

THE ROAR

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Listening, Learning, And Understanding

By Butch Swank - butch@goodladandswank.com



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

I had a conversation with my son right after dinner because when we were done, he'd promptly gone outside to the redneck fridge and grabbed an Uncrustable. If you're unfamiliar, an Uncrustable is a frozen pre-made peanut butter and jelly sandwich with no crust. Kids LOVE them. Earlier, I'd clearly heard his Mom say, "No Uncrustables before or after dinner, honey. It's best to save them for when you must rush out the door and haven't eaten yet. That way, you won't go hungry." That's a very motherly, nice, and reasonable approach, right? Easily understood, I'd add.

Back to our post-dinner conversation: "Why would you grab this sandwich after dinner when you were just reminded not to?" He said, "I don't know. I guess I was not listening." I

said, "But you knew she said it and even acknowledged it, correct?" "Yes, Dad." Suddenly, a light bulb appeared in my head, and I said: "Son, why do you think your Mom took the time to say that?" Just then, a remarkable thing happened; he explained that if he kept eating them, they would all be gone when he really needed one. This teenage kid went from listening to understanding. Behold, a Christmas miracle!

That got me thinking. I've spent a lot of time working with/battling the Lee County School District. I do so because when our kids began school, at least a few schools around town had A ratings, and several had B's. Then, it seemed the District's approach and the quality of education changed. They started moving principals, administrators, and teachers all around the county. It seems the thinking was to move effective administrators to failing schools to bring them up. After two to three years, sure enough, scores improved, and this solid administra-

tor was then yanked out and sent to another failing school. That meant stability was gone again, so kids and teachers had to re-adjust to yet another new environment. It was like a principal Whack-A-Mole approach to fixing education. Also, think about how the families of the school that had a great administrator removed feel about the rationale their principal was doing too good of a job for too long. I know exactly how they feel. Around 2010, the elementary school we'd chosen for our kids had consistent A ratings, and get this: a 100+ person list for teachers waiting to teach there. It's pretty much been C's since then, and the school, like many others, faces an ongoing critical teacher shortage. Teaching is hard enough. Why would the District continually do this and make it harder?

Another challenge is that schools must use standardized tests that determine the school's and teachers' relative success or failure. If we base their "success" solely on these tests,

it stands to reason that the schools would focus on these tests alone, and I cannot blame them for that. If I were a principal, I would do the exact same. Well, time has passed, and the results are becoming clear: our students are performing worse, and I see no signs of a change in direction on the horizon. These tests don't accurately assess the school and, I argue, force schools to not focus on educating children but instead focus singularly on programming children for the standardized test. It's a cycle that must end.

It seems that Departments of Education across America simply aren't listening to the chorus of data clearly showing this decline. It's also clear they don't understand the predicament they've put the entire school system into. A funny reality is that as some people age, they get cranky and say stuff like, "Things were better back in my day." Regarding education, I totally agree with that statement, which I guess also means that

CONTINUED ON PAGE 2

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CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

I'm officially old! However, in this case, I have mountains of data to objectively back up my cranky position. Sometimes, problems that are seemingly incredibly complex can be solved by simple solutions. I say there is a solution – the critical hiccup is whether the powers that be are willing to try to understand where they've gone wrong.

My simple solution is to acknowledge that our educational system switched from teaching methods that fostered a real understanding of subject matters to only teaching with the goal of kids passing standard-

ized tests. This shifts teachers from real teaching to focus on whatever the standardized test requires that school year instead. We've all taken a math test where we knew just enough to pass, but that knowledge was gone from our brains in weeks. Pretty much everyone remembers that one special teacher. They believed in you and, no matter the subject somehow made learning fun and, dare I say, enjoyable. If we could focus on figuring out what makes those teachers so magical and, in turn, develop an educational best practices kit to share with all teachers, kids would no longer learn just enough to pass. Because of this, they'd truly understand the subject and have a

lifetime of knowledge instead of a few weeks of passing familiarity. The current system gives them no real-world education because their learned skills only center around performance on a bureaucratically designed exam. Let's work towards ditching these standardized tests. Let's begin to allow high-performing administrators to stay in their schools. Let's also allow them to mentor assistant principals in how they do their jobs so well and then send these well-trained administrators off to the schools that need help. This ensures the high-performing school stays that way, and then the school that needs help has an emerging new leader taught by the

best. If good principals can stay put, it stands to reason, so will the teachers. Teachers can again buy homes near where they teach without fear of being re-assigned across the county, and, in a few years, we'll begin to have real community schools that are thriving again. Let's stop this focus on a goal of standardization and begin to focus on what really counts: educating our kids with the knowledge and skills that give them the best chances to have a fulfilling and successful life. Education has to stop "listening" to these standards, begin teaching again, and pursue the true goal of education, which is for kids to truly understand what they've been taught. 🐾

“New” Canine Respiratory Condition

By Dr. Veja Tillman, DVM

The “new” canine respiratory illness has gained much media attention since its first reporting earlier in the year. This condition has been included in a group of canine respiratory conditions referred to as Canine Infectious Respiratory Disease Complex, or CIRDC. CIRDC respiratory conditions are ever present in our environment. Most of the diseases are seen and treated by veterinarians on a regular basis. Others are seen less often.

Currently, there is no clearly identified infectious agent for this illness and not enough confirmed cases to say whether it is of immediate concern for the pet population. However, several veterinary agencies are making efforts in the identification of its cause. Until the cause of this condition is identified and a determination of whether or not it is truly “nationwide”, our pets should be monitored closely, and general precautions should be taken.

The most common clinical sign of this illness is a honking cough that may sound like retching (or attempts to vomit). This cough may be wet or dry, mild or severe. Other signs include sneezing, discharge from the nose and eyes, lethargy, decreased appetite, vomiting, labored breathing (when pneumonia develops). Signs may be mild or severe. Complications of this

condition include pneumonia, chronic tracheobronchitis, and chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD) to name a few. Some pets have died due to complications related to this condition. Not all dogs show the same signs and signs do not develop in a particular order. So, pay close attention to any changes in your pet's health.

Currently, there is no one size fits all standard treatment for this illness. Typical treatment may include antibiotics, an anti-inflammatory agent and possibly a cough suppressant. However, veterinarians have been treating various respiratory diseases of dogs for a longtime. Discuss your concerns with have been treating various respiratory diseases of dogs for a longtime. Discuss your concerns with Remember, early treatment increases the chance of a healthier outcome.

Remember, early treatment increases the chance of a healthier outcome.

- **Vaccination:** make sure that your pets is vaccinated completely for diseases that cause respiratory symptoms. This includes Distemper (Adenovirus), Parainfluenza, Bordetella (kennel cough) and Influenza. Keep in mind, some of these vaccines require a booster within 3-4 weeks after the first

dose to give your pet the best immune response.

- **Socialization:** While we do not want to disrupt our pet(s) social calendars, we must also be careful to monitor our pet's exposure to potential sources of infection. This would include daycare, grooming (including mobile grooming), dog parks and any other types of social gatherings for pets that do not live in the same household. It is recommended to limit your pet's socialization to smaller well-known groups of similarly vaccinated pals. Also, consider avoiding pets that have recently traveled out of your area (for at least 2 weeks). They may carry potential infections that may harm your pet, even if they are not currently showing clinical signs.

- **Fomites:** Fomites are objects that may harbor potential contaminants (bacteria, viruses, fungus, chemicals, etc). Examples of these would be food bowls, water dishes, toys, bedding, clothing, unsanitized hands, etc). Frequent sanitation, cleaning and hand washing is highly recommended to decrease the potential of passing on germs from pet to pet and from pet to human and vice versa.

- **Medical care:** It is best to have your pet seen by your veterinarian immediately if signs of illness are noticed. The sooner the better. Delays in evaluation and treatment can cause worsening of signs and increases the potential of passing on the contagion to other pets. Treating at the earliest signs of illness generally leads to a better outcome than waiting for the signs to get worse and then starting treatment.

Be diligent in recognizing changes in your pets health and normal routine. Discuss with your veterinarian any signs of illness that your pet may be experiencing. There is no one size fits all when it comes to treating respiratory diseases. So, working closely with your veterinarian is the best way to ensure that your pet receives the best recommendation for their individual needs.

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. 🐾

New Primary Care Practice Opening

By Dr. Khalid Sabha, MD



Photo: Dr. Khalid Sabha, MD, Fort Myers Primary Care & Wellness.

Fort Myers Primary Care and Wellness is currently welcoming new patients.

Dr. Sabha, MD, CMD, is excited to announce the opening of his new primary care practice conveniently located across from Gulf Coast Medical Center, just off Metro Parkway.

Dr. Sabha completed medical school at St George's University and did his residency in family practice at St. Joseph Hospital in New York. With over 18 years of clinical expertise, Dr. Sabha is a compassionate healthcare provider who has cared for critically ill hospitalized patients and managed skilled nursing facility patients, with a particular emphasis on the mental health well-being of the elderly. Additionally, Dr. Sabha has long track record of

demonstrated leadership as CEO and Co-Founder of FMA Hospitalists and later as a national Chief Medical Officer. He implemented quality care programs to reduce hospital readmissions and enhance overall patient outcomes. Dr. Sabha states, “As a patient, you can expect to be greeted with a caring, professional attitude by our entire staff. I will work with other team members to create a coordinated, personalized care plan.” He places particular emphasis on Wellness, Prevention and longevity in his approach. He is an avid Tennis Player and competes in Local and National Competition when he is not spending time with his wife and two kids.

His dedication to compassionate healthcare ensures a welcoming and attentive experience for all new patients. Fort Myers Primary Care and Wellness is located at 14131 Metropolis Ave, # 105, Fort Myers, Florida 33912. Call Dr. Sabha at 239-922-0909 to make an appointment today. 🐾



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“As a patient, you can expect to be greeted with a caring, professional attitude by our entire staff. I will work with other team members to create a coordinated, personalized care plan.”
–Dr. Khalid Sabha, MD



Dr. Sabha is a compassionate provider with extensive clinical experience of over 18 years, including caring for very sick hospitalized patients and managing skilled nursing facility patients with a special focus on mental health well-being in the elderly. He has National Leadership as a Chief Medical Officer, setting up quality care programs to decrease hospitalizations and improve quality outcomes for patients.

Dr. Khalid Sabha, MD is delighted to announce the launching of his new primary care practice right across the street from Gulf Coast Medical Center, off Metro Parkway.



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General Woman's Club of Lehigh Acres

By Melissa Barry

The General Woman's Club of Lehigh Acres have been busy making 160 boxes homemade cookies to be distributed at the Lehigh Community Services' Senior Christmas party on Friday, December 8th. The General Woman's Club of Lehigh Acres is a non-profit organization made up of women of diverse backgrounds and ages who work together to improve the lives of our Lehigh Acres residents and community.

The General Woman's Club of Lehigh Acres will hold their monthly meeting on Friday, January 19th, 2024, at the Rise Christian Church (50 Bell Blvd. Lehigh Acres, FL) at 1:00 PM. There will be a silent auction, and members are asked to have their auction items at the

church by 12:20 PM on January 19th **JUST REMEMBER YOUR JUNK IS SOMEONE ELSE'S TREASURES!**

This is also the day for our membership drive. Please bring potential members with you.

Our next upcoming event will be our quarterly auction taking place on Saturday, January 20th, 2024 at Mugs N' Jugs Restaurant (5512 8th St. West, Lehigh Acres, FL). Food and Drinks will be available for purchase at Mugs N' Jugs.

ABOUT GENERAL WOMAN'S CLUB OF LEHIGH ACRES

The General Woman's Club of Lehigh Acres is a non-profit organization. The club has been in existence since 1964. Their mission is to bring together women of diverse backgrounds and of all ages to provide opportunities for them to help themselves and others grow through humanitarian and social events.



Photo: Melissa Barry, Lehigh Community Services, along with some club members who participated and delivered the cookies: Connie Puzevic, Fran DelPalma, Marsha Leap, Betty Walsh, and Bobi Goloja.

Lehigh Acres always welcomes new members and encourages anyone interested in joining to call our membership chair person: Betty Smith - 239-850-6617. 🐾

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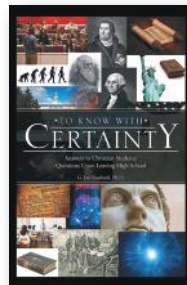
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THE ALVAINIAN

Sprawl Hurts Us All

By Susan Allen



Photo: Susan Allen
www.alvastrong.org

Why should anyone lose sleep over what happens in little Alva, Florida, or any other rural area? For many, Florida's planned communities offer the seemingly perfect lifestyle with their protective gates, golf courses and clubhouses. But once outside the cloistered existence, we begin to see the devastating effects of Sprawl.

I was born in Washington, D. C., but grew up in a distant city suburb. I rode horses, climbed trees, built forts and played with neighborhood friends. Evenings were filled with the sounds of whippoorwills and bobwhites calling their mates. Coveys of quail frequented my back yard and it was not unusual to see deer grazing in our yard. When we got sick, our pediatrician would make a house call or we were seen in his office without delay. The treatment was usually a prescription of a ghastly green concoction, which was mostly alcohol, but it always worked. No one waited for weeks to see their doctor or was forced to go to urgent care or an ER for minor health issues. Teachers had time for their students and crime was something one only saw on the evening news. Life wasn't perfect, but we all knew we were living the American Dream. Now, the sound of whippoorwills is only a memory, our forts and treehouses have been bulldozed over and replaced with tightly packed subdivisions. With time, our community expanded, neighborhoods became more restrictive, and children could no longer stray far from their own backyards. Hometowns became a thing of the past, replaced with condos, duplexes and houses on tiny lots. Children once played outdoors, interacted with and appreciated nature. Now they sequester themselves in their rooms with their designer sheets and handheld devices, rarely speaking face to face with their fellow humans, let alone their parents. The sense of community is gone with the cows, horses, forests and fields. It may be time to bring it all back or, at the very least, reign in the sprawl.

Florida has suffered a similar fate. Lee County's rural community of Alva faces off with aggressive developers and complacent County Commissioners who are perpetuating the problem of irresponsible over-development. Alva has become a microcosm of the issues that face us all in Lee County and much of the nation. What are now pristine fields, pastures and precious (and increasingly rare) habitats in rural Alva have been slated for a massive development by Neal Communities. The proposed subdivision would nearly triple the existing population of the area. The housing density of one

dwelling unit per acre dictated by the county plan has been promoted by the Board of County Commissioner and large developers to increase the density to 1.39 dwellings per acre to include over 1000 homes on 738 acres consisting of duplexes and houses on 30-40 foot-wide lots. This represents a disregard for the community plan that was so thoughtfully created by those impacted. The property is currently a combination of woods, pasture, wetlands and critical habitat. It is home to protected and endangered wildlife, with recent sightings of panther, caracara, spoonbills and gopher tortoise. Some of these species are considered to be keystone species as they support and are necessary to the existence of other species. While, as a whole, the community of Alva is not opposed to development, it is opposed to the devastating effect of high-density housing and the corresponding population surge that will destroy our rural feel and collapse our infrastructure. The neighboring property (owned by our Lee County Commission Mike Greenwell) has already been approved for 400,000 SF of commercial space to include a big Box store and apartments. Such development will compound the existing problems involving the wildlife corridor, availability of timely healthcare, emergency services, traffic, teacher shortages and the affected quality of our rivers and beaches. Developers who live elsewhere dump their houses and retreat to their neighborhoods, leaving the consequences of overdevelopment behind.

On a daily basis, the impact of Sprawl manifests itself as endless hours stuck in traffic. Add seasonal snowbirds and visitors to the mix and paradise starts to feel like The Hunger Games. Gridlock is a symptom of a serious issue and is directly population-driven. If a patient is bleeding to death, you don't jump in and wash his sheets, you stop the bleeding. The carte blanche approval of proposed large high-density development, compounded by the lack of infrastructure, is the underlying pathology we all have to deal with. It's a disease that needs treatment and the prescription lies with our Lee Board of County Commissioners. The ill effects of worsening traffic aren't simply an inconvenience. Our very health is also at risk.

When was the last time you could see a doctor promptly? An acute illness or injury may have to wait days, weeks or months for treatment. This forces many patients to seek care at an urgent care center, which often refers them back to their primary care physician, thus creating a Catch-22 situation. Worse, patients flood our ERs with non-emergency cases, thus delaying critical services and causing prolonged wait times. Why? It boils down to poor planning! According

to the Florida Medical Association, a report from IHS Markit, commissioned by the Florida Safety Net Hospital Alliance and the Florida Hospital Association, projects a shortfall of 17,924 physicians in the Sunshine State by 2035. This analysis is based on projected supply and demand, accounting for Florida's population growth. The greatest shortages in Lee County are in Cape Coral, Lehigh Acres and Fort Myers. Emergency services are struggling to keep up with demand as well due to increasing numbers of patients and an aging population that requires greater levels of care. The Lee County Staff Report states, "Lee County CAN NOT yet sufficiently serve the entirety of the subject property within the "established response time threshold".

If your child is healthy enough to attend and can get to school with an already overtaxed bus system, there may not be a desk or a teacher waiting for him when he arrives. Lee County is facing a severe shortage of teachers and classrooms. According to Lee County School Board representative Armor Person, Riverdale High School has no room to add more seats for the expected 2,000-3,000 new students coming into the area thanks to the expansion of Babcock Ranch and the proposed Neal Communities projects near Alva. So despite the lack of student space, teachers, doctors and emergency services, our County Commissioners continue to approve the unchecked growth of Lee County.

Local elections are increasingly important as the tie between local government and developers has become an unholy union. Lee County Commissioners and land developers are stuck together like conjoined twins. Neither makes a move without the other. Our District 5 commissioner, Mike Greenwell, had his own land rezoned after taking office. Many believe this to be a conflict of interest and a blatant move to profit from his elected position personally. In the meantime, irresponsible development degrades every aspect of our quality of life. Who are our elected officials beholden to? Is it their constituents, or is it the developers? The recent fight over building heights on Captiva demonstrates the answer. Despite overwhelming local opposition to tall and high-density buildings on Captiva, the public petition with over 13,000 signatures was ignored in favor of the developers.

We have been told development for development's sake is beneficial. They



Photo: "The Tree" by James Kennedy captures the heart of rural Alva

call it "growth," but in truth, unbridled development hurts us all. At some point, we must hit the pause button and make strategic decisions about how we want our communities to look and function. Our responsibility is to elect honest and responsible leaders and hold our state and local officials accountable for poor management. Our commissioners must stop green-lighting developers and the exponential growth masked in their shiny plans and slick pandering. These projects are planned, approved, and forwarded through our county politics without regard to infrastructure and the effect on the community. More importantly our officials are tone deaf to the voice of the constituents they have sworn to represent.

So what's the fix? First, learn the reputation, background, and track record of each candidate for county commissioner. Second, vote in your party's primary. Good elections start with good candidates. Ask yourself who will listen to their constituents and live under the same rules as those he/she represents. Just because a candidate has achieved fame in the past, it does mean he will make a good leader. Get involved and attend local government meetings. You may be shocked at what you experience.

Ultimately, we all need to take note of little rural Alva, Florida and come to her aid. Our Lee County Board of Commissioners tentatively plans to meet on January 17th to vote on the transmittal of CPA 2022, which will amend the county plan to bring public water and sewer to over 1000 acres of rural land. Go to leegov.com for up-to-date information. Let this be your Call to Action. It's time for all of us in Lee County to let our County Commissioners know that SPRAWL HURTS US ALL.

ABOUT SUSAN ALLEN

Susan Allen is an Alva resident and the Secretary for ALVA STRONG, whose mission is to unite the region to protect the rural character of Alva, Florida. To preserve the past, influence the future, and enjoy Florida's Natural state. www.alvastong.org

Senators Greet Constituents And County Leaders At Annual Pre-Session Luncheon

By Katrina Salokar

Senator Kathleen Passidomo and Senator Johnathan Martin greeted constituents and county leaders at the annual pre-session luncheon at Plantation Golf and Tennis Club Monday, December 18th. Senator Passidomo talked about the Live Local and Live

Healthy initiatives that address affordable workforce housing and initiatives to attract and retain healthcare providers and train them locally. There is a substantial amount of work happening now on addressing mental health concerns and people experiencing home-

lessness. She spoke about upcoming agenda items relating to deregulating public schools to make them easier to function. Senator Martin talked about cracking down on casino arcades and massage parlors that are not following the law or are illegal. Senator Martin

has 70 bills drafted and 10 filed. He urged everyone to keep up with the Senate website and let him know personally if something in a bill is going to affect how they work, live, or play.

www.flsenate.gov



Photo: Joseph K Lamb Jr, Grant Fichter, and David Deetscreek



Photo: Grant Fichter and Commissioner Brian Hamman



Photo: Senator Kathleen Passidomo is with Katie Larsen, Government Relations for Lee Health



Photo: Grant Fichter, Director of Surveying at AIM Engineering, with Matt Caldwell



Fort Myers City Planning Board member Terri Lewis is with Katrina Salokar of THE ROAR



Photo: Matt Calwell, Charlotte Rae Nicely of Lehigh Community Services, and FGUA Staff Members Mike Currier and Donna Lizotte



Photo: Representative Adam Botana, Representation Mike Giallombardo, Lee County Clerk of Court Kevin Karnes, and Samuel Fisher Lee County School Board



Photo: Sponsors AIM Engineering and Survey, Inc with Molly Scott of ChrisTel Construction

The Alva Museum By Grant Fichter

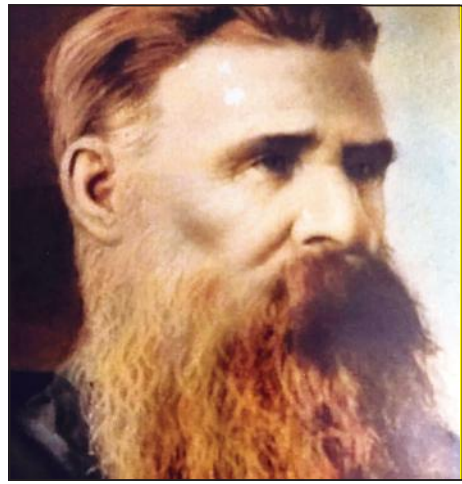


Photo: Portrait of Captain Peter Nelson; the founder of Alva

In 1901 the Founder of the town of Alva, Danish Sea Captain Peter Nelson and librarian Esther Hover started the Alva Book Club. The Book Club grew in size and eventually outgrew the living rooms of the local residents and in 1906 the Alva Library Association was formed. Peter Nelson decided to donate some of his property for a Community Library, and in 1909 with the financial help of the community and Mr. Charles A. Dean, the funding to build the Library was in place. On March 27th, 1909, A.J. English began construction on

the project and finished on July 5th of that year. It would be the first community library in Southwest Florida.

The Alva Garden Club became involved in 1974 and offered to turn the Library into a Museum. Miss Irby Clay, Mrs. Dan (Alice) English and Mrs. Margaret Foster made up the Museum Committee while Be Skillinger and Mattie Watkins of the Garden Club and many other community members donated their time and funds to make the museum a reality. The Museum building itself is a site to behold and a testament to the craftsmanship and ingenuity of the early settlers of the area. The Museum experience includes a visit to The Owanita Baptist Chapel, built 1901, which was moved to the Alva Methodist Church after the 1926 hurricane, and later to the Museum grounds.

The Museum is a treasure trove of local artifacts, historical documents, photographs, book, textiles, a dugout canoe pulled from the river bottom and many other amazing things that represent the

history of not just Alva, but all of Southwest Florida. The Museum is open every Saturday from 10-2 and fully funded by donations and help from the community. There is almost always a local legend or a newcomer to the area visiting the museum, and often at the same time which makes for some great conversation and connections. The Museum holds events from time to time and recently hosted a photography exhibit with John Brady. You can find the Alva Museum on Facebook or visit their website for more information. If you are in the area, and looking for a step backwards in time, feel free to come on by and



Photo: Interior of Alva Museum



Photo: Interior of Alva Museum

visit, you will definitely not regret it. 🐾

Continental Women's Club

By Liz Paul

The Continental Women's Club will hold its monthly luncheon meeting on Thursday, January 4th at 11:30 a.m. at The Hideaway Country Club.

Our January program will feature a presentation by Haley Volcy, Membership and Community Outreach Organizer for The Alliance for the Arts. You are invited to attend and learn how this vibrant nonprofit visual and performing arts center is fulfilling its mission to transform lives and improve our community through the arts.

Continental Women's Club is a social,

cultural, and philanthropic organization established in 1975, and membership is open to women living in Lee County. We have many special events and interest groups within our Club that you can participate in for social and educational purposes. 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 January 4th is Tuesday, December 26th. Please call Liz Paul at 239-691-7561 for additional information or to make a reservation. 🐾

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VOICES OF LEHIGH

Happy New Year – 2024! May East Lee County And Its Communities Experience Continuing Prosperity And Recovery In The New Year!

By Mike Welch



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

At this writing we close the year 2023 with an improving economy and with the recognition that many of our citizens and families are experiencing hardship and rising costs in housing as well as housing shortages that has put a strain on many. Several residents have called the Chamber of Commerce out of fear and frustration on the out of reach costs for property insurance, car

insurance and costs that add burdens to our moderate income residents and seniors. Small businesses in Lehigh Acres often speak of the tough climate our area has experienced for years.

Yet local government at all levels combined with the market turns to the eastern part of our county for the future – that is here! Our State Road 82 is proving to be a zone for economic growth between Lehigh Acres and Gateway. New employers of nationally known companies are planning for their arrival. And, all of this needs to be planned and coordinated. Stay tuned. 🐾



Photo: State Senate President Kathleen Passidomo (R-Naples/East Lee County) with the Singing Trio of Harnes Marsh Middle School at the Annual Pre-Session Legislative Luncheon 12/18/23

Remaining Alert During The Holidays

By Sheriff Carmine Marceno



Photo: Sheriff Carmine Marceno, Lee County Sheriff

It's that time of year! Lee County population swells with guests and tourists. Our restaurants and retail stores are brimming with activity, with shoppers and long lines.

Thieves make their moves when you are not focused on your purse, your wallet, your shopping bags, your cell phone. Their criminal partners may even cause a distraction...bumping into you, asking directions or posing a question, making a loud noise that attracts your immediate attention. When occupied or looking in another direction, one is additionally vulnerable.

While many of us have visions of sugar plums dancing in our heads, there are others with less pleasant thoughts...criminals and thieves.

When out dining or shopping... please avoid complacency.

While we are out and about enjoying the season and each other's company, less scrupulous individuals are watching and waiting for their victims to become inattentive and vulnerable.

Purses left hanging from the back of restaurant seats or left in unattended shopping carts are extremely susceptible to theft. Place handbags on your lap or between your feet while dining. Never leave your bag open or in the shopping cart child-seat. Inevitably, you will reach for an item on a shelf, compare prices or search for a particular product. In those brief moments, your purse is accessible to thieves.

Avoid carrying large amounts of cash



Photo: Thief With Gloves Looks In Stolen Purse

or utilizing ATMs alone during the evening hours and/or in poorly lit areas. Be certain that you are not being followed when departing from ATMs.

Lastly, do not leave purchases, firearms or other valuables unattended or in plain sight in parked vehicles. Thieves scour parking lots looking for valuables and removing them takes mere seconds.

The Lee County Sheriff's Office has increased patrols and added significant resources throughout the county for the holiday season. Sheriff Carmine Marceno is committed to keeping all residents, guests and visitors safe.

Let us all be careful and aware and have a wonderful holiday season! 🐾

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School District Scores Improvement in 2022-2023 School Grades Report

By Lee County School District

In a school year when students and staff were disproportionately impacted by the devastation of Hurricane Ian, the School District of Lee County is proud to announce that we have made excellent progress related to student outcomes. The results are reflected in the Florida Department of Education's 2022-2023 School Grades Report.

Eighteen (18) schools earned an "A" grade from the State of Florida including 12 elementary, three middle, two high schools and one K-8. New additions to the "A" list included Gulf, Edison Park and Trafalgar Elementary Schools. Three Oaks Middle School also joined the list of the highest ranking schools within the School District of Lee County (SLDC). An additional 10 schools also improved their school grade by one letter from last year.

Most notable in the improvements were G. Weaver Hipps Elementary, Manatee Elementary and Fort Myers Middle Academy. During a year of impact from Hurricane Ian and new testing standards, these schools improved their grades to a "C" and will be released from state supervision.

"Our administrators, principals, teachers, paraprofessionals and students worked diligently under very trying circumstances last year and the overall rise in achievement is due to their effort and hard work," said Superintendent Dr. Christopher Bernier. "Lives and learning were interrupted by a major hurricane and new state implemented testing standards. Our staff rose to the challenge and removed three schools from state supervision and increased the overall

student outcomes which are reflected in the improved school grades. We are proud and they should celebrate and recognize their commitment that led to the outcomes and the grades they earned."

The District increased its overall score by 6 points in the 2022-2023 School Grades Report. The increase would have earned an "A" last year, but under the new standards, the District maintains its "B" grade for the 9th consecutive year. Dr. Bernier remains committed to increasing performance and says the District is on the right path to become an "A" District.

Nineteen (19) District schools earned a "B" in the 2022-2023 School Grades Report. With the support of District staff, schools will now use

the baseline grades from the FAST assessment to make changes in instructional practices that will lead to better outcomes for students.

As a part of Florida's first-in-the-nation transition to using progress monitoring instead of traditional high stakes testing, grades for the 2022-2023 school year serve as a baseline and carry no negative consequences. Following the transition to the B.E.S.T. standards, FDOE developed a new test, Florida's Assessment of Student Thinking (FAST). FAST is a progress monitoring system that provides teachers, students and parents real-time, immediate and actionable data at the beginning, middle and end of the school year to drive student improvement. 🐾

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, January 25, and our planned program will feature Linda Coin, a design professional with ten years of experience in residential design here in SW Florida. Linda is the De-

sign Director of DECORATING DEN INTERIORS and will speak on how to "LOVE YOUR HOME: MARVELOUS MAKEOVERS!" Linda also plans to raffle DECORATING DEN INTERIOR design prizes.

Luncheon fee is \$28.00 and the planned regular menu will be grilled chicken with tzatziki drizzle, wheat-berry, white bean, spinach and tomato medley along with seasonal vegetables with cannoli for dessert. The plant-based/vegan meal will

consist of falafel with vegan tzatziki drizzle, wheat-berry, white bean, spinach and tomato medley and seasonal vegetables with vegan cannoli for dessert. Fresh rolls and butter are always served.

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, January 18. 🐾



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January 8 Bubble Bath Day

Bubble baths are so much fun. We wish everyday could be Bubble Bath Day. Today is a fun day to relax and enjoy the warm and soothing pleasures of a bubble bath. Best of all, it can be enjoyed by kids and adults. For kids, it's playtime. For adults, it's soothing pleasure.

January 12 National Hot Tea Day

Tea is the second most consumed beverage in the United States, behind only coffee. A cold January day (and night) is a great time to enjoy a steaming hot cup of tea. To most of us, tea is a delicious and relaxing drink. Drinking tea is healthy for you. With these things in mind, it is only fitting that January 12th is National Hot Tea Day.

January 16 Appreciate a Dragon Day

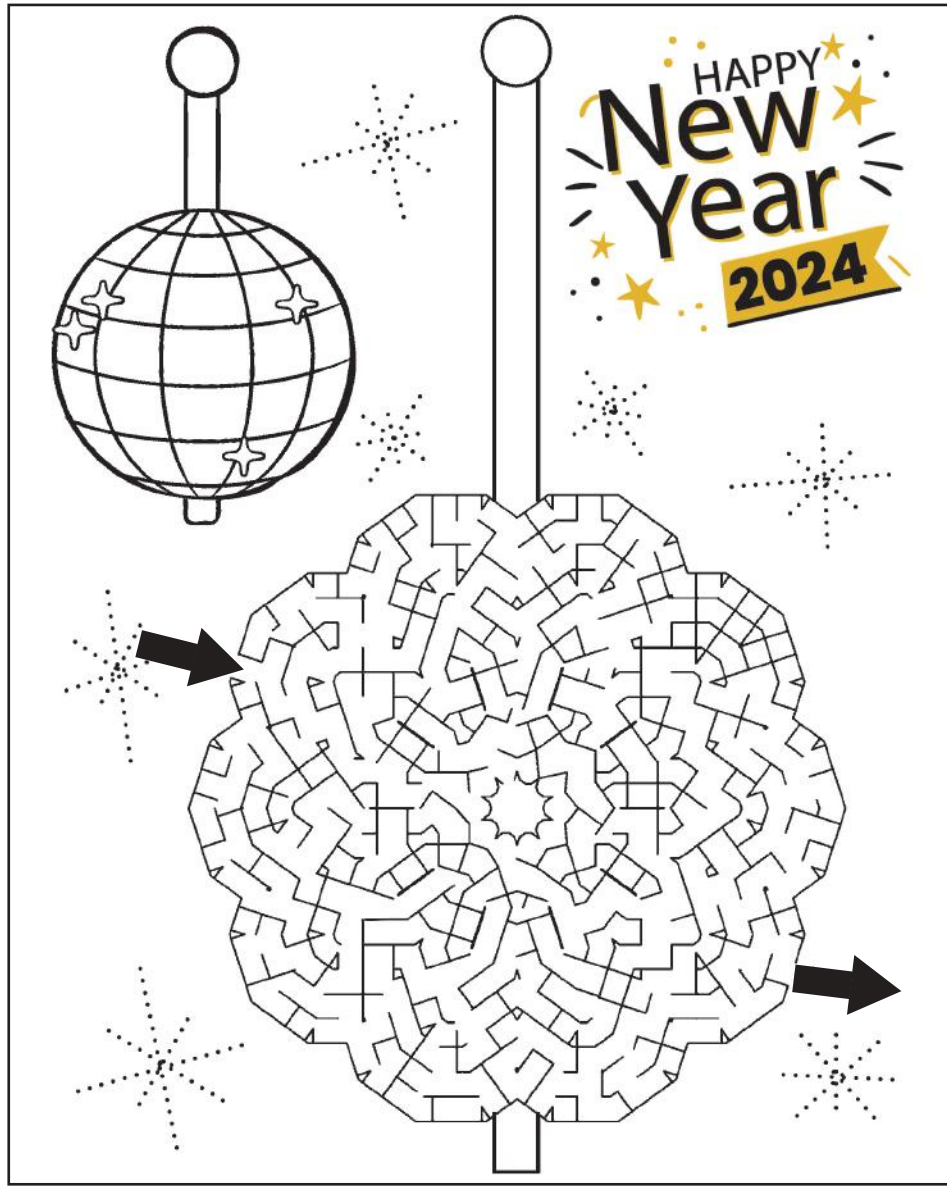
All of us, young and not so young, can appreciate dragons. You'll find good and bad dragons in legends, folk lore, children's books, songs, and top movies. According to Donita K. Paul, the creator of this special day, you are encouraged to learn and explore the cultural and historic significance of dragons. So, reach for a book about dragons, and read it today!

January 21 National Hugging Day

What a great day! Hugs are loving. Hugs are therapeutic. Hugs are caring. Hugs are celebratory. Hugs make you feel good inside. A hug is a way to say everything is, or will be okay. Have you ever received a hug from someone who didn't care? I didn't think so. That's proof positive that you're loved and cared about. Celebrate today by giving hugs to family, friends and loved ones. You'll love the warm feeling you get.

January 26 Spouse's Day

Spouse's Day is a time to enjoy and appreciate your better half. Show your spouse you love them! Use it as a time to show your spouse that you care and appreciate all of the things that they do for you and for the household. In other words, take a minute to be thankful for what you've got.



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

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Nick Bonacolta



CHARLIE BONACOLTA

239-994-1062

charlisold@gmail.com

NICK BONACOLTA

239-887-0468

nbonacolta@gmail.com

NEWLY REMODELED 2 BEDROOM 2 BATH ORANGE GROVE PARK CONDO



Popular 2 bedroom 2 bath Orange Grove Park condo, newly remodeled with crown molding throughout, granite countertops in the kitchen and baths, new cabinets with lazy susan and soft close doors and drawers in both kitchen and baths, high back saver vanities in bathrooms with newer toilets, newer appliances in kitchen including built in microwave and French door refrigerator, tile backsplash, laminate floors with ceramic tile in baths and newer luxury vinyl in kitchen and bedroom, NEW CENTRAL HEAT AND AIR IN 2021, NEW WATER HEATER IN 2023, walk in closet, newer front and side exterior doors, indoor laundry room with stack washer and dryer, extra insulation in attic for energy efficiency, open patio on the side with a storage unit, STUCCO ON EXTERIOR, 55+ community, walking distance to the stores etc, lowest monthly maintenance fee in Lehigh at \$70 per month, quiet low traffic street, No Flood insurance required here, Highest elevation in Lee County, built in drain system on the roof.

Offered At\$160,000

Charlie Bonacolta 239-994-1062 charlisold@gmail.com

3 BEDROOM 2 BATH POOL HOME IN VARSITY LAKES



Popular Varsity Lakes Community, gated entrance, CENTRAL WATER AND SEWER and sidewalks, corner lot, NEW DIMENSIONAL SHINGLE ROOF IN 2018, new central heat and air in 2016 with upgraded ductwork, screen enclosed IN GROUND POOL with solar and electric heat pump, beautifully landscaped for privacy, excellent sunset views as well as views of the lake and birds etc from the lanai, banana trees & pineapple plants, screened front entryway, high ceilings throughout, plant shelves, wood plank porcelain tile floors, living room and dining room plus large eat in kitchen with nook area, GRANITE TOPS, breakfast bar and pantry, all appliances, newer faucet, indoor laundry room with washer/dryer and additional cabinets and storage, ACCORDION STORM SHUTTERS, spacious master bedroom with private master bath, newer dual vanities, mirrors and faucets, separate garden tub and walk in shower, walk in closets in every bedroom, guest bathroom has newer vanity, sink, commode, mirror and fixtures, auto irrigation system on a well, common playground area, excellent location just minutes to I-75 and Ft Myers as well as schools within walking distance. A definite must see in a great community.

Offered At\$395,000

Charlie Bonacolta 239-994-1062 charlisold@gmail.com

3 BEDROOM 2 1/2 BATH HOME WITH 2146 SQ FT OF LIVING AREA



2146 Square feet of living area in this spacious 3 bedroom 2 1/2 bath home, open great room with LUXURY VINYL FLOORS, NEW DIMENSIONAL SHINGLE ROOF IN 2017, NEW CENTRAL HEAT AND AIR IN 2017, IMPACT RESISTANT WINDOWS, newer dual tank water treatment system, French doors lead to 28 X 14 screened lanai with "HOT SPRINGS" hot tub, granite countertops in kitchen with island counter, breakfast bar, extra large pantry, upgraded appliances including a Samsung French Door refrigerator and double oven, tile backsplash, plantation shutters, crown molding, half bath located off the main living area, soaring high cathedral ceilings with plant shelves, walk in closets in every bedroom, master bedroom with private bath, dual sinks and vanities, large walk in shower with built in bench and multi shower heads, newer commodes in all bathrooms, LED lighting, oversized 579 Square foot double garage with plenty of storage, excellent west Lehigh location just minutes to SR 82, I-75 and Ft Myers.

Offered At\$380,000

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2024

HAPPY NEW YEAR

2 BEDROOM 2 BATH POPULAR PINEWOOD CONDO



Popular Pinewood Condominium, 2 bedroom 2 bath with double driveways and parking for 3 cars, open park like setting in the rear with plenty of privacy, open patio behind the carport, the condo association just installed a new roof on this unit, newer laminate floors throughout the entire unit, NEW WATER HEATER IN 2022, eat in kitchen, GE stack washer and dryer inside laundry area, walk in closet, 55+ community, pets OK, walking distance to stores etc. THE ROOF AND EXTERIOR SIDING IS MAINTAINED BY THE CONDO ASSOCIATION. In need of some updating but priced accordingly. NO flood insurance required here. Lehigh is the highest elevation in the Lee County.

Offered At\$125,000

Charlie Bonacolta 239-994-1062 charlisold@gmail.com

3 BEDROOM 2 BATH IN LAURELWOOD WITH CENTRAL WATER & SEWER



Quiet low traffic Cul De Sac in Laurelwood Community. CENTRAL WATER AND SEWER, common pool just steps away, NEW METAL ROOF IN 2021, NEWER TANKLESS WATER HEATER, NEWER SQUARE D ELECTRICAL PANEL BOX, oversized yard with plenty of privacy, cathedral ceilings, laminate floors throughout the entire home, master bedroom with walk in closet, private bath with large vanity, walk in shower and access to the screened lanai, breakfast bar and pantry in kitchen with appliances, 20 X 10 screened lanai under truss overlooking the backyard, oversized double garage with auto opener and wind rated garage door, screened front entryway, NO FLOOD INSURANCE REQUIRED HERE, LEHIGH IS THE HIGHEST ELEVATION IN LEE COUNTY, walking distance to stores etc.

Offered At\$275,000

Charlie Bonacolta 239-994-1062 charlisold@gmail.com

2 BEDROOM 2 BATH STONE EDGE CONDO



This second floor two bedroom/two bath condo is in a 55+ community that does NOT allow pets. It will include all appliances as well as the washer and dryer which are located in the laundry room inside the unit. The main areas are carpeted and baths and kitchen have tile floors. The community has covered parking with ample guest parking. There are sliding glass doors from the master bedroom to the screened lanai and also sliding glass doors from the living room to lanai. The view from the porch is of the heated swimming pool and tennis court (with lights) and nicely landscaped gardens. Less than 5 minutes to the heart of Lehigh on Homestead.

Offered At\$167,900

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