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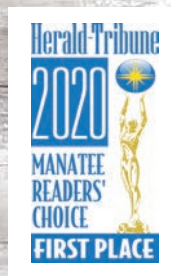
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You delivered groceries to those at risk, you donated masks, food, and artwork to LWR Medical Center, you painted your driveways and sidewalks, you supported LWR restaurants and businesses, you homeschooled your children, and you stayed home to help flatten the curve.

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Director, Community Relations



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CONTENTS

SUMMER 2020



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FEATURES

54 **ALL THE FIXINS**
The best joints to grab some barbecue and enjoy the taste of summer.

62 **PEACEFUL RETREAT**
A trip to see the way Florida was is closer than you think.

71 **PERSONAL SPACE**
Closets are more than just storage. They're sanctuaries.

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84



32



38



88

DEPARTMENTS

18 FROM THE EDITOR

25 BUZZ

Business leaders discuss their response to the pandemic, Center Point takes center stage for new development and expectant mothers get special treatment at local hospital.

38 CLASS ACT

Katherine Benoit knew she could do something to help frontline workers. Then she recruited an army of help.

42 CHARITY SNAPSHOT

Meals on Wheels Plus keeps the food flowing amidst increased need.

46 STYLE

Business casual shifts to just plain casual as work-from-home changes our wardrobe rules.

50 SCREEN TIME

Social distancing means events have gone online — but community continues.

71 HAVEN

Whether you want it to feel like a locker room or an upscale boutique, today's closets offer amenities as unique as their owners.

80 ART AND ABOUT

Got a little time on your hands? Here's a list of great reads, just in time for summer.

84 THE JOLLY RANCHER

Ranch Dad has turns his love of pies into his family's preoccupation.

88 RANCH SCENE

90 PARTING GLANCE



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LWR LIFE

LAKEWOOD RANCH AREA'S COMMUNITY, NATURE, STYLE

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Can I just get a hug?



Lakewood Ranch resident Katherine Benoit pulled together an army of volunteers to make gowns for front-line workers at Tidewell Hospice.

To be honest, I never thought I would have this sentiment about the formerly ubiquitous embrace. My husband is a hugger. Me? Not so much.

He goes in with arms spread wide, wrapping people in a warm envelope of chest and shoulders.



I stand next to him, giving an awkward smile and a little wave.

But right now, I would love to be able to go to an event — a real event, with *lots* of people — and hug someone I haven't seen for a while. I wouldn't feel self-conscious or self-doubting at all. In a world that isn't this one right now, I would love to wrap someone in a display of affection that says I missed you, and you matter, and I appreciate you.

One of the things I've learned during this strange time of social distancing and quarantines is that I've taken some things for granted. Little things. Things like getting to work shoulder-to-shoulder with my coworkers, talking about photo selection or layouts or grammar or heck, weekend plans.

Remember weekend plans? Things like chatting up strangers during a meal at the bar in our favorite restaurant, or going shopping just to walk around and look at things, or even spending a day at the beach. (We live so close! Who else never went to the beach but the second they closed them had an INSANE urge to go?)

One thing I haven't taken for granted is our community's response. My heart fills with pride as I hear stories of support, and love, and resilience and hope.

People have pitched in and stepped up in all kinds of ways. Take Katherine Benoit, for example (Page 38). Benoit came up with the idea of making reusable gowns for workers at Tidewell Hospice. Not only did she get to work sewing, but she also recruited 18 others to join her, sewing gowns out of bed sheets and whatever other fabric they could find. More than 100 gowns later, they're still humming, working relentlessly on creating another 200, each bearing a heart insignia to show it was made with love.

Or how about the community's Giving Challenge? Nearly 700 nonprofits

benefited from the 24 hours of online giving, but there at the top were two organizations dedicated to feeding those in our community who need it most. On Page 42, we share how Meals on Wheels Plus of Manatee has been navigating new rules and new realities as it works to continue feeding 618 seniors a week and meet an increased demand of more than 65% at the Food Bank of Manatee.

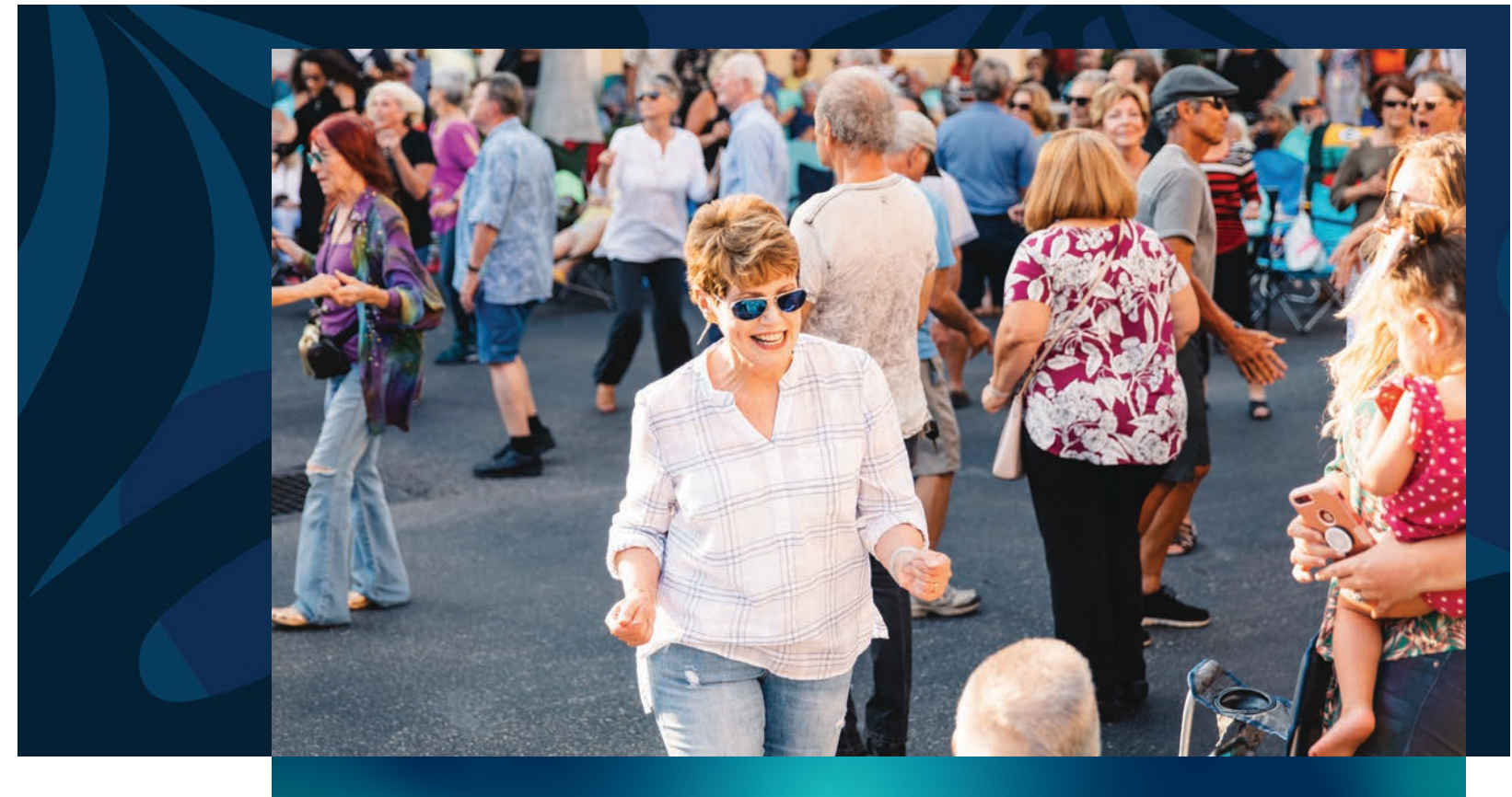
Or look at LWR Communities (Page 50). It would have been easier to simply cancel all its events, but Director of Community Relations Monaca Onstad and her team leaped into action to come up with virtual offerings to keep us all connected. Whether it's live music at a Sunday brunch event or a weekly meditation class, they've been working hard to keep us safe and sane — and together.

Someday soon, we will be able to enjoy all the things we love again, even if it's in a modified way. But once we do, let's not forget our gratitude for the little things.

Even hugs.

Kat Hughes
Executive Editor

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New planned development expands dining and retail options. **PAGE 28**

Changing Times

Business leaders discuss their strategies to survive the COVID-19 shutdown and their outlook for the recovery. BY RYAN KOHN

MOLLY JACKSON
UNIVERSITY PARK NEW BALANCE
CO-OWNER



Spreading the word about a new store location is hard enough under normal circumstances. In a pandemic? According to Molly Jackson, who owns the new University Park New Balance store with her husband, David, it has been one of the biggest challenges of her career.

Jackson says the biggest change has been going digital. Prior to the pandemic, the Jacksons' New Balance store, which moved to its current location across from University Town Center (8204 Tourist Center Drive) from the north side of University Park on Feb. 22, was all about the in-person experience. Sales people would help customers find the exact right shoe and fit, she says, while treating each one like a VIP. It was so central to the experience that customers could not purchase shoes from the store online, only reserve them for an in-store purchase.

Current circumstances being what they are, that strategy had to change. Jackson says she worked with New Balance to get an online store running through Locally.com. Now customers can purchase products online and pick them up curbside or have them delivered. Jackson says the University store was the first New Balance store in the U.S. to test the method. The entire process took less than a week. So far, she says, things have been running smoothly.

"The minute it went live, I was screaming about it to everyone I know," Jackson says.

On May 4, the physical store reopened with safeguards in place. Employees wear masks, and customers are offered them if they are not already wearing one. Employees will regularly have their temperature taken, and there will be signs on the floor to direct traffic and help with social distancing, similar to signs currently found in grocery stores.

Jackson says she is hopeful everything is back to normal for back-to-school sales. After all, everyone needs new shoes to show off to their friends, she says.

PAM CHARRON
REALTOR, BERKSHIRE HATHAWAY
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Realtor Pam Charron says she feels lucky in comparison to others. The pandemic has yet to seriously impact her business's finances, thanks to strong performances in January and February, but it has changed the way Charron operates day to day.

"Online communication is more prevalent than ever," Charron says. "Almost everything can be done remotely. FaceTime tours of houses and that kind of thing — that's not new, but it's being marketed differently and is a more popular option. I also don't have to go to closings or inspections. If someone does want to have an in-person showing, I will wear gloves and bring wipes to sanitize everything."

Charron says anything can happen in real estate, but for now, there's still a market for both buyers and sellers. It is three to six months from now that she is unsure about.

"I have had six customers from out of the state call me [the last week of April] and say, 'I will come down to look at properties when I can,'" Charron says. "Well, no one knows when it will be safe to do that. Until then, those customers are waiting it out. But the summer months tend to be slower, anyway. I think the biggest effect will be on people looking for houses that are more of a want than a need. We will likely see less of those."

Although Charron believes some good can come from lessons learned during the pandemic — she says she thinks video chat house tours will remain a popular option — she also hopes customers do not shy away from the in-person real estate experience completely. Agents can act as a guide to new cities and communities, she says. Her favorite part of the job is being that "area ambassador."

"I'm an optimistic person," Charron says. "I think we will see a strong return to normalcy soon."

KEITH PANDELOGLOU
EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR, LAKEWOOD
RANCH COMMUNITY ACTIVITIES



A world with no outdoor activities is a sad one for Keith Pandeloglou.

"Shutting everything down was, I think, tougher emotionally for me than for most people," Pandeloglou says. "In everything I do, I want to bring people together, and until it is safe,

we have to keep them apart."

Pandeloglou is the executive director of Lakewood Ranch Community Activities, which plans events for the people of the community to enjoy. Under normal circumstances, this means things like Music on Main, a monthly event where people enjoy live music while perusing vendor tents and eating food. Those aren't possible right now, and Pandeloglou says he is not sure when they will be.

In the interim, Pandeloglou has been moving as many events as possible to an online format. Lakewood Ranch's YouTube page has videos with tips on mindful meditation and general fitness, plus art project tutorials for kids. Pandeloglou says these videos are getting more views than they would get attendees in a live setting because people can watch them at their leisure. There is no pressure to be anywhere at a given time.

Pandeloglou says he does not believe getting back to what we considered normal in the past is possible, at least not for a long time, but getting back to a "new normal" is. That might mean having the tents at a Music on Main event spaced 10 feet apart instead of being next to one another. For Pandeloglou, it also means changing the definition of a successful event.

"We used to think a large clump of people meant things were going great," he says. "We're not going to have that now. People are going to continue self-policing themselves, I think. You might see a group of less than 10 standing together, but those groups will be spaced out. It will be a challenge, especially in those open-air places like Main Street, but I'm excited for people to be out on the streets again."

GREG CAMPBELL
EXECUTIVE CHEF,
GROVE RESTAURANT

Greg Campbell's mind was turning long before restaurants were shut down by Gov. Ron DeSantis on March 20.

Campbell is the executive chef and the director of operations at Lakewood Ranch's Grove restaurant on Main Street, as well as Bradenton's Pier 22 restaurant. Grove was voluntarily down to 50% dining capacity when the shutdown occurred. Campbell says he knew right away how the restaurant could survive the down time: by becoming something else entirely.



"I would go on grocery store runs and see that they were out of a lot of things," Campbell says. "No sanitizing wipes. No toilet paper. They were low on a lot of other essentials, and everyone was crowded together. It was a total debacle. I thought, 'We can provide groceries in a better way than this.'"

Because Grove has never offered delivery or even a takeout option, Campbell says, he thought the transition to the grocery store model would be the easiest path to success. His belief was proven correct on the operations side: It was as simple as taking food from one bag and putting it in a different bag and then putting that bag in someone's trunk. Customers didn't even have to roll down their windows, Campbell says. As of the last week of April, Grove was filling 60-80 of these orders per day.

The hardest part was creating a way for people to order their groceries online, something Grove did not have. Campbell's staff created a secondary website, accessible through GroveLWR.com, where people could do just that. Campbell says people worked 12 hours a day for three days to complete it as soon as possible.

"It's Amazon level," Campbell says. "It's awesome. They did great work."

Even though Grove opened back up to 25% indoor capacity May 4 and expanded its outdoor seating, as allowed by phase one of DeSantis' reopening plan, Campbell says it will continue fulfilling grocery orders plus other things it has tried, such as family-sized meals available for pickup, while still experimenting. Campbell says plans for cook-at-home meal kits and delivery service are in the works, and some of these ideas might continue long after the coronavirus is gone.

"It's in challenging times when you come up with potential new business plans," he says. "We are doing the best we can to find them and execute them."

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Courtesy photo
Center Point in Lakewood Ranch includes a medical office building, a 30,000-square-foot specialty grocer, a four-story hotel, four to five restaurants and 250,000 square feet of retail space.

Point Made

A 50-acre, \$50 million project is primed to turn what was only office and industrial space into a retail and restaurant destination.

BY MARK GORDON

Having overseen development of more than 7 million square feet of commercial space in seven states during his career, Brett Hutchens knows a lot of people in national development circles. When he steers the conversation to Lakewood Ranch, his home base at Cas-to Southeast Realty Services for at least the past decade, many of his contacts are surprised — pleasantly. Developers see the demographics, the income levels and the past three years of new-home growth in Lakewood Ranch, and “they are really impressed,” Hutchens says. “When you show them the metro studies, and then they get here, and you take them around, they often say they had no idea how big it is,” Hutchens adds. “It’s a market onto itself.” Hutchens will use those good vibes to his advantage and build upon them with the latest large-scale project for Lakewood Ranch, Center Point, a \$50 million project spread on some 50 acres east of the Lakewood Ranch Boulevard/University Parkway intersection. Plans include a 30,000-square-foot specialty grocer, a four-story hotel, four to five restaurants and 250,000 square feet of retail space. In addition, there’s a 73,000-square-foot medical

office building already under construction. Construction is ongoing, and parcels will likely begin opening later this year and into 2021. Center Point — which is near Water-side Place, another project under development that includes apartments, townhomes, shops, restaurants, office space and a theater — is a significant milestone for Lakewood Ranch. Notably, Center Point, south of University Parkway, is one of the first projects in the Sarasota County side of Lakewood Ranch that takes advantage of zoning overlay changes approved last August. The area, the Lakewood Ranch Corporate Park, had been zoned for office and industrial uses. Another key to Center Point is that it will utilize new roads, specifically the Fruitville Road extension and connection to Lakewood Ranch Boulevard, which opened earlier this year. That extension is projected to boost the traffic that passes nearby Center Point by 69%, from 13,000 cars to 22,000 cars a day. The road extension, Hutchens says, also “allows you to draw easily from the Founders Club and Laurel Oak,” a pair of luxury communities

Continued on Page 30

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East of the Lakewood Ranch Boulevard/University Parkway intersection, Center Point already has several committed tenants, including a second location of Owen's Fish Camp.

Continued from Page 28

south of Center Point.

Casto acquired the property from Lakewood Ranch developer Schroeder-Manatee Ranch. Hutchens says an idea of something like Center Point goes back several years, when he and SMR officials began a series of conversations about what would be the best fit there. “We both feel that this is the centerpiece of Waterside,” Hutchens says. “This deserves to be a special project.”

Several tenants have already publicly committed to the space, including the second Owen's Fish Camp, joining a sister location that opened in 2010 in Burns Court, just outside downtown Sarasota. On the medical side, 60% of the building was leased or under a letter of intent through early May. Signed tenants include Sarasota Interventional Radiology, which has committed to 20,000 square feet.

Through early May, Hutchens had letters of intent from several other

tenants, and although the coronavirus pandemic gave some pause, it wasn't a deal-breaker. “We've been talking to national and regional tenants,” he says, “and they tend to look past [things] like this.”

Owners of Owen's Fish Camp, the Caragiulo family, announced the Center Point location in early February and remain excited — and undaunted by the dramatic business slowdown caused by the pandemic. “We had looked at several places over the years, but nothing really panned out,” co-owner Paul Caragiulo says.

Other restaurants that got started in and around downtown Sarasota have opened Lakewood Ranch outposts or places nearby in recent years. That list includes Libby's and Nancy's Bar-B-Q, both in Lakewood Ranch shopping plazas, and Selva Grill, a downtown Sarasota restaurant that announced plans in December for a location in The West District at University Town Center.

Although Caragiulo says he and his brothers, who operate Owen's, wanted

to be in Lakewood Ranch, they didn't want cookie-cutter spot. Hutchens, a customer of the Burns Court Owen's and a Caragiulo family friend, brought the Center Point concept to them last year. Caragiulo says he and his partners discovered that Center Point “isn't a standard in-line shopping plaza” and offers the unique experience-based place they sought for Owen's.

“It took us a while, but it finally worked out,” Caragiulo says. “We are obviously very confident in Lakewood Ranch as a destination, as a place where people want to be.”

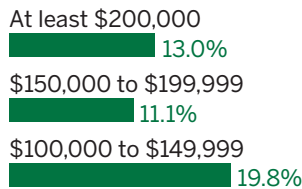
Casto and Hutchens have experience developing destination-like places in Lakewood Ranch: More than a decade ago, it developed the 158,000-square-foot Main Street at Lakewood Ranch. That history is another reason Hutchens, going back to positive reactions he gets when potential tenants discover Lakewood Ranch, says he and his team have a lot of pride in the development.

“We live here, and we have an office here,” Hutchens says. “We love it here.”

BY THE NUMBERS

(within 3 miles of Center Point)

Estimated household income:



Businesses: 2,201

Employees: 22,470

Estimated population: 25,545

People with a bachelor's degree: 28.3%

People with a graduate degree: 25.2%

Estimated household expenditure: \$938.8 million

Source: Casto Southeast Realty Services

“We are obviously very confident in Lakewood Ranch as a destination, as a place where people want to be. PAUL CARAGIULO, CO-OWNER, OWEN'S FISH CAMP

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Baby Blueprint

Moving into its second year, Lakewood Ranch Medical Center's Birth Designer Program proves successful in preparing patients for a positive childbirth experience.

BY RANDI DONAHUE

Rachel Schwegel recalls being discouraged from having a birth plan when she had her son, Liam, four years ago in a Michigan hospital. It was different in March, though, when she gave birth to her daughter, Lila, at Lakewood Ranch Medical Center. As a participant in the hospital's Birth Designer Program, Schwegel was encouraged to be prepared for anything.

"When you are in labor, you're not really in a mindset to be thinking through all the scenarios," Schwegel says. "So having the birth plan laid out ahead of time that says: 'If this happens, then this. If that happens, then that,' helps keep everything less stressful during the process."

The Birth Designer Program celebrated one year in May, having ushered more than 130 women through childbirth. All pregnant women intending to give birth at the facility have access to it.

Birth designer Chrissy Coney has been at the helm of the free, optional program since its inception and is responsible for all the educational tools patients receive. Her goal is to help women and their families quell the preconceived notion that childbirth is intimidating and instead feel comfortable and confident about what will take place. She becomes a trusted advocate for her patients by facilitating the skills and knowledge they need, so they are not just prepared but also have a positive outlook on what is to come.

"We want to get people away from thinking that it's a scary, painful experience," Coney says. "It can actually be really wonderful."

Coney meets with participating patients on their schedule during the later stages of the prenatal period. Using tools including PowerPoint presentations, she exposes patients to all that



Courtesy photo

As the birth designer, Chrissy Coney (center) has helped more than 130 women navigate the process of childbirth, including (left to right) Kyra and Jace Perry, Darcy and Kylo Jasper, Ally and Athena Sager and Katiria and Rocko Ocanas.

the hospital offers, from birthing balls to pre- and post-natal classes. During the in-depth meeting, each patient is asked to fill out a birth plan that can be referred to when the big day comes. Coney has seen patients anywhere from 24 weeks pregnant to full-term at 38 weeks.

"It was really good to sit down with Chrissy and go through all that and say: 'This is what I want. This is what I wouldn't like,' and for her to say, 'Here is what the hospital offers,'" Schwegel says.

For example, Coney connected Schwegel with a doula, a person who provides guidance and support throughout the pregnancy and childbirth process. It was something Schwegel had never considered before meeting with Coney.

"When patients come into the hospital to see me, many have never even been in a hospital before," Coney says. "Or if they've been to birthing classes, they've seen what the hospital looks like, but they still don't know what goes on in the labor room or about the experience of labor and delivery or even

what it's like to have a C-section."

Although Coney, as the birth designer, focuses on education and preparedness, her decade of experience as a labor and delivery nurse paired with what patients call a kind and caring nature play a unique role in the successful outcomes of the program.

"Going into it, I had no idea what to expect," says Danielle Delk, who had her first child in January at Lakewood Ranch Medical Center. "I was a little bit naive and didn't want to face what was truly to come."

The Birth Designer Program changed that for Delk, and she felt prepared when her son, Prescott, was born at 1:34 a.m. via an unplanned Cesarean section. Prescott was the first baby born in 2020 at Lakewood Ranch Medical Center. Coney was there at 7 a.m. to check on Delk and her baby and to present the family with a gift basket.

Although she was unable to be there during Delk's C-section, Coney says she does her best to check in on patients preceding such procedures and

Continued on page 34

ARE YOUR ASSETS PROTECTED DURING THIS PANDEMIC?

By Mark Clark, CFP®, CKA®



Photo Credit: John Cannon Homes

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Continued from page 32

is more than willing to hold a nervous patient's hand in the operating room.

"Just so that they have that extra support, and again they know me and my face," she says. "If it is something that is going to help my patient, I am going to do whatever I can for them."

The program has proved beneficial to hospital staff as well. Coney says educating patients ahead of time and having them fill out a birth plan enables the labor and delivery nurses to instantly tailor their care to that specific patient.

"I think it's critical for the medical staff to understand the needs of the patient and then the patient to understand the reasons behind things that otherwise you may not know if you were just doing internet research," Schwegel says.

Then if something unplanned comes up, as it did in Delk's case, both the patient and their care team are ready to tackle it with less uncertainty and as a team.

"Our patients come to understand what they are asking for, and they understand the reason why they are asking for it," Coney says.

Although one might think this is only geared toward new moms, Coney sees many who are new to the area or had a less-than-ideal experience with their first birth.

"I still get second- and third-time moms coming through because maybe their first experiences weren't the best," Coney says. "We'll talk about what happened and, assuming things go more smoothly this time, what they can expect when they come in here."

Birth designer care follows patients through pregnancy and delivery but also offers care postpartum. Coney gives her personal phone number to patients as well as permission to contact her any time after they leave the hospital. She checks in on all of her postpartum patients as well to see if there is anything they might need in the way of support. As a lactation specialist, she can also assist with any breastfeeding challenges patients might be facing.

"It wasn't like it was the first meeting, and that was it," Delk says. "It was a continuous help. Yes, she has the title of birth designer and this position, but she's really a nurse at heart."

Below: Rachel Schwegel had daughter, Lila, in March at Lakewood Ranch Medical Center. Her son, Liam, 4, was born at a hospital in Michigan.



Above: Danielle Delk had son Prescott via C-section Jan. 1. Prescott was the first baby of the year born at Lakewood Ranch Medical Center.



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Community shows
its love in pandemic
response.

PAGE 38

PULSE
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Katherine Benoit started making masks before she realized isolation gowns would be more prudent. Courtesy photos

Threads of Hope

When Katherine Benoit saw a need for PPE in the community, she jumped into action — and brought others along with her.

BY RYAN KOHN

Standing outside the University Park Joann Fabric and Craft store at 9 a.m., an hour before the store opened, Lakewood Ranch’s Katherine Benoit focused on her sole objective: bias tape. Benoit, 70, was sixth in line, which meant she had a good chance to grab all of it if she hurried. When the clock struck 10 a.m., Benoit raced to the correct section and grabbed the lot of it. It came out to \$256 at the register, where, after paying, Benoit asked the checkout worker on a whim if she could grab any bias tape available in the checkout counters’ drawers. The

worker acquiesced, to Benoit’s delight. She promised her it was going to a good cause. Benoit, an active member of the community, needed the bias tape for her latest venture. She was, and is, making garments for Tidewell Hospice workers during the coronavirus pandemic, and the tape simplifies and speeds up the process of sewing the gowns. At first, Benoit says, she focused on masks, but since the end of March, Benoit has been making isolation gowns, which cover the majority of medical workers’ skin, creating a barrier between themselves and their

Continued on Page 40

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patients. Benoit says she was informed that gowns were in higher demand because everyone started making masks at the same time.

Not everyone contributing to the cause has been as committed as Benoit, though. Her garment-making journey began with an urge to help and an open call to her friends March 21 asking for sheet donations. When Benoit received 500 sheets in response — a number she says still shocks her — she was faced with two options. She could work alone until she got tired of it, letting many of the donations go to waste, or she could rally the troops.

Benoit chose the latter, becoming less of a sewing machine and more of an armchair general by roping approximately 20 of her friends into the operation and giving each one a specific job to do in their homes. Some cut out the patterns. Others sewed material together. Still others used serge sewing machines for a finishing touch or volunteered to drive the gowns from one operation to the next.

Benoit, the Don Corleone of isolation gowns sewn, coordinated these efforts and did the little things, such as washing the gowns before packaging them and stitching a heart symbol on the chest to give each gown a signature touch.

Thus far, Benoit estimates that the group has completed 100 gowns, with 100-200 more in the pipeline. Each gown can be washed, which makes them invaluable to workers who had previously been forced to wash disposable gowns, limiting their effectiveness.

“Everyone wants to help somehow during this time, but some people do not know how,” Benoit says. “I happen to be at home, isolated, and I sew on my own anyway. I have an addition on my house that is only a sewing room. I didn’t plan on doing all of this at the beginning. I thought I might be in over my head, but it turns out it has been nice to be a part of something bigger than myself.”

Bernadette Meisenheimer, a friend of Benoit’s, has been helping her with sewing and has even recruited a few people to the team herself. Meisenheimer laughs and says she has 15 gowns hanging on her closet door because of Benoit. She is not the least bit surprised it is her friend spearheading the grassroots movement.



The team that has worked on the gowns. **Back:** Mary Alice Czerwonka, Brenda Deona, Joanne Brennan, Chris Aster, John Brooks, Liz Wolff, Sharon Mays. **Middle:** Shelia White, Beth Salimbene, Katherine Benoit, Bernadette Meisenheimer, Connie Kravitz, Jane Imperial, Kate Haase. **Front:** Ellen Cunningham, Margaret Hayes, Diane Laybourn. **Not pictured:** Susan Charnas and Donna Quinn.



The isolation gowns Benoit and her team make feature custom heart insignias on the chest.

“Katherine loves being involved,” Meisenheimer says. “She is always doing something, whether it is making jewelry or being on the board of the [Sarasota] Opera. She puts things on her own shoulders and carries them. She is intelligent and organized. I cannot think of a more perfect person to be putting this together.”

At the onset of the journey, Benoit says she was met with resistance from some people she queried about the gown-making process. One of her acquaintances, a nurse, told Benoit she did not see the point in making gowns at all. Hospice workers don’t need them, she says, and they are not

that effective anyway. Benoit says one phone call to Tidewell Hospice proved the nurse’s theory incorrect, but being challenged like that gave her even more motivation to do whatever she could to help.

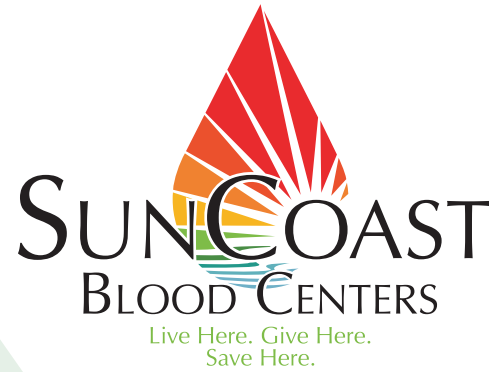
She does not plan on stopping any time soon.

“I am having so much fun,” Benoit says. “I get to work with friends and with people I have never met before. People will come pick up gowns in their golf carts, and I’ll chat with them from a distance. It’s nice.”

“The best thing, though, is seeing the gowns being put to good use.”

“
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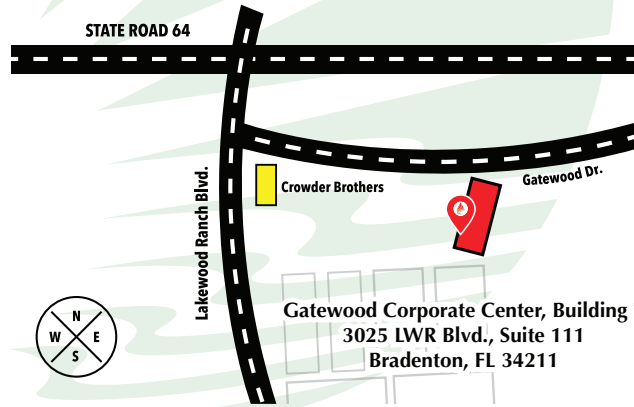
KATHERINE BENOIT



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charity snapshot

More Than a Meal

As Meals on Wheels Plus continues its services amid a pandemic, it relies on efficiency and the generosity of the community.



Photos by Ryan Kohn
Above: Meals on Wheels Plus staff member Terri Hill stacks cans of tomatoes. The organization is asking for all types of foods as donations, but especially nonperishables.



Right: Meals on Wheels Plus staff member Barbara Folds packs meals into a van for delivery. The organization has 618 customers it delivers meals to each week.

BY RYAN KOHN

On a normal day, the campuses of Meals on Wheels Plus of Manatee welcome at least 100 volunteers, plus staff, completing all sorts of jobs. Some help greet people at the nonprofit’s dining centers. Some sort and stock food at its Food Bank of Manatee, and some are out in their cars, making their rounds to check in and deliver meals to customers across the county.

Of course, there are no more normal days.

As of the first week of May, the workforce has been reduced to 25 staff members and a handful of volunteers. A normally bustling food bank — the only food bank in the county — is eerily quiet, limited to 10 people inside at a time, clad in masks and gloves as they happily work among the warehouse’s shelves. When the weather allows, a few more volunteers can sort food outside, helping serve the increased demand caused by the coronavirus.

As CDC and state rules keep changing, Meals on Wheels Plus has changed with them, all while maintaining its focus on completing its mission: to serve and feed customers while staying healthy.

This is no simple task given the breadth and depth of the organization’s services. In some cases, such as with its dining centers, its whole purpose is to fight social isolation by bringing people together. In others, such as its meal delivery services, new protocols abound to ensure both volunteers and customers can stay safe while continuing to make these vital

Continued on Page 44



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connections. Gone are the days of volunteers or staff members entering customers' homes to have a chat and drop off meals. Instead, customers are asked to leave a chair or a stool outside their front door, where a staff member will leave the customers' food. Its volunteer team has been restricted, with screening protocols in place to ensure all who serve are well.

"It's tough for everyone because a lot of our customers have been with us for years," says Amy Towery, the organization's vice president of development. "They form bonds with our staff members and get to know each other. Not only do we deliver them meals, but we check on them and make sure they are doing OK. For some of them, our staff members are the only people they talk to all day. We did not want to take that away, but we did have to tell everyone not to give any hugs for a while. It's hard but necessary."

Customers and delivery people can still talk at a safe distance, Towery says, though the organization has changed its delivery pattern. Instead of delivering meals five days a week, it will deliver on Tuesdays and Fridays, each time giving enough food to last until the next delivery. This cuts down on potential virus transmissions while also, as a silver lining, allowing customers more choice in which meals they eat on which days.

AMPLE NEED

Since the pandemic began in the U.S., food withdrawals at the food bank are up 65% from the same period in 2019, Towery says. The food bank is independent and relies solely on the community. Thanks to everyone's generosity, it has been able to keep up with demand. The Giving Challenge on April 28-29 provided a particularly bright spot for the organization. Out of 687 participating organizations, it finished second in overall donations received during the 24-hour online fundraiser, with \$295,320.

The Giving Challenge provided a much-needed boost, Towery says, but the need remains sobering. For example, the organization provides home delivery meals to 618 seniors. That amounts to 4,200 meals, at an average cost of \$7 — which adds up to about \$29,400 per week.



Clockwise from top left: Volunteers help pack, though Meals on Wheels Plus is not allowing more than 10 people in the food bank at one time, including staff. Kathie Coles would pack food while her husband, Bill, moved the boxes. Coles, a Bayside volunteer, wears gloves and a face mask while working.

Without a crystal ball to see what the landscape will look like in six months, the organization is planning best it can and soliciting donations nonstop, both for food and cash. From past experiences, Meals on Wheels Plus knows the summer months are when donations crater and when demands peak because kids are missing meals at school. If everyday life is close to normal by that point, Towery says she hopes people do not forget about the charity because those kids will still need food. Nonperishables are espe-

cially helpful. "We will accept whatever people can give, though," Towery says. "Any food, we will put it to good use."

MAKING IT STRETCH

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style

Comfort Clothes

The new dress code? We're not sure, but one thing we do know: Athletic clothes aren't just for working out anymore.

BY HARRY SAYER

Something that has been obvious during the pandemic and ensuing shutdown is that our dress code has changed. As more businesses have adopted a work-from-home approach, workers have slowly shifted from business casual to just plain casual. We're not saying you should look scruffy all the time, but comfortable clothes have become more and more popular, even pre-pandemic. Here are a few picks from Lakewood Ranch-area stores that will have you feeling comfy and ready to tackle your day — no matter where you're going (or not).

Bows & Arrows Boutique
5275 University Parkway, Suite 133

Bows & Arrows Boutique in the University Town Center area doesn't specialize in athletic wear — though it does have plenty of college game day shirts that are always useful for relaxing or exercising — but has plenty of relaxed clothing that goes well with yoga pants and leggings. Some also have a distinctly beachy feel, perfect as we head into the summer.



New Balance
315 N. Cattlemen Road

This New Balance shop, owned by local Molly Jackson, has a number of workout clothes and sneakers that can make those daily walk-breaks with the dog easier. If you've already checked out the store's sneakers and gym shirts, try out one of its stylish hats or visors. We're in Florida, and it's just going to get hotter.



Continued on Page 48

Continued from Page 47

barre3
8141 Lakewood Main St.

The Barre3 exercise center has a number of workout tanks, leggings, yoga pants, water bottles and more that can be good for a workout or just as good while relaxing at home. Many of the workout shirts and tanks have a quick-drying fabric to avoid being sweaty and damp all day.

"A lot of times, I go from the studio to pick up my kids and then Publix," owner Nikki Roenicke said. "I'm constantly running errands. We want something that can go from studio to street."

She especially recommends the center's signature high-waisted leggings, which are made from recycled materials.



DIY High Shine Leggings
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Spiritual Gangster Top
\$59

barre3 Signature Leggings
\$88

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Virtually Social

When the coronavirus outbreak canceled events, LWR Communities got to work to keep the community connected online.

BY PAM EUBANKS

Monaca Onstad, LWR Communities' director of community relations, remembers the date everything began to change.

It was March 13, and concerns about the novel coronavirus had begun taking over news outlets and inciting a sense of panic within the community, as well as the nation at large.

Lakewood Ranch is known for its social calendar of events — whether its live monthly Music on Main concerts at Main Street Lakewood Ranch or its farmers market during the fall and winter months.

But almost overnight, socializing had quickly become taboo.

“We started talking about canceling events,” Onstad says. “It was a different time for all of us — the community as a whole. We’re just so used to having social activities, this time to connect.”

But social distancing was about to become mandated — the new “normal.”

And so the pivot began. Instead of simply putting life on hold, Onstad challenged her team to think creatively. What existing partnerships could they leverage? Which partners would need support? How could they create a sense of “normalcy” for residents?

“That was our mission within the time frame of COVID-19 — let’s do what we can,” Onstad says.

The trend toward virtual began. LWR Communities partnered with organizations including Brain Health Initiative to offer virtual “meditation moments” Tuesday mornings and with Anchor Fitness & Performance for “Fit Tip Fridays.”

It even added a Sunday brunch with



live music and shifted new resident orientation meetings to a virtual format. A television partnership with WFLA turned into a live Facebook event.

“It’s about being in the same space, all seeing each other on the same screen,” Onstad says of socializing virtually.

Onstad says the results have been solid, the reach of its Facebook posts up 53%. As of May 4, about 150,000 people had participated in 35 virtual

events hosted.

Of those, about 70% of viewers are logging in from Florida.

Onstad says the programs are geared toward Lakewood Ranch residents, but anyone is welcome to participate. There are still a wide variety of offerings.

On May 5, Lakewood Ranch hosted a Cinco de Mayo event through its

Courtesy photo
Lakewood Ranch’s Jenn Lockwood and other players of virtual cornhole use two cameras to showcase their turn. One camera focuses on the throw, and the other focuses on where the beanbag lands.

Continued on Page 52

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Continued from Page 50

Facebook page. MVP Sports and Social, a partner organization, hosted a virtual happy hour through Zoom. Separately, guests could watch Facebook livestreams for a cocktail-making demonstration and then live music by Tampa-based band La Lucha, which was originally slated to play for the May Music on Main concert that had been canceled.

On Wednesday nights, Ranch Nites Live replaced the traditional Ranch Nites held at the Sarasota Polo Club. Instead of listening to live music and eating from food trucks stationed at the Sarasota Polo Club, participants were encouraged to get takeout from a local restaurant as they listened to live music virtually.

“We tried our best to be able to do things like that to bring together all the elements of something like Ranch Nites into your own home,” Onstad says.

Onstad commended the creativity of MVP Sports and Social Founder Chris McComas, who found a way to have people play cornhole virtually.

McComas says players use their cellphones and a laptop, both logged into a Zoom meeting, to show themselves throwing a shot as well as where their beanbag lands. McComas moderates, so players each take a turn. More than 60 people participated in a cornhole event.

He also had more than 260 people participate in his Quarantine Cup, a series of events each week where people can earn points by participating and winning — all after just one Facebook post and an e-blast.

“I feel that’s a pretty telling sign,” McComas says. “That tells you people still want their social life.”

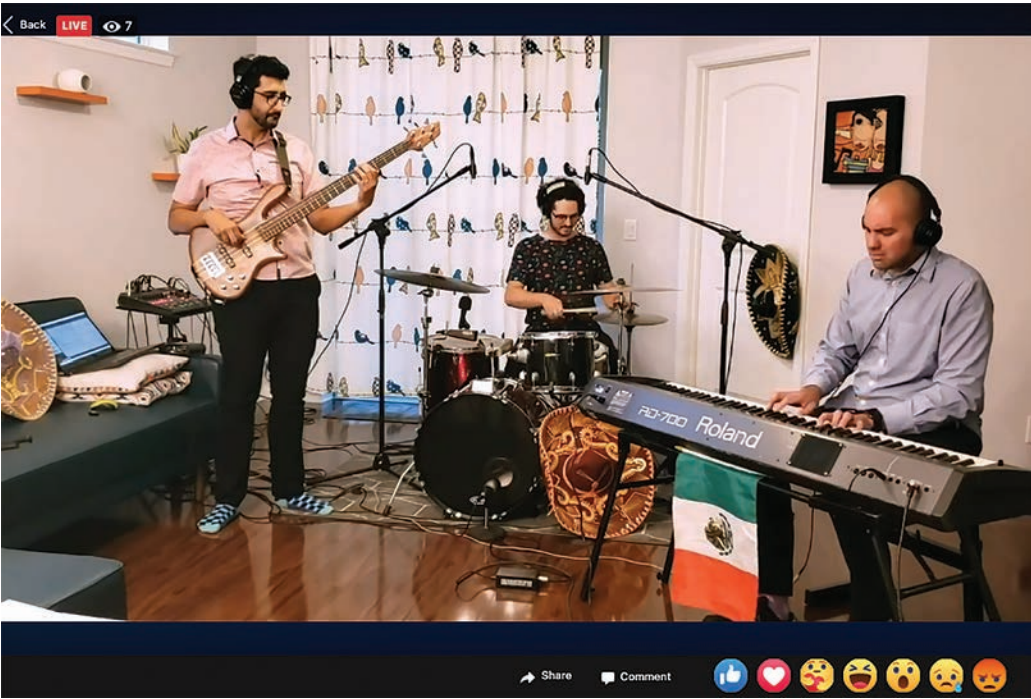
Events ranged from a hot dog eating contest to trivia and Family Feud.

Onstad says virtual programming isn’t as easy as one might think. It’s challenging to make sure clips are produced correctly and that there are no glitches when events go live. Even simple things like a countdown timer have to be programmed.

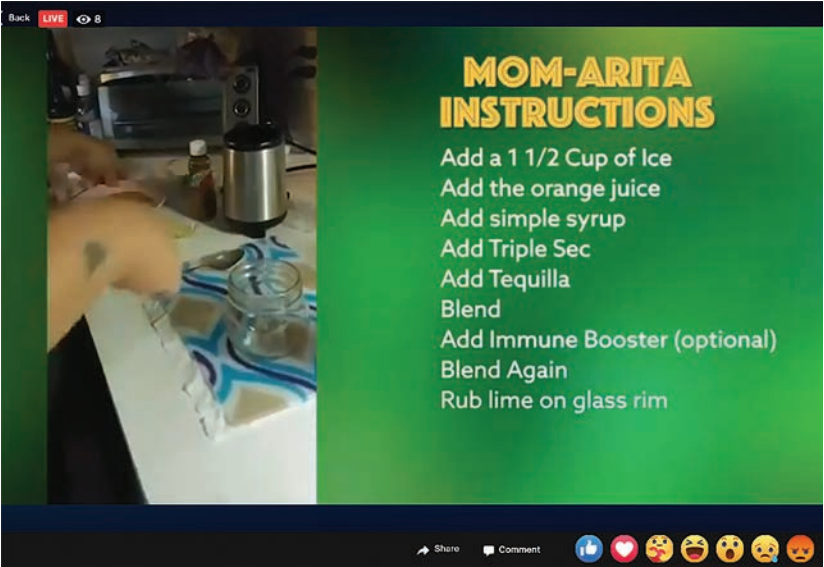
Onstad herself had to increase her Wi-Fi speed at home to make sure there would be no hiccups when it came time for events to go live.

“There’s so many more things that could go wrong,” she says.

It’s still too early to tell how long



La Lucha was scheduled to play at Main Street at Lakewood Ranch’s May Music on Main concert. Because it was canceled, LWR Communities had the band play live virtually for the May 5 Cinco de Mayo celebration.



During LWR Communities’ Cinco de Mayo event May 5, those who logged onto the Facebook livestream started the evening with a cocktail-making demonstration.

Lakewood Ranch will continue with virtual programming, Onstad says, but no live events currently are planned for summer.

For now, she’s envisioning that virtual events might continue as part of Lakewood Ranch’s regular lineup,

though maybe not with the same frequency as social distancing guidelines are lessened.

“It’s opened up a lot of possibilities,” she says.

WHAT’S HAPPENING?
To see virtual events happening in Lakewood Ranch this summer, visit the events calendar at LakewoodRanch.com.

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Smokin' Summer Spots

LWR Life contributor Shellie Terry shares the secrets to finding the best barbecue in town.



What goes better with summer than a barbecue? I'll wait. That's right — there's nothing that caps off a day by the pool or at the beach or that rings in the Fourth of July quite like some finger-licking, saucy chicken or fall-off-the-bone smoked ribs. But if slaving over a hot grill in the middle of a Florida summer sounds like torture, no need to worry. Several East County joints are sweating over the smokers for you, and they are definitely bringing the barbecue goods. We found five of the best authentically smoked and grilled options, plus all the bonuses that make a barbecue spot special: the technique, the atmosphere and, of course, the delicious side dishes.

As of publication, all locations listed in this article were open and serving take-out. Please check websites or call for the most up-to-date information.



Owners Jarrett and Donna James

Party in the Front, Smoking Business in the Back

Everything about the Hickory Hollow look is kitschy — from the year-round Christmas decorations to the portly pink pig sculpture greeting customers from the road. But when it comes to the menu, things get serious. From smoked turkey to char-grilled pork shanks to Carolina-style barbecue, the Hollow staff, led by second-generation owner Jarrett James, is cooking up great hickory-smoked flavors around the clock. “All of our processes are low and slow,” says James, who sources his hickory wood chips from Virginia. Although the Hollow's traditional barbecue sauce is tomato-based, it's the North Carolina vinegar-based sauce that stands out. “If you like salt-and-vinegar potato chips, this is what you want,” James says. Plentiful options fill the menu, from seafood to sirloin, and the locally sourced veggie favorites, including corn pudding and squash-and-cheese casserole, complete the unmatched Hickory Hollow experience.

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HickoryHollowBBQ.com, 941-722-3932

Cook It Slow, Serve It Fast

★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★
 A smoke signal rises from the back of C&K Smoke House BBQ in Parrish to let you know you've arrived, and this is the real deal. Carl and Kimberly Rhodes (the C&K) got their start in the meat-smoking restaurant business in 2003 after Carl, a former pastor, got bored with retirement. The couple chose the barbecue path to bring some much-needed home-style cooking to the area. They slow smoke their meats — chicken, ribs, pork and brisket — over oak and citrus wood with a dry rub of mixed seasonings. The meats are served minutes after customers place their orders, with a choice of sauces presented on the side. The result is full-flavored, moist meat across the board. "It's a flavorful, mouth-watering, lip-smacking experience," Carl Rhodes says. Made only better when you add the crave-worthy, buttery garlic potatoes, we say.



C&K Smoke House BBQ, 12119 U.S. Highway 301 N., Parrish, CKSmokeHouseBBQ.com, 941-776-1440

Carl and Kimberly Rhodes

A Master Class in Meats & Sides

★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★
 Don't let the humble food truck/trailer on the roadside fool you — Alday's is a powerhouse party caterer throughout the region, fronted by its two walk-up locations, one on Bahia Vista Street in Sarasota and the other on Highway 64. Owners Jeff and Lisa Alday opt not to baste the oak-smoked meats, which include tender brisket, juicy half chicken and salmon. Instead, tangy mustard and sweet and mild sauces are offered in do-it-yourself squirt bottles. Alday's has also mastered tastes and textures throughout its sides. Green beans are perfectly boiled soft and paired with the snap of still-crisp white onion, and potatoes are expertly chunked in a creamy salad. But stay till the end, folks, for the banana pudding. It's made with sweetened condensed milk, Jeff Alday says, plus a secret ingredient: "It's sour cream," he half-whispers with a chuckle. We're not going to argue. Just keep it coming.

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Steve Stottlemeyer

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Across from an RV park behind a gas station and under a Tiki hut is where you'll find some of the best brisket around at Stottlemeyer's Smokehouse. Sounds about right for hosting an Old Florida shindig. Five years ago, Steve Stottlemeyer doubled down on his Texaco station, widely known for its delectable fried chicken. The addition of the pecan hardwood smoker and open-air restaurant has created the ideal spot for a family meal or some late-night boogie with the top local bands, including One Night Rodeo and Kettle of Fish. We must insist that you start your meal with an original: the cornbread smokestack. The hands-down best cornbread around is topped with pulled pork or beef brisket, remoulade, barbecue sauce and coleslaw. You could begin and end the night right there, but Stottlemeyer's rounds out its menu with salads, chicken, fish, pizza, tacos and more.

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Paddling in Peace

Think Gulf Coast beaches are your only waterfront respite?
in time, and experience the unspoiled Florida wilderness

Think again. Take a quick drive east for a trip back
along the waters of Peace River. BY RANDI DONAHUE

Lined with cypress knees and swathed in Spanish moss, Peace River is a freshwater river that ultimately flows into Charlotte Harbor, the second largest estuary in Florida.



All ages can delight in the hunt for shark teeth and fossils. Find spots that offer a loose graveling bottom, scoop them with a colander or shovel, and dump them out on shore to sift through and spot the treasure.

There's a time machine that meanders through Southwest Florida

about an hour from the white sand beaches of Siesta, Lido and Longboat keys. Spanish conquistadors called it Rio de la Paz, or River of Peace. The Seminole Indians referred to it as Talakchopcohatchee, or River of Long Peas — courtesy of the wild peas that grew upon its banks. Throughout Florida's history, Peace River has supported the indigenous people and settlers who found solace in and among its presence.

As a second-generation Florida native and avid nature lover, my goal was to do the same with a day spent paddling a stretch of Peace River. My family happily came along for the journey.

Our daylong canoe trip started where many do — at the end. Although there is access at any of the public boat ramps or parks along the river — from Polk County southwest for 106 miles to Charlotte — the historical rancher town of Arcadia is a quick jaunt from Sarasota and Manatee counties. Canoe Outpost-Peace River was our chosen spot to park our cars and rent canoes. The riverside outfitter celebrated its 50th anniversary last year and is the perfect spot to garner gear and information needed for a successful trip.

Knowing what shark-teeth treasure awaited our discovery, we were armed with shovels, buckets, colanders and sifters. After we signed a few papers, outpost staff hauled us and our canoes upriver to the drop-in point for the Oak Hill run, considered a short, half-day run.

As quickly as our canoes were offloaded and put in the river, we loaded them up with our belongings, including life vests, sunscreen, coolers — even the golden retriever. Off we went.

We spent less than 10 minutes paddling before we found a great spot to beach our canoes and start panning for treasure. A destination spot for novice and expert fossil hunters, the river itself is a history lesson about how the Sunshine State was once wholly submerged and traversed by prehistoric creatures, including sharks.

After 30 minutes of sifting, our bucket bottoms were lined with shark teeth. We had happy kids and were ready to journey onto the next spot. The Oak Hill run is estimated to be about 1.5 to two hours of paddling. Avoiding a return to reality, we took our time on our trip. We often stopped along the way for riverfront snacks and gravel bottom sifting, and we decided to linger on one stretch that offered the kids rides on a mini rapid. It would shoot them 50 feet down the river, and then they would put their feet down, walk back to the start and do it again and again.

Come late afternoon, knowing we still had more river to cover, we decided to put the time in paddling and take in all the nature that abounds along the banks. It became clear that it's not necessary to be in search of archeological treasures to relish the unspoiled beauty Peace River offers.

We had started our journey around 10 a.m. and pulled off the river at the outpost close to 5 p.m.

With rested souls, buckets of shark teeth, tired kids and slight sunburns, we slowly walked back to our cars, collectively planning our next trip back in time.

See the following pages for more pictures and tips to plan a trip of your own.

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TRIP TIPS

- 1 Check the water levels before you go. Lower water levels mean better fossil finding.
- 2 Do not bring glass. It's not allowed.
- 3 Do not leave trash behind. Everything you bring must leave with you.
- 4 Bring plenty of snacks and water. Although shade can be found, on a sunny day, the paddle gets hot.
- 5 Do not feed the wildlife.
- 6 Pay attention to private property signs.
- 7 Water shoes aren't necessary, but they are recommended.
- 8 Wear bathing suits, and leave a change of clothes in your car. The outpost offers a place to rinse and change when you return.



Clockwise from top left: In the spring months, the river pace is especially slow with lower water levels that kids and adults alike will enjoy for a leisurely paddle. Shark teeth abound along the bottom of Peace River as little reminders of a Florida once submerged. Although it can be an intimidating sight for many first-timers, alligator attacks are rare on Peace River; rivergoers should always practice caution and never feed or taunt wildlife. Flowers are a common sighting along the banks of Peace River, home to thousands of species of flora and fauna. Peace River has some areas where visitors of all ages will delight in short lazy river rides. In addition to those sifting for treasures, paddlers are likely to see alligators, turtles and plenty of birds along the way.

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Trent Anthony (left) is the general manager at Canoe Outpost in Arcadia. Anthony grew up paddling Peace River waters, and his mom, Becky Bragg, became the owner of Canoe Outpost in 2001. The outpost was established 50 years ago and offers several options for any level of paddler.

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HAVEN

SPOTLIGHTING LIFE ON THE RANCH



What's hiding in the closet?
A wealth of possibilities.
PAGE 72



HERS

The closet spaces, such as this women's closet in the Korina model by John Cannon, have become extensions of living space.

Photos by Jay Heater

ON DISPLAY

Modern-day custom
closets shift from a place of
storage to a living space.

BY JAY HEATER

T

The tour of the Lakewood Ranch home was complete, and the newly convinced buyers were ready to sit down with builder John Cannon himself and members of his staff to talk about construction at The Lake Club.

Considering that the 4,536-square-foot Korina model is a \$2.75 million custom home that can be altered by Lakewood Ranch-based John Cannon Homes to meet the buyers' dream of the perfect dwelling, a lot has to be discussed.

But first, Cannon asks what he has learned is a telling question: "How many pairs of shoes do you have?"

Continued on Page 74

Continued from Page 73

This is not an Imelda Marcos-inspired joke. Perhaps the buyers don't have 3,000 pairs of shoes like the former first lady of the Philippines, but luxury buyers often do have 100 pairs, or 200 or more. Knowing how essential a closet is to the client can be a key clue to unlocking expectations surrounding a space that can range from purely functional to downright fancy.

"If you understand how many pairs of shoes someone has, it tells you how important a closet is going to be right off the bat," Cannon says.

The closets of yore have quickly evolved into important elements of a custom design. Where most houses used to feature reach-in closets throughout, with walk-in closets reserved for the master bedroom, the new mark of luxury is walk-in closets in guest bedrooms and master bedrooms sporting palatial areas of closet comfort.

Over the past 20 years, closets have grown from a place where you store things to an extension of living space.



HIS

John Cannon designed this Korina model men's closet to create the ambiance of a luxurious locker room.



The sink area in this Korina model by John Cannon flows right into the closet.

Instead of a place for clothes, they now mimic high-end retail stores, including custom shelving to display handbags, trays and shelves for jewelry and organization schemes that would make Marie Kondo proud. They have become a place of sanctuary with mirrors, makeup stations, chairs for lounging and even chandeliers.

Aside from growing in stature and style, the intimate nature of closets has led to an intense level of personalization for their owners.

One solution that Kathy Cioffi, the vice president of design for Lakewood Ranch's Neal Communities, has seen is the addition of his-and-her closets to keep everything personalized to each partner's wishes.

"Men and women have different needs," she says.

And the personalization doesn't end there. Closets with coffee makers, kitchenettes, center islands for jewelry, even racks for bicycles — Cioffi says whatever clients can dream, they can do, all in the space of a few hundred

Continued on Page 76



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Continued from Page 75

square feet, assuming they have some cash to devote to the effort.

For example, the “Her” closet, as designed in Cannon’s Korina model, is 194 square feet and costs approximately \$175 per square foot. The “His” closet is 85 square feet and costs about \$235 per square foot. Details and customizations go up from there.

Those custom touches can include everything from specialty shelves to interesting cabinet pulls, fit for a luxury store. In the current design trend of modern and clean lines, designers use clothing and accessories as decor. Rather than just a place to store

a wardrobe, now closets are places to display one’s wardrobe.

“Sometimes they just want glass doors to see their Gucci purse and feel good about it,” Cannon says.

Lisa Nopper, the co-owner and head designer of Divine Interiors Group of Lakewood Ranch, says closet design goes beyond a room with racks and drawers; they are an extension of the master bedroom, a private retreat.

“Closets have become true dressing spaces,” Nopper says. “They have benches, so you can sit down, and islands in the middle. They are more decorated. I saw a wallpapered closet once ... That was kind of silly.”

“Closets have become true dressing spaces. They have benches, so you can sit down, and islands in the middle. They are more decorated.”

LISA NOPPER, DIVINE INTERIORS GROUP OF LAKEWOOD RANCH



Neal Communities offers a variety of models for homeowners who want to showcase, rather than just store, their clothing and accessories using compartments.

They can also be places of beauty. “One of our clients probably spent \$100,000 on her closet, down to the beautiful glass doors,” Nopper says. “All the pulls, or handles, were crystal. It was an extension of the master suite ... You want to feel good about your space.”

FORM FOLLOWS FUNCTION

As Cannon’s closet designs expanded, he started to consider what he would like to see in a closet. He thought, why not a little chair? He thought about a place where he could sit down and

Continued on Page 78



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Continued from Page 76

smoke a cigar, and that means ventilation. He thought about a locker room feel from a country club.

Over the years, he has built closets with secret rooms, safe rooms and motorized racks that move up and down or rotate. He has seen those who design kitchens begin to lay out closet spaces because it was deemed just as important.

As closet size has grown, Cannon says the square footage has come off other spaces, such as formal dining rooms. Open floor plans have replaced the need for large formal dining spaces. That space has gone into the master bedroom closet.

“The use of materials, the height of the ceiling — there are so many hours put in to create what we are talking about,” Cannon says.

What about his own master bedroom closet?

“I have a nice arrangement,” he says with a laugh. “And I am able to see my two pairs of jeans.”



From cosmetics to suitcases, closets are about much more than clothes. This one is in the Cortina model by Neal Communities.



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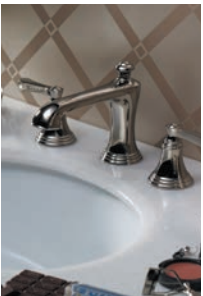
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art and about Binging on Books

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SU BYRON
CONTRIBUTOR

Before the pandemic, sensory overload was the new normal. Smartphones and computers plugged us into a global communications network that bombarded us with instant answers — and instant questions, usually work-related. That network is still in place, but many of its users are now stuck at home. That has unintended consequences. For the new wave of shut-ins, it's a lot like a meditative retreat. Once the urgency is gone, the mind slows down. Fractured attention spans come back into focus. After years of multitasking, there's now time to think. There's even time to read. Netflix and Hulu are still just a click away. But try reading instead. After all, you've got the time.

Here are a few great books to get you started.

Medicine for the Mind

Tara Brach is a psychologist, author and meditation teacher. Her teachings blend Western psychology and Eastern spiritual practices. Brach's latest book, **"Radical Compassion,"** explores the concept of RAIN, a tool for practicing mindfulness and compassion using four steps: recognize, allow, investigate and nurture. Her gentle practice unplugs old patterns and opens you up to the beauty of the now.

Alison Hawthorne Deming and Laurret Savoy's **"The Colors of Nature"** is a savvy anthology of multicultural, environmental literature. Readers get a glimpse of the natural world through the eyes of more than 30 contributors exploring the intersection of cultural diversity and ecological awareness.

Continued on Page 82



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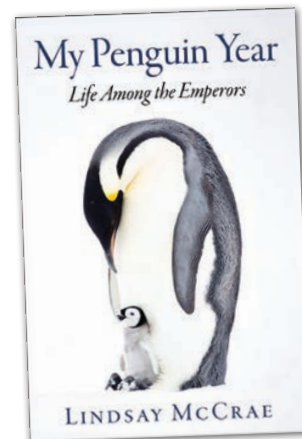
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Continued from Page 80

Following in the footsteps of Henry David Thoreau, Annie Dillard's **"Pilgrim at Tinker Creek"** is a philosophical diary that unfolds her year in Virginia's Roanoke Valley. It's far from the maddening crowd — and the perfect place to consider humanity's place in the greater scheme.



Who doesn't need penguins during a pandemic? In **"My Penguin Year,"** Lindsay McCrae follows 11,000 emperor penguins amid the astonishing beauty of Antarctica. This masterful work chronicles the author and photographer's 337 days of isolation in a hostile, frozen landscape. It makes a few weeks stuck at home watching Netflix seem like nothing.

What's Cooking?

Bestselling cookbook guru Nigella Lawson rightly describes Ella Risbridger's **"Midnight Chicken and Other Recipes Worth Living For"** as "a manual for living and a declaration of hope." Lawson's uplifting "manual" offers soul-warming recipes for everything from chili-lemon spaghetti and spicy fish finger sandwiches to yes, roast chicken. The stories behind the recipes are equally tasty.

Toni Tipton-Martin's **"Jubilee: Recipes from Two Centuries of African American Cooking"** celebrates African American cuisine in the here and now. Along the way, she shines a light on how contemporary cooks have reinvented the African American classics from days gone by.

Shut-ins could use a culinary survival guide. Ned Baldwin's **"How to Dress an Egg: Surprising and Simple Ways to Cook Dinner"** will do the job. Baldwin reinvents classic gourmet recipes and makes them easy for home cooks. His methodology leads to wonderfully tasty meals, one ingredient at a time.

Armchair Traveling

Frances Mayes (author of "Under the Tuscan Sun") continues her celebration of Italy in **"See You in the Piazza,"** which chronicles an upscale journey she and her husband took through 80 towns and 13 regions. It's a multisensory, sensual vacation in print. *Buon viaggio!*

John Baxter's **"A Year in Paris: Season by Season in the City of Light"** is a luminous romp through the city of artists, composers, writers and dreamers. If Paris is on your mind, this book of days is the next best thing to booking that ticket.

Paul Theroux's **"Riding the Iron Rooster"** is just the ticket for cynical armchair travelers who hate happy-happy puff pieces. This train ride through China in the 1980s is packed with sharp observations and an even sharper wit. Theroux's writing is strong medicine and a sure-fire cure for cabin fever. That applies to all of his 19 travel books. Take as often as needed.

Funny Stuff

Patrick McGilligan's **"Funny Man: Mel Brooks"** takes a serious look at a comedic giant. Brooks reinvented American comedy — and himself, in the process. Brooks' life story is as engaging (and hilarious) as his life's work.

David Sedaris' **"Calypso"** is an anthology of 21 semi-autobiographical, witty essays. Start with the title story, where Sedaris shares his childhood fantasy of a beach house. "It would be everyone's, as long as they followed my draconian rules and never stopped thanking me for it." That dream came true when the adult Sedaris and his husband purchased a charming seaside cottage. But be careful what you wish for.

Timely. Maybe a Little Too Timely

Stephen King's **"The Stand"** is a fever dream of a killer super-flu that leads to an apocalyptic confrontation between good and evil in humanity's few survivors. (The author notes that his fictional pandemic is far worse than our real one.)

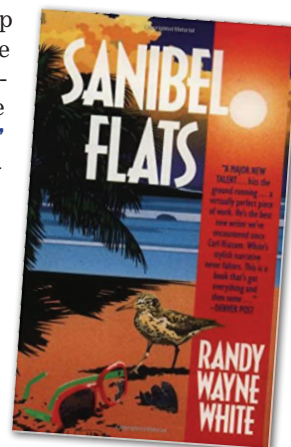
John M. Barry's **"The Great Influenza: The Story of the Deadliest Pandemic in History"** is fascinating, frightening and ultimately hopeful. The 1918 flu pandemic might have killed 100 million people around the world, but medical practices rose to the challenge. Science, not superstition, turned the pandemic around. That lesson was burned in humanity's collective memory. Hopefully, we'll never forget it.

Albert Camus' **"The Plague"** offers a fictional version of 1918's real-life heroes. Dr. Bernard Rieux is a rationalist. He scorns the notion that the plague is God's punishment for humanity's sins. As he sees it, the plague has no reason. It's a random event and ultimately absurd. Rieux fights it — because it's the rational thing to do.

Florida Fare

Carl Hiaasen's **"Tourist Season"** is a snarky whodunnit from Florida's glory days. Tourists, and the promoters who lure them to the Sunshine State, wind up dead in ghastly yet creative ways. That's always bad for tourism. Hiaasen's book is hilarious — and a bittersweet reminder of a time when there were actually too many tourists.

To continue your deep dive into Florida crime fiction, check out Sanibel author Randy Wayne White's **"Sanibel Flats,"** the first novel in his addictive "Doc Ford" series. White's eponymous hero is a marine biologist, environmentalist and retired government agent who tangles with bad guys on the low-rent fringes of Florida life — the seedy bars and fishing shacks that eccentrics love and tourists never visit.



Science Fiction

Neal Stephenson's **"Snow Crash"** is a near-future odyssey of linguistics, cryptography, anthropology, religious megalomaniacs and pizza delivery. His book is a trip, and it's well worth taking.

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Happy Making Pies

Ranch Dad gives us insight into his passion for making pies with his son and his dream of owning a pie shop in retirement.



BY GABRIEL JIVA
RIVERWALK
RESIDENT AND
DAD TO SONS
ALEXANDER
(ABOVE) AND
FREDERICK

Somewhat over a decade ago, for two — short — seasons, there aired a wonderful TV series on ABC called “Pushing Daisies.” It was a quirky, whimsical, fairy tale kind of detective show where the lead character could temporarily bring the dead back to life, which allowed him to help solve inscrutable crimes. It was charming, well acted and spoke to me on a few different levels, but there happened to be one in particular having to do with pie.

You see, the guy reluctantly participated in private detection as a side gig. His day job was owning a pie shop. That’s right: a pie shop. Now, I’m not convinced such a thing exists in real life. But I guess it might be possible in New York City, where entire restaurants are dedicated to rice pudding. The concept fascinated me, though. The shop in the series served nothing but pies. (And his pies were supposedly extra scrumptious because he used his powers to revitalize the ingredients and bring them to a supernatural level of flavor.)

The closest I’ve ever come to pie heaven in suburbia is a place like Yoder’s or Perkins, both of which have a wide selection of pies — but also a regular food menu. It was such an audacious business model but one I would wholeheartedly support with frequent financial contributions because I love pie.

It was thanks to that show that I started fantasizing about opening my own pie shop in retirement — not to make money but just to have something fun to do. One speed bump existed, though: I had no idea how to make pie. Being single and carefree at the time, I decided it would be a good time to start learning, so I could



Courtesy photos

Five-year-old Alexander has started helping out in the kitchen, where pies are a staple.

be proficient by the time retirement came along.

I started small, using a store-bought crust and making pumpkin pie filling for Thanksgiving dessert. That’s about as simple as a pie can be: Mix together a bunch of ingredients in a bowl, and dump them into a pie shell. Soon I branched out into cherry pie — my favorite — which has the added complexity of a second crust on top.

After a couple of years of that, I took the leap into making the crust from scratch, which took a while to perfect. Turns out, I wasn’t rolling the dough thin enough, out of fear that it wouldn’t hold the filling.

By the time I met my wife, I was pretty good at making pies. Then, (tragically) several months into our

Continued on Page 86

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Continued from Page 84

relationship (so that it could withstand the blow), she confessed she did not generally enjoy pie.

“But why?” I asked, seeking an explanation that might make sense. Was it the crust? The presentation? Some kind of allergy?

But the answer was more bewildering than I could’ve imagined: She just didn’t think fruit could pass for dessert. From her perspective, dessert needed chocolate.

Aha!

I immediately started my quest for chocolate pie recipes while simultaneously avoiding cream pies — for which I have no particular affection. I tested some that I thought my wife might enjoy, including a very promising but very messy Nutella pie. About a year later: Eureka! S’mores pie won her over to my pie world. It was a decadent affair: graham cracker crust foundation; followed by a layer of marshmallow spread, broken Hershey’s chocolate bars and mini marshmallows; and finished with another graham cracker

crust and a smattering of chocolate chips. It’s still her favorite of my pies to this day. It’s also now a staple dessert on holidays, not in small part because our 5-year-old — shockingly — also loves it.

In fact, as soon as he had enough dexterity, we encouraged him to help out in the kitchen, and now he makes sure he’s present when we make the s’mores pie. The dough is pretty easy to make, and he enjoys pouring in each ingredient — though he still thinks it’s too gross to knead by hand. To be honest, his favorite part of the baking is sneaking marshmallows and pieces of chocolate as we fill the crust and licking the spread off of the spatula.

Since starting out as the resident baker’s assistant, he has helped out with a couple of other recipes, another big hit being buckeyes. For those unfamiliar, they are peanut butter balls dipped in chocolate, which, as the name implies, makes them resemble a buckeye. As a lifelong Florida Gator, the association here with Ohio State University is more than a little uncomfortable, but they are delicious. The



Alexander enjoys helping make buckeyes, peanut butter balls dipped in chocolate, though he oddly enough doesn’t eat them when they’re done.

twist, however, is that, for unknown reasons, the kid doesn’t actually like eating them. He loves making the dough and rolling it out into balls (and also a couple of snakes), but he will not actually consume the final result. It’s an odd thing for sure, but at the end of the day, I’m just glad that he shares in my love of baking. Oh, and maybe he’ll help out in my retirement pie shop, too.

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Photos by Jay Heater

Left: The joy was obvious in the faces of Grand Living residents and employees as the parade of horses made its way around the building.

Above: The Sarasota Polo Ranch's Pippa Campbell shows the message as she rides in a makeshift Easter parade put together to entertain the residents at Grand Living at Lakewood Ranch.

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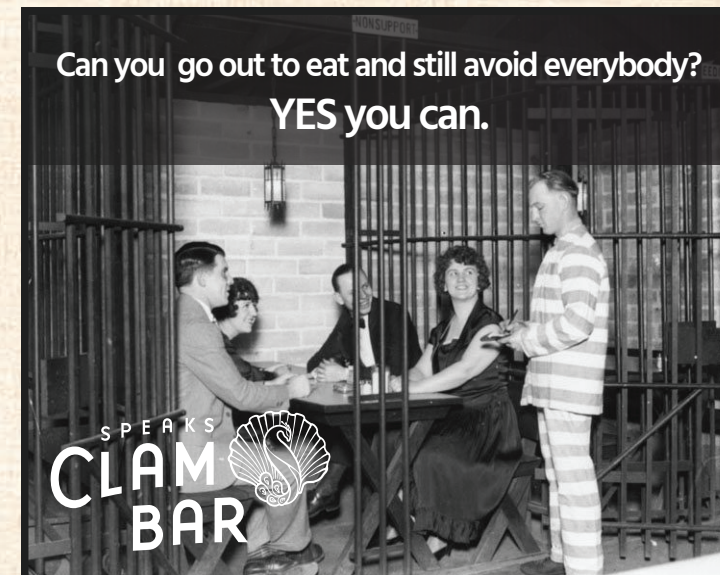
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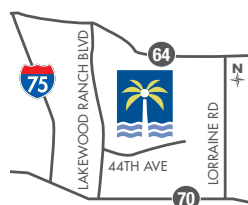
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