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EAST LEE COUNTY NEWS | DANIELS CORRIDOR

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Southwest Florida Business Alliance

By Butch Swank - butch@goodladandswank.com



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

There's a saying I've always found interesting: Nature hates a vacuum. In essence, it means if something was in a place and now isn't, something else is absolutely going to fill that place. It does not matter why it went away. What matters is the empty place is going to be filled. This occurs not just in nature but also in business, real estate, education, athletics, grocery stores, libraries, and so on. If you think about it for just one minute, you'll probably come up with a bunch more examples than I just did. It is a universal concept that applies to everything. I guess that's why the term was coined as Nature hating that vacuum because Nature covers all the bases.

I say this because nearly three years ago, my friend Katrina Salokar, who owns Paradise Creative Group, and I were at my office talking. We were basically whining about how local businesses were no longer connected. They no longer talked to each other. They didn't refer business to each other because nobody knew each other anymore. Most businesses didn't do much except keep their heads down and simply try to survive. Katrina and I were in that very same boat. Looking back, and to be

fair, COVID had drastically changed how all people (both customers and providers) did business, and that leaned mostly towards interacting as little as possible with each other. This leads to another saying I love: Patterns repeat themselves.

The trick with patterns is they are not always easily identified. Some are obvious, like your teenager not waking up in a joyous mood. Others are not quite as obvious. Now, back to Butch and Katrina whining. What was obvious to us was that something was wrong but seeing the pattern was less clear to us. That's when we realized that businesses suddenly had no formal organization to help stitch back together the networks they once had. Unlike in the past, there were no central places or groups for them to gather and ask for advice, promote their business, share a laugh, or even just having someone familiar with you to gripe to and they'd get it. I'm not a trained psychologist, but I'm fairly confident in stating that being alone sucks. In prison, there's a reason they punish prisoners with solitary confinement. We humans are just not wired to operate alone, and the business community was unintentionally punishing itself with isolation.

Katrina and I whining was not a behavior pattern either of us felt com-

fortable with and certainly didn't want to repeat. (I can't believe I'm publicly stating we were whining. Katrina's going to kick me when she reads this! Thankfully, I'm taller than her, so please pray for my leg and hind end.) Whining might make you feel better temporarily, but it very rarely makes the situation better. So, like the red-blooded American entrepreneurs we are, we stopped and focused on solving the problem. After some study, we identified there were no solid organizations to lean on. Sure, there were some here or there, but the vibe they had just didn't feel right. Keep in mind, building something from scratch is far harder than fixing something that's already there. That route would be both faster and easier, but again, none of their vibes felt "right." We discussed this fact, then did some mental and emotional math, and decided to instead start our own thing to ensure it had our mentality in its DNA from the get-go.

Enter the Southwest Florida Business Alliance. It was originally planned to just represent the East side of Lee County because that's where we saw the most need. However, by the end of our first year, we had businesses ranging from Marco Island to Tampa as members. It was astonishing, and still is, to be frank, how well received the message was. I think, more im-

portantly, the execution of our plan is what has truly led to this success. We came up with some core principles and have stuck with them. Southwest Florida Business Alliance membership is now in the hundreds, and, seeing this pattern, I imagine it will just continue to grow. I write all this to say clearly that if you are a business owner, if you know one, are an executive, or are a person with ambition and a drive to succeed, we want you. We've been able to accomplish some amazing things together. We're helping to steer smarter growth in Southwest Florida. We're helping to share with people in power that things like the capacity of our roads must be taken into consideration before greenlighting yet another development. We're working with the Economic Development Office and providing the insight they would not have had without these new eyes participating. The EDO has been so open and welcoming, and for that, we are truly grateful. We offer value, and that means something. Good things are already here, and the future looks even brighter. Our recipe is simple: get some good people in a room, talk, come up with actionable decisions, and implement them. If you have the same mentality, please reach out to us. We would love to speak with you! Visit www.swflba.com or call 239-470-5611.



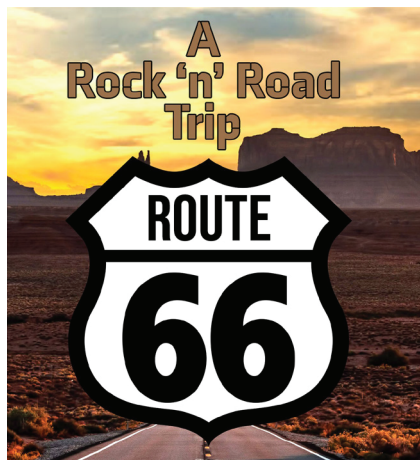
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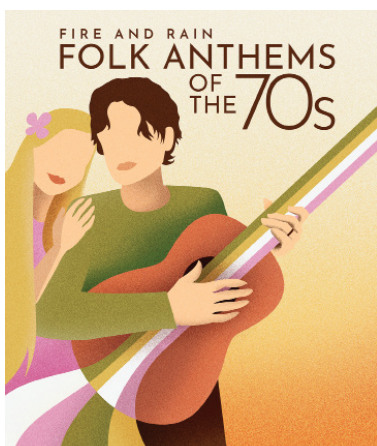
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Expansion Without Proper Infrastructure

By Susan Allen



Photo: Susan Allen
www.alvastrong.org

I recently wrote an article called "Sprawl Hurts Us All". It elaborated on the concern that unbridled development has harmful effects on the citizens of Lee County. Alva Strong, a local group of concerned citizens and several other local groups, have been fighting the Lee County Commissioners over the ever expanding, high density developments. Their close ties to land developers such as Neal Communities have, at very least, an appearance of impropriety with a recent 5-0 vote in favor of amending the zoning map to allow water and sewer to feed the 1000+ homes that Neal is proposing on North River Road what is now a rural area.

Pat Neal is a former state representative who has close ties and donated to each commissioner. In spite of the overwhelming public outcry against high density, high population communities, our Lee County Board of Commissioners Yes vote was in direct opposition to its own Local Planning Agency recommendation. The commissioners paid little attention to the public as they voiced their concerns

and several commissioners disrespected their constituents by being absent on the days during parts of the public hearing. The plan will allow for a sewer pipe to be placed under the Caloosahatchee River, a river already plagued by pollution that contributes to red tide. Traffic, pollution, and the effect on wildlife are but a few of the long term consequences of rapid ill-planned development. But perhaps the most significant dangers of overpopulation are the effect on our health care system. As Lee County's population reaches nearly one million, and with no sign that our commissioners intend to slow the growth, the system is flooded and the healthcare system becomes as sick as its patients.

According to statistics there should be a minimum of 2.4 hospital beds per 1000 people. Lee County is well below this benchmark. Compound that with an acute shortage of Florida physicians and nurses due to the ever expanding population, and seasonal guest and our ER waiting rooms look like a combat zone. In Florida, the shortage of family medicine physicians achieve only 62% of the demand. By 2030 an additional 22,000 physicians will be required to meet future needs. EMS services are

over stressed and prolonged response times are now the norm.

I'd like to share a personal story that unfortunately reflects the seriousness of Lee County's dilemma. I was an RN for 43 year. My roommate from Nursing School and I have been best friends since I was 17 years old. She experienced a life threatening reaction to the Covid booster and spent a week in the ICU, I invited her and her 95 year old mother, who was under her care, to move to Florida and share our home so she could recover and have help with her mother. Sadly, she was diagnosed with cancer a year ago and because it was caught early required only surgery. However, now the cancer had spread to her abdomen. Her surgeon referred her to a medical oncologist to develop a treatment plan for chemo and possible radiation but her prognosis is not encouraging. Some statistics place her survival at 2-11 months without treatment. In spite of many discouraging hours on the phone, it took 2 weeks before she could get in contact with the office to secure an appointment date. Many doctors were not seeing new patients and had only distant appointment times available. The nearest appointment time was for

an additional 6 weeks out. Let's do the math. A quickly growing cancer without treatment but she can't be seen by a physician for 6 weeks. This is only one story. There are many more just like it. I place the blame squarely on the Board of County Commissioners who put their interest and those of the insiders above the citizens that they have sworn to represent. More homes and people require more doctors, nurses and hospital beds. It's time we hold our commissioners responsible for their dangerously poor decisions.

Flooding our communities with more and more people without the infrastructure to support it is irresponsible. So what can we do? First let's stop voting in candidates that do not have the public's best interest in mind. This is not a right verses left issue. Good and honest government begins at the local level. VOTE THE PRIMARY! Remove the current board that are beholding only to commercial interest. Write your representatives, attend public meetings and vote wisely. Let's replace this commission with servant leaders who actually represent us. Get involved! For more information contact AlvaStrong.org. 🍀

A Neighborhood School

By Denise Eberle

When I went to school, children went to the schools closest to their homes. They also were designed to complement their communities. Smaller schools in the suburbs and more prominent schools in the urban communities.

Lee County School District has plans to build a high school for 2800 students in the small rural community of Alva, smack dab in the middle of the 20/20 wildlife corridor, the Scrub Jay Preserves, near two active gun ranges and a gun accessory stand.

This wildlife corridor is the last of its kind in Lee County. Stakeholders have paid tens of millions of dollars to preserve this wildlife corridor. The wildlife that traverses this preserve are black bears, panthers, crested Cara Cara birds, gopher tortoises, and many more.

However, an alternative school property would be more conducive to the wildlife, the students, and their families.

That property is 46.5 acres located in Lehigh Acres, where the students and families live with no wildlife concerns. It would be a neighborhood school. It is located at 201 Joel Blvd. The old golf course.

This property is a centralized in location for other schools. It is centralized within Lehigh Acres.

I attended the Rock, Blues and Brews Festival in Lehigh Acres, an annual event put on by the Rotary Club of Lehigh Acres. I went there to talk to parents, families, and residents about the High School because the Lee County School District have yet to communicate with Lehigh Acres families at all about this school. Which I found interesting because the Lee County School District is saying they are proposing to advance neighborhood schools and reduce busing.

Every person I spoke with wanted this school to be built in Lehigh. Stu-

dents approached me and wanted it built in Lehigh. The overwhelming response was, "It's just common sense."

It keeps the students together when they transition into High School, and many students can walk or ride bikes to this location. There are 2 middle schools (Lehigh Middle and Lemuel Teal) and a K-8 (VPAA) in the 2-mile radius of this location. All needed infrastructure is there. No wildlife or environmental concerns.

So, who exactly is Lee County school district building this school for?

Alva has virtually no students in the 2-mile radius. Students can not walk or ride a bike to school. There is absolutely no infrastructure at this location. There are no sidewalks, very narrow residential roads, or room for pedestrians. It would cost taxpayers an additional 10's of millions of dollars. Where's the transparency, financial feasibility, and responsibility?

Lehigh Acres students and families deserve a High School where they live, not out in the farthest NE corner of Lee County where EVERY student must be bused. That's at least 36 additional buses and drivers needed. What happened to reduced busing? Those familiar with this area are very familiar with the accidents that occur. Do you want your teen drivers traveling out here?

Contact your school board, community organizations, Rotary Club, Chamber of Commerce, and Kiwanis Clubs of Lehigh Acres. Request that they represent you to the Lee County school district.

Email your school board District 5 representative, Armor Persons. Start a petition within your community.

You can contact me, and I will collect them. I will deliver them to the school board. You can email me at eemsouch@aol.com if you have any questions. 🍀



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“Trash to Cash Rulemaking”: Incinerators, Permits and Models

By Marsha Ellis



Photo: Marsha Ellis

What happens when snow-birds flock to SWFL? What is the flipside of the rosy economic boon, the busy hotels, restaurants, HOAs, roads and destinations? There’s more trash. Newcomers? Boomers? Hurricanes? Different question, same answer --- more people, more storms, more trash. Blue skies? Trash. Grey skies? Much more trash. Are the consequences of all of this trash being unequally shouldered by East Lee communities?

The Covanta-Lee incinerator in Buckingham exceeded dioxin-furan emission allowances, receiving violations in Jan-

uary and April of 2023. After eventually “passing” six months later in June, Lee County Solid Waste reached a settlement with the FDEP and Covanta paid a \$2,000 fine. Given no “right to know”, East Lee communities were unaware until the “settlement” buried in the Commissioner’s consent agenda, came to light.

Complacency about incinerator emissions, including dioxin – the world’s most toxic chemical and mercury, have led to regrettable planning practices including putting a park next door! Florida burns more trash than any other state even though factors in our environment INCREASE susceptibility to health impacts. Consequences of waste incineration both disproportionately

affect neighborhoods and spread beyond --- contributing to over 2,000 fish advisories statewide due to mercury bioaccumulation. In March you can give public comment through three FEDERAL RULEMAKING opportunities:

MUNICIPAL WASTE INCINERATORS: (by 3/25) proposing to end exceptions for malfunctions at municipal waste incinerators, **TITLE 5 PERMITS** (by 3/11) assessing federal oversight of “stationary sources of air pollution” permits and **WARM v16 MODEL** (by 3/15) contemplating incinerator incentives, displacing or disadvantaging other practices. For more information, links to the rulemaking and possible talking points to supplement your observations and position review the google slides at:

<https://rebrand.ly/ju0n2zj>

To learn about solutions and alternatives to incineration for Florida communities sign up for a three-part webinar (6:30pm 2/27, 3/26, 4/23) hosted by Sierra Club detailing and endorsing Zero-Waste initiatives.

The Landscape of Solid Waste Management in Florida – Where do Incineration and Zero Waste Fit In?

[HTTPS://REBRAND.LY/PLN97YY](https://rebrand.ly/pln97yy)

Write your Commissioners by visiting: www.actionnetwork.org/letters/local-officials-lets-talk-about-incineration

Annual Plant Sale & Strawberry Shortcake Fest Supports Alva Garden Club Community Projects

Submitted By: Susan Hegarty

The Alva Garden Club announces its long running Plant Sale and Strawberry Shortcake Festival, a local tradition for area gardeners and those craving an old-fashioned sweet strawberry shortcake treat.

The event, scheduled from 9 a.m. to 1 p.m. Saturday, March 9 at Alva Methodist Church, 21440 Pearl Street, is an opportunity to purchase healthy living plants at very affordable prices. Visitors

can also enjoy a bowl of fresh strawberry shortcake and purchase baked goods made by Alva Garden Club members.

A variety of Florida-grown plants from club members will be sold, in addition to beautiful specimens donated from local nurseries. Plant varieties vary and are sold on a first-come first-served basis.

Homemade strawberry shortcake baked by garden club members will

feature indoor seating, along with a large variety of baked goods to take home. In addition, visitors can browse a large collection of gently used books and a variety of craft and food vendors. On-site parking will be available.

Proceeds from this event allow the club to continue providing civic contributions in the community. In addition to creating community enhancements, club members meet monthly between

October and May for educational meetings and to attend area field trips to garden-related destinations. Visit alvagardenclub.org for more information.

• Time and Date: 9:00 a.m. – 1:00 p.m. Saturday, March 9, 2024

• Location: Alva Methodist Church 21440 Pearl Street, Alva, Florida 33920

Unlocking the Mind: The Cognitive Rewards of Exercise

By Dr. Khalid Sabha, MD



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

Exercise is not only essential for physical health but also for cognitive well-being. When we exercise, our brains light up like a Fourth of July fireworks display, releasing a cascade of neurotransmitters that enhance mood, cognition, and creativity. Numerous studies have highlighted the positive impact of exercise on cognitive function. Below, we’ll explore some of these benefits.

• Enhanced Memory and Learning: One of the most notable cognitive benefits of exercise is its ability to enhance memory and learning capabilities. Research suggests that engaging in regular aerobic exercise can lead to structural changes in the brain, particularly in the hippocampus, a region critical for memory formation and consolidation. Exercise promotes the production of neurotrophic factors, such as brain-derived neurotrophic factor (BDNF), which play a key role in neuronal growth and

synaptic plasticity—the brain’s ability to adapt and grow in response to new experiences. As a result, individuals who exercise regularly often exhibit improved memory recall and faster learning abilities compared to their sedentary counterparts.

• Increased Attention and Focus: In today’s fast-paced world, maintaining attention and focus can be challenging. However, incorporating exercise into one’s routine can help sharpen cognitive abilities related to attention and focus. Physical activity has been shown to increase blood flow to the brain, delivering oxygen and nutrients essential for optimal cognitive function. Moreover, exercise stimulates the release of neurotransmitters like dopamine and norepinephrine, which are involved in regulating attention and arousal. Consequently, individuals who exercise regularly often experience enhanced concentration, improved task-switching abilities, and better cognitive control.

• Protection Against Cognitive Decline: As individuals age, the risk of cognitive decline, including condi-

tions such as dementia and Alzheimer’s disease, becomes a growing concern. Fortunately, research suggests that exercise can help mitigate this risk by promoting brain health and resilience. Studies have demonstrated that staying physically active throughout life is associated with a reduced risk of developing cognitive impairments later on. Moreover, exercise has been shown to slow the progression of existing cognitive decline in older adults. By promoting neuroplasticity and neurogenesis, exercise serves as a protective factor against age-related cognitive decline, allowing individuals to maintain cognitive function and independence as they grow older.

• Improved Mood and Mental Well-being: In addition to its direct effects on cognitive function, exercise also exerts a powerful influence on mood and mental well-being. Physical activity stimulates the release of endorphins, often referred to as “feel-good” hormones, which can alleviate stress, anxiety, and depression. So, the next time you’re feeling stuck in a mental rut or just need a little

pick-me-up, don’t underestimate the power of a good workout – your brain will thank you for it.

In conclusion, as you move your body, whether it’s competing in tennis matches (my all time fav), running, cycling, swimming, or even just dancing around your living room like nobody’s watching, you’re not just working up a sweat – you’re also giving your brain a workout. With each step or spin, your brain releases a flurry of chemicals like dopamine and serotonin, and ramping up your BDNF, all of which elevate your mood and sharpen your focus faster than a double shot of espresso.

ABOUT DR. KHALID SABHA, MD

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—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.

Caloosa 80: The Responsible Decision

Submitted By: ALVA INC. www.alvafll.org

ACTION REQUESTED: On March 25th, the Lee County Planning Agency (LPA) will be deciding to approve an amendment to the water and sewer service areas for another portion of the Alva Community. While water and sewer service is sometimes considered an upgrade to the community and to civilization in general, it is a canary in the coal mine for rural communities and overdevelopment. The approval of such an amendment will no doubt lead to increased density. As described in the public notice for the hearing, it will seek to change 93 acres from the Rural Land Use Category to the Sub-Outlying Suburban Future Land Use category, paving the way for increased density. **If you wish to have a word on this decision, please attend the meeting on the 25th at Administration East Building (Room 118), 2201 Second St., at 9:00 am. This will be your opportunity to ask the planning panel to refrain from the amendment.**

History of the project: Way back in 2008, the planned development of Caloosa 80 had been approved for a development that would include 400 RV lots that average 1 dwelling unit per

acre, consistent with the Rural Land Use Category and Alva's Community Plan. Now, they would like to add 30,000 sq ft of commercial space and increase the RV lots to 700, nearly doubling the already approved use of the property. Many people in the area wonder why we cannot leave the existing entitlements in place and go forward with the original plan.

Why should the community care about this? There are a host of reasons why people need to be aware of Caloosa 80 and its potential impact on the community.

The property today is adjacent to Hickey Creek Mitigation Park. Hickey Creek Mitigation Park began in 1994 as a gopher tortoise mitigation park. Developers from other areas in Lee County could relocate sensitive wildlife to the area (as an offsite alternative to rare species impacted by development). This created a habitat for rare wildlife, plants, and trees to be protected. The park is home to threatened and endangered wildlife, including the Florida panther, wood storks, snail kite, and the Florida scrub jay.

With the current request and plan, the landowner seeks to clear-cut the property, eliminating the habitats of the animals that reside there, including the species listed above. Less than 30 feet separate the mitigation park from the proposed development, and on any day, you can see wood storks, kites, and scrub jays on the proposed development site.

In addition to the environmental impacts listed above, there are other concerning features with developing this property. The area directly adjacent to the property is part of the HickeyCreek Floodway (FEMA flood map). It is a sensitive area that saw dramatic flooding with both Hurricane Irma and Hurricane Ian. The property today operates as a natural basin that blunts the impacts of heavy rain or flooding by first flooding the pastures and cypress swamps. The developer had indicated that they would dig a series of lakes on the property (presumably for the fill required to raise the property to a buildable level.) In addition, they described the construction of high berms along Bateman Rd as part of the stormwater retention plan for the property. The construction of these

berms will change the current flow of water and could have a magnification impact, given the proximity to the Hickey's Creek Floodway.

Included with the application is a request for 30,000 sq ft of commercial space adjacent to Palm Beach Blvd (SR-80). In the previously approved plans, commercial space was allowed in the interior of the project to accommodate the needs of the residents and was intended solely for the use of the residents. Given the requirements of FDOT for SR-80, there would be a single entrance/exit for the park and to access the commercial space. The presence of the commercial space and the single entry to create access on a high-speed principal arterial will create additional traffic hazards. Congestion on the roadway due to variance in speed increases accident rates and congestion.

Join the conversation in person and let your input on this transformational project be heard on March 25th, Administration East Building (Room 118), 2201 Second St., at 9:00 am.



A Look At Lee County Housing Development

By Special to East Lee County News

During the last 10 years, while Lee County's population grew by 23% - an estimated 140,000 residents - single-family home values rose by 213.8% during that same period. The Lee County Property Appraiser's preliminary tax assessment for 2022 places average home values at \$415,448, over 3 times what the average home was worth in 2012 (\$132,415). This has become the clearest indicator of local demand. Home value listings in Lee County have gone up 45% over the past two years, where the median single-family home will be listed for \$499,000 as of April 2023. For comparison, home values typically increase about 4-8% during a particularly good year.

Approximately 80,000 residential units are in the pipeline, with 28,094 units under production in the cities and 42,931 residential units currently being planned or under construction in Unincorporated Lee County. The number of single-family building permits issued in Unincorporated Lee County jumped from 2,234 new homes started in 2019

to 4,957 new homes started in 2021 - a 122% increase. The same market trends are essentially true for the rental market as well. Of all of the housing being proposed or built, less than 1% is expected to be workforce or affordable housing. This, along with the number of homes damaged after the storm, is the main reason that the county's housing initiative is so important and timely. Out of the \$1.1 billion granted by HUD to Lee County, \$660 million has been allocated to support affordable housing investment. A description of the first program that will be released is below. Housing costs are not the only problem affecting the housing market's challenge. Home insurance, surging material prices, supply chain challenges, higher interest rates, and all combine to make the housing market costly and difficult for working families to access.

COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT BLOCK GRANT: DISASTER RELIEF (CDBG-DR)


Community Development Block Grant Disaster Recovery (CDBG-DR) grant funds are appropriated by Congress and allocated by HUD to rebuild disaster-impacted areas and provide crucial seed money to start the long-term recovery process. (Issued by U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development)

LEE COUNTY FUNDING FOR ATTAINABLE HOUSING PROJECTS: DESCRIPTION OF FIRST PROGRAM RELEASE

\$50 million in Multifamily Affordable Housing Rehabilitation of 5 units or more that was not covered by insurance or other federally funded methods. \$300 million in New Construction/Acquisition/rehabilitation/conversion.

- Eligible costs: Acquisition and/or Rehabilitation of Multi-Family Housing, including conversion of non-residential or market rate units to affordable units (labor, materials, and other costs of rehabilitation of properties). New

Construction of Multi-Family Housing (property acquisition, soft costs, and hard costs related to new construction of housing units)

- A minimum amount of funding is \$4,000,000 - The maximum is \$20,000,000 or \$250,000 per unit for multifamily housing (5 units or more). Applicants can pool their properties together to meet minimum standards.
- 51% of the units must be occupied by households with 80% AMI or less
- Projects must be completed within 6 years of HUD's executed agreement of grant funds to Lee County
- Must comply with Davis-Bacon
 - HUD-funded housing construction projects consisting of properties with eight (8) or more residential units are subject to Davis-Bacon regulations and apply to contractors and subcontractors carrying out federally funded or assisted contracts in excess of \$2,000 for corresponding work on similar projects in the area. 

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Full Foarce: World's Toughest Row- Pacific

Submitted By The Full Foarce Team

It's an arduous 2,800 mile race across the vast Pacific Ocean that will force teams to battle the sea, elements and exhaustion. It's called the World's Toughest Row - Pacific and it will take teams more than a month to finish. The all-female crew called Full Foarce has banded together to inspire the next generation.

Cait Miller, Cassidy Hurd, Elaina Loveless, and Laura Newton are the four brave women taking on this challenge, calling themselves Team Full Foarce.

This team began in the summer of 2022, they have spent the last year and a half creating their campaign, finding sponsors, raising funds, choosing the charities they want to support, and preparing their minds and bodies to take on this endeavor. They say the hardest part is getting to the start line, and this team has felt that!

The 28-foot boat will be the team's home for the duration of the race. The women will be rowing in pairs of two

for three shifts, 24/7 until they reach Hawaii. When they are not rowing they will be eating, doing chores, boat maintenance, communicating with their land support, and trying to get some sleep in the tiny cabins at the bow and stern of the boat. This row is totally unsupported, they have to bring everything they need with them to survive for 50+ days at sea. They will be making their own water using the on-board desalinator, using a jet boil to 'cook' their freeze dried meals, and using a bucket for a bathroom!

Despite all the sacrifices they'll be making, living on the water in close corridors with minimal creature comforts, they believe it will be worth it. These four women will be bonded by this experience for the rest of their lives. They are all looking forward to pushing their limits physically and mentally. They hope to inspire other ordinary people to do extraordinary things! They want the next generation of young women to believe they can do anything they set their mind to, and

chase their wild dreams!

The race is set to kick-off in Monterey, CA on June 8, 2024. Team Full Foarce expects to finish in 34 to 50 days. The current women's 4-person team world record is 34 days 14 hours and 20 minutes.

They are rowing to raise awareness for two non-profit organizations: Play Like a Girl and the Papahānaumokuākea Marine Debris Project

Mark Loveless, father of Elaina Loveless and owner of Markin Products, proudly sponsors the team. He admires his daughter and the team for their courage in embarking on this remarkable adventure to raise awareness for nonprofit organizations.

"Seeing Elaina and her team take on this incredible journey to support nonprofit organizations fills me with immense pride. Their courage and determination inspire me every day." - Mark Loveless, Owner of Markin Products

You can follow along with Team Full Foarce's journey leading up to the race and during their ocean crossing on their website and social media pages:

- **Website:** <https://www.full-foarce.com>
- **Linktree:** <https://linktr.ee/fullfoarce>

THE TEAM IS STILL LOOKING FOR SPONSORS!

Email them at fullfoarce@gmail.com if you or your business is interested in partnering with Full Foarce.

They are also accepting donations via their GoFundMe page: gofundme.com/fullfoarce

Sponsor a Stroke/Mile/Day: <https://rb.gy/4e8fhk>



Photo: Team Full Foarce - Cait Miller, Cassidy Hurd, Elaina Loveless, and Laura Newton.



Photo: Full Foarce Team picture with the World's Toughest Row- Pacific Shirts On.



Photo: Team Full Foarce preparing for the World's Toughest Row - Pacific



Photo: Team Full Foarce preparing for the World's Toughest Row - Pacific during sunset.

The General Woman's Club: Friendship Is Fashionable Fashion Show And Monthly Meeting

By Connie Puzevic

The General Woman's Club of Lehigh Acres will hold their largest fund raiser of the year, their fashion show, "FRIENDSHIP IS FASHIONABLE" on Saturday, March 9th, 2024 at the Pelican Preserve Country Club, Fort Myers. Doors open at 10:30 am. Tickets are \$45 each and may be purchased by calling Betty Walsh at 315-863- 9300

or you can reserve a table for 10, if you desire.

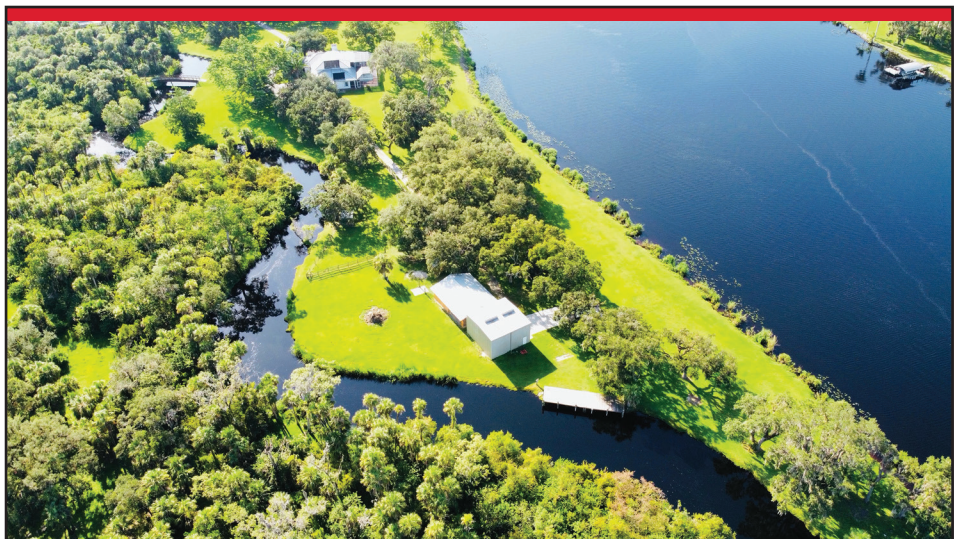
This elegant event is always a fun day with our many basket drawings, door prizes, delicious luncheon, and our club members as models with fashions from Chico's of Ft. Myers. Our models this year are Club members: Jeanne

Swanson, Wanda Ferrer, Marilyn Wilson, Christine Stotz, Karen McKenzie, and Melverdine Davies.

Our monthly meeting will be held on Friday, March 15th, 2024 at 1pm at the Rise Christian Church, 50 Bell Blvd, North, Lehigh Acres. The speaker will be Steve Thomas from Edward Jones,

and he will speak on Senior Finances.

As always, the club welcomes new members, and anyone desiring further information may contact Betty Smith @ 239-850-6617. 🍀



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Smart Growth or Growth



Photo: Terri Lewis, BSEE, MBA, Director of Planet Connected

Are you tired of sitting in traffic jams? Tired of water quality

issues? Boil water notices? Tired of double-digit property tax and insurance increases? Tired of double-digit water rate increases? Are you concerned about the loss of wildlife and green space? Angry about living next to a landfill? Worried about future tax and service price increases? Lee County needs to embrace Smart Growth vs Growth.

Smart Growth drives proactive planning and includes a financial assessment of the options, like a family budget or a business investment. Lee County is growing. The numbers projected for the population are around 1.2 million, up from the current population of ~ 800,000. This isn't new as this has been the projected growth since about 2005.

So, what would embracing Smart Growth mean? Smart Growth is an urban planning process that prioritizes the long-term vs the short-term. It assumes there will be growth, but must be managed intentionally, comprehensively, and with a structured fiscal plan. The ten concepts behind Smart Growth¹ are the following:

1. Mix land uses
2. Take advantage of compact design
3. Create a range of housing opportunities and choices
4. Create walkable neighborhoods
5. Foster distinctive, attractive communities with a strong sense of place
6. Preserve open space, farmland, natural beauty, and critical environmental areas
7. Direct development towards existing communities
8. Provide a variety of transportation choices
9. Make development decisions predictable, fair, and cost-effective
10. Encourage community and stakeholder collaboration in development decisions

The last two concepts embrace fiscal planning (and transparency) as necessary for residents to weigh in... because they ultimately pay for the services and taxes. Below are a couple of examples.

Currently, Lee County residents (per TomTom, the GPS navigation and location data business) spend an average of **six working days** in traffic congestion per year. That's a significant loss of productivity for the workforce and a considerable cost burden for workers.

Let's take a specific example of Emma, who drives from Lehigh Acres to downtown Fort Myers for work, where she makes \$22 an hour. Her travel time is 45 minutes, sometimes an hour. We'll be optimistic and use 45 minutes:

EMMA'S TRAVEL TIME/DAY
= 1.5 hours
= 30 hours of travel per month
x \$22 earnings per hour
= \$660 salary per month
x 12 months
= \$7,920 year in lost earnings due to travel

Add to that the costs of fuel, maintenance and car insurance (where Lee County has some of the most expensive auto insurance rates in the state, Florida ranks consistently as 3rd highest in the nation). There is a real problem for Emma and many others to be able to afford a car. While there is a lot of talk about Workforce Housing, what about Workforce Transportation?

Captains for Clean Water and the Sanibel Conservation Foundation and Conservancy of Southwest Florida released the impact of poor water quality on the economy. For Lee, Charlotte and Collier counties, another harmful event of algae blooms or red tide would have a negative impact on 43,000 jobs, \$17.8 Billion in decrease in property values and a loss of \$60M in property tax revenue.

In Lee County we have urban sprawl, which is unrestricted growth. Pundits will say, "people are wanting to move here and they have the right to a single-family home". That is true,

By Terri Lewis

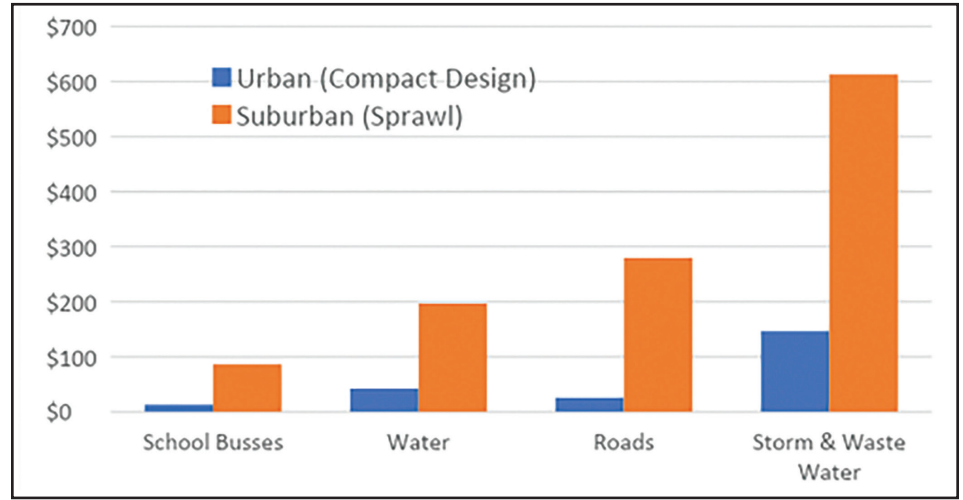


Photo: Figure 1: The Costs of Services per Household

but land use decisions can provide housing options without the negatives of sprawl.

What exists in Lee County is new residential land use, further and further from work, schools, and services, subsequently residents need to drive further because there are no other transportation options. Roads are widened and water infrastructure is put in place. This is sprawl, and it is expensive.

A study done by Sustainable Property in 2015 puts the tax and service cost comparisons, per household, of the following services for Urban vs Suburban².

In recent news, there are concerns resonating from citizens all across Lee County about the downsides of urban sprawl; loss of wildlife and green space, noise, air pollution, boil water notices, congestion, red tide, etc. These issues are leading indicators to the costs that will ultimately need to be paid for by residents; either in increased taxes, loss of property values, price increases for services, loss of time, or health issues. While we may not have experienced the full financial impact now, it will be a risk for further generations. Most roads need to be replaced in 30 years. How will that be paid for?

Smart Growth America is the thought leader organization in the United States, summarizing Smart Growth as: "We envision a country where no matter where you live, or who you are, you can enjoy living in a place that is healthy, prosperous, and

resilient."

Urban3³ is an organization that helps communities model their expenses and revenues, asking if land use, fee structures and tax policies are poking holes in your budget bucket. They "help your community see the economic impact of varying types of development within the same market, allowing you to understand and choose your best future." There is a growing group of businesses and residents who want this level of fiscal clarity to be able to engage in prioritizing capital improvements and make informed community design decisions. Everyone in Lee County has a say. Make your voice heard.

Lee County needs Smart Growth.

REFERENCE

¹ Smart Growth America, "What is Smart Growth?", <https://smartgrowthamerica.org/what-is-smart-growth/>

² <https://archinect.com/news/article/122203711/the-true-costs-of-sprawl>

³ Urban3, "Urban3 Brings Financial Intelligence to Your Community", <https://www.urbanthree.com/about/>

ABOUT TERRI LEWIS

Terri Lewis, BSEE, MBA, is Director of Planet Connected, an Industrial Technology Consulting organization based in Fort Myers. She is currently pursuing a Masters of Science in Civil Engineering - Smart Cities from the University of Central Florida. Email Terri at press@eastleeneews.com



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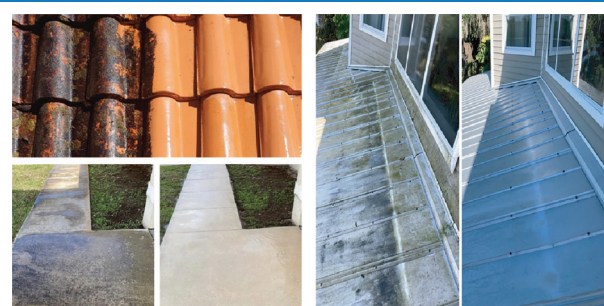
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East Lee County Chamber Of Commerce Gala March 9th – East Lee Middle School Student Take Tallahassee On Chamber Capitol Trip

By Mike Welch



Photo: Mike Welch
Let Us Hear From You!
Contact Us At:
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As we move into the height of the season the East Lee County Chamber of Commerce moves forward with membership that includes Lehigh Acres, Gateway, SR80 and up to the Babcock Ranch. Our Gala on March 9th at the Plantation Golf & Country Club will highlight the contributions of our teachers, law enforcement, and those in public and healthcare service.

A recent Chamber tradition is our Students Take Tallahassee program as Senate President Kathleen Passidomo and Senate President-Designate Ben Albritton – both representing Lehigh and East Lee County host our Chamber Middle School Students at the Capitol during the Annual Session of the Florida Legislature. Some 30 students were chosen to attend. They were introduced on the floor of the Senate by Senator Albritton to the other senators. Additionally various people and staff welcomed our group with talks and information on how our Legislature works. Lee County State Representa-

tive Jenna Persons-Mulicka visited the students along with School Board Member Armor Persons as they explained current legislation and how ideas and concerns can become laws. Lee County Representative Tiffany Esposito met with our students. As an added feature President Passidomo arranged for the group to tour Florida State University. This program is underwritten by the Chamber Board.

Major Brenda Lane provides us with an article on the current work the Salvation Army in Lehigh/East Lee County. As many of us know Florida and

in our region the property insurance market is critically stressed. As such combined with the strained housing market more people are losing their homes to the point of being out on the streets. Contact the Salvation Army at 239-491-6071

Sheriff Marceno addresses a frequent topic we see on Facebook Community Board sites regarding fraud and sadly Florida is a hotbed for victimization.

Wishing you the best for a Blessed Passover and a Blessed Easter! 🍀

2023 Fraud Numbers Are In



Photo: Sheriff Carmine Marceno, Lee County Sheriff

The Federal Trade Commission works diligently, throughout the year, to both document consumer fraud incidents, as well as to notify law enforcement of current trends and activities.

The information is stored in a secure database called the “Consumer Sentinel Network” and available to law enforcement agencies only. This information is extremely valuable and we pass on much of what we learn regarding trending practices to our residents.

The 2023 numbers are in and while there has been a decrease in reported incidents from 2022 to 2023 (6.12 million reports in 2022 reduced to 5.39 million reports in 2023), the volume of fraudulent activity remains disturbing.

With the advent of the internet and social media, the numbers have ballooned. For this reason, I constantly

remind our residents and guests, here in Lee County, to exercise extreme caution when utilizing the internet, email, cellular text and social media.

Below, please find a list of the most commonly reported fraud categories across the United States and, when encountering these subjects/topics online, please exercise discretion and approach them with skepticism and caution:

1. Identity Theft-1,036,903 reports
2. Imposter Scams 853,935 reports
3. Credit Bureaus, Information Furnishers and Report Users 711,802 reports
4. Online Shopping and Negative Reviews 369,469 reports
5. Banks and Lenders 230,224 reports
6. Auto Related 178,100 reports
7. Prizes, Sweepstakes and Lotteries 157,520 reports

By Sheriff Carmine Marceno

8. Internet Services 125,118 reports
9. Debt Collection 124,450 reports
10. Business and Job Opportunities 110,364 reports

The financial losses that were the result of the reported frauds and scams reached \$10,021,305,005...well over ten billion dollars!

While many assume that seniors are the most frequently-targeted individuals, 44% of victims were between the ages of 20 and 29 years of age...seniors ages 70 to 79 represented only 25% of the reports.

While this may partially be true as many seniors fail to report their victimization, I share this to remind our residents that anyone can be victimized if not careful...even “tech-savvy” adults.

Regrettably, one of the most victimized states is Florida.

The week of March 3rd to March 9th is “National Consumer Protection Week.” It is an excellent opportunity for me to share reminders, such as this one, with our community.

There are no easy solutions or fool-proof tips to protect you from these criminal activities. Certainly, basic measures such as using strong passwords, keeping devices up to date with the most current updates and guarding your personal information will prove to be helpful, however, intense scrutiny of any and all online opportunities should be performed and, whenever uncertain, reach out for assistance prior to making hasty decisions online.

All fraudulent activity needs to be reported. These incidents should be reported to local law enforcement as well as to the Federal Trade Commission at <https://reportfraud.ftc.gov/#/>.

Stay alert. Be cautious. Ask for assistance when uncertain. 🍀

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Toxic Talk : Pets and Poison Do Not Mix

By Dr. Veja Tillman, DVM

As loving pet owners, we want to keep our pets safe and healthy. But with so many different types of toxins (poisons) and each producing vastly different symptoms in our pets, it is hard to know what is or is not safe. Being informed of common toxins and other hazards that can harm our pets is a great start. Here are 10 common pet toxins that can affect your pet.

- 1. Over the counter (OTC) medications** are the most common group of toxicants pets ingest. Most often these ingestions are not accidental. They are exposures from good-intentioned pet owners. Ibuprofen, acetaminophen, joint rubs, and herbal supplements all fall within this category. These items are commonly found in homes and are often stored in purses and backpacks. Make sure to keep these items far from the reach of your pets and contact your veterinary health professional before administering any over the counter products to your pets.
- 2. Human prescription medications and Lifestyle supplements and treatments.** Heart medications, ADHD, thyroid, and antidepressant medications make up a significant amount of these cases. In recent years, marijuana (Hemp/ THC, in various forms) toxicity has increased in pets causing mild to very severe reactions. Always make sure your prescription medications and recreational supplements are safely locked away and out of paws' reach.

Even small amounts of some of these products can cause severe concerns in pets.

- 3. Food.** Grapes, raisins, macadamia nuts, onions, garlic and protein bars make up most of the exposures in this list. However, in recent years many sugar free food products containing Xylitol have caused a majority of toxicities in this category. Keep these foods away from your pets as even small amounts may cause signs of toxicity: vomiting, diarrhea, tremors or signs of kidney or liver failure.
- 4. Chocolate** remains one of the most common exposures for dogs. Dogs can eat enough to get themselves into severe trouble. Relentless vomiting and diarrhea, weakness and sometimes seizures and heart failure can be seen.
- 5. Veterinary products and pet medications.** Chewable medications are yummy. Dogs and cats will eat the entire container. Make sure to treat these products like prescription medications and keep them away from your pets.
- 6. Household items:** Home improvement projects can expose pets to many potential toxins such as paint, adhesives (Gorilla Glue) or spackle and other building materials. Most of these materials will cause intestinal obstructions which require costly surgery to remove.
- 7. Rodenticide (rat poison)** exposure is dependent on the type of active in-

redient present in the product. Mouse and rat baits can cause bleeding, kidney failure, seizures or even death.

- 8. Plants.** As beautiful and ornate as they may be, can cause a range of clinical signs such as vomiting, diarrhea, difficulty urinating, heart anomalies and difficulty, as well as liver or kidney failure. Some of these exposures can be fatal. Other plants include Dieffenbachia, Oleander, Foxglove, Sago palm and Bird of Paradise flower to name a few.
- 9. Insecticide exposure.** Eye irritation, sneezing, vomiting, diarrhea, tremors to seizures may be seen with these products. Safer product alternatives and better handling of these types of products will help keep pets safe.
- 10. Garden products.** Many pets find fertilizers (especially organic products) irresistible. Upset stomach, lethargy, weakness, tremors, seizures may be caused by these products.

Tips to help keep pets safe:

- Pay close attention if your pets show any of the signs mentioned. If these signs increase or do not resolve, take your pet to see your veterinarian or the local emergency hospital.
- Keep toxic plants, chemicals, and medications out of reach of your pets to prevent accidental ingestions and exposures.
- When using any type of yard treatment, protect your pet from exposure by not allowing them to "help" with the yard

activities. Consider placing them in a separate area or dropping them off at daycare until the treatment has dried or dissolved completely.

- With any potential dangers and toxins, it is important to keep these things out of your pets' reach.
- Contact your veterinarian or any of the pet poison hotlines immediately if you know that or suspect your pet has been exposed to any toxin. Immediate action reduces the potential risks to your pet's health.

We're here to help. If you have any questions or concerns about what your pet should eat or what's safe to have in your home, please reach out to your veterinary team. You may also contact one of the following pet poison help centers: ASPCA 24/7 Poison Control Hotline at (888) 426-4435 or the Pet Poison Helpline at (855) 764-7661. There are fees for the services, but it's well worth it.

March is Pet Poison Awareness Month. Let's be extra careful and keep our pets safe from exposure to toxins and chemicals.

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. 🍀

The Salvation Army Need Your Help!

By Major Brenda Lane

I hope this finds each of you well and enjoying the beautiful weather we are having, and can you believe we already in March!! Before you know it, summer will be here!!

I don't need to remind you that we are all facing some pretty rough times as it relates to everyday living and the daily increase in the cost of food, gas, rent and so much more. We are seeing so many more families in our office who are facing loss of jobs because they can't afford the cost of gas to get back and forth. We are seeing Families who are facing eviction due to the extreme rise in rent and mortgage. I fear it is only going to continue to get worse.

We are assisting more families than usual with Emergency Food. Again, this is due to loss of jobs and the rise in rents and over all cost of living.

We here at The Salvation Army stand ready to assist in any way we can. However, we can't do it alone, it takes a village!! We need your help. There are so many ways in which you can help us help those coming to us for assistance every day. We need canned goods and non perishable food items to replenish our Emergency Food. Canned meats are a great need. We are getting requests for tarps, ponchos, help paying for Medication, help with gas and so many other necessities. We have some

wonderful people in our Community of Lehigh Acres, who support us, and make it possible to continue to have the resources to serve those who come to us with various needs. Our resources are running low and we don't want to turn anyone away if they have a legitament need. We need your help.

If you are in a position to help with any of the things I have mentioned, or perhaps, you are able to make a monetary donation (tax deductible), be assured your support will go a long way in allowing us to fill the needs and requests of those who are not able to provide for their families at this time. If you would like more information on ways to help us continue serving and

providing for the needs of those who are struggling to make it day to day, please feel free to give us a call or stop by our office Monday thru Friday, 8:30 am to 4:00 pm (closed 12:00 to 1:00)


We are located at 25 Homestead Rd. N #42 (33936) -(facing Alabama Rd) in (behind Joe's Café)

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The CULTURAL ARTS CALENDAR

March 7 "Carmen" Gulfshore Ballet and Opera Naples

Come see Jimmy Gamonet's Carmen, a collaboration between Gulfshore Ballet and Opera Naples, Thursday, March 7th at the Cambier Park in Naples 7-8 pm. Featuring the talented cast from Sanctuary of the Arts and Gulfshore Ballet's pre-professional students. Costumes are courtesy of the Miami City Ballet. Operanaples.org

March 7 Alliance of the Arts Exhibition

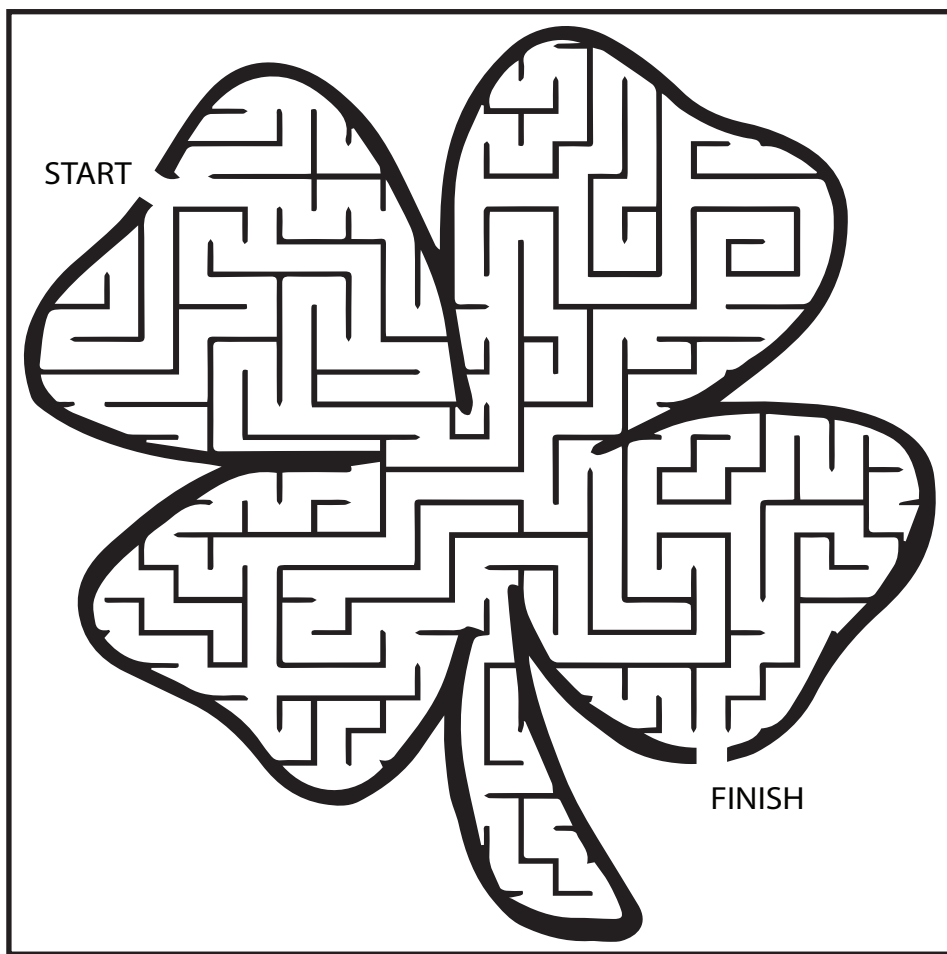
38th Annual All Florida Exhibition March 1st through March 30th. This is a juried exhibition and the Alliance for the ARTS longest running gallery show. This year's competition brought in 691 entries from across the state. Cash and prizes were awarded, and 56 pieces will be on display. Artinlee.org

March 9 Plant and Strawberry Shortcake Festival

The Alva Garden Club announces its long running Plant Sale and Strawberry Shortcake Festival, a local tradition for area gardeners and those craving an old-fashioned sweet strawberry shortcake treat. Saturday, March 9, 2024 from 9:00am to 1:00pm at the Alva Methodist Church, 21440 Pearl St., Alva, FL 33920.

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. www.stnj.org/events/detail/kyiv-virtuosi-symphony-orchestra



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MORE TO CELEBRATE!

Dates & descriptions provided by www.holidayinsights.com

March 7 National Cereal Day

Did you have your bowl of Wheaties today? Perhaps it was Cheerios, Captain Crunch, Alphabets, or and one of dozens of different varieties to choose from. Maybe you had a bowl of bran cereal, to really get you going. Whatever cereal you chose, you are in good company. About one half of Americans enjoy a healthy start to the day, with a bowl of their favorite breakfast cereal.

March 11 Johnny Appleseed Day

Johnny Appleseed Day honors one of America's great legends. Johnny Appleseed was a real person. Born John Chapman, he was among the American settlers who were captivated by the movement west across the continent. As Johnny Appleseed travelled west, he sold apple trees and seeds to settlers, and planted many apple trees himself along the way. Johnny Appleseed continued planting and selling apple trees for over forty years. With every apple tree that was planted, the legend grew.

March 14 National Potato Chip Day

National Potato Chip Day celebrates the ever popular potato chip. Potato Chips are America's #1 snack food. But, its not just a snack food. Its the potato of choice for many lunchtime and dinner meals. Regular (or plain) potato chips are by far the most popular. Other popular flavors are barbecue, sour cream & onion, oil & vinegar, and ranch.

March 19 Let's Laugh Day

Today is definitely not a day for "Debbie Downers". Rather, today is a real laugher. Honest to goodness it's Let's Laugh Day and that's funny. It's perfectly okay to laugh while no one is around. There's nothing wrong with that. However, laughter is best enjoyed with others. We suggest you collect an assortment of humorous jokes and share them with everyone you meet. It's a great way to brighten your day and that those you come in contact with. If you're not out and about today, make a few phone calls or texts to spread the laughter. Join us today in a deep belly laugh that reaches all the way down to your toes!

March 25 International Waffle Day

Celebrates the patenting of the waffle iron by Cornelius Swarthout of Troy, New York on August 24, 1869. The origin of the waffle: The waffle dates back to the 1300s in Greece. Greeks cooked flat cakes between two metal pans. At the time, they topped it with cheeses and herbs. Pancake syrup wasn't around back then. Waffles are commonly eaten as breakfast or a snack. They are also an occasional dinner meal for some people. Celebrate by having your favorite waffle today!

March 31 National Crayon Day

Today is a colorful day, one truly worth celebrating. Today is National Crayon Day. It is a day to celebrate the creation of crayons and the joy of coloring. Do you know what to do to celebrate National Crayon Day? Get out the coloring book and crayons, and show off your artistic skills.

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ANSWER KEY
MARCH 2024

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

THE ROAR
EAST LEE COUNTY NEWS

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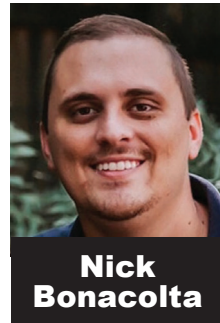
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3 BEDROOM 2 BATH POOL HOME STEPS AWAY FROM CALOOSA HATCHEE RIVER



Newly refurbished POOL HOME just feet from the CALOOSA HATCHEE RIVER, quiet low traffic street, 3 bedroom 2 bath on an oversized lot, FENCED YARD, SCREEN ENCLOSED INGROUND POOL with new diamond brite finish, 22 X 12 covered screened lanai plus plenty of open deck space around the 35 X 41 pool area, oversized driveway for plenty of cars, boat or RV, covered carport plus 20 X 17 storage/utility room, freshly painted interior, new luxury vinyl floors throughout the entire home, newly remodeled kitchen with QUARTZ countertops, new lower cabinets with soft close doors and drawers, newly remodeled bathrooms with new vanities, fixtures, commodes, soft close doors and drawers on the bathroom cabinets, master bedroom with large walk in closet, private bath with newly tiled shower, glass tile accents, QUARTZ tops in the bathrooms as well, new ceiling fans in the interior with new LED lighting, TRANE CENTRAL HEAT AND AIR NEW IN 2020, NEW METAL ROOF IN 2016.

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3 BEDROOM 2 BATH POOL HOME IN AMBERWOOD ESTATES



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