

A Vote For Amanda Cochran By Butch Swank - butch@goodladandswank.com



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

Over the past six months or so, I've spoken to people out and about or here in the office, and the recurring is this - people being upset about various proposals being considered by the Lee County Commissioners. I've heard these proposals range from building yet another crowded development despite the traffic problems we face to sewage being pumped in pipes under an already fragile Caloosahatchee River. Being good citizens, these people invested their precious time in attending these County Commission meetings and explained to the Commissioners why they felt it was wrong to greenlight these proposals. Can you guess what seems to happen each time the people speak in a uniform voice against? Yes, correct, a 5-0 vote in favor of what the community opposed. At this point, it is hard to imagine that the Commissioners care what the people who elected them think. By the way, do you know what At-Large voting is? It's a system where all the voters in a County vote for all five Commissioners rather than just the one in their district. This voting method, it seems, tends towards Commissioners not being directly accountable to the people who elected them because, by definition, it is an election of the entire County. It also means that only big-money politicians often stand a chance of being elected because it costs five times more money to campaign all over Lee County instead of just focusing on the District the candidate represents.

Currently, we have two candidates running for County Commissioner District 5. I know very little about the person running for reelection, Mike Greenwell, and it's not for a lack of trying. So, I wanted to share my observations and thoughts to date. Early on, after being elected, I repeatedly offered Commissioner Greenwell the opportunity to come and speak at one of our Southwest Florida Business Alliance meetings, and the publisher of this very paper offered him space for articles to share what he was doing for us. After multiple attempts at outreach, we were ultimately told via his assistant: "Commissioner Greenwell said he would reach out to you if he is able to speak or write." You'll be shocked to learn that he could never speak or write even once in the past two and a half years. As a last-ditch effort, and being sometimes a bit bullheaded, I figured, all right then, why not just go to him instead? I was happy to get a meeting scheduled at his office, and after the meeting ended, I'll just say I didn't feel the Welcome Wagon vibes flowing that day. I walked into that meeting open-minded and optimistic and left feeling quite the opposite. Time has passed, and based on further observations, my feelings have not improved.

District 5 candidate Amanda Cochran is Greenwell's primary opponent this August. Amanda's from Alva, and like a lot of us, she doesn't like how we're not being represented. A trait I find admirable is that Amanda had no interest in public office, but seeing no good options, Amanda jumped right into that ring. Running for office is hard and, at times, downright ugly, and Amanda is now getting a firsthand education in that reality. Regardless, she's a fighter and is just getting started. People like Amanda

Cochran, who have no interest in becoming career politicians, are a big part of the solution Lee County needs. We can't keep electing the same people, year after year, and expect anything to change. I believe Amanda embodies what future government leadership should be. She's interested in us, not advancing her agenda. I want to think that as a businessman, I've developed a good sense of who people are, and I like Amanda Cochran. I encourage you to check out her website and her speaking schedule to find out for yourself. This lady is all over Lee County because, as said earlier, the current system makes her campaign all over Lee County to win. So, she's covering a lot of ground and will likely speak in your neighborhood soon. Go and listen to her and, by all means, ask some questions to see where she stands on things. I don't want someone representing me who is not interested in how I feel or what I care about. The current guy falls squarely in that category, and I believe Amanda Cochran does not. To me, Amanda Cochran is the best candidate for County Commissioner District 5 because, unlike the incumbent, she wants to hear your voice and will fight for you. What a refreshing change that would be!

To wrap things up, I wanted to share that there is an alternative to At-Large voting: Single-Member voting. In it, only your district (neighborhood) can vote for their candidate - no other areas have a say in the matter. In Single-Member voting, it stands to reason that an elected candidate would want to do a good job representing their neighborhood so their people would be helped, thereby increasing the chances of being reelected since they're doing such a bang-up job. Another thing to keep in mind

is that we vote for the Governor, Senators, House of Representatives, mayors, etc., using this Single-Member district voting scheme. A legislative proposal is being discussed to allow Lee County a November vote to switch to this Single-Member scheme, and guess what? The Lee County Commissioners are against even allowing that to be voted on. Why? What's their motivation? Hell, it's entirely possible the people may want to stick with At-large. I'm reading tea leaves here, but maybe, just maybe, they feel like that switch would not be good for them, so it's smarter to stop it early. Now, to be charitable, maybe it's because the Commissioners are in a bubble and genuinely do not know how many people in Lee County feel like their voices are being ignored. Instead, they think everything is as rosy as it could be. Regardless, the Commissioners seem to believe there is no reason to change how things are going. In my book, the switch to Single-Member district voting could have a profoundly positive impact because our leaders would now be in a position where they're encouraged to act for us instead of for themselves. The beauty of America is that we can have many different opinions, and, in the end, the one that gets the most votes wins. That's my spin on local elections. You're fully entitled to disagree 100% with what I just wrote, which I 100% respect. After all, we are both Americans and at the end of the day, we support each other. I'll end with this - go vote for Amanda Cochran!

Think of it this way: Should people in Georgia be allowed to vote for Florida's governor since they are so close to Tallahassee? Of course not! That's just plain silly. 🐾

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Paid by Amanda Cochran, Republican,
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Why Primaries Are Important



Photo: Susan Allen
www.alvastrong.org

August 20th, 2024 is the date of the upcoming primaries in Florida. Here in Lee County there are several challengers seeking to replace several of our sitting Lee County Commissioners. Generally speaking there is an emphasis on general elections Republican vs Democrats. Even those of us who believe we are informed and want to fight the craziness which has taken over politics ignore the primary process. Local elections rarely draw much interest. My eyes were opened this year as our neighborhood joined together, both R's and D's to prevent high density development in our rural community, in direct opposition to our community plan. Having attended several Lee County Board of Commissioners meeting and hearing the public outcry about Lee County's unprecedented growth it has become clear that there is at minimum an appearance of impropriety at the commissioner level and a total dismissal of the public's wants and needs. It is hard to imagine anyone who attends or views these meetings can believe our elected officials are committed to their constituents. Rumors abound that the Sunshine Laws may have been violated as there have been reports of multiple meetings with developers prior to critical votes. I will leave that to the experts to decide. The voices

of Lee County residents have not been heard in the Commissions Chambers but we will be heard in August.

A recent campaign ad for sitting Commissioner Greenwell states, "I'm fighting overdevelopment in Lee County". In truth commissioner Greenwell's actions and voting record prove the opposite. Greenwell had his property along SR 31 rezoned from agricultural to commercial use, a 400,000 SF parcel to include room for big box store and apartments. In an interview he is quoted as saying, "we cannot say no to these developers if they have been through the application process and receive the hearing examiners' recommendation. We can be sued by the developer". While this has some truth to it, it should not be the default response when dealing with sensitive areas such as Captiva where increased density shrouded as resiliency just doesn't make sense. Now we see the citizens are forming groups to sue the county to challenge these drastic changes that don't align with the Lee Plan. This has happened in Alva, Corkscrew, Captiva and Buckingham in just the last two years. It seems the citizenry is willing to stand up for the greater good of the county by pushing back on overdevelopment, but the BOCC is not. Mike Greenwell's opponent for District 5, a long time Lee County business woman and conservative republican Amanda Cochran, strongly opposes unbridled development and has stressed her commitment to strategic growth, im-

proved infrastructure and a sincere desire to represent the constituents over developers. Another candidate running for commissioner District 3 Matt Thornton also shares this view and believes the citizens of Lee County deserve to be heard. In the last 2 years the board has voted to amend the Lee Comprehensive Plan and Zoning Cases all but one time (Eden Oaks) based on staff recommendations, many of which increase density for development. There have been hundreds of people speaking in opposition to some of these changes, with little or no support from the board.

Developers and their minions word smith their proposals to soften the impact and quiet the voices of opposition. Developers call duplexes "single family dwellings", call bulldozed and flattened land "preservation areas" and press the commissioners to vote for more and more density increases. It has been reported that a campaign consultant to a number of the commissioners is also a lobbyist for a large developer pressing into Lee County. Traffic, wildlife habitat issues and river quality are all impacted by overdevelopment and surging population growth. This is not just a numbers issue but is a Life issue.

By the Lee County's own staff reports the county admits to inadequate EMS services stating, "Lee County CAN NOT yet sufficiently serve the entirety of the subject property within the

established response time threshold". Our county is expected to have one million residents by 2030. Our commissioners readily admit this (no wonder as they are driving force behind it). Southwest Florida is considered "medically underserved." At the current rate Florida is projected to have the second-largest physician shortage in the country by 2030. In addition hospital beds and a shortage of nurses are outpaced by population growth at this alarming rate. Lee County is a balloon being inflated to its breaking point. It is our current commissioners that are blowing it up with their hot air.

To make matters worse honest concerned citizens dare not run for office against these entrenched officials. There have been unwarranted attacks on grassroots candidates and their staff to discourage competition. Beware of misleading inaccurate hit pieces and seek out the facts. Register to vote and vote in the primary. (Only registered republicans can vote in the republican primary). Next time you sit in traffic, see a car crash (our roads are the 3rd deadliest in Florida), can't get a timely doctor's appointment, are placed in an emergency room hallway waiting for a bed, see a dead gopher tortoise on the side of the road, your well runs dry or your community is on water restrictions remind yourself that primary elections matter. Vote August 20! 🐾

Be A Lubber, Not A Fighter! The Eastern Lubber Grasshopper

By Kara Tyler-Julian, Biologist

If you've spent time in the natural areas of Florida, chances are you have encountered a large, distinctive insect known as the Eastern Lubber Grasshopper (*Romalea guttata*), or Lubber for short. The Eastern Lubber Grasshopper is native to Florida and the Southeastern United States and is a member of the family Orthoptera- the grasshoppers, katydids and crickets. These large, colorful grasshoppers are slow-moving and somewhat clumsy in nature. Their slow movement combined with their bright coloration and healthy populations makes them a commonly observed insect in our natural areas and our gardens. This species can be found in many habitats, but it prefers low, wet areas such as wetlands, ditches, and adjacent areas. While the adults are generally a bright coloration of yellow and orange with some shades of red, their coloration is variable and they can even occur in a dark black form, especially in North Florida. Their bright coloration is an example of aposematic coloration, a warning to predators that they are inedible due to toxins contained in their bodies. As an additional defense against predation, these grasshoppers can emit a distasteful and odiferous frothy substance from their spiracles.

Lubbers are a polyphagous insect, which means that rather than specializing on eating one species or family

of plants, these insects feed on a wide range of plant species. They have been documented to feed on over 100 species of plant, but they seem to prefer plants in the lily family, as many gardeners can attest. The toxins that the lubber grasshoppers produce come from the plants that they consume and the variety of plants in their diet leads to a variety of toxins in their bodies. Females deposit the eggs underground by digging a small hole up to 5 cm deep and then laying. The female will lay clusters of eggs in approximately 3-5 pods with each pod having around 60 eggs in it. The eggs are deposited in the summer and will hatch after 6-8 months, requiring at least 3 months of cool weather in order to hatch. When the eggs hatch, the young grasshoppers that emerge are called nymphs and they are visibly different from the adults, appearing black with either red or yellow stripes. Nymphs can usually be seen beginning to emerge in the spring through early summer.

The lubber nymphs are gregarious in nature and can often be seen in large groups, defoliating plants. As they grow and develop through their 5-6 instars, they will gradually decrease in number as they disperse and are consumed by predators. While the internet is rife with misinformation about these insects having no natural predators, numerous native animals have been documented



Photo: The Eastern Lubber Grasshopper In Grass.

feeding on them through photographs. The loggerhead shrike is well known to feed on the lubbers by impaling them and leaving them for some time to allow the toxins to break down, but other animals have been observed consuming them without this step. The predators of the lubbers include, but are not limited to: wasps, spiders, wheel bugs, Northern cardinals, blue jays, blue birds, Mississippi kites, swallow-tailed kits, leopard frogs, box turtles, Eastern gray squirrels and fox squirrels.

While many gardeners are quick to kill every lubber grasshopper that they see,

keep in mind that this is a native insect and a natural part of the local ecosystem. Try to plant native plants and stay away from lilies and you won't have much trouble from these creatures. Remember to minimize the use of pesticides because these products can affect more than just the one species you are trying to get rid of, and just try to appreciate the beautiful diversity of life in your yard when you spot these land lobsters. If you really want them out of your yard, try grabbing them and tossing them into your neighbor's yard or releasing them into a nearby natural area. 🐾

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Making the Most of New AI



Photo: Trey English; Former President of Energid Technologies Corporation. Current freelance software business strategist. Fifth generation resident of Alva.

An age of Artificial Intelligence (AI) has arrived, brought on by a recent invention called the Large Language Model (LLM) that gives computers mastery of everyday human speech. LLM AI software is both already amazing and improving at a breathtaking clip. Large and capable companies like Google, Apple, Microsoft, Amazon, and Meta are competing to make powerful new products easy to use. This article will guide you on how to understand, run, and use the latest and best.

The LLM is a recent invention. Google published a key breakthrough in 2017, and it became famous with the software ChatGPT, made by the company OpenAI in 2020. ChatGPT, whose technology the company called GPT-3, shocked users because it felt like conversing with a person. It was great with facts and good with words, succeeding at tasks that had not been automated before, like describing history, explaining science, and writing letters.

GPT-3 was followed by GPT-3.5 in 2022 and the much-improved GPT-4 in 2023. These upgrades had better language skills and the added ability to both understand photos and, through integration with other tools, create images. GPT-4 could converse with users through voice using a headset or microphone.

GPT-4 was in turn followed by current variants, GPT-4 Turbo and GPT-4o. And competing software came from many directions: Google's Gemini, Microsoft's Copilot, xAI's Grok, Meta's Llama, and Anthropic's Claude, among others. These use different programming, train-

ing data, memory sizes, and censorship approaches to give unique features and strengths. They represent the complex, fast-paced, and fantastically funded world of AI. AI will not have one form, but many forms that serve separate purposes, and these will improve quickly as they integrate with our lives.

If you have not yet tried this software, you should. And you should try more than one. A good way to start your personal AI journey is by visiting the latest AI leaderboards that score and rank the software options. A good one can be found at <https://chat.lmsys.org/?leaderboard>. Leaderboards also give links, describes the companies behind the models, and gives the knowledge-cut-off date—the last date of data used for training.

We will go through installing and using two examples: 1) ChatGPT with GPT-4o and 2) Venice AI. GPT-4o is technology developed by OpenAI, the company mentioned above that launched the LLM phenomenon with ChatGPT. It excels in many areas. GPT-4o, though, stores your input and may censor output. The other interface, Venice AI, leverages decentralization to improve privacy and flexibility. It serves as a helpful alternative to GPT-4o when you want to discuss something sensitive or controversial.

GPT-4o can run on either a computer or a smartphone. For a computer, go to <https://chatgpt.com> and sign up. If you do not sign up, the interface uses GPT-3.5, which is not as good. Consider paying for a Plus account, which gives more time, includes image generation, and gives early access to new features for \$20/month. Or you can install the ChatGPT application on your iPhone or Android phone by going through the App Store or Google Play. If you register on one device, that works on other devices. Using it on a smartphone can be better because it allows voice interaction on the go and easy picture

By Trey English

taking.

Consider also adding Venice AI for its privacy and freedom. It will answer edgier questions—like how to break into a car, say—and will create more images, including, for example, those with famous living people. You can have it make a picture of Ron DeSantis jumping into the surf on Fort Myers Beach, if you want. Venice AI can be accessed through a Web browser on your computer or your smartphone via the URL <https://venice.ai>. A paid subscription gives more daily queries and improved censorship avoidance for \$49/year.

To get the best results from AI, communication needs to be, as with a person, clear and detailed. The best way to do this is with back-and-forth dialog. You can ask a general question first, then make it more detailed based on the initial response. Do this multiple times. You might, for example, start with a request like, "Did Thomas Edison make any inventions in Fort Myers?" The answer will mention battery research, and you can follow up with, "Tell me more about his battery research." You'll learn about his work on batteries for electric vehicles. Then you can ask, "How are his car batteries used today?" to learn how they are in fact still used to support wind and solar power.

But LLM AIs can do much more than historical investigation. Here are 12 ideas for GPT-4o:

1. When walking or driving, use it in voice dialog mode instead of a podcast to learn about a new subject.
2. When struggling with a text or e-mail, use it to rewrite.
3. Use it to learn a foreign language by asking it to teach you and talk to you as a student.
4. Give it photos to help identify plants and animals.
5. Take a photo of a broken personal item to find out how to fix it or order a new one.

6. Ask for a summary of the latest news.
7. Give bullet points for it to write a formal letter, and have it ask you questions that will improve the letter.
8. Have it read and summarize a long document.
9. Tell it to convert disorganized data from a PDF into an Excel spreadsheet.
10. Have it proofread something you write.
11. Ask it to explain something that happened in a popular movie (it has seen most of them).
12. Give it a screen shot of hard-to-use software or a website and ask for advice.

Once you start using AI for these and other everyday tasks, you will return to it often, and your skill in instructing it will grow. AI has transcendent knowledge and a way with words. Any task you can think of that leverages these capabilities can be handed off, making you more efficient in work and play.

As a closing point, this new technology can also write software. LLM AIs know many programming languages and are good with them just like they are with English. And even if this may not sound like a way you want to use it, appreciate the revolutionary importance of software that can write software. This ability will launch a virtuous circle of improvement in the years ahead. Try and use AI now, become proficient, and stay up with the latest as this new technology improves and finds broad application in increasingly powerful ways.

ABOUT TREY ENGLISH

Trey English is the former President of Energid Technologies Corporation. Current freelance software business strategist and a fifth generation resident of Alva. 🐾

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Protecting Your Personal Information

By Kevin Karnes, Lee County's Clerk of the Circuit Court & Comptroller



Photo: Kevin Karnes, Lee County's Clerk of the Circuit Court & Comptroller

Every day, you do something to protect yourself.

You lock your door at night. You look both ways before crossing the street or pulling out into traffic.

But when you think of safety and security, do you think about ways to protect your personal or financial information? Keeping this kind of information safe is extremely important.

Identity theft is a common problem and occurs when someone uses your personal or financial information without your permission. Thieves can gather this kind of information in many ways – including through the

trash, which is why it's so important to properly dispose of documents that contain information like your home address, social security number, birthday, banking and credit card numbers, or anything else identifiable on it.

Unfortunately, identity theft continues to rise.

According to the U.S. Department of Justice, at least 1 in 5 people have fallen victim to identity theft in their lifetime.

As Lee County's official record keeper, the Clerk's office goes to great lengths to ensure personal information is protected in your public records and we want to help you do everything you can to keep your confidential information at home safe.

My office has hosted two free shred-

ding events in the last six months to help community members keep their private information secure. In total, we shredded more than 13,700 pounds of confidential documents at those events, which we called The Big Shred. We plan on making The Big Shred a semi-annual event, with the next stop in Lehigh Acres this fall. (We'll announce more details on the next Big Shred as we get closer to the date. To be the first to know about future events, sign up for our newsletter at www.leeclerk.org/subscribe.)

If you weren't able to make it to one of our previous events, there are other ways you can protect yourself.

I highly recommend purchasing a small home shredder if you're able and shredding all documents that contain your personal information.

Also, the Federal Trade Commission recommends reviewing your bank and credit card statements carefully and often. Review your credit reports at least once a year. Know your payment due dates and if a bill doesn't show up when it's supposed to – call the company and inquire.

In addition to protecting your personal information, I always recommend safeguarding your home or property with our free Property Fraud Alert service, which will notify you within 24 hours if someone tries to file a deed in your name. You can sign up at www.leeclerk.org/fraudalert.

Please do everything you can to protect yourself and your family from identity theft and fraud. 🐾

Still Serving

By Pat Whitehall

Did you know that the oath taken when joining the military is a lifetime commitment for VFW members? They served our country honorably and are now dedicated to serving the communities in which they reside. The impact of their efforts goes from coast to coast and is accomplished around the world.

Joining your VFW will help you celebrate in many ways. There are constant ceremonies for different reasons, and many of them include the nearby community. Many VFW Posts affiliate with the local law enforcement, fire departments, schools, and Scout troops. At any event, some of these same people can be seen participating, whether it's in a Flag Ceremony, a Celebration of Life, or a Welcome Home Veteran's celebration.

We may be a little post here in Lehigh Acres, but we are definitely the Little Post with a Big Heart. We are also very proud to be known as a Purple Heart Post. Not only do we have

so many special Post members, but we have an awesome Auxiliary, a great Riders group, a DAV that welcomes everyone even if they're not disabled, and everyone who is involved finds some time and some way to volunteer some service to keep our Post going. We proudly proclaim the best group of volunteers found anywhere!

We are open seven days a week, starting at 9:00 a.m. Sundays, we have a good breakfast at very reasonable prices, and it's the only day we open at 8:00. We always welcome the public to any event we may be organizing and participating in, often with other groups in our area.

Monday through Friday, we have lunches to which the public is also invited; Monday evenings, there is a Show Me the Money game; Tuesday evenings are for the different meetings necessary to keep the post active; Wednesday is a dinner and entertainment beginning at 5:00 p.m., Thursday

is a Bingo night which starts at 6:00 p.m., Fridays are special meals with more entertainment and Saturdays have Hillbilly Bingo twice a month and often there is some other event taking place. Call to ask what's happening on

any given day.

Our location is 25 S. Homestead Road, and we're always happy to see new faces. So, stop in and say hello. You'll be glad you did! 🐾



Photo: Veterans of the VFW Post 10097 during Memorial Day Celebration

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Fun, Sun, Fleas and Ticks By Dr. Veja Tillman, DMV

Florida is the perfect vacation spot. We have beaches, sunny weather, fleas, awesome fishing, entertainment, ticks and lots of great outdoor activities for the family and pets. Oh, did I mention fleas and ticks? That's right Florida is known for its high population of fleas and ticks. Right now, is the perfect weather for these parasites to disrupt your vacation. They thrive in warm temperatures and humid weather (sounds like June to September). But what are they and what can we do about them?

FLEAS

Fleas are dark-brown and no larger than sesame seed. Fleas thrive when the weather is warm and humid. Depending on where you live, fleas may even be seasonal or a year-round concern. Your pets can pick up fleas anywhere an infestation exists (often areas where other dogs, cats or wild animals frequent). Once a flea has selected your pet as a host, it spends virtually all its time on your pet.

You may not know that your pet has fleas until the numbers increase to a point where your pet is obviously uncomfortable. Signs of a flea problem can range from occasional scratching to severe biting and chewing of the skin which can lead to skin infections and hair loss. Some pets even become allergic to flea bites, which can cause

long-term discomfort from one or two flea bites.

Fleas are known to carry tapeworms which can infect your pets if they are ingested while your pet is licking or chewing to scratch the flea bite. If a flea infestation is moderate to severe, people may also be bitten by fleas. Fleas can transmit several infectious diseases to pets and people, however, this is rare.

TICKS

There are many different species of ticks that can affect dogs and cats. Ticks are commonly found in wooded areas, brush, shrubs and wild undergrowth, and any animal (including humans) is at risk of becoming a tick's host. Recent expansion into once wooded areas/ reserves has increased the incidence of pet and human exposure to ticks.

Tick exposure may be seasonal, depending on geographic location. You will most often find ticks around your pet's neck, in the ears, in the folds between the legs and the body, and between the toes, but they can be found anywhere on the body and are usually easily seen or felt. Tick bites can cause skin irritation and heavy infestations can cause serious health concerns.

Ticks can spread serious infectious diseases (such as Lyme disease, Rocky Mountain Spotted Fever, and others) to the pets and the people on which they feed. They can also cause tick paralysis. Disease risk varies by geographic area and tick species.

TREATMENT AND CONTROL

Pets at risk for fleas and ticks should be evaluated by your veterinarian and appropriate treatment plans recommended. Treatment plans are recommended based on seasonality of the infestation, your pet's environment, needs and health, and the severity and type of infestation present.

Treatment plans may include a single treatment or combination of treatments for your pet, its environment (yard, furniture, floors, car etc.), bedding, grooming tools and treatment of other pets in the home. Treatments may include frequent bathing, preventatives or controlling agents, medications to eliminate the infestation and other supportive care medications to treat secondary effects of the infestation (Antibiotics, allergy medications, etc.). You should always pretreat your pets for fleas and ticks before going on trips or vacations with approved flea and tick medication.

Your veterinarian can recommend an appropriate course of action and

suggest ways to prevent future infestations of your pet(s).

IMPORTANT POINTS

- Start flea and tick control before you leave for vacation or ahead of the flea and tick season.
- Look for fleas, ticks, and hair coat abnormalities any time you groom your dog or cat or when you return home from areas that are likely to have higher numbers of these parasites.
- Consult your veterinarian if your pet excessively scratches, chews, or licks his/her coat, or persistently shakes his/her head or scratches his/her ears.
- Leave treatment to the experts. Your veterinarian offers clinical expertise and can assist you in identifying products that are most likely to control and treat your pet's parasite problem effectively and safely.

ABOUT DR. VEJA TILLMAN, DMV

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

Montage Women's Club By Rita Artwohl

The Montage Women's Club is a social and philanthropic club open to all women residing in Lee County. We meet on the fourth Thursday of each month at The Landings Yacht, Golf, and Tennis Club (community entry off McGregor Blvd between Cypress Lake Drive and College Pkwy). Meetings begin at 11:30 a.m. with a short social period followed by lunch at Noon followed by an informative speaker

program and a short business meeting. Within the organization are various interest groups for members' participation. Membership is open to both year-round and seasonal residents. We welcome you to visit Montage for a luncheon.

Our next meeting will be held on Thursday, July 25th, and our guest speaker will be Leslie O'Halloran, Com-

munity Outreach and Development Supervisor for the Children's Network of Southwest Florida, a private, non-profit lead agency that administers the Child Welfare System in Lee, Collier, Charlotte, Hendry, and Glade Counties.

Luncheon fee is \$28.00 and the planned regular menu entree will be Quiche Lorraine with petite garden salad and Balsamic vinaigrette. The

plant-based/vegan option entree will be Southwestern stuffed tomato, black bean cake with Pico de Gallo, grilled Tofu with cilantro lime sauce.

If you would like to attend a Montage meeting, need further information, or would like to make a reservation, please call Rita Artwohl at (239) 703-7787. Reservations cut-off to attend this meeting is Noon, Thursday, July 18th. 🐾

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East Lee County Chamber Hosts Region Luncheon: “Lee County Moving Together Into The Future - The Value Of Service”

By Mike Welch



**Photo: Mike Welch
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June 17th at the Plantation GCC in Gateway/Eastern Fort Myers saw citizens come together for presentations by Lee County Commissioner, Cecil Pendergrass and County Manager, Dave Harner. Pendergrass is also member of the Board of Directors of the East Lee County Chamber. Members and guests of the Chamber came from the various communities of Lee County as well as several public officials from the region.

Mr. Harner along with Commissioner Pendergrass spoke about the culture of service in the administration of

local services for the communities of Eastern Lee County - Lehigh Acres. Many guests were impressed on the activities and investments being made in infrastructure and road work being undertaken in eastern Lee County as well as the expansion of law enforcement, traffic control, utilities as well as various economic development projects. The presentation will be a template for the new County Administration to make presentations around local communities in Lee County regarding particular areas.

East Lee County Chamber Board of Directors Chair Mike Welch also highlighted the work of the Florida Legislature with over \$2millions in planning funds for a new East Lee County Technical College for the pop-

ulation of east Lee. Welch and Pendergrass thanked the leadership of School Board Member and Chamber Board Member Armor Persons, State Representative Jenna Persons and Senator Jonathan Martin for their work on this project. He also highlighted together with Pendergrass and Harner the several millions of dollars approved by the Legislature for water/sewer expansion in Lehigh/East Lee for Florida Government Utilities. All leaders thanked Senate President Kathleen Passidomo who also represents parts of Lehigh/East Lee.

Mr. Harner’s overview of County projects and investments in Eastern Lee showed the direction of the Board of Commissioners in regards to the governance of eastern Lee. 🐾



Photo: (Top) Lee County Commissioner Cecil Pendergrass (Bottom) County Manager, Dave Harner

School Is Out – Drive Cautiously

By Sheriff Carmine Marceno



Photo: Sheriff Carmine Marceno, Lee County Sheriff

The summer is upon us and the Lee County school year has ended.

The dynamics of our streets and roadways change dramatically as children play on sidewalks, chase one another and run haphazardly in all directions. These conditions place an additional and significant burden on those operating motor vehicles.

As always, the Lee County Sheriff’s Office requests that all drivers obey speed limits, comply with traffic signals and avoid using electronic devices that serve as distractions. We have all, to varying degrees, become dependent upon our smart devices and cell phones. Much like other addictions,

we compulsively reach for our cell phones and struggle when we are unable to do so.

While many believe that they have become somewhat “proficient” at using their phones while driving, this practice has become one of society’s prevailing perils. When we consider risky and unhealthy behaviors we, as humans, have a tendency to believe that the consequences only happen to others...until it happens to us or to a loved one.

While Florida Statute 316.305 allows law enforcement officers to stop motor vehicles using wireless communication devices and issue citations for drivers who are “manually typing or entering multiple letters, numbers, symbols, or other characters into a wireless communications device or

while sending or reading data on such a device for the purpose of non-voice interpersonal communication, including, but not limited to, communication methods known as texting, e-mailing, and instant messaging,” this means little following a catastrophic incident.

Exercise additional caution when driving on side-streets and residential roadways. Younger children rarely consider the hazards around them and outdoor games often result in unanticipated darting into the roadway.

Parents and guardians are strongly encouraged to discuss the potential



Photo: Children outside playing and blowing bubbles

dangers with their children. Younger children should always be supervised while playing outdoors.

Please...the safety of our children is dependent upon our responsible driving. 🐾

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The Hidden Burden on Family Members and Those Who Support Our Heroes

Why Military Mail Should Be Postage-Free

By Richard Erschik, Veteran, US Army Vietnam War

In the land of the free and the home of the brave, it's astounding that the family members and those supporting our brave men and women serving in our military still have to pay postage for letters and packages sent to them.

This is a practice that demands re-consideration, as it reduces the amount of expressed appreciation of those who are already sacrificing so much for our country.

A recent volunteer effort of the Cascades community in River Hall, Ft. Myers, FL to purchase, package, and ship 31 boxes of donated items including useful personal items and snacks to active-duty members required over \$652 in postage.

When we send mail to our active-duty military personnel, we are not merely sending letters and packages; we are sending support, love, and a piece of home. These tokens of affection and gratitude are crucial for their morale,

especially when they are stationed far from family and friends in challenging and often dangerous environments. It is nothing short of ridiculous that the family and friends of these heroes, who are actively protecting our freedoms—including the operations of the United States Postal Service—should have to pay for them to receive mail.

These costs, though seemingly minor to some, can add up and become a significant issue, especially in today's economy.

Moreover, when packages and letters are clearly addressed to 'military posts', it stands to reason that the logistical burden of postage cost should not be required. These service members are stationed at defined locations, often within the infrastructure of the military itself. The mail is a lifeline, and its delivery should be facilitated without additional charges.

The solution is straightforward: elim-

inate postage fees for mail sent to active military personnel. This is not only a gesture of gratitude but a practical step that acknowledges the unique sacrifices made by our service members. It is a small but significant way to show that we value their commitment and that we are willing to support them in every way possible.

As a nation, we must reflect on how we treat those who protect us. Removing postage fees for military mail is a simple, tangible way to demonstrate our appreciation and support. It's time we ensure that our heroes can receive morale-boosting letters and packages from home without the added worry of postage costs. Let's honor their service by addressing this issue and making military mail postage-free. It's a small step with a big impact, and it's the least we can do for those who do so much for us.



Photo: Close Up Man Sealing Envelope
ABOUT RICHARD ERSCHIK AND LAURIE DOUGHERTY

Richard Erschik and Laurie Dougherty are originally from Chicago and now live in Alva, FL. Richard is a US Army veteran of the Vietnam War and served from 1965-67. He founded and was CEO of a marketing services service business in the trade show industry. Laurie was the Executive Director of a non-profit in the water industry. Today they are both online trainers. Richard conducts online training classes on Public Speaking and (making) Presentations, while Laurie teaches online Effective Meeting Facilitation classes. 🐾



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July 11 Cheer up the Lonely Day

Cheer Up the Lonely Day is an opportunity to make a lonely person happy. Any time you can make someone happy, you've done a good thing, and should be proud of yourself.

July 13 Embrace Your Geekness Day

Embrace Your Geekness Day is a great day to be a Geek. Or, to know a Geek. Spend plenty of time with your computer. Talk computer lingo and jargon. If you are a geek, stand tall and proud.

July 17 National Ice Cream Day

When you get the urge for a snack on a hot, humid summer night, what's the first thing that comes to your mind? That's right....Ice Cream! On this day, we hope you enjoy an ice cream cone, a sundae, or a milk shake.

July 24 Parent's Day

National Parents Day is a special day to honor your mother and father. And, its a time to celebrate the family structure and family values. The family unit is an important structure for the health of children, and the nation. That structure, and those values, are established and nurtured by your parents. The best way to mark this day is by spending time with your parents doing something fun. Its also important that you let them how much they are loved and appreciated.

July 30 National Cheesecake Day

Despite being a rich, high calorie, and cholesterol filled, cheesecake is a very popular dessert. Why? Because it tastes so good. Enjoy the day with a piece of cheesecake, along with your favorite topping.

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The EVENTS CALENDAR

July 14 - SWFL Business Alliance Networking Event With Amanda Cochran

SWFL Business Alliance Networking Event with Amanda Cochran for Lee County Commissioner at Beef O' Brady's, 2514 Santa Barbara Blvd, Cape Coral, FL 33914 on Sunday Night, July 14th from 5 PM to 7 PM. Bring the whole family!

July 18 - Preserve Buckingham Community Association Meeting

Thursday, July 18th, 6:30 PM at Lee County Mosquito Control, 15191 Homestead Road. Meet the Candidates for Lee County Board of County Commissioners District 5 representing Buckingham, Alva, and Lehigh Acres.

July 23 - Board of Lee County Commissioners Meeting

The Board of Lee County Commissioners Meeting will be held Tuesday, July 23, 2024 at 9:30 AM to 11:30 AM. The location is at 2120 Main St - Fort Myers, FL

August 5 - Lehigh Acres Community Council

Join your fellow residents and learn updates about what's happening in Lehigh and Lee County. The meeting is located in the community room at the Lehigh, Lee County Sheriff's Office, 1299 Homestead Rd, Lehigh Acres, FL 33936. This is a voluntary organization with open meetings for community connectivity and input.

August 8 - East Lee County Republican Club

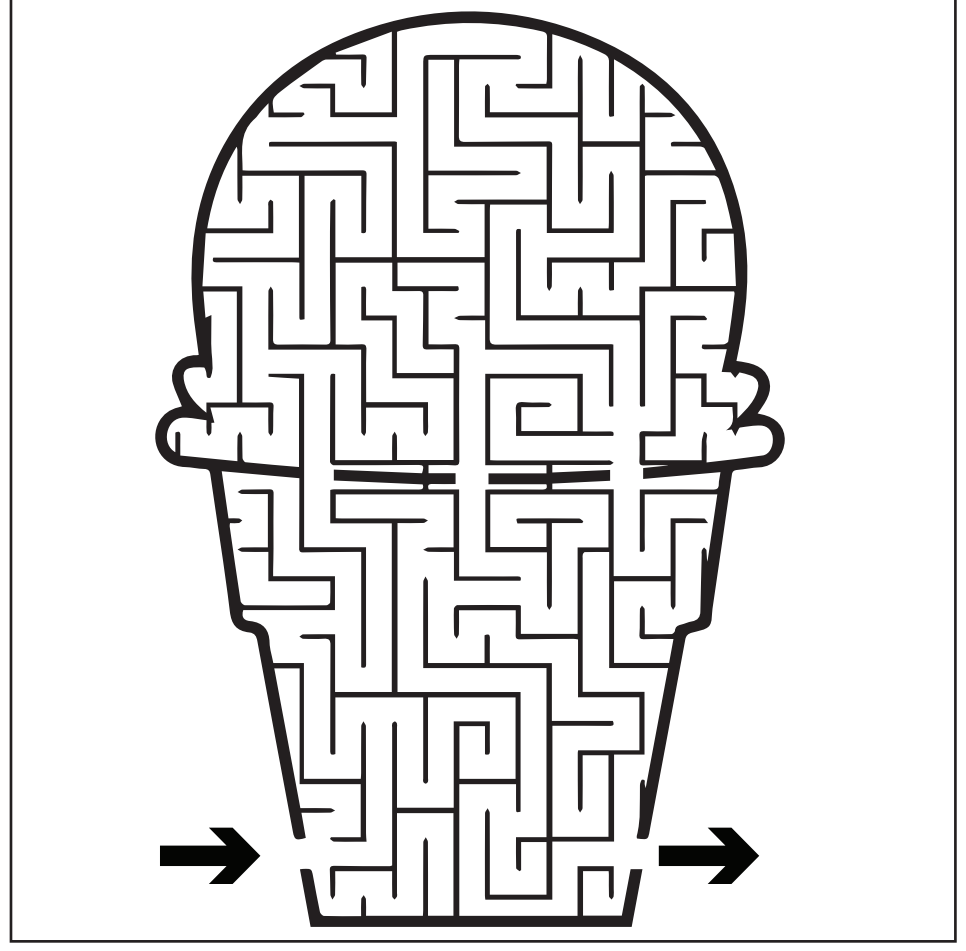
The East Lee County Republicans monthly meeting is at the American Legion, Post 323, 1124 Ashlar Ave., Lehigh Acres. Our guest speaker is Matthew Thornton, candidate for Lee County Commissioner District #3; Social/Meal is at 5:30 pm, and the Meeting is at 6:30 pm.

August 13 - A Living Vision of Alva, Inc

Gather at the Alva Community Center & Park, 21471 N River Rd, Alva, FL 33920, every second Tuesday of the month. We will hear updates on community concerns.

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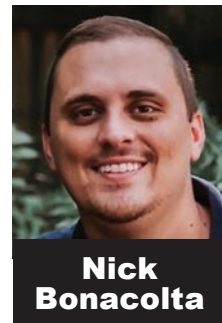
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CHARLIE BONACOLTA
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NICK BONACOLTA
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3 BEDROOM 2 BATH BEACON SQUARE VILLA



Popular Beacon Square Villa, 3 BEDROOM 2 BATH END CORNER UNIT, NEW ROOF IN 2024, nicely landscaped unit with an enclosed front porch plus an enclosed glass rear porch with porcelain plank tile floors leading out to the open lanai with covered umbrella and grilling area, cathedral ceilings with SKYLIGHT IN LIVING ROOM with new LUXURY VINYL FLOORS, LARGE MASTER BEDROOM with private bath and walk in closet, new commodes in both bathrooms, third bedroom currently being used an exercise room, eat in kitchen with stainless steel appliances, built in microwave, dishwasher, range, newer recessed can lighting, Simplisafe alarm system will convey, partial reverse osmosis system in the kitchen, indoor laundry area with full size washer and dryer, pull down stairs for attic storage, detached storage units on the exterior of the unit plus a door in the back leads to a storage closet, just steps away to the newly refurbished COMMON HEATED POOL with all new paver decking and patio furniture, shuffleboard etc, excellent location, walking distance to stores and minutes to SR 82, I-75 and Ft Myers. Low monthly HOA fee covers all exterior maintenance including the roof. 55+ Community, two small cats allowed, NO DOGS

Offered At\$179,900

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

3 BEDROOM 3 BATH TWO STORY POOL HOME-UPGRADES GALORE



UPGRADES GALORE IN THIS 3 BEDROOM 3 BATH TWO STORY POOL HOME with 2715 SQUARE FEET OF LIVING AREA, NEW CENTRAL HEAT AND AIR IN 2021, ceramic tile and real wood floors, porcelain wood plank tile floors in the den and family room, crown molding throughout, five inch baseboards, formal living room and dining area plus den that could be a possible 4th and 5th bedroom with use of the spacious loft on the second floor with built in shelving, spacious kitchen with granite countertops, island counter, plenty of cabinet and counter space with decorative plant shelving above the cabinets, large pantry, stainless steel appliances, wine rack, guest bath on first floor with granite tops in all bathrooms, indoor laundry room with plenty of cabinets and built in laundry sink, SOARING HIGH CEILINGS, wooden stair case lead upstairs with Roth iron/wood railing, master bedroom with walk in closet and in suite bathroom with dual sinks, separate garden tub and walk in shower, all guest bedrooms are extra spacious with walk in closets, guest bath on second floor as well with tub/shower, screen enclosed in ground heated pool/spa with electric heat pump, plenty of covered and open deck space for entertaining, beautifully landscaped for privacy, pavers on the pool deck as well as the front driveway and walkway leading to the side entry double garage, covered front porch, elegant lighting throughout, quiet gated community with CENTRAL WATER AND SEWER, very low monthly HOA fees of \$110 per month covers the use of the community's expansive amenities including a large swimming pool, fully-equipped exercise room, playground and interconnected sidewalks throughout the neighborhood. Ideally situated minutes away from Veterans' Park, grocery stores, shopping/dining, and schools, convenience is at your doorstep. A definite must see in excellent move in condition.

Offered At\$525,000

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

3 BEDROOM 2 BATH POOL HOME IN MARBLEBROOK



THREE BEDROOM TWO BATH POOL HOME BUILT IN 2019, located in an excellent neighborhood atmosphere of Marble Brook, Very low HOA fees, CENTRAL WATER AND SEWER, sidewalks, secure gated entry, walking distance to common clubhouse, fitness center and playground, Pool was built in 2020 with spacious open deck with light grey pavers, electric heat pump, salt water system and Baja deck in pool for sunning, BUILT IN FIREPIT overlooks the FENCED BACKYARD with excellent views of the lake in the backyard as well as plenty of privacy by not having another home in the yard, pavers in double driveway and walkways, NEWLY REMODELED KITCHEN WITH GRANITE TOPS, breakfast bar, BARNYARD DOOR over pantry with custom built in shelving and drawers, SAMSUNG STAINLESS STEEL KITCHEN APPLIANCES, decorative stone tile wall accents on the kitchen wall, backsplash, under breakfast bar and around entry way, spacious living room with decorative wood accent wall overlooks the pool area, ceramic tile floors throughout with newer LUXURY VINYL FLOORS IN THE BEDROOMS with 5 inch baseboards, CROWN MOLDING, master bedroom located in the rear of the home with pool and lake views, private en suite master bath with walk in closet, separate water closet, dual sinks and walk in shower, guest bedrooms located in the front of the home with upgraded vanity and fixtures in the guest bath, indoor laundry room with accent wall, built in cabinets and shelving with full size washer/dryer, double garage with auto opener, storm panels for openings, quiet low traffic street. The home is located near schools, Veteran's park and minutes to Downtown Lehigh for shopping etc. yet minutes to I-75, SR 82, Ft Myers and the airport. NO FLOOD INSURANCE REQUIRED HERE. HIGHEST ELEVATION IN LEE COUNTY.

Offered At\$380,000

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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. The adjoining villa at 1927 Golfside Village Dr is also available for sale with it's own private pool.

Offered At\$279,900

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3 BEDROOM 2 BATH HOME IN POPULAR LAKE CAMILLE AREA



Newly updated 3 bedroom 2 bath home on central water in the popular Lake Camille Area of Lehigh with over 2,000 square feet of living area! New luxury vinyl floors throughout the home, Kitchen has been completely remodeled with quartz countertops, stainless steel appliances, new LED light fixtures, and a large island breakfast bar, the living room has also been remodeled with a decorative stone accent wall and a beautiful Heatilator fireplace, large dining room with a wood plank accent wall, two large guest bedrooms with plenty of closet space, new vanity with dual sinks in the guest bathroom, along with new mirrors and fixtures, spacious master bedroom with sliding door access to the screened lanai, large walk in closet, updated vanities with dual sinks in the master bathroom, indoor laundry room with washer and dryer included, covered lanai with a pass through window from the kitchen over looking the fenced backyard. Home sits on an oversized lot, NEWER AC IN 2015, NEWER WATER HEATER IN 2017, Roof is in great shape with a 5 year roof certification from a licensed roofer.

Offered At\$334,900

Nick Bonacolta 239-887-0468 nbonacolta@gmail.com

METICULOUSLY MAINTAINED 3 BEDROOM 2 BATH + DEN HOME - FULLY FENCED



Meticulously maintained 3 bedroom 2 bath home with a den, great location close to stores and easy access to Ft. Myers and I-75. This home has been well maintained and boasts a Newer roof in 2018, Newer central heat and air, New water heater, 4 new impact resistant windows, and newer well equipment. Updated stainless steel kitchen appliances, large breakfast bar, and a pass through window from the kitchen to the den. Cathedral ceilings make the home feel more spacious and inviting, tile floors throughout with wood laminate floors in the bedrooms, indoor laundry room with washer and dryer included, updated vanities in both bathrooms, large walk in closets in all 3 bedrooms, oversized 2 car garage with built in cabinets and counterspace, pull down stairs to the attic, inviting screened front porch, fully fenced backyard for privacy, home is located on an oversized lot with vacant lots to the left and behind the property. NO FLOOD INSURANCE NEEDED!

Offered At\$313,000

Nick Bonacolta 239-887-0468 nbonacolta@gmail.com

GROUND FLOOR 2 BEDROOM 2 BATH CONDO IN GATEWAY



Convenient ground floor 2 bedroom 2 bath Condo located on the 5th hole of Gateway Greens Championship golf course. Located right next to the community pool and mailboxes, Just Minutes to JetBlue Park and SWFL International airport! Breakfast bar in the kitchen as well as a nook for a table, split bedroom layout for privacy. The master bedroom has a beautiful golf course view with access to the lanai, large walk in closet, dual sinks in master bathroom, indoor laundry room with washer and dryer included, newer water heater in 2021, Summerwind has the luxury of being close to Daniels Pkwy by utilizing the Westlinks Dr Entrance. Gateway is a beautiful serene gated community and offers a soccer park, dog park, bike and jog path, and more. Included in HOA fee: Comcast cable, High-Speed WIFI, Water, Sewer, Garbage, Landscaping, Exterior Pest Control, Roof & Paint Reserves, Building Insurance, access to pool, Etc. Owner's just pay FPL electric!

Offered At\$265,000

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2 BEDROOM 2 BATH PINWOOD CONDO



Popular Pinwood Condominium located in the last phase of Pinewood with stucco exterior, quiet low traffic Cul de Sac with plenty of privacy, covered carport with a 26.10 X 12 screened lanai with access from the kitchen door directly to the screened lanai, largest screened lanai in Pinewood with built in storage cabinets and drawers and extra counterspace, NEW CENTRAL HEAT AND AIR IN 2020, ceramic tile and wood laminate floors throughout, mirrored walls in the living room, newer front and side doors both with screens for those nice days to let the fresh air inside, newer insulated windows for energy efficiency, stack washer and dryer inside unit, walk in closet in the guest bedroom, bathrooms have ceramic tile in the bathtub and shower areas, blinds on the windows, 55+ community within walking distance to stores etc. on Homestead Rd, PETS OK. THE ROOF AND EXTERIOR IS MAINTAINED BY THE CONDO ASSOCIATION. No Flood insurance required here. Highest elevation in Lee County.

Offered At\$144,900

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