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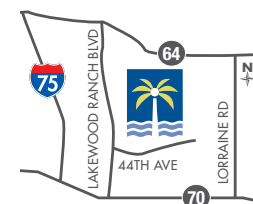
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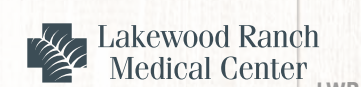
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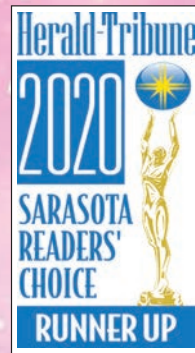
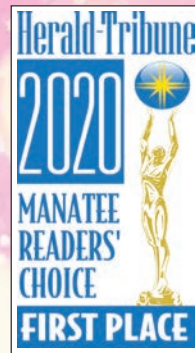
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Timeless Bridal



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oh, the places you can go.



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LWR LIFE

LAKWOOD RANCH AREA'S COMMUNITY, NATURE, STYLE

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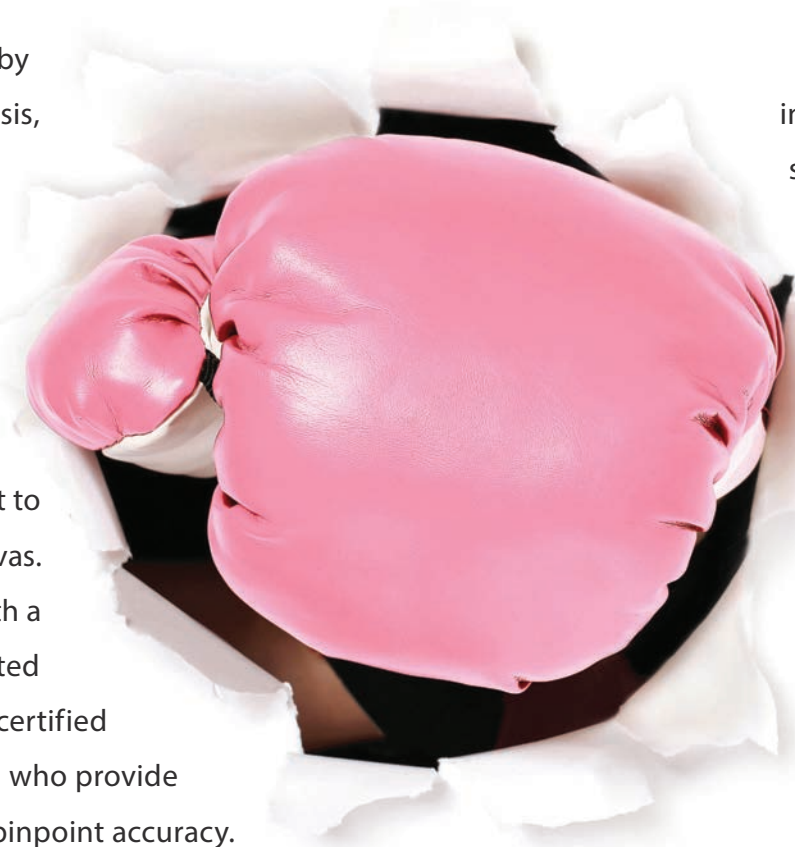
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published in May, August, November and February in partnership
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Striving for a simpler season



Holidays? Ugh.

I'm sorry, did I say that aloud? Paint me green and call me the Grinch, but the thought of trying to be merry while all masked up really wilts my mistletoe.



Let's face it: Even pre-pandemic, the holidays could inspire feelings of dread. Fighting crowds at the mall trying to find the perfect gift. Rushing all around town running errands in preparation of the holiday feast. Traveling and going to great lengths to visit family only to find everyone is much happier when you're on your way home.

It's stressful. And right now, the last thing we need is Any. More. Stress.

Although I'm not proposing we bag the eggnog and yuletide completely this year, I do think it would be a nice change of pace to celebrate a simpler, purer version of the holidays.

For example, rather than trying to channel your inner Martha on every

dish this year, maybe outsource a few things to patronize our local businesses in dire need of your dollars.

Or when it comes to presents, if the stress of what to get someone is weighing heavy, maybe a donation to an area charity in their honor would be a heartfelt gift a bit more practical than a pair of matching pajamas.

And maybe instead of trying so hard to keep all our traditions of yore alive — while social distancing, nonetheless — we give ourselves a break and start new, simpler ones to help everyone have extra time to appreciate life and one another.

My point is, in 2020, we have had life stripped down to its essentials in many ways. A lot of that is bad, but when you think about it, some things that have come out of it were pretty darn good.

Our cover story focuses on those lessons and the good things we have realized from having our lives turned upside down. In our "Silver Linings" feature on Page 54, we hear

how 12 Ranchers have adapted and overcome obstacles in the past nine months. From little things, such as being grateful for the community's response to personal protective equipment needs, to larger life lessons, such as how a canceled travel schedule for work brought a family together, each is a reminder that we have a lot to be thankful for, even if things aren't back to normal just yet.

So maybe we can hold onto that gratitude a little longer and get beyond ourselves and our lofty expectations to focus on what really matters. As they say, the reason for the season.

Don't worry, I'm sure someday we'll be back to our hectic schedules of parties and shopping and travel — and the stress and worry that accompany them.

But right now, life is giving us a unique break to pause and reflect and reexamine what's really important.

Let's take it.

*Kat Hughes
Executive Editor*

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BUZZ
NEWS, HAPPENINGS AND PEOPLE

FOR STARTERS



Courtesy Images

BY LWR LIFE STAFF

1 FRUITVILLE ER TO THE RESCUE

Here's a riddle: What's some place that you never want to go, but couldn't be happier when you need it that it's close by? An emergency room, of course.

And for residents of Lakewood Ranch's southern area, they can rest assured that even though they don't want to check out Lakewood Ranch Medical Center's new emergency room on Fruitville Road just east of Lakewood Ranch Boulevard, it's going to be there, open starting Dec. 1.

The new \$10 million building will offer the same level of service at this 10,873-square-foot facility as what patients can get at the ER at the medical center's hospital, minus the inpatient beds and operating rooms.

Andy Guz, CEO of Lakewood Ranch Medical Center, called the ER at Fruitville "a natural expansion" of the hospital.

The new emergency room will have a full lab, an x-ray room, a CT scan, six patient rooms and isolation rooms, among other features. It even has plans to have a helipad on-site.

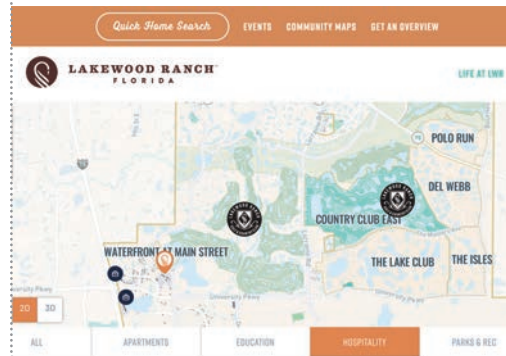
3 TAKE A (VIRTUAL) HIKE

Ever wonder where a certain neighborhood is, or what middle schools are in your area, or what hotels are closest to put your in-laws up in during the holidays? Or maybe you just like to do a little home shopping virtually, contemplating your next great house upgrade in the Ranch.

Well, thanks to a new interactive map, you can learn everything about your community without leaving your front door.

The community maps at LakewoodRanch.com feature 2D and 3D representations of the Lakewood Ranch area, complete with layers that show locations of schools, villages, parks, shopping and dining and more.

So before you go out and explore, you can plan a little more ahead of time.



2 LECOM TOURNEY BACK IN SWING

Since the pandemic began, sports is just one thing of the things that remains filled with uncertainty. But here's one thing we know: the LECOM Suncoast Classic is coming Feb. 18-21 to the Lakewood National Golf Course. What we don't know? How many spectators will be part of that experience.

However, LECOM Suncoast Classic Director Justin Kristich remains optimistic that a limited number of fans



will indeed be able to attend in person, and he has been doing his homework by watching to see how other similar

golf tournaments are handling the in-person dilemma.

Things such as hospitality areas and bleacher seating will likely look different, but Kristich hopes fans will still be able to get in on the action, a crucial element to attract sponsors for the event, which is not televised. Last year about 20,000 fans attended the Korn Ferry tournament stop over four days.

"Hopefully, we will have a somewhat normal event," Kristich said in September.

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Ryan Kohn

The Out-of-Door Academy's Tyler Beasley and Braden River High's Shawqi Itraish are the two top quarterbacks in the area. Both have received offers from NCAA Division I schools.

SLIM ODDS

The area is home to two Division I-caliber quarterbacks this season. Their talent is just one of the things that sets them apart.

BY RYAN KOHN | CONTRIBUTOR

What's tougher for an elite quarterback: reading a defense or battling the bugs that gnaw on their victims at Greenbrook Adventure Park?

On Oct. 15, the bugs were a more pressing threat for Braden River High quarterback Shawqi Itraish and The Out-of-Door Academy quarterback Tyler Beasley. The quarterbacks, both seniors, were at the park for a photo shoot, and the midges were buzzing like it was the 2007 MLB playoffs. The quarterbacks swiped at the flies between clicks of the camera. It did not help much.

You would never know there was an issue just from looking at the pictures. Itraish and Beasley handled the infestation like professionals. That's a promising sign because the top two quarterbacks in the region are likely going to have to deal with more un-

comfortable photo shoots in the future. Itraish, who is 6-foot-3, is committed to Rice, selecting the Owls over schools such as Appalachian State and Connecticut, as well as most every Ivy League school. Beasley, who is 6-foot-1, is uncommitted but received an offer from Tennessee in March.

To have one quarterback with NCAA Division I (Football Bowl Subdivision) talent in an area is rare; there are 130 FBS teams, so if they each have approximately three scholarship quarterbacks on their roster, that's 390 quarterbacks of that level nationwide at one time. That's not many, and it feels even less when you remember that there are approximately 16,000 high school football programs in the U.S. That means only 2.4% of starting-caliber high school quarterbacks make the FBS.

Continued on Page 30



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Continued from Page 28

Having two quarterbacks with that talent in the same graduating class, at schools less than 8 miles apart? That's special.

Special, too, are these quarterbacks. Itraish, a traditional pocket passer, is in his second full season as the Braden River starter. As of Oct. 15, he's passed for 3,192 yards in his career, completing 60.5% of his passes and throwing 26 touchdowns to just five interceptions. Beasley, a dual-threat quarterback, is in his third season at ODA's helm. He has improved each season. Beasley accumulated 18 touchdowns (10 throwing, eight running) in 2019, and through two games in 2020, he's thrown for 708 yards and seven touchdowns to just two interceptions.

UNTEACHABLE TALENT

Despite growing up close to each other and playing the same sport, Beasley and Itraish had never met before the photo shoot. Braden River and ODA are in different football leagues (the Florida High School Athletics Association and the Sunshine State Athletic Conference), and they had never run into each other at a camp or in a seven-on-seven league, where they spend so much of their offseason. Being an elite quarterback does not leave much time for friend-making, especially outside of their own schools.

To them, the sacrifices are worth it. "It shows that if you keep working, keep your head down, your time will come," Itraish says.

You can read the stats and watch the tape, but what makes the duo unique are the things that cannot be taught. You cannot, for instance, be taught how to be teachable. You cannot be taught how to build chemistry with a wide receiving corps, ensuring you know with pinpoint accuracy where each member of that corps will be when you take the snap and count to three in your head as 250-pound linebackers try to bulldoze you into the turf. You cannot be taught to lead an 11-person unit into a three-hour-plus battle and keep morale high when things inevitably go wrong.

"My mindset is to always be prepared," Itraish says. "I just do my best on the field when the time comes. Everything will fall into place."

A humble answer, but one that belies the work these kids put into their



Photos by Ryan Kohn

Braden River High's Shawqi Itraish (left) has committed to Rice University. ODA's Tyler Beasley remains uncommitted in his recruitment.

“

If you keep working, keep your head down, your time will come. **SHAWQI ITRAISH, BRADEN RIVER HIGH QUARTERBACK**

craft. Like most elite quarterbacks, Itraish and Beasley have been working at this since they could throw a football. They practice their throws, yes, but they're also in the weight room getting stronger and in the film room studying defenses — or studying other area quarterbacks. Both Beasley and Itraish admitted they take a peek at what others in the area are doing, especially if they share an upcoming opponent. But that can be a dangerous game.

"You don't want to get too caught up in that stuff, the comparisons," Beasley says. "You don't want to get a big head. But you do want to see what everyone is doing."

That goes for media, too. At a time when most professional athletes deny reading the things written or said

about them (even though they do), Itraish and Beasley embrace it. To them, they say, it is a chance to hear another opinion, to get more feedback, even if they are not going to like it. It is another tool, another way to improve, however subtly.

It's the advice Itraish and Beasley say they would give young quarterbacks hoping to reach their level someday: Never stop improving. Never feel satisfied. Yes, there are things great quarterbacks have that can't be taught, but you don't know if you possess those traits until you try.

So try. The odds are, admittedly, against them, but it's not impossible. This year's duo knew the odds, too, and waived them away like Han Solo.

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Jay Heater

David Fink, the Lakewood Ranch Community Fund president, and Joan Leonard, SunCoast Blood Centers' community liaison, say the \$13,000 grant was huge for SunCoast during COVID-19.

Doing the Most Good

As it learns more about local needs, Lakewood Ranch Community Fund works to engage more donors.

BY JAY HEATER | CONTRIBUTOR

When it comes to philanthropy, there is no shortage of options in our area. But how does one choose the organization with the most need or how best to help?

It's that type of research, knowledge and relationships that Lakewood Ranch Community Fund President

David Fink says allows his nonprofit to stand alone in East County.

Since 2002, the community fund has given grants to approximately 150 nonprofit organizations while getting more than 60 grant applications a year. Only about a third of them are selected to receive funds.

That's where the research becomes so important.

Each year, the community fund puts together a 15-person grant team made up of its advisory board members, local business leaders and those who have given significant amounts to the fund. They pull the grant applications, which Fink says contain extensive information about each nonprofit and

the expected use of the funds. Then the research begins.

They look through each nonprofit's financial information through IRS Form 990 reports along with checking resources through assessment organizations, such as Charity Navigator.

Members of the team look into how effective each organization has been realizing its goals and how efficient each has been financially. After the grants have been awarded, members of the grants team follow up with each nonprofit to make sure the money went to its intended purpose.

"We take that responsibility very

Continued on Page 34

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seriously," Fink says.

All that information garnered over the years came in handy during the COVID-19 pandemic. The community fund made \$165,000 available in grants, but it contacted area nonprofits that it knew would have special needs due to previous years' research.

Tidewell Foundation was one of those nonprofits, and the community fund gave it a \$10,000 grant to purchase personal protection equipment and pay extra expenses related to staffing.

Through conversations in awarding the first grant, the community fund board learned about a program that Tidewell was considering to help its patients improve their quality of life during their final days. The pandemic threatened to put that program on hold.

The fund came back with a \$5,000 grant to purchase the equipment and monthly subscription needed to run the program, a virtual reality system that allows those living in senior living facilities and hospice houses to make connections and reduce isolation.

Debbie Mason, the president of Tidewell Foundation Sarasota, says the two grants made a huge difference. The technology already is paying off.

She says Tidewell has clinical evidence that when its patients use the virtual reality system, their breathing becomes improved, their heart rate slows, and their pain decreases.

Would Lakewood Ranch area residents have known about the virtual reality system and what Tidewell Foundation was trying to accomplish? Possibly not.

"No nonprofit here makes the impact of the community fund," Fink says. "None focus solely on the benefit of Lakewood Ranch. We don't have a pet cause. We let the causes bubble up."

One of the causes during the pandemic was SunCoast Blood Centers' hope to land a grant to help it buy a van that could go directly to the homes of those willing to donate blood. The fund gave \$13,000 toward the van.

"The need was there, and we were funded," says Joan Leonard, the community liaison for SunCoast Blood Centers. "That doesn't happen with individual donors. It takes time."

Amanda Tullidge, a principal at Blalock Walters, has been an advisory board member for six years. She grew



Courtesy photo

Community fund grants helped purchase the RendeVR VR System for Tidewell Foundation's Lakewood Ranch facility.

up watching her mom, Julie Smith, do the fund's spreadsheets at home. She later joined the board and began to understand that the community has hidden needs.

"As soon as you scratch the surface, you see a lot of need," Tullidge says. "People have Parkinson's and epilepsy, and we have lots of kids who have special needs. If you live here, you might not be able to put in the time researching nonprofits in Lakewood Ranch. But you want to know your money is going to someone reputable."

people who could help spread the community fund's message. Small recurring donations would be most welcome. If successful, the board members hope to produce more stories like Tidewell's new technology success.

"I don't know that I knew the need," says Onstad, who gave to the fund before joining its board but has learned more about the causes it helps. "I didn't know how important this is."

Tullidge recalls one particularly poignant moment at Stillpoint House of Prayer in Bradenton, which receives annual grants from the fund. One day she was there giving out food with her dad, Bob Smith.

"We were there, and we gave one man a can of soup," she said. "He said, 'I can't open this type of can because I don't have a can opener.' We were 20 minutes from our affluent community, and he can't open a can of soup because he doesn't have an opener. You don't expect to see that."

Mason hopes people take notice of how important the fund is to the community. "During COVID-19, they stepped up in a very generous way," she says, noting that Tidewell has received \$26,000 from the community fund since 2011. "It's the kind of leadership that is incredibly important for nonprofits ... that flexibility and support you need during a crisis."

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LAKWOOD RANCH COMMUNITY FUND FINANCIALS

Endowed fund: \$1.1 million
Discretionary fund: \$125,000
Grants presented in 2018: \$83,000
Grants presented in 2019: \$58,000
Grants presented in 2020: \$165,000
(the increased amount due to COVID-19 needs)

DID YOU KNOW?

The Lakewood Ranch Community Fund has an expense load near zero. The board is entirely volunteer, and there are no paid employees.

Information:
 LWRFund.org



Renée Dedio Preininger

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SECOND HIGHEST RESALE in Lakewood Ranch Country Club since 2006

American Cancer Society
builds local support to help
those in need. **PAGE 38**

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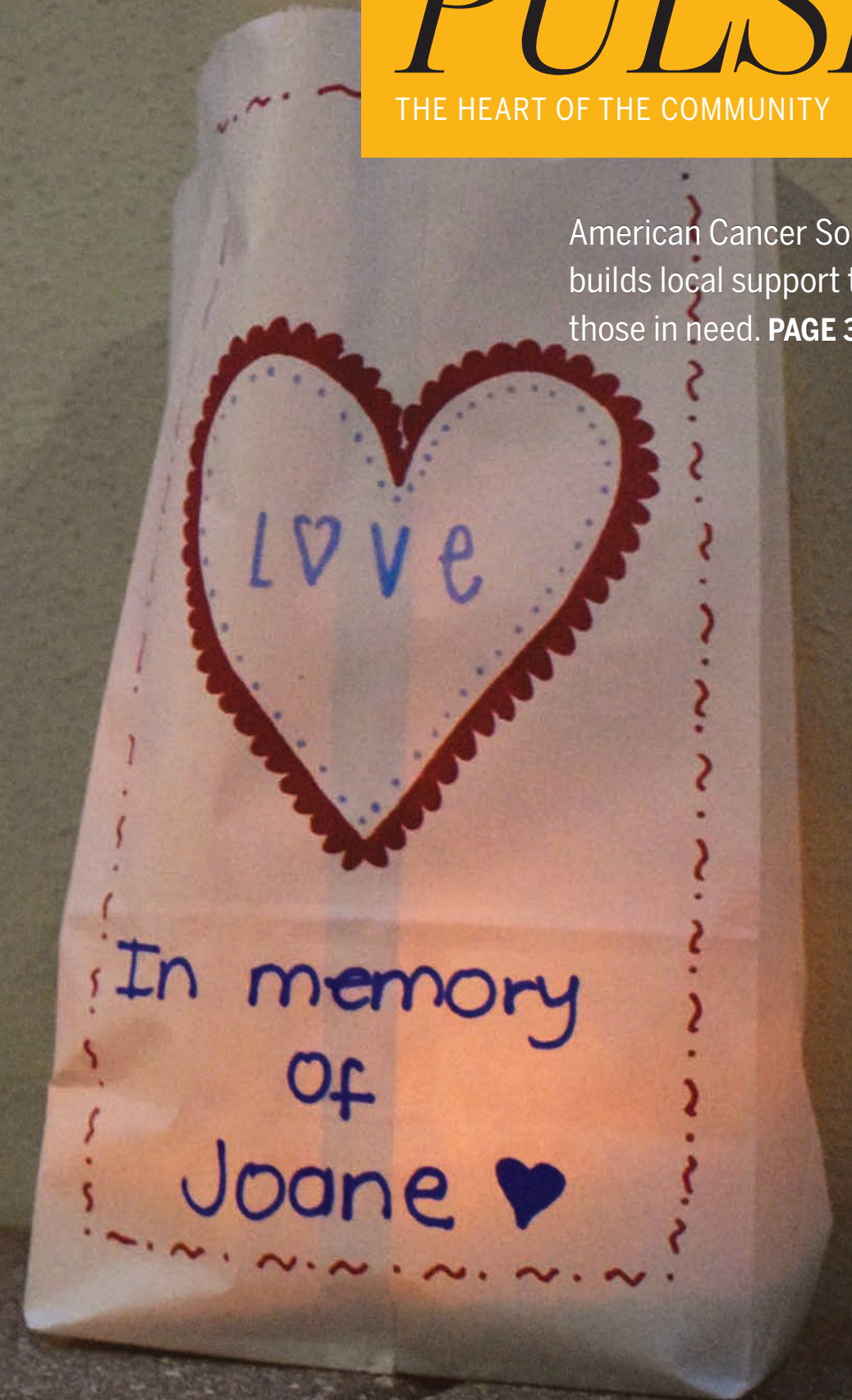
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charity snapshot

Lighting the Path

Thousands of Lakewood Ranch residents volunteer and participate in American Cancer Society events and raise money.

BY LIZ RAMOS | CONTRIBUTOR

River Club's Bethany Lynch quietly walked down Main Street at Lakewood Ranch on Sept. 20, starting from the small garden between Ed's Tavern and the Fish Hole.

She observed each of the luminarias on the ground giving off a slight ray of light from the tea lights inside.

Some of the small, white paper bag luminarias had pictures of loved ones while others had messages of hope written on them, but each was decorated in its own way in honor of someone who has been impacted by cancer. Lynch is familiar with how cancer can impact a person and a family. Her sister Allyson Spain and grandparents Enrico and Anna Cicero and Leoma Crick all had cancer.

Three years ago, Lynch started working with the American Cancer Society as its senior community development manager.

"It was the perfect combination of corporate and nonprofit because it's a big, well-established nonprofit that has been around for over 100 years," Lynch says. "It just feels that at that time of my life, it felt better to give something more than just to my own income. I had two children, and I wanted them to understand about giving back to our community and being involved in the community."

Although Lynch is the only Lake-



wood Ranch resident currently employed by the American Cancer Society, dozens of residents from around the greater Lakewood Ranch area have given their time and money to support the national organization.

Lakewood Ranch's Fred Lopez has been volunteering for the American Cancer Society since his wife, Ragnsild Oyen-Lopez, died of cancer in 2007. He's raised money for the nonprofit and helped during its Relay for Live events. He helps in any way he can.

"I want to give back to people who are in the same position I was," Lopez says. "When someone is sick, I know what they're feeling because I went through it."

GROWING ROOTS

Lynch noticed in the past five years that turnover in community development staff for the nonprofit caused

inconsistencies in the presence of the American Cancer Society in Lakewood Ranch, so when she joined the nonprofit, she saw opportunities to get the community more involved.

"This is my home and my community," Lynch says. "I've lived here longer than I've lived anywhere in my life, and I know how generous, giving and involved this community is ... Now getting it back in front of the right people, the people that it means more to, I think we're starting to build that momentum up again."

The first-ever Neighbors Unite event Sept. 20 was an example of how community members in the area have come together to support one another and the nonprofit.

Due to COVID-19, the American Cancer Society had to cancel its large fundraising events, such as Relay for

Photos by Liz Ramos
River Club's Isabella Juliano and her mother, Patricia, make luminarias in honor of friends and family members who have been impacted by cancer.

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Continued from Page 38

Life. In its place, the nonprofit decided to host Neighbors Unite, which brought communities together on a smaller scale for a luminaria event to honor those affected by cancer.

Lynch, along with University of South Florida Sarasota-Manatee student Jordan Gorrell and Harmony's Tiffany Thornhill, helped coordinate the local event and recruited volunteers, including high school students, longtime American Cancer Society volunteers and cancer survivors.

"I love seeing everybody come together for a common goal and common results and having that sense of accomplishment after you do that," Lynch says. "There's nothing like being at the actual event that you planned and seeing the whole vision come together."

Country Club East's Lynn Minnelli had never been to a Relay for Life event, but after volunteering every so often with the American Cancer Society and being furloughed from her job, she wanted to be more involved.

"It was amazing just seeing everybody's names on the bags not only in memory of but also in honor of people and how everybody is stepping up to support their friends and their family that are fighting this disease," she says.

Minnelli was diagnosed with breast cancer on New Year's Eve in 2015. She underwent a lumpectomy and then six rounds of chemotherapy and radiation. She was also treated with the drug Herceptin, which doctors told her if the drug had not been developed, her journey would have been vastly different. Minnelli has been in remission for three years.

"The support I received from my family and my friends was just amazing," she says. "Then getting involved with Making Strides and volunteering for the American Cancer Society has just made me feel like now that I survived, I can give back. That just makes me feel like maybe I can do something for someone else."



Harmony's Tiffany Thornhill, River Club's Bethany Lynch and Jordan Gorrell, a University of South Florida Sarasota-Manatee student, work together to organize Neighbors Unite in Lakewood Ranch.

Through Neighbors Unite, the group sold 570 luminarias to put along Main Street at Lakewood Ranch. The event raised \$5,720.

"I'm so thankful for all the research that is being done for breast cancer and any other cancer because just knowing how that helped me and knowing if new drugs can help people like that, that's amazing," Minnelli says.

THE FIGHT CONTINUES

Lynch says the nonprofit is facing a 50% decrease in income and donations this year as a result of the pandemic, which will affect not only fundraising efforts but also the resources it provides across the country, including those in Lakewood Ranch.

"It's the first time in a decade that we've had that low [of funding]," Lynch says.

Chris Galli, a sophomore at Lakewood Ranch High School, is working to raise money through the Real Men Wear Pink campaign, which is a group of men raising awareness and money to save lives from breast cancer.

Galli became involved in the campaign in September in honor of his grandmother, Debby Tremblay, who is a cancer survivor.

"Not only am I in a way helping my grandmother, [being involved in the campaign] makes me feel like I'm help-

ing a lot of people," Galli says.

Galli says his grandmother's diagnosis was heartbreaking because he couldn't do anything to help her, so he's happy to be involved in raising money to help others who have cancer.

He has raised \$920 since September and has a goal of raising \$2,500.

"It's a great feeling," Galli says. "It's actually crazy to me that I almost raised \$1,000."

Besides the research that could someday find a cure for cancer, the American Cancer Society provides resources to help patients and their families every day, including its 24/7 hotline; its website, Cancer.org; the Richard M. Schulze Family Foundation Hope Lodge; the Reach to Recovery program; and the Road to Recovery program.

Due to the pandemic, the American Cancer Society had to make Reach to Recovery, which pairs a person living with breast cancer to a breast cancer survivor to provide support, virtual. The nonprofit also repurposed Hope Lodge to provide housing for front-line workers. The Road to Recovery program, which provides rides to treatment for patients, was put on hold.

"We need [donations and volunteers] now more than ever," Lynch says. "The mission matters now more than ever. Cancer hasn't stopped, so neither can we."

WHAT DONATIONS CAN PROVIDE

\$25

Provides free information, support and access to resources through the American Cancer Society's 24/7 help line

\$50

Provides transportation to treatment for breast cancer patients who don't have a ride or are unable to drive themselves

\$65

Provides a breast cancer patient with one-on-one peer support from a breast cancer survivor

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Provides breast cancer patients and caregivers with two nights of free lodging at a Hope Lodge facility when they need to travel for cancer treatment



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BY THE NUMBERS

- 50% Reduction in funding for cancer research due to COVID-19 in 2020
- 1 in 8 Women diagnosed with breast cancer in their lifetime
- 1 in 3 People diagnosed with cancer in their lifetime
- 1.7 million New cancer diagnoses in 2018
- 200 American Cancer Society events held in 2019
- 1.2 million Participants in 2019 events
- 7 Road to Recovery drivers in the greater Lakewood Ranch area



Photos by Lori Sax

In 1998, Bonnie and Rich Vannucci began Operation Serving Children, which provides medical kits to those in need in 38 countries.

A Lifetime of Giving

A Lakewood Ranch couple turns a spiritual-themed novel into a fundraiser for their small, international relief agency.

BY ERIC SNIDER | CONTRIBUTOR

In September 1983, Rich Vannucci sat on a concrete floor in Calcutta having a one-on-one discussion with Mother Theresa. The 24-year-old from Pennsylvania, who was on a yearlong mission to help the poor in India and Africa, exhausted from months of hard work and suffocating Indian heat, was wearing a T-shirt emblazoned with “Happiness is a Cold Pabst Blue Ribbon Beer.”

“Mother Teresa pointed at my chest, smiled, and asked, ‘Do you believe that to be true?’” Vannucci recalls. “I said, ‘Yes, I would be very happy to have a

cold beer, Mother.’ She giggled like a 16-year-old girl.”

That’s just one of the more epic encounters in Vannucci’s anything-but-typical life, which has been primarily dedicated to serving the needy. His wife of 30 years, Bonnie, has been his steadfast partner in human charity.

The Lakewood Ranch residents run Operation Serving Children, a small but robust relief agency that provides medical kits to the poor in 38 countries, as well as food and other

Continued on Page 44

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Continued from Page 42

necessities to people in the Sarasota/Bradenton area. They founded their organization in 1998 — and were all in from the start. Vannucci resigned from his position teaching theology at Cardinal Mooney High School to start the nonprofit. He had no job. The couple had no income and were raising two small children. They got by on their savings. “Conventional is not part of our vocabulary,” Vannucci says. “God provided. We got through it.”

The Vannuccis’ latest venture is a novel titled “Maximum Joy,” its updated edition released on Origin Press in January. The work of biographical fiction recounts Rich’s world travels and life of sacrifice and includes protagonist Nic’s personal archangel, Michael. The 300-plus pages intersperse ample portions of spiritual and socially conscious dialogue. One potently relevant example is this line: “A powerful few own almost everything, and billions live in dire poverty.”

The “Maximum Joy” project had a convoluted backstory, Rich says: He originally wrote a screenplay about his endeavors, which gained some traction in Hollywood, including an offer from a major producer. But Rich wanted to make a film in which the cast and crew donated their time, so the lion’s share of the proceeds could go to charity. “I was naive,” Rich, 61, says of his eight-year screenplay saga. “Hollywood does not do things of that nature. The guy I was working with from DreamWorks suggested I turn it into a novel. This was 2007. I went outside on the lanai thinking, ‘My God, I can’t write a novel.’ I went inside and said, ‘Bonnie would you like to write a book?’”

“I said sure,” Bonnie, 58, chimes in. “I knew Rich’s story, of course, and I also asked him a lot of questions. I did some research on the places in the screenplay. When I wrote, I would get in the flow and feel myself being there.”

The first edition of “Maximum Joy” was self-published in 2008. The new version was rewritten — with increased emphasis on spiritualism and social sustainability — at the behest of Byron Belitsos, the founder and owner of California-based Origin Press, which publishes mostly nonfiction works concerning spirituality, health and philosophy. All proceeds from “Maximum Joy” go to Operation Serv-



“

Our approach is to teach someone how to fish after you’ve given them something to eat. If they’re hungry, they’re not going to be able to concentrate on how to fish. RICH VANNUCCI

ing Children, Rich says. So do all the funds they raise from other sources, roughly \$25,000 a year. The charity is able to exponentially grow the value of that relatively small sum with donations by food banks and pharmaceutical companies.

The medical kits, for instance, are packed with about 75 pounds of vital drugs and supplies. Each has a retail value of \$30,000, according to the charity’s website. As of October, the Vannuccis were planning to ship 20 packs from Miami to Haiti by boat in January. The disruption of air travel due to the coronavirus pandemic has hampered their overseas efforts in 2020. In an ordinary year, the agency uses roughly a hundred volunteers around the world to deliver relief packages.

Operation Serving Children’s local relief program “teams with other agencies to turn a dollar into 25 dollars’ worth of groceries,” Rich says.

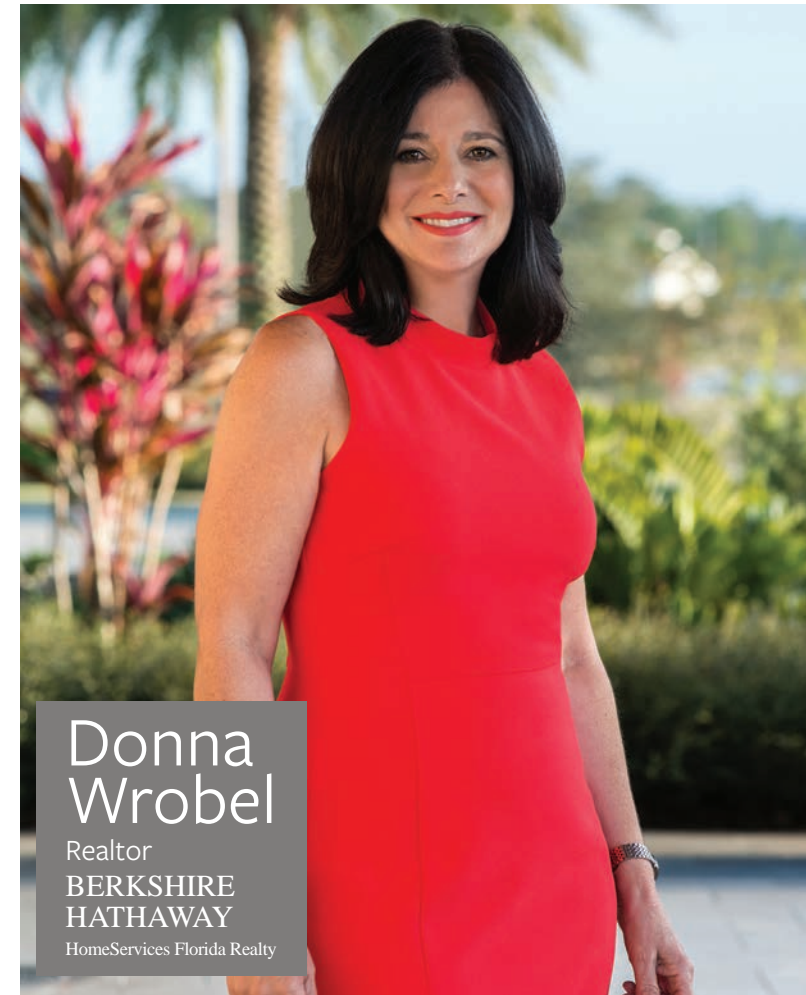
The giving — which can also include help with delinquent rent, plumbing services, car repairs and other immediate needs — comes with conditions. In return, a recipient must register at Suncoast Workforce, take workshops and mount a job search. “Our approach is to teach someone how to fish after you’ve given them something to eat,” Rich says. “If they’re hungry, they’re not going to be able to concentrate on how to fish.”

Rich works as a building inspector, and he and Bonnie pour countless hours into Operation Serving Children. They are helped by their sons, Pablo and Marco, and their daughter, Nina — all in their 20s. The family members don’t extract administrative fees, pay themselves salaries, or even stipends. “None of us get any money from it,” Rich says. “We want all of it to go toward helping people in crisis.”

LEARN MORE

To learn more, go to Maximum-Joy.com for information about the book and OSCRelief.org for information about Operation Serving Children.

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File photo
Ted Phillips
(right) helped his
son, Benji, to fish
at Nathan Bend-
erson Park's Rec
Day. Ted, who
is visiting from
Alexandria, Va.,
says he was ex-
cited to get some
sun and time
near the water.

DECEMBER

DEC. 5

REC DAY AT BENDERSON PARK

Runs from 10 a.m. to 2 p.m. at Nathan Benderson Park, 5851 Nathan Benderson Circle, Sarasota. The public is invited to visit Nathan Benderson Park on NBP Rec Day and experience paddleboarding, kayaking, canoes and fishing. Rides on a 15-foot sailboat will also be available. The event costs \$10 for ages 7-18. Parents who attend with their children are free. Adults who attend without their children pay \$10. Children 6 and under are free. Anyone age 16 and older who goes fishing needs a freshwater fishing license. Event continues Dec. 9 and 19.
■ For more information, visit NathanBendersonPark.org/programming/nbp-rec-days.html.

HOLIDAY MARKETS AT UTC

Shop local for your friends and family this holiday season. More than 100 local businesses will be open during mall hours, 11 a.m. to 7 p.m., in the parking lot at The Mall at University Town Center, 140 University Town Center, Sarasota. Event continues Dec. 6.
■ For more information, call 727-674-1464.

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The market, featuring fresh vegetables, live music, activities and products from more than 60 vendors, returns from 10 a.m. to 2 p.m. at the parking lot of Lakewood Ranch Medical Center, 8330 Lakewood Ranch Blvd., Lakewood Ranch. Continues every Sunday through April.

■ For more information, visit TheMarketLWR.com.

BARRE IN THE PARK

Begins at 9 a.m. at Bob Gardner Park, 2710 White Eagle Blvd., Lakewood Ranch. The public is invited to participate in a free barre workout at Bob Gardner Park. The event is hosted by Barre3. Bring your own mat and water bottle. Mats must be placed 6 feet apart. All participants are asked to follow social distancing guidelines. Continues Dec. 20.

■ For more information or to register for the event, go to LakewoodRanch.com

DEC. 9 RANCH NITES LIVE

This virtual event begins at 7 p.m. The event, held the second Wednesday of

Continued on Page 48

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Continued from Page 46

the month, replaces the regular live event until the pandemic subsides. The livestream of local and national musicians can be accessed on the Lakewood Ranch Facebook page at FB.com/LakewoodRanch to help you enjoy your own indoor happy hour. A "live" alert will appear on the Facebook page.

■ For more information, visit myLWR.com.

DEC. 10 CHANUKAH CELEBRATION

Chabad of Bradenton and Lakewood Ranch will celebrate Chanukah starting at 6 p.m. at the Chabad, 5712 Lorraine Road, Bradenton. A menorah will be lighted, and guests can enjoy Israeli-style kosher food and entertainment. Details regarding COVID-19 safety to come. Admission is free.

■ For information, call 941-952-3030.

DEC. 12 COMMUNITY NATURE WALK

Join Lakewood Ranch Ambassador Greg Spring for a 2-mile, one-hour nature walk on some of the trails in Lakewood Ranch. The walks start at 8 a.m. at Greenbrook Adventure Park at the pavilion, 13010 Adventure Place, Lakewood Ranch. Continues Jan. 9 and Feb. 13.

■ For more information, visit LakewoodRanch.com.

DEC. 13 SARASOTA POLO

The Sarasota Polo Club kicks off its season with an afternoon of tailgating and polo. Gates open at 10 a.m., and matches start at 1 p.m. at the Sarasota Polo Club, 8201 Polo Club Lane. General admission is \$15 for adults; children 12 and under are free. Polo matches will be held every Sunday through April 25.

■ For more information, visit SarasotaPolo.com.

YOGA IN THE PARK

Begins at 9 a.m. at Bob Gardner Park, 2710 White Eagle Blvd., Lakewood Ranch. The public is invited to participate in a free yoga workout at Bob Gardner Park. The event is hosted by Yoga Shack and sponsored by Brain Health Initiative. Bring your own mat and water bottle. Mats must



File photo

Emily McLachlan, of Country Club East, picked out sunflowers with her daughter, Molly, at The Market in 2019.

be placed 6 feet apart. All participants are asked to follow social distancing guidelines. Event continues Dec. 27.

■ For more information, go to myLWR.com.

DEC. 19 BIKE RIDE

Lakewood Ranch Ambassador Greg Spring will lead a 10-mile, one-hour casual bike ride through Lakewood Ranch. Participants will meet at the fountain at 8 a.m. at Lakewood Ranch Main Street. Continues Jan. 16 and Feb. 20.

■ For more information, visit LakewoodRanch.com.

CREATE & CELEBRATE WITH KORI

Kori Clark will lead art projects for the kids, or the entire family, virtually. Tune in at 3 p.m. to create a holiday project perfect for the season.

■ For more information, visit FB.com/LakewoodRanch

CHRISTMAS GLOW RUN 5K

Nathan Benderson Park will be decked out in holiday spirit for this glow-in-the-dark run. Participants receive a tank or tech tee and a finish medal with entry. Race begins at 6 p.m. at Nathan Benderson Park, 5851 Nathan Benderson Circle, Sarasota. Cost is \$39.

■ For more information and to register, visit RunEliteEvents.com/sarasota-christmas-glow-run-5k.html.

DEC. 24 JINGLE 5K

Move your feet to the jingling beat for this festive jingle bell run, which is going virtual this year. Submit your times from 4 p.m. Dec. 24 to 1 p.m. Dec. 27 to be eligible for raffle prizes.

Race benefits Lakewood Ranch Medical Center Auxiliary.

■ For more information, visit LakewoodRanchMedicalCenter.org.

JANUARY

JAN. 7 MEGA CHALLAH BAKE

Chabad of Bradenton and Lakewood Ranch will host this challah-making event for ladies ages 9 and up at 7 p.m. Location details regarding COVID-19 safety to come. Cost is \$36 per person.

■ Reservations are required to ChabadOfBradenton.com/MegaChallahBake or 941-752-3030.

JAN. 15 VEGAS CASINO NIGHT

Sisterhood for Good hosts its winter fundraiser at 6 p.m. at Sarasota Polo Club, 8201 Polo Trail, Lakewood Ranch. Enjoy hors d'oeuvres, gaming tables and a cigar station. Each guest receives two cocktail tickets, two beer tickets and \$200 in gambling "Casino Ka\$h."

■ For more information, visit SisterhoodForGood.org.

FIND YOUR FRESH

The Farmers' Market at Lakewood Ranch is in full swing 10 a.m. to 2 p.m. every Sunday in the parking lot of Lakewood Ranch Medical Center through April. Enjoy a curated gathering of the best produce, meat, artisanal bread and more in the region, as well as prepared foods. Visit TheMarketLWR.com for additional details.



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style

Tote-Ally Awesome Bags

Got a lot of stuff but nowhere to put it? Have no fear, these great totes are here.

BY HARRY SAYER | CONTRIBUTOR

It feels good to have a nice handbag, but let's face it: Busy women end up with stuff. Lots of stuff. Whether stuff for kids or your husband or yourself, it always seems to find its way into your bag.

Enter the tote. These spacious, strong-handed caverns can manage whatever you throw at them (or in them), and in an assortment of colors and sleek materials, they can elevate your outfit and camouflage the fact that, in reality, you have a small suitcase's worth of stuff tucked neatly under your arm. We checked in with local shops and boutiques to see what kinds of tote bags will make it all look effortless this season.



Vera Bradley dog tote, \$100

Vera Bradley small red tote, \$100



Vera Bradley Christmas tote, \$140



Vera Bradley black commuter tote, \$155

Crowder's Gifts & Gadgets

2401 Lakewood Ranch Blvd. Crowder's Gifts & Gadgets in Lakewood Ranch has a sizable collection of Vera Bradley totes, ranging from smaller items to larger pieces good for all kinds of travel. It also helps that many of their bags have fun patterns, such as a whole selection of different dogs. Christmas items are also coming in, so if you want a fun reindeer bag, this is your moment.

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Scout & Molly's
5275 University Parkway, #132

The Haute Shore bags have been a big seller for Scout & Molly's near Lakewood Ranch, and staff say it's been almost impossible to keep them on the shelves. As it happens, the store currently has a few bags from Haute Short, including the Greyson Reserve and the Greyson Lady, both going for \$98.



Greyson Lady, \$98



Greyson Reserve, \$98



Patrizia Luca Chevron Geo Tote, \$72



Classic Tote Poppy Playa BL, \$285

GrabnGo Basic Lulu Dot, \$34

Wish On Main

8141 Lakewood Main St.
The Wish On Main boutique has quite a few handbags, totes and other carry items, but Owner Jan Nicholson is really enjoying the current Consuela brand, which sports some varied and colorful patterns and designs. There are also smaller totes that have some bright pink color if you want to go a different way.

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The 12 Rays of COVID-19

Just when we thought there wasn't one silver lining to 2020, a dozen Lakewood Ranch optimists flipped a switch in the darkness.

BY HEIDI KURPIELA | CONTRIBUTOR

There's a memo going around right now letting us know it's OK to not be OK. In case life wasn't miserable enough, positivity has now been branded toxic. So let's begin with this disclaimer: Suzy Sunshine, Pollyanna, reach under your masks, and zip your lips. Debbie Downer is here to tell you COVID-19 is real. People are suffering. Jobs are gone. Families are separated, and politicians are grievous. Air hugs are lame. Virtual field trips are depressing, and your drive-by 40th birthday parade looked more like a Grey Poupon commercial than an actual celebration.

Yeah. Things are going to hell in a handbasket.

But then one afternoon you find yourself wandering off the beaten path at Greenbrook Park with your jeans rolled up like Tom Sawyer's, tramping through a creek with Jeff and Jenni Zych and their almost-3-year-old daughter, Avery.

You watch Avery splash through the meandering gully, her pink dress tied up in a knot, her water shoes sinking into the sandy bottom. You watch Jeff hoist her every so often up to the sky, so she can see the birds warbling in the trees. You watch Jenni laugh whenever their dog, Fritz, gallops in her direction, a stick hanging out of his mouth, his floppy ears skimming the water.

You learn that Jeff, a regional account manager at a pharmaceutical company, has never spent so much time with his family. Before COVID-19, the admittedly high-strung 37-year-old was in the air more than he was home, traveling up to five days a week for work. When the pandemic grounded his schedule to a halt, he was forced for

the first time to work from home in Lakewood Ranch.

It was jarring at first, and then something interesting happened. As the days dragged into weeks, and the weeks dragged into months, Jeff fell into a new normal. He took long bike rides with his daughter and taught her to fish. He did puzzles, coloring books, painting and swimming. He helped with potty training. He introduced her to golf.

One day, he looked at a picture of his chubby-cheeked toddler that was taken back in January, and suddenly, it hit him how much she had changed in six months. "I realized how happy I was that I got to spend every single second I could with her," Jeff says. "Slowing down was not a bad thing. In some ways, I had more fun doing absolutely nothing. Life moves too quick; I get that now."

So with that attitude in mind, let us provide a healthy dose of nontoxic positivity. And if you're still feeling surly at the end of this piece, just remember the U.S. Postal Service is too broke and backed up to deliver our handbaskets to hell.

Photos by Heidi Kurpiela
Lakewood Ranch residents Jenni and Jeff Zych (pictured here with daughter Avery and dog Fritz) discovered this hidden creek near their Summerfield home during the height of the pandemic. Before COVID-19, Jeff spent most of his days traveling for work. Working from home forced him to slow down and revel in life's little pleasures. "He's learned how to play with our daughter," Jenni says.



1 “Being home, I was able to take longer walks in the morning. I started seeing so many animals — deer, alligators and coyotes playing in the early morning light. I had a hilarious encounter with a wild pig. I swear it was judging me as it tossed its head and sauntered away like I was last year’s roadkill. Over the course of six months, I got to see several different families of sandhill cranes raise their babies. A few times I had to shepherd them away from the highway. I still see a skunk on a weekly basis. It’s like I’m watching a wilderness soap opera.”

Janet Allen lives in Greenbrook with her husband, Kevin, and 4-year-old daughter, Summer. She teaches English and creative writing at Venice High School.

2 “I feel like I’ve been given time to breathe, like I can stop and smell the roses in a way I couldn’t before. So many of us were running in different directions with candles burning at both ends. It was hard to keep going at that pace, or maybe we didn’t notice because we were all going at that pace. I’m definitely a better person now, less overwhelmed and more balanced.”

Jeffery Kin is the managing artistic director of The Players Centre for Performing Arts, which recently wrapped its 90th (and final) season inside its storied Sarasota playhouse. The Players is in the process of moving its North Tamiami Trail theater into temporary digs as it forges ahead with a capital campaign to build a \$30 million performing arts complex at Waterside Place in Lakewood Ranch.

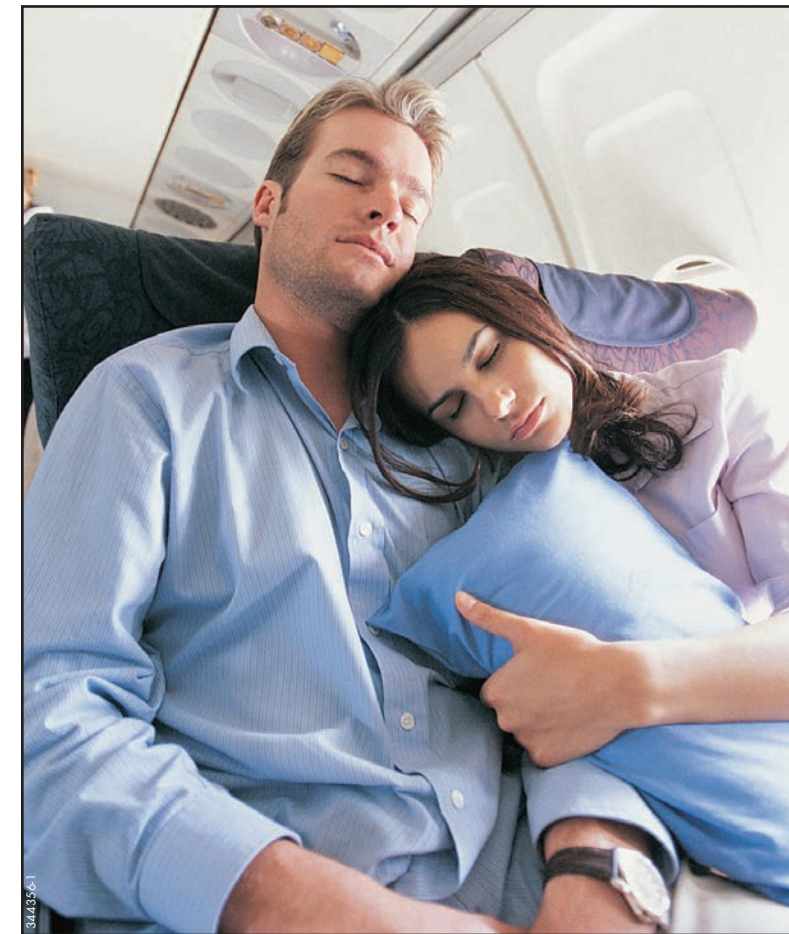
3 “This crisis has really reinforced the purpose of the [Lakewood Ranch Medical Center] auxiliary. People take a lot for granted until there’s a crisis — especially a health crisis. It reorients us. We appreciate nurses when we’re sick in the hospital, but we need to value them when we’re well, too. Our mission has always been to make sure our nursing students get the support they need to finish their degrees. Last year we decided to include candidates who are going for their master’s degrees. The one thing that has rung true to me throughout all this is that the auxiliary is on the right track.”

Carole Cowan is the president of the Lakewood Ranch Medical Center Auxiliary, which supports the health needs of the community and provides scholarships to students pursuing careers in nursing and other health care careers.



4 “The day they shut us down, I cranked it up. I was like, how do we punch this thing in the face? The restaurant industry is a dog fight, and I’m a fighter. I said to my employees: ‘Let’s not just sit around and wait for things to open back up. Let’s figure out a way to serve the community.’ In four days my management team built an online grocery store that had 180 items on it. There were so many shortages at the big-box stores; meanwhile my vendors were sitting on cases of toilet paper. I think I was selling into car trunks on March 21. It was incredible. People who had never heard of us before were coming to get groceries. It kept our employees working and gave us relevancy in the community.”

Greg Campbell, above, is the executive chef and director of operations for Pier 22 and Grove Restaurant, which opened two years ago in the former Polo Grill location on Main Street in Lakewood Ranch.



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5 “COVID-19 brought to mind the importance of health. Americans scrambled for exercise equipment during the lockdown. I hope they’re still using it now. My business has definitely seen an upswing, which says to me people are finally waking up to the fact that health is wealth. What we eat and how we take care of ourselves matters.”

John Richardson, above, is a certified sports nutritionist, a personal trainer, an MMA conditioning specialist and the owner of Temple Fitness in Lakewood Ranch’s San Marco Plaza.

6 “Everybody we work with — patients, families, colleagues, donors, volunteers — is trying to embrace life with more compassion. There’s an understanding that we don’t know what a person is dealing with under that mask. Hundreds of individuals, associations and companies responded to our shortage of [personal protective equipment]. They made masks, gowns and face shields. One man who runs a commercial cleaning company in New Jersey shipped us his last case of N95 masks. His parents had been in our care, and he wanted to give back. People feel an urgency to donate, and I think that’s a beautiful outcome.”

Debbie Mason is the executive vice president and chief philanthropy officer at Tidewell Hospice and Stratum Health. Last February, she was appointed to president of the nonprofit’s new foundation.

7 “Now that my husband is no longer traveling for work, he’s getting to spend time he never would have gotten with our daughter. Before the pandemic, he was gone three, sometimes four bedtimes a week. Most mornings, I’d wake her up and tell her Daddy was on an airplane. Now that he’s home, he’s learned how to play with her — and not just play, but sit on the floor and do puzzles and go on bike rides and explore parks. Over the summer, we found this hidden stream at Greenbrook Park, and the three of us had a blast splashing in the water, just hanging out.”

Jenni Zych lives in Summerfield with her husband, Jeff, and daughter, Avery, who nailed potty training and napping during quarantine.

8 “Some of our clients had trouble procuring PPP loans back in the spring. The big banks weren’t calling them back. Our referrals to small local branches made a big difference. When was the last time you walked into your local bank branch and made a personal connection? Those relationships in banking had gone away. When COVID-19 hit, I watched the small banks come in on their white horses and save the day.”

Allison Imre is the owner and president of Lakewood Ranch-based Grapevine Communications.



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9 “We took this year as an opportunity to reassess ways to get our residents outside, active and healthy. In the past, we were an organization looking to put on 1,000-person events. This year, we pivoted to help build out programs in our parks, [rolling out] classes for all ages in yoga, barre, acting and fitness.”

Keith Pandeloglou is the executive director of Lakewood Ranch Community Activities and the CEO of UTC Venture Group.

12 “I’ve run cross-country for the past three years, and I was worried my school would cancel it this year. Thankfully, they didn’t. I felt lonely when we were all isolated in our houses. I’m grateful to be able to go back to school in person. Running cross-country with my friends again brought me out of the slumps.”

Chelsea Ball, below, is a senior at The Out-of-Door Academy. She lives in Summerfield with her family and hopes to study biology next fall at Northwestern University.



Photo courtesy of The Out-of-Door Academy

10 “Our real estate market is on fire right now. People are fleeing big cities and moving to communities like ours. I’m seeing clients from Manhattan and L.A. with little children in tow. It’s been refreshing to get to know all these young families.”

Gloria Bracciano is a Realtor with Michael Saunders & Co. and a resident of Lakewood Ranch Country Club.

11 “We had a Total Gym apparatus folded up in our garage that we were going to get rid of until this all began. When our community gym closed, we found a way to fit it inside my husband’s office. We rearranged his desk, got a fold-up stationary bike and a small treadmill. We sort of pushed everything sideways. It’s a little unkept, but it works. We’re lucky because this pandemic hasn’t been a terrible hardship. Every day we say thank you for our location, our weather, our community and all the little things that make the situation tolerable.”

Pamela Gunzl is a retired real estate broker who lives with her husband, George, in Esplanade Golf & Country Club. Together they have five children and eight grandchildren.

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Preserving a Living Art

A family legacy intertwines with one of the world's rarest horse breeds on a Myakka City ranch.

BY BRYNN MECHEM | CONTRIBUTOR

Photos by Brynn Mechem
Rebecca McCullough trains a Lipizzan as it works through traditional movements dancing horses perform during shows at Herrmanns' Royal Lipizzan Stallions.

Buried deep in Myakka City, about 20 minutes from the nearest grocery store, sits a black, wrought-iron gate.

Behind it, you won't find a grandiose ranch house nor a sprawling plantation home. Instead, you'll stumble upon a quaint family farm chock-full of history and stocked with one of the world's rarest breeds of horse.

As you drive onto the property of Herrmanns' Royal Lipizzan Stallions, you'll most likely be met by a curious corgi and a smile from owner Gabriella Herrmann.

Herrmann is the current proprietor of the family legacy — breeding and showing Lipizzan stallions — a trade that has been in the family for nearly 300 years.

Although the family is now in its sixth generation as performers, Lipizzans wouldn't be the family trade without a gratuitous gift, the intervention of the U.S. Army and a generations-long passion for dressage.

A HORSE FOR ROYALTY

First developed by the Habsburg monarchy for its use in the 16th century, the Lipizzan is one of Europe's oldest breed of horses.

The Hapsburg family controlled both Spain and Austria when classical riding was revived during the Renaissance. Around then, both military members and classical riding school students were in need of a light, fast horse.

Habsburg Emperor Maximilian II brought the Spanish Andalusian horse to Austria and founded the court stud while his brother, Archduke Charles II, established a similar stud at Lipizza. The established breed was only to be used by those in power.

"Nobody could see the Lipizzans," Herrmann says. "They were only for royalty, heads of state, dignitaries. People knew about them, but not very many people saw them."

The Lipizzan stud farm remained a possession of the Habsburg monarchy until 1916, when the horses were evacuated due to World War I. After World War I, central Europe was reorganized, and the breeding stock was divided.

During World War II, the breed



A Lipizzan performs a levade, in which it raises 45 degrees, which would allow riders during wartime to see far into the distance.

again was threatened when Nazi Germany transferred most of the mares in the breeding stock to what was then Hostau, Czechoslovakia. In spring 1945, the horses were threatened by the advancing Soviet army. However, a portion of the U.S. Army, led by Gen. George Patton, was stationed near the area. Patton, a horseman, heard about the horses at Hostau, where 400 Allied prisoners also were being kept.

Operation Cowboy, led by Col. Charles Reed, resulted in the recovery of 1,200 horses, including 375 Lipizzans. Patton then worked with the head of the Spanish Riding School, Col. Alois Podhajsky, and the American Army to herd the horses 35 miles across the border into Germany.

Patton's crusade was later made famous by the 1963 Disney movie "Miracle of the White Stallions," but the Herrmann family tells a much more personal story.

A FAMILY LEGACY

Herrmann's family, originally from the Austro-Hungarian Empire, has been around Lipizzans for more than 300 years. A knight in Herrmann's lineage originally was gifted a stallion, and throughout the years, her family helped breed the horse.

"As the generations and the family grew, there were times where there were a lot of horses and times when there were a few horses," she says. "But there was always somebody that was interested in having the horses."

Around the same time that Patton was running Operation Cowboy, Herrmann's family was running a rescue mission of their own. The Herrmanns were fleeing war-torn Europe, but not without their Lipizzans. So Herrmann's grandfather and father began smuggling their horses out of Europe.

Continued on Page 66

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Continued from Page 64

“It was a jewel for them,” Herrmann says. “They would put mud on them and camouflage them, and they would leave in the middle of the night to get the horses out.”

The family had long dreamed of immigrating to the U.S., but it would be several years before they were able to realize that dream. For many years after the war, the family toured with small circuses throughout the Caribbean and South America before eventually finding a sponsor that would bring them to the U.S.

In 1962, the family finally docked in the U.S. with one stallion, one mare and a 6-month-old colt. They began performing in smaller venues with touring companies until they saved enough capital to tour on their own.

Once the Herrmanns had enough horses to be self-sustaining, they began traveling the U.S. by themselves. After traveling for many years and performing at venues, such as Cow Palace and Madison Square Garden, the Herrmann family wanted a place to call their own.

FINDING A HOME

The family already owned a small piece of land off Fruitville Road, but it needed a bigger piece of real estate to open a private farm to local visitors during the off-season.

Herrmann’s father bought the current property at 32755 Singletary Road in Myakka City in 1963, back when the roads were like a patchwork quilt weaving around farms.

“The first thing out of my grandfather’s mouth was: ‘Son, what have you done? Nobody will ever find us,’” Herrmann recalls.

Nonetheless, the family began building, and not soon after, a man driving by saw the Lipizzans and stopped to look at them. The next week, the driver brought friends to watch, and popularity snowballed from there.

Eventually, the family had to build a larger arena and add more weekly shows to accommodate all the interest. The shows would feature classical dressage, dancing horses and battle maneuvers, such as the popular “airs above the ground.”



The airs above the ground comprises three movements: the levade, in which a horse lifts itself into a 45 degree angle to allow the rider to see far into the distance; the courbette, in which the horse lifts itself on its hind legs and jumps forward at an opponent; and the capriole, in which the horse jumps straight up and kicks out at opponents with its hind legs, the force of which could decapitate an opponent.

“All these maneuvers are natural, and any horse can do them,” Herrmann says. “However, the Lipizzan was created for its bone and muscle mass to take the impact of these maneuvers.”

After the invention of gunpowder, however, military men didn’t have a need for horses to learn the maneuvers, and the airs above the ground are now considered a lost art, one that the Herrmann family is proud to keep alive.

Today, there are fewer than 8,500 purebred Lipizzans in the world, according to the U.S. Lipizzan Federation, and the Herrmann family owns 25 of them. Ten of the horses perform in the shows, with some still in training and others now retired.

Lipizzans are born black, brown or gray and gradually lighten to the white coat they’re known for between



the ages of 6 and 10, which is just after they’re fully trained for the show.

Herrmann, her family and several volunteers work with the horses on and off throughout the week to train. They first start with line training to get the horses used to being handled and then work their way to airs or dancing, depending on the horse.

One volunteer, Abby Di Lecce, says she volunteers four days a week because she loves being around the family and its collective knowledge.

“Gabby’s like a walking encyclope-

Continued on Page 68

Top: A Lipizzan performs a capriole, during which it jumps up and kicks straight back. When used during war, the force of a capriole could decapitate an opponent. Above: A new edition to the farm, 1-year-old corgi Totoro often runs around the training rings with the horses.

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dia of knowledge and horse history," Di Lecce says. "We don't just come and train, but while we're mucking stalls, Gabby will tell us stories, and we'll learn things we wouldn't learn anywhere else."

PRESERVING AN ART

The farm runs off of donations and money made from touring, but due to COVID-19, the family's summer tour was canceled, and their weekend shows have been shut down since March.

It takes about \$5,000 a month to feed the horses, not to mention the added costs of equipment and upkeep. The group started a GoFundMe page to help keep it afloat, but it didn't garner much support.

"It's been a very hard, long summer for us," Herrmann says. "At this moment in time, it's getting critical. The thought is, 'Are we going to continue?' We're trying as hard as we can because I'm not getting rid of the horses.

They're family."

But the family isn't the only one to miss performing. Volunteer Samantha Dittmann, who has performed with the family for several years, says the horses miss the crowds as well.

"It's so much fun performing because the horses know the crowd is out there, and they're excited to perform as well," Dittmann says. "We're all ready to get back out there."

Despite the setbacks, the family is determined to keep going. They still work with the horses each morning and hope to open again for shows in December. For Herrmann, it's paramount to protect the history of the Lipizzans.

"This is living art, and we have to preserve the art," Herrmann says. "It's history, it's art, and it has to be preserved, or we will lose it."

Right now, Herrmann's daughter and granddaughter, Rebecca and Sydney McCullough, perform in the show, and although Herrmann says it would be great if they'd carry on the family



tradition, she's not banking on it.

"It's quite a responsibility, and if they want to do it, that's great, and if not, that's fine too," Herrmann says. "This is something you have to want to do from inside. You can't do it because it's your heritage. It has to be your passion."

Owner Gabriella Herrmann has worked with Lipizzans since she was a child. Throughout her life, she has worked to preserve the breed and the historic dressage it was bred to perform.



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Coming to My Senses

The pandemic infected my instincts, so I turned to Lakewood Ranch physician's assistant-turned-energy healer Susan Milligan for help. The outcome still has me reeling.

BY HEIDI KURPIELA | CONTRIBUTOR

I'm lying face up on a white sheet,

stretched out on a table trying not to fidget. The sunlight glinting through the closed blinds bathes my line of sight in a buttercup hue — the very color of my most decrepit chakra, the solar plexus, aka the complex system of nerves and ganglia in the pit of my stomach. Aka my gut.

Susan Milligan, a Lakewood Ranch reiki master and energy healer, approaches the table. "It helps to set an intention before we begin," she says. "If you can think of one thing you'd like to work on ..."

Stick-to-itiveness, I say to myself. "I feel like the wind keeps getting sucked out of my sails," I say out loud. "Hmmm," Milligan says.

"Like my inner compass is spinning." Another hmmm.

"I never used to feel this way. I used to be decisive and determined. Like a dog with a bone."

Milligan seems to intuitively understand the rest, so I leave it at that and close my eyes, letting the ghost of my former tenacious self soften into the table. As I do this, my thoughts drift to my stomach, where I can feel hunger pangs and Milligan's light, hovering touch. I fight the urge to get up and grab the packet of peanuts I stuffed in my camera bag that morning. Why didn't I just eat breakfast before leaving?

Through slitted eyes, I can see Milligan doing some sort of finger dance over my navel, tugging and knotting

Continued on Page 72

Photos by Heidi Kurpiela

Minus the crystals and incense, Susan Milligan's energy treatment room (located in the back of her Sarasota metaphysical boutique) resembles any other wellness practice. "I'm not the super crunchy hippie type," Milligan says. "I'm still that soccer mom who likes her BMW and Gucci purse. It's not like I had a personality transplant simply because I developed a deeper sense of awareness."



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Continued from Page 71

invisible string, a sort of pantomime of Cat's Cradle — air sewing if you will. I take a deep breath and surrender to the void just as my phone, set to vibrate, begins mewling in my purse. The buzz harshens my two minutes of mellow and immediately dredges up the impending stress of my afternoon: the one-hour drive back home to St. Petersburg, the fact that I'm going to be late getting my children from school and later still getting the other two children I offered to babysit. Why didn't I just tell my friend I couldn't watch her kids today?

I start sweating, which makes me think of air conditioning, which makes me think of ventilation, which makes me think of COVID-19. Always COVID-19. I hear the voice of my husband and the collective voice of every social media user in my Facebook feed scolding me for not wearing a mask during this appointment. My imaginary tongue-lashing goes something like this:

Why didn't you wear a mask?
Because the practitioner said it wasn't necessary.

How does she know?
Because she's deeply in tune with the universe.

Dr. Anthony Fauci is deeply in tune with science, and he says we should always be masked.

But neither one of us has COVID-19. Can you prove it?

No.
Well then shame on you, disease

Milligan was originally trained in reiki but shifted her healing style years ago after studying less structured modalities at the Barbara Brennan School of Healing in South Florida.

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Holistic healers and proponents of alternative medicine often promote the use of crystals and stones to help aid the body in myriad ways, from alleviating pain and enhancing creativity to fine-tuning one's own clairvoyance.

Continued from Page 72

vector. Enjoy your energy healing! Thanks. I'm going to bury myself in a hole when it's over. A sudden physical awareness cuts through my self-deprecation, a trembling below my ribs that feels like butterflies flapping or a fetus kicking. My eyes flicker open a hair, just enough to see Milligan knotting the final loop-de-loop of invisible thread. In this moment I feel the skin on my abdomen



tugging and puckering like I'm being sewn shut. The sensation is so strange that I will myself to close my eyes tighter and roll with it. That's when I realize my eyes were never open to begin with, and for a second I feel like I'm melting. Then I remember I need to pick up my kids, and I ladle my molten aura off the table and reach for my phone to check the time.

AN UNLIKELY MYSTIC

Susan Milligan didn't always feel so comfortable mucking around other people's energy fields.

Growing up in New York in the 1970s, Milligan stayed squarely within the bounds of her middle-class Catholic upbringing. Her father was a New York City police officer, and her mother was a school teacher, neither of whom dabbled in esoteric wonders and "tutti-frutti" beliefs — Milligan's words.

"I very distinctly remember looking around my Catholic elementary school and thinking, 'Does anyone else have a problem with this?'" recalls Milligan, now 52. "The premises of these Muslim, Jewish and Christian religions always felt to me like a way to scare and control people. At the time I wasn't

sophisticated enough to rebel against it. I was indoctrinated to be obedient, but I always knew in my core it didn't feel right."

Milligan has always felt things in her core, and not just her things either — things radiating out of other people's cores: pain, joy, anxiety, fear, love. It's a mixed blessing that haunted her for two decades as a physician assistant. A graduate of Boston College and the physician assistant program at The School of Health Sciences at Touro College, she spent most of her career feeling other people's pain.

When Milligan joined the house staff working nights at Good Samaritan Hospital Medical Center on Long Island 27 years ago, she didn't think she'd last a month.

"You're working with patients already admitted and patients in emergency and patients ready to leave," she says. "You're putting in tubes and starting IVs and basically hurting people all the time. Two weeks into the job, I was like, 'Oh, my God, what did I do?'"

She hated it at first but stuck it out anyway, partly for the paycheck, partly out of service and partly to prove to

herself that she was on the right path. Plus, she was good at it, thanks to her no-nonsense, Type-A demeanor and intuitive bedside manner. "You might toughen up on the outside, but you still feel turmoil on the inside," she says.

Milligan never considered how the bad juju was impacting her health until she was married and unable to get pregnant.

Desperate, the then 20-something made an appointment for an energy healing at the suggestion of a friend whose aunt practiced reiki, a Japanese light-touch technique based on the idea that all living things have a life force energy that can be tapped, channeled and unclogged.

"I told her I'd do it if it didn't cost more than a pair of shoes at Nordstrom," Milligan quips. "I went into the session rolling my eyes because of course I didn't believe in that stuff."

The spiritual tuneup had a profound and lasting effect, resulting in a positive pregnancy test one month later. "Something shifted in me after that," she says. "My whole world opened up."

She started studying reiki and other related modalities shortly thereafter



and in 2004 enrolled in the Barbara Brennan School of Healing, a mecca for light workers, spiritual gurus and champions of Eastern medicine. (The school was founded on Long Island in 1982 by former NASA astrophysicist and human energy field pioneer Barbara Brennan.)

Guided by a reiki mastership and four years of comprehensive Brennan training, Milligan began doing healings on the side for a small cadre of hospital

colleagues and friends. The sessions made her feel less at odds with Western medicine and better equipped to lead those most hurting through the darkness.

In 2015, she relocated to Lakewood Ranch with her husband, a computer engineer, and two teenage daughters. After a brief stint working as a physician assistant at Ideal Image, she

Milligan recently moved Inquire Within Goddess Shoppe out of its Lakewood Ranch location on Lake Osprey Drive to a cottage in Gillespie Park. The shop's retail component functions as a vehicle for Milligan's healings.

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LWR LIFE 75

"I really feel for health care workers right now," says Milligan, who worked from 1993-2016 as a physician assistant primarily in New York hospitals. "I'm more grateful than ever that my higher self led me away from that career."

Continued from Page 75

opened Inquire Within Goddess Shoppe, a metaphysical boutique on Lake Osprey Drive selling all the requisite new age accoutrements: crystals, stones, sage, candles, oils and a diverse collection of handmade jewelry. The shop, which Milligan relocated in January to a quiet cottage in Gillespie Park, functions as a sort of gateway to her more powerful proclivities: "goddess" healings and energy medicine.

When the pandemic hit in March,



she had no idea the space would feel like such a refuge from the madness.

"The system is fracturing," Milligan says. "Things are breaking down. There's a lot of chaos and a window of opportunity. Now is the time to grab back our power."

A SPIDER DITCHES HER WEB

There was a time not long ago when I ran only on instincts. So acute were these hunches that I dubbed them my Spidey senses and acted on them as if I were in a latex suit, slinging and swinging from one webbed roofline to the next. Without them, I would have never taken the life-affirming risks I've taken as a journalist, wife and mother.

I was originally given this assignment back in March, but I postponed it for COVID-19 reasons. At the time, I had no idea how disorientated I'd feel by October or how big the blockage would get in my gut after carrying around the weight of so many second guesses. I might not have gone out looking to grab back my power, but my soul did without asking permission.

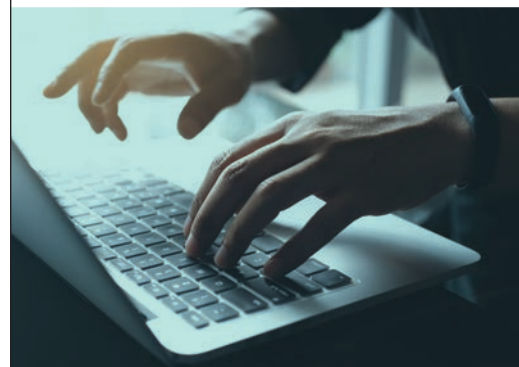
When I walked into Milligan's shop with its enchanted crystals, mesmeriz-

ing baubles and sunshine-imbued but-tercup milieu, the only thing I knew for sure was that I didn't know anything for sure, except that I was steeped in the wake of a spreading virus and its subsequent mire of economic and interpersonal quagmires.

COVID-19 cut me off from friends, family, neighbors and vital professional relationships, including my parents, whom I haven't seen in person since January. It cost my husband his job and our health insurance and sent our kids into a kind of hibernation marked by long bouts of screen time, screaming and scant socialization.

No wonder I felt inert. The universe fired a poison dart at my ever-swinging body and flatlined my Spidey senses. But like all things with strings attached, my pummeled receptors dramatically perked up when I threw them this one gift: faith. In the weeks following my session with Milligan, I made a promise to no longer tether my instincts to the things you cannot see. It might seem counterintuitive, but I don't think so. I'm finding it easier to get around now. I feel freer now without my web.

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SPOTLIGHTING LIFE ON THE RANCH

A water view framed by tropical palms highlights a lavish home in The Lake Club.
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CASTLE — ON THE — LAKE

A Lake Club couple find inspiration
in European architecture.

BY ROBERT PLUNKET | CONTRIBUTOR

The home's impressive exterior showcases the owners' passion for European architecture. Years of travel and exploring contributed ideas for the design,

including the signature turret. It provides both a dramatic entryway on the ground level and a secluded study on the second floor.



Top: A careful blending of details and proportions give the great room a scale worthy of its castlelike pedigree. Above left: A minstrel gallery overlooks the two-story space. Above right: A wood-paneled bar is tucked away off the formal dining room.

A man's home is his castle, so the saying goes. And for a couple in The Lake Club, it's a truism come to life. Their castlelike home is a stylish and highly livable tribute to the grand residences that have dotted the European countryside for ages.

And it's a labor of love for Gregg and Alexis Heckman, the couple who built it in 2015.

"I love European architecture," Alexis Heckman says. "I love old-world charm."

And so, after 20 years of trips to Europe, often returning to revisit their favorite places — Venice, the Loire valley, Nueschwanstein (King Ludwig's classic castle in Bavaria) — they turned their dreams into reality and

built their castle in the perfect location: a lakefront lot in The Lake Club, itself a 1,500-acre tribute to the beauty of Tuscany, Italy.

Continued on Page 84

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Continued from Page 82

Is there a turret? Of course. "I knew I wanted a turret from day one," Alexis says. It dominates the facade, clad in stone and soaring to its conical roof. The lower level functions as an impressive entryway to the home. One flight up, you'll find a charming circular study, perfect for reading a good book. The Heckmans are originally from Pittsburgh, where Gregg was in the furniture business, and Alexis owned a floral and bridal shop. This gave them a firm grounding in designing a home. Gregg understood furniture, and planning weddings had taught Alexis all about color, coordination and drama. These lessons were put to good advantage, and, incorporated with ideas from their European tours, the Heckmans have created a home that might be rooted in the past but manages to live quite easily in the present.



The focal point of the kitchen is a custom-designed banquette that provides the perfect gathering spot for visiting grandchildren. Lighting fixtures are Italian, as is most of the hardware in the home.

Continued on Page 86

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Continued from Page 84

details. Even the lighting fixtures, mostly from Venice, have their story. The barrel ceiling in the guest bath is another castle detail, as is the minstrel gallery that overlooks the two-story great room. And accessible from the formal dining room lies an outdoor eating area, complete with pergola and fountain. "We call it the grotto," Alexis says, its inspiration being a favorite restaurant in Sorrento, Italy.

The home's interior lives up to its exterior. It's a balance of grand formal elements with easy modern living. The great room is the grandest of the formal elements and is definitely castle-worthy. It is slightly sunken, which adds even more volume to a space that soars 21 feet high. Windows on the second floor fill it with light, and a big, bold fireplace set opposite a large mirror in a baroque frame enlarges the great room's scale.

The decorating is anything but me-

Continued on Page 88



The cream-colored master bath is French in feeling and features a soaking tub with a view of the lake. Nearby is a large walk-in shower with a garden view.

Embracing Every Moment



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Continued from Page 86

dieval, though. Alexis decorated the house herself and describes it as “traditional, with some flair and glamor added.” The color scheme is carefully thought out, as befits the eye of a wedding planner and the style varies from room to room.

The coziest room in the castle is the kitchen and family room, perfect for hanging out with the Heckmans’ three children and seven grandchildren. The star of the room is definitely the banquette. Alexis designed it to fit into the kitchen island. It is semicircular and features a padded seat. It attracts the grandkids like a magnet, she reports.

In the master bedroom we get more formal again. Here Alexis has chosen a color scheme designed to relax: grays, mossy greens, the lightest beige. Mirror-clad nightstands reflect flashes of color and touches of mellow dark wood ground the room.

The master bath might well be the most European space in the home. The carefully laid out custom cabinetry suggests French provincial, and the bathtub offers a view of the lake. The large walk-in shower, clad in marble, has a view of its own, out to a private garden, and a leaded glass insert adds to the charm.

The Heckman home is designed to accommodate visiting family and guests, with the bedrooms spaced out and separated, perfect for longer stays. In addition to a first-floor guest suite, there’s a second master suite on the second floor. Dining options are equally flexible. Meals can be served in a variety of places: the formal dining room, the family room banquette, out by the pool (there’s an outdoor kitchen) or in the grotto.

Much of the visiting revolves around the bar, a custom feature off the dining room. It’s a wood-paneled space that features a wine refrigerator, a sink, etched glass and custom antique cabinetry, some of it from the store Alexis owned in Pennsylvania. Over a century old, the repurposed woodwork adds both personal and historic notes to the home.

If the inside is the domain of Alexis, husband Gregg is in charge of the outside. A premium half-acre lot has given him a Loire Valley setting to work with. A green lawn, accented by carefully tended flowers, runs down to the shore



grass and a view of shimmering water and trees on the far horizon.

Still, to a casual viewer, the most intriguing part of the Heckman home is the four mounted golf balls in Gregg’s office. Each represents a hole-in-one. (Full disclosure: Alexis has one of her own.) Golf, in fact, has played a major role in the Heckmans’ life. They moved from Siesta Key to Lakewood Ranch because Gregg plays four times a week, and it was becoming a bit of a commute. “When it comes to golf, he’s serious,” Alexis says.

The Heckmans have decided to downsize and are building a new home nearby. The 5,160-square-foot castle will soon have a new keeper to appreciate the elegant refinements and details they have reimagined and brought to life in the perfect tropical setting.

Located off the formal dining room is an outdoor eating area inspired by the owners’ favorite restaurant in Sorrento, Italy, complete with pergola and fountain.

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art and about

Area art is back!

Things still might look a little different, but as we have learned, art will find a way. Here are selections to enjoy in the upcoming months.



SU BYRON
CONTRIBUTOR

The infamous 2020 is almost over. Whew. Thanks to a certain virus, our area arts community and audiences endured a silent spring, a bummer summer and a fallen fall. Is this the winter of discontent for creative expression? Not quite. Our arts leaders rallied to the challenge. In the months of forced downtime, they have adapted, adopted, pivoted and planned ahead. As winter begins, they are slowly but surely doing all they can to fill up our senses with beautiful music and compelling imagery. Art is coming back. And here's some of what you'll find.

Shine a Light on the Holidays. Choral Artists of Sarasota's "Holiday Lights" celebrates light — a symbol of hope and peace. Ariel Ramirez's "Navidad Nuestra" is the heart of the program, a work that illuminates the Christmas story through the eyes of Argentina's indigenous people. This virtual concert features the voices of stunning tenor Rafael Dávila and the Choral Artists. Artistic Director Joseph Holt will delve into the music in a "Concert Insight" talk at 10 a.m. Dec. 10. The online concert takes place 4 p.m. Dec. 23. ChoralArtistsSarasota.org; 941-387-4900.

Do the Kabuki. Kabuki actors were Japanese superstars in the popular art form's heyday. Visual artists cashed in on that popularity with mass-produced, woodblock prints of those performers. Their yakusha-e portraits became highly popular in the mid-1800s — and set the pattern for manga and anime art in the years to come. "Kabuki Modern" at The Ringling showcases portraits of Kabuki performers painted by significant Japanese artists



Choral Artists of Sarasota

Courtesy photos



"Kabuki Modern" at The Ringling

from 1868 through the 1950s. Drawing on the museum's archive and loans from area collectors, the pieces evoke

Kabuki's expressive dynamism and reveal how the style absorbed Western influences over the decades. Highlights include Toyohara Kunichika's "One Hundred Roles of Baikō" (1893) and Shin'ei's haunting "Onoe Baikō VI as Oiwa" (1926), capturing Baikō VI's portrayal of the horrifying heroine of Tōkaidō's ghost story. *Through June 27. Ringling.org; 941-359-5700.*

Anna Deavere Smith's "Twilight: Los Angeles, 1992" grapples with a topic that seemingly defies human understanding: "The Rodney King Incident." Those four innocuous words fall short of the brutal reality. In 1991, a protracted police beating of a helpless Black man was captured on videotape. In 1992, six days of deadly riots erupted in Los Angeles when a jury refused to convict any of the LAPD assailants. The one-two punch of "The Rodney

Continued on Page 92

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King Incident” touched the lives of thousands of ordinary people, both guilty and innocent. It also formed a microcosm for centuries of systemic racism. To do justice to this massive topic, Smith conducted hundreds of interviews then distilled them into a powerful drama. Her work was originally an acclaimed one-person play. It will now be performed by the Asolo Conservatory’s entire company of second-year actors, along with alumni from remote locations across the nation. Available for streaming Dec. 2-13. AsoloRep.org/conservatory/season; 941-351-9010.

Walk the Art. Billboards are usually eyesores. But the billboard-sized art you’ll find at Sarasota’s Island Park is a sight for sore eyes. You’re looking at **Embracing Our Differences’** annual outdoor exhibit, a celebration of diversity honoring the spectrum of the human family. The 50 gargantuan images of the 2021 exhibition were created by professional and student artists both locally and around the world. Each is

also accompanied by an inspirational quote. It’s a powerful outdoor art show, but there’s more than meets the eye. It’s the heart of a year-round educational program using the power of art to promote peace, love and understanding. *Jan. 20 to April 1 at Bayfront Park in downtown Sarasota. EmbracingOurDifferences.org; 941-404-5710.*

Masters of Jazz. Jazz lovers can break their musical fast with **Dick Hyman and the Florida Jazz Masters.** This scintillating live, outdoor concert happens at 5:30 p.m. Dec. 6 on the great lawn of Marie Selby Botanical Gardens. The jazz masters in question are six of Florida’s finest, including the legendary Dick Hyman. The music includes compositions by Irving Berlin, Duke Ellington, George Gershwin, Benny Goodman, Dick Hyman, Thelonius Monk, Cole Porter, Randy Sandke, Mike Treni and Harry Warren. Expect an eclectic musical feast spanning the spectrum of jazz from straight-ahead to swing to be-bop. Our Florida jazz masters definitely know the score. ArtistSeriesConcerts.org; 941-306-1202.



“Indigo Girls” by Eleanor Merritt, from the 2018 ASALH exhibit

AND DON'T MISS ...

ASALH Black Muse: 2021 Group Exhibition is a virtual exhibition of art by Black artists from around Florida. Each season, the Manasota Chapter of ASALH: The Association for the Study of African American Life and History works in partnership with Art Center Sarasota to highlight and exhibit the work inspired by the African diaspora’s culture, lives and history. This exhibit is co-sponsored by Suncoast Black Arts Collaborative Inc. *Jan. 28 to March 2 at Art Center Sarasota. ArtSarasota.org; 941-365-2032.*

Hermitage Sunsets @ Selby Gardens. This five-part outdoor series features performances and talks by Hermitage artists in residence and alumni. The next performance is 5:30 p.m. Jan. 22 at Marie Selby Botanical Gardens’ downtown campus. (Featured talent to be announced.) HermitageArtistRetreat.org.



Emanuel Ax

Pianist Emanuel Ax. Ever since winning the first Arthur Rubinstein Piano Competition in 1974, Emanuel Ax has established himself as a preeminent recitalist, chamber musician, guest soloist with orchestras and, above all, consummate musician. As part of the Sarasota Concert Association’s 2021 Great Performers Series, the esteemed artist will grace the Van Wezel stage March 16. SCASarasota.org; 941-225-6500.



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the jolly rancher A Great Epiphany

A marital dispute takes an unexpected turn down the rabbit hole of Christmas traditions — and timing.



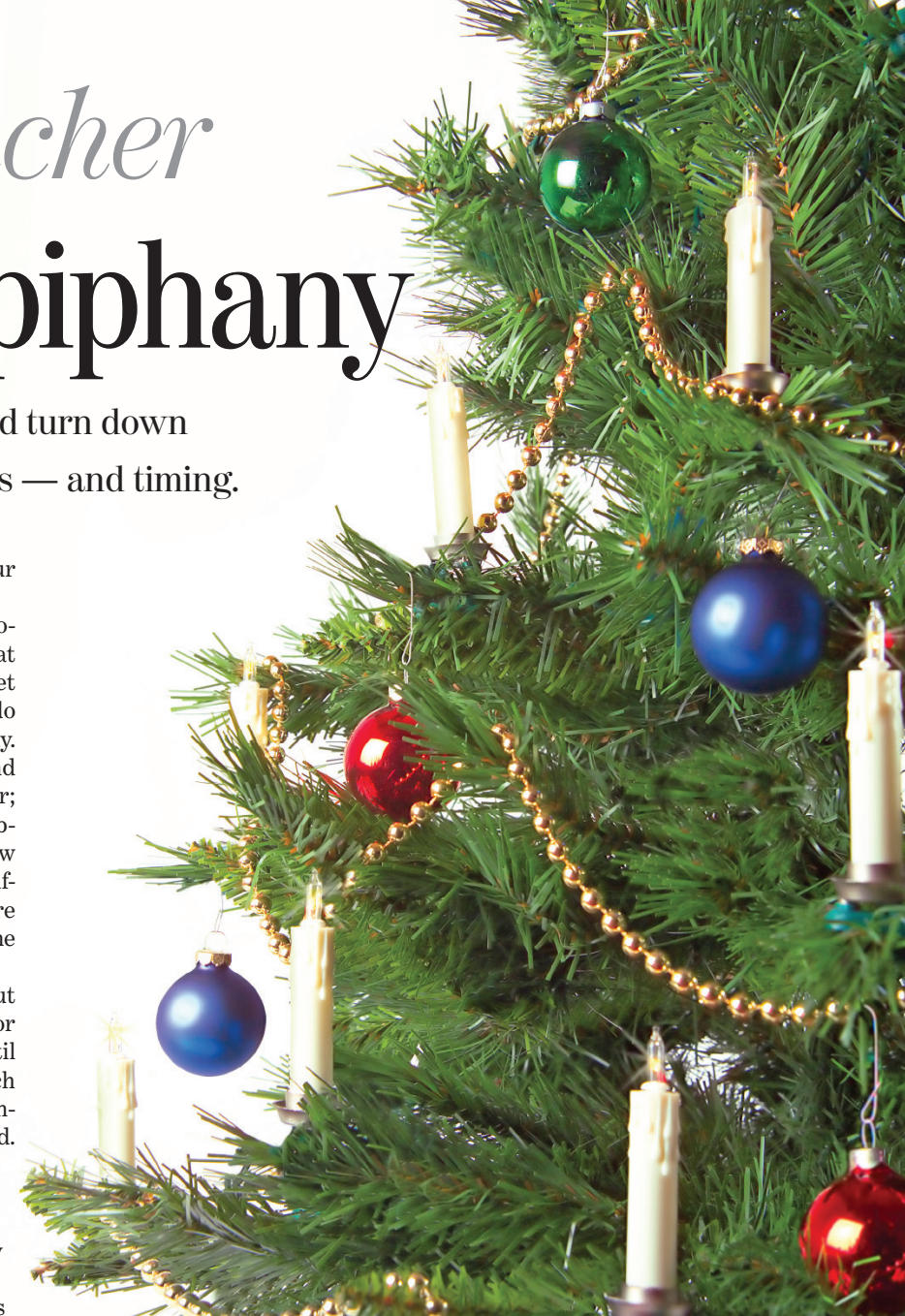
BY GABRIEL JIVA
RIVERWALK
RESIDENT AND
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ALEXANDER
(ABOVE) AND
FREDERICK

When do you take your Christmas tree down? If you're like most people — and I've looked at what is surely very rigorous internet polling data on the subject — you do it sometime around New Year's Day. And it depends on how the weekend squares with your Christmas cheer; those of you who love the season probably push it to the weekend after New Year's, even if it's a full seven days after, and those of you whose hearts are two sizes too small take them down the first chance you get.

There's a third group though, about 1 in 7 people, who leave the tree up for what's known as "far too long." Until visitors do a double take at seeing such a relic. Until the HOA sends a warning. Until it becomes a real fire hazard. Naturally, I'm one of those people.

Or at least I would be if my wife allowed such shenanigans. Left to her own devices, she'd be firmly in the "weekend after New Year's" clique. And yes, I get that the thing's been up for well over a month at that point and that the season has got to end at sometime, but let me counter with this: In the Philippines, the season lasts five months. Reread that. Yes, it says five. From the beginning of September all the way through the end of January. Now even to me that's a little much, not because of the length really but due to the fact that Halloween and Thanksgiving also need their own monthlong decoration seasons. (They don't do Thanksgiving in the Philippines, but I am curious about the interplay of Halloween and Christmas decorations — must be very "Nightmare Before Christmas.")

In any case, the end of January sounds to me like a perfectly reason-



able time to end the Christmas season. There's a certain balance to it, too. You have about a month between Thanksgiving and Christmas Day and then another month after, leaving the main event right in the middle. It might even be poetic.

Don't worry: The wife didn't buy that either. And so, this being a very important problem in a marriage with me, I reached for the conflict resolution tool called internet research. Was there an actual consensus on when the decorations should come down? Well, surprisingly, it turns out that yes, there is. And not from internet polls, either, but from 1,500 years of history. Most importantly, though: Is leaving the tree

up until the end of January really "far too long"? Also yes. Probably.

For most of my life, I thought the "Twelve Days of Christmas" song was the musical equivalent of a Dalí painting: surreal and whimsical. By the end of it, the guy has sent more than 42 geese-a-laying! How is that even logistically possible, to find that many geese that are actively laying an egg? Do the lords-a-leaping have a leaping schedule? Surely they need to rest. And why are they leaping to begin with? Is it supposed to be entertaining? And if so, why is nobility doing it and not, like, acrobats? And so on, with all those baf-

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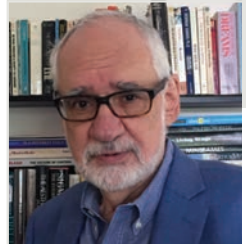
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Continued from Page 95

fling “gifts,” but also including the fact that they’re celebrating Christmas for 12 days, which is kind of a ridiculously long amount of time.

Except that — and here was the surprising thing — it’s not because it’s been officially and exactly that long since the year 567, when the church defined the Christmas season at the Council of Tours. Most Christian denominations follow what’s called a “liturgical calendar,” which divides the calendar up into several “seasons” around Christmas and around Easter — seasons like Lent. The rest of the year is called “Ordinary Time,” to really drive home how boring it is.

Advent is one of these seasons, and it starts the fourth Sunday before Christmas — around the beginning of December. It’s followed by the main season of Christmastide, which starts at sunset on Christmas Eve and goes for 12 days, until a holiday called Epiphany, which is the day the Magi finally found Jesus. After Epiphany, the situation’s a little murkier, with some traditions calling it Ordinary Time until Lent and others celebrating Epiphanytide, which is a continuation of the Christmas season and — as if I’d designed it myself — goes on until another holiday you’ve never heard of, called Candlemas, which is when Mary and Joseph took Jesus to the Temple in Jerusalem, on Feb. 2.

I’d never expected to get such cut-and-dried answers to such an important question. I expected more of a WebMD experience, telling me five different things, one of which would be horrible, like taking the tree down Dec. 26. But there it was: quite the epiphany, in no uncertain terms. And so, because Feb. 2 was a nonstarter, we take the tree down when Christmas season officially ends Jan. 6. But please know that in France, they celebrate Candlemas with crepes and by lighting all the candles in the house. Nice, right?

One last tidbit: In some countries, such as Spain, they don’t do the gift giving Christmas Day, which is the first day of Christmas, but rather wait until the 12th day, Jan. 5. And in others still, they exchange gifts on all 12 days, kind of like Hanukkah. Don’t let your kids find out.



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Photos by Brendan Lavell

Above: Barbara Posner is a two-time breast cancer survivor. She matched the \$9,750 raised by walkathon participants. **Right:** Martin and Cynthia Flacks walked in honor of their friend Lorie, who died of breast cancer.



Micki Kacmar (left) walked in honor of her mom, Dorothy, and best friend, Dawn. Lynn Joseph walked in honor of her friends Jan and Sharon.



Leslie Erb (left) walked in honor of her mother, Dorothy Nelson, and Jan McLaughlin walked for her sister, Nancy.

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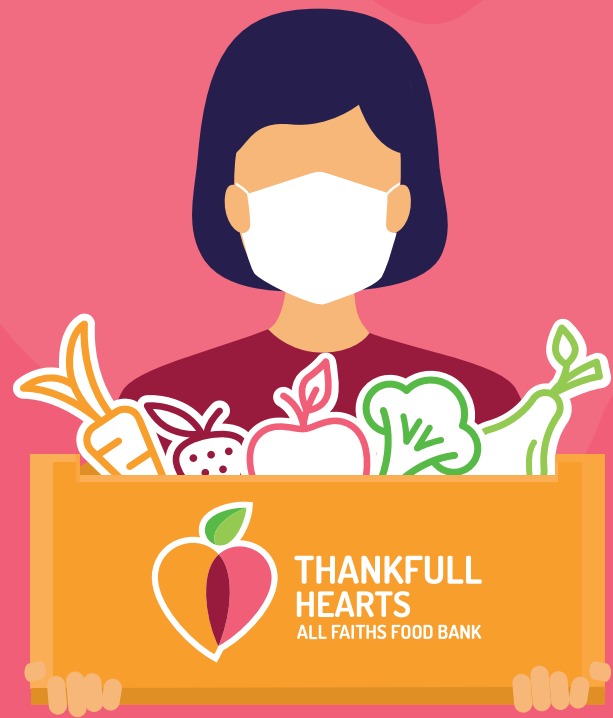
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FIESTA! FRIDAY

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Photos by Brendan Lavell
Above: Jackie and Mark Brettingen and Dee and Mike Adams came to Fiesta! Friday to hear the Black Honkeys. They had never seen them live before.



Left: Nala Gato (right) finishes her move in a game of Jenga against Mark Parsons. Gato won after a 15- to 20-minute battle.



Bill Thornton and Brenda Kahn of Country Club came to Fiesta! Friday to see the Black Honkeys. They are big music fans: Kahn recently started doing open mic performances, and Thornton used to be a DJ.

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Photos by Jay Heater

East County's Pam Gordon and her poodle-Yorkie mix, Cloie, enjoy The Market at Lakewood Ranch on the opening day.

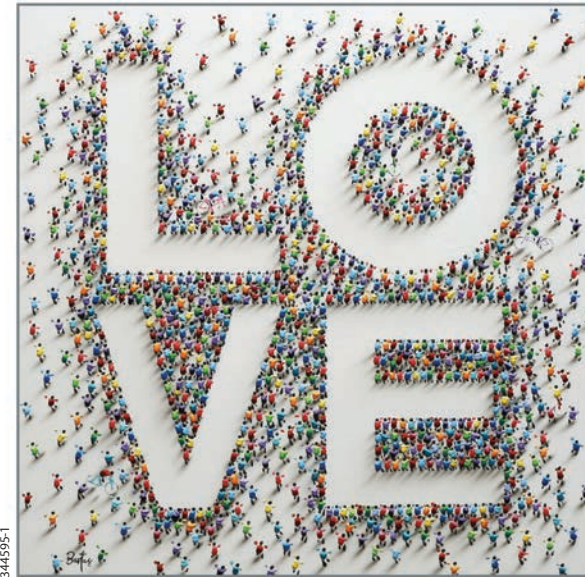


Above: Sophomore Erin Walsh and senior Abigail McManus do volunteer work for the Lakewood Ranch High Key Club by manning the information booth.



Left: Martha Prado, the owner of Medalion Flowers, says she is glad to be back selling in Lakewood Ranch.

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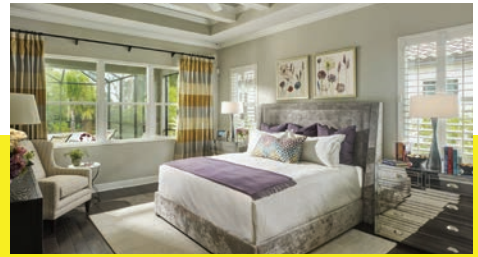
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