



Lehigh Acres Sign by James Kennedy

WAIT! Don't Shred That!

The Honorable Matt Caldwell | Lee County Property Appraiser



TRIM Season is in full swing at the Lee County Property Appraiser's office, which means Lee County property owners are on the lookout for their Notice of Proposed Property Taxes. This formal communication is prepared by my office and coming to your mailbox soon! The annual mailing is sent in mid-August to all Lee County residential and commercial property owners, as required by law.

This official document is often ignored or mistaken for junk mail, but it contains important information about your property taxes and should be examined carefully. If you do not receive your notice in a timely manner, or accidentally file yours in the shredder, all is not lost! Current and historical notices are available for download on our website at, www.leepa.org, where you can preview your notice, save it to a digital file, or print the document for your records.

BETTER KNOWN AS THE TRIM NOTICE

The Notice of Proposed Property Taxes is commonly known as the Truth in Millage (TRIM) Notice in honor of the Truth in Millage Act, which was passed by the Florida Legislature in 1980. Truth in Millage was designed to keep taxpayers fully informed which taxing authorities are responsible for the taxes levied and the amount of tax liability owed to each one. The law established statutory requirements for all taxing authorities levying a millage to follow, including maximum millage levies for counties, municipalities, and special districts. The law also prescribed requirements for all notices and budget hearings, which is why taxpayers receive a TRIM Notice.

WHY IS THE NOTICE SO IMPORTANT?

Not everyone likes surprises, especially when it comes to their taxes! The purpose of your TRIM Notice is to notify you about changes in your November tax bill, including your ad valorem property tax estimate and the proposed tax rates for the coming year. The Property Appraiser does not collect taxes or set the proposed tax rates. The taxes are collected by the Tax Collector and the rates are set by the local taxing authorities based on their budgetary needs.

UNDERSTANDING YOUR TRIM NOTICE

The Florida Constitution requires the Property Appraiser to determine the market, or "just" value of all property within the county each year, as of January 1st. In Florida, market value is considered the most probable sale price for a property in a competitive, open market between a willing buyer

and a willing seller. Your market value is the amount assigned for tax purposes and located at the top of your Notice.

Next, you'll see your assessed value, which is your market value minus any assessment reductions, like the "Save Our Homes" benefit, or an agricultural classification. Any exemptions you qualify for will also be itemized on the notice, such as the homestead exemption, veterans' disability and charitable exemptions. Exemptions are applied to the assessed value, including deductions for agriculture, conservation or historic preservation.

The taxable value listed on the notice is your assessed value minus the exemptions you qualify for. In some cases, your assessed and taxable values may vary by taxing authority, because certain assessment reductions and exemptions may not apply to all levies and discounts.

IF YOU DISAGREE WITH THE NOTICE

Examine your notice closely to confirm that the Property Appraiser's valuation is correct. If you think the proposed taxes are too much, or the tax rates are too high, take part in the decision-making process and contact the appropriate taxing authority to voice your concerns or objections. The notice includes their contact information, and the dates and locations for the budget hearings.

If you feel the Property Appraiser's valuation of your property is inaccurate, or an exemption or classification you've applied for is not reflected on the notice, you may file a petition with the Value Adjustment Board (VAB), at the Lee County Clerk of Court to preserve your taxpayer rights. If you decide to file a petition, do not delay! The filing deadline is 25 days from the date of the mailing of the notice. We recommend you also contact the Property Appraiser's office to schedule an informal conference, so we can answer your questions and listen to your concerns. Please have your evidence available to support your opinion. If we discover a discrepancy in our valuation, your value will be adjusted accordingly, and you won't need to use the hearing process.

DON'T BE TAKEN BY SURPRISE!

Reviewing the details on your TRIM Notice helps you stay informed about your property taxes, and it gives you enough time to seek clarification if you disagree with the information presented. It also provides an opportunity to offer feedback to your local taxing authorities and keeps you engaged in the tax assessment process. As always, if you have any questions just reach out, the Property Appraiser is here for you. 🐾

Opportunity Set, Southwest Florida

Wesley Sprecher | Swamp Cat Brewing Co.

Neighbors,
What a time to be alive in SWFL. As the old saying goes, “If nothing changes, nothing changes,” and let me tell you from firsthand experience—change is coming. Change is coming to our region because change agents are already here. That being said, there are a myriad of challenges, generally speaking, that impact our daily lives in ways we may not appreciate.

Consider economically, we are positioned for massive growth, yet politically, we are wrapped around “culture wars.” As a young strategist in manufacturing and technology, few of my business partners or consulting clients feel as if we are aligned regionally due to the “good old boys network” and “siloeed regional initiatives that are non-inclusive of existing resources in our market,” which forces us decision-makers to look out-of-market to find the “best service providers.” I ran into this problem as a sales executive.

Consider in SWFL, we have one of the greatest wealth networks in the entire country; we have institutional knowledge of how the American System works for and against us as business owners, investors, and compassionate neighbors. However, we in the angel investor community struggle with deal flow, not because we cannot find worthwhile investments or do not know how to deploy capital effectively. So, why do we struggle with incentivizing innovators, startup founders, and true titans in the industries of tomorrow, like Medical Technology, Climate Technology/Manufacturing or Distribution/e-commerce or web development?

One project that truly has my heart is Swamp Cat Brewing Company. I am the Co-Founder of that organization, which was born in the FGCU Veterans’ Entrepreneurship incubator, and I am not a Veteran. Veterans are a prime example of the “opportunity in SWFL.” I say that, not because they are fantastic entrepreneurs worth considering when investing in startups. I say this because from a human “raw materials perspective,” Veterans typically offer investors the premier behavior profile we look for when we put our “money where our mouth is.”

You may think, “Wes, this is all well and good, but what do you want me to do about it?” Well, what can you do about it? At the risk of sounding cheesy: “Ask not what your country can do for you, but what you can do for your country,” consider the precipice of a cultural Renaissance. We’ve all heard the talking point on the news about our nation being at an “inflection point.” We in SWFL are a microcosm of the echo chambers we choose to dwell within. Who are you listening to? What questions are you grappling with as a decision-maker? How can we ask each other better questions?

We have an enormous, massive, better-than-most-others opportunity set in the United States. What is your Opportunity Cost?

In IT, we have observed Technology Executives transition to positions of influence and authority across the Fortune landscape because of the inherent need to embrace technology within the context of business. But, and this is the “black hat” in me, how are you protecting yourself from the threats of the digital age? Most MSPs sell on the ability to “protect the network,” but they have little to no expertise in CyberSecurity. That is an Integrity Challenge.

In manufacturing, we have observed significant regional investment in multiple industries. Speaking from experience, making widgets is not a complex business. Then why are government incentives not geared toward our core “Talent Pipeline,” “Sustainable Growth,” and diversified economic output challenges? I’m not here to blame the government. A lot of problems solve themselves. I am here to call out my neighbors, Republican, Democrat, Libertarian, who cares. If we cannot compartmentalize our ideological passions, we will not be able to collaborate at the caliber necessary to thrive in a Global Economy heading toward a system of Regionalization.

Lastly, in a positive spirit, I share with you—I am 28 years young. If Mandela was right about anything, why are we so afraid to let education “be the most powerful weapon we can use to change the world”? 🐾



Wes Sprecher (second from the left) With Partners and Associates of Swamp Cat Brewing Co.




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LARAQUE MORISSAINT 239-989-4739
laraquemorissaint1@gmail.com

\$175,000



SUNSET LAKE CONDO

Beautiful 2-story condo with pool view and 2 parking spaces. Spacious open floor plan, upstairs bedrooms with private baths. A must-see!

KAREN MAKOWSKI 607-259-9289
karenrealtor33905@gmail.com

\$215,000



FABULOUS LOCATION

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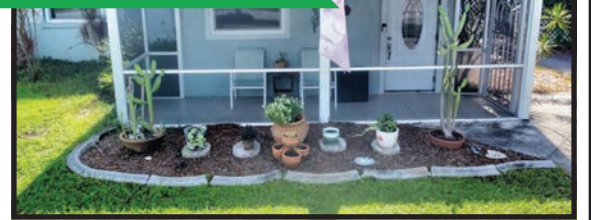


MADE FOR THE FAMILY

Immaculate villa on the golf course. Direct view to 12th green, spacious 2/2 with separate living and dining rooms, complete appliance package, and NO HOA FEES!

ABBY DILLON 239-645-6808
abbydillon@hotmail.com

\$310,000



MARIANA HEIGHTS 4/2

This home features 4 bedrooms and 2 baths with tile flooring throughout. New roof in 2019, impact windows, fenced backyard, 10x10 storage shed, and NO HOA FEES! Close to restaurants, shopping, hospitals, and beaches.

MARY BRUZIK 704-780-9528
marybsellshouses@gmail.com

\$319,900

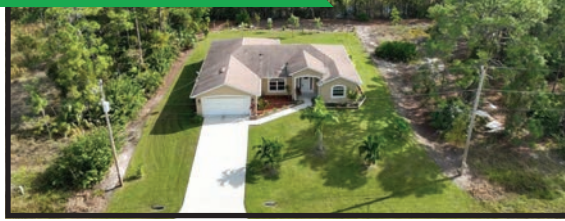


YOUR DREAM HOUSE AWAITS!

This stunning 3BR/2BA gem built in 2019 features a modern kitchen, luxurious master suite, and serene screen porch. Nestled on an oversized corner lot. Don't miss out! Call to schedule a private viewing.

AYO MICHAEL 239-770-8523
agentpauljacobs@gmail.com

\$365,750



GET MORE FOR YOUR BUCK!!

Amazing 4 bedroom, 2 bath home with formal dining, living, and family rooms, walk-in shower and jacuzzi in the master and a hot tub on the patio. Built in 2019 on an oversized lot. No home can be built behind you.

ESPERENCIA CADET 239-478-5492
espycadet@gmail.com

\$369,900



NEAR OAKWOOD

Spacious 3BD/2BA in-ground pool home. Almost 1,700 sq. ft. of living area. Complete appliance package. Newer roof and solid CBS construction. Walking distance to everything. Property needs some updating but value priced at \$369,900

PAUL JACOBS 239-371-1365
agentpauljacobs@gmail.com

\$399,900

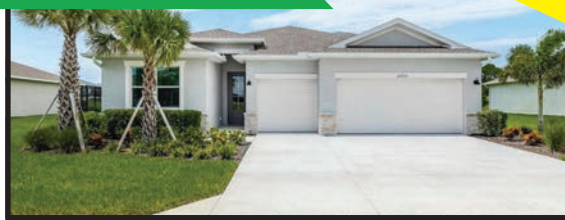


BETTER THAN NEW!

2019 home has 3BR/2BA split floor plan and in-ground heated saltwater pool. Home comes with a whole house Generac generator with a 500 gallon underground propane tank. Interior is clean and freshly painted. On a quiet street, close to all amenities.

URSZULA GALEK 847-830-4722
ursularealtor@yahoo.com

\$419,250



BETTER THAN NEW!

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The Bert Harris Act: How It Began and How It's Going

Nathan Cochran | Student at the University of Florida Levin College of Law, Class of 2025



Florida property rights are grounded in the state constitution, which guarantees individuals the right to acquire, possess, and protect private property. This right, outlined in Article I, Section 2 of the Florida Constitution, is secured against governmental actions that result in a complete “taking” of title or deprivation of the value of one’s property under Article X. However, not all governmental actions constitute a full constitutional taking of private property.

Enter Bert Harris Jr., a Florida Agricultural Hall of Famer and one of the state’s most prominent advocates for private property rights. Harris Jr. and other Florida legislators were tasked with addressing the gap between the constitutional remedy of full compensation for total takings and the lack of a meaningful remedy for governmental actions that imposed an “inordinate burden” on private property. Before the passage of the Bert Harris Act in 1995, private property owners had no recourse for recovering losses from governmental actions that fell short of a complete constitutional taking.

As I discussed in an article last month, Florida adopted the country’s most comprehensive property rights legislation in response to growing concerns over overdevelopment and unsustainable population growth. The legislation had two distinct, but related parts. The first, the Bert J. Harris, Jr. Private Property Rights Protection Act (Bert Harris Act), created a cause of action for private property owners to receive money damages based on inordinate burdens of real property imposed by the government. The second, the

Florida Land Use and Environmental Dispute Resolution Act (Dispute Resolution Act), established a mediation process by which landowners could acquire relief from government restrictions that were allegedly “unfair” or “unreasonable.” The former provided substantive property rights protection and procedural safeguards, which was uncharted territory.

Since the inception of the Bert Harris Act, however, courts have struggled to determine the statute’s scope and limits of the Act’s protections. This uncertainty has impaired the process by which government officials make zoning and other land use decisions. Local government officials are often unwilling to deny development permits, fearing costly claims from property owners that could supposedly strain local budgets, giving rise to Developers using intimidation efforts, including threats of lawsuits against local governments if projects are denied. Perhaps this is why most Bert Harris claims are settled by the parties, often in favor of developers. This tendency to settle claims prevents courts from establishing clear standards to determine under which circumstances landowners are entitled to compensation.

The Bert Harris Act undoubtedly shifted the balance of power between real estate developers and the public, significantly restraining the government’s ability to implement new land use regulations. This shift created the so-called “chilling effect” I referenced in last month’s article, where local planners and government attorneys find themselves constrained in performing their duties effectively. The clear winners of Florida’s takings initiative have been the well-endowed



Bert Harris Law: Twisted Legacies

special interest groups. Much anecdotal evidence indicates that influential developers can strong-arm the government into granting development rights, leaving public outcry unheard. Why are these well-positioned players allowed to override public interests and essentially coerce local governments into removing regulatory obstacles, enabling larger and more environmentally intrusive developments than would otherwise be available in the absence of the legislation?

Although champions of property rights often claim they are protecting homeowners, in many instances, regulatory decisions made in the shadow of the Bert Harris Act have done more harm than good for the average homeowner. The original purpose of the Bert Harris Act seems to have been lost, evolving into a tool—or even a weapon—for developers to secure higher densities and expanded uses, leading to greater financial returns that were once unobtainable. As courts are left with the very difficult task of grappling with the nuances of the Bert Harris Act, they face the ongoing challenge of balancing private property rights with the broader public interest. 🐾

Lehigh Acres Newest Restaurant Gets Rave Reviews

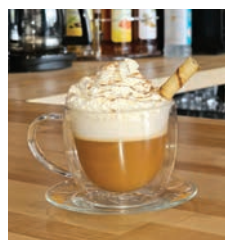
Omar Gonzalez

Maggy’s House is more than just a restaurant; it’s a sanctuary where the hustle and bustle of everyday life fades away. We’ve carefully crafted a unique blend of a modern-day coffee shop’s laid-back vibe with the heartwarming comfort of a home-cooked meal. Our hybrid approach to cuisine brings together the best of American, Mexican, and other cultural influences, ensuring a special dish for everyone who walks through our doors.

At Maggy’s House, we believe in taking the time to create fresh, satisfying meals that nourish both body and soul. We’re not fast food—we’re fresh food served in a welcoming environment where you can truly relax, unwind, and stay as long as you like. Our goal is to make you feel comfortable and at ease, whether you’re here to catch up with friends, get some work done, or simply savor a delicious dish with a little international flair. Certainly! Here’s the edited text to make it more compelling and persuasive:

Come and immerse yourself in the warmth, charm, and sense of belonging we’ve created specifically for you. We can’t wait for you to make yourself at home.

At the time of printing, Maggy’s House had 41 glowing Google reviews. We welcome you from 10 AM to 10 PM, Tuesday through Sunday, at 1241 Taylor Ln #5b, Lehigh Acres, FL. Call 239-837-1437 to verify our hours of operation, or visit Maggy’s House on Google to explore our delicious menu. 🐾




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Gone But Not Forgotten: Remembering Fort Hood

Richard Erschik | richarderschik.com

The landscape of what I remember as my Army base at Fort Hood, Texas, has transformed beyond recognition. What once stood as a familiar, vibrant hub of military activity during my service from 1965 to 1967 has all but disappeared. The base itself, renamed in 2021 to Fort Cavazos, no longer bears the iconic title that marked it as a cornerstone of U.S. Army tactical operations. The 16th Artillery Honest John Field Rocket Artillery Unit, where I spent the most formative years of my life, is gone, as is the storied 2nd Armored Division tagged “Hell on Wheels.” The insignias I wore on my uniform have all faded into history, leaving behind only memories—vivid yet intangible.

While in the military, I served alongside an unforgettable group of (young) men from across the country—Bill Ensminger, Wayne Hannusch, Ed Baker (RIP), Ken Curran, Fred Newhouse, Dave Lundberg, and Bill Nesiba. We were more than just comrades; we were a brotherhood, united by the disciplines of shared experiences and challenges, always in preparation for overnight deployment to Vietnam if/when the ‘big’ weapons might be needed to bring the enemy to its knees. Each of these men played a part in shaping those years at Fort Hood into something that earns the forever-lasting term—unforgettable.

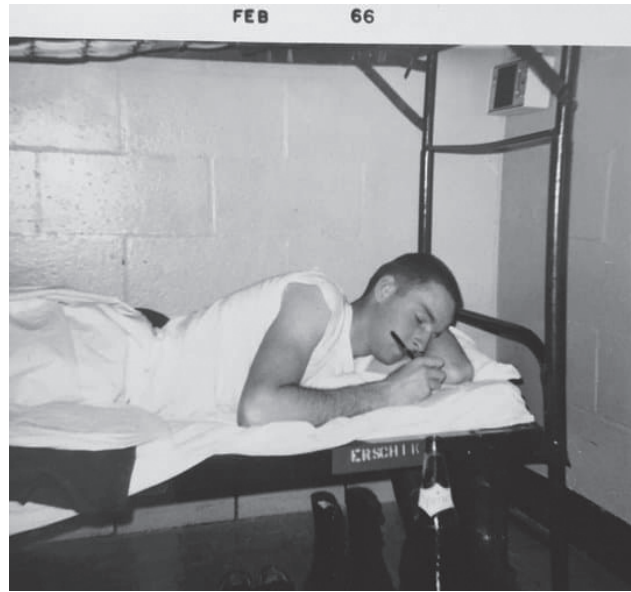
As life moved on after our service, we each found

different paths. Bill Ensminger returned to coal mining in PA and later worked as a security guard; today, he resides in Central Florida. Wayne Hannusch became a truck driver and youth baseball umpire and still calls Chicago home. Ed Baker, who took on his father’s machine shop business, has sadly passed, but his family remains in Fort Wayne, Indiana. Ken Curran became a union plumber and now lives in a suburb of Boston. Bill Nesiba earned national recognition for his work in classic car restoration and sign painting, and he now resides in Grand Island, Nebraska. Dave Lundberg took a different route, becoming a diesel mechanic for Cummins Engine, and still resides in Amarillo, Texas. We are all still in touch, thanks to social media.

As for me, after my military service, I ventured into business, becoming the founder of a national marketing services organization and a speaker and presenter in the trade show industry. I also wrote seven books, including one about my military service, titled “My Time Served in the United States Army,” which is available on Amazon and Apple Books. Nearing 60 years since those days, this book is my lasting tribute to a vanished era—and reflections on my ties to Fort Hood, the 2nd Armored Division, and the 16th Artillery.

While Fort Hood, now in its new incarnation, may no longer resemble the place where I served,

the impact of that time still shapes who I am today. Though the base name has changed, and the units in which I served have faded from history, the spirit of those days and the brotherhood we formed lives on. It exists now only in the hearts and minds of those of us who served there—a memory of a time when we were young, driven by duty, and bound together by a shared experience that will never be forgotten by any of us. 🐾






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Lehigh Regional Medical Center

Lehigh Regional Medical Center Volunteer Team's Spirit of Service

Julie Lawrence | Manager, Business Development & Marketing With Lehigh Regional Medical Center

Lehigh Regional Medical Center's non-profit volunteer organization is vibrant with a diverse group of people from our community who devote their time and hearts to the hospital. The Lehigh Hospital Auxiliary Volunteers welcome all who enter the hospital and reach out into the community as well with scholarships.

The team was mostly disbanded during Covid, but has been built back with long-time volunteers, newer residents of Lehigh Acres, and local students earning hours for high school and college. With over 2000 volunteer hours in 2023, their duties include greeting and signing in visitors, providing helping hands stocking supplies, refreshing waters for patients, and assembling information packets.

The volunteers operate Gifts from the Heart. The hospital gift shop is a highlight for employees and visitors with beautiful arrangements from Westminster Florist, phone chargers, puzzle books, costume jewelry, scented candles, seasonal décor, and snacks. Jean Sapp, a Pink Lady volunteer in 1984, and current volunteer says, "Volunteering has been one of the most rewarding things I have done. Sharing joys and sorrows with visitors has been a blessing. And, the gift shop's one-of-a-kind items are a real plus." Profits from the gift shop, bake sales and popcorn days are used for scholarships.

The Lehigh Hospital Auxiliary Volunteers relaunched their scholarship program this year, awarding two \$500 scholarships to well deserving students. Scholarships are awarded twice a year to applicants pursuing an education in health-care. Applicants must be Lehigh Acres residents,

or can live outside of Lehigh Acres if they are an employee or immediate family member.

Lauralee Pierre, 2024 Lehigh Senior High School graduate, was awarded the May Scholarship. Joel Ball, Volunteer Manager, presented the award at the Senior Awards Ceremony at Lehigh Senior High School. Lauralee is attending USF, with goals of getting her Ph.D. and opening a Christian Psychology practice. Her mother, Marie Pierre is an Emergency Department RN.

The August Scholarship was awarded to Leah Woodrum, 2024 Labelle High School graduate, attending the University of Florida majoring in Biomedical Engineering with a special interest in prosthetics. Leah's mother, Jami Woodrum, is a Surgery Department RN.

In addition to their exceptional academic records and recommendations, both young women earned college credits while in high school and were active volunteers in their community and church. It was an exciting year for the scholarship re-launch and the team is looking forward to helping many more students in the future.

Lehigh Regional Medical Center is grateful for the volunteers so generously sharing their talents to serve the hospital and the community. Joel Ball adds, "The most rewarding aspect of volunteering is sitting at the front door of the hospital at the main desk- the welcome mat of the hospital. We lend a helping hand, words of comfort, and try to bring a bright spot to the hospital setting."

For volunteer and scholarship applications, call 239-368-4479 or email jlawrence2@primehealthcare.com. 🐾



May 2024 Scholarship Presentation / Pictured L to R: Joel Ball, Julie Lawrence, Lauralee Pierre-Scholarship Recipient



Jean Sapp in the Hospital Gift Shop, Gifts from the Heart



May 2024 Scholarship Presentation / Pictured L to R: Joel Ball, Leah Woodrum-Scholarship Recipient, Jami Woodrum

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A piece for me and a piece for you. Who hasn't shared a small piece of food with their pet? I know I have and those small pieces add up. More than 85% of pets in the United States are obese. Obesity in pets has become a serious problem over the last decade or so. Pets have become more and more integrated into the family unit and we are feeding them like family members as well. It is no wonder why they are gaining weight. So how do we get our furry friends back in shape? Between diet and exercise, where do we start?

Here is what you need to know to try to control your pet's weight.

TALK TO YOUR VET

Talk to your veterinarian before starting a weight loss program for your pet. This is paramount in making sure that your pet's needs are met during this process. It may also help ensure that your pet's specific needs and health conditions are addressed during the weight loss journey. Discuss your pet's specific health conditions and how the weight loss, diet change, and exercise will affect your pet's health and daily routine. Your veterinarian can also help guide you in monitoring your pet's progress and alert you to any concerns during the process.

DIET

The type of food you feed your pet will determine the

weight loss or gain of your pet. So choosing the appropriate diet is important. When choosing a diet for weight loss, discuss diet recommendations with your veterinarian. They may recommend non-prescription or prescription diets depending on your pet's requirements. Diets that are high quality but lower in calories are best. The portion of the diet is also important. Don't forget about portion control. You can feed the best high-quality diet and your pet may still gain or not lose any weight. This may be due to the portion or amount of the diet that is fed. Decreasing the portion size will decrease the amount of excess calories that your pet will consume and decrease the storage of the excess calories as fat. Excessive fat storage may lead to the formation of fatty growths under the skin known as lipomas.

EXERCISE/ACTIVITY

The next important factor is your pet's activity level. How active is your pet? Do they run zoomies around the house or in the yard or are they couch potatoes? Are they younger or older pets? How and what type of exercise to introduce to your pet are great questions for your veterinarian. Your veterinarian knows your pet and can work with you to give the best recommendations for weight loss for his or her specific condition, age, and physical fitness level. They can guide you on when and how to exercise your pet and what physical activity will be safe for your pet's age and physical and/or medical condition. Just like us,

the wrong type of physical activity may cause injury instead of helping to achieve your pet's physical fitness goals.

SNACKS/TREATS

Try to limit the amount of snacks and treats given to your pet. I know this is hard. Especially when they give you that deep eye contact that pierces your soul and you just can not say no. It's ok, I get caught up in it too. However, we have to be strong for them and offer treats in moderation. We all want our pets to live long healthy lives and keeping them at healthy weights is one way to ensure that they will be with us for years to come. If moderation is easier said than done, the treats and snacks may be replaced with healthier alternatives such as high-fiber fruits and vegetables (green leafy veggies, green beans, apples, pears, oranges, etc with seeds removed). Take care to use root vegetables (potatoes, carrots, etc) in moderation as they can be quite starchy or contain higher amounts of sugar.

In summary, talk to your veterinarian before starting a weight loss program for your pet. Include. Any health concerns for your pet, types of diet foods, portion control, physical activity, and limitation of snacks and treats. Use your veterinarian as a key source of information for your pet's weight loss journey. Your veterinarian is there to support you and your pet through this process. 🐾

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.

Mark Your Calendar For the Craftie Ladies Fall Craft Fair

Glenda Ziegler | Craftie Ladies of St. John XXIII Catholic Church

The Craftie Ladies of St. John XXIII Catholic Church are once again having their Fall Craft Fair.

If you've been to one of our craft fairs before, you know we have a large variety of top-quality, homemade items for sale. In addition to our well-known, exquisite quilts, afghans, and hand-knit and crocheted items, there will be pillows, table runners, placemats/napkins, hand-made rosaries, jewelry, mother/daughter aprons, tooth fairy pillows, novel baby items, lots of lovely holiday décor, including our fabulous wreaths, and so much more!

Some of our always fabulous raffle baskets include BBQ, Evening in Paris, Chocolate, Cat, Dog, and Layette baskets, plus more made by our wonderfully talented women. The drawing for each basket will take place at 1 pm on Sunday, Novem-

ber 10. You don't have to be present to win!

Come and join us on Saturday, November 9th, from 10 am to 5 pm and Sunday, November 10th, from 8 am to 1 pm.

The Craftie Ladies came together 15 years ago. The group has grown to nearly 40 talented and dedicated women. All proceeds go directly back into the community. Just a few causes we donate to are ACT, Blankets and Blessings, Eva's Closet, St. John XXIII Villas, and St. Martin De Porres.

We hope to see you at our Craft Fair at St. John XXIII Catholic Church Parish Life Center on Palomino Lane, just north of Daniels Parkway. Stop by, have a chat, and get some early shopping done. 🐾

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The Eastern Indigo Snake: A Sight To Behold

Kara Tyler-Julian

In southwest Florida, with our warm subtropical climate, our native ecosystems support many species of snakes. The vast majority of the snakes that we encounter in this area are non-venomous and not dangerous to humans or pets, with only 4 species of venomous species found in the area. Unfortunately, many people moving here from other places are unfamiliar with our native snake species and operate under the assumption that “the only good snake is a dead snake”.

In writing these articles about our native wildlife, I am hoping I can convince a few people to think differently about snakes and other commonly-maligned wildlife.

The Eastern Indigo snake (*Drymarchon corais couperi*) is one of our many beautiful native snake species and might be the most beautiful if you ask this biologist. If you ever happen upon one, consider yourself extremely lucky as these are rarely encountered and extremely docile. This absolute gem of a snake is ready for a formal occasion, being stylishly dressed in all black with an iridescent sheen and is commonly confused with the more common and also non-venomous, Southern Black racer. However, there are a few differences to look for to determine which snake you are seeing. The Eastern indigo snake will have a reddish coloring on the chin area, whereas the black racer has a white coloring on the chin and is significantly smaller than the Eastern Indigo with a much worse attitude. The Eastern Indigo is the longest snake in North America, reaching lengths of 8-9 feet.

This threatened species of snake inhabits pine flatwoods, hammocks, hardwood forests and the edges of cypress swamps. They have a varied diet that can include insects, small reptiles, amphibians, and mammals, birds, and even other snakes. Of course one of their prey items is rodents such as rats, so just like our other species of native snakes, they are an important natural rat control. These non-aggressive reptiles especially rely on gopher tortoises, as they will utilize the gopher tortoise burrows for shelter and as a place to lay their eggs. They are just one of the hundreds of species that use the burrows created by our native tortoises, further supporting the need to protect the gopher tortoises and their burrows.

Eastern Indigo populations are threatened for many reasons including, but not limited to: capture for the pet trade, habitat destruction and fragmentation, vehicle strikes, parasites spread by invasive pythons, and of course intentional killing by people due to fear and miseducation. Being a predator makes these gorgeous creatures an indicator of ecosystem health and the absence of these and other predatory animals indicates an ecosystem that is not in balance. So, if you are lucky enough to see this or any other native snake species, know that you are likely in an area with a balanced ecosystem and appreciate the natural diversity of our native snake species



Eastern Indigo Snake by Garrett Craft



Eastern Indigo Snake by Garrett Craft

the role they play.

Visit the Calusa Nature Center and Planetarium at 3450 Ortiz Avenue in Fort Myers to see one of the largest Eastern Indigo snake specimens in their live native animal teaching exhibit. 🐾



Riverfront large lot on the Caloosahatchee Intracoastal Waterway in Alva. The best-kept secret in Alva is this private large estate home development near the Hendry County line called Caloosa Preserve. Large expansive river views with across river protected view. Large community boat ramp and dock—riverboat ramps are rare commodities in SWFL. Excellent value! This could be the best value in riverfront living. Deed restricted. 3,400 SQ FT of living area, so the homes are large.
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Fraudulent Job Offerings

A Message From the Desk of Sheriff Carmine Marceno



PHOTO: Sheriff Carmine Marceno, Lee County Sheriff

Following the pandemic, an enormous segment of the workforce was offered an opportunity to work from home... many never wishing to return to the office environment.

“Work from home” opportunities began to appear nearly everywhere... online, via text, and in print.

Many of these job offerings were legitimate opportunities to generate income from home.

Many were opportunities for scammers to generate revenue by stealing money and personal information from unsuspecting job seekers.

The Federal Trade Commission is now issuing warnings regarding some of the fraudulent activity found online, by way of text and on apps such as “WhatsApp.”

It begins with an offer for a position that pays many hundreds of dollars, per day, for work that can be performed at home. They offer a seemingly easy way to earn quick money, “from home,” and in your “free time.” Jobs may include data entry, stuffing envelopes, customer assistance, rebate processors, online reshipping, etc.

The requirements are almost non-existent... as one only requires a valid Social Security number. It doesn't get easier than that!

Once your personal information, inclusive of your Social Security number is received, you have heard the last from this “employer.”

You have become another victim of identity theft.

These scams are not exclusive to Southwest Florida. They are being perpetrated across the globe. Since the pandemic, the number of similar scams

reported to the FTC has more than tripled.

Scammers have additionally learned how to use Artificial Intelligence (AI) to create phony job postings and to create fictitious job posting sites using fake URLs, corporate logos, and the names of well-known national and international companies.

As it is imperative that new employers obtain an employee's Social Security number and bank account information (for purposes of direct deposit of your earnings), job seekers are rarely hesitant to provide this information.

Some of these scams require the job applicant to pay upfront “expenses” such as application fees.

There is no shame when one is fooled by these job postings. Many computer-savvy and perceptive business people have been scammed by this practice.

Some thoughts:

In virtually all scams, including the false job posting scheme, the ad sounds too good to be true... because it is. There is usually a sense of urgency created by the scammer.

If you're asked to pay upfront fees... it's a scam.

Prior to providing ANY information, obtain the corporate name and address. Use this information to locate the real corporate website. Using the phone number(s) posted on the website, call first to verify the legitimacy of the offer and the employment status of the individual who has made the offer to you.

Visit ReportFraud.ftc.gov or call 1-877-FTC-HELP (382-4357) to report fraudulent activity. This information is then shared with thousands of local law enforcement agencies. 🐾



Amplify Your Voice in the ROAR

PHOTO: Lehigh Acres Sign by James Kennedy

WE WANT TO HEAR FROM YOU!

Here at The ROAR, we aim to amplify voices for the Eastern and South Central part of Lee County.

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State of the Region: Keynote Speaker Announced

Alexa Scoby | Marketing & Communications Manager With SWFL Inc.

SWFL Inc. is pleased to announce that Richard Stern, Director of the Grover M. Hermann Center for the Federal Budget at The Heritage Foundation, will be the keynote speaker at this year's State of the Region event. With over seven years of experience as a Congressional staffer, Stern has been a pivotal figure in shaping federal budget policies. His leadership within the Republican Study Committee was instrumental in crafting the FY 2020 and FY 2022 federal budgets. A graduate of Emory University with a Bachelor of Arts in Economics, Stern brings a wealth of knowledge and expertise to the event.

Stern will address critical issues surrounding the federal budget, the broader economy, and the key drivers of innovation. Stern will also share strategies for fostering innovation in both regional leaders and stakeholders. His expertise is expected to spark meaningful discussions on how the region can navigate economic challenges and seize opportunities for future prosperity. State of the Region is set to take place on Tuesday, September 10th at the Hyatt Regency Coconut Point. Attendees will have the opportunity to gain valuable insights on the trends, economics, and policies that have a direct impact on attainable housing, infrastruc-

ture, talent development, and expected growth for the future.

The State of the Region event promises to be a platform for collaboration and actionable insights as we work towards a brighter future for Southwest Florida. Additionally, SWFL Inc. would like to extend a special thank you to MY Shower Door and D3 Glass for their invaluable support as the Presenting Sponsor of the State of Region event.



Richard Stern

State of the Region will be held on Tuesday, September 10, from 8:30 a.m. to 11:00 a.m. at the Hyatt Regency Coconut Point. Tickets can be purchased at swflinc.com/2024-state-of-the-region. For any inquiries or if you are interested in sponsorship opportunities, please feel free to contact Katy Johnson, SWFL Inc.'s Events and Programs Manager, at Katy@SWFLinc.com.

SWFL Inc. is the region's only Five-Star Accredited Chamber of Commerce serving businesses in Lee, Collier, and Charlotte. Services are designed to help the SWFL business community connect through networking, advertising opportunities, and educational workshops. Contact us today to sign up for your free membership.

The Lee County Posse and Cracker Day Rodeo

Taylor Whitney

The Lee County Posse, founded in 1960, is currently the only non-profit arena available for use in Southwest Florida. Members pay a fee and can use the arena anytime outside of scheduled events. A group of elected board members runs the Lee County Posse. The current board members are President Sherry Groff, Vice President Debbie Whitney, Treasure Kathy Cross, Secretary Annette Detzel, and Junior Posse Advisor Bobbi Harrison, along with others. Many more volunteers donate their time to help provide people of all ages with a welcoming, safe place to ride their horses. They are funded and supported through sponsorships, advertisements, and local businesses that donate their time, money, and equipment to maintain and improve the facility.

The organization's biggest fundraiser is the Cracker Day Rodeo, hotsed in January of each year except for in 2018 due to Hurricane Irma. The rodeo is held on a little piece of land purchased by five local businessmen who took out mortgages on their own properties to purchase a place for local youth to ride. The upcoming 64th Annual Lee County Posse Arena Cracker Day

Rodeo will be held on January 24th, 25th & 26th, 2025. This event draws in both local families and professional cowboys and cowgirls from all over the country to compete. Sunday morning before the rodeo, Cowboy Church is hosted, which is free and open for anyone to attend. Cowboy Church is an outdoor sermon using a horse to teach practical life lessons. The Lee County Posse also holds a youth rodeo for ages 0-18. It will be held on January 4th, 2025. You can expect most of the traditional rodeo events at both of these rodeos, including bull riding, team roping, bulldogging, barrel racing, pole bending, mutton busting, and a calf scramble. Vendors come from all over to sell specialty products such as Western clothing, jewelry, homemade items, horse tack, decor, and more. Food vendors and the Lee County Posse Concession stand will also be on site. A newly added covered V.I.P. section seating with dinner catered by a local company is a great way to watch the festivities.

I encourage you to come out, enjoy the rodeo, and support the arena and all they do for our community. Tickets will be available for purchase in December. If you want to sponsor the event or for more information, please contact the Lee County Posse's Treasurer, Kathy Cross, at 239-851-3053 or visit their website, www.leecountyposse.com.

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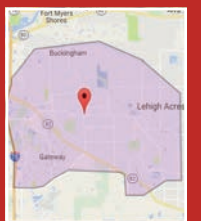


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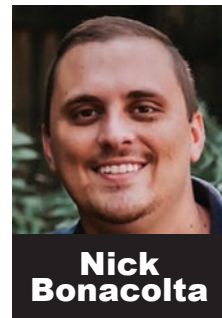
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CHARLIE BONACOLTA

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2 BEDROOM 2 BATH PINEWOOD CONDO



Two bedroom two bath Pinewood Condo with carport, OVERSIZED 24 X 12 ENCLOSED SCREENED LANAI with direct access from the kitchen to the lanai, two screen doors one on the front from the carport and one to the side of the property, double driveway with parking for three cars, newer insulated windows and doors throughout, tile floors on the screened lanai with Florida screen for privacy and weatherproofing on the back, open park like setting area to the side allows plenty of privacy and room in between units, updated kitchen cabinets and countertops with plenty of extra cabinets and countertop space on both sides, tile backsplash, newer dishwasher and French door refrigerator, ceramic tile floors throughout with wood like vinyl plank floors in the bedrooms, updated bathrooms with newer vanities with granite tops, brushed nickel fixtures, indoor laundry area with stack washer and dryer and extra shelving, NEW WATER HEATER IN 2024, textured ceilings, newer light fixtures, walk in closet, 55+ community, walking distance to the stores etc., pets OK. **Offered At\$144,900**

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 \$110 per month, CENTRAL WATER AND SEWER, sidewalks, secure gated entry, walking distance to common clubhouse with resort style pool, fitness center and playground, Private Pool on the home 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, HEDGES ARE ALLOWED ALONG THE FENCE LINE FOR PRIVACY, 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 ensuite 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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POOL HOME OVERLOOKING THE GOLF COURSE



Affordable POOL HOME overlooking the GOLF COURSE. Pay as you play. NO HOA FEES OR MEMBERSHIPS HERE. NEW DIMENSIONAL SHINGLE ROOF IN 2015, NEW CENTRAL HEAT AND AIR IN 2023, NEW POOL PUMP AND EQUIPMENT IN 2023, NEW WATER HEATER IN 2023, NEW STAINLESS STEEL APPLIANCES IN 2023, freshly painted interior, ceramic tile floors throughout, skylights in the formal dining area with mirrored wall, eat in kitchen with nook area and pantry, PRIVATE IN GROUND POOL WITH GREAT VIEWS OF THE GOLF COURSE, roll down storm shutters, NEW SCREENS ON POOL CAGE, master bedroom with access to the pool area, private bath with dual sinks, shower and walk in closet, enclosed porch with tile floors may be used for a den or office, vaulted ceilings in the living room, quiet low traffic street with CENTRAL WATER AND SEWER. **Offered At\$269,900**

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POOL HOME JUST FEET FROM THE 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. **Offered At\$290,000**

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3BR/2BA-CENTRAL WATER & SEWER-NEW ROOF



NEW DIMENSIONAL SHINGLE ROOF IN 2023, NEW WATER HEATER 2024, affordable three bedroom two bath with a beautifully landscaped FENCED BACKYARD with a double gate and 50 amp hook up for RV, firepit, canal in the rear for privacy, manicured backyard with a black olive tree, mango and avocado trees, covered front porch plus a 16 X 10 screened lanai under truss overlooking the backyard, cathedral ceilings, plant shelves, newer wood like porcelain plank tile floors throughout the entire property, QUARTZ COUNTERTOPS in the kitchen with breakfast bar, pantry and all appliances including a French door refrigerator, indoor laundry room with washer and dryer, master bedroom with walk in closet and private bath, newer dual tank water system, air conditioned double garage with auto opener and plenty of storage and room for the cars, central heat and air new in 2014, excellent location in SW Lehigh just minutes to SR 82, I-75 and Ft Myers, quiet low traffic dead end street. **Offered At\$300,000**

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#1 OFFICE**

3 BEDROOM 3 BATH TWO STORY POOL HOME



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\$499,900**

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COMMERCIAL OFFICE/STORAGE IN HIGH TRAFFIC LOCATION



Excellent high traffic location on Homestead Rd So. Newly paved and expanded road with central water and sewer. Easy access to SR 82, I-75, Ft Myers and SWFL International Airport, yet minutes to Downtown Lehigh. C-2 ZONING. Commercial office/storage up front with 14 storage units in the back. Two commercial units up front, one is a used appliance sales/storage and the other was previously uses by an HVAC company, private office under central heat and air with built in reception desk in front with two other private offices that were used for the owner and accounting, roll up overhead door to access storage of equipment, supplies etc., NEW ROOF IN 2020, cement block construction on concrete slabs, 14 storage access doors in the rear for 10 X 20 units, some units have been combined for 20 X 20 units, storage units have drywall to the ceiling for privacy, etc. easy access in and out, firewall in between the two commercial units, excellent opportunity for an end user to run their plumbing, water treatment equipment, HVAC, electrical business etc. from unit A with plenty of room to store equipment and receive customers etc. and subsidize your expenses with the storage income and Unit B rental income. \$2800 per month rental income with unit A vacant. Storage units are rented by local businesses for storage of equipment and business files etc. No furniture or personal belonging storage. OWNER FINANCING AVAILABLE TO OWNER OCCUPANT BUYERS (UNIT A) 30% down, 10% interest, 5 year balloon. **Offered At\$735,000**

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GROUND FLOOR 2/2 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\$224,900**

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3 BEDROOM 2 BATH + DEN- 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\$304,900**

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4 BEDROOM 3 BATH NEW CONSTRUCTION

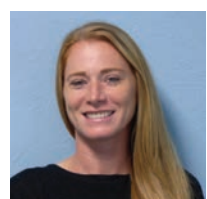


Brand New Under Construction. *CO SHORTLY* Gorgeous property with a Jr. Master Suite and an enormous Primary Suite that was built entirely for functionality. With so many elegant design elements, modern touches, this stunning property has clearly not spared any money. Every shower in every bathroom has a floor to ceiling tile, and all of the doors in the house have modern designs and accent colors to enhance the look of the rooms as opposed to the typical doors found in most other homes. Impact doors and windows have been added for an additional degree of security, sound abatement, temperature regulation, and insurance deduction advantages. The master bedroom and the large living room both have tray ceilings, which are more architectural elements in this house. Extra custom features include staggered kitchen cabinetry, large walk-in closets, and gorgeous tiling throughout. Simply constructed differently, and the caliber. Builder's Warranty Included. **Offered At\$379,000**

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