

THE R A R

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EAST LEE COUNTY NEWS | DANIELS CORRIDOR

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Authority And Responsibility



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

My nickname is Butch. I much prefer that to my real name, Ralph, but like most things in life, there's a tradeoff. When I was much younger and would run into a group of boys at a new school or new play yard, almost inevitably, one or two self-assigned bullies would make a comment sounding something like this: "If your name is Butch, you must be tough." Without more context, that almost sounds like a compliment, right? It wasn't. I quickly learned it was an opening signal that my toughness would soon be tested. Lots of times, I could avoid a real fight just with a solid reply. Then again, lots of times, I couldn't. In retrospect, and trying to be positive, think of all the free martial arts training I received! At first, it wasn't pretty. I had a lot of "learning" to do. But, after tough years of adolescence and into manhood, I'd become more than capable of looking out for myself. With a reputation I never wanted but a track record to back it up, meeting new people suddenly became a much friendlier affair. It's weird how that works. A solid reputation makes a loud statement without uttering a word.

Great, why are you telling me this, Butch? Well, I'm afraid, as voters, we're developing a bad reputation. It seems to me that our local elected leaders have learned something about us. We elect them, which provides them with the authority to lead us. Historically, there's a deal here where we assume that by electing them, they understand they now have a responsibility to make decisions based on our best interests. After all, we all have lives to live, so we cannot be involved in the day-to-day decision-making. We put you there because, based on your campaign, we thought you'd be best at representing what we want and need. Here's where our reputation comes in. If you've been watching the news lately, a pattern has formed. The people will gather at a meeting and voice concerns against a proposal, yet the vote comes back 5-0 in favor of what the people didn't want. I'm afraid we've developed a reputation of never punching back, so the part of the deal of them representing us is clearly off since we keep re-electing the same people. As voters, we refuse to fight back.

But, and this is a big but (Ha! - unintentional Sir Mix-A-Lot reference), I don't want you to feel totally terrible here because there's a wrinkle making these elections more complicated. The way Lee County elections currently work, we're not really electing "our"

By Butch Swank - butch@goodladandswank.com

guy or gal. We're electing everybody's. Really. Our elected County Commission is currently based on an entire county election. You get to vote for everybody. It's not, "Oh, let's pick this person because they're from my neighborhood, know it well, and will represent us correctly because they know us, too." It's more like people from all over the entire county get to vote for all five people, and those five then get to make the decisions about your specific neighborhood. It's nuts. Think of it this way: it's like allowing people from Georgia to vote for Florida's Governor because they live nearby.

The technical term for our current County Commission setup is an at-large district. On the flip side, our State elected leaders, the State Representatives, and Senators are elected by a setup called a single-member district. This is what we're used to, and don't feel bad - I had no idea there were two options either, and I studied political science in college. Shame on me! In the single-member district system, you elect someone from your neighborhood to represent your neighborhood. I've recently learned that our elected State leaders also don't like the way Lee County Commissioners are currently elected and have taken two measures to remedy that. One would change County Commission elections back to single-member, and the other

would be to create a County mayor. To me, this is an elegant solution. The current Commissioners don't like the proposals. I can't blame them because I wouldn't either if I were in their shoes. They have a good gig going, so why mess it up? The single-member thing should be clear by now, so I'll now say a bit about the mayor.

In 2022, Lee County voted in favor of an elected School Superintendent by 62%. In our times, 62% is a landslide victory. That was put to a vote because the School Board picked the Superintendent in our old system, so that person was basically obligated to do what the Board told them. Now, once elected, the Superintendent must still work with the Board but is free to make a decision that goes against them if they feel doing so would be best for the schools and kids. We have a similar situation here with a mayor. The County Commission would switch from "The" deciding body to more of an advisory group. The elected mayor would make the executive decisions, within their power, for all of Lee County. Also, if the single-member thing goes through, your next Commissioner would have to do a good job representing your area, or guess what? The odds just went way up that they wouldn't get re-elected. Same goes for the Mayor. Same goes for the Superintendent.

CONTINUED ON PAGE 2

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CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

This is a principle called having skin in the game. If you can be held responsible for your decisions, you will be much more likely to make decisions that are best for the people who put you in this position of authority.

To finish, our current setup gives certain people authority over us, but they don't have a responsibility to

represent us as we wish. Largely, this current predicament is totally on us because we keep re-electing the same people over and over. These two bills would give us a fresh start and will send a crystal-clear message to those we elect that if they're not responsible with this authority we've given them, they'll be out of a job in the next election. Our State legislators have given us two smart solutions to a complicated problem. The House and Senate are currently in session as you

read this. I strongly encourage you to reach out to them and voice your approval of these bills. A great way to do this is to ask their office to host some community town halls to discuss these issues after the session is over when they're all back home from Tallahassee. On the flip side, you're 100% free to disagree with everything I've just written. I encourage you to contact them as well and also be sure to attend the community town halls. Your voice counts just as much as mine. That's the

beauty of living in America. I 100% respect your opinion while also not agreeing with it. After all, America as a whole is a representative democracy, and I'd sure like to see a lot more representation locally in the future. Whichever side you stand on these issues, it's important your position is heard. We cannot keep sitting silently on the sidelines. Please call or email your State legislator and make your voice heard! ❤️

4-H Club: It's About Way More Than You Think!

By Taylor Whitney

WHAT IS 4-H?

4-H is a global youth development organization aimed at teaching youth the life skills they need to become responsible, caring, and productive citizens through a learn-by-doing approach and youth-adult partnerships. The four Hs stand for head, heart, hands, and health, which are essentially "target areas" that the program focuses on. The head portion is about learning to think critically, make decisions, and solve problems. The heart portion is geared towards learning about communication, empathy, and positive attitudes. The hands aspect is talking about the hands-on experiences like community service or in our personal 4-H projects and what we learn from those like teamwork and other marketable skills. The health part is about teaching youth the importance of a healthy lifestyle, both physically and mentally. Once you join a 4-H club, you will need to pick a project to do.

HOW DID YOU GET INVOLVED?

My parents encouraged me to join at a really young age so I've just grown up with the program throughout the years. I've been with the same 4-H club since I first joined. A few years ago someone suggested I should also join Teen Leadership to broaden my 4-H experience a little, and that was probably one of the best things I did in my 4-H career.

HOW LONG HAVE YOU BEEN INVOLVED?

I joined 4-H as a Cloverbud when I was 5 so I've been involved 13 years.

WHAT IS YOUR ROLE?

I am a 4-H member. I am in two of Lee County's 4-H Clubs, Alva Livestock and Lee County Teen Leadership 4-H Club. I am the club president of both. As President, I am responsible for planning and running club meetings and activities, serving as a role model to younger members, and any other things that may arise. I have mentored younger members with their goat project, helping them learn things like grooming their goat and showmanship. I also do things beyond the club level, as recently I helped to host a Goat Clinic for local youth.

IS 4-H JUST ABOUT LIVESTOCK? WHAT OTHER PROJECTS ARE THERE?

Livestock can be a big part of 4-H, especially in Lee County, but there is so much more to 4-H than just that. 4-H is all about learning life skills and becoming leaders, which you can do through other projects than just livestock. There is an immense amount of 4-H projects and programs out there. Different states or counties have different things. The three main focus areas are healthy living, STEM, and Leadership. There's projects for pho-

tography, cooking, space, gardening, and more! There are many kids who never do a livestock project in 4-H and they still have similar experiences with the program.

WHAT IS THE GOAL OR PURPOSE OF 4-H?

4-H believes in "learning by doing" and "to make the best better". The goal of 4-H is to teach youth the life skills they need to become responsible, caring, and productive citizens through a learn-by-doing approach and youth-adult partnerships.

WHAT ARE YOUR FAVORITE THINGS OR MEMORIES AS A 4-HER?

My favorite 4-H memories have come from the overnight trips and events like 4-H University, Executive Board, and the Southern Region Teen Leadership Conference. It has also been fun to watch my projects change and develop over the years and see how much I've learned.

HAS THIS GROUP WON ANY AWARDS OR RECEIVED RECOGNITION?

Last year, my Teen Leadership group received an award for a top 5 Community Pride project. Community Pride is a state-wide service-learning grant program through 4-H that helps clubs to tackle issues in their own communities.

We applied to do another Community Pride project this year and are waiting to see if we receive funding.

WHAT PROJECTS HAVE YOU DONE?

I've done projects in goats, horses, swine, beef breeding, small animal, citrus, mushrooms, mindfulness, leadership, photography, and community service.

WHAT HAS BEEN YOUR MOST SUCCESSFUL PROJECT?

My goats have definitely been my most successful project and the base of my 4-H journey. They were one of my first projects when I joined, and I have continued with it ever since. I now have a breeding herd of registered Pygmy goats, Rocking 3W Pygmies, that I show in both 4-H and National Pygmy Goat Association shows. Through this project I learned about responsibility, record keeping, communication, goal setting, and much more. I am soon going to be showing a couple goats and a market hog at the upcoming Ag Expo which I am excited about.

MORE INFORMATION

To learn more about 4-H and Rocking 3W Pygmies | Alva, FL, please visit: www.facebook.com/profile.php?id=100089808185339. ❤️



Photo: Taylor Riding Ricky At The Fair



Photo: Taylor Riding Chrissy At Pgha



Photo: Taylor Competing At The 2022 Npga National Show



Photo: Grand And Reserve Champion Goats At The Fair



Photo: Crown, Herd Sire Of Rocking 3w

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A Response to Lee Health Town Hall Meetings

By Mike Meunier

As a member and sponsor of the SWFL Business Alliance and Network, I attend many networking events. I find it helpful in my current career to be plugged into the community. At one specific meeting, the discussion among the other small business owners was regarding the rumors about Lee Health and their recent decision to become a "For Profit" Hospital system. Why would Lee Health want to do that?

I have had many conversations with clients regarding the cost of healthcare and how to pay for it in retirement. The last thing they want to hear is whether the costs are going up or they cannot get the same care they had been getting. In a previous career in a hospital healthcare system, I served my community at a non-profit as a CCO as part of our Administrative Healthcare Leadership team, where I was a participant in hospital strategic planning and operations, so I decided I had to go and attend one of these town halls and ask Lee Health Board members and leadership why a three billion dollar system would choose to become "for profit" and therefore have to pay property taxes and lose significant benefits Centers for Medicare and Medicaid non-profits are afforded.

Non-Profits do not pay taxes if they provide community benefit. More about that in a minute. In my experience, the only time a healthcare provider system becomes "for profit" is because it is bought by a larger "for profit". No one at the town hall mentioned anything about being bought out. Quite the contrary. Lee Health's goal is to strengthen its ability to fulfill its mission and compete on an even playing field for the patients it serves. Lee Health, as a government-run organization, maintains five districts with an elected board of 10 members, two board members representing each of the districts that make up the ten-member board. If a private non-profit is in the direction they go, they would re-write the bylaws

to require a ten-member board with representation from those same areas of Lee County. It would be foolish not to.

The advantage of remaining non-profit but becoming a private non-profit will allow Lee Health to expand outside of its Lee County boundaries if it chooses to, with the goal of expanding geographically and providing more access to care. It is important they explore potential growth opportunities as other healthcare systems plan to move into the area. Lee Health leadership made it clear this is a process of fact-finding and exploring the possibility of this conversion. The community was encouraged to ask questions, and many concerns were raised surrounding the topic of who will now provide care for the indigent, the poor, the mentally challenged, and alike.

Lee Health is a safety net hospital system and must provide these services to maintain its non-profit status. They must show a percentage of revenue in community benefit. In the 2023 statistics provided, Lee had a net community benefit of over 165 million dollars. This number includes charity care, unpaid Medicaid insurance write offs, as well as several funded community outreach and educational programs. This will not change. To maintain non-profit status, this access to care will not change and should not change. Lee will still accept the same insurance plans, as well as Medicare and Medicaid, as they do now. To the public, the patient care, the costs, services, and the patient experience should not be affected. Because Lee Health does not receive funding from Lee County resident tax dollars, it will rely on Medicare and Medicaid reimbursements and insurance payments, as well as in philanthropic development work, donations, and various government programs for funding.

Comments to Mr. Meunier can be addressed to: press@eastleecountynews.com ♥



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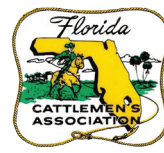
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The Role Of A Hospitalist In Modern Medicine

By Dr. Khalid Sabha, MD

WHAT IS A HOSPITALIST?

Every so often, when I see patients in my office, I get asked about the role of a hospitalist and how filling that role can help when a patient visits the hospital. Because I have had the unique opportunity to co-found one of the largest hospitalist groups in the Lee and Collier county areas, I am comfortable explaining and performing in the role of Hospitalist in the continuum of care.

The term "hospitalist" was first coined by Doctors Robert Wachter and Lee Goldman, in a 1996 New England Journal of Medicine article, referring to a physician who assumes the responsibility for managing the care of hospitalized patients[1].

Hospitalists are medical professionals who specialize in the comprehensive care of patients admitted to the hospital. These physicians play a crucial role in managing hospitalized individuals' complex and varied medical needs. Hospitalists collaborate with diverse healthcare providers, including nurses, specialists, and other support staff, to coordinate and deliver high-quality inpatient care. Their responsibilities often include conducting initial assessments, developing treatment plans, overseeing the implementation of medical interventions, and ensuring effective communication between healthcare providers. Hospitalists are also crucial in facilitating

care transitions, coordinating with outpatient providers, and addressing post-discharge follow-up needs. Their focus on hospitalized patients allows them to provide dedicated attention to acute medical issues, contributing to improved patient outcomes and streamlined healthcare delivery within the hospital setting.

For patients in the hospital, this can be incredibly stressful, especially when they are sicker more anxious, and seeing a "New Doctor" taking over the role of their primary care physician. My patients are incredibly relieved when I assume their care in the hospital or coordinate with my colleagues to ensure they get the appropriate care efficiently and follow up in my office closely after discharge.

Ultimately, the best case scenario is to focus on maintenance and prevention and keeping patients out of the hospital and only meet a "Hospitalist" like me in my office to keep you healthy and out of the hospital!

ABOUT DR. KHALID SABHA, MD

Dr. Khalid Sabha, MD, is a compassionate provider with over 18 years of clinical experience, including caring for very sick hospitalized patients and managing skilled nursing facility patients with a special focus on mental health and the well-being of the elderly. He has National Leadership

as a Chief Medical Officer, setting up quality care programs to decrease hospitalizations and improve patient quality outcomes.

To become a patient or consult with Dr. Khalid Sabha, MD, please contact his office at 239-922-0909. The practice is called Fort Myers Primary Care and Wellness, they are located

at 14131 Metropolis Ave, #105, Fort Myers, FL 33912.

REFERENCES

[1] Wachter RM, Goldman L. The emerging role of "hospitalists" in the American health care system. *N Engl J Med.* 1996;335(7):514-517. ❤️



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Victory Town Center Presents A Spectacular 4th Of July Fireworks Celebration

Submitted By Makennah Santana

Announcing the 4th Annual 2024 Victory Town Center 4th of July Freedom Fest: Honoring Unity, Local Artistry, and the Spirit of Home

Save the date as Victory Town Center and Victory Church are excited to announce the **4th Annual 2024 Victory Town Center's 4th of July Freedom Fest and Fireworks Show: Honoring Unity, Local Artistry, and the Spirit of Home**, located at 1201 Taylor Ln Ext, Lehigh Acres, Florida.

On the night of July 4th, 2024, Victory Town Center will transform into a hub of exhilaration and jubilation. The event will showcase live performances by talented local bands; attendees can sway to the rhythms of our community's diverse musical talent, showcasing the richness and creativity of our local arts scene. In addition to the outstanding live mu-

sic, **Victory Town Center's 4th of July Freedom Fest and Fireworks Show** will tantalize taste buds with an array of delectable offerings from local food trucks. This culinary emphasis underscores our commitment to supporting and spotlighting the talents of our local culinary entrepreneurs.

To display patriotism and honor our nation, a mesmerizing color guard performance will grace the stage at the event. This poignant display will pay tribute to the sacrifices of our service members and their families and instill a sense of pride and gratitude for our country. The color guard performance will serve as a heartfelt reminder of our cherished values and the unity that binds us together as a community.

Moreover, Victory Town Center is thrilled to offer a range of exciting activ-

ities for children, including a rock wall, bounce house, and obstacle courses. These kid-friendly attractions add extra fun and excitement to the celebration, ensuring families enjoy a memorable Independence Day together.

As anticipation builds within the community, Victory Church would like to invite business owners and organizations to sponsor the festival. There are various opportunities to represent your business in print, digitally, and in person with a booth and signage on stage. We have speaker opportunities and an awards presentation you'll want to participate in. **Opportunities range from \$500 to \$5,000; please contact Katrina Salokar at 239-470-5611.**

The 4th Annual Victory Town Center's 4th of July Freedom Fest and Fireworks Show promises to celebrate



Photo: Fireworks From The 3rd Annual Victory Town Center's 4th Of July Freedom Fest

unity, patriotism, and the importance of community bonds. Families, friends, and neighbors are encouraged to mark their calendars and save the date for this grand event. For more information about the event, please contact Victory Church at (239) 303-9585. ❤️

Pet Health: Dental Abscess

By Dr. Veja Tillman, DVM

Dental abscesses are one of the many dental diseases commonly treated by veterinarians. This disorder not only affects your pet's daily life but, at times, may be life threatening. Do not ignore your pet's dental health as it is an important part of your pet's overall health and wellness.

WHAT IS A DENTAL ABSCESS?

Dental abscesses (also called a tooth abscess) are painful pus-filled swellings caused by infection of the teeth or gums next to the tooth root and surrounding structures. This condition occurs when bacteria enter the soft tissue in the middle of the tooth (called the pulp cavity), or the gums. Tooth abscesses can be caused by tooth decay, cracked, or fractured teeth or gum disease (periodontal disease). It is a common health problem affecting many dogs and cats each year.

WHAT ARE THE SIGNS OF A TOOTH ABSCESS?

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

MANAGEMENT AND PREVENTION

Dental infections must be treated immediately with antibiotics and pain medication, followed by appropriate dental treatment. Antibiotic treatment on its own will not cure the

tooth abscess, it must be treated by a veterinarian. Left untreated, a tooth abscess can lead to a serious infection of the jawbone, teeth and surrounding tissue. In rare cases, bacteria from dental abscesses can spread to the blood causing life threatening sepsis (blood infection).

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

Routine professional dental cleaning is recommended at least once a year to maintain healthy teeth and gums for your pet. Removing plaque and tartar from teeth beneath the gumline and removing diseased teeth from the mouth are vital in maintaining your pet's overall health.

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

February is National Pet Dental Month!

Contact your veterinarian today to schedule a Complete Oral Health Assessment, Dental Cleaning and to discuss your pet's dental health.

ABOUT DR. TILLMAN

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. ❤️



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Lehigh Acres Deserves A Local School

By Denise Eberle

Lee County School District is doing a disservice to the children and families of Lehigh Acres. Unfortunately, the school district has not communicated with the families of Lehigh Acres about the proposed new high school which they are proposing to build in Alva on Joel Blvd and Tuckahoe Rd. The children and families in Lehigh deserve a neighborhood high school, where they live.

Alva is in the farthest Northeast corner of Lee County, and this location is contradictory to the Superintendent's narrative of "neighborhood schools and reduced busing". To build the school where it is currently proposed is fiscally irresponsible. Every student would require busing to the Alva location, meaning more bus drivers and longer transport times. The school district is now considering lowering bus driver hiring standards because of the busing shortage.

The school district just cut their budget in half from 2.3 billion dollars to 1.4 billion dollars after voting in favor of a seven million dollar Phase 1 for this school. Now other previously planned projects such as school expansions have been cut. By building this high school within Lehigh Acres at the alternative site of 201 Joel Blvd with all its infrastructure, tens of millions of dollars would be saved and could be used towards projects such as the expansion of Estero High School and a fund the 30 million dollar cut for maintenance expenditures eliminating some planned enhancements and upgrade of other existing schools.

The 46.5-acre property at 201 Joel Blvd in Lehigh Acres is owned by the school district is a better alternative property. Below are pertinent points comparing

locations.

LEHIGH ACRES PROPERTY

The property I refer to is owned by the school district and is 46.5 acres and located at 201 Joel Blvd in Lehigh Acres. It is a centralized location, in between the two "dead zones" as depicted by the school district. These "dead zones" have no schools and a high school is needed in Lehigh Acres.

It is central to students and families which will significantly reduce busing and allow shorter transportation times since students can walk and ride bikes to school. Parents can drive their kids to school since this location is closer to their homes and makes it easier for parents and students to attend after school sports and activities. Per Lee County School District Planner, in reference to the new School Proximity Zones, "Alva is a geographically significant distance from the student population."

The students can transition easily from the surrounding elementary and middle schools including Amanecer Elementary, Lemuel Teal Middle, Lehigh Middle, Lehigh Elementary and Veterans Park Academy for the Arts and remain with the friends and families they know.

This location is already a school zone and has all the infrastructure needed and is a safer location, with sewer and water, sidewalks, saving Taxpayers tens of millions of dollars.

There are no environmentally sensitive areas, wildlife concerns, and flooding.

ALVA LOCATION

The Alva Location is located on Tuckahoe Road and Joel Blvd. Below are the

negative impacts of building the high school at this location.

There are approximately 200 kids total in the Alva community and virtually no kids in a two-mile radius of the proposed location. All students would require busing to the farthest Northeast corner of Lee County, meaning longer transportation times.

There is no infrastructure including sewer, water, cable, high speed internet, etc. This will cost the taxpayers additional tens of millions of dollars above the 140 million dollars to build the school, that could be used for good teachers and classrooms to educate our students.

It is a dangerous traffic area. Joel Blvd is a two-lane road with no sidewalks in the proposed location and is not slated to widen for at least ten years. The neighborhood roads are small, narrow residential roads with deep ditches on both sides leaving no room for pedestrians. If and when they widen the roads, traffic will substantially increase and so will speed, which will be an existential risk to all drivers especially for inexperienced teen drivers, causing accidents to happen.

There are multiple active private gun ranges in the immediate vicinity. Noise from these gun ranges will have schools required to do lockdowns until deemed safe.

This will have a devastating negative impact on the surrounding 20/20 conservation lands. There is a wildlife corridor directly adjacent to the south, east and west of this property. There are black bears, panthers, gopher tortoises, crested caracara birds, sandhill cranes, scrub jay, otters, and even alligators

that traverse this property and cross Joel Blvd. Lee County stakeholders have spent millions for preservation of this area.

There are significant environmental impacts including flooding, pollution of the Caloosahatchee River from oil, gas, diesel, fertilizers, and herbicides.

There will be massive amounts of fill needed and endless dump trucks entering and leaving this property of 102 acres. Active continuous construction for at least six years not including the road widening that would follow, which would add at least another two years of construction meaning eight years of continuous construction.

I encourage Lehigh families to please email your school board and let them know you want this high school to be built where it is needed. Wouldn't it be better to have a high school centralized within these schools rather than the children being bussed miles away? There is still time to stop it from being built in Alva, but you must act now. The school is currently in phase 1, which means they are doing the "groundwork" including design, permits, surveys, engineering. Your children deserve a school close to home. If you want it, you must fight for it. Lehigh parents, get involved! Make sure to attend the school board meetings and bring your children. Do your part by reaching out to the members of the school board. Listed below are the email addresses of the school board members.

EMAILS FOR SCHOOL BOARD

To email the school board. Please visit: https://www.leeschools.net/school_board

General Women's Club

By Connie Puzovic

The General Woman's Club of Lehigh Acres will hold their monthly meeting on Friday, February 16th, 2024, at the Rise Christian Church (50 Bell Blvd. Lehigh Acres, FL) at 1:00 PM. The speaker will be a representative from the Lee County Sheriff's Departure speaking on personal safety.

The club is gearing up for their Fashion Show, largest fundraiser of the year, to

be held March 9th, 2024 at The Pelican Preserve Country Club (Fort Myers). Door open at 10:30 am with fashions from Chico's.

Last year the club was able to award \$12,000 in scholarships to single parents with children living at home from Lehigh Acres who have chosen to further their education and make a better life for themselves and their children.

Fashion show tickets are \$45 per person and can be purchased by calling Betty Walsh at (315) 863-9300.

ABOUT GENERAL WOMAN'S CLUB

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.

The General Woman's Club of Lehigh Acres always welcomes new members and encourages anyone interested in joining to call: Betty Smith - (239) 850-6617.



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Season 2024 In Full Swing

By Mike Welch



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

Speeding, bullying, tailgating, cutting off, texting, running red lights and other bad behavior along with unlicensed, suspended license, uninsured, criminal activity as well as so many other dangerous situations have not presented a deadly cauldron of stress, grief and changed lives. East Lee County stands with the rest of the region with a dangerous situation that is only getting worse. The morning and evening rush periods have begun to rival the traffic patterns of large metro areas with not much immediate relief in sight. Vehicle insurance going sky high? We can blame many of the factors listed above. If you know

people getting behind the wheel who have no right or privilege to get behind that wheel – credit them in part for this mess.

Our Eastern Zone deputies and staff work hard, and the people of Lee County invest via a Board of Commissioners in public safety. Unfortunately, how do you regulate moral decision making and destructive behavior. Maybe the answer is for our leaders to enact penalties with deep consequences as we now equate driving with possible deadly results. I hope you read Sheriff Marceno's article and let him know that you support his deputies and that our leaders need to look at more penalties that are deep and are realistic deterrents with driving behavior and keeping people off the roads who don't have the privilege to drive.

EAST LEE CHAMBER GALA – MARCH 9TH – PLANTATION GOLF & COUNTRY CLUB

The 62nd Anniversary Gala of the Chamber is in full planning stage with our area's educators, public service and health care professionals being recognized for their service to our communities. The Chamber will also recognize our outgoing School Superintendent Dr. Christopher Bernier for his servant leadership during his tenure that included putting our district back together after Hurricane Ian. His attention and concern for East Lee/Lehigh has been showing results. Thank you, Chris, for crossing our path over the past years! For information call Melissa or Peg at the Chamber

Office 239-369-3322 or www.eastlee-chamber.com for information and reservations.

ONWARD TO TALLY!

Once again Senate President Kathleen Passidomo (R-Naples/East Lee) and Senate President – Designate Ben Albritton (R- Wauchula/East Lee) have invited close to 30 middle school students from Harnes Marsh Middle School and Lemuel Teal Middle School as their guest to visit the Florida Legislature on February 28th. Last year was a successful and productive time for the students who are studying government at this stage. This now annual trip is funded and organized by the East Lee County Chamber of Commerce. ❤️

Driving Safely In The New Year

By Sheriff Carmine Marceno



Photo: Sheriff Carmine Marceno, Lee County Sheriff

The holidays have passed and we begin a new year here in Lee County. While Santa has returned to the North Pole, the seasonal congestion that we experience here in Southwest Florida remains.

Lee County, as a rule, experiences an approximate population increase of 22 percent during season. This equates to a significant increase in the number of vehicles, bicyclists and pedestrians on our streets and roadways. Some of the drivers here during the winter season are unfamiliar with our road-

ways and with recently updated traffic patterns. Roadways are a bit more congested and our children return to school following the holiday break. These variables require that drivers and pedestrians remain focused while out and about.

The Lee County Sheriff's Office, in an effort to reduce traffic-related incidents, remind drivers to obey speed limits, comply with traffic signals and to maintain distance between vehicles.

A significant percentage of vehicular collisions occur as a result of tailgating and failure to maintain an adequate distance between ourselves and the car or truck ahead of us. Ensure that you are maintaining a full three-second

distance between yourself and the vehicle in front of you. Additionally, wet roadways require additional stopping distance, especially at highway speeds.

Should you be operating a heavily-weighted vehicle or towing a trailer/camper, recognize that significantly more time is required to bring your vehicle to a complete stop. Should the car or truck behind you be following at an unsafe distance, please attempt to change lanes and allow that individual to pass. Avoid speeding up or intentionally slowing in response to the tailgater. Avoid partaking in road-rage incidents. This is a difficult time of year for many. There is an element of

stress returning to work after the holiday season and the additional traffic adds to our frustration. It is important, however, to do whatever is necessary to avoid aggressive interaction with other drivers.

As mentioned, students are returning to school, bus stops will once again have children present and school buses will be making frequent stops to pick up and discharge passengers. Please exercise extreme caution!

Let's begin the new year safely, with consideration for others, and make 2024 an awesome year here in Lee County. ❤️

Balancing Act As Supply Increases & Price Negotiate Down

By Melissa Flexsenhar



Photo: Melissa Flexsenhar

The real estate landscape in Southwest Florida is experiencing a noticeable shift, marked by a decline in the number of homes sold year over year. Recent statistics reveal a downward trend.

According to data from the past three years, the number of homes sold in SWFL has seen a steady decrease. In 2021, the region recorded just over 48,000 home sales, but by 2022, the figure dropped to around 35,000. The latest available data for 2023 indicates a further decline, with only 31,000 homes sold. This downward trajectory is a departure from the robust market seen in the last couple years.

Breaking down the statistics for the last seven days provides a snapshot of the current state of the SWFL real estate market. In this brief period, there were 1398 new property listings, 974 pending transactions, and 468 homes successfully sold. Additionally, 1699 homes experienced price decreases, reflecting a dynamic market responding to changing demand and supply conditions.

Like many real estate markets, SWFL is highly localized. While one neighborhood may be experiencing an increase in property values, a nearby area might witness a decline. This localized variation

adds a layer of complexity to the overall market dynamics.

Homes are spending more time on the market, with the average days on the market reaching approximately 60 days. This indicates a shift in the speed at which homes are being bought and sold. Buyers are taking their time, and sellers are finding themselves in a position where negotiation becomes essential to close deals.

The broader trend of the market indicates a change in the negotiation power dynamic. In many cases, sellers are now more open to negotiating prices down from the listed values. This willingness to negotiate reflects the evolving nature of the market and the need for flexibility in transactions.

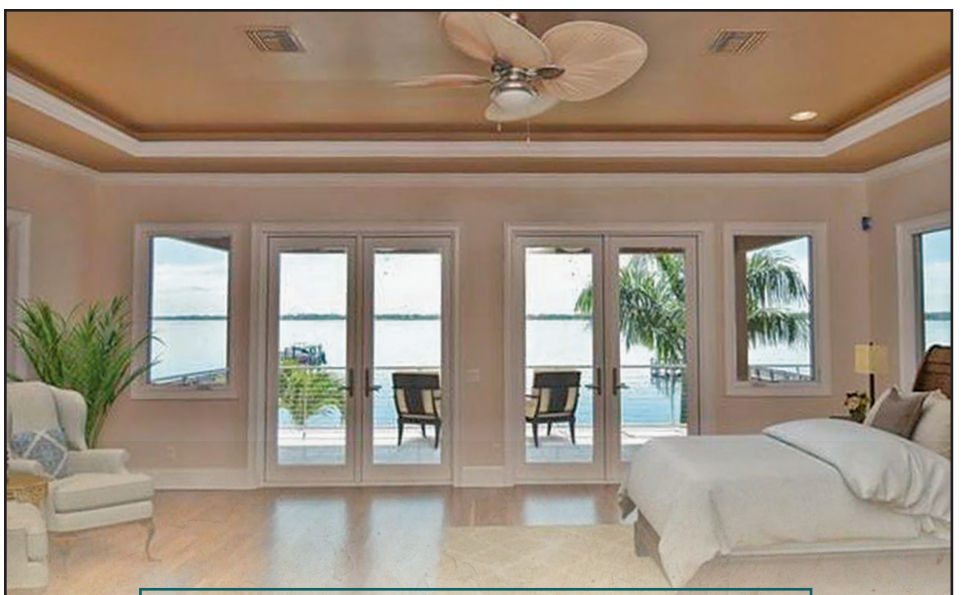
While migration to the SWFL area continues, there has been a noticeable slowing down in recent times. This shift in migration patterns could be influenced by various factors, such as economic conditions, job opportunities, and lifestyle preferences.

As the SWFL real estate market undergoes this transformation, industry players and potential buyers alike are closely watching the evolving landscape, navigating the changes, monitoring interest rates and adapting their strategies to thrive in the new market conditions.

ABOUT MELISSA FLEXSENHAR

Melissa Flexsenhar has been a realtor in this area since 2002, if you are con-

sidering buying or selling or just have questions about the current market Melissa can be reached at 239-839-2690 or email her at: melissaflexsenhar@gmail.com ❤️



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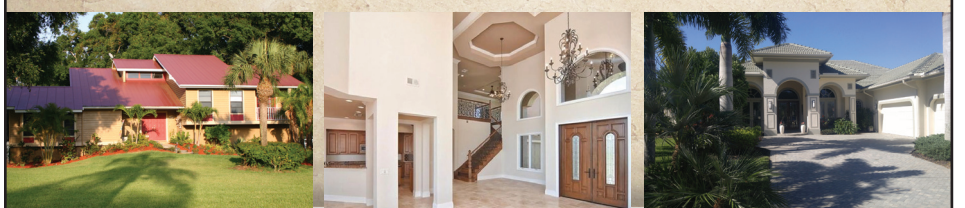
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LJ's Lounge And Package Closing: Urban Sprawl Is Set To Claim Another Victim

By James Kennedy

The creep of urban sprawl is about to claim another victim. LJ's Lounge and Package. Billed by the owner and founder Linda Flaitz and her husband and partner, Marc Murray, as "The Last Cracker Honky Tonk in Lee County," LJ's is facing its last day on February 4th, 2024, at the time this paper went to press. This bastion of redneck revelry and country nightlife has been a fixture in East Lee County for 33 years, starting initially at a location in Fort Myers Shores on State Road 80, also known as Palm Beach Blvd and is. After a couple of years, LJ's eventually moved around the corner just a little ways down State Road 31, which may be a more fitting home for this humble establishment. But, what used to be somewhat of a back road, just a little off the beaten path, is developing into a heavily trafficked artery thanks to the establishment of the new urban center of Babcock Ranch, the latest blow to the rural heart of Florida.

Marc says he will remember the kindness and friendship that flowed from LJ's, a manifestation of Linda's kindness. While the old watering hole might have had a rough demeanor, the days have passed when bouncers were called for, but the generosity of the owners and patrons hasn't. Marc said they have done benefits every year they've been open, and Linda has always tried to help those in need. When the lights are turned out, another thing that will fade will be this unofficial community center's acts of benevolence.

When talking to the patrons of LJ's there's a noticeable sadness in their eyes and voices as they recall memories spanning the last three decades. The recollections are held close, many joyful and wild, some, well, somber for lack of a better word. Some folks have been coming here since the doors opened; some

found it yesterday. There is a unique air to the place. This old honky tonk was more than just a bar, entering the youthful lore of youngsters excited to rub elbows with older friends and local legends. In its own way, it became a home away from home, a wild and wooly community center, hosting a range of social events from weddings to wakes and benefits to birthdays. Now, sure, not everybody that went through the doors was a rough and tough cracker cowboy or biker; the crowd has been a mix of everyone from tradesmen to doctors and lawyers and such. An eclectic mix of the friendly people that live out east. Besides being a spot to decompress from a hard day or an oasis of down-home charm, LJ's played host to many bands, more than anybody seems to be able to count.

The creation of Babcock Ranch, or maybe, more accurately, the reinven-

tion of Babcock Ranch as a sprawling town center in the middle of formerly productive agricultural land, was the final straw for LJ's and the slower-paced rural outreaches of SWFL Florida. Nothing lasts forever. In the case of LJ's, the memories made there will preserve a unique aspect of life in Florida's rural country circles.

When LJ's doors close for the last time, it's not just the closing of a bar or the passing of a cultural symbol. It's a loss like that of a home or a friend. Some wonder where they'll go to visit their friends who held onto each other using LJ's as a gathering place. It may just be a bar to some, but it was a treasure to others.

Check back next month for our follow-up article and pictures from the closing. ❤️

FOR MORE PICTURES AND TO COMMENT ON LJ'S LOUNGE AND PACKAGES, PLEASE VISIT EASTLEENews.COM



Photo: Annette Renfro and her husband, Joey. They met at LJ's at that very corner of the bar 23 years ago. Annette was quickly overcome with emotion as she shared that Linda, the owner, let them have their reception there free of charge. She went on to say that Linda had hosted funerals for people and fundraisers when they had cancer, all for free, and even when people have passed away in her own life, it hasn't hurt her heart as much as this place closing. "It's like the death of an old friend. It truly is. It's like a piece of my life," said Annette.

Photo: Matt Armstrong, 45, and his wife, Angie, in the center. They are from Cape Coral and brought their friends Julie & Kristopher Klein, who are visiting from Chicago. They came to LJ's that night to introduce them to "Florida before a bunch of people moved here and f-worded it up," he continued, "When I moved to Florida in 1984, as far as you could see, you could maybe see two houses, that's it. Now this place now sucks, and I want out of here. LJ's is one of the last real bars left, and we came here instead of some real commercialized bull#%@ bar." Kris added, "This is the only cowboy bar I've ever seen in Florida, and I'm really upset that it's not going to be here."

Photo: Annette Renfro, pictured here with Cami-Jo, a bartender at LJ's for 23 years, said, "I wanted to add that LJ's is not just a bar; it's a place where generations of people that was born in Fort Myers go to socialize; at any given time, I can walk in that door and see somebody I went to school with that's very comforting to a lot of people, friends for 30, 40 years gather and just have a good time I don't know where we're going to gather. I don't know how long it'll be before I see some of those people once LJ's closes. That's what LJ's is: a gathering place."

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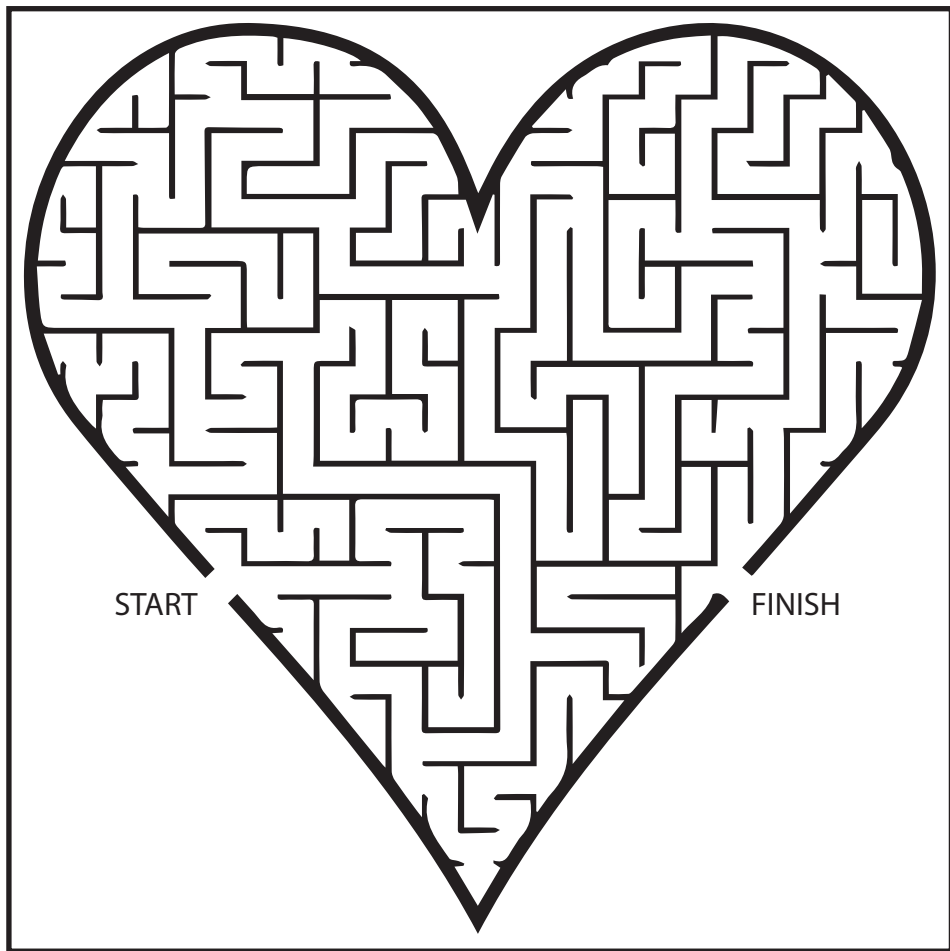
The CULTURAL ARTS CALENDAR

February 5 Great Voices from Opera to Broadway
Concerto Soloists Internationale returns to the Community Concert Association with all new music, featuring popular highlights from grand opera to Broadway to pop performed by international soloists from four continents with a live on-stage orchestra and an emcee.

March 7 Barcelona Flamenco Ballet
Known for its outstanding and unforgettable productions, the Barcelona Flamenco Ballet offers an innovative combination of both traditional and more modern and contemporary flamenco dance set to musical styles ranging from classical to jazz to conventional flamenco.

March 7 Festival Under The Stars: Carmen
Now in its 3rd century, the magnificent tale of Carmen proves fascinating and ageless in the hands of Jimmy Gamonet de los Heros. Here, he forged a modern version of the story, focusing attention on the dancers themselves. Although the fiery Carmen is unmistakably the ruling figure, Gamonet created choreography for her suitors that allows each to express his own complexity of character and well-spring of passion. Producing a ballet with a known storyline was a departure for Jimmy Gamonet, who was best known for his neoclassical creations.

March 19 Kyiv Virtuosi Symphony Orchestra
Years of friendship and collaboration between a group of talented Ukrainian laureates and world famous conductor and cellist Dmitry Yablonsky led to the creation of the Kyiv Virtuosi Symphony Orchestra. During this year's "Tour of Freedom," the orchestra will be joined by MultiPiano, a unique piano ensemble ranging from one piano with four hands to several pianos in a variety of multi-hand combinations.



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- February 9 National Pizza Day
- February 11 Make a Friend Day
- February 13 National Wingman Day
- February 15 Do a Grouch a Favor Day
- February 18 National Drink Wine Day
- February 20 Cherry Pie Day
- February 23 Play Tennis Day
- February 26 National Pistachio Day
- February 29 Leap Day!

**IMPORTANT MEETING!
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Everyone who cares about PROTECTING THE BUCKINGHAM RURAL COMMUNITY LIFESTYLE is urged to attend.

This is our opportunity to inform the Lee County Board of County Commissioners about how these development changes will impact our community and quality of life.

Wednesday, February 7th • 9:30 AM
Lee County Courthouse, 2120 Main Street

A public hearing on a rezoning proposal to increase Orange River RPD from 160 to 258 homes on 129 acres at Ornge River Blvd. and Staley Rd.

Presented by the Buckingham Community Association, Inc. A Florida Not-Ror-Profit Corporation. For more information, email: press@eastleenews.com, and we will forward your questions to the proper contacts at Buckingham Community Association, Inc.

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HAPPY Valentine's DAY

ANSWER KEY FEBRUARY 2024

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THE ROAR EAST LEE COUNTY NEWS

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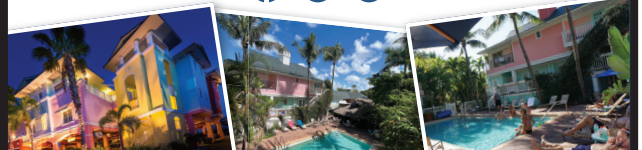
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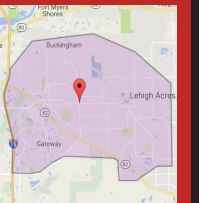
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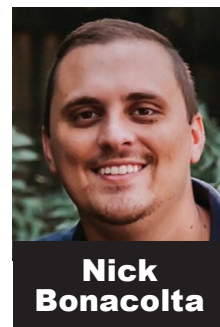
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Nick Bonacolta



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5 BEDROOM 3 BATH TWO STORY HOME IN TOWN LAKES - ALMOST 3500 SQ FT.



Almost 3500 square feet of living area in this 5 bedroom 3 bath two story home in Popular Town Lakes Subdivision, very low quarterly fees, gated entry, sidewalks and CENTRAL WATER AND SEWER, home was BUILT IN 2017, extra deep FENCED BACKYARD OVERLOOKING THE LAKE, commercial grade LUXURY VINYL floors, formal living room in front may be used as a den, large formal dining room, extra spacious kitchen with walk in butler's pantry, island countertop with breakfast bar, pendant lights, all appliances, breakfast nook area overlooking the backyard all open to the large family room, guest bedroom on the first floor with guest bathroom, all bedrooms have walk in closets, indoor laundry room with washer and dryer, second floor has a large loft or playroom/recreation room, master bedroom with large walk in closet, views of the water, private bath with dual sinks and separate garden tub and shower, large guest bedrooms one with water views from the windows, nicely landscaped yard with covered porch in the front, sliding doors from the kitchen area to the backyard with covered porch and open patio with pavers, excellent for entertaining, gutters have been installed, LED lighting throughout.

Offered At\$390,000

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

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\$122,500

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

3 BEDROOM 2 BATH VILLA IN VISTANNA VILLAS GATED COMMUNITY-NO AGE RESTRICTIONS



Well maintained 3 bedroom 2 bath villa with a 2 car garage in the popular Vistanna Villas gated community, NO AGE RESTRICTIONS HERE, Secure gated entry with common pool and playground area, central water and sewer, low quarterly maintenance fees, large screened lanai with pull down sun shades in the backyard, One of the largest lanai's in the entire community, screened front porch, tile throughout the home with wood laminate in the bedrooms, indoor laundry room, pantry in the kitchen, breakfast bar, newer stainless steel appliances, master bedroom with private bathroom with walk in shower and dual sinks, Large walk in closet in master bedroom, accordion hurricane shutters on all windows and openings, home is conveniently located directly across from the community pool and playground, perfect centralized location, close to stores and easy access to Ft. Myers and I-75.

Offered At\$260,000

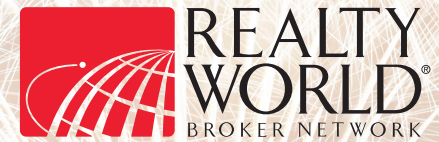
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2 BEDROOM 2 BATH STONE EDGE CONDO



55+ community - no pets - 2nd floor unit with assigned covered parking. Ceramic tile in living area. Laminate floors in bedrooms. This two bedroom/2 bath unit is a split bedroom arrangement. There is a laundry room inside the condo. The tennis court has lights and the swimming pool is heated. The view from the screened porch is lovely. Located just minutes from the heart of Lehigh and easy access to SR 82 and the international airport (RSW) and Jet Blue Park.

Offered At\$172,900

Mary Abell 239-229-5062 maryabell@earthlink.net

3 BEDROOM 2 BATH + DEN NEW CONSTRUCTION



Brand new construction C.O. HAS BEEN ISSUED AND THE HOME IS READY FOR IMMEDIATE OCCUPANCY, 3 bedroom 2 bath plus den that may be used as an office or 4th bedroom, ceramic tile floors throughout, 5 inch baseboards, IMPACT RESISTANT WINDOWS, nicely landscaped corner lot with irrigation system, 20 X 12 covered lanai in the rear of the home, GRANITE COUNTERTOPS, REAL WOOD CABINETS WITH SOFT CLOSE DOORS AND DRAWERS, breakfast bar and walk in pantry in kitchen with pendant lighting, stainless steel kitchen appliance package is included in sale, master bedroom with tray ceiling, dual walk in closets, large master bath with dual sinks and vanities, spacious walk in wrap around shower with dual heads, glass tile accents, large closets in guest bedrooms, indoor laundry room with laundry tub, double garage with opener, LED lighting throughout, extra long driveway with plenty of parking, excellent location on a quiet low traffic street yet just minutes to 10th St West for easy access to Ft Myers and I-75.

Offered At\$360,000

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AFFORDABLE POOL HOME OVERLOOKING THE GOLF COURSE



Affordable POOL HOME overlooking the GOLF COURSE. Pay as you play. NO HOA FEES OR MEMBERSHIPS HERE. NEW DIMENSIONAL SHINGLE ROOF IN 2015, NEW CENTRAL HEAT AND AIR IN 2023, NEW POOL PUMP AND EQUIPMENT IN 2023, NEW WATER HEATER IN 2023, NEW STAINLESS STEEL APPLIANCES IN 2023, freshly painted interior, ceramic tile floors throughout, skylights in the formal dining area with mirrored wall, eat in kitchen with nook area and pantry, PRIVATE IN GROUND POOL WITH GREAT VIEWS OF THE GOLF COURSE, roll down storm shutters, NEW SCREENS ON POOL CAGE, master bedroom with access to the pool area, private bath with dual sinks, shower and walk in closet, enclosed porch with tile floors may be used for a den or office, vaulted ceilings in the living room, quiet low traffic street with CENTRAL WATER AND SEWER.

Offered At\$295,000

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3 BEDROOM 2 BATH POOL HOME IN MIRROR LAKES



Located in the highly routed Mirror Lakes area of Lehigh Acres. No need to lug heavy water bottles from the grocery store as this home features central water and sewer. Beautifully kept completely tiled three bedroom, two bath pool and spa home is perfect for entertaining or just enjoying those sunny days and cool nights. The oversized Master bedroom features pocket sliding glass doors that lead you out to the refreshing heated saltwater pool and spa, two spacious walk-in closets, and a very WOW looking Master bathroom. The open shower has a relaxing overhead Rain waterfall feature and built-in tile shelf perfect for all your bath and beauty needs. The two remaining bedrooms are both spacious. For anyone looking for a Dream Kitchen I believe this home will fill that need. Beautiful upgraded granite, stainless steel appliances, open concept with so many cabinets and counter space. Looking to entertain, look no further as this home features a living room, family room also with pocket sliding glass doors that lead out to huge lanai(storm shutters) with an oversized pool and spa. The backyard features many fruit trees with still plenty of space for a future garden or playground.

Offered At\$444,900

Louis Bonadies 239-218-5305 loub513@comcast.net

3 BEDROOM 3 BATH POOL HOME IN MIRROR LAKES - NO HOA FEES



Exceptional estate sized home in the Mirror Lakes area. NO HOA FEES. 3656 square feet of living area in this 4 bedroom 3 bath home with NEW METAL ROOF 2021, beautifully landscaped property includes the adjoining lot, fenced dog run area with six foot fence, pavers in driveway and walkway to the front door, grand double door entry, dual central heat and air units new in 2016 and 2021, roll down storm shutters, oversized double garage, built in automatic generator, great room at entry with skylights, family room with wet bar and fireplace, formal dining room with mirrored walls, excellent for entertaining, spacious kitchen with plenty of cabinets, new refrigerator and garbage disposal, walk in pantry, large nook area overlooking the pool, two tankless water heaters, two master bedrooms with private bathrooms, new upgraded carpet in two guest bedrooms, main master suite W/ extra large dual walk in closets, fireplace, sliders to the pool area, private bath with dual sinks, walk in shower & oversized jetted tub, oversized screened lanai with in ground pool, outside kitchen with Jenn Air grill and sink, excellent location with plenty of privacy and minutes to SR 82, I-75 and Ft Myers.

Offered At\$570,000

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