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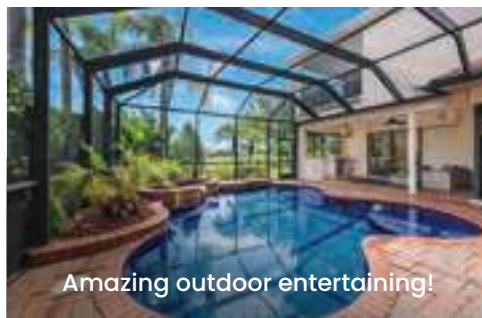
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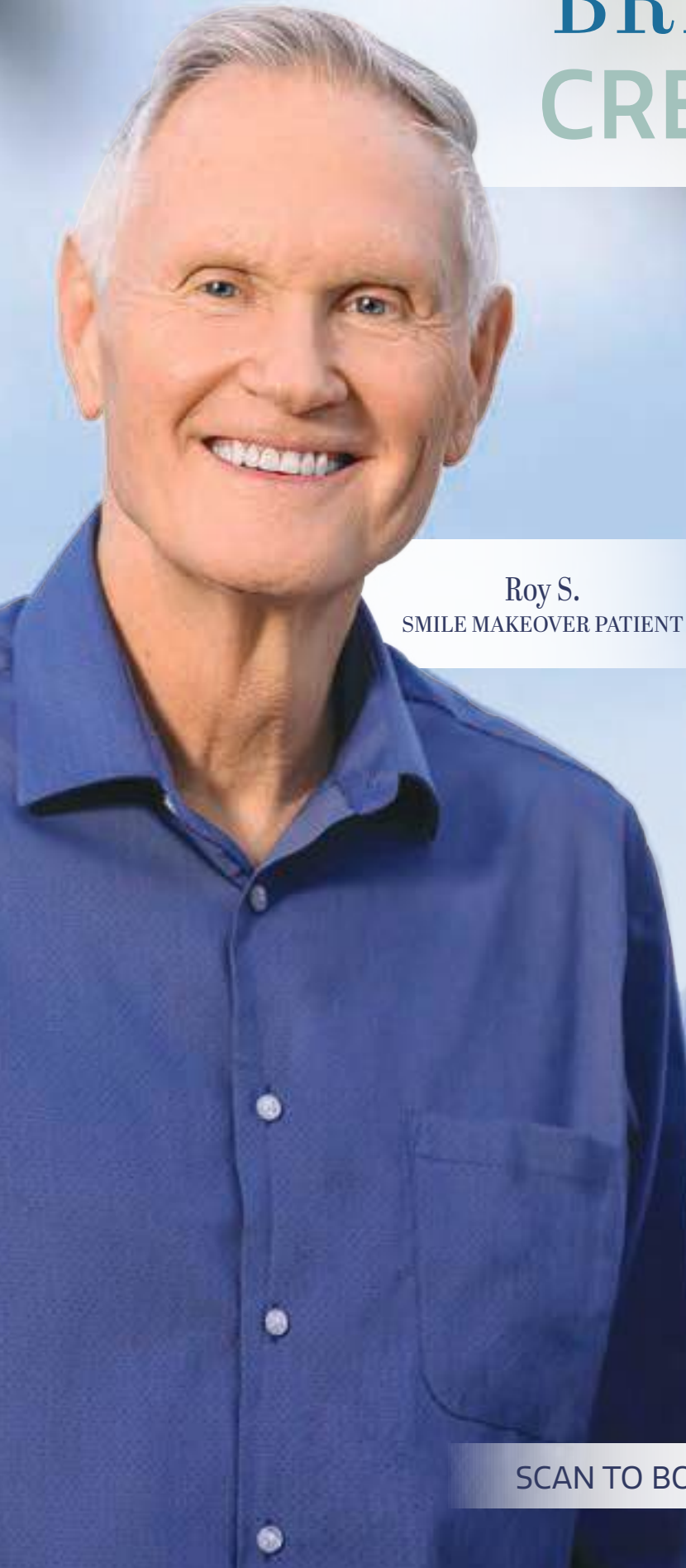
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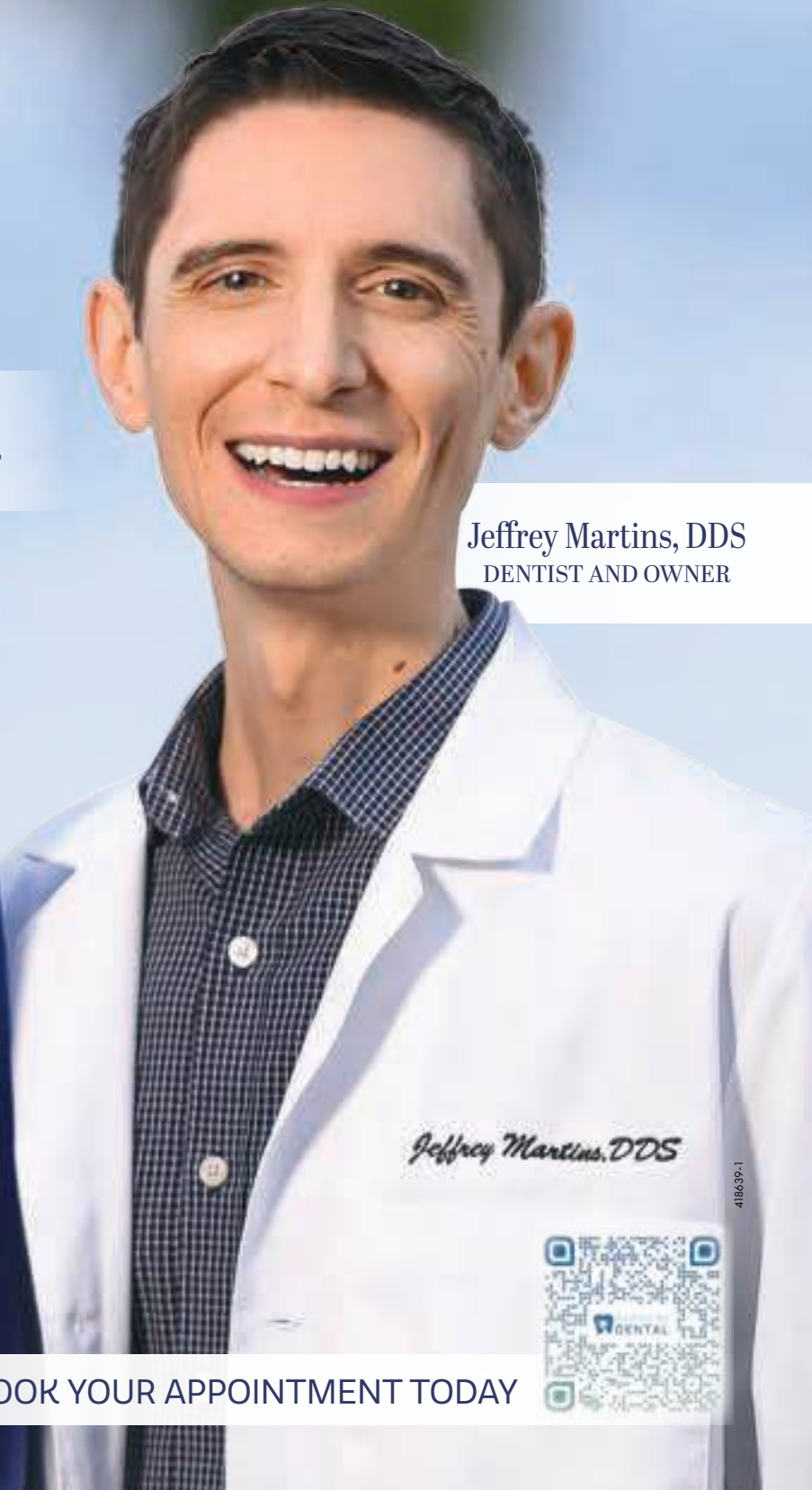
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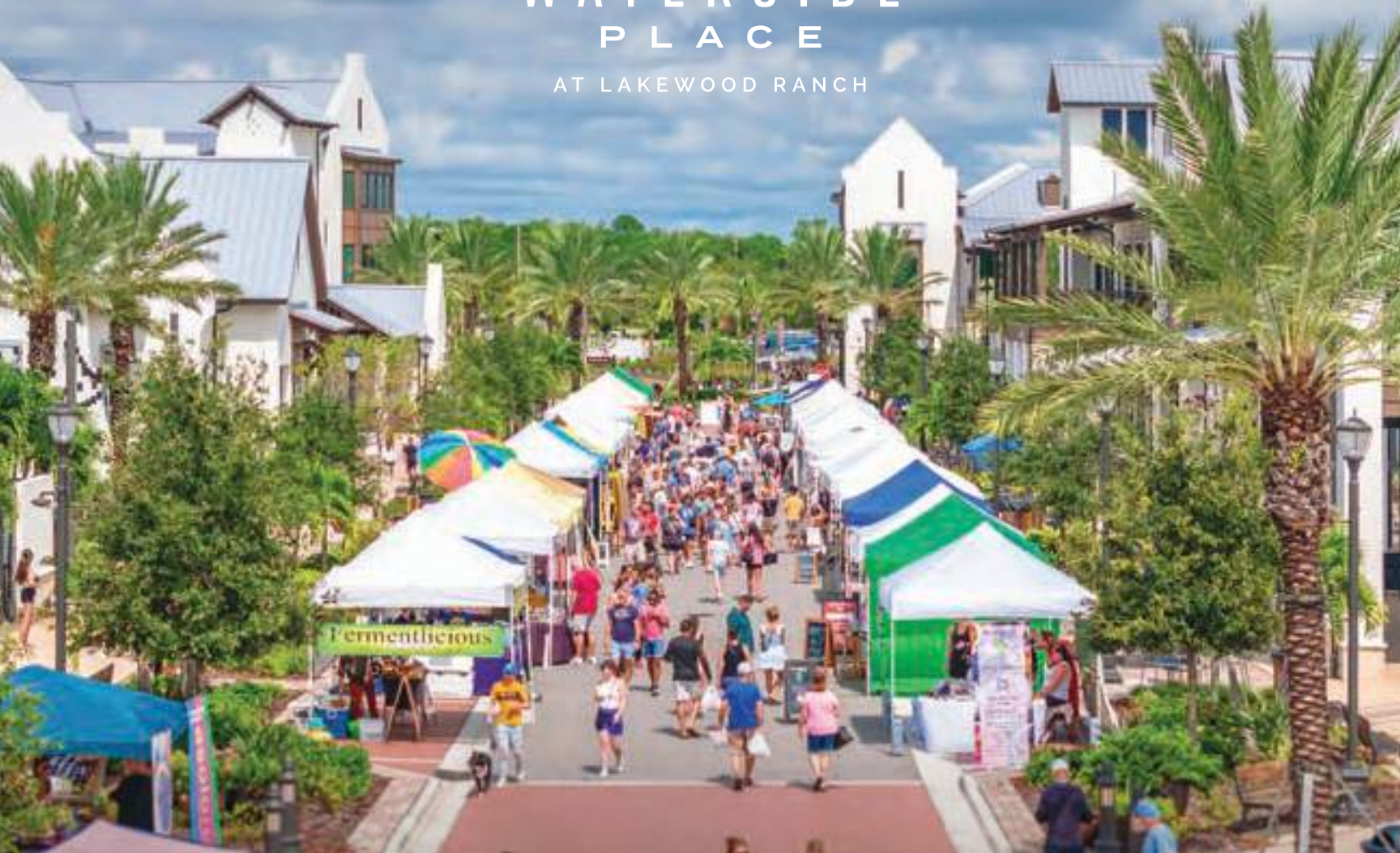
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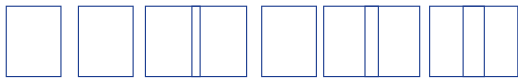
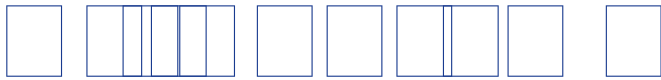
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**Departments Editor** — Mark Gordon

**Design** — Nicole Thompson

**Editor At Large** — Lisa Barnott

### Contributors

Susan Burns, Lesley Dwyer, Kelly Fores,  
Marty Fugate, Ryan Kohn, Louis Llovio, Robert Plunket,  
Lori Sax, and Eric Snider

## ADVERTISING

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**Associate Publisher** — Lori Ruth

**Advertising Managers** —

Kathleen O'Hara and Penny Nowicki

**Advertising Executives** — Richeal Bair, Lexi Huelsman,

Jennifer Kane, Honesty Mantkowski, Toni Perren,

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## CREATIVE SERVICES

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and Luis Trujillo

## CONTACT LWR LIFE

To submit story ideas or calendar listings,  
contact Kat Wingert at [KWingert@YourObserver.com](mailto:KWingert@YourObserver.com).

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# *The athletes amongst us*



Lori Sax

Paddlers with NBP Paddling train for upcoming events — including the World Crew Club Championships in Italy in September.

When we think of athletes, a certain image tends to come to mind: lithe bodies with chiseled muscles, smooth skin sun-kissed from hours of outdoor training, and, more likely than not ... youth.



I'm here to correct our collective bias. We have some amazing athletes in our area, and most of them are not young. Point in case: At a recent local 5K race, a 69-year-old woman ran it with a time of 25:06, an average of 8:05 minutes per mile. She finished 36 out of 100 runners, including men.

Another local 10K trail race had age categories going into the 80s. I just hope I'm still vertical in my 80s, let alone fit enough to run more than 6 miles on a trail.

The same is true of the members of a different sport: dragon boat racing. In our story on Page 74, contributor Susan Burns shares her lens on the sport

after she herself took up a paddle and joined a boat.

Teams comprise people of all abilities, but given our area's demographics and the time required for the sport, those in the boats tend to be a little more, ahem, mature.

That doesn't make them any lesser athletes.

Nathan Benderson Park's dragon boat program is the second largest in the country, with about 120 of its members competing for spots on racing boats.

And in September, 73 athletes from NBP Paddling are headed to Ravenna, Italy, to compete in the Club Crew World Championships for the Dragon Boat Federation.

At 54, paddler Jerry Marshbanks told Burns he thought he was in good shape, only to find after a few practices that "70-year-olds were beating the pants off me."

The cardiovascular and strength

training dragon boating builds is a sure way to stay feeling young and in shape — no matter the age. It's one of the reasons the sport became popular for those battling or recovering from breast cancer.

But the best part of the sport, according to its devotees, is the synchronicity of it. There's something about being in a boat with 10 or 20 people and everyone paddling together. The feeling is an addictive one that keeps people coming back — even into their 80s.

With this opportunity right down the road, it's just another thing that makes living here so special.

So the next time you think about athletes, think about this: No matter what sport you're watching, there are likely octogenarians doing it. And most of them can beat the pants off you.

*Kat Wingert*  
Executive Editor



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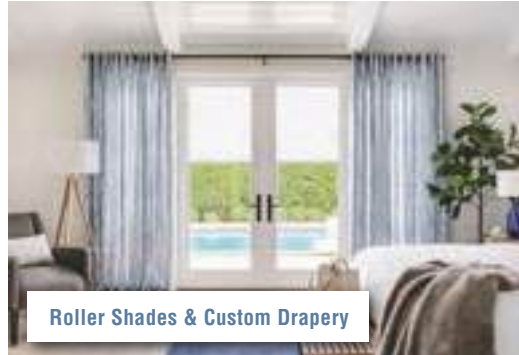
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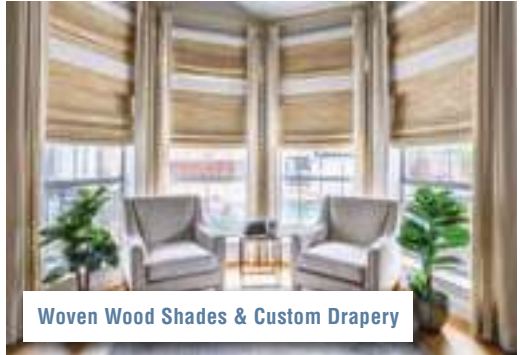
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# *BUZZ*

NEWS, HAPPENINGS AND PEOPLE

Gardeners Out East work to foster deep roots in the community.

**PAGE 36**

Lori Sax  
Although they do some gardening, like tending to plumeria, the Gardeners Out East are also avid fundraisers.



Photos by Lori Sax

# LAND GRAB

The push-and-pull of land for conservation vs. land for development shines brightly in east Manatee County.

BY LOUIS LLOVIO | CONTRIBUTOR

In a way, it's a race. That's the way Debra Woithe, Manatee County's Environmental Lands Program manager, describes the process of buying conservation land for the county.

She doesn't actually use the word race. She chooses "urgency" instead.

But the meaning is the same in the sense that her countywide office, along with state organizations both public and private, are doing what they can to secure conservation lands as developers look for space to build much-needed housing.

The issue — or issues depending on how you look at it — is urging people

and groups tasked with setting land aside for environmental protection and long-term public use to move fast.

"I'm hearing, 'The time is now' echoed throughout the conservation community," says Woithe.

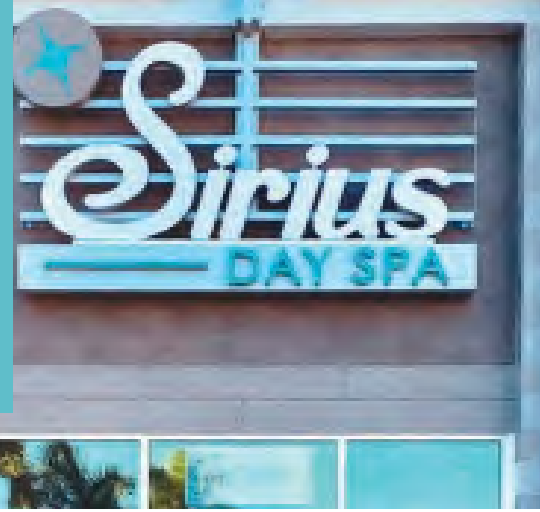
"I think there is a sense of urgency in that you see the governor supporting the funding to make it happen. And because of the pressure, the time is now to get it. That doesn't mean that we're trying to stop growth. We're just trying to get those natural places in place and connected and get the growth filled in around properly."

What Woithe is talking about — balancing the needs of conservation

Debra Woithe says there is a big sense of urgency in buying land for conservation in Manatee County.

*Continued on Page 34*





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Continued from Page 32

and growth — is by no means unique to Manatee County. But the county's conservation conundrum is a prime example of the issue municipalities grapple with statewide.

It's especially true in east Manatee County, where an influx of people and a demand for space has driven developers to push for more places to build.

That is where Woithe's department is focused.

She says the county is actively looking to purchase larger pieces of land with "really outstanding" habitats that are also unique.

One of the main goals is connecting existing conservation lands, so the department is looking at bigger tracts that can either be purchased outright or through conservation easements that would protect them. The Environmental Lands Program allows the use of tax money to buy, improve and manage land to protect natural resources and create parks.

To that end, Woithe says a big part of her job these days is meeting with property owners in East Manatee County to talk about how they can sell their lands or easements to the state or local government to preserve it.

For some, it's a great option: it can allow them to preserve the land and either cash in by selling outright or continuing to work it by selling the development rights through an easement. (The public can nominate land to be purchased on the county's website.)

It's important to note Manatee's Environmental Lands Program is not necessarily buying the land on its own. The plan, says Woithe, is prioritizing properties that other conservation organizations see as a priority as well, and then working together to secure the funding. "Our strategy is making our tax dollars go as far as possible."

An example of that is the purchase of a 68-acre parcel of riverfront land between Interstate 75 and Fort Hamer Road in Parrish late last year. Manatee County commissioners unanimously agreed to pay \$11.2 million for that site, Crooked River Ranch, to benefit manatees that graze on vegetation along the shoreline as well provide a habitat for birds, including roseate spoonbills and wood storks.

The county worked with the property owners and the Conservation Foun-



A gopher tortoise — a threatened species — enjoys the Rye Preserve in northeast Manatee County.

### CREATING A CONSERVATION MOVEMENT

A grassroots effort led by individuals and organizations throughout the region resulted in the Conservation and Parks Projects referendum in 2020. The referendum, which passed with 71% of the vote, allowed for Manatee County to finance the purchase, improvement and management of conservation lands. It calls for a 0.15 mill ad valorem tax and up to \$50 million in general obligation bonds. While the referendum provides a dedicated funding source, the county depends on partnerships with other organizations that often result in additional funds and resources that support the program.

datation of the Gulf Coast for almost a year to put the sale together, and it was bought through funds from the Environmental Lands Program. Four months after the deal was approved, in April, the county announced it had received a \$5 million grant from the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration to offset the cost.

Manatee County spokesman Bill Logan says the sale had already closed, but the "grant frees up more county dollars to work on protecting even more environmentally sensitive properties here in Manatee."

Which takes the situation back to the race.

Conservation advocates from across the political and economic spectrum agree there needs to be a concerted effort to protect the state's natural resources. Which, the advocates are

quick to point out, is what has drawn people to the state since it was founded in 1845.

Recognizing this, the master-planned Lakewood Ranch has set aside natural areas for preservation.

But outside the Lakewood Ranch boundaries, the reality, given the area's growth, is all the people coming to and visiting the area need places to live, eat, work and play. And that's where developers enter the equation.

And it's why conservation organizations end up competing with developers for land.

"It is pressing," says Woithe. "It really is very much 'the time is now.' We have to be quick. If we blink, somebody else snatches up those properties and they become developed. Getting them at the right time is definitely important."



### WANT TO SELL YOUR PROPERTY?

Anyone can nominate a property for a conservation acquisition, but the owner has to be willing to sell it. It then must be assessed and deemed a priority by the Environmental Lands Program and approved by the Manatee County Commission. To nominate a property, visit: [MyManatee.org/departments/natural\\_resources/environmental\\_lands](https://www.mymanatee.org/departments/natural_resources/environmental_lands).



# Denny Wong

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# SHEAR JOY

A determined group of gardening gurus overcame a slow start and is now a thriving Lakewood Ranch club. But it's not all about plants.

BY LESLEY DWYER | CONTRIBUTOR

Carolyn Lowry-Nation usually has a smile on her face and a little dirt under her fingernails — two signs she's a gardener.

Lowry-Nation is also the founder of the Gardeners Out East Club. While she doesn't go a day without gardening, the Esplanade resident says she actually started the club to grow and cultivate friendships, not only to propagate plants.

Gardeners Out East is celebrating its 10th anniversary this year. Despite a bumpy start in 2014, the club has made its mark on the Lakewood Ranch area over the last decade, and now has some 40 active members.

The club has installed a butterfly garden at Summerfield Park, a Blue Star Marker at Town Hall and a Gold Star Marker at the Lakewood Ranch Library, among other accomplishments. The markers honor active and fallen members of the military and their families.

Gardening and environmental issues are the focus of the club's activities, but supporting veterans and active military members has become the mission of the club's philanthropic side.

In 2014, there were only six friends in the club. They needed 10 to become a part of the Florida Federation of Garden Clubs. They recruited four



Photos by Lori Sax  
Karen Eckert, Nancy Schneider, and Carolyn Lowry-Nation have all played a role in helping grow and sustain the Gardeners Out East Club.

*Continued on Page 38*



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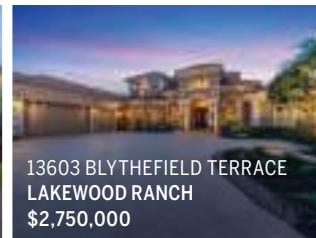
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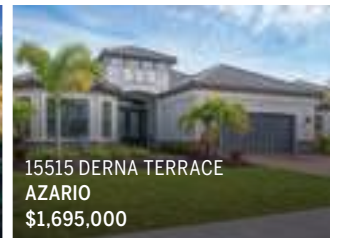
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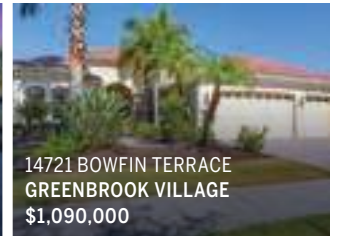
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more members, and became an official 501(c)(3) nonprofit.

The next challenge? They discovered they had no place to hold meetings.

Lakewood Ranch Town Hall wouldn't accommodate them because another garden club was already meeting there. Undeterred, the gardening group began meeting at each other's homes and took field trips. They also used a room inside a Northern Trust Bank office.

When the Robert Toale & Sons Celebration of Life Center opened in 2022, meetings were held there. Ten years after forming, the club recently found a permanent home, at the Lakewood Ranch Library on Rangeland Parkway.

In addition to the Gold Star Marker that stands across from the library's exterior stairwell, Gardeners Out East donated a wooden flag that hangs inside the library's entrance. The hand carved flag was purchased from Heroic Flags, another Lakewood Ranch nonprofit on a mission to support veterans.

The markers are provided through a National Garden Clubs program, which provided the Gardeners Out East with a direction. From there, members started looking for other charitable endeavors that benefit service members and veterans.

The club gave Vets 2 Success a donation because its services fit the club's philanthropic mission and passion for gardening. The culinary program taught veterans how to cook with homegrown ingredients.

"Our next venture will be to raise funds for scholarships of children of veterans or whose parents are still serving," Club President Nancy Schneider says. "We're going to have a plant sale."

The club's next field trip will be to Celery Fields in November. Members will be led on a nature and birding tour by an Audubon docent.

Celery Fields is an easy drive down Interstate 75 to Fruitville Road in Sarasota, but the group has caravanned as far as Bok Tower Gardens — two hours away in Lake Wales.

There are over 40 members in the club, and the Gardeners Out East welcome everyone — women, men, even those who don't live out east or garden.



Part of the mission at the Gardeners Out East Club is to support veterans groups and causes. Its work includes a Blue Star Marker at Town Hall and a Gold Star Marker at the Lakewood Ranch Library.

“

*You meet a lot of people that you wouldn't know without the garden club.*

**NANCY SCHNEIDER, CLUB PRESIDENT**

"If they want to come, they're more than welcome," Schneider says. "You meet a lot of people that you wouldn't know without the garden club."

Last July, members met former HGTV star John Gidding when the club hosted a stop on his book tour. Over 100 people attended the event to get gardening advice from the former host of "Curb Appeal." His book, "At Home with Nature," recommends native plants to reduce watering.

The club is picking up where Gidding left off for the welcome meeting in October. Karen Eckert, former club president and master gardener, will discuss gardening for residents who have moved to the area from other

climates.

The club meets monthly from October through May. The meetings cover a range of topics.

In January, members are scheduled to learn about the importance of ponds from Biologist Sean Patton, who specializes in habitat restoration. February's meeting, meanwhile, will cover Ikebana, the Japanese art of flower arranging. Attendees will watch a demonstration and then make their own arrangements to take home.

"The members are not all active gardeners, but they're active friends," Lowry-Nation says. "We talk about environmental issues and a lot of things besides gardening."

## GARDENING TIPS

Carolyn Lowry-Nation and Nancy Schneider with the Gardeners Out East Club provide some Florida-friendly gardening tips, including:

- Understand your environment because what grew in your home state probably won't grow in Florida.
- Select plants that are drought tolerant.
- Talk to knowledgeable nursery staff before buying.
- Don't crowd the plants because things grow year round in Florida.
- Mulch garden beds to retain moisture, regulate soil temperature and suppress weeds.



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Photos by Liz Ramos

Greg Crawford and Kyle Murphy with M/I Homes say this is Lakewood Ranch's first Benefit Home. The proceeds of sale of the home will go to Pelotonia, an organization that works to fund cancer research.

# Beneficial Build

A competitive spirit combined with a big heart motivates a Lakewood Ranch homebuilder to orchestrate a six-figure cancer charity donation.

BY LIZ RAMOS | CONTRIBUTOR

Driving down Savory Mist Circle in one of Lakewood Ranch's newest communities, Sweetwater, the streets are lined with construction vehicles.

Day after day, builders make progress on the homes being constructed.

But one house on Savory Mist Circle is more than just a dream home for one family.

From the inside and out, the M/I Homes' abode looks like the others being built on the street. But with every step of progress made on the 2,337-square-foot, three-bed, two-and-a-half bathroom house comes an opportunity to help millions of people.

It's called the Benefit Home.

The proceeds from the sale of the Benefit Home will be donated to Pelotonia, an organization dedicated to providing funding for cancer research. After donations of labor and materials from trade partners, the donation is projected to be more than \$110,000. (A Savory Mist Circle home the same size and specs sold May 21 for \$630,000, Manatee County property records show.)

Greg Crawford, area president of M/I Homes of Sarasota, says almost everyone he knows has been impacted by cancer in some way, so building a home that will benefit cancer research

*Continued on Page 42*





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Continued from Page 40

is rewarding. “It makes everybody feel proud that we’re doing something that is going to help other people,” he says.

Pelotonia primarily funds research at James Cancer Hospital at Ohio State University, one of the biggest cancer centers in the U.S. (Both M/I Homes and Pelotonia are based in Columbus, Ohio, home of Ohio State.)

“We fund not just a single type of cancer. We fund every different type of cancer, every different sort of stage of treatment with the primary goal of trying to fund people and ideas early,” says Pelotonia CEO Joe Apgar.

The organization, he adds, delivers a dose of speed to the sometimes slow world of medical research by providing funding that would otherwise not be there. Ultimately, he says, the work Pelotonia does “gives people the gift of more time” to do what they love with the people they love, which is empowering and motivating.

Crawford says not only will proceeds from the sale of the home go toward M/I Homes’ donation, but more than 50 trade partners working on the home have contributed in some way, whether providing materials at a discounted rate or donating labor. It gives each of the trade partners a direct hand in making an impact. Then M/I Homes matches that number.

Crawford says Lakewood Ranch developer Schroeder-Manatee Ranch is the first developer in M/I Homes of Sarasota’s division to contribute to a Benefit Home.

There’s friendly competition among the various M/I Homes divisions, especially after the Sarasota division donated \$80,000 through its Benefit Home built in Parrish last year. In addition to separate Tampa and Sarasota divisions, M/I Homes has units in 17 markets, from Austin to Detroit. Builders and cousins Melvin and Irving Schottenstein founded the company in 1976.

Crawford says each division tries to out-do the other, with the real winner, of course, being Pelotonia. That competitive spirit led Crawford, who has worked for M/I in the Tampa Bay and Sarasota markets for nearly 20 years, to Lakewood Ranch. “We felt Lakewood Ranch was a very desirable location that would draw some attention and show the good that could be



Greg Crawford, the area president of M/I Homes of Sarasota, shows off the interior of the Benefit Home.

done from this organization,” Crawford says.

Apgar says the support of M/I Homes has been amazing, especially considering that a single home can make a “massive difference” in the ability to fund research and help millions of people. “It’s really cool to see something that’s already a beautiful life milestone, which is buying a house, sort of having this double impact,” he says.

He hears of that impact through stories from people who have had a hand in the construction of the home or the family living in it. Apgar recalls meeting a carpenter working on a benefit home in Tampa. He learned the carpenter was a cancer survivor himself and had directly benefited from research. Apgar says the man was thrilled to be able to use his craft to be able to support more cancer re-

search — something he never thought would be possible.

“It shows the power of how we can all have input on something much bigger than ourselves,” Apgar says. “It just shows the power of community and working together for all those beautiful things.”

The Lakewood Ranch home is expected to be completed by early September. The M/I Homes team will come together with its trade partners, Lakewood Ranch and most importantly, Apgar and Pelotonia staff, to mark the completion of the home and the donation to Pelotonia.

“During the actual construction process we know we’re doing something good, but you feel it at the end when the home is done and we’re standing here with Joe and we hand him a very big check,” Crawford says. “It makes it all worth it.”

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# PULSE

THE HEART OF THE COMMUNITY

Dogs Inc. gives clients more than help. It gives them hope. **PAGE 50**

Photo by Lori Sax  
McKenzie Hanlon received CJ four years ago from Southeastern Guide Dogs, which in May officially changed its name to Dogs Inc.

*class act*

# Play Through



Ryan Kohn

Lakewood Ranch resident and golfer Kevin Roy, battling both players and the thoughts in his head, steadfastly sticks to his one big goal in the sport: win a tournament on the PGA tour.

BY RYAN KOHN | CONTRIBUTOR

Only a select few make it onto the PGA Tour. Then there's the matter of sticking around. Kevin Roy knows. After three-plus years of competing on the Korn Ferry Tour — which is effectively the AAA level of American professional golf — Roy shot his way onto the PGA main stage for the 2022-'23 season. He was 32.

This year, he's back on the Korn Ferry Tour. While Roy didn't play badly during his PGA Tour stint — he finished in the top 25 in three tournaments and made nine cuts — he didn't rank high enough to stay. "There's a small avenue to make the tour," the Lakewood Ranch resident says by phone during a tournament stop in Knoxville, Tennessee. "But it's not like

it's icing on the cake. You still have to play really good golf to stay out there."

Not that the Korn Ferry Tour is a backwater where impoverished golfers live hand to mouth. Through mid-June, he had made just shy of \$175,000 in winnings for the season. (Sponsorships cover most of his travel costs.) He ranked 19th in the Korn Ferry standings with 14 events to go. The Top 30 move up to the PGA Tour next season. Roy likes his chances. "I'm playing really good golf," he says. "I'm one or two good tournaments away from pretty much locking it up."

Roy does not doubt he's talented enough to have an extended career on the PGA Tour. Most Korn Ferry play-

Kevin Roy says the mental side of golf is sometimes tougher than playing the actual sport.

*Continued on Page 48*



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ers have the requisite ability, he adds. The difference between the top-level pros and the AAA strivers is mostly between the ears. To that end, about a year ago Roy hired a mental coach, Brian Cain, who's based in Scottsdale, Arizona.

"It's one of the best decisions I've ever made," Roy says. "Before that, it wasn't like I'd have a bunch of crazy outbursts, but in my mind, or under my breath, I would beat myself up. That clearly wasn't working. Before talking to Brian, I'd have a tough time leaving a bad round of golf on the course. Like, I'd bring it home. I'd be in a bad mood. That's when golf isn't fun. Now I feel more loose and calm, and I'm having fun out there."

The performance coach has instilled in his charge the need to focus not on expectation but execution, to stay in the moment and to leave bad shots immediately behind. Roy has improved in "his ability to compete versus compare," Cain says in a phone interview, "to compete with himself, and to be the best version of himself versus comparing himself to the leader board or the other people that are playing. Kevin is consistent emotionally. And that's important. Emotion clouds reality."

Cain's coaching is not restricted to the golf course. For instance, he suggested Roy get into the habit of making his bed immediately after getting up. "You start the day with a win and you just stack small wins on top of each other," Cain says. "Plus, if you get your tail kicked [on the course], you want to come home to a bed that's made to remind you that tomorrow is gonna be better."

These days, Roy has more to look forward to after a round than a tidy bed. He and his wife of nearly three years, Annie, have a daughter, Mia, who recently turned 1 year old. "Mia doesn't care if I shoot 66 or 76; when I walk in the door, she's still gonna say 'Dada,' and smile and laugh," Roy muses. "She makes it easier to turn golf off in my mind."

Annie is a sideline reporter and studio host for Cincinnati Reds telecasts. (The daughter of former Reds star third baseman Chris Sabo, her professional name is Annie Sabo.) The couple's careers make it so Roy spends substantial periods of time away from



Ryan Kohn

After making it to the PGA Tour once before, Kevin Roy remains dedicated to getting there again — and winning enough to stay there.

his wife and daughter. He takes these separations in stride. Kevin and Annie are "wildly supportive" of each other's careers, Roy says, and they have a strong family support system. "Her mother is like a traveling nanny right now," he adds. Roy heads to Cincinnati on off weeks. Annie brings Mia and joins him on tour when possible. Then there are the off-seasons in Lakewood Ranch, where the family has lived for a year after moving from South Tampa.

Roy grew up in Syracuse, New York. His father, Jim, played a year on the PGA Tour and, then at age 50, made the PGA Tour Champions senior tour, where he competed for a couple of years. Jim is now one of his son's swing coaches.

Roy played basketball and golf in high school, and earned a golf scholarship to Long Beach State Universi-

ty, where he played all four years. He decided he would give pro golf a shot "about midway through college." After graduating in 2012, he experienced a couple of lean years, playing in entry-level tournaments, paying his own way, bunking in low-budget motels or occasionally catching a few hours sleep at truck stops. Weary of the grind, he left professional golf in 2017, only to return a year later, rededicated.

Roy has surely paid his dues. And it has paid off — just not quite enough. "Right now, the goal is to get my PGA Tour card back," he says. "And once we check that box, the next goal is to stay out there. Check that off and the ultimate goal is to win [a tournament]. If I was to win on the PGA Tour and someone said I could never play golf again, I'd be OK with that. I'd say it was a successful career."

“  
*You start the day with a win and you just stack small wins on top of each other.*”

**KEVIN ROY on the habit of making his bed immediately after getting up.**



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“Everyone throughout my stay made me feel truly comfortable,” says Smithson. “Follow-up instructions were provided and after about two hours, we said our goodbyes to the wonderful team at ER at Fruitville. I think it’s important for people to know they can get into ER at Fruitville quickly and safely and that they have very competent staff.”

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# charity snapshot

## Heart and Paws

Thanks to Dogs Inc., McKenzie Hanlon's bond with her guide dog, CJ, transformed her life.

BY ERIC SNIDER | CONTRIBUTOR

It's touching to see the interaction between McKenzie Hanlon and her dog, even if it is via a computer screen. "You want to meet CJ?" she asks on a Zoom call. Hanlon speaks haltingly, certain words garbled, just one of several disabilities the 25-year-old endures — the result of six brain surgeries, two strokes and a seizure disorder. On cue, CJ, a beautiful yellow Lab with soulful eyes, puts her forepaws in Hanlon's lap, lifts up and licks her face.

Just about everyone with a dog loves their dog, but Hanlon and CJ have a deeper relationship. Where to begin? For starters, CJ is always by Hanlon's side, even sleeping in bed with her. CJ is a guide dog, a support dog, a companion dog and, at least once, a savior dog. "About a year ago, we were walking in Greenbrook Village and we came to a crosswalk," Hanlon recalls. "I heard the flow of traffic and that's when I go or stop. This one person was driving so fast. CJ backed up. I froze. The person never slowed down."

Disaster averted.

Hanlon received CJ four years ago from Southeastern Guide Dogs, which in May officially changed its name to Dogs Inc. to better reflect its extensive reach and breadth of services. Founded in 1982 as a small guide-dog school, the Palmetto nonprofit has grown into a national resource with a sterling



Photos by Lori Sax

McKenzie Hanlon's relationship with CJ opened her world and changed her outlook on life. "CJ gave me the security I needed to move on to greater things."

*Continued on Page 52*

# Matching You & Your Home to *Your Lifestyle*



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Continued from Page 50

reputation that reaches beyond the United States. Dogs Inc. meticulously raises and trains guide dogs for people with vision impairment, service dogs for veterans, and companion dogs for folks with trauma disorders. The organization provides the canines and training for the recipients — all at no charge.

Matching a dog with a person in need is a painstaking process. That was definitely the case with Hanlon, who, besides having 80% vision loss, has problems with balance and significantly diminished use of her right arm. Hence, she required an extra-special dog. Hanlon says she met 15 pooches during a vetting process.

“McKenzie has to harness her dog, put the leash and collar on, just using one hand,” says Kayla Cook, a senior instructor and alumni advisor for the Guide Dog Program at Dogs Inc. “So, CJ has to have the patience to just stand there and wait until McKenzie is ready to go.”

That’s just one of this dog’s special set of skills. Hanlon says she has fallen twice during her partnership with CJ. “She knows how to brace, so I can use her to pull myself up,” Hanlon says.

Life’s been tough for McKenzie Hanlon since birth. She was born 12 weeks early at 2 pounds, 2 ounces, but rallied enough to live an essentially normal childhood in her hometown of Birmingham, Alabama. The headaches began at age 14. The doctors wrote migraine prescriptions. One night, when she was 17, the anguish became unbearable.

Within a day, McKenzie was on the operating table at UAB Hospital for the first of her brain surgeries. The surgeons had to remove a 45-millimeter aneurysm — about the size of a small orange. “The doctors didn’t know if I was going to make it through the first surgery,” Hanlon recounts. She did, of course, but then came the strokes, which caused paralysis in her right side, speaking difficulties and vision loss.

Countless doctor’s appointments, more brain surgeries — the last was in 2017 — and intensive physical therapy ensued. Hanlon had to relearn how to walk and grew frustrated with using a cane. “Five times, it got stuck in my ribcage and I fell over it. I had to go to



Matching a dog with a person in need is a painstaking process. That was the case with McKenzie, who, besides having 80% vision loss, has problems with balance and significantly diminished use of her right arm.

the emergency room,” she says, a tinge of frustration still evident in her voice.

So, Hanlon applied for a guide dog “somewhere in Florida.” In 2018, she moved with her mother and stepfather to Lakewood Ranch, unaware that the Southeastern Guide Dogs campus was only 20 minutes away. She waited two years to get the call. It was during the organization’s Match Day in September 2020 that Hanlon found out CJ would be her new guide dog. The young woman was ecstatic. But it wasn’t a matter of the two just heading home. They went through three weeks of training. “The classes are grueling,” Cook says. “We ask a lot of you. But I could see that McKenzie was a getter.”

It’s not an overstatement to say that the arrival of CJ dramatically reversed the course of McKenzie Hanlon’s life. “I was, uh, depressed, and I was working through therapy, but I didn’t have that push,” she says. “I was overcome with ‘what-ifs?’ I was in a dark place.”

Hanlon’s relationship with CJ opened her world and changed her outlook on life. “CJ gave me the se-

curity I needed to move on to greater things,” she says. The veil lifted to the point that Hanlon matriculated at Southeastern University in Lakeland. She loved it but stayed only three semesters. Hanlon says she left because the college came up short on making accommodations for her disabilities and her guide dog.

Hanlon would like to return to school one day, but it’s not a high priority at the moment. Asked if she hopes to get a place of her own, she replies, quickly and sharply, “Yes!” and with a shy smile adds, “But I’d have to be close to mom.”

In February and March, Hanlon did an internship with Dogs Inc., rotating through various departments on campus. Those six weeks deepened her connection to the place, the mission, the dogs. Hanlon hopes to land a regular job there. “I love the atmosphere, the positive outlook. It’s so generous and kind,” she says effusively of Dogs Inc. “I would do anything. It’s my dream job.”

Here’s to hoping that McKenzie Hanlon’s dream comes true.

“  
CJ is a  
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a support  
dog, a  
companion  
dog and,  
at least  
once, a  
savior dog.”

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# calendar fall 2024

## SEPTEMBER

### SEPT. 1

#### THE MARKET AT LAKEWOOD RANCH

The Market at Lakewood Ranch features fresh vegetables, produce, baked goods, honey, guacamole, pastas and more, along with ready-to-eat foods like empanadas, fresh bagels, donuts, barbecue, and hot and cold coffee from local vendors. Hours are 10 a.m. to 2 p.m. at Waterside Place, 1561 Lakefront Drive, Sarasota. Continues every Sunday.

■ Visit [TheMarketLWR.com](http://TheMarketLWR.com).

### SEPT. 6

#### MUSIC ON MAIN

This monthly event returns on Lakewood Ranch's Main Street from 6-9 p.m. Enjoy a free concert by Cassie Jean & The Fireflies, food vendors, beer trucks and kids' activities. Proceeds will benefit Lakewood Ranch Community Foundation.

■ Visit [LakewoodRanch.com](http://LakewoodRanch.com).

### SEPT. 12

#### LWR 101: NEW RESIDENT ORIENTATION

This event introduces you to Lakewood Ranch's history, clubs, governance and other features of the community. It will be held virtually on the Lakewood Ranch Community Activities Facebook page from 6-6:30 p.m. Also takes place Oct. 10 and Nov. 14.

■ Visit [MyLWR.com](http://MyLWR.com).

### SEPT. 13

#### MOVIE IN THE PARK

Enjoy a free movie night at Waterside Park, 7301 Island Cove Terrace, Lakewood Ranch. The event begins at 7 p.m., and a family-friendly movie will begin at approximately 8 p.m. The event is sponsored by Grace Community Church. Seating is available on a first-come, first-served basis. Those who attend are welcome to bring a blanket and lawn chairs. Concessions will be available from We B' Poppin Popcorn and Kettle Corn. Inflatables for kids will be available from 7-9 p.m. Continues every second Friday of the month.

■ Visit [LakewoodRanch.com](http://LakewoodRanch.com).



Photo by Jay Heater

### SEPT. 14

#### SARASOTA CARS AND COFFEE

Join fellow car enthusiasts from 8-10 a.m. every second Saturday of the month at the West District at UTC, 125 N. Cattlemen Road, Sarasota. Continues Oct. 12 and Nov. 9.

■ Visit [UTCSarasota.com](http://UTCSarasota.com).

#### REAL MEN WEAR PINK FASHION SHOW

The Mall at University Town Center, 140 University Town Center Drive, Sarasota, will unveil its Real Men Wear Pink of Sarasota and Manatee candidates during this high-energy fashion show benefiting the fight against breast cancer. Details to come.

■ Visit [Cancer.org](http://Cancer.org).

### SEPT. 19

#### UTC NIGHT MARKET

UTC's monthly night market is 6:30-9:30 p.m. at The Green at UTC, 125 N. Cattlemen Road, Sarasota. Enjoy live music and more than 35 local vendors

selling gifts, jewelry, art, handmade goods and more. Continues Oct. 17 and Nov. 21.

■ Visit [MallAtUTC.com](http://MallAtUTC.com).

### SEPT. 28

#### CENTERSTONE LIFE: STORY RUN/WALK

Run or walk in Centerstone's annual 5K/10K at Nathan Benderson Park, 5851 Nathan Benderson Circle, Sarasota, to raise awareness of depression, share that suicide is preventable and erase the stigma around seeking help for mental illness. The run is also available virtually. Registration starts at \$45 for the 5K and 10K run/walk and is \$25 for the youth 5K and 10K.

■ Visit [Centerstone.org](http://Centerstone.org).

### SEPT. 28

#### LUAU 5K, 10K, & HALF MARATHON

US Road Running Race Club hosts its Luau races at 8 a.m. at Heritage

Those competing on wheels kick off the 20th annual Boo Run on Oct. 28, 2023, in Lakewood Ranch.

*Continued on Page 56*

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Continued from Page 54

Harbor Park, 700 River Heritage Blvd., Bradenton. Registration is \$25 for the 1-mile, \$30 for the 5K, \$45 for the 10K, \$50 for the 15K and \$65 for the half-marathon. All finishers will receive a themed medal. Costumes are encouraged.  
■ Visit [USRoadRunning.rsupartner.com](http://USRoadRunning.rsupartner.com).

### SEPT. 27 SIGHTS AND SOUNDS AT WATERSIDE PLACE

The September event of the Sights and Sounds cultural series features Lakewood Ranch Wind Ensemble and the Choral Artists of Sarasota celebrating the arrival of fall with "Autumn Serenade." The performance begins at 6 p.m. at Waterside Place, 1560 Lakefront Drive, Sarasota. Seating is limited.  
■ Visit [LakewoodRanch.com](http://LakewoodRanch.com).

## OCTOBER

### OCT. 4 MUSIC ON MAIN

This monthly event returns on Lakewood Ranch's Main Street from 6-9 p.m. Enjoy a free concert by Alan Grant Band, food vendors, beer trucks and kids' activities. Proceeds will benefit Nate's Honor Animal Rescue.  
■ Visit [LakewoodRanch.com](http://LakewoodRanch.com).

### OCT. 5 YOUTH & TEEN FISHING TOURNAMENT

Youth ages 5 to 19 can test their fishing skills and compete for prizes during Lakewood Ranch's annual Youth Fishing Tournament from 9 a.m. to noon at Lake Uihlein, behind Lakewood Ranch Town Hall, 8175 Lakewood Ranch Blvd. Registration is \$5 for residents and \$15 for nonresidents.  
■ Visit [LakewoodRanch.com](http://LakewoodRanch.com).

### OCT. 10 DESIGNER BAG BINGO

The Sisterhood for Good is holding a night of fundraising bingo with designer bags as the prizes. Doors open at 5:30 p.m. at Hyatt Regency Sarasota, 1000 Boulevard of the Arts, Sarasota. Tickets are \$150 and include three bingo games, wine and beer, a buffet dinner and dessert.  
■ Visit [SisterhoodForGood.org](http://SisterhoodForGood.org).

### OCT. 11-13 BENDERSON CHASE

The annual rowing regatta will be held at Nathan Benderson Park, 5851 Nathan Benderson Circle, Sarasota. Athletes ages 13-75 will participate in 97 races, taking place 9:15 a.m. to 3:30 p.m. Saturday and 8:30 a.m. to 1:45 p.m. Sunday.  
■ Visit [NathanBendersonPark.org](http://NathanBendersonPark.org).

### OCT. 9-13 OKTOBERFEST AT EDELWEISS

Restaurant Edelweiss, at 611 Manatee Ave. E., Bradenton, hosts its annual Oktoberfest, featuring live German entertainment, vendors, and plenty of German food and beer. Admission is free.  
■ Visit [EdelweissBradenton.com](http://EdelweissBradenton.com).

### OCT. 12-27 HUNSADER FARMS PUMPKIN FESTIVAL

Hunsader Farms hosts its annual pumpkin festival from 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. Saturdays and Sundays at 5500 County Road 675, Bradenton. In addition to pumpkins, the festival features crafts, live music, hayrides, food, chainsaw sculpting and more. Admission is \$15 for adults and free for children 10 and under. Parking costs \$5.  
■ Visit [HunsaderFarms.com](http://HunsaderFarms.com).

### OCT. 19 MAIN STREET MARKET

From 10 a.m. to 2 p.m., visit Lakewood Main Street to shop from more than 60 vendors featuring local art, jewelry, retail, food, plants and more. Event continues Nov. 16.  
■ Visit [MainStreetMarketLWR.com](http://MainStreetMarketLWR.com).

### WATER LANTERN FESTIVAL

Enjoy the magic of hundreds of lanterns lighting up the lake at Nathan Benderson Park, 5851 Nathan Benderson Circle, Sarasota. Enjoy food trucks and live music starting at 4 p.m., and at 6:30 p.m. you can design your own eco-friendly lantern. Lanterns launch at 7 p.m. Tickets are \$36 or \$46 after Oct. 11.  
■ Visit [WaterLanternFestival.com](http://WaterLanternFestival.com).

### CELTOBER FEST

The New World Celts Sarasota Chapter holds its annual Celtober Fest at Motorworks Brewing, 1014 Ninth St. W., Bradenton. Enjoy beer-swilling, kilt-sporting, Lederhosen-loving



Photo by Lesley Dwyer

entertainment all weekend long. Vendors, live music, food trucks, cocktails and wine will be available, along with, of course, plenty of craft beer.  
■ Visit [CelttoberFest.org](http://CelttoberFest.org).

### OCT. 19-20 FALL FESTIVAL

From 11 a.m. to 6 p.m. Saturday and Sunday at The Mall at UTC, 140 University Town Center Drive, Sarasota, enjoy a fall festival with vendors, food trucks and performances. Featured activities include carnival rides, a pet costume contest, food trucks and more. Admission is free.  
■ Visit [FloridaPenguinProductions.com](http://FloridaPenguinProductions.com).

### OCT. 20 OUT OF THE DARKNESS WALK

The Out of the Darkness Walk, a journey of hope and support, begins at 9 a.m. at Nathan Benderson Park, 5851 Nathan Benderson Circle, Sarasota, benefiting the American Foundation for Suicide Prevention. Registration is free; donations are accepted.  
■ Visit [AFSP.org](http://AFSP.org).

### OCT. 26 HAUNTED 5K, 10K, & HALF MARATHON

US Road Running Race Club hosts its Haunted races at 8 a.m. at Heritage Harbor Park, 700 River Heritage Blvd., Bradenton. Registration is \$25 for the 1-mile, \$30 for the 5K, \$45 for the 10K, \$50 for the 15K and \$65 for the half-marathon. All finishers will receive a themed medal. Costumes are encouraged.  
■ Visit [USRoadRunning.rsupartner.com](http://USRoadRunning.rsupartner.com).

Luna and Zander Hartman enjoy the pumpkin patch at the UTC Fall Festival in 2023.

Continued on Page 58





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Continued from Page 56

## BOO RUN

The Lakewood Ranch Running Club hosts its annual Boo Run at FCCI Insurance Group, 6300 University Parkway, Sarasota. The family-friendly race, which starts at 8 a.m., includes a costume contest. A virtual option will be Oct. 25-31. The 5K run or walk is \$40 or \$45 after Sept. 25, the kids dash is \$15, and the virtual race is \$40. The race benefits Another Day for Gray.

■ Visit [RunLWR.com/boo-run](http://RunLWR.com/boo-run).

## OCT. 27

### FLORIDA INLINE SKATING MARATHON AND 5K RUN

Run941 and Bont Skates host an Associated World Inline Cup race at Nathan Benderson Park, 5851 Nathan Benderson Circle, Sarasota. Skaters of all ages and levels can choose from a world-class marathon, an age-class marathon, a half-marathon, a 10K and a 5K, with a total purse of \$20,000. An awards ceremony will be held at 3 p.m. Prices vary by race type and registration date.

■ Visit [FloridaInlineSkatingMarathon.com](http://FloridaInlineSkatingMarathon.com).

## OCT. 29

### TRICK OR TREAT ON THE LAKE

Celebrate Halloween at Nathan Benderson Park, 5851 Nathan Benderson Circle, Sarasota, with its annual Trick or Treat on the Lake. Come dressed in Halloween costumes for an evening of trick-or-treating along a candy trail decorated by community organizations. Admission is free.

■ Visit [NathanBendersonPark.com](http://NathanBendersonPark.com).

## NOVEMBER

### NOV. 1

#### MUSIC ON MAIN

This monthly event takes place on Lakewood Ranch's Main Street from 6-9 p.m. Enjoy a free concert by Trevor Bystrom Band, food vendors, beer trucks and kids' activities. Proceeds will benefit Manatee PAL.

■ Visit [LakewoodRanch.com](http://LakewoodRanch.com).

### NOV. 2

#### SUNCOAST FOOD AND WINE FESTIVAL

The Rotary Club of Lakewood Ranch hosts the annual event at Premier

Sports Campus, 5895 Post Blvd., Lakewood Ranch. Tickets — \$95 for general admission and \$185 for VIP — include a sampling of wine and food from dozens of the area's finest restaurants, as well as live music, cooking demonstrations and vendor booths. Proceeds benefit local charities through a grant process.

■ Visit [SuncoastFoodAndWineFest.com](http://SuncoastFoodAndWineFest.com).

### NOV. 2 TO DEC. 1

#### SARASOTA MEDIEVAL FAIR

Runs each Saturday and Sunday from 10 a.m. to 5:30 p.m. at Woods of Malabar, 29847 State Road 70 E., Myakka City. Visitors can enjoy the medieval era through a wide range of family-friendly activities. Features include local artisans and craft demonstrations, live performances, food vendors and a children's area. A single-day ticket is \$25 for adults; \$22 for students, seniors and military; \$15 for children age 5-10; and free for children 4 and younger.

■ Visit [SarasotaMedievalFair.com](http://SarasotaMedievalFair.com).

### NOV. 3

#### CYCLEFEST

The Sarasota Manatee Bicycle Club offers this family-friendly ride, and riders can choose fully supported routes of 20, 35, 62 or 100 miles. Registration opens at 7 a.m. on Main Street in Lakewood Ranch. Advance registration is required. Cost is \$60 or \$70 after Sept. 30.

■ Visit [SMBC.us](http://SMBC.us).

### NOV. 8

#### EMPTY BOWLS

Come to Lakewood Ranch Main Street to enjoy delicious soup from area restaurants while raising money for the Food Bank of Manatee. Attendees of the event, which runs from 11 a.m. to 1 p.m., will get to enjoy a selection of soups, fresh-baked bread and desserts and take home a hand-painted ceramic bowl. Admission is \$35.

■ Visit [MealsOnWheelsPlus.org](http://MealsOnWheelsPlus.org).

### NOV. 9

#### TIDEWELL REMEMBRANCE WALK

This 3-mile walk benefiting Tidewell Foundation will be held at Nathan Benderson Park, 5851 Nathan Benderson Circle, Sarasota. Tribute signs to honor loved ones will be available for purchase. Registration opens at 8 a.m., and the walk begins at 9 a.m. An awards ceremony will follow the walk



Photo by Liz Ramos

for top fund-raisers, and food trucks and refreshments will be on-site.

■ Visit [TidewellFoundation.org](http://TidewellFoundation.org).

### NOV. 23

#### PIE GOBBLER

US Road Running Race Club hosts its Pie Gobbler races at 8 a.m. at Heritage Harbor Park, 700 River Heritage Blvd., Bradenton. Registration is \$25 for the 1-mile, \$30 for the 5K, \$45 for the 10K, \$50 for the 15K and \$65 for the half-marathon. All finishers will receive a themed medal. Costumes are encouraged.

■ Visit [USRoadRunning.rsupartner.com](http://USRoadRunning.rsupartner.com).

### NOV. 28

#### FLORIDA TURKEY TROT

Spend your Thanksgiving Day morning burning prefeast calories while raising funds for The Big Bill Foundation. This 5K run/walk will be held at Nathan Benderson Park, 5851 Nathan Benderson Circle, Sarasota. Participants will receive a race shirt and a finisher's medal. Registration for the 5K starts at \$40; kids' dash is \$20.

■ Visit [RaceRoster.com](http://RaceRoster.com).

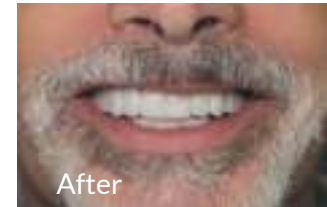
Brian Howard, also known as Broom, juggles fire, an apple and a bowling ball on Nov. 4, 2023, at the Sarasota Medieval Fair.



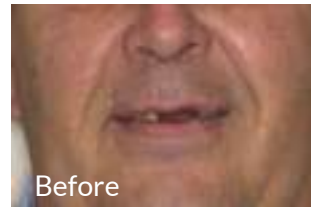
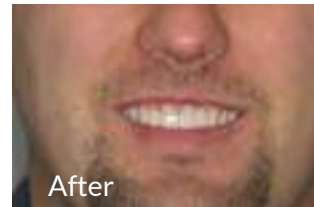
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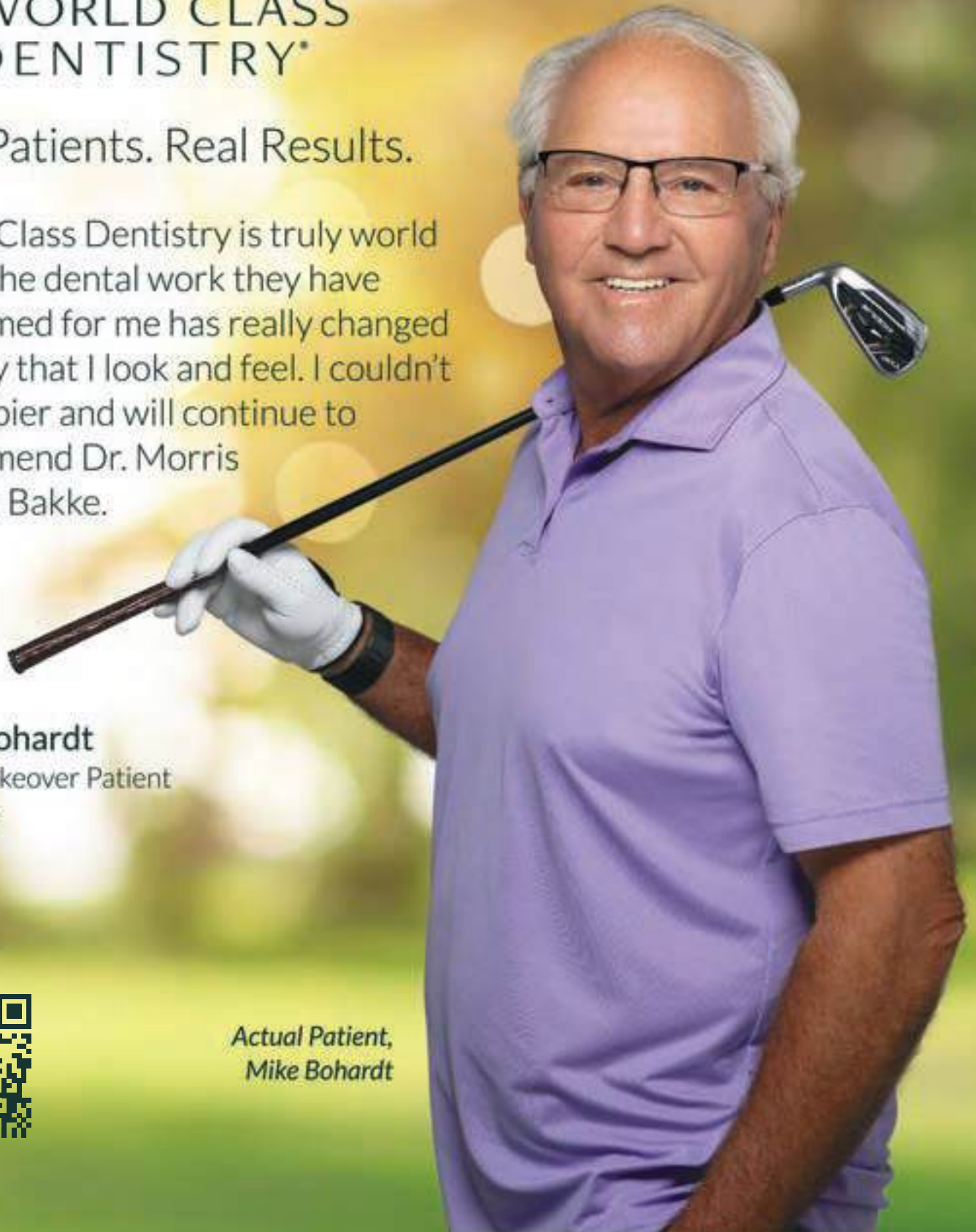
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[PlantMadeAlchemy.com](http://PlantMadeAlchemy.com)

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A visit to Gilly Girls boutique is like stepping into a vibrant wonderland. Shop owner Jenny Phillips fills the space with fun and affordable fashions, jewelry, and unique home goods and gifts. LWR-branded items are sprinkled around the store, including grilling tools, cutting boards, coasters, hats and more.



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Continued on Page 64

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# FOR THE HEALTH OF IT: FIVE PATHS TO WELLNESS

Five Lakewood Ranch practitioners blend traditional, holistic and modern techniques.

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BY SU BYRON AND MARTY FUGATE | CONTRIBUTORS

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**L**akewood Ranch is home to many holistic healers who rejuvenate mind, body and spirit with a variety of practices. Whether it's acupuncture, Reiki, sound healing, salt therapy, or Gyrotonics, you'll find a healing path that's right for you. We spoke with five dedicated practitioners who have committed their lives to the well-being of others. Each was happy to share her passion for her path.



Photo by Katrina Lathrop Bystrom  
“Music, sound and guided imagery are a powerful combination,” says Zoey “Zen” Seraphine.



Photo by  
Katrina Lathrop  
Bystrom

Zoey “Zen” Seraphine is a lifelong musician who was inspired by her own sonic journey and her work with domestic violence survivors.

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# SOUND THERAPY

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**Zoey “Zen” Seraphine** is a lifelong musician; her work as a sound therapy practitioner began in 2017. This engagement was inspired by her own sonic journey and her experience in therapeutic outreach to domestic violence survivors. Seraphine now offers sound alchemy classes at the Yoga Barre in Lakewood Ranch and throughout the Sarasota-Manatee region.

## SOUND THERAPY IN A NUTSHELL

Sound therapy combines ambient sounds and musical compositions to promote relaxation, enhance meditation, encourage self-discovery and clear energetic and emotional blocks.

It also enhances focus, creativity and mindfulness. “Music, sound and guided imagery are a powerful combination,” Seraphine says. “It can cross cultural barriers and open up silenced voices.”

## ORIGIN

According to Seraphine, sonic healing has both ancient roots and modern pioneers. “The practices are a mix of old and new,” she says. “Crystal singing bowls actually emerged from Silicon Valley technology. Music itself has healing and calming properties — that’s been known for millennia. Some practitioners have mystical interpretations. I don’t put them down, but I’m more evidence-based.”

## BENEFITS AND RESULTS

Sonic modalities can reduce anxiety and depression and increase self-acceptance. They also promote deep relaxation and self-healing. Unexpected pain relief is often the result. “Sound therapy has profound results in the treatment of trauma,” says Seraphine. “Outside of trauma-informed treatment, daily sonic practice promotes wellness and peace of mind. I encourage people to create a sacred time for self-connection and compassion.”

*If You Go: Visit [ZenSeraphine.com](http://ZenSeraphine.com) for more information.*

# ACUPUNCTURE



Courtesy photo

The journey that led Amanda Carter to study Chinese medicine began when she was 25, when she found herself suffering from chronic pain.

**Amanda Carter** is a board-certified acupuncturist, a doctor of Chinese medicine, and the owner and founder of Lakewood Ranch Acupuncture & Wellness. The journey that led Carter to study Chinese medicine began when she was 25, when she found herself suffering from chronic pain. She was ultimately diagnosed with chronic fatigue, depression, anxiety and a sleep disorder. Carter ended up on six different medications, which eventually lost their effectiveness, leading to a decline in her health. Desperate, she weaned off the drugs with her doctor's help and immersed herself in studying holistic nutrition. Changing her diet sparked her passion for learning about natural health. Carter's passion for natural health had been ignited — and it burns brightly to this day. Her own health struggles gave her profound empathy for her patients.

## ACUPUNCTURE IN A NUTSHELL

Acupuncture is a Traditional Chinese Medicine (TCM) practice in which needles are inserted into points on the body to promote healing. This balances the body's flow of energy, known as Qi (pronounced "chee"). Acupuncture works to relieve pain, reduce stress

and treat illness by stimulating the body's natural healing response.

## BENEFITS AND RESULTS

Carter explains that acupuncture goes to the root causes of health issues — imbalance in the forces of yin and yang. "For example, if the kidney yin is deficient, that may result in symptoms like low back pain, knee pain and night sweats," she says. "By restoring balance in the body, acupuncture helps the body heal itself."

## BEYOND ACUPUNCTURE

Along with acupuncture, Carter also offers such TCM practices as Chinese herbs, nutraceuticals and homeopathic injections. She and her colleagues use these to help their patients take charge of their health. Carter stresses that TCM is a time-tested medical system that's not connected to any religious worldview. "It works in synch with Western medicine," she says. "That's especially vital in chronic care. TCM is a compassionate approach — but it's in harmony with evidence-based treatment."

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Photo by Lori Sax

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# SALT THERAPY

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**Myra Maldonado** was inspired to open the Salt Cave & Spa when her mother and mother-in-law were both enduring chemotherapy treatments. For Maldonado's mother, the treatment felt worse than the disease. When her mother stopped chemotherapy, Maldonado sought out holistic alternatives and discovered salt therapy. After finding out about its benefits, she decided to create a safe space where her mother could relax and find relief. Sadly, Maldonado's mother died before that could happen. She launched Salt Cave & Spa in her mother's honor.

## SALT THERAPY IN A NUTSHELL

Salt therapy (also known as halotherapy) involves inhaling micro-particles

of pharmaceutical-grade dry salt that's been dispersed into a controlled environment. "The salt is super absorbent, anti-bacterial and anti-inflammatory," Maldonado explains. "It's a trifecta of healing properties."

## WHAT SETS HER PRACTICE APART

Instead of the typical one-person salt booths, Maldonado opted for an authentic salt cave environment. In her space, guests are surrounded by pink Himalayan salt bricks, calming music and a simulated starry night. Sessions last 45 minutes in the communal eight-person cave or the more intimate two-to-four-person cave. (Your canine companion can also join you for a heal-

ing session in the private salt room.) Maldonado also offers ionic footbaths, infrared therapies and classes in sonic healing.

## BENEFITS AND RESULTS

"Salt therapy has a vast range of benefits," Maldonado says. "It's a powerful treatment for respiratory issues like asthma, bronchitis and sinus problems." She adds that it also alleviates skin conditions like acne, dermatitis, and psoriasis, while also providing relief for anxiety, depression, stress, PTSD, and other mental health issues.

***If You Go:** 5200 Paylor Lane, Sarasota; 941-290-5113; [TheSaltCavesLWR.com](http://TheSaltCavesLWR.com).*

Rather than just one-person salt booths, Maldonado opted for an authentic salt cave environment to provide a more authentic retreat.



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Photo by Lori Sax

Lauren Sham is a classically trained dancer, who was drawn to Gyrotonic training after a profound personal experience of its potential to liberate human movement.

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# GYROTONIC METHOD

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Gyrotonic Sunara is the brainchild of **Lauren Sham** and **Lauren Elford**. Sham is a classically trained dancer with a passion for kinesiology and anatomy. She was drawn to Gyrotonic training after experiencing a life-changing Gyrotonic session. Sham came away with a vastly expanded range of motion. She realized it could unlock the limitless potential of human movement in others as well.

## THE GYROTONIC METHOD IN A NUTSHELL

The Gyrotonic method uses specialized equipment to guide the body through circular, spiraling and fluid movements. This exercise regime enhances strength, flexibility, balance and coordination. It also promotes freedom of movement and a greater sense of well-being.

## HOW DOES IT WORK?

According to Sham, Gyrotonics integrates the core principles of yoga, dance, gymnastics, and tai chi. “The focus is spinal mobility and joint articulation,” she adds. “This holistic approach promotes core stability, improved posture and overall body awareness.”

## BENEFITS AND RESULTS

“Gyrotonics benefits the systems of the human body at every level,” says Sham. “It’s a dynamic system that links your breath to the movement cycles. As a result, you feel very connected with the world around you, and also what’s going on inside your body. Regular practice can reduce pain, prevent injuries and increase physical vitality. As a comprehensive, low-impact workout, it’s ideal.” Sham notes

that she’s seen the dramatic benefits of Gyrotonic practice in people suffering from arthritis, back pain, osteoporosis and problems with balance.

## WHO IS IT FOR?

“Gyrotonics is really for everybody,” Sham says. “That’s true, regardless of your age or current state of health.” She adds that, whatever shape you’re in, vibrant health is a universal human birthright. “As children, we naturally play, run, jump, crawl, walk on our hands and do silly things with our bodies. Most adults grow out of that. Gyrotonics puts you back in touch with your body’s full potential.”

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**If You Go:** 8209 Natures Way, Unit 203, Lakewood Ranch; 941-210-4535; [GyrotonicSunara.com](http://GyrotonicSunara.com).



# REIKI



**Janette Brown** is the owner and founder of Yoga Barre Studio. Her haven of health offers workout space and qualified instructors in a range of practices. Brown herself teaches classes in both yoga and Reiki. She discovered that discipline during a yoga teacher training session. Brown liked the results so much, she became a Reiki Master. Today, she's sharing her hands-on knowledge with her students.

## REIKI IN A NUTSHELL

Reiki is a form of energy healing that emerged in Japan. This practice uses the power of touch to manage the flow of life-force energy in the human body. (A skilled practitioner can transfer their own life force energy to where it's needed.) The Reiki master can either touch the recipient directly, or place their hands just above their skin. The goal is to balance energy, reduce stress, and promote relaxation and healing.

Joanna Rettler Photography  
**Left:** Janette Brown notes that her clients often experience pain relief, stress reduction, and mental clarity.

## BENEFITS AND RESULTS

Brown notes that her clients often experience pain relief, stress reduction and mental clarity. "Metaphorically, it's like a dam bursting," she says. "Buried experiences come up. You'll become aware of emotional baggage that you need to let go. And you'll feel safe to do that. Reiki's like a big warm hug dialed up to 11. You're totally relaxed, totally in touch with yourself and totally free to be your real self."

## PAYING IT FORWARD

"Everyone has the capacity to share love and positive energy," Brown says. "Reiki's about both giving and receiving. You're bathed in an all-accepting love and feel safe to drop your defenses. Your own life force is what you receive. It bubbles up inside you, and you naturally want to pay it forward. You learn to protect and manage your own energy and pass it on to those who need it."

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# DRAGON POWER

Nathan Benderson Park's dragon boat program has become one of the largest and most competitive in the U.S. In September, its athletes are headed to the world competition in Italy.

BY SUSAN BURNS | CONTRIBUTOR

Angela Long, head coach of Nathan Benderson Park's dragon boat program, is standing on a motorboat in the middle of the park's big lake.

"Paddles up," she shouts. Immediately, 20 men and women on a long, skinny boat lean forward and lift their paddles in the air as though they're about to spear a sea monster.

"Go!"

The blades plunge and catch the water, and the boat rises and jumps forward, propelled by 20 paddles entering and exiting the water at the exact same moment. A steerer in the stern sets the course and a drummer sitting at the bow sets the pace. The boat glides across the water until Long shouts, "Let it run!" All 20 paddlers lift their paddles out of the water. The synchrony is euphoric.

I know this feeling because sometimes I'm in one of those boats. When I come home from a practice, endorphins still pumping, I gush nonstop about the coach, the paddlers, the training, the physical sensation of many people becoming one organism. "Sounds like a centipede," said one friend, when I urged her to give it a try. Not exactly the image I was going for, but I stopped bugging her.

At every practice, I learn and improve. I escape into a state of complete focus. All distractions and worries of the world recede. The only thing that matters is what the person in front of me is doing.

Psychological studies have shown that the experience of being in sync creates a sense of well-being, according to a report in *Scientific American*. Think line dancing, choir practice, marching bands — the act of practicing together in large groups builds strong bonds and trust, say scientists, perhaps an evolutionary trait that contributed to our survival. All I know is that dragon boating feels good.

My son has heard me talk about this so many times, he thinks I've joined a cult.

Coach Long laughs when I tell her that. "A cult? We kind of behave like that. It's so addictive. It becomes a way of life. I tell people it's a party in a boat. You get people together. We work hard, play hard and we do it all in sync. When

*Continued on Page 76*





Photos by Lori Sax  
Nathan Benderson  
Park's dragon boat  
program is the second  
largest in the country.

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you join the team, you have 20 instant best friends.”

Dragon boat racing should not be confused with rowing where rowers sit single file, face backwards and stroke with oars. In dragon boating paddlers — 10 in a small boat or 20 in the standard boat — face forward in two rows, each person holding a single paddle and stroking on one side.

The sport dates to the 5th or 6th century A.D. in China. But boats decorated with dragon heads, tails and scales date back more than 6,000 years. The Chinese put the dragon, a mythical creature controlling the weather, rain and seas, on boats to ensure a good rice harvest; other historians say dragon boats were used in military exercises that eventually became a spectator sport. Whatever its origins, dragon boat festivals were concentrated in China for centuries until 1976 when Hong Kong launched the first ever international dragon boat festival.

Since then, the sport has spread around the world. One of the sport's governing bodies, the International Dragon Boat Federation (IDBF), now counts 75 countries as members, and many sources estimate about 50 million participants worldwide.

Nathan Benderson Park's dragon boat program, officially called NBP Paddling, started in 2013 as a breast cancer survivor team, Survivors in Sync (SIS). At the time, park leaders wanted to expand the venue's offerings and reputation — it had already earned an international reputation in rowing — by hosting an international breast cancer dragon boat festival. They wanted a local team. Long, now 55, who had earned a respected reputation working with cancer survivors through local nonprofits in the last decade, was persuaded to come onboard to launch the team and ended up the coach. She had no experience with the sport or coaching but, diagnosed with breast cancer at the age of 34, knew what it took to survive and had the passion to support other women going through the same life-changing event. By 2021, largely due to Long's leadership, coaching style and emphasis on technical skills, the club expanded to

Continued on Page 78



Dragon boat head coach Angela Long, at right, with assistant coach Beth Turconi, at a recent Saturday practice.



In dragon boating paddlers — 10 in a small boat or 20 in the standard boat — face forward in two rows, each person holding a single paddle and stroking on one side.

### DUNESKA GRANT,

53, who moved to the U.S. 25 years ago from Colombia, has been involved in sports and exercise her whole life. About a year and a half ago, a workout friend told her about dragon boating.

“I’d never heard of it. I wasn’t into competing or racing,” she says. “I just like to be active, so I finally tried it and fell in love with it.”

Now Grant, who owns the residential real estate company, The K Company Realty, is one of the top paddlers in the club, qualifying for Team USA in Thailand in 2023, where she and her teammates won two silver and two gold medals. She’s now headed to the world championship in Ravenna, Italy, this September where she will be competing in the 50-plus age division in the 200-, 500- and 2,000-meter races for both the women’s 20-seat boat and the mixed men and women’s 20-seat boat.

Grant trains at least seven times a week, sometimes heading to Nathan Benderson Park twice a day to get in her workouts. She also has a personal trainer. “It’s discipline and time in the water,” she says. “There is no replacement for training.”

Training isn’t the only motivation, though. “I don’t know a lot of sports that people our age do in a team environment,” she says. “We have people on the team more than 80 years old. They are an inspiration.”



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Continued from Page 76

include the Warriors (a team of all cancer survivors), a veteran's team, other men's and women's competitive teams, as well as the Survivors in Sync team.

NBP Paddling now has 150 members. While that might sound small, it's not. The program is the second largest in the country, just behind Philadelphia's team, the oldest in the country. It's also considered one of the most competitive clubs in America, consistently winning top medals in national and international competitions. "It happened quickly," says Long. "We shocked some local teams."

This September, 73 NBP athletes are headed to Ravenna, Italy, to compete at the big biennial International Dragon Boat Federation's Club Crew World Championship. That almost half the team has qualified in time trials makes NBP Paddlers an exceptional group in the world of dragon boat racing. In fact, about 120 members of the team are on a competitive track

Continued on Page 80

**GINA TOYNTON**, 49, a social worker in the Manatee County school system, went to her first dragon boat practice less than two months after a bilateral mastectomy for breast cancer. She had decided while waiting for her diagnosis that she would not adopt a "Why me?" posture. A friend told her about a dragon boat's breast cancer team called Survivors in Sync. "My surgery was in November 2022, and as soon as I got the all-clear to move my body, I started paddling," she says.

The first time out, she sobbed: "You have a different body, different parameters of movement." But she had a goal. "I was putting my energy into forward momentum. I wanted to compete from the get-go, so I was willing to do everything to make sure I'd succeed."

Toynton progressed rapidly, and only six months later had times fast enough to qualify for the U.S. Club Crew National Championships held in July 2023 at Nathan Benderson Park. At the nationals, she qualified for the Ravenna world race this September. She will be racing in the Survivors in Sync 20-person boat and the Warriors' 10-person boat.

Dragon boating is a beautiful sport, she says. "When you're in sync, it's an amazing thing to see. For any breast cancer survivor out there, you can come here and have your experience be normalized, a place to channel energy in a

positive way. We'll show you you're powerful again. We have women who paddle while they're still in chemo. They're beasts!"



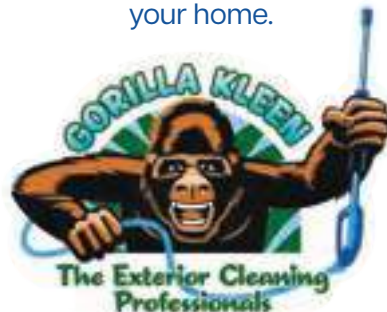
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## JERRY MARSHBANKS,

54, loves the water. He spent 31 years in active duty as a physician assistant with the U.S. Coast Guard, deployed on ships to Antarctica and all over the world before retiring to Florida in 2022. While stationed in Puerto Rico, he competed in standup paddleboard. Water sports became a family pastime. His wife, Stephanie, competed in outrigger canoe competitions; his daughter was a highly competitive standup paddleboarder.

So, when the couple decided to move, they wanted to find a place close to a body of water. They eventually moved to Parrish in Manatee County for his new job as a physician assistant for a family medicine practice. It was far from the wide-open oceans he was used to. "SUP is open ocean and the Gulf is calm. I lost my water community," he says. Then Stephanie found NBP Paddling. They both joined.

"I thought I was in good shape," says Marshbanks, who is a muscular 6' 4". "But I showed up for my first three or four practices, and I was amazed that 70-year-olds were beating the pants off me."

In four months, Marshbanks qualified to be an alternate in the U.S. Club Crew National Championships held in July 2023 at Nathan Benderson Park, and then qualified for the Ravenna worlds this September. "I'm on a Senior Mixed B, five men and five women, 50 years and older," he says. His wife, also a top paddler, will be competing in Ravenna as well.

"You catch the fever once you're in your first race," he says. "It's not 10 or 20 individuals. We're one person, everyone going together, feeding each other. It's magical."



*Continued from Page 78*

and vie for spots on racing boats. For someone like me, who is content to remain a recreational paddler, just happy to be in nature on a boat and to get my heart rate up while I try to improve my technique, these competitive teammates — who occasionally train on the same beginners' boat to embed the basics and precision of the stroke — are intimidating. I'm assured by NBP's multimedal winner, 62-year-old Beth Turconi, that I am welcome, even if I haven't been to practice for a month. "We've got every level of paddler," she says. "When you're ready to come back, there's a seat on the boat for you. You don't have to be super competitive."

At 66, I fit the demographics if not the competitive drive. Most NBP members are in their 50s, 60s, 70s

## WHAT TO KNOW ABOUT RAVENNA

The 14th International Dragon Boat Federation Club Crew World Championship takes place Sept. 3-8 in Ravenna, Italy. More than 7,000 paddlers have qualified, including 73 of the NBP club's athletes. Races are 200, 500 and 2,000 meters.

*Continued on Page 82*





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Continued from Page 80

and even 80s, although anyone older than 18 can join. And most are women. I understand why the sport skews older — the practice requires a huge time commitment if you want to be competitive, which younger people with jobs and families can't always afford, and we have plenty of empty nesters and retirees here. But why the gender imbalance? Only 15% of paddlers are men at NBP. It's a puzzle, says Long. Dragon boat requires upper body strength, cardio fitness and serious training. "We've had an influx of men recently," says Long, "and I'm hoping that continues."

I showed up at a recent practice after having been out of town for a month and was worried about being a clumsy stranger. Long spotted me, smiled and said, "Welcome back." I climbed into the boat and said hello to my benchmate and focused on the athlete in front of me.

Paddles up.



**HOW TO JOIN** NBP Paddling welcomes anyone over 18 who wants to try the sport at its 101/Technical/Recreational practices, which are offered every week. Go to [NathanBendersonPark.org/dragon-boat-paddling](http://NathanBendersonPark.org/dragon-boat-paddling) to register. The Dragon Boat 101 fee of \$99 gets you four practices with the team at a beginning level. Paddling takes place at 5851 Nathan Benderson Circle.

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# No Plan B

The charmed life of Mark Pentecost includes nice houses in multiple states, a 10,000-acre east county ranch, tens of millions given away to cancer organizations and even his own private island. Getting to the top required a combination of grit, guts and good old fashioned hustle.

BY ERIC SNIDER | CONTRIBUTOR

Long life spans run in Mark Pentecost's family. His parents are in their late 80s. Three of his grandparents lived into their mid-90s. "So that was my plan," Pentecost says, sitting in his capacious office at the Palmetto headquarters of It Works!, a company he founded in 2001 that has amassed him and his family a substantial fortune.

"Then I got hit."

In 2016, he was diagnosed with multiple myeloma, an incurable form of blood cancer. Pentecost, 67, has outlived his life expectancy. "Usually, it's a five-year [death] sentence," he says. "But we caught it early. My memory is not as sharp. I blame it on the chemo. Because of the stem cell treatments, I lost all my hair and muscle. I don't have the stamina I used to."

If cancer has Pentecost operating at a deficit, it doesn't show. The hair is back and he looks fit wearing a blue sport jacket and pin-dot shirt. His ruddy complexion connotes a man who spends considerable time outdoors. Pentecost, with a home three miles west of the State Road 64 exit of Interstate 75, has also spent considerable time in east Manatee County. These days, he follows his passions, which include making a movie, giving money — lots of money — to cancer charities and spending time with family.

On a Friday afternoon in late May, meanwhile, the large waterfront office building was mostly empty due to employees working from home. Pentecost sits in a cushy chair that provides a panoramic view of the Manatee River and Bradenton to the south. He points east toward his primary residence at the Inlets, a warren of mansions and other homes on the riverfront in Bradenton. Pentecost built homes in the same neighborhood for his three children — two daughters and son — as well as his parents. Kami, the oldest, is a single mom who lives two doors down with her five children that range in age from 12 to 19. One of Pentecost's great joys is having his grandkids nearby.

During a 90-minute interview, Pentecost is open and affable, and does his level best to suppress the irrepressible salesman in him. At one point, well into a soliloquy about the value of dreaming

*Continued on Page 86*



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Courtesy

*Continued from Page 85*

big, he stops. "I guess I started preaching a little bit," he says with a sly smile.

**EXPANDING HORIZONS**

In 2021, Pentecost stepped down as CEO of It Works!, while remaining chairman of the board. The direct-sales enterprise has routinely racked up more than \$500 million in annual revenue selling an array of skin care, nutritional and beauty items. Its foundational product is Skinny Wrap, used for body toning. The company's sales force, all of them independent contractors, numbers about 30,000, Pentecost says.

Free of the corporate day-to-day, Pentecost turned his attention to dream projects. He conceived, financed and produced a scripted movie titled "Florida Wild," which was filmed on his 10,000-acre ranch in Myakka City. It stars Lee Majors of "The Six Million Dollar Man" fame and Oscar-winner Mira Sorvino.

"Florida Wild" is not the only project in the Pentecost pipeline. He's also putting the finishing touches on a book, "Living Your Best Dream," which is part memoir, part motivational tract. Both the movie and the book are due for release in the first quarter of next year.

"My wife said the other day that I've excelled at everything except retirement," Pentecost says. "I'm really bad at retirement." He and Cindy, his high school sweetheart, have been married for 46 years, and she's been a partner in business as well as life.

Not to say it's all work and no play. Pentecost tries to get out to his ranch

Mark Pentecost's 10,000-acre ranch in east Manatee County features a waterfront home.

“*My wife said the other day that I've excelled at everything except retirement. I'm really bad at retirement.*”

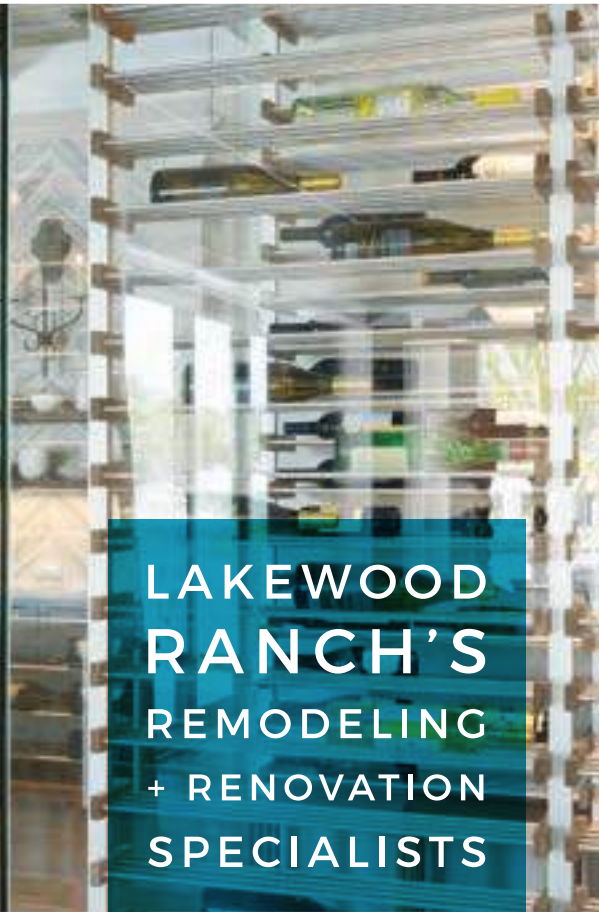
**MARK PENTECOST**

*Continued on Page 88*

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Continued from Page 86

every Tuesday to “ride horses, round up cattle, shoot guns.” He has a regular tee time on Wednesdays at The Founders Golf Club in Sarasota. Pentecost used to play at Stoneybrook Golf Club, which he bought in 2010 for \$3.5 million. He sold the property in the late 2010s.

Pentecost also owns a private island. He purchased 104-acre Little Bokeelia Island, west of Fort Myers, for \$14.5 million in 2015, primarily for business entertainment. The property includes a 6,500-square-foot, Spanish-style villa. Lately, he doesn’t get out there as much as he’d like.

Mark and Cindy are spending the summer at their home near Banner Elk, North Carolina. They bought it to provide an escape from the Florida heat, which takes more of a toll on Mark due to cancer. “Typical me — I saw a mountain that had a trout stream, so I bought the land,” Pentecost says. “I’d never fly-fished, but now I fly-fish.”

All told, not bad for a former high school math teacher and basketball coach.

### A FOCUS ON PHILANTHROPY

Since cancer, Pentecost has put more of his time and money into philanthropic pursuits. He’s one of the biggest donors to the V Foundation, the children’s cancer charity passionately supported by basketball announcer and Lakewood Ranch resident Dick Vitale. In May, Mark and Cindy Pentecost surprised the audience at the 19th Annual Dick Vitale Gala in Sarasota by announcing a gift of \$12 million. They’ve made substantial contributions at the event in the last few years. But this was the largest. “The next day I looked at my wife and said, ‘What did we just do?’” Pentecost quips. “But it’s such a good cause.”

Vitale was floored, based on social media posts of the event and donation.

“Mark and Cindy love utilizing their incredible success in a positive way, especially in causes that touch them emotionally,” Vitale says via text message. “They have been a key reason why my gala has had such fantastic success. If I were on ESPN & talking about Cindy & Mark I would simply say ‘CINDY & MARK ARE AWE-

SOME BABY WITH A CAPITAL A!’”

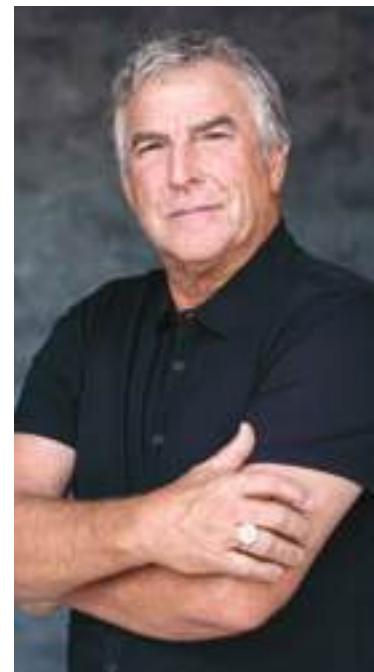
In addition, the Pentecosts are helping fund research for Tampa-based Moffitt Cancer Center. Mark had treatment at top hospitals in Boston and Houston, and then Moffitt. “If I was doing it over today, I’d go straight to Moffitt,” he says. The Pentecosts have donated \$13 million and established the Pentecost Family Myeloma Research Center there.

### WORKING CLASS ROOTS

Pentecost’s grandparents on both sides moved from Tennessee to Michigan in the 1950s to work in the automobile factories. His father, along with five brothers, stayed on the same track.

Mark played basketball and tennis at Holt High School in Lansing, Michigan, and was good at math. He got together with Cindy when he was a senior and she was a sophomore. Their first date was at the end-of-season varsity basketball party. “We took a timeout [in our relationship] once or twice, but then realized, ‘Hey, this person is pretty special,’” Pentecost says.

Continued on Page 91



Courtesy  
Mark Pentecost founded It Works! in 2001 and built it into a direct-sales empire.

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## MOVIE MAN

The producer Mark Pentecost hired to run his film project, "Florida Wild," told him the shoot would need to happen in Georgia. That state has lucrative tax incentives for filmmakers. The state of Florida hasn't had any since 2016. Still, it didn't make sense to Pentecost for a scripted movie about Florida cowboys shortly after the Civil War to be filmed in Georgia.

Besides, Pentecost had the ideal location — his 10,000-acre ranch in Myakka City in east Manatee County, with working cowboys and cattle. The producer countered with, "We can't do it there because you don't have a western town," Pentecost says. "And I said, 'I'll build one.'"

Construction began in December 2023, and included a saloon, a jail and a general store. "Florida Wild" was shot from Feb. 1 to April 15. It caused quite the hullabaloo in Myakka City. "We had 250 people a day on set," says Pentecost, who invested more than \$10 million into the film. "We had a hundred people from town as extras. Plus, we had the cowboys and the cattle, too."

Billed as an "action-packed period film" set in 1880, "Florida Wild" tells the story of three brothers who leave the Deep South and come to Florida to start over as cattle ranchers. "They meet a girl, and there are some outlaws, of course," Pentecost says.

The film stars Lee Majors — the 85-year-old actor best known for his lead role in the 1970s TV show "The Six Million Dollar Man" — and Mira Sorvino, 56, who in 1995 won the Academy Award and Golden Globe for Best Supporting Actress for her performance in Woody Allen's "Mighty Aphrodite."

Pentecost says he'd go to the set three or four days a week. "On Fridays, we shut down for an hour and a half and have a bluegrass band playing during lunchtime," he says. "I'd be sitting there, looking around — people tapping their feet, people smiling — and I'm going, 'This is fun.'"

The western town is still standing, and Pentecost has no plans to tear it down. He thinks it could even be the set for another movie down the line.



Courtesy  
Mark Pentecost tries to get out to his 10,000-acre ranch in Myakka City every Tuesday.

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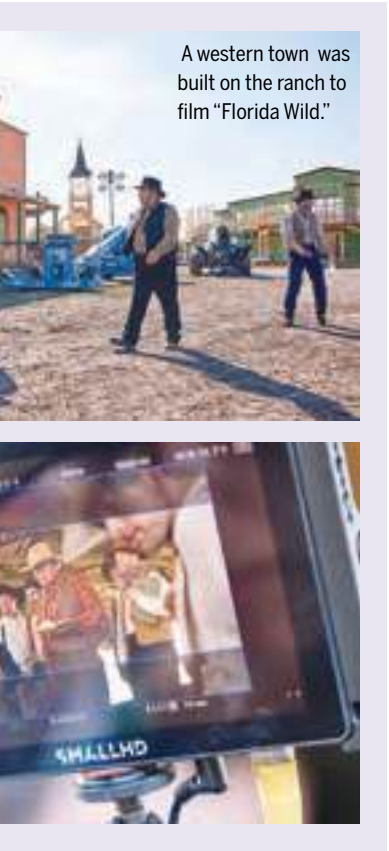
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A western town was built on the ranch to film "Florida Wild."

*Continued from Page 88*

A key pivot point in his life came after high school, when he was accepted at the General Motors Institute. "You go to school there for like three months and then you work in the factory for three months, and then you get a job and make great money," Pentecost recalls. Another option was to matriculate at nearby Grand Valley State University. Pentecost's father encouraged him to leave the family trade and chart his own course. Mark was the first in his family to attend college. He joined the Teamsters and worked during summers as a mover for North American Van Lines.

After graduating, the newly married Pentecost took a job as a math teacher at Allegan High School south of Grand Rapids, Michigan. He worked his way up to head basketball coach. It was a solid life, but Pentecost was growing restless. "I was making forty-thousand a year teaching," he says. "I'd take my lump sum from coaching and we'd get a little bit ahead. But something

*Continued on Page 92*



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Courtesy

*Continued from Page 91*

always went wrong — the car makes a funny little rattle, the washing machine is not working, so we could never stay ahead. I was driving a junk car. We had the ugliest house. It was a battle.”

Pentecost’s father, who had retired from GM and moved back to Tennessee, tipped his son to a job at a company called Excel Communications, a reseller of long-distance telephone minutes that used a multilevel marketing platform. “So dad calls me and says, ‘You need to do this.’” Pentecost recalls. “I said, ‘Dad, I haven’t got the time. I’m coaching basketball games every Tuesday and Friday.’ He said, ‘Son, 10 years from now you’re going to be just as broke. The only thing you’ve lost is 10 years of your life.’”

Pentecost relented, and he and Cindy signed on as Excel reps. They worked their side hustle on nights and weekends, hoping to make an extra \$500 a month. Mark proved adept at recruiting new sales people under his umbrella, and — in the standard multi-level sales mode — made money off of their earnings. “All of a sudden, I’m making 6,000 a month and, I thought, ‘If we get to 10,000, I think I’ll quit teaching,’” Pentecost says.

He left Allegan High in ‘97. In all, working for Excel provided five lucrative years. But in the late ‘90s, the rise of cell phones caused the bottom to fall out of the long-distance reseller business, and the Pentecost’s household income plummeted. “At this point, I’m thinking, ‘I don’t wanna go back to teaching,’” he says. “I decided that the next thing I did, I was gonna own my own company — because I wanted to control my destiny.”

Pentecost’s plan was to continue applying the network marketing prowess he honed at Excel, but needed a new product. He heard about a body wrap

An aerial view of Mark Pentecost’s Myakka City ranch.

“  
*I decided  
that the next  
thing I did,  
I was gonna  
own my own  
company  
— because  
I wanted to  
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**MARK PENTECOST**

*Continued on Page 94*

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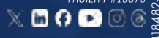


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*Continued from Page 92*

that could strip away inches of fat in 30 minutes. The Pentecosts visited the manufacturer in Mexico to check it out. They applied the wrap, and to their surprise, it worked, Pentecost says. "It may not have been a product I would've chosen," he adds "The athlete in me wanted energy and strength [products], but I had a strong feeling that these wraps would really sell."

In 2001, Pentecost took out a second mortgage on his Michigan home and sank \$300,000 into founding It Works Global Inc. They chose the name because it answered the question everybody asked about the fat-fighting wraps. "I had the owner of Direct Selling Journal tell me, 'That's a terrible name. Did you pick the name?'" Mark recalls. "Ten years later, he said, 'That name is genius.'"

It Works! didn't exactly burst out of the blocks. "People say, 'Oh, you're so lucky,'" Pentecost says. "But there were like three or four times during probably a seven-year period where we didn't know if we were gonna make it or not. But it was all in. I didn't have a plan B."

The company ultimately found its footing and then hit full stride. Sales spiked from \$29 million in 2010 to \$200 million in 2012. During that time, Pentecost decided to move corporate operations from Grand Rapids to Bradenton. The climate, the lifestyle and tax incentives offered by Manatee County all factored into his decision.

It Works! purchased a then-vacant waterfront building in Palmetto for \$3.1 million and expanded it to 50,000 square feet. The gleaming white HQ has plenty of amenities inside. Visitors can skip the stairs and instead hurl down a slide from the second floor to the first.

These days, Pentecost's cancer is "under control, that's what the doctors say. But I don't like the word 'control.' I prefer, 'cure,'" Pentecost states emphatically. "I feel great right now. But I do go at a different pace."

As the conversation begins to wind down, Pentecost muses, "What a journey." Then, he utters a surprise. "I don't think I'd do it again."

After a pause, he added, "But I was talking about this to a friend and he said, 'We would do it again if we were that age again.'"

Pentecost smiles in agreement. Of course he would do it again.

“  
People say,  
'Oh, you're  
so lucky.'  
But there  
were like  
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A life well-lived is curated and on display  
in this dramatic home. **PAGE 100**

Photos by Richard Scott Waid  
The lushly landscaped  
entry to Mark Muse's  
home brings to mind his  
native Panama.

# Elegant Sophistication



Mark Muse's home in Country Club dazzles with perfect taste and subtle artistry. BY ROBERT PLUNKET | CONTRIBUTOR



American artists; the coffee table is from Crate and Barrel. Muse believes in mixing mainstream pieces with antiques and one-of-kind finds.



The home's primary bedroom now serves as Muse's office. Antique maps of Panama and the Caribbean are from his father's collection.

Some people write their autobiographies. Others do it with a great deal more panache. Like Mark Muse. Take his bungalow-sized home in Lakewood Ranch's Country Club. It's the story of his life, told not with words but with the things he loves — art, furniture and objects collected over the years, all arranged in a way that dazzles with its elegant sophistication.

For 32 years Muse held a most unusual niche in the world of corporate America. His job was to plan — and execute — company events at the highest level. The guests were CEOs and top government officials. He first worked for Phillip Morris, then changed to Mastercard International.

These events were much more than parties. They were business meetings, sightseeing tours and galas that would last for as long as five days. All the stops were pulled out. For a gathering in Budapest, Muse arranged for a private train excursion during which the

40 guests were “kidnapped” by a posse of Omar Sharif look-alikes and taken in luxurious horse-drawn carriages to an estate where they enjoyed a lavish multi-course Hungarian dinner and a performance by the national folkloric ballet. Then it was back to Budapest where the bar at the Four Seasons had been cordoned off for a nightcap of Cristal Champagne and canapes.

For an event in Mexico, Muse spruced up an entire picturesque village, painting the buildings and creat-

*Continued on Page 104*

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Continued from Page 102

ing a fantasy of mariachis, street food, piñatas and dancing. He even had the local pigs all washed and groomed and then saturated the ground with rose-water.

With a background like this you would expect his own home to be something special, and it does not disappoint. There is no “tropical” or “coastal” vibe here. Instead, it’s rather dark and mysterious, an elegant, layered cocoon of perfect taste and subtle artistry. “Don’t ever fall victim to the general statement I’ve heard so often,” he says. “Now that I’m in Florida now. I have to go white and coastal. No, you don’t!”

Muse believes in decorating with all five senses in mind, and when you walk into his home you enter a world of incredible attention to detail. The ceilings are high and the walls are dark. It’s hard to tell if they’re grey or blue or green. There’s a subtle, expensive scent in the air — “the per-



Continued on Page 106 By the pool you’ll find an outdoor version of the indoor style, with a view out to the lake.



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*Continued from Page 104*

fect scented candle. I've been using it for years." Chances are there's some mood-setting music, probably bossa nova. Everywhere are luxurious textures to explore — fur throws and pillows, handwoven textiles and polished wood. And so much to look at. Muse's colors are deep and saturated. Their very names summon up his aesthetic: cognac, caramel, moss green, burnished gold.

Muse was born and raised in Panama, where his expat parents encouraged his early interest in design and collecting. By 12, he was already decorating his own room. He still remembers "the unabashed joy of fussing over and selecting the fabrics for the curtains and throw pillows." He even purchased a Percival Lafer coffee table (Lafer was a pioneer of the Brazilian modernist movement).

Mark and his father designed what he describes as "a gorgeous bookcase" stained to match the rosewood of the coffee table. A descendent of that bookcase now is the signature note of his Lakewood Ranch home. Almost 40 feet long, it sets the tone for his salon-style living area. On its shelves are displayed not just books but the treasures he's acquired over decades of travel and collecting. You'll see fam-

The walls in the guest bedroom are painted a dramatic Chinese red. "It's a powerful statement of passion, love, joy!" Muse says.

There is no "tropical" or "coastal" vibe here. Instead, it's rather **dark and mysterious**, an elegant, layered **cocoon of perfect taste and subtle artistry.**

*Continued on Page 108*



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Continued from Page 106

ily photographs, museum-quality baskets woven by indigenous craftsmen, pre-Columbian sculptures, curious knick-knacks of forgotten origin, all perfectly lit by carefully positioned track lighting.

The right lighting is one of Muse's passions. "I have an area of my home dedicated to the storage of incandescent bulbs. All sorts of them. And no LED, please. That technology has simply not arrived." The result is both moody and evocative, a location hard to define in terms of geography and era but one that rolls over you in an emotional wave.

Overall, Muse's home is that of a collector extraordinaire. There is a strong Latin America input, often with a tribal/ethnic slant. The red-walled primary bedroom is lined with "molas"—handwoven textiles created by the San Blas Indians of Panama. An extraordinary number of paintings and artwork enliven the home, and they are diverse in scope — check out the antique maps of his native Panama

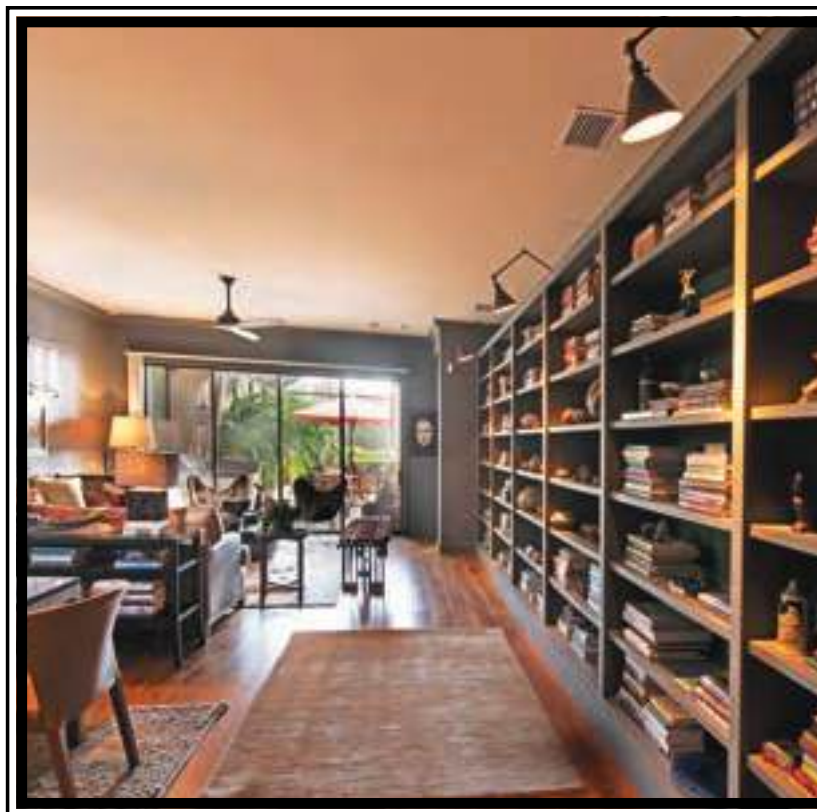
in the study — and provenance. Some are by well-known artists; others are finds from art shows and a secondhand store or two. For Muse, a prize possession might be found anywhere — a consignment shop, the internet, even Home Goods.

Muse is an unabashed bon vivant. Now retired from the corporate world, he designs and decorates for private clients. But living well may be his prime consideration. "I have 62 bottles of liquor," he notes. "I just counted." Fortunately, these are not for his own use but rather for his famous parties.

His party secrets?

"The appropriate glassware. Prime ingredients. Linen napkins, please. A lavish array of hors d'oeuvres, enough to make a meal of. The perfect scented candle. Put all this together with a great guest list — people who are charming, interesting, highly personable and love a fab get-together — that makes for a damn good party."

Sometimes the party spills outdoors. Step through the sliding glass



Continued on Page 110

The long bookcase in the living room provides a perfect display area for the treasures

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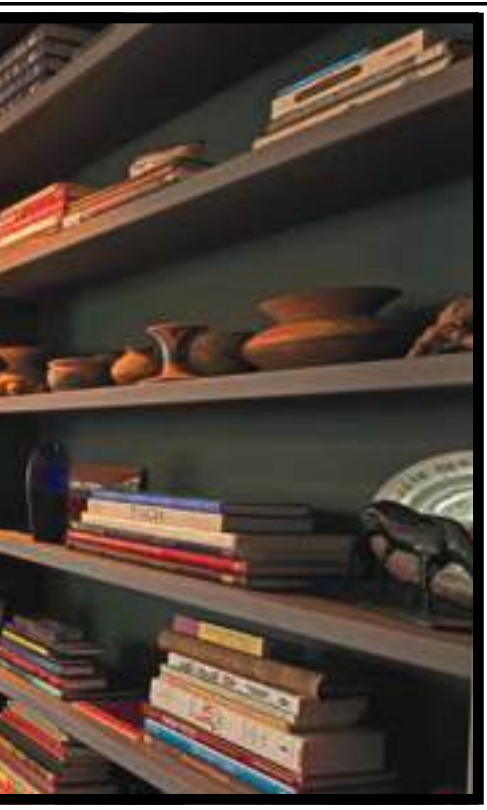
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Mark Muse



The tea set in the entrance hall belonged to Muse's grandmother.

Mark Muse believes in decorating with **all five senses** in mind, and when you walk into his home you enter a world of incredible **attention to detail**.

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Continued from Page 108

doors out to the pool area and you're in Florida again. Here the mood is anything but subtle. Bright orange umbrellas enliven the atmosphere, with even more art on the walls and a view out to a lake. "That's the reason I bought the house," Muse says. "I walked in and saw that view and I knew this was it."

Muse's life isn't all about his elegant possessions, though. He's on the board of directors of Retreat Sarasota, a one-of-a-kind event space set on 84 acres of conservation land. Proceeds from rentals benefit Resilient Retreat, a nonprofit dedicated to empowering trauma survivors to be resilient and thrive by providing accessible and evidence-based programs.

And he loves all that Sarasota and Lakewood Ranch have to offer. "The area is superbly designed and aesthetically stunning."

The same might be said of his home. It's the story of a life well-lived, a self-anthology that continues to dazzle and delight.



Intricate mini-tapestries from the San Blas Islands add drama to the primary bedroom. These are from Muse's mother's collection; many date back to the 1950s.

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art and about

# Falling Back into Season

The 2024-2025 arts season is packed with inspiring and captivating performances and exhibits. Here are seven sensational not-to-miss experiences.

BY SU BYRON  
MANAGING EDITOR

## IN A GALAXY NOT SO FAR AWAY

Do you feel a disturbance in the Force? Fear not — the energy you feel is musical and it's coming from the light side. Sarasota Orchestra is presenting "Star Wars: The Empire Strikes Back" on Oct. 25 and 26. John Williams' stellar compositions will be synchronized in real-time with a screening of the second "Star Wars" movie. Dust off your light saber and bring your favorite robot. It's happening at the Van Wezel — and not in a galaxy far, far away. *Visit SarasotaOrchestra.org.*

## SONIC VISIONARIES

EnsembleNEWSRQ (enSRQ) is rolling up for a musical mystery tour on Jan. 13. "Visions and Miracles" will take listeners on a sonic trek through the lands of dreams and visions. The program features recent compositions for strings, flute and clarinet. These include: Anna Clyne's contemplative "Rest These Hands" for solo violin; Chris Theofanidis' "Visions and Miracles," an ethereal exploration of inner and outer space for string quartet; Gabriela Lena Frank's "Milagros," a haunting work for string quartet; and Dai Wei's cosmic "How the Stars Vanish" for clarinet, violin and cello. These compositions speak of things seen and unseen, of transient beauty and transcendental possibility. Get ready to blast off. *Visit EnSRQ.org.*

## HIGHWAY TO ARTISTIC HEAVEN

"The Florida Highwaymen: Interstate Connections" takes viewers on a fascinating road at Selby Gardens. Where

it leads is a bold chapter in Black history. In the mid-20th century, an enterprising group of African American landscape painters created a legacy in Southeast Florida. They cleverly got around the "whites-only" gatekeepers in the galleries and museums of the segregated Sunshine State — and sold their lush subtropical landscapes by the side of the road. A critic named them "The Highwaymen," and it stuck. But forget the name — and remember the talented artists. This exhibition celebrates their achievements and connects their game-changing artistry to the struggles of Sarasota's African-American community during that time. Through Sept. 15. *Visit Selby.org.*

## FEEL THE EARTH MOVE

"Beautiful: The Carole King Musical" sings the praises of the legendary singer/songwriter in this Asolo Rep production, Nov. 13 to Jan. 5. Along with King's chart-toppers, this Broadway smash offers cool liner notes on her life story. You discover that King had wanted to be a songwriter in high school. Her mother told her, "It's not practical! Girls don't write music." (We're lucky she didn't take her mother's advice.) By the age of 18, she'd written hits for Aretha Franklin and The Drifters. At the ripe old age of 29, King became the voice of a generation. With anthems like "You've Got a Friend," "(You Make Me Feel Like) A Natural Woman," and "I Feel the Earth Move," King's voice has moved several generations in the decades that followed. In this soaring musical, it rings out loud and clear. How beautiful is that? *Visit AsoloRep.org.*



Photo by Sorcha Augustine

Dancer Xiao-Xuan Yang Dancingers will perform in Sarasota Contemporary Dance's "The Barker Project" in December.

*Continued on Page 114*



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Continued from Page 112

## CREATIVE INTERPLAY

“Flesh and Bone” tells a tale of art, love, inspiration and obsession at Sarasota Museum of Art, Nov. 17-April 13. The late photographer Larry Fink and sculptor Martha Posner are the protagonists. They were romantic partners and artistic co-conspirators for more than 30 years. This exhibition explores the creative interplay in the couple’s work. It’s a study in contrasts — and common obsessions. They shared a fascination with desire, vulnerability and brutality. Posner’s sculpture re-imagines heroines from assorted myths and legends; Fink’s photos capture fleeting moments of bravado in everyday life. The couple’s creations also reflect their lives on a Pennsylvania farm — a place where the boundaries of man and beast blur. Fink began photographing that patch of green in the 1970s. Posner didn’t arrive until the 1990s — and instantly found magic in the idyllic surroundings. Here, you see their work side by side. The air seems thick with artistic dialog. Visit [SarasotaArtMuseum.org](http://SarasotaArtMuseum.org).

## BRIBERY, DECEPTION, DISGUISE – AND A HAIRCUT

Bugs Bunny provided a swell introduction to Rossini’s “The Barber of Seville.” (Great animation, but there’s more to it than that.) This Sarasota Opera production makes one thing clear: Elmer Fudd makes no appearance whatsoever. Even so, Rossini’s actual opera is pretty darn funny and one of the most beloved comedic works in the operatic repertory. The plot itself is delightfully contrived. Count Almaviva is determined to win the heart of the beautiful Rosina. He needs to spirit her away from Dr. Bartolo, her wicked guardian. He seeks the help of — you guessed it — Figaro, the eponymous barber of Seville. Side-splitting complications ensue, all set to the tune of Rossini’s scintillating, sprightly music. (Even better? This opera actually has a happy ending!) This production features Lisa Marie Rogali as Rosina in her company debut. Filippo Fontana (an audience favorite) will return as Figaro. Feb. 22-March 29. Visit [SarasotaOpera.org](http://SarasotaOpera.org).



Courtesy of the Asselstine Collection

Harold Newton’s “Backcountry Creek with Brahma and Hereford Bulls” is part of Selby Garden’s exhibition “The Florida Highwaymen: Interstate Connections.”

## SONG-AND-DANCE GUMBO

Sarasota Contemporary Dance is known for its syncretistic collaborations between different artists, art forms and attitudes. Its 19th season is no exception. “The Barker Project,” Dec. 5-8, kicks it off — with a kick. This kinetic concert is bassist Johnnie Barker’s dazzling, improvisational collaboration with a cohort of talented musicians and the SCD dancers. Do they color outside genre lines? Absolutely. Barker’s song-and-dance gumbo will be rooted in jazz, and seasoned with a blend of funk, rock, blues and gospel. The dancers will be equally fluid in their genre-busting moves. Don’t be surprised when this show surprises you. Visit [SarasotaContemporaryDance.org](http://SarasotaContemporaryDance.org).



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## table talk

# Mike Herley of Wheat + Water Italian Kitchen

Italian American cuisine offers the best of both culinary worlds in Mike and Kim Herley's welcoming restaurant.

BY MARTY FUGATE | CONTRIBUTOR

**F**rom pizza to pasta, Wheat + Water Italian Kitchen offers a full spectrum of Italian American dishes. It's the brainchild of Mike Herley and his wife and business partner, Kim. Before opening it in 2015, Herley was an executive for top restaurants around the nation. He brings all that experience (and a zeal for experimentation) to their venture. In the following conversation, Herley shares his recipe for culinary success.

### **We launched Wheat + Water when ...**

The space became available about nine years ago. Kim and I didn't want to duplicate what other restaurants were offering. We looked around and asked, "What's missing in Lakewood Ranch?" At the time, our community didn't have that many Italian restaurants. We said, "Well, heck, I've got a lot of background in Italian food. Let's do this."

### **Our roles are ...**

Kim handles the front-of-house operations. My main role is developing the menu. I spent six months perfecting our recipes at home before we opened. We tested it out on our neighbors throughout the process.

### **Our name stands for ...**

The key ingredients in Italian cooking. Wheat and water are what we use to make bread, pasta and pizza dough.

### **We're planning to reintroduce our famous New York Italian-style pizza.**

There were lots of unhappy customers when we discontinued it last January. We'll also be rotating specials throughout the summer. They'll change every two weeks.

### **The three secrets of our success start with ...**

High-quality food. Then add first-rate service and a totally relaxed attitude. We're a place where you just be yourself. You can get all dressed up or come in shorts and a T-shirt. You'll feel welcome and comfortable either way.

### **Consistency drives our success.**

When the public's expecting something from you, you have to deliver. Like my grandfather said, "When people go to McDonald's, nobody walks away unhappy. They know what they'll get and it's the same every time." We set a higher standard at Wheat + Water. Now that we set it, we can't fall below it. We're not just great — we're consistently great.

*Continued on Page 118*



Photos by Christopher Green

Mike Herley brings extensive restaurant management experience and a zeal for experimentation to Wheat + Water Italian Kitchen.

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Continued from Page 116

**Wheat + Water Italian Kitchen is ...**

My idea of great Italian American food. I say “Italian American” because that cuisine isn’t the same as what you’d find in different regions of Italy. “Italian” and “Italian American” are two very different animals.

**Don’t leave Wheat + Water without trying ...**

Our meatballs are to die for. And, when it’s available, our osso buco is hands-down the best there is around.

**My culinary superheroes include ...**

Chris Bianco has done great things with pizza and pasta. He taught me that you don’t have to pack a recipe with everything in sight. He lets the simplicity of the ingredients speak for itself. Make sure it’s all great and let that sing the song. David Chang is another hero. He’s done a lot to bring Korean street food to a wider audience across the country.

**Outside our restaurant, my wife and I love to dine at ...**

Well, I usually cook at home. But we do eat out occasionally. Apollonia Grill and Connor’s Steak House are our two top choices.

**When I’m not at work, I love ...**

Baking sourdough bread. I have my own starter and it’s now 5 years old. I’ve always done a lot of barbecuing, but I’ve also recently taken up smoking. About once a week, I’ll be smoking chicken, fish or meats. I guess my hobbies don’t fall too far from the tree.

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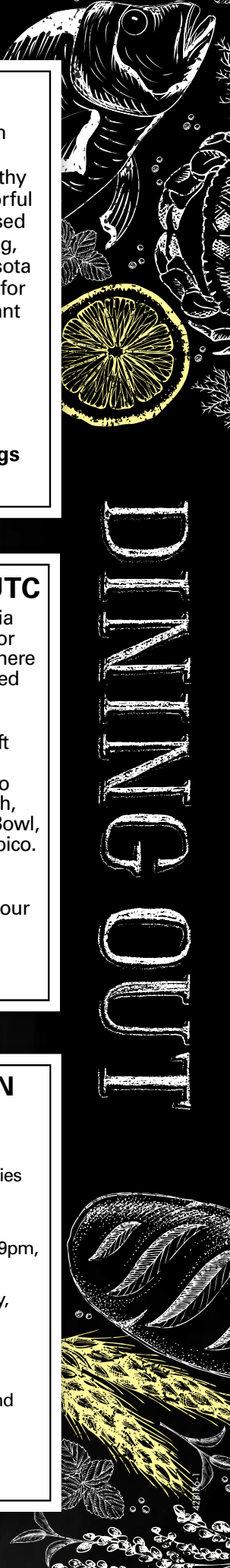
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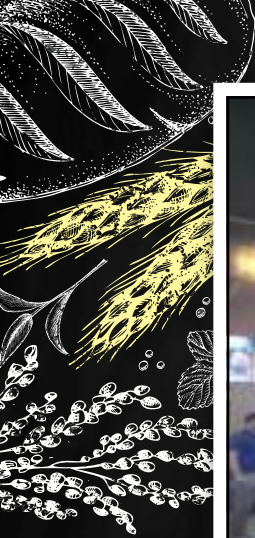
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941-329-1010

10719 Rodeo Drive, LWR  
941-907-0400

416276-1



## GROVE - RESTAURANT, PATIO & BALLROOM

Discover exceptional Contemporary American cuisine at GROVE. With a personal and authentic approach, GROVE showcases a diverse selection of house-made dishes using fresh seasonal ingredients. Experience the perfect harmony of refined flavors and approachability, complemented by carefully crafted cocktails. With inviting gathering spaces including a casual patio, spacious dining room, a lively, modern bar and intimate private rooms, GROVE provides the perfect fusion of sophistication and hospitality.

10670 Boardwalk Loop, Lakewood Ranch  
941.893.4321 | www.GroveLWR.com

412191-1

## KELLY'S

BOSTON'S LEGENDARY ROAST BEEF & SEAFOOD  
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## KELLY'S

For more than 70 years, Kelly's Roast Beef has been the staple of the North Shore of Boston, renowned for its thinly sliced "melt-in-your-mouth" roast-beef sandwiches and generous platters of New England seafood. Enjoy fried whole-bellied clams, lobster rolls, scallops, homemade clam chowder along with our traditional customer favorites. 100% of our menu can be made gluten free!

Open Every Day 11am-9pm  
Drive Thru Open

5407 University Pkwy, Sarasota, FL 34201  
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941.263.1911 | www.kellysroastbeef.com

412571-1





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Indulge in our mouthwatering sandwiches, vibrant fresh salads and comforting hearty soups. Order breakfast sandwiches all day and experience the warmth of homemade goodness with every bite!

Open Monday- Friday 10am - 4pm. Take out, indoor and outdoor dining available.

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**941-500-1082 | LakewoodRanchDeli.com**

428477-1



## MCGRATH'S KITCHEN & COCKTAILS

Come see what's hot out of the oven at the ALL NEW McGrath's Kitchen & Cocktails American grill! Take a bite out of the brand new menu full of mouthwatering entrees for the entire family to enjoy at an affordable price. Try one of our \$10 and under lunch specials, indulge in bottomless mimosas and Bloody Marys at Sunday Brunch or visit our website for other daily offers. With a full bar and live music on the weekends, fun is guaranteed. Visit our website for a full menu.

Monday-Thursday 11am-10pm

Friday 11am-11pm, Saturday 10am-5pm, Sunday Brunch 10am-3pm

**8110 Lakewood Main Street, Lakewood Ranch  
941-210-4398 | www.McGrathslwr.com**

416281-1



## STATION 400

Station 400 is your local family owned & operated breakfast & lunch restaurant. Offering chef inspired twists on your favorite brunch items. With the best local ingredients and always above & beyond service.

Specialty Mimosas, Seasonal Menu, GF & Vegan options.

Voted 2023 Best Local Breakfast Spot

**LWR Ranch  
8215 Lakewood Main St.**

**Downtown Sarasota  
400 N. Lemon Ave**

**www.Station400.com**

428393-1

DINING OUT



# *PARTING GLANCE*

Gordon Silver took this photo of  
a Southern magnolia in bloom.

# INTEGRITY • *Tenacity* • EXPERIENCE

Stacy is honored to be ranked among the top 1.5% of all Realtors® nationwide for the third year in a row and the **#1 individual agent in Lakewood Ranch in 2023**, while maintaining a consistent track record as a top performer in her office.

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- **Master Certified Negotiation Expert**
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