to have it

there because our organization has grown so much that our previous place was too small to hold everyone. If interested, here is the website: <https://swflbusinessalliance.com>. Look, good things are happening, good people are working towards making this an even better place, and I write all this to ask that you make sure your very important voice is heard, too.

For Questions or remarks, please email [press@eastleenews.com](mailto:press@eastleenews.com) 🐾

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## Pet Preparedness By Dr. Veja Tillman, DVM

It is officially hurricane season in southwest Florida. It's time to get our pet(s) emergency and disaster ready. Whether it is the next hurricane or other natural disaster, or it is man-made, having a plan for your pets must be included with your family's emergency plan.

### GET A PET EMERGENCY KIT

A collection of basic supplies that you may need in the event of an emergency.

- Food and water for at least 3 days
- Pet medications (2 weeks supply replaced often to maintain their quality based on expiration dates.)
- Pet First Aid Kit
- Updated Pet Identification (microchip, ownership documentation, your contact information, pictures of you and your pet together, etc)
- Updated vaccination documents (include the name of your veterinarian with telephone number, address and email)
- Crate or carrier, harness or leash/collar
- Pet litter, paper towels, plastic bags, cleaning supplies
- Familiar items (favorite toys, bedding, treats, etc)
- Assemble kit in an easy-to-carry, waterproof tote; stored in an easily accessible area away from extreme temperature changes and keep this kit in a designated place ready in case you must leave home/ work quickly. Make sure all family members know where the kit is kept.
- Consult your veterinarian for advice on making a pet emergency kit that is appropriate for your pet's individual needs.

### HAVE AN EMERGENCY PLAN FOR YOUR PETS

- Identify family or friends who will be willing to take you and your pets in during and/or after an emergency.
- Locate hotels that are pet friendly outside of the evacuation/emergency area.
- Research local boarding facilities that are emergency shelters for pets incase you are not able to evacuate with your pet.
- Talk to your pet's veterinarian about emergency planning, especially if your pet has medical conditions that require consistent monitoring and supervision.
- Gather contact information for animal emergency treatment facilities locally and outside of the emergency zone.

### STAY INFORMED

- Be aware of the types of emergencies / disasters that can happen where you live and work.
- Sign up to receive local emergency alerts on your cell phone or email available through your city and county.
- Tune into your state and federal emergency management websites and social media for information from official sources.
- Become familiar with your local emergency response plan, evacuation routes, etc

### ABOUT DR. 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. 🐾



Photo: Pack Of Luggage With Pug Sitting In Dog Carrier And Waiting To Leave



Photo: Hurricane Season

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## Fort Myers Latin Music Festival Set for September 16 at Caloosa Sound Amphitheater

Submitted By Susan Bennett

Latin music lovers will rock the day and night away Saturday, Sept. 16, when well-known internationally-acclaimed artists from Cuba, Puerto Rico and South America perform at the first-ever Fort Myers Latin Music Festival at the Caloosa Sound Amphitheater on Edwards Drive in downtown Fort Myers.

The family-friendly event will include music, food trucks, and a kids' zone with four bounce houses and will run from noon to 10 p.m.

Headlining the music festival will be some of the most well-known artists in Latin music along with rising stars in the music industry. Among the performers will be:

- **Osmani Garcia** is a popular Cuban singer and songwriter known for the catchy and upbeat reggaeton and Latin music. Garcia participated in the National Festival of Cuba and received several awards. He co-founded El Duo de Cristal, which played three domestic Cuban tours with songs reaching number one on the Cuban charts

- **Lucy Grau** is a Miami-based singer and songwriter who has been dubbed the "Latin Disco Queen" for her soulful and electrifying performances. She masters both English and Spanish as she proves in her hits "Last Dance" and "On the Radio" (salsa version), the Donna Summer classics she chose as a rendition to the late singer.

- **The Celia Cruz All Stars** is a group of musicians and singers who once played with the legendary "Queen of Salsa," Celia Cruz. Fans call the group "classic Celia" with a funky, contemporary twist.

- **Bianca Leony** was born in Miami of Cuban-American parents who made the Latin rhythm part of her soul. Her grandmother Bianca Varela was a renowned opera singer in Cuba and is the inspiration for Leony's music.

The festival also will feature some rising Florida Latin stars, including Joe Hernandez y su Orchestra Clasica, Sessi, Aivy and DJ LEXX.

The festival will showcase a variety

of Latin music genres, including salsa, bachata, merengue, reggaeton, and more, according to organizers.

"Attendees can enjoy Latin cuisine, shop for unique crafts and souvenirs and experience the vibrant and colorful atmosphere of the festival," said organizer Eddie Latour of Nice Guys Productions. "The festival promises to be a fun-filled celebration of Latin culture that will bring people together and create lasting memories."

The event is presented by Hyundai of Fort Myers with a dozen other sponsors providing support.

A portion of the proceeds from the festival will support local non-profit organization Music aLIVE SWFL, formed in October, 2022, in the af-

termath of Hurricane Ian to preserve and promote live music in Southwest Florida. Music aLIVE SWFL will provide financial assistance, education and other support to local musicians and others that support the live music industry, Latour said.

Tickets are \$40 presale and \$50 at the door. Children under age 5 are free. VIP tickets cost \$150 and include VIP parking, buffet dinner from 3 Pepper Burrito, exclusive walk-in bathrooms, meet and greet with the performers, a VIP tent with shade and a designated area to dance by the stage. Tickets can be purchased at <https://outertix.com/niceguys/20>

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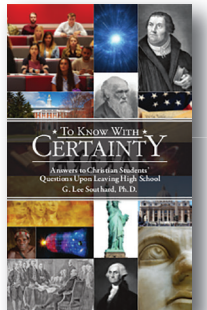
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# The Customer-centric Approach – A Lost Art Whose Time Has Come, Again!

By Alex Moffett, iD Legacy, Leadership Coaching

Maybe I'm just living in the old glory days of yesteryear and wishing they would return. I remember the day when...

You walked into an establishment, and people actually looked you in the eye and shook your hand. You were actually greeted enthusiastically and asked, "How may I be of service to you?" or "How may I help you?" When you asked a question, you weren't treated like you just asked this person to do something that is unreasonable, foreign, or impossible, making you feel as if you, yourself, were an imposition.

In those days, most businesses and retailers went out of their way to take care of their customers because they understood this simple truth...Customers come first! Why? Because without customers, there is no business, no profits, no paycheck! It was as simple as that! It seems gone are the days when we were happy to see a customer walk through the door, or the phone would ring, and we would get excited because we got the opportunity to take care of somebody and solve a problem. People were treated like we really mattered (not just in business, but in life) because we really did!

OK, maybe my frustration makes me delusional, maybe I am exaggerating slightly, or maybe I have high expectations and need to be more realistic. Maybe I'm just old and cranky and really need to get in tune with the times. I mean, I recently celebrated my 60th birthday, so I think it's fair to say that I am a little old-school or (at least according to my kids) just "old-fashioned" and a little behind the times. I accept that, although I prefer the term "vintage" - thank you very much!

If being old-fashioned means I still prefer personal, face-to-face human interaction, clear communication, ser-

vice with a smile, and simplistic care that says, "You are seen and heard as a person" rather than a mere potential money-grab...I'm in! Then, yes, guilty as charged, I am officially "old-fashioned."

But consider this: It's those good old-fashioned values that have inspired and required us as a society to develop and utilize soft skills that can turn any marketplace interaction from a transactional exchange to a more "customer-centric" relational experience. And, could it be that somehow those same "soft skills" that have been at the cornerstone of great customer experiences have now found themselves going by the way of the Do-do? So how did we get here?

In a world full of impersonal interactions via DIY online shopping, chatbots, social media DMs, self-checkout lines, automated tellers, and advanced AI phone responders, could it be that we have somehow forgotten the importance of the human touch? Honestly, half of the time, we don't even know if we are talking to a person.

Could the lockdown of the pandemic be a contributing factor as to why it seems we have lost the skills of talking and interacting with one another? Could it be why most marketplace interactions lately seem dry, impersonal, and transactional? Have our collective values been abandoned and replaced with apathy and simple goal-oriented exchanges with one another? Although I wish it weren't so, it appears to me that the importance of customer service and creating the perfect customer experience is, sadly, a fleeting, nearly lost art. So what's the solution?

Maybe we've got to get back to a customer-centric business focus! But what does it even mean to be customer-centric? It means a complete focus on pri-

oritizing the customer's experience in every aspect of your business, from the initial contact via marketing and social media to reception and phone engagement, from sales and product development to service and ongoing customer support in the back end. It is a deliberate and intentional fundamental understanding and practice of the old adage "Customer comes first" at the core of your company culture, and it shows!

If this feels good so far, imagine a company that offers the following:

- 1. Communication** – The company is excellent at communicating warmly and effectively because connection and clarity matter!
- 2. Perspective** – The company is in touch with your needs, motives, and values and strives to understand your perspective as a person first, then a potential customer.
- 3. Value** – The company is passionate about offering pressure-free, value-based solutions because they understand you work hard for your money, and only you get to decide how to spend it.
- 4. Transparency** – The company is transparent with its pricing and practices simply because they agree; trust is not simply given; it is earned.
- 5. Care** – The company is obsessed with the human touch, so whether it is remembering your birthday, personalizing your solutions or simply sending a considerate reminder text, they do it because they genuinely care!
- 6. Protection** – The company is committed to your protection via proper insurance, warranties, and written guarantees because they know sometimes things happen and you need to be covered.
- 7. Excellence** – The company is passionate about meeting, nay, exceeding your expectations because

you have standards, and you deserve to be wowed!

I admit that at the end of the day, I wrote this article partly out of my frustration and partly because I want to know that there are others who see what I see (because I'm not crazy). Can I get an "amen"?

But I also wrote it to spread a little hope! You may have to look a little harder to find the gold these days, but it's there. There are some giant retailers and small to midsize, family-owned and operated businesses that get it. And with everything that's going on, they are a lot easier to spot these days. So what do we do? How do we, as consumers, respond?

Well, we find the ones that offer more of a relational experience, and then we shout it from the rooftops so that others can have and enjoy the customer-centric service of yesteryear! And, of course, when we find companies like this, big or small, we naturally reward them with our dollars and loyalty. And whenever possible, we write a review and let the business know why you chose them over all others. After all, every dollar we spend is a vote in favor of who will stay and who will go. Because at the end of the day, when it comes to spending my hard-earned dollars, I am always in charge, and so are you. Maybe yesteryear isn't in the rearview mirror after all, and the glory days are, in fact, ahead of us all!

William and Alex Moffett are the founders and owners of PUR Home Services, a water treatment service company, as well as, iD Legacy which is a leadership Coaching company. To learn more about PUR Home Services please visit: <https://purhomeservices.com/> or to reach Alex, feel free to email: [press@eastleenews.com](mailto:press@eastleenews.com). 🐾



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## 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 Club at Pelican Preserve, 9802 Pelican Preserve Blvd, Fort Myers 33913 (community entry off Treeline Avenue between Colonial Blvd and Daniels Pkwy).

Activities begin at 10:30 a.m. with a short social period, a business meeting at 11:15 a.m., followed by lunch at Noon, and normally an informative speaker program, ending at 2:00 p.m. 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, September 28, and our planned speaker will be Mr. Tom Donoghue of Hearts and Homes for Veterans. This non-profit organization is run by veterans who help their fellow veterans end homelessness, provide low-income veterans and their families with everyday life necessities, and aid returning veterans repatriate back into the



**Photo: Hearts and Homes for Veterans inc. was formed not just to be another charity, but to end homelessness and assist low income veterans in SWFL.**

SW Florida community.

Luncheon fee is \$28.00 and the planned regular menu will be roasted pork loin with tropical relish, coconut rice, assorted squashes, tomato fried plantains, and key lime pie. The plant based / vegan entree option will be blackened tofu with fresh fruits and berries 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, September 21st.

## Continental Women's Club

By Liz Paul

Continental Women's Club is a social, cultural, and philanthropic organization established in 1975, with membership open to women living in Lee County. Our major fundraising efforts each year focus on our Scholarship Fund. In June of this year, we awarded a \$2500 scholarship to each of three graduating senior girls from Lee County High Schools.

Our next Luncheon event, on Thursday October 5th, will feature

a presentation by students from a local Arts/Theater Program.

Our Luncheon 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. Reservation deadline for October 5th is Tuesday, September 26th. Please call Liz Paul at 239-691-7561 for additional information or to make a reservation.



# September Programs At East County Regional Library

Submitted By Courtney Barr

This month's roster of activities at East County Regional Library offers topics for all ages. The following activities are free to the public:

### ADULT PROGRAMS

**English Café** | 6 p.m. Wednesdays, September 6, 13, 20, 27

**East County Craft Club: Personalized Tote Bags** | 2 p.m. Saturday, September 9

**Chess Anyone?** | 2 p.m. Mondays, September 11, 18, 25

**Book Discussion: "Now Is Not the Time to Panic" by Kevin Wilson** | 3:30 p.m. Monday, September 11

**Download Drop-In** | 11 a.m. Tuesdays, September 12, 26

**Knit and Stitch** | 5 p.m. Wednesdays, September 13, 27

### CHILDREN'S PROGRAMS

**Toddler Tales** | 10:30 a.m. Tuesdays, September 5, 12, 19, 26

**Family Storytime** | 10:30 a.m. Wednesdays, September 6, 13, 20, 27

**Preschool Storytime** | 10:30 a.m. Thursdays, September 7, 14, 21, 28

**Kids Read Down Fines** | 11 a.m. – Noon Saturday, September 9 & 2 – 6 p.m. Mondays, September 11, 18, 25

**Read to the Dogs** | 11 a.m. Saturday, September 9

**Build It at the Library** | 1 p.m. Saturday, September 16

**Baby Rhyme Time** | 10:30 a.m. Saturday, September 23

**Bilingual Storytime and Author Visit** | 10:30 a.m. Saturday, September 30

### TEEN PROGRAMS

**High School Game Day** | 2 p.m. Friday, September 1

**Library Teen Talk** | 2 p.m. Tuesdays, September 5, 12, 19, 26

**Kids Read Down Fines** | 11 a.m. – Noon Saturday, September 9 & 2 – 6 p.m. Mondays, September 11, 18, 25

**Chess Anyone?** | 2 p.m. Mondays, September 11, 18, 25

**Welcome Back High Schoolers Party** | 2 p.m. Wednesday, September 13

**High School Movie** | 2 p.m. Wednesday, September 20

**TAG: Teen Advisory Group** | 5 p.m. Tuesday, September 26

The East County Regional Library is located at 881 Gunnery Road in Lehigh Acres. For more information about a program or to register, please call the library at (239) 533-4200. Check the Lee County Library System's website at [www.leelibrary.net](http://www.leelibrary.net) to find out about programs at other locations. Call the host library, or Telephone Reference at (239) 479-INFO (4636), for more information about a specific program.

To receive updates from Lee County Government, sign up for the newsletter here: [www.leegov.com/resources/newsletters](http://www.leegov.com/resources/newsletters). 🐾

## Blessings In A Backpack Currently Feeding 7,300 SWFL Students

Submitted By Lindy Kleivo

Blessings in a Backpack of SWFL surpassed a significant milestone in its mission to eradicate childhood hunger in the region. As of August 2023, the organization is now providing essential weekend meals to an astounding 7,300 students who would otherwise go hungry over the weekends. This exponential growth is attributed to the extension of their services to include schools in Charlotte County, a community where many students are facing homelessness and food insecurity.

Did you know 59% of students in Florida are eligible for free or reduced lunch? These kids eat meals at school during the week but are without access to affordable, healthy food on Saturday and Sunday. The consequences are much more than a growling stomach. Hunger can cause many physical health problems. It can shorten a child's attention span, lower their IQ, and keep them from making good grades.

Blessings in a Backpack of SWFL has long been dedicated to ensuring that children have access to adequate nutrition even outside of school hours. With the addition of two new programs, the organization is taking an even greater step toward alleviating hunger among vulnerable students. The first of these programs will commence at the end of August, with 150 children expected to benefit from this initiative.

"We are beyond grateful for the support we have received from our community, donors, and volunteers," said Cecilia St. Arnold, Executive Director of Blessings in a Backpack of SWFL. "By expanding our services to include Charlotte County, we are addressing the critical issue of childhood hunger in Southwest Florida and its devastating impact on academic performance and overall well-being."

The expansion into Charlotte County comes at a crucial time when the community's youth face challenges due to devastating Hurricane Ian,

food shortages, and increased prices. By offering nutritional meals on weekends, Blessings in a Backpack seeks to bridge the gap and provide children with the sustenance they need to grow, learn, and thrive.

"We firmly believe that no child should ever have to worry about where their next meal will come from," St. Arnold continued. "With the support of our dedicated volunteers and the generosity of our donors, we are making a tangible difference in the lives of thousands of students, enabling them to focus on their education and dreams for a brighter future."

Blessings in a Backpack of SWFL urges the public to continue supporting their cause, whether through donations, volunteering, or raising awareness about childhood hunger in the region. Together, we can ensure that every child has the nourishment they need to reach their full potential. For more information on how to get involved or to donate, please visit <https://swfl.blessingsinabackpack.org> or contact [cecilia@blessingsinabackpack.org](mailto:cecilia@blessingsinabackpack.org).

### BLESSINGS IN A BACKPACK HELPS PREVENT CHILDHOOD HUNGER

Blessings in a Backpack SWFL serves over 7,300 students through 33 school-based programs located throughout Lee, Collier, and Charlotte Counties. In these schools, test scores, reading skills, positive behavior, general health, and school attendance have improved dramatically due in part to students receiving the nourishment they need throughout the week and the weekends.

Kids are our future; you can help secure theirs. A \$130 donation will feed a child for one full school year. Gifts of all sizes are welcome through the donation portal at <https://swfl.blessingsinabackpack.org/> or via mail at P.O. Box 61402 Fort Myers, FL 33906. All contributions are tax-deductible. 🐾



Photo: Children receiving meals from Blessings in a Backpack.

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# Hurricane Idalia – A Clarion Call For Prep And Planning For The Height Of Hurricane Season

By Mike Welch



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

At this writing Idalia has left Florida leaving destruction and heartache for the people of the Big Bend area of our state not seen in generations. Certainly, our region feels and understands much of what they endure. And our people are responding. The Salvation Army of our region left for the Big Bend and are

now situated on the ground as many other units of the Army from the SE United States are making their way to the area. The Red Cross and other organizations are setting up relief services.

We as a community can help with our treasure and time but you can also take some steps while there is time. Have a plan. Be prepared. Ask the simple questions now and not when the crisis is at hand:

- Do I vacate my home?

- Where should I go if I evacuate?
- Make arrangements now.
- Your pets? Are they ready to Evacuate?
- Check in on vulnerable relatives and neighbors.
- Do you have enough medications?
- Do you have enough food?

These are arrangements to be made for now. Get after your friends if they have not given it much thought. Our planning helps government services out given the work

and many times the selfless service of our sheriff's office personnel as well as our fire and rescue service professionals. Remember, the local hospitals are not shelters. For your planning please visit Lee County Government at [www.leegov.com](http://www.leegov.com) and for a copy of a Hurricane Prep. Booklet call the East Lee County Chamber and I'll be happy to mail you one. Office: 239-369-3322

Wishing you and your family and friends the best for the remainder of the storm season. 🐾

## IRS: Those Impacted By Idalia Qualify For Tax Relief; Oct. 16 Deadline, Other Dates Postponed To Feb. 15

Provided by IR-2023-159

The Internal Revenue Service today announced tax relief for individuals and businesses affected by Idalia in parts of Florida. These taxpayers now have until Feb. 15, 2024, to file various federal individual and business tax returns and make tax payments.

The IRS is offering relief to any area designated by the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA). Currently, 46 of Florida's 67 counties qualify. Individuals and households that reside or have a business in these counties qualify for tax relief, but any area added later to the disaster area will also qualify. The current list of eligible localities is always available on the disaster relief page on IRS.gov.

### FILING AND PAYMENT RELIEF

The tax relief postpones various tax filing and payment deadlines that occurred from Aug. 27, 2023, through Feb. 15, 2024, (postponement period). As a result, affected individuals and businesses will have until Feb.

15, 2024, to file returns and pay any taxes that were originally due during this period.

This means, for example, that the Feb. 15, 2024, deadline will now apply to:

- Individuals who had a valid extension to file their 2022 return due to run out on Oct. 16, 2023. The IRS noted, however, that because tax payments related to these 2022 returns were due on April 18, 2023, those payments are not eligible for this relief.
- Quarterly estimated income tax payments normally due on Sept. 15, 2023, and Jan. 16, 2024.
- Quarterly payroll and excise tax returns normally due on Oct. 31, 2023, and Jan. 31, 2024.
- Calendar-year partnerships and S corporations whose 2022 extensions run out on Sept. 15, 2023.
- Calendar-year corporations whose 2022 extensions run out on Oct. 16, 2023.
- Calendar-year tax-exempt organizations whose extensions run out on

Nov. 15, 2023.

In addition, penalties for the failure to make payroll and excise tax deposits due on or after Aug. 27, 2023, and before Sept. 11, 2023, will be abated as long as the deposits are made by Sept. 11, 2023.

The IRS disaster relief page has details on other returns, payments and tax-related actions qualifying for relief during the postponement period.

The IRS automatically provides filing and penalty relief to any taxpayer with an IRS address of record located in the disaster area. These taxpayers do not need to contact the agency to get this relief.

It is possible an affected taxpayer may not have an IRS address of record located in the disaster area, for example, because they moved to the disaster area after filing their return. In these kinds of unique circumstances, the affected taxpayer could receive a late filing or late payment penalty

notice from the IRS for the postponement period. The taxpayer should call the number on the notice to have the penalty abated.

In addition, the IRS will work with any taxpayer who lives outside the disaster area but whose records necessary to meet a deadline occurring during the postponement period are located in the affected area. Taxpayers qualifying for relief who live outside the disaster area need to contact the IRS at 866-562-5227. This also includes workers assisting the relief activities who are affiliated with a recognized government or philanthropic organization.

The IRS may provide additional disaster relief in the future.

The tax relief is part of a coordinated federal response to the damage caused by this storm and is based on local damage assessments by FEMA. For information on disaster recovery, visit [disasterassistance.gov](http://disasterassistance.gov). 🐾

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# Summer Greetings from Lehigh Community Services

Submitted By Lehigh Community Services

We're around the corner from our one year anniversary of IAN. Let's plan ahead and continue to collaborate together to meet our community's needs. The pandemic and IAN brought agencies together as never before. While we couldn't solve everyone's issues, together we helped to make things better here in Lehigh Acres. A hard lesson was learned by all of us, share resources, prioritize the most important and critical problems, work together to make it happen showing unity to our community. For example, last week we received a monumental amount of supplies from San Carlos Fired Department. The L.A. Fire Dept., & Cape Coral Fire Dept. joined in the delivery, unloading, and shelving the supplies. LCS shared the bounty with the Salvation Army, Christ at the Crossroads, New Life, & Servants of Christ/Rise Church. Many hands make light work and it took all of us working together to distribute those supplies. Our pantry clients were happy campers to receive a case of toilet paper instead of a couple of rolls! Our homeless clients got small coolers, other agencies got hand sanitizer, and masks. Those supplies were left over from the IAN distribution. Project collaboration results in serving

more clients.

Did you know that LCS has served a total of 30,563 Lehigh residents through July 31, 2023? What will the next few months bring? We do what we do with a passion. But it takes a small army: staff, volunteers, administration, and funding to accommodate the needs. Funds are used for various projects. Such as, our upcoming holiday happenings. Holiday food baskets, Senior Christmas Party, bus passes, gas cards, emergency help, etc. Because, just like you, we have utility bills, daily expenses, gasoline (yikes!) emergency repairs, & payroll, etc. We proudly serve as the United Way House for Lehigh Acres, allowing us a monthly donation but we have to stretch it to the limit! It's no secret we hold fundraisers during the year to make our budget. For example, our next fundraiser is our golf scramble September 16, at River Hall Golf Club. LCS needs, sponsors, teams, raffle baskets, and volunteers to make this event successful. Will you play a part in this event with us?

Another fundraiser was our Rain Barrel painting project, a collaboration with FGUA, and the Senior Center

raising funds to help pay Senior's water bills. It was a fun, productive event with professional & amateur artist displaying their talents. Lehigh Acres has a wealth of resourceful people. Our third annual rain barrel painting project will be April 2024.

In January, our Duck Race at "Wings Over Water" collaboration with LAM-SID at Harns Marsh was fun and prosperous for our agency & participants. Harns Marsh is a beautiful gem and valuable resource in our community. In March, we hold our St. Patrick's Day corn beef & cabbage dinner – a delicious, & delightful evening with entertainment.

We also invest time and resources in our homeless population. Our wish list for our homeless are phone chargers, and tools to repair their bicycles. Consider donating these supplies, if you please? We all know that Lehigh Acres is in desperate need of a homeless shelter. Can you help? They need a place to shower and wash their clothes, because they're unable to travel to Fort Myers for the resources there. One of our biggest needs is pet food for our clients. Many folks need pet food for their

animals. And you know how important that is if you love pets!

Your donations make a difference. Because of you, we are able to provide: references to available resources, food, hygiene kits, bus passes, gas cards, literacy classes, Sign language classes, Senior Boxes, bread & sweets, food stamp, Medicaid, & financial appointment. Free income tax preparation. All are subject to availability, of course. Another did you know- We've had over a MILLION dollars returned to this community for the past 9 years!

Collaboration not duplication is key. The non-profit arena is growing and expanding to meet the needs of our exploding population. LCS strives to be prepared, & pivot when necessary to meet challenges, share resources, using our time, talents, and treasures wisely to provide the best we possibly can for our residents. LCS mission is to provide emergency services to residents of the community while promoting self-sufficiency. Please contact our office for more information 239-369-5818 or [www.lehighcommunityservices.com](http://www.lehighcommunityservices.com) Thank you for your support of LCS! 🐾

## Disaster Relief Scams, Scorching Summer And Roadway Safety In Our East District

By Sheriff Carmine Marceno



Photo: Sheriff Carmine Marceno, Lee County Sheriff

The video and still photographs depicting loss of life and property, from natural disasters around the globe, are devastating and heartbreaking, especially

to those in Southwest Florida who recently experienced the decimation brought on by Hurricane Ian.

While an immeasurable number of volunteers and relief agencies tirelessly and selflessly work to help those in need, catastrophe and misfortune bring scammers and fraudsters to the surface. Reports of fraudulent email and text messages are already being reported, to no one's surprise, across the nation.

Fraudulent "Go Fund Me" accounts, and credible-sounding relief agencies, spring up immediately following these catastrophic events. While some may be reputable and may have good intentions, many are deceitful and dishonest.

Should you elect to make a financial donation, please ensure that your funds will be used as intended. There are numerous reputable agencies working to assist the victims of the

deadly and horrific wildfires, flooding and severe storms. It is recommended that one invests a bit of time researching the relief agency to which one is considering donating to. Gather information regarding the intended use of donated funds and verify that the agency has experience in disaster relief.

Agencies verified by the Better Business Bureau Standards for Charity Accountability can be viewed by visiting <http://give.org/>.

### THE SWELTERING HEAT

The blistering temperatures are forcing us to make changes to our daily routines requiring additional water consumption and more time indoors. The sweltering heat requires similar considerations to be made for our animal population... both domestic and livestock.

The Lee County Sheriff's Office reminds pet and animal owners that all animals are at risk when temperatures reach these record levels. Please ensure that your pets and animals have access to water and shade. Please be certain to avoid leaving pets in parked cars under any circumstances.

### ROADWAY SAFETY AND STREET-RACING

dren and school buses are seemingly everywhere and must be protected. Patrol, Traffic and unmarked units are closely monitoring school zones and bus routes across the county. Drive cautiously!

Roadway safety, student transportation safety and street-racing enforcement efforts will continue across the county. We will continue to dedicate resources to enforcing traffic laws and making Lee County Roads safer for all residents and guests. 🐾



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Dates & descriptions provided by [www.holidayinsights.com](http://www.holidayinsights.com)

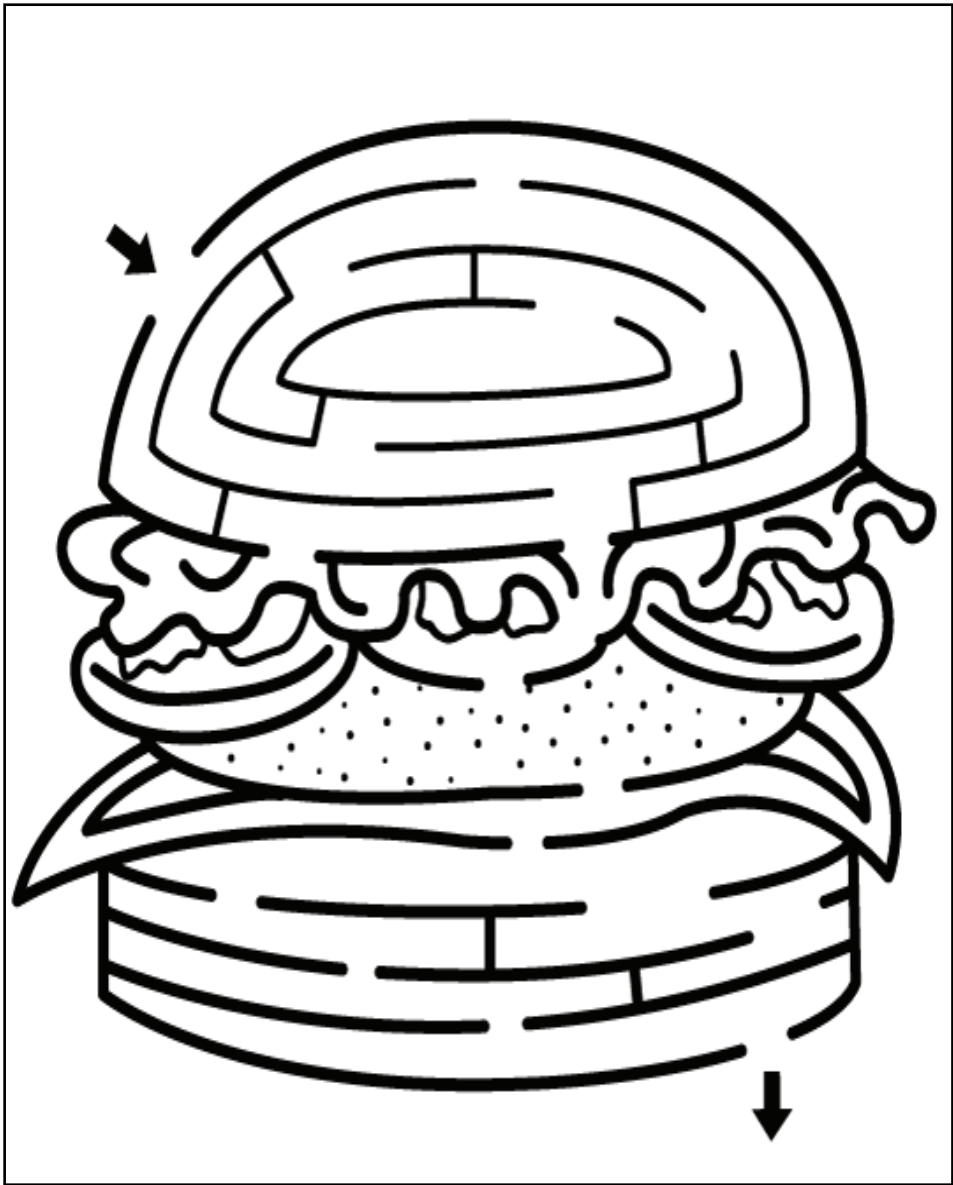
**September 2 International Bacon Day**  
International Bacon Day celebrates crispy strips of salted pork...Bacon! This is a day to thoroughly enjoy bacon at every meal. Snack time, too. It is recommend that you enjoy bacon today in social gatherings. So, go ahead, and have a bacon party!!

**September 12 National Chocolate Milkshake Day**  
National Chocolate Milkshake Day is an opportunity for chocoholics to savor and enjoy. The weather may have cooled off. But, our appetite for chocolate, specifically chocolate milk shakes, hasn’t cooled off one iota. It’s time to enjoy a cold, thick, frothy chocolate milk shake. Chocolate is the most popular milkshake flavor. For those of you who prefer other flavors, only a chocolate milkshake will do today. Did You Know? Among the ingredients of the original milkshake was whiskey! It also included heavy cream. It took more than a century to evolve into the milkshake as we know it today.

**September 18 National Cheeseburger Day**  
Celebrate National Cheeseburger Day by firing up the grill, and cooking cheeseburgers. You can do so for lunch or dinner.... or both! Any kind of cheese will do. Try a different cheese, if your adventuresome. For the carb conscious, eat your burgers without the buns.

**September 25 National Comic Book Day**  
National Comic Book Day is a super cool day. Share a comic book with a friend today. We don’t know of anyone who doesn’t like a good comic book. Comic books are great reading. They either tell an ongoing story, provide humor, or offer intrigue and suspense. In all comic books, good eventually prevails over evil. So, comic books always make us feel good.

**September 28 National Good Neighbor Day**  
Ah, Good Neighbor Day. It’s definitely a good thing. Being good neighbors is an important part of the social fiber that makes this country so great. Therefore, it seems only fitting that one day a year honors good neighbors.



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

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ANSWER KEY  
SEPTEMBER 2023

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

THE ROAR

EAST LEE COUNTY NEWS

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PRODUCTION • DESIGN

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Marlene Asta

CUSTOMER RELATIONS

David Foetisch

DISTRIBUTION

East Lee County News is a Direct Mail Publication.  
Additional copies may be picked up in boxes in the marketplace.  
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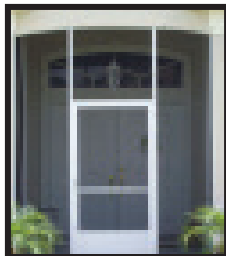
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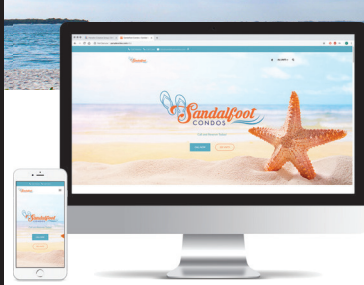
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