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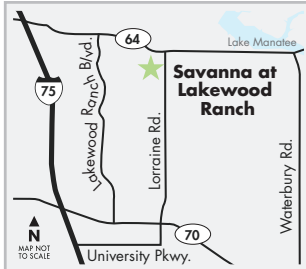
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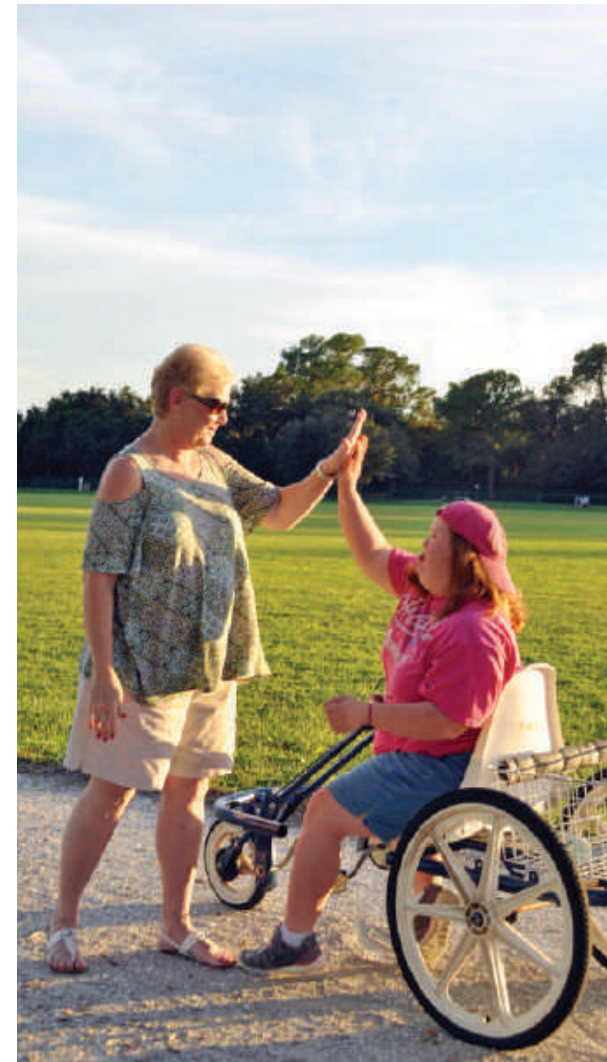


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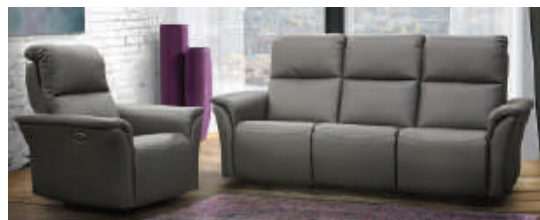


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LAKWOOD RANCH AREA'S COMMUNITY, NATURE, STYLE

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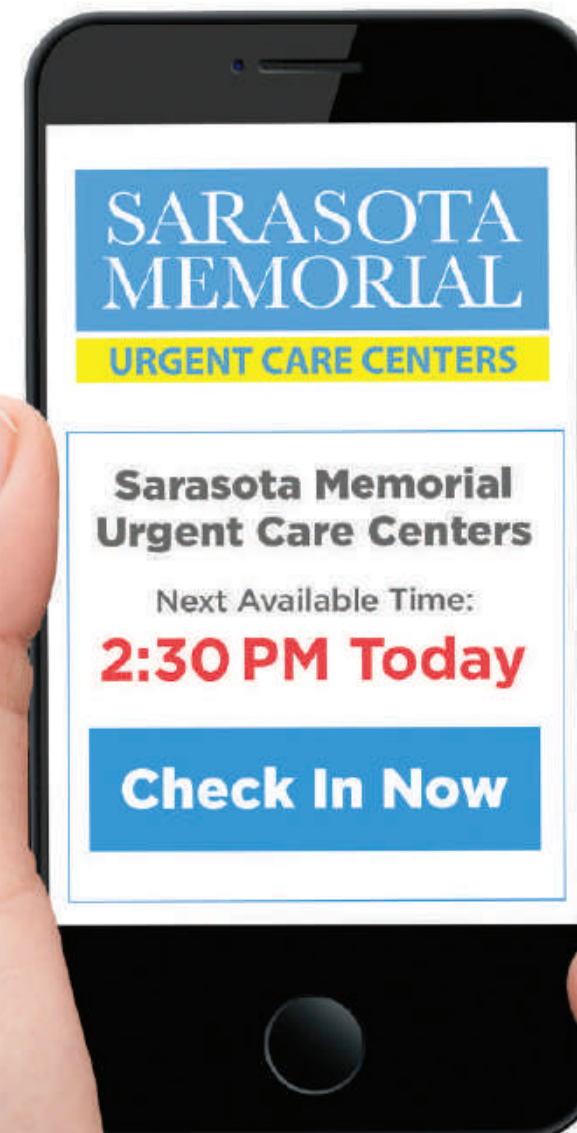
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# Building a community



A group takes advantage of a yoga class at The Market.



Kids with autism spectrum disorder find a haven at Beyond the Spectrum.

Take a look around. Lakewood Ranch is booming. It seems like every week there's another new business, a plan moving forward for a new development and clubs and organizations adding members.

And this is all without the boost yet to come in the form of Waterside, which will add about 5,100 housing units south of University Parkway.



So we know there's a lot of building going on. We see the construction, we understand the signs of growth.

But what do buildings have to do with community? Nothing ... and everything.

As we all know, a community is more than bricks and mortar. It's the feeling we get from a place, the way it envelopes us and welcomes us to become part of it. It saturates the places where we gather, both informally, like at parks and bars, or more formally, like at Town Hall gatherings or a meeting of the Lakewood Ranch Business Alliance. And although many of us enjoy this communal fruit, few stop to think

about what goes into growing it.

For this issue, I spoke with Monaca Onstad, whose job it is to plant the seeds that help communities grow.

Her title is community relations director for Lakewood Ranch, but what that means is helping develop things both tangible, like the renovation of The Lake Club's Grande Clubhouse (page 28), and more intangible, like starting the new Backyard Music Series (page 54).

Like a good farmer, Onstad is cultivating ideas, testing them to see what sprouts.

Take The Market, for example (page 26). Now in its second season, the weekly farmers market has taken root at the Sarasota Polo Club. But eventually, the plan is to move it to Waterside Place, where it will become a focal part of that new area. It will act as a catalyst to help build that new community, much like how a mature tree can help improve the landscape around it.

It's not all about new things, though. Established communities need love, too. They require opportunities to con-

nect, to strengthen existing ties. As Onstad explains, this was the synthesis of the Backyard Concert Series. "We really are just trying to seed the idea, to see if residents like it and it will work," she says.

If successful, the goal is to turn the series over to the communities. After all, it's for them.

So sure, there's a lot of building going on, but as people move in, something special starts to happen. The human element builds a structure of its own.

It's the support that caregivers feel when they need extra help getting through tough times (page 76), or the special school where kids with autism spectrum disorder can enjoy a place just for them (page 46), or it's providing living expenses for a neighbor fighting cancer (page 42).

With all this growth, it's important to remember developers can build the buildings and seed the community, but we are responsible for nurturing it.

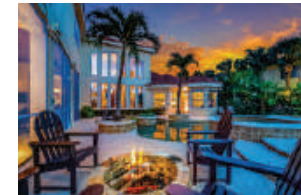
*Kat Hughes*  
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# BUZZ

NEWS, HAPPENINGS AND PEOPLE



Wine club provides a perfect pour of friendship.

**PAGE 36**



## BY THE NUMBERS

15

Vendors who started out at The Market at Lakewood Ranch at the start of last season

>40

Vendors who will participate in The Market at Lakewood Ranch this season

2017

Inaugural year of The Market at Lakewood Ranch

20

Number of Wednesday markets to be held this season.

Courtesy photo

# Room to Grow

BY LWR LIFE STAFF

If your thoughts of a farmers market conjure cramped street tents standing over vegetables wilting in the heat, The Market at Lakewood Ranch is here to give you a fresh perspective.

Starting Dec. 5, The Market is back, and it has a full basket of fun to offer patrons in its second season. From 3 to 7 p.m. every Wednesday through April 17 at the Sarasota Polo Club, patrons can expect all the things that made The Market great in its inaugural year — fresh food vendors, live music, food trucks and family-friendly activities — but this year it will blossom into something even bigger.

For starters, says Market Manager Morgan Bettes, at least 40 vendors will start the season, compared with 30 featured at the end of last season.

The Market will also have a rotating schedule of monthly events. The first Wednesday will welcome Create U DIY to hold woodworking workshops for adults and kids; the second Wednesday will feature Makers' Market, which will offer craft products such as jewelry, soap and candles; and the fourth week will bring back bingo.

These are all in addition to the weekly purveyors and activities, including the Chef at The Market program, where a chef creates a “healthy hack” of recipes using ingredients you can buy right there on-site.

But the thing that really makes The Market stand apart from its farmers market brethren is its location.

“I can't tell people enough about what a nice market this is,” Bettes says. “Most farmers markets are in urban settings, but this one is like a farm. It's fun, it's relaxed, and we have tons of green space. We can do a lot with the lights and the setup, and there's plenty of space for kids to just run around.”

Monaca Onstad, who led the creation of The Market as director of community relations for Lakewood Ranch, agrees.

“We've really focused on making it a tradition that's easy, where families can come and kids can run free,” she says. “Not only do we have cage-free chickens, but we also have cage-free kids.”



# Cleaning House

The Lake Club gave its clubhouse a \$4 million makeover, and added a kitchen, concierge services and a minimalist's touch. Now residents have no excuse to stay home.

BY HEIDI KURPIELA  
MANAGING EDITOR

In October, when The Lake Club opened its renovated Grande Clubhouse before the Lakewood Ranch Tour of Homes, more than 1,200 people flooded into the Tuscan village to check out the 20,000-square-foot showpiece.

The private clubhouse looked more like a five-star resort than a community gathering spot with its concierge desk, Calcutta porcelain accents, handblown glass fixtures, indoor-outdoor bar, two pools, gym, sauna and spa treatment rooms. Just stepping out on the veranda with a cup of coffee felt like a luxury — like being at The Ritz or The Don CeSar, but with less luggage and more natural light.

“It feels light and brighter,” says Monaca Onstad, Lakewood Ranch’s director of community relations. “We opened it up. We added more windows and clean lines. We wanted a more modern, minimalist design to balance out the architecture. We wanted that sense of airiness because we live in Florida ... we want to be around sunshine.”

Gone are the heavy baroque flourishes and fussy art in gilded frames, faux-finished walls and dark wood. In its place is a white back-lit bar with a quartz countertop, a new game room and fireplace, an expanded fitness center equipped with Peloton exercise bikes and a 1,600-square-foot kitchen, which is occupied three days a week by Tableside Restaurant Group, proprietors of Louies Modern, Libby’s Cafe & Bar and Oak & Stone.

Anyone familiar with the neighborhood’s previous clubhouse is awestruck.

The Lake Club, which sold its first lot in 2007, is touted as the crown

*Continued on Page 30*



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jewel of Lakewood Ranch. The average house inside this gated community — home to 650 residents — sells for more than \$1 million. Three-hundred homes are already sold, and developers plan to sell 400 more by the end of build-out. Part of the push to “reimagine” the clubhouse was to make the community more appealing to homebuyers.

Mission accomplished.

Residents have been waiting years to see a food and beverage operation move into The Lake Club, much less a stocked bar. Now they’ve got both, including concierge services they can call on to wash their car, organize their closets, walk their dog or do their Christmas shopping, for example.

“As soon as they started talking about redoing the clubhouse and making it a true resort-type atmosphere, our home values started going up and more houses started selling,” says Jay Traverso, who moved with his wife into The Lake Club five years ago after retiring from a corporate job in environmental management outside of Washington, D.C. “We live three houses down, so we’re the most excited about being able to walk to get lunch or dinner. It’s so much more fresh and inviting. When you look over the railing at that pool, it’s stunning. We call it the Disney pool.”

All of this comes at a cost of course. Access to the pool and fitness center is free for members; dinner on a Friday night or an appointment for micro-dermabrasion is not. Residents know this and are willing to pay for fringe benefits. Some of them have already participated in a culinary class. The first one focused on preparing a proper charcuterie plate and came with a special Lake Club-branded cutting board.

Onstad, who helped shepherd the renovation over the past two years, says there’s nothing else like the Grande Clubhouse in Lakewood Ranch. The Amenity Center at Esplanade Golf & Country Club comes close, but even that doesn’t offer a concierge program, or its own custom blend of coffee.

“Little things matter to people,” Onstad says. “Like offering towels at the pool or having an aesthetician sample sunscreen. It shows you care and it makes your members’ lives better.”



Photos by Heidi Kurpiela

“It’s so much more fresh and inviting. When you look over the railing at that pool, it’s stunning. We call it the Disney pool.”

**JAY TRAVERSO,**  
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Rendering courtesy of Nate's Honor Animal Rescue

The new rescue facility will have a veterinary clinic, cafe, groomer and a community space to host birthday parties and weddings. "Everything we're adding will be a revenue stream to support the animals," says Rob Oglesby, director of development.

# Honor Bound

The pack leaders at Nate's Honor Animal Rescue say the organization is on pace to break ground early next year on its \$8 million Lorraine Road expansion.

BY HEIDI KURPIELA | MANAGING EDITOR

Nate's Honor Animal Rescue has never looked like a run-of-the-mill animal shelter.

Rather than keep its dogs and cats in one cold industrial building, it separates them into smaller groups and houses them in cute cottages painted bright blue and cheerful yellow on a bucolic 8-acre property off Lorraine Road.

To help offset its costs, it operates a small boutique in the Shoppes at University Center, organizes charity polo matches at the Sarasota Polo Club and

rounds up families for 5K fun runs at Nathan Benderson Park. It offers training for kids who might not know how to interact with a rescue pet and hosts carnivals on its property.

And despite having outgrown its 960-square-foot adoption center — home to a rotating crew of more than two dozen volunteers — it still takes in a staggering 2,000 animals a year. But it's time for a change.

In January, the no-kill shelter will break ground on a 20,000-square-foot expansion to its Lorraine Road campus.

*Continued on Page 34*



Photos by Heidi Kurpiela

"There's nothing better than seeing a dog walk out with a happy family, and we get to see that 2,000 times a year," says Director of Development Rob Oglesby.



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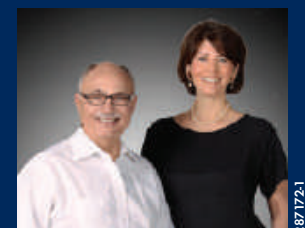
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Continued from Page 32

The new Nate's will offer veterinary care for the first time, a summer camp for kids, a cat cafe and a community room dedicated to birthday parties, yoga classes and, yes, weddings.

The organization has already raised \$3.5 million toward its \$8 million goal.

"We think outside of the box," says Rob Oglesby, Nate's director of development. "And we run Nate's the same way we used to run our business."

Oglesby and his wife, Dari, who serves as Nate's executive director, got involved with the organization 10 years ago when their daughter, then a student at Ringling College of Art and Design, started photographing animals for the rescue's Facebook page.

Ready to offload a 25-year real estate evaluation company, the couple agreed to help steer the nonprofit after being approached by late developer Nathan Benderson, who had taken a shine to the rescue during the build-out of his Cooper Creek shopping plaza.

"I told him I didn't want to run it, and he said, 'You're not keeping the property unless you do,'" recalls Oglesby of Benderson. "He loved those animals."

The rescue's original leadership had fragmented, and Benderson wanted someone to step in and oversee the nuts and bolts of the operation. Oglesby admits he was at first "suckered into it," but since then he hasn't looked back.

Seven years ago, when the shelter — renamed in 2012 in tribute to Benderson — moved out to Lorraine Road people told the Oglesbys no one would drive that far east.

They were wrong. In 10 years, Nate's has placed more than 10,000 animals in homes around the area. Its cottage concept, most of which was funded by Benderson, has been a huge success. And Lorraine Road no longer feels like the middle of nowhere.

"When it comes to animal rescue out here, people think of Nate's," says Mary Dietterle, executive director of Animal Rescue Coalition, which spays and neuters about 30 to 40 of Nate's cats and dogs a week. "It's excellently branded and well-run. They have a great team of volunteers, great donor support, and Dari and Rob are completely into the mission. If anyone can succeed at it, Nate's will."

Most of the bells and whistles



Rob and Dari Oglesby began their run at Nate's 10 years ago as volunteers. They were pushed into managing the nonprofit when its leadership began to break down. "Thankfully we said yes," says Rob. "It's been a blast." The rescue will double its 10-person staff when it opens its new Lorraine Road facility in 2020.

“*They have a great team of volunteers, great donor support, and Dari and Rob are completely into the mission. If anyone can succeed at it, Nate's will.*”

MARY DIETTERLE, EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR OF ANIMAL RESCUE COALITION

planned for the new facility were inspired by things the couple saw at other shelters, including their cat cafe, which was modeled after a similar cafe in Orlando.

"It's called plagiarism," jokes Oglesby. "We've been planning this expansion for two years. Throughout the process we traveled across the country and checked out other rescues and basically walked away with an idea from each one. We always asked them, 'What's the best thing you're doing, and what's the one thing you wish you could change?'"

Oglesby has always wanted Nate's to feel more like an attraction than an animal shelter.

"We want to be the Disneyland of animal rescue," he says. "The point is to make it fun for kids. We're trying to change the way they think of going to a shelter, one generation at a time."

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Photos by Dex Honea  
Kevin Allen (right) bonds with Corrine Wagner (left) and Maggie and Ron Magee over a bottle of chardonnay at a pop-up meeting of the Lakewood Ranch Wine Club.

# Sip and Tell

A Lakewood Ranch wine dilettante uncorks three bottles of vino with the town's wine club.

BY KEVIN ALLEN | CONTRIBUTOR

**W**e met in the Lakewood Ranch Town Hall parking lot on one of those sticky September nights when the heat just hangs.

Three prominent members of the Lakewood Ranch Wine Club greeted me as I stepped out of my car: Ron Magee, his wife, Maggie, and Corrine Wagner. It was then that I, an invited guest who enjoys a decent bottle of

red from time to time, realized I had shown up empty-handed.

It didn't matter, for these were the least pretentious, most amiable wine aficionados this side of Interstate 75. During my hour and a half of swilling, I came to learn this kind of laid-back hospitality is the norm for this group. The club's mission is "to make wine fun and approachable," not fussy and exclusive.

Ron Magee is a Vietnam War veteran and a retired Washington, D.C., engineer who recently earned his

sommelier certification. Ron can be found working at Fine Wine and Tastings on Main Street a few days a week, which is ironic given that his wife, Maggie, a retired technical writer and editor, says she "dragged" him into the hobby. Their dear friend and neighbor, Boston transplant Corrine Wagner, admits she's "new to wine." A Coldwell Banker real estate agent by day, Wagner serves as the club's membership coordinator on the side.

Wagner was gracious to convene a makeshift meeting on my behalf. There are 90 members on the club's mailing list and membership is free unless you RSVP for tastings (i.e. meetings). Each meeting calls on a different member to present a bottle of his or her choosing. Gatherings are capped at around 50 people. For \$30 or less, participants are invited to sample a selection of wine at various price points.

*Continued on Page 38*



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It's a simple thing, really, a bottle of wine. But if you think about it, when consumed responsibly it can strengthen bonds, fuel conversation and accelerate the transition from acquaintance to friend. In that spirit, I sat down with this trio to talk about their club and passion for all things vino. By the end of the interview, membership was up to 92. I asked Wagner to include me and my wife on the next mailing list.

### BOTTLE NO. 1

**Katherine's Vineyard Chardonnay 2015 (Cambria Estate, Santa Maria Valley; \$16.99) Notes of oak, caramel, vanilla, peach**

*What's your most memorable wine moment?*

**Ron Magee:** A long time ago, Maggie and I were traveling through the Loire Valley and we stayed in a wonderful chateau there. We went out to a restaurant that was recommended by some of the locals and had incredible food. And they brought this wine out. We had just said to the waiter, "We want a white wine and we're at your mercy." It was just absolutely wonderful. Now, knowing what I know now and where we were, it was probably a Sancerre or a chenin blanc. I can't even remember the taste, just that it complemented everything else so wonderfully, and we were having such a glorious time. That was a very special wine adventure.

**Maggie Magee:** We were doing a wine tour of Napa and we went to the Mumm vineyard. It was wonderful because in California they did such a beautiful job with tastings. They offered beautiful vineyards and you could sit there and look over the whole valley. Of course Mumm is a champagne and I love champagne, so they offered a flight. I never thought Mumm was all that great until we went there. Now I love it.

**Wagner:** The last month of every year, the club invites four or five members to put forth one wine to present, and I stepped up to the plate. But I was one of the last and so most of the wines that I was familiar with were already spoken for. So, I said, "All right. I'll do a Chianti." And I had a lot of fun trying out various Chiantis, and we found a great Chianti for about \$15. It was just amazing. And afterward, two or three of the longtime members came up to



The LWR Wine Club meets at the Lakewood Ranch Town Hall on the third Friday of each month from now through April. Contact Corrine Wagner for information about membership: [corrine@wagners4.com](mailto:corrine@wagners4.com)

“

*I think wine and food are the things that make people come together.* **MAGGIE MAGEE**

me and said, "You know, I was really dreading your Chianti, and this was a good Chianti."

### BOTTLE NO. 2

**Andre Delorme Blanc de Blancs Brut Reserve (Burgundy, France; \$12.99) Aromatic and bubbly with a smooth, fruity finish**

*What do you love about wine?*

**Maggie Magee:** I think wine and food are the things that make people come together. We've always loved to pair food and wine. And I'm learning from him mostly that certain wines go before dinner, certain reds and various wines go with certain foods. And (to Ron) what is it you always say? What grows together goes together?

**Ron Magee:** That's a good general rule.

### BOTTLE NO. 3

**Château Les Millaux Bordeaux 2016 (France, \$11.95) Truth be told, we didn't make it to the third bottle. It was, after all, a weeknight. And I did show up empty-handed.**

*What's your desert island wine?*

**Maggie Magee:** Katherine's Vineyard Chardonnay.

*The one we just had?*

**Maggie Magee:** The one we just had. My favorite ... so far.

**Ron Magee:** I would just love it if I were on my desert island ...

**Maggie Magee:** With me, I hope.

**Ron Magee:** Of course. And on my desert island comes washing ashore this crate of Chateau Petrus. I don't even care what year. They run about \$3,000 a bottle.

**Wagner:** I love River Road Double Oaked Chardonnay. They age it in American oak and ... in French oak.

*And what about the wine club keeps you coming back?*

**Ron Magee:** It's very welcoming and comfortable for people who are not well-versed in wine.

**Corrine Wagner:** I was able to prove with my Chianti that you don't have to be an aficionado.

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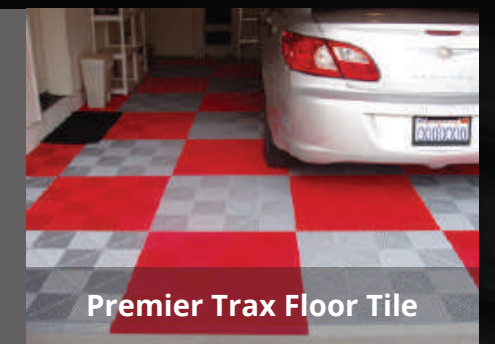
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Education center creates a welcome place for kids with special needs. **PAGE 46**



class act

# Special Forces

Brad and Terri Prechtl's support of Florida Cancer Specialists keeps them rooted in Lakewood Ranch and laser-focused on taking better care of cancer patients.

BY ERIC SNIDER | CONTRIBUTOR

**B**rad and Terri Prechtl are not an opposites-attract sort of couple. They're bookends — or as Terri says, “a mirror image” of one another.

He's the CEO of Florida Cancer Specialists. She's a former registered nurse and an active volunteer at the organization's bustling Lakewood Ranch clinic. They met on Match.com and were married in 2009, each for the second time.

There's more: “We met in our 40s and pretty much had parallel lives,” Terri says. “We'd both been married for 20 years, divorced two years, had a son followed by a daughter. We each had a list of what we were looking for and what we would not tolerate. We like the same things: working out, traveling, hiking, all the same spectator sports. We're extremely compatible.”

Says Brad, “We're meticulous about keeping the house completely organized. I have a closet I'm very proud of — everything's hung on the same hangers, short-sleeves and long-sleeves grouped together, work versus casual. If someone wasn't comfortable with that, it could drive them nuts.”

Terri more than tolerates Brad's busy schedule, which often requires him to work nights and take calls on



Photos by James Ostrand

Terri and Brad Prechtl moved to Lakewood Ranch in 2012 and haven't looked back. A tidy, well-organized couple, they say the community's manicured, carefully arranged setting makes them feel at home.

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The Prechtls are ardent Pittsburgh Steelers fans and often travel to Brad's home state of Pennsylvania for games.

*Continued from Page 42*

weekends. Plus — “equally if not more important, I can talk to her about what’s happening at work,” Brad says. “She has a tremendous ability to give me great insight and sometimes a completely different perspective.”

Florida Cancer Specialists has experienced robust growth on Brad’s watch. When he relocated from the Pittsburgh area and came on as CEO in 2009, the practice, founded in 1984 by Dr. William Harwin, had around 50 physicians. These days it’s up to 230.

Nine years ago, FCS was concentrated on the west coast of Florida, from Tampa to Naples. Now its clinics cover the entire state, with the exception of the Panhandle and Miami areas. The firm will see 72,000 new patients this year, with more than 1.5 million patient visits overall. In 2009, FCS amassed \$300 million in revenue and is on track to bring in \$2.4 billion this year.

Brad has all these figures memorized, and it’s not because he likes to brag up his tenure. It’s that he’s hyper-organized, has a head for numbers and loves lists.

“I believe that just because I have the title doesn’t mean I’m more important than a person, say, working in

medical records,” says the CEO. “The person at the front desk who greets a cancer patient and puts a smile on their face has a big impact on how they feel about themselves. I hopefully project that throughout our organization.”

His wife is one of those friendly faces. Having worked as a nurse, Terri has a natural empathy for patients. After losing her father to leukemia, her role at FCS become even more personal. As lead patient support volunteer, she takes the time to sit with people, listen to their worries and provide a distraction before the next round of chemo.

“Sometimes patients come in and don’t have a family member,” Terri says. “The nurses are busy, so just sitting and talking with them for 30 minutes, letting them pour their hearts out or talk about something other than cancer has a positive effect.”

The Prechtls moved from Nokomis to Lakewood Ranch in 2012, shortly after getting married and merging families for the first time. “We never had all four kids under our roof,” Terri says, “usually two at a time. We moved here to have a bigger home, so we’d have enough bedrooms if everyone showed up at once.”

The couple immediately embraced Lakewood Ranch’s well-oiled *joie de*

*vivre*. They golfed, participated in clubs and hobnobbed with friends at social gatherings. Now empty-nesters, the Prechtls still feel connected to the community. It suits their lifestyle and Type A tendencies. “We kind of like things that are uber-organized,” Terri says. “We love the manicured landscape, the flowers, the way the streets are laid out, the live music, the planned gatherings.”

They’re especially excited about FCS’s pending expansion. In August, the operation will occupy a new two-story, 42,000-square-foot multitenant building near State Road 70 and Lakewood Ranch Boulevard on the Ranch’s CORE campus. The move will double the size of the organization’s Lakewood Ranch oncology practice, allowing for 38 chemotherapy chairs, 10 examination rooms, an imaging suite and access to clinical trials.

“It’s critical to have a cancer center of that magnitude in this area,” Terri says.

The couple’s other project, Party Under the Stars, will celebrate its fifth anniversary Feb. 9. The fundraising event, which benefits the Florida Cancer Specialists Foundation, will take place this year at the Hyatt Regency Sarasota. In its inaugural year (2014), the Prechtls hosted it at their home, anticipating around 75 people and ending up with nearly double that number. Terri jokes they had to move it to a banquet facility so no one would fall in their pool.

Although Brad no longer serves as the foundation’s board chair, he’s still deeply involved in the success of the nonprofit, which helps offset the cost of living expenses for patients undergoing cancer treatment. At last year’s gala, held at Fête Catering & Ballroom in Lakewood Ranch, the foundation raised more than \$200,000. At the event, it announced it had established the Brad & Terri Prechtl Fund in honor of the couple’s leadership and support.

“FCS covers all of the foundation’s overhead,” Brad says. “That includes rent, supplies, the salary and benefits of six full-time employees and other expenses.”

Perpetually crunching numbers, he quickly estimates the cost of this overhead to be around half-a-million dollars.

“It’s probably the only foundation I’m aware of that fully covers expenses like that,” Brad says. “That allows the dollars raised to go to the people who need it.”

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# charity snapshot



# Full Spectrum

Beyond the Spectrum provides holistic care and educational services to children with autism and other related disorders.

BY ERIC SNIDER  
CONTRIBUTOR

It all started in the parking lot of a private school catering to children on the autism spectrum. Moms would drop their kids off, the sound of tantrums ringing in their ears, and head to their cars in tears. Other mothers would rush to console them. They'd exchange advice

and ideas on treatments and coping techniques, and simply show that they were there for each other.

An ad hoc support group was born. Donna Donnelly, the mother of a 3-year-old girl on the spectrum, was part of it. So was Catherine Peabody, who had a 3-year-old son with a similar disorder. It was 2004. Something had to be done — not out of grievance with the school, but to provide parents with more choices.

In 2007, Peabody, along with her

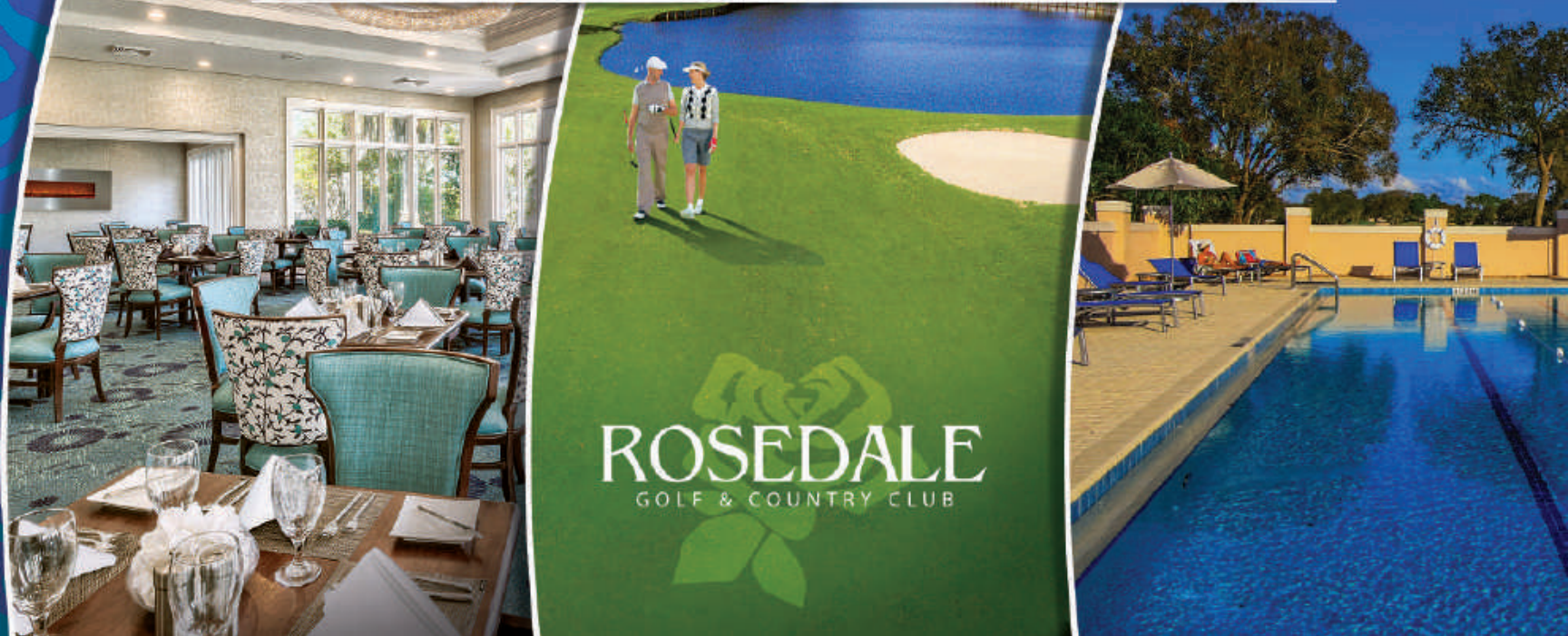
Photos by Kayleigh Omang

**Top:** Athletic Director David Gaulman (right) and eighth-grader Dusty Wilson (second from right) lead Melody Wells and Jose Enriquez, students in the school's Mariposa program, through a parachute exercise.

**Above:** Mariposa program teacher Kye Milsap helps student Ethan Grant make pigs from rice cakes for "On the Farm" month.

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Beyond the Spectrum Executive Director Donna Donnelly and founder Catherine Peabody in the center's Garden of Happiness. "There's no judgment here," says Donnelly.

Continued from Page 46

husband, Chris, started a small Applied Behavior Analysis clinic and called it Beyond the Spectrum. Donnelly took a job as the bookkeeper. The program grew, and three years later the Peabodys reopened Beyond the Spectrum as a full-fledged education and treatment center for kids with autism and related disorders.

Today, the facility has three distinct programs that treat and educate roughly 100 children in student-to-teacher ratios that do not exceed 4-to-1. The school's staff includes 42 full-timers and three part-timers, as well as an array of contracted on-site therapists specializing in occupational, speech, music and other therapy disciplines. Although most students live locally, some come from as far south as Punta Gorda or as far north as Hillsborough County.

Donnelly now serves as the organization's executive director. "We aim to be a one-stop shop," she says. "We're a very different school — the only one [in the area] that does all of these programs and therapies on-site and at no additional cost."

She says tuition ranges from around \$12,000 to \$17,000 a year, but adds most students benefit from some type of scholarship assistance. Beyond the

Spectrum has had a waiting list of 50 children since last year. "It pains us to turn people away," she says.

The board and administrators hope to eventually move the school from its current 9,000-square-foot space into a bigger building in a business district just south of University Parkway in the coming years.

Donnelly says when her daughter, Shannon, was 3 in 2004, one in 500 children was diagnosed with autism. Today, that number is one in 59. The majority of these students are boys. "We have maybe 10 girls here," Donnelly says.

Ashley Yaeckel is a mother to one of the students. Johnathan, 8, is in the third grade in the school's Monarch Academy, which is tailored to children on the high end of the spectrum. The Monarch program, which adheres to Common Core standards and goes through 12th grade, offers students a high school diploma. Yaeckel's son has high-functioning Asperger's syndrome, severe ADHD and sensory issues, but overall she says, "He's a little more put together than some."

Johnathan landed at Beyond the Spectrum two years ago after encountering problems at two previous schools. Since then, his grades and behavior have shown marked improvement, and he's made friends, some of

whom are on his special needs soccer team. "I have never seen this kid more excited to go to school," says Yaeckel, who drives every day from Palmetto. "In kindergarten, he cried all the way to and from school for no apparent reason. These days, the improvement in the transition time between school and home has probably been the biggest help to me as his mother. He gets in the car and most of the time he's excited and happy. He'll say, (his teacher) 'Miss Betsy said I did great today.' Before, he couldn't remember a thing."

Much of Beyond the Spectrum's success hinges on its customized approach to learning. Students are able to stay with the same teachers throughout the day, as opposed to shifting from one to another, as they would in a traditional middle or high school setting. This consistency better enables the students to stay on track.

"All of our kids learn differently — some are auditory, some learn tactilely," Donnelly says. "Some learn better standing up, some have to move every half hour. Some need the lights to be lowered, some need extra time to process."

Donnelly says she and her staff recognize that autism is a "family diagnosis." It doesn't just affect the child. It affects the parents, grandparents and siblings. "We understand the worries," she says.

#### AT A GLANCE

Beyond the Spectrum's programs are separated into three "wings": The Monarch Academy, The Mariposa Program and The Early Learning Center.

**The Monarch Academy** is a K-12 academic program that uses Common Core standards to educate high-functioning children on the spectrum and with related disorders. Attendees can earn an accredited high school diploma.

**The Mariposa Program** provides intensive behavioral intervention for students aged 8 to 22 with severe forms of autism. They learn communication, behavioral and independent life skills.

**The Early Learning Center** fosters early peer interaction and works on improving behavioral and social skills with children as young as 3 and up to second grade.



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## DECEMBER

### DEC. 1 JINGLE AND JOG 5K AND 1-MILE RUN/WALK

Participants have the option of a 5K or 1-mile run/walk, to benefit The Haven, formerly Community Haven for Adults and Children with Disabilities. Registration starts at 7 a.m. and the race starts at 8 a.m. The walk starts at 8:45 a.m. at The Haven, 4405 DeSoto Road, Sarasota.

■ For more information, visit [communityhaven.org](http://communityhaven.org).

### DEC. 2 SHOEBOX PARTY

Drop in to donate or create decorated shoeboxes filled with items for needy seniors supported by Meals on Wheels Plus of Manatee from 5-7 p.m. at The Clubhouse at The Lake Club 15804 Clearlake Ave., Lakewood Ranch

■ For more information, visit [mealsonwheelsplus.org](http://mealsonwheelsplus.org).

### 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 \$12 for adults, children 12 and under are free. Polo matches will be held every Sunday through April 28.

■ For more information, visit [sarasotapolo.com](http://sarasotapolo.com).

### DEC. 4 CHANUKAH CELEBRATION

Chabad of Bradenton will celebrate Chanukah starting at 6 p.m. at Main Street at Lakewood Ranch, 8100 Lakewood Main St., Lakewood Ranch. A menorah will be lighted at Main Street. Guests can enjoy Israeli-style kosher food, face painting, doughnut decorating and more. Admission is free.

■ For more information, call 941-952-3030.



### DEC. 5 FARMERS MARKET

The Market returns, featuring fresh vegetables, live music, activities and more, from 3-7 p.m. at the Sarasota Polo Club, 8201 Polo Club Lane, Lakewood Ranch. Continues every Wednesday through April 18.

■ For more information, visit [lakewoodranch.com](http://lakewoodranch.com).

### CLASSIC CAR SHOW

Celebrate classic cars in this show the first Wednesday of each month, from 5 to 8 p.m. on Lakewood Ranch Main Street. Bring your car, truck, or any-

thing on wheels. Cost is \$10 to enter a vehicle, free to spectate.

■ For information, visit [lakewoodranch.com](http://lakewoodranch.com).

### DEC. 6, 13, 20 MAIN STREET CELEBRATES THE CHRISTMAS SEASON

The holidays will take over Lakewood Ranch Main Street with carriage rides, carolers and Santa strolls from 6:30-8:30 p.m.

■ For more information, visit [lakewoodranch.com](http://lakewoodranch.com).

File photos

Santa takes a break from a stop in Lakewood Ranch to answer questions.

*Continued on Page 52*

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Continued from Page 50

**DEC. 7**

**MUSIC ON MAIN**

Come to Main Street at Lakewood Ranch from 6-9 p.m. for a free concert from Rebel Heart benefiting the American Cancer Society.

■ For more information, visit lakewoodranch.com.

**DEC. 8**

**LUNCH WITH SANTA AT MACALLISTERS**

Join Santa for lunch from noon to 3 p.m. at MacAllisters Grill and Tavern, 8110 Lakewood Main St., Lakewood Ranch. It's a great opportunity for pictures, food and family fun.

■ For more information, call 941-359-2424.

**DEC. 9**

**BREAKFAST WITH SANTA AT ED'S TAVERN**

Join Ed's Tavern for breakfast with Santa from 9-11 a.m. at the restaurant, 10719 Rodeo Drive, Lakewood Ranch.

■ For more information, call 941-907-0400.

**DEC. 14**

**HOLIDAYS AROUND THE RANCH**

Enjoy "ice" skating, sugar cookie decorating, caroling, the lighting of a Christmas tree, Santa parade and other holiday festivities from 6-9 p.m. at Lakewood Ranch Main Street.

■ For more information, visit lwrcac.com.

**DEC. 15**

**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.

■ For more information, visit lakewoodranch.com.

**DEC. 16**

**LUNCH WITH SANTA AT THE TRATTORIA**

Enjoy lunch with Santa from 1-3 p.m. at Main Street Trattoria, 8131 Lakewood Main St., Lakewood Ranch.

■ For more information, call 941-907-1518.



Teams Whiskey Pond and Sienna play hard for the crowd. Polo matches run every Sunday through April 28.

**DEC. 21**

**JINGLE 5K**

Join in on this festive jingle bell run starting at Lakewood Ranch Medical Center, 8330 Lakewood Ranch Blvd. Children's dashes start at 6 p.m., and the 5K starts at 7 p.m. Benefits Lakewood Ranch Medical Center Auxiliary.

■ For more information, visit lakewoodranchmedicalcenter.org.

**DEC. 23**

**CHRISTMAS CELEBRATION**

Grace Community Church will host a community Christmas celebration from 6-8:30 p.m. at Main Street at Lakewood Ranch. Festivities include food, games, rides, music and Santa.

■ For more information, visit lakewoodranch.com.

**SARASOTA POLO**

The Sarasota Polo Club is partnering with The Market at Lakewood Ranch to provide even more fun for this season.

In addition to the polo matches, which run every Sunday Dec. 2 through April 28, The Market will bring in live music and food trucks on the general admission side. Also, don't forget to coordinate your tailgate with the week's theme, a few of which are below. For more information, visit sarasotapolo.com.

**Dec. 23** — Holidays Around the World

**Jan. 27** — Far Out '60s

**Feb. 17** — What Happens at Polo, Stays at Polo

**Feb. 24** — 1920s Speakeasy

**March 3** — Think Pink

Continued on Page 54

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Continued from Page 52

## JANUARY

### JAN. 4. MUSIC ON MAIN

Come to Lakewood Ranch Main Street from 6-9 p.m. for a free concert. Proceeds benefit a local charity. ■ For more information, visit [lakewoodranch.com](http://lakewoodranch.com).

### JAN. 12 COMMUNITY WALK

Join your 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. ■ For more information, visit [Lakewoodranch.com](http://Lakewoodranch.com).

### JAN. 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. ■ For more information, visit [lakewoodranch.com](http://lakewoodranch.com).

## FEBRUARY

### FEB. 1 MUSIC ON MAIN

Come to Lakewood Ranch Main Street from 6-9 p.m. for a free concert. Proceeds benefit a local charity. ■ For more information, visit [lakewoodranch.com](http://lakewoodranch.com).

### FEB. 9 LEARN TO FISH

At this learn-to-fish seminar, student anglers will learn about casting, knot tying, bait use and being a good angler. All children under 15 must be accompanied by a parent. ■ For information, visit [lwrccac.com](http://lwrccac.com).

### FEB. 16 YOUTH FISHING TOURNAMENT

Lakewood Ranch youth can test their fishing skills at this annual fishing tournament presented by the Lake-



Summerfield's Carter Bagshaw, 9, gets ready to try another fishing spot at the Fishing Tournament.

wood Ranch Angler's Club. ■ For information, visit [lwrccac.com](http://lwrccac.com).

### BIKE RIDE

Lakewood Ranch Ambassador Greg Spring will lead a 10-mile, one-hour casual bike ride through Lakewood Ranch. Participants will meet at 8 a.m. at the fountain at Lakewood Ranch Main Street. ■ For more information, visit [lakewoodranch.com](http://lakewoodranch.com).

### FEB. 23 HEALTH AND WELLNESS EXPO

Lakewood Ranch Medical Center hosts more than 50 exhibitors in the health field who will perform screenings and share and information valuable to everyone of all ages. Runs from 9 a.m. to noon. ■ For more information, visit [lwrccac.com](http://lwrccac.com).

## BACKYARD CONCERT SERIES

Sunday mornings may get the credit for being easy, but what about Sunday afternoons?

For those looking to kick back and enjoy an effortless time listening to music and hanging with the fam, Lakewood Ranch has you covered.

From 1 to 4 p.m. starting Jan. 13 and running the second Sunday through March, enjoy some Ranch-style relaxation by taking in a live band in one of the area's great parks.

In the spirit of this low-maintenance event, residents are invited to bring their own food and beverages, plus their lawn chairs or favorite blanket, and settle in for some good tunes, good times and good folks.

Bands lined up to perform are:

- Jan. 13 — Have Gun, Will Travel
  - Feb. 10 — Bearded Brothers Band
  - March 10 — The Music Makers
- Locations are TBA. For more information, visit [lakewoodranch.com](http://lakewoodranch.com).

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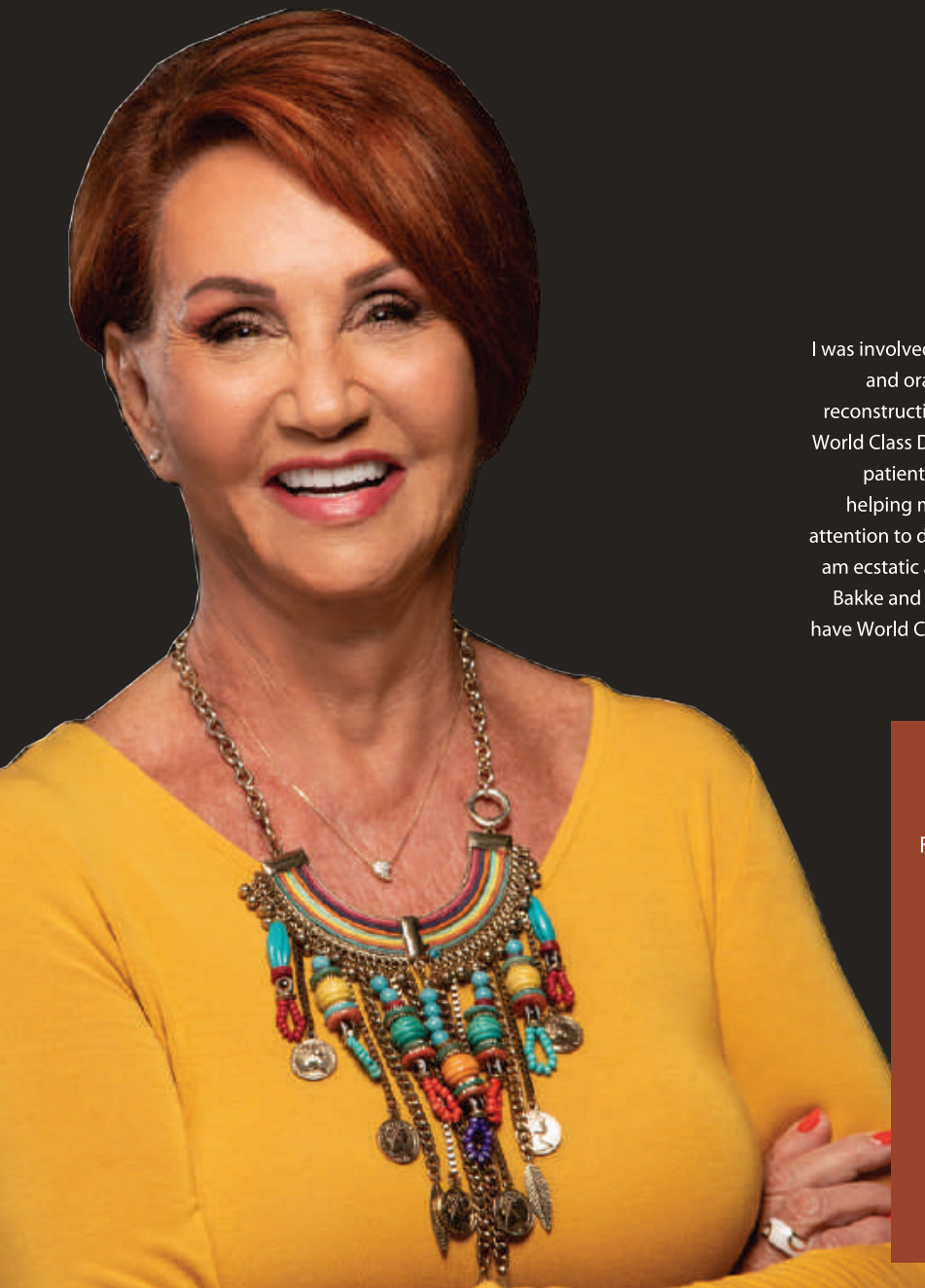


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-Gale Wilson

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style

Cap Sleeve Midi Dress, \$42.99



Aviate LWR Hat, \$34.99



Mud Pie hat, \$27.99



Skies Are Blue, Lace V Neck Dress, \$45.99

**LINE OF THE STYLE**  
At Crowder's Gifts & Gadgets, we found two simple dresses for a classic look. Both can be dressed up with fine jewelry, such as pearls, to really give your outfit some class. And although the hats here don't match the dresses, it doesn't mean they don't belong on the polo grounds. Wear the Mud Pie hat with a little black dress and the LWR hat on a more casual polo day to represent Lakewood Ranch.

# PUTTIN' ON THE POLO

We visited three boutiques to find the perfect polo fashions.

BY KAYLEIGH OMANG | CONTRIBUTOR

It's time to put on your Sunday best — polo season is upon us.

There's a certain type of look to be achieved when going to a polo match. It may not be as dramatic as dressing for the Kentucky Derby, but a preppy, chic and classic look is always best. We shopped Crowder's Gifts & Gadgets, FiFi's Fine Resale Apparel and Accessories and Malibu Fox to find the best styles at great prices, so you can go to polo week after week and avoid a fashion repeat.



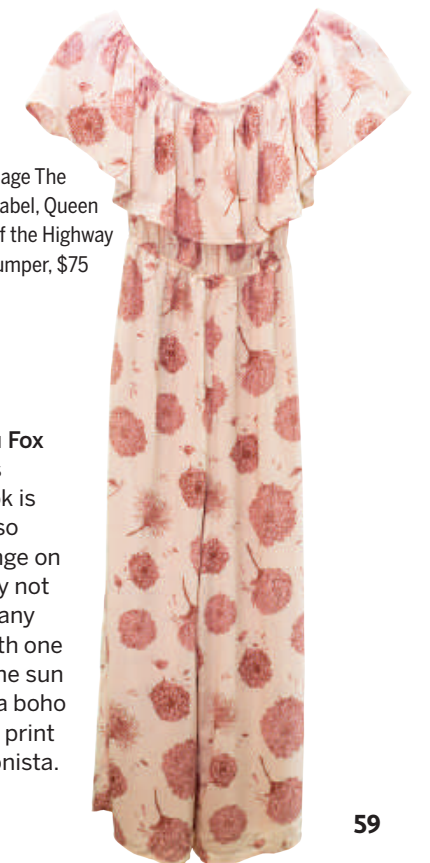
Sage The Label, Light of Moon Maxi Dress, \$89

Amuse Society hat, \$62

Lack of Color hat, \$88



Beach Vida Bling, La Palma Dress, \$80



Sage The Label, Queen of the Highway jumper, \$75

## BOHO BEAUTY

For our bohemian ladies, we shopped Malibu Fox for the trendiest polo looks. The maxi dress's length is great for polo, for the traditional look is to have your dress go below your knees. It also has great colors, with the deep blue and orange on point for the season. The La Palma dress may not be exactly knee length, but it's a great fit for any body type, and is the perfect dress to pair with one of the hats on those days you want to keep the sun off your face. A more classic polo outfit with a boho touch is the jumpsuit. The pink color and the print is girly and chic, but still a look fit for a fashionista.

## HORSESHOES

Ladies, save your heels for the weekdays and get out those flats, booties and wedges on polo Sunday. The polo grounds have a lot of different terrains to walk on, including concrete sidewalk and grass, so good comfortable shoes are a must. We also recommend close-toed shoes if you want to join the masses in stomping the divots at halftime.



Ziggy Boots, \$40 Malibu Fox



Splendid, \$24 FiFi's Fine Resale Apparel and Accessories



Donald Pliner, \$28 FiFi's Fine Resale Apparel and Accessories



**KNOCK-IN FASHION**

Since Fifi's Fine Resale Apparel and Accessories is a consignment store, the possibilities for outfits are almost endless. We picked out three classic polo looks in three color styles. The white and pink Antonio Melani is the most traditional polo outfit you can get — especially for where we live. It's bright, colorful and pretty from head to toe. Same goes for the Lilly Pulitzer dress — especially since Florida loves Lilly. The other Antonio Melani is just as classic as the other two dresses, but without the added color, perfect for the ladies that lean toward edgier looks and prefer to stay away from the girly style.



Lilly Pulitzer, \$42

Antonio Melani, \$24

Antonio Melani, \$28



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Courtesy photo  
Richard Albero threw out the first pitch at Yankee Stadium after completing his walk.

# A Walk to Remember

In 2015, Lakewood Ranch resident Richard Albero embarked on a 1,200-mile trek to raise money for wounded warriors. Now he's penning a memoir about the experience and plotting his next step.

BY RYAN KOHN | CONTRIBUTOR

Richard Albero stares at his home office computer screen with his arms crossed, leaning back in a black desk chair. A video is playing on the YES Network, the television broadcasting partner of the New York Yankees. It's about Albero, and a long walk he took three years ago, when he was 65. Albero watches the video silently. His desk is covered with photos of his three kids, a crucifix and an outdated Yankees magazine. To his left, a bronzed pair of sneakers hangs on the wall. Behind him is a cross-stitched message that reads, "kindness costs noth-

ing." The rest of the office wall space is dedicated to the Yankees in one form or another — player statues, pictures, trading cards.

The items in Albero's Lakewood Ranch office paint almost as clear a picture of his accomplishment as the video. On March 2, 2015, Albero, a retired teacher, stepped on home plate at Tropicana Field (home of the Tampa Bay Rays). Eighty-six days and 1,200 miles later, he strode up to home plate at Yankee Stadium in the Bronx.

All of this in the name of raising mon-

*Continued on Page 64*



Richard Albero's office is filled with memorabilia representing his walk, alongside Yankees statuettes, cards and pictures.



ey for the Wounded Warrior Project.

He walked through Ocala, where a woman passed him in a pickup truck, made a U-turn and stopped in front of him, hopping out and aiming a shotgun at his head for taking a picture of her property. ("It was pretty," Albero said.) He walked through Jacksonville, where a man with a hidden blade up his sleeve escorted Albero through a run-down part of town, telling him he'd better hurry or there was a chance he'd "get his a\*\* capped." He walked through endless fields in North Carolina, where weeds came up to his chest and mosquitoes feasted on his flesh.

He walked every day until he reached the Bronx. He'd stop at night and have one of eight "support drivers" take him to a hotel to sleep. But so exact was Albero about walking the entire distance, without cheating a foot, he'd tie bright kerchiefs around trees so he'd know where he left off.

The closest he came to serious injury — or worse — was in a one-way tunnel in Virginia. He was on the phone with Nick Verrastro, a friend of six decades who had volunteered to be one of his support drivers. The tunnel had a curve at the end, and it was daytime, so Albero couldn't tell if a car was coming. It was so narrow, he had to walk through it sideways, his lower body rubbing against a railing. As he was approaching the curve, he heard the sound of tires rolling across pavement.

Albero said to Verrastro, "Nick, I'm going to die," and his friend believed him at the time. As the car neared him, he leapt over the railing, his feet landing on the street on the other side. Somehow, the driver missed him, and Albero walked away unscathed.

"Something was guiding me, whatever you want to believe in," Albero says. "I don't know if I'll ever learn about it in this life."

The walk forced Albero to rotate 12 pairs of shoes, three of which he wore through completely. He'd never wear the same pair on consecutive treks, and to relieve pain he'd soak his feet at night in Epsom salt in his hotel room. Before the adventure began, he watched YouTube videos demonstrating foot massage techniques. These tutorials came in handy. He got a few blisters, but nothing serious.

Incredibly, the trek had no effect on



Richard Albero still has the ball from his first pitch at Yankee Stadium.

Photos by Kayleigh Omang



Courtesy photo

Richard Albero takes the final steps in his 1,200-mile journey from home plate at Tropicana Field to home plate at Yankee Stadium, accompanied by members of the Wounded Warrior Project.



A Babe Ruth cookie jar adorns the island in Richard Albero's kitchen.

“  
Something was  
guiding me,  
whatever you  
want to believe  
in. I don't know  
if I'll ever learn  
about it in this life.”

**RICHARD ALBERO**

other aspects of his fitness. He started the walk at 187 pounds and finished it at 187 pounds.

He made three T-shirts for the occasion, neon green ones printed with the words "Walking Tampa to the Bronx." He wore them every day. He's wearing one in his office as he watches the video, except now the "ing" in "Walking" has been crossed out with red tape and replaced by "ed." Walked.

He carried with him a phone charger and a pair of headphones, used in the mornings to listen to Van Morrison or other classic rock artists. In the afternoons, he'd chat with radio personalities along the coast in the hopes of bringing in more donations. Occasionally, he would record audio clips on his phone, documenting how he was feeling. That's more or less how the journey went down. It was a bare bones operation.

When his journey came to an end, Albero raised \$56,000 for the Wounded Warrior Project, including a \$25,000 contribution from the Yankees. Along the way, he stopped to visit the charity's Washington, D.C., office to share with them his mission. He met a veteran named Dave, who told him he represented the bottom figure in the Wounded Warrior logo: the one of a figure carrying his brother in arms. That made Albero proud.

This was more than just an item on a bucket list. There was a purpose behind it, and to Albero the purpose was everything.

**A HEAVY HIT**

No one compares to Babe Ruth.

That's Albero's viewpoint anyway. Of all his Yankees gear, items involving "The Bambino" outweigh everything else. Albero has newspapers from the day Ruth died. He has approximately 50 T-shirts related to "The Sultan of Swat" and a cookie jar on his kitchen island in the shape of Ruth. "He has the face of an angel," he says of Ruth.

He also loves the legend's penchant for hot dogs and beer, and the way he treated the kids who lionized him, never acting "above" them, Albero says.

Albero loves other Yankees players, of course (Mickey Mantle), and dislikes a few, too (Reggie Jackson). His passion for the team extended to his nephew, Gary Albero, who worked as an insurance broker in New Jersey and was almost as big of a Yankees fan as his uncle. The pair often went to games together, and when they did, they always stopped by Stan's, a popular bar in the Bronx to have a beer.

Those were special times, Albero says. The pair was so close Albero made Gary the godfather of his son, Dante. Albero remembers Gary used to lift Dante onto his shoulders every time he'd visit; Dante couldn't get enough of it.

On Sept. 11, 2001, Albero, a New Jersey native, was working as a math teacher at Briarcliff High in Westchester County, New York. He remembers he walked through the library and noticed all the televisions tuned into the same coverage: multiple plane crashes, crumbling buildings, and so many deaths.

In that moment, as he stood there with his eyes fixed on what used to be the World Trade Center, Albero was overcome with a sensation he'd never felt before, or since.

"I got this feeling in my stomach," he says, "and I just knew. I knew Gary was gone."

Gary didn't normally go to the World Trade Center for work. But on that day, as Albero would later discover, Gary had a meeting on one of the center's top floors.

He didn't make it out. He was 39, survived by his wife, Aracelis and his 4-year-old son, Michael.

Continued on Page 66



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### THE NEXT INNING

When Albero first conceived of his long walk, back in November 2014, he saw it as an adventure, a bucket-list item that he wanted to do just to prove he could do it.

But then, in service to this mantra, “kindness costs nothing,” Albero, a former Navy officer, decided to turn his walk into a fundraiser for the Wounded Warrior Project, a cause that made perfect sense to his friends and family. When he dedicated it to his late nephew, however, his inner circle was caught by surprise.

“I didn’t realize how deeply it affected him,” Verrastro says. “People our age don’t like to talk about stuff like that. I think the walk was an outgrowth of having to deal with unspeakable grief. It was a moving thing to see, and pretty remarkable.”

Speaking now, Albero is decidedly mellow about the experience, downplaying the bits about “inner growth.” But the audio clips he recorded along his pilgrimage, which had remained private until he shared them last summer with the Del Webb Lakewood Ranch American Veterans and Military Supporters Group, hint at the depth of his catharsis.

In one of the clips, dated “Day 32,” Albero talks about how happy he is to be walking on a sidewalk. “(I’ve) had a couple weak moments,” he speaks into the recorder. “But I’m reaching down for my soul. It’s still there.” The entire thing lasts 59 seconds.

Continued on Page 68

“

*I didn’t realize how deeply it affected him. People our age don’t like to talk about stuff like that.*

NICK VERRASTRO

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Continued from Page 66

And then there's this one — an undated clip that lasts all of 16 seconds.

"Gary, I hope you're up there watching me, man," Albero says. He sniffles. "I know I got a ways to go, but I'll be up in New York on Memorial (Day). Keep me safe. I love you." The clip ends with the sound of a whizzing car.

Albero says he doesn't feel different now than he did before he walked. He's not a better person, nor a changed person. Verrastro agrees, even though he adds that his friend is more "sociable" now and more willing to talk about things going on in his life.

Personal transformation was never Albero's goal. Now he just wants people to hear his story and know they can unlock the good in themselves, too. He says he didn't realize it at the time, but that was probably his goal all along.

He is writing a book about his experience, titled "Not Just a Walk in the Park." He expects it to be published sometime next year. Verrastro says he sees it as another entry in Albero's crazy life. Albert sees it as a prelude

to his next adventure. The 68-year-old is feeling the itch to do something big again. Maybe another walk. Maybe something else. However it plays out, it'll be for a purpose, just like the last one.

He can't fathom doing it any other way.

It probably won't end the same way the first walk did, with Albero wearing those now-bronzed shoes, stomping down on home plate at Yankee Stadium, the place where he and Gary spent so many afternoons together.

Albero threw out the first pitch at that game, surrounded by his kids. It was a perfect strike. Not even Babe Ruth — people forget he was also a masterful pitcher — could have done better.

After the game, Albero went to the only place that felt appropriate, Stan's.

He stood on the bar, beer in hand, and toasted to Gary's memory. The bar toasted back.



Courtesy photo  
Richard Albero stands on the bar at Stan's after completing his trek, giving a toast to his nephew, Gary.

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# Holiday Spirits

These five East County cocktails will keep you merry and bright all season long.

BY SHELLIE TERRY | CONTRIBUTOR

We know that one stiff drink won't get you through the holidays. (It might not even get you through one hour with your in-laws.) But hey, it could take the edge off. We met with some of the hottest mixologists working behind the bars at East County restaurants to find specialty cocktails that will make your mother's spiked eggnog and rum balls look like tea and crumpets. These tasty (and creative) beverages up the ante in Yuletide drinking, so if you're feeling grinchy, order one and watch your holiday cheer go from bah-humbug to joyful and triumphant.

## CHRISTMAS IN A CUP *Iced Cinnamon Whiskey Chai at Valentino*

This festive cocktail is the perfect holiday elixir. It blends the Christmassy spices of a chai latte with the creaminess of a White Russian and adds a punch of whiskey to let you know it's no cup of cocoa. Valentino's manager, Anna Solari, fine tunes the craft cocktail menu each season with the help of new liqueurs, such as Sompriya Sômrus Indian Cream. Pistachio, saffron, cardamom, rose and almond work together in this rum concoction to deliver a classic holiday zing. Paired with Knob Creek Whiskey, (secret ingredient) maple syrup and creamer, the cocktail is shaken and poured over ice in an Old-Fashioned glass rimmed with cinnamon sugar and topped with a cinnamon stick. Trust us, you'll want to order it with a Valentino's cannoli. We give you permission to have your dessert and drink it, too.

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Photo by Heidi Kurpiela





**WHERE THERE'S SMOKE ...**

***Smoked Old-Fashioned at Speaks Clam Bar***

Eric Holmes, the sommelier and bar manager at Speaks Clam Bar, will take you back in time with his deft mixology skills and black felt fedora. Holmes has perfected the applewood-infused Smoked Old-Fashioned, a booze-forward cocktail for serious imbibers. This elegant drink is a study in simplicity that's meant to impress. Holmes starts with a generous pour of Evan Williams Green Label bourbon. Then he adds a simple syrup and whiskey barrel-aged bitters, which are stirred — not shaken — so the ice doesn't dilute the alcohol. The mixture is chilled and then poured into a small carafe topped with applewood smoke to enhance the robust flavor. The carafe is sealed for as long as the customer is willing to wait and then served with a giant ice ball, lemon and orange zest and a maraschino cherry for a full-bodied sensory experience.

**Speaks Clam Bar**

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Photos by Dex Honea



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**PURPLE PEOPLE PLEASER**

***Butterfly Martini at JPAN***

For a kiss of springtime in the midst of winter, JPAN's bar manager, Robert Boyland, delivers the restaurant's signature cocktail: the pretty, purple Butterfly Martini. The key to creating a successful signature cocktail menu, Boyland says, is the right balance of spirits, sweetness and sour, which the Butterfly delicately delivers. Juices are fresh-squeezed and syrups are handmade and paired with Effen Vodka, which has been infused with butterfly pea flower and lemongrass, elderflower and fresh lemon. The citrus mixture is presented in a martini glass alongside a small carafe of the purple potion, which is poured together tableside. Boyland makes a whimsical "butterfly" from lemon zest, which will carry you away to a day in May, no matter how much holiday hustling you've got left to do.







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### FROSTY FLORIDA FAVE *Bellini at Brio*

If day drinking during the holidays is wrong, we don't want to be right. The frosty Bellini at Brio at University Town Center is the light, refreshing pop of sweet effervescence that goes down well with brunch while you're mall shopping. The menu suggests "peach," but ask your server or bartender what other options are available. Blackberry or strawberry are easy

substitutes if you'd rather swap out the peach nectar and schnapps for a more berry taste. The nectar and liqueur are blended and topped with Cuvée Storica Cinzano Prosecco, making the cocktail zippy without being too boozy or outrageous. You can order it by the glass or by the pitcher, depending on whether you're feeling naughty or nice.

### A BETTER BUZZ *Irish Coffee at MacAllisters*

We can't think of a better way to cap an evening of Christmas carriage rides on Lakewood Ranch Main Street than with a coffee with cream and Jameson. MacAllisters Grill & Tavern's caffeinated spirit is your typical Irish coffee cocktail mixed with Baileys Irish Cream, but since the restaurant is known for its selection of specialty spirits, Manager Justin Simms likes to add an ounce of Jameson whiskey to give it a little

kick. "That way it feels like you're having a real drink," says Simms. The hot brew is topped with whipped cream and a swirl of chocolate syrup, making it the perfect drink to wash down the tavern's Sticky Toffee Pudding and, in general, all of your holiday fatigue.

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Noah Racey and Britney Coleman in *The Music Man*.  
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Lakewood Ranch is a great place to live, work and play,  
but it's also a great place to get well.

Caregivers say the community has served as a  
sanctuary during their loved ones' darkest days.

# HEALING WATERS

BY HEIDI KURPIELA | MANAGING EDITOR

For years Dave and Bobbi Norris checked all the usual boxes as baby boomers living in Lakewood Ranch. Sixty-something. Semi-retired. Transplants from bigger cities. Well-traveled. Long business resumes. Golfers. Bicyclists. Philanthropists. Regulars at Capital Grille. Kids and grandkids scattered across the country.

Successful, but not pretentious. Upbeat, but not cloying.

Serial entrepreneurs, they lived in a lot of different states (California, Arizona, New York and Texas) before settling in Florida.

In 2004, they bought a home in the Lakewood Ranch Country Club, and for a short stretch left to run a remediation and recycling business in Texas. In 2011, they returned to East County — one of the few places they didn't feel restless — and moved into a 4,400-square-foot house on the second-best lot in The Lake Club.

Former marathon runners, the Norrises embodied the town's live-work-play ethic. Dave served as the CEO of his own corporate consulting firm, and Bobbi worked as an independent operations and revenue consultant in the health care industry. From one side of their million-dollar nest, they could watch the sunrise and from the other side, the sunset. Even the couple's children were surprised to see them so content in one place.

"It was utopia," Bobbi says. "Then we hit a bump in the road."

In 2015, Dave, then 64, started hav-

ing a hard time swallowing food. Rarely sick, he assumed it was reflux and made an appointment with an ear, nose, throat doctor. An endoscopy revealed a tumor at the base of his esophagus. When doctors diagnosed him with Stage 4 stomach cancer, he had already lost 48 pounds from his athletic frame.

"They told me, 'You've got X-amount of months,'" Dave says. "But Bobbi didn't focus on that. She said, 'You've got to fight this,' and so we did."

Married for 18 years, the couple fell in love 25 years ago, after Bobbi asked Dave to help her train for a marathon in the Adirondacks. After processing his diagnosis, she understood it was her turn to get him through a race.

They ended up at the University of Texas MD Anderson Cancer Center in Houston, not far from their daughter, son-in-law and two grandchildren. Despite the convenience, they decided to stay in Florida and fly back and forth to Texas every two weeks for treatment, a schedule they stuck to for six months.

*Continued on Page 78*



Photos by Heidi Kurpiela

Dave Norris insisted on flying back and forth to Texas during his six months of chemo at MD Anderson Cancer Center in Houston. "Whenever he felt well enough, we'd go for bike rides through Lakewood Ranch. The community played an important role in his treatment," says his wife, Bobbi.



Dave was adamant. He would ride out the effects of the chemotherapy in Lakewood Ranch.

“The community was our sanctuary,” Bobbi says. “We’d go straight from treatment to the airport. It was always the first thing Dave would say when chemo was over — ‘Let’s go home now.’”

Doctors in Houston decided to take an aggressive approach to treating Dave’s cancer given that he was in otherwise impeccable shape. In addition to infusions at MD Anderson, he was given seven chemo pills a day, a high dose of steroids and subjected to an eight-week knock-out round of chemo and radiation at Florida Cancer Specialists in Lakewood Ranch. For more than a year, Bobbi assumed the role of taxi driver, dry cleaner, grocery shopper, chef, bill-payer and cheerleader.

“I had to be his security, too,” she says. “People would reach out, and I’d have to say, ‘No, not today.’”

Behind the Tuscan entrance to their gated development, the Norrises fought the kind of onerous battle you don’t see in real estate pamphlets: Bobbi anticipating Dave’s dizzy spells as he continued to work from home teleconferencing with clients, Dave shivering under blankets pulled straight from the dryer, Bobbi stirring a pot of Bolognese sauce, desperate to fill him with something warm and familiar, Dave holding a drink with an oven mitt because the glass was too cold in his hands.

“There were days he couldn’t see the light at the end of the tunnel,” Bobbi says, “so I had to dig a bigger hole so more light could get in.”

On good days, the couple would go for long bike rides down Lakewood Ranch Boulevard or play a round of golf at Lakewood Ranch Golf and Country Club. On bad days, Dave would sit queasy on the couch watching a Yankees game and Bobbi would write her thoughts in a journal. When their two weeks were up, they’d fly back to Houston for a few days and then return home to repeat the process, neither one ever questioning their decision to stay in Lakewood Ranch.

“There is a depth of character in this community and a wealth of services,” Bobbi says. “Your neighbors are your friends. The staff at the restaurant down the street knows your name. Re-

“

*The community was our sanctuary.*

**BOBBI NORRIS**

ally, you couldn’t ask for a more warm or comfortable location to deal with something ugly and uncomfortable.”

**RESTORATIVE RANCH**

Bobbi Norris isn’t the only one lighting the end of a tunnel in Lakewood Ranch. In addition to young families and active retirees, East County is a little-known sanctum for caregivers.

The community’s newer housing, carefully planned infrastructure, abundance of green space and access to feel-good amenities and nonprofits make it an ideal place to care for ailing family members or children with special needs.

From equine therapy and respite care to in-home elder care services, cancer foundations, caregiver support groups and autism schools, families lifting heavy loads in Lakewood Ranch are getting help — and the number of these accommodations is rising with the population.

Florida Cancer Specialists & Research Institute, for example, will double its Lakewood Ranch oncology practice this summer when it opens its \$16 million facility at State Road 70 and Lakewood Ranch Boulevard. More chemotherapy chairs, more examination rooms and more clinical trials means fewer area patients will have to drive an hour north to Moffitt Cancer Center in Tampa.

“People find refuge here,” says registered nurse Beth Wittmer, senior manager of care management at Florida Cancer Specialists. “It is an attractive place if you’re dealing with a chronic condition. The setting itself is relaxing, and there are a lot of resources. It feels safe.”

Wittmer says she meets a lot of seniors, many of whom live on Longboat Key who have expressed interest in moving to Lakewood Ranch for this reason. Over the past two years, the community has opened The Sheridan at Lakewood Ranch, an upscale assisted living and memory care facility with 121 apartments, and announced plans to build a 50,000-square-foot medical building on its CORE Campus (Col-

laboration Opportunities for Research and Exploration) — a 265-acre biotech hub located between Rangeland Parkway and State Road 70. A Tidewell Hospice House is built and awaiting certification to open.

Not surprisingly, builders are also heeding the call.

This winter, Neal Signature Homes will roll out nine new floor plans in Country Club East, four of which will come predesigned with flex options for in-law suites. Neal Purchasing Manager Tony Compano says the company has always offered customizations, but this is the first time it’s addressing the need upfront.

“We get enough requests that we decided to redo our plans,” Compano says. “People aren’t just looking for in-law suites, but modifications to the inside of their homes; lowered countertops, zero-entry showers, grab bars, that sort of thing. A lot of people are buying houses here thinking it’s the last place they’re going to live. They see themselves in the future, and they understand they might be in a wheelchair. They realize if they want to stay in their home as they get older, they might have to move in a caregiver.”

**POWER OF POSITIVITY**

Caregivers face a sobering reality, but it’s not always depressing, and not all caregivers are taking care of sick or elderly loved ones.

Greenbrook resident Mary Smith serves as executive director of Lakewood Ranch-based Family Network on Disabilities of Manasota, a nonprofit that assists families with children with disabilities and special needs. The organization’s cardinal service is providing in-home respite care so caregivers can get a break.

This temporary relief was monumental for Smith and her husband, Brian, when they moved in 1995 from Lakeland to Bradenton. Away from family and caring for two small children with disabilities (Michelle has Down syndrome and Paul has autism), Smith felt alone and overwhelmed. Then pregnant with her third child, she turned to FND Manasota for help.

She connected with parents in the same boat and soon began volunteering for the organization and serving on its board. In 2000, she helped launch FND’s

*Continued on Page 80*



Greenbrook residents Brian and Mary Smith are full-time caretakers to their two grown children, Michelle, who has Down syndrome and Paul, who is autistic.

**The Season for Caring**

BY JULIE COOK DOWNING  
PRESIDENT OF CAREGIVERS’ COMFORT CREATIONS LLC  
Caregiving is quite possibly the hardest job in the world, and the holidays increase the responsibilities and intensity of this job. Having been a caregiver, I know firsthand how important it is to carve out time for yourself so you can appreciate what should be a happy time.



I took care of my mother, who had Alzheimer’s disease, and my father, who had dementia. If I could survive the holidays with my parents, just about anything is possible. But how do you combat the sadness?

If you focus on the true meaning of the holidays it can help jolt you into the present. As evidenced by the amount of money caregivers spend hashing out issues with professionals

in workshops, therapy and support groups, we all want to focus on the NOW, but we so often dwell in the past or look forward to the future.

Remembering the real meaning of the holidays will remove some of the chatter in your head, which includes making peace with the fact that holidays are not the same anymore. But the spirit of the season remains constant!

Thanksgiving is about being thankful for the people in our lives and the country in which we live. When we are filled with gratitude, a marvelous mechanism kicks in and problems can be subjugated to a low priority.

As we approach the December holidays, we must work even harder at actively celebrating. Family traditions have faded, but our memories of them feel more vivid because we know what once WAS is no longer.

The holidays are a season of hope, awakening, peace, love and freedom. Recognize they are a gift because not everyone has pleasant holiday memories. I am grateful to have had a loving family and loving memories. The holidays give me the opportunity to reflect on this.

I know I gave hope to my parents because I did the best I could do. I’ve realized I handled the hardest job I’ve ever had to perform, and now I feel like I can do anything. Because of my attention, my parents received the best possible care, which fills me with a great sense of peace.

Whether you’re giving care in your home, from a distance or overseeing the treatment of a loved one in a facility, your involvement has made a difference. If you don’t buy a single gift this holiday season, address any cards or attend any functions, you can rest in the comfort of your caregiving. That is the biggest gift of all. It’s the gift of love and you have the freedom to make the best decisions that work for you and your loved ones.

Julie Cook Downing is the Sarasota Caregiver Support Group facilitator for all caregivers every third Monday at Doctors Hospital of Sarasota. She facilitates the Veterans Caregiver Support Group every third Wednesday at JFCS of the Suncoast. Join her from 10 a.m. to 1 p.m. Dec. 10 at Doctors Hospital for a free Family Caregivers Celebration. To register, call 888-685-1596. For more information on caregiver support, email [caregivercomfort@aol.com](mailto:caregivercomfort@aol.com).



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Continued from Page 78

respite program and three years later was appointed to executive director.

"If we didn't have respite when our kids were little, I don't know how we would have survived those years," says Smith, 57. "Respite keeps you out of the valley. If you're in the valley, it pulls you out. It gives you a sense of normalcy."

Even though the Smiths' children are grown now — Michelle is 27 and Paul is 25 — they still live at home and will continue to do so until they outlive their parents. The couple's youngest daughter, Julie, 23, who just graduated with a degree in health science from Florida Gulf Coast University, is on board to be their caregiver when that day comes.

In the meantime, life is pretty good in Lakewood Ranch, says Smith. Michelle and Paul are enrolled in a day program that provides vocational training at The Haven in Sarasota. They play Miracle League baseball and attend the special needs prom at Woodland Community Church. They ride their bikes to Greenbrook Adventure Park or go out to dinner at Metro Diner, where they've become regulars over the past few months. They love going to the beach and the movies.

"It's doom and gloom if you make it doom and gloom," Smith says. "You can spend your time asking why me ... why two kids like this ... but my husband and I never had that kind of attitude. We believe our kids were given to us for a reason or a purpose. We have a positive outlook, and that's the key to everything."

Dave and Bobbi Norris agree.

In 2016, after receiving two experimental rounds of heated chemotherapy at MD Anderson, Dave was declared cancer-free. After getting the news, he and Bobbi found a new cause for their Make a Difference Foundation — Blanket Warmers for Cancer Patients, which donates commercial-grade blanket warmers to Florida Cancer Specialists locations across the state.

Their first machine went into the Lakewood Ranch center, right beside the chair Dave used to sit in to get chemo.

"Making a difference with time I wasn't supposed to have is extremely important to me," says Dave, who credits the community and his wife with helping him heal. "Bobbi said to me early on, 'Lean in as hard as you can, and I'll lean back harder. That way we never fall.'"

*Editor's note: As the story went to press, we learned that Dave Norris died Nov. 7 of a sudden illness, with family by his side.*

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# HAVEN

SPOTLIGHTING LIFE ON THE RANCH

An elegant Padian villa occupies a premium place in the Tuscan-themed Lake Club. **PAGE 84**



# LAKE CLUB CLASSIC

BY ROBERT PLUNKET | CONTRIBUTOR

A former model home shines as brightly as ever.



Courtesy photos  
Looking out on a spectacular water view,  
the homes of Showcase Circle have set the  
standard for luxury in The Lake Club.





**L**akewood Ranch is way too young to have much history attached to it. But when it is written, I have a feeling there will be a special mention of this issue's home.

Along with its 10 or so immediate neighbors, it takes pride of place on Showcase Circle, the group of model homes built 12 years ago to launch The Lake Club.

Each home was by a different builder — this one was by Pruett — and the sense of competition is palpable. Each one tries to outdo the others, with every upgrade, every extra detail, every unique flourish. And each one faces one of the area's greatest inland water views — a long vista across a lake to an arched and rustic bridge fringed by that most Tuscan of trees, the cypress.

If it wasn't gated and closed to the public, it would be one of the area's tourist attractions.

Nowadays Showcase Circle is called Waterton Lane, and the homes have been owned privately for more than a decade. Every once in a while one comes on the market, and number 7921 is one of the best. It's a little more discrete and understated than the others, a Palladian villa that perfectly suits its setting.

It's the home of Charlie Eaton, a former packaging executive from Connecticut who first began retired life in the Villages, the famous built-from-scratch community north of Orlando. He enjoyed living there but missed being close to the beach. He also wanted something more upscale, something gated. And, as he put it, "a place where there is more to life than watching Sean Hannity."

A friend recommended Lakewood Ranch, and when Charlie and his girlfriend, Lola Schnabel, first entered the home on Waterton Lane they knew it

*Continued on Page 88*

**ENTER HERE** Top: A custom glass front door, both leaded and beveled, welcomes guests. The formal dining room is to the right. Center: The living room ceiling and stone fireplace show off the elaborate details that fill the home. Bottom: The kitchen opens to the other living areas and continues the light and airy feeling.

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Continued from Page 86

was the one. The entry way alone did the trick, with its granite and marble inlaid floor and leaded glass front door. Lola's first comment said it all: "If you don't buy this house, you're crazy."

It's the attention to detail that makes the home unique. The decorating touches are all spot on, with a glamorous atmosphere that reminds you of a deluxe suite at a Ritz-Carlton. Everything is carefully thought out and of the highest quality. The colors are elegant creams and grays, accented by the lightest blues and greens. You'll see hints of French art deco in the furniture, and mirrors are everywhere reflecting light off yet another lake behind the house.

Charlie Eaton bought the house totally furnished from the original owner and so far has not done a thing. It still has its original model home interiors intact, and while most homes that reach their 12th birthday are ready for an update, this one comes across as classic and timeless.

Charlie still delights in showing off the home's more unusual features, his favorite being the "safe room." Disguised as a large kitchen pantry, it is constructed to withstand a major hurricane. Both the walls and ceiling are made of poured concrete, with concrete footings on the slab. It also has direct outside air vents with a fan, and boasts phone and cable outlets.

But the real show-stopper of the home is the master suite. Here the Ritz-Carlton comparison kicks in even more. The space is cool and calm, with one of the home's signature coffered and trayed ceilings rising up to 14 feet above the plushly carpeted floor. There's an intimate sitting area at the far end, complete with a mini bar for morning coffee or a late-night drink. (There's even a mini dishwasher.) Taffy,

Continued on Page 90

**MASTER SUITE** Top: Another coffered ceiling and custom moldings add character to the luxurious bedroom. Center: A tucked away wet bar, complete with mini-dishwasher, is perfect for early morning coffee. Bottom: The elegant master bath features a vaulted ceiling and a walk-in double shower behind the free-standing tub.



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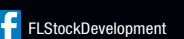
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*Continued from Page 88*

the rescue dog — part Chihuahua, part terrier — who presides over the house can find plenty of soft places to nap.

A mirrored dressing room provides access to two walk-in closets, one is windowed, and leads to the master bath. Here you'll find a unique vaulted ceiling and a whirlpool tub. But the most unique feature remains the walk-in shower. It's a dual shower, actually, each with separate showerheads and controls. As Charlie says, "You can actually live in the master suite."

In reality, though, most of the living gets done in the family room and kitchen. The space flows seamlessly from the more formal areas into a large space that is perfect for informal entertaining. You'll find a bar, plus a separate breakfast bar that seats eight. There's also dining around a table overlooking the pool. During the cooler months the glass doors to the outdoor living area can be opened and pocketed into the walls, providing an expansive space that's perfect for Florida living. And yes, there is an outdoor kitchen just steps away, complete with gas grill.

Health concerns are causing Charlie to sell his home, and with a great deal of reluctance he will be moving to Atlanta, where his two sons and three grandkids live. The asking price is \$1,525,000. This does not include the furniture, but a savvy buyer may want to make a separate offer since it so perfectly completes the home.

I have a feeling that someday the homes on Showcase Circle will fill the same place in the public's imagination that the grand old Spanish homes of the Ringling era hold. They will be prized for their status as showplaces, with unique details everywhere you look and custom touches that are getting harder and more expensive to duplicate. But even more important will be their status as style setters — they were here first, and their strong and vibrant personalities set the tone for all that followed.

**FUN AND GAMES** Top: The theater room is windowed and could also function as an extra bedroom. Center: The screened pool and infinity spa overlook another lake behind the home. Bottom: Glass doors slide back to double the home's living space, with outdoor seating and dining.



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back at the ranch

# Don't Give My Kids Gifts This Christmas

With all due respect to grandparents, this Grinch-of-two doesn't need anymore flashing Paw Patrol vehicles in her house.



JESS MCINTYRE GREENBROOK RESIDENT AND WORKING MOM TO SONS GAVIN, 3, AND JACKSON, 2

The holidays are coming. They are coming fast and they are coming for YOU.

In our society, it has become perfectly acceptable, if not expected, to put up decorations as soon as Halloween ends. Heck, you can buy ornaments in some stores as early as July! Yuck.

As a parent, I start to frantically change the television channel anytime a holiday toy commercial comes on. My heart shrinks two sizes too small (like someone we know who has all the tender sweetness of a seasick crocodile) the moment my kids start mentioning the latest Hatchimal.

I'm not afraid to deck the halls (or a family member who starts asking about Santa in October). All I can say is hark the herald — you can avoid some of this nonsense by only letting your kids watch commercial-free, on-demand programming.

I know I'm not alone when I lament that my children beg — and by beg, I mean engage in FBI-style negotiations — for new toys they MUST have.

Their playroom is already bursting at the seams like a busted can of buttermilk biscuits. The last thing I need is one more piece of plastic that is immediately broken, discarded or forgotten about until my annual Clean-Sweep-Before-Christmas purge kicks in.

Seriously folks, please stop sending my kids things for the holidays.

What this exhausted and over-extended mama really needs is the (free) excuse to get out of the house. Give my

small humans experiences, memories and fun!

Getting a membership to a kid-friendly organization or attraction is like being handed a golden ticket. It is literally the gift that keeps on giving ... for one year. Kids of all ages will enjoy Mote Marine Laboratory and Aquarium, Marie Selby Botanical Gardens, Sarasota Jungle Gardens, Big Cat Habitat and Gulf Coast Sanctuary, ZooTampa at Lowry Park, Glazer Children's Museum or Great Explorations Children's Museum. Many of these places offer reciprocal memberships or discounts, meaning that your one gift might buy us entrance into multiple places.

Gift cards are practical, too. I know they feel impersonal, but we all love them because we use them how we please. If you feel icky handing my kid a Target gift card, get one for Menchie's or Chick-fil-A. Even better, purchase one to play mini golf. (The courses at Smugglers Cove in Bradenton and The Fish Hole at Lakewood Ranch are Florida putt-putt at its best.) And here are two other local fun factories: SkyZone, an indoor trampoline park, and Bounce Down Under, an inflatable manna from kid

heaven. If you're buying for kids who are too old or too cool for bounce houses and pirate mini golf, get a gift card to Lakewood Ranch Cinemas.

The new superhero movie "Aquaman" opens in theaters on Dec. 21.

Speaking of tickets, if you're looking for fun for the whole family, consider shelling out money

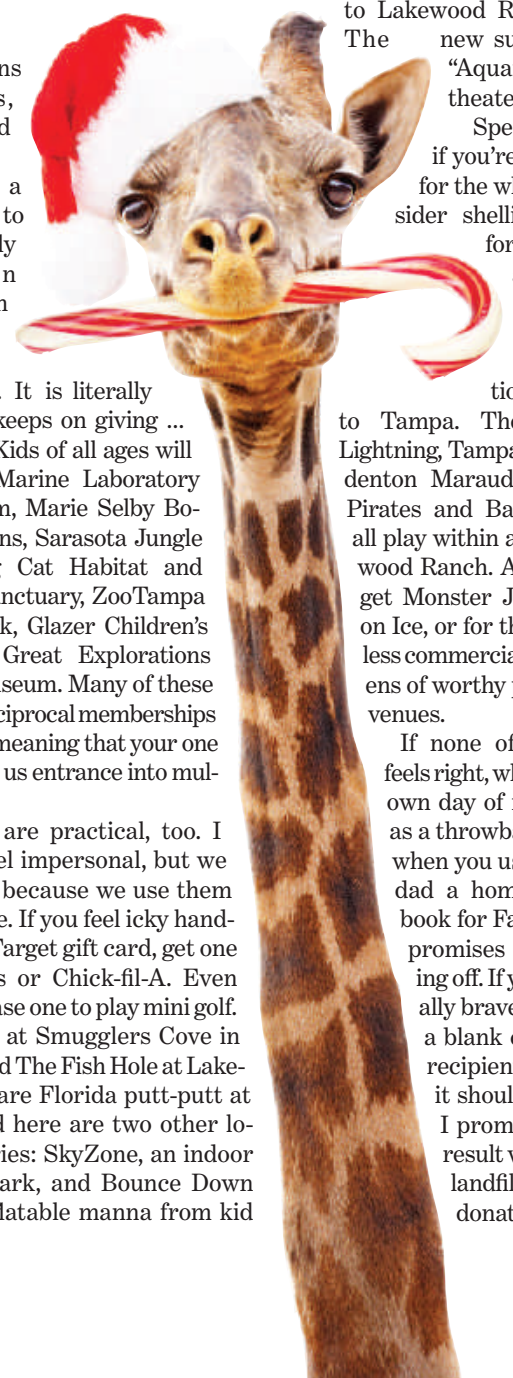
for admission to a sporting or entertainment event. There's

a wealth of options from here

to Tampa. The Tampa Bay Lightning, Tampa Bay Rays, Bradenton Marauders, Pittsburgh Pirates and Baltimore Orioles all play within an hour of Lakewood Ranch. And let's not forget Monster Jam and Disney on Ice, or for those of you with less commercial tastes, the dozens of worthy performing arts venues.

If none of these options feels right, why not build your own day of fun? Think of it as a throwback to the years when you used to give your dad a homemade coupon book for Father's Day with promises to stop mouthing off. If you're feeling really brave, give the gift of a blank coupon. Let the recipient choose where it should be redeemed.

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# How I Sleigh Christmas



BY GABRIEL JIVA  
RIVERWALK  
RESIDENT AND  
DAD TO SONS  
ALEXANDER, 4,  
(ABOVE) AND  
FREDERICK,  
2 MONTHS

While your stockings were hung by the chimney with care, I was out in Lakewood Ranch upping my Santa game.

When I was a kid, Christmases were wonderful. We would get a tree on a Saturday in mid-December, spend the evening decorating it, put up some outdoor decorations and catch whatever Christmas flick was on TV — “Frosty the Snowman” and “Rudolph the Red-Nosed Reindeer,” the usual merry fare.

In the car, we’d turn up the volume on the same loop of infectious tunes that played every day for three weeks leading up to Dec. 25. Maybe we’d visit the Christmas village at the mall. Sit on Santa’s lap. Ask for a Transformer. Go home. Drink Hi-C. Mess with a Rubik’s Cube. It was a simpler pre-Elf on the Shelf era.

On Christmas Eve, we would watch

“It’s a Wonderful Life,” and I would stay up until carolers from our church came a-wassailing by the house, at which point my family would give them desserts. (I wonder why the tradition of giving carolers beer, moldy cheese, and Christmas loaf died out?)

When I became a teenager, I joined the carolers and soon learned the length of caroling was roughly proportional to the spread provided.

Now that I have small kids, I realize the importance of these warm and cozy memories. They are the mental comfort food we turn to when we’re overwhelmed by adulting. Because of this, my wife and I (and seemingly every other parent in Lakewood Ranch) go to great lengths to manufacture the same holiday cheer for our kids.

Yes, it’s a great diversion from having to be boring the other 11 months of the year. Mortgages, roof repairs, doctors’ appointments, watching what you eat and keeping current on your social media accounts is taxing. It’s no surprise Christmas these days is on another level. What better way to escape real life in 2018 than to go full-bore on the festive?

This year, like last year, we’re planning on pretty much doing something Christmassy with the kids every weekend. First up: buying the Christmas tree the day after Black Friday, otherwise known as Small Business Saturday because you don’t buy something from a small business on Monday because that day is relegated to online shopping. (Insider’s tip: If you’re looking for a Christmas tree lot, St. Barbara Greek Orthodox Church on Lockwood Ridge has a great one.)

*Continued on Page 96*

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Continued from Page 94

The Greek Orthodox tree is our main tree because my wife, who doesn't love real tannenbaums, also decorates her grandmother's 50-year-old artificial fir and the 2-foot Charlie Brown tree that sits on our son's dresser.

On the first weekend in December, we go to The Florida Railroad Museum in Parrish to ride the North Pole Express. This is a real train to a fake North Pole. Perhaps the experience is meant to demonstrate what the North Pole Express might look like after centuries of climate change turn the arctic into the west coast of Florida. Nonetheless, it's a fantastical Christmas village with all kinds of activities for kids, including a light maze, making reindeer food and eating s'mores on hay bales around a real wood fire. Oh, and the best Santa, who holds court in the best Santa living room ever.

The following weekend, we'll probably eat lunch with Santa at MacAllisters Grill & Tavern. This Santa, like most Santas, isn't overly toddler-friendly. The first time we took our oldest son



Alexander Jiva with Santa

to MacAllisters to see this Santa, he was terrified of the guy. Now that he has a little brother, we're looking forward to seeing him succumb to the horror again as we pass his infant brother to a strange old man in a red onesie.

My wife is part of the Lakewood Ranch Moms Group, which is a great

resource for any mom in the community. In addition to organizing nights out, running book clubs and recommending plumbers, the group rents a venue each December with great holiday ambiance and hires a top-notch Santa to dole out toys to your kids. Each present is purchased by you prior to the event, but your little cherub doesn't know this when he sits down to schmooze Kris Kringle. Trust me when I say watching the perfect gift manifest before children's eyes is magical.

In between all this, my family fits in the ordinary stuff I used to do as a kid. We watch all the Christmas movies and specials on all the streaming platforms. We go to Sarasota Jungle Gardens to see the lights and to Marie Selby Botanical Gardens because their lights are better. We attend the tree lighting on Lakewood Ranch Main Street and muster the fortitude to wait in line for the Santa who set up camp Nov. 9 at the Mall at University Town Center ... because in Lakewood Ranch it's never too soon to kick off Christmas.

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Photos by Jay Heater  
**Above:** Lakewood Ranch's Kelly Taylor, an ARC volunteer, rolls on the ground with Ellie May, a 1-year-old basenji-bull terrier mix.



**Left:** Remo, a 2-year-old German shepherd, enjoys Gardner Park with owner Lenore Boccia of Lakewood Ranch.



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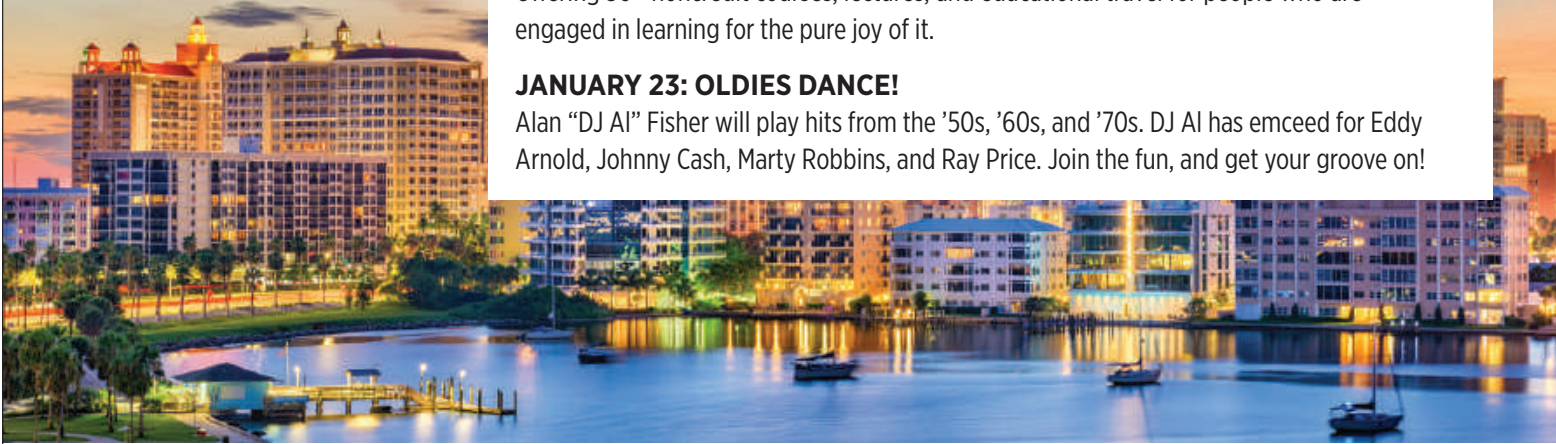
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Sisterhood for Good's Brea Niski congratulates her friend, Edna Zul-lin of Lakewood Ranch, as she filled out her membership application for Sisterhood for Good.



Photos by Amelia Hanks

**Above:** Sisterhood for Good members Kathy Fraley, Kathy Collums, Peggy Kronus and Heather Kasten



**Left:** Sisterhood for Good's Kimi Newcomb, Graceann Frederico and Yvonne Schloss

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### DARUMA

Enjoy superb Japanese cuisine that is fun, fascinating and delicious. Choose between our Traditional dining or Hibachi table-side cooking by classically trained chefs. Select from our Traditional Japanese favorites and innovative combinations such as Shrimp Teriyaki, Tempura, Sesame Chicken, Filet Mignon, Seafood and much more. Our Sushi lounge has freshly prepared selections made to your order. Savor Japanese delights like sashimi, sushi, and makimono. Relax with a craft signature cocktail or enjoy an after dinner drink in our friendly piano lounge. Visit Daruma tonight for an elegant dining experience!

**Sarasota North | 941.342.6600**  
**Sarasota South | 941.552.9465**  
[darumarestaurant.com](http://darumarestaurant.com)



### ED'S TAVERN

A Jersey Joint in Lakewood Ranch, Ed's Tavern is the perfect blend of local neighborhood sports bar and family friendly restaurant right in the heart of Main Street (next to the movie theater). We're the only lakefront dining in Lakewood Ranch! The menu has something for everyone, from Southern favorites like pulled pork and fried pickles to our authentic New Jersey classics like open-faced sandwiches and disco fries. Our newly remodeled full-service bar now includes 26 ice cold draft selections plus over 26 flat screen TVs.

Daily Specials, Trivia every Wednesday and Thursday. Live Music every Friday & Saturday night. Mon - Thur 11am - 12am, Fri - Sat 11am - 2am, Sun 11am - 11pm.

**10719 Rodeo Dr, Lakewood Ranch**  
**941.907.0400 | [facebook.com/edstavernlwr](https://www.facebook.com/edstavernlwr)**



### HANA SUSHI LOUNGE

Combining art with traditional Asian cuisine and service to create a unique culinary experience in Lakewood Ranch is what we at Hana Sushi Lounge strive for each day. With a fusion of artful sushi, inspired kitchen items and handcrafted cocktails, there is always something for everyone to enjoy. No matter the occasion, our friendly and knowledgeable staff look forward to making your visit special every time.

Happy Hour Every Sun- Thurs, 4pm-7pm.

**8126 Lakewood Main St, Lakewood Ranch**  
**941.907.1290 | [facebook.com/HanaSushiLounge](https://www.facebook.com/HanaSushiLounge)**





**keke's** KEKE'S UNIVERSITY TOWN CENTER  
 7:00am to 2:30 pm daily | 941-388-8953  
 5405 University Parkway | Unit 104 | University Park, FL 34201 | kekes.com

**KEKE'S BREAKFAST CAFE**  
 Keke's Breakfast Cafe is a full-service restaurant dedicated to providing an outstanding breakfast and lunch experience; a meal where everything is handmade, using the best ingredients available, with fresh fruit, vegetables, bread and dairy products. Some favorite Keke's dishes are the Florida Pancakes, topped with fresh strawberries, banana, blueberries and powdered sugar, the Banana, Nut & Caramel Waffle, which features banana and pecans baked in the waffle, topped with more banana, pecans, caramel and powdered sugar, an extensive amount of omelet options such as Greek, Three Meat, and Hawaiian omelets, as well as a complete lunch menu. Additionally, a must-have at every Keke's visit is a serving of our fresh, hand cut, redskin potato home-fries.  
**5405 University Pkwy #104, University Park**  
**941.388.8953 | kekes.com**



**941-755-FISH**  
**LOBSTER POUND**  
 Fresh Seafood & Specialty Market

**LOBSTER POUND**  
 We are a casual seafood bistro and fresh fish market. We are passionate about our Fresh Seafood and Live Maine Lobsters delivered daily. With a large selection of seafood to take home and make a wonderful dinner, to a full lunch menu, you can find almost anything to enjoy. There is also a fresh Grab and Go selection with Stuffed Clams, Egg Rolls, and Crab Cakes all made in house. Stop in and enjoy some of our "Famous" New England Chowder and Lobster Roll. Offering catering for offices, holidays, and any large events. ENJOY FRESH!!!!  
 Seasonal Hours Sun-Mon 10:30am-5pm, Tue-Thur 10:30am-7pm, Fri-Sat 10:30am-7:30pm  
**8740 E SR 70, Lakewood Ranch**  
**941.755.FISH (3474) | lobster-pound.com**



**Linger LODGE**  
 EST. 1945  
 Nestled along the lazy Braden River

**LINGER LODGE RESTAURANT**  
 Established in 1945 as a fishing camp, the Lodge has evolved into a great place to dine, listen to live music & enjoy the great views. Folks naturally gravitate to the extensive taxidermy that adorn the inside walls & ceiling. Our 2 outside covered & screened decks provide picturesque water views & are perfect for parties and other large events - outdoor seating up to 100 guests. A full liquor bar & an inside air-conditioned dining room complete the setting - indoor seating up to 100 guests. Nestled along the lazy Braden River, it is quintessentially Old Florida at its best.  
 Daily Specials. Happy Hour M-F 4-6.  
 Karaoke every Friday. Live Music every Saturday.  
 Open Mon-Thu 11:30am-9pm, Fri & Sat 11am-10pm, Sun 11:30am-9pm  
**7205 85th St Ct E, Bradenton**  
**941.755.2757 | facebook.com/LingerLodge**



**MacAllisters**  
 Grill & Tavern

**MACALLISTERS**  
 Enjoy our tavern atmosphere along with some traditional Scottish favorites: fish & chips and shepherd's pie.  
 Of course, our bar includes a large selection of scotch and local craft brews on draft with daily happy hour!  
 We are conveniently located on Lakewood Main Street with outdoor patio dining!  
 Kids welcome!  
 Open for lunch & dinner seven days a week.  
 Sun - Thurs 11:30am - 10pm & Fri - Sat 11:30am - 11pm.  
**8110 Lakewood Main St, Lakewood Ranch**  
**941.359.2424 | macallisters.com**



**LITTLE GREEK**  
 RESTAURANT

**LITTLE GREEK FRESH GRILL**  
 At Little Greek Fresh Grill, we start each day focused on preparing the most flavorful Greek food possible. We offer a variety of tasty and affordable Greek menu items to suit any appetite. Each dish is lovingly made to order using fresh, high-quality ingredients and served with our warm and attentive customer care. Although we are best known for our amazing Greek salads and gyros, we also have some of the best Greek desserts found anywhere! Visit us for our fresh, flavorful and fabulous Greek cuisine.  
**8310 Market St, Lakewood Ranch**  
**941.210.4560 | littlegreekrestaurant.com**



**MST**  
 MAIN STREET TRATTORIA

**MAIN STREET TRATTORIA**  
 Opened in 2010 by owner Gary Fennessy, Main Street Trattoria in Lakewood Ranch features fresh Italian cuisine including their signature bruschetta focaccia, chicken milanese and hand-tossed thin crust pizza. Make sure you save room for homemade tiramisu and cappuccino for dessert.  
 Mr. Fennessy has created a one-of-a-kind experience for friends and family to gather and dine together. Enjoy our inside/outside bar, including our outdoor dining area. You will find live music every Wednesday-Saturday 6-10pm and Sunday 4-8pm. Happy Hour Daily 2-7pm. Takeout and Kids menu also available.  
**8131 Lakewood Main St #101, Lakewood Ranch**  
**941.907.1518 | mstrattoria.com**





**PARIS BISTROT**  
 Family owned and operated since 2008. Paris Bistrot serves crepes (sweet or savory), salads, sandwiches and quiches for lunch. Enjoy Beef Bourguignon or Pork Tenderloin in black pepper and Cognac sauce directly from Grandma's recipe book for dinner. We offer weekly specials and delightful desserts. For a romantic and intimate dinner or a nice evening with friends, Alexandra and Christopher will be glad to welcome you. Monthly wine tastings. Enjoy Breakfast & Brunch every Saturday and Sunday.  
 Open Monday - Thursday 11:30-2pm & 5:30 - 9pm. Friday 11:30-2pm & 5:30-9:30pm, Saturday 8:30am-2pm & 5:30-9:30pm Sundays 8:30- 2pm.  
**8131 Lakewood Main St, Lakewood Ranch**  
**941.388.0564 | ParisBistrotFl.com**



**PASCOONE'S RISTORANTE'**  
 Welcome to an Unforgettable Dining Adventure! Family owned Pascone's Ristorante' recreates recipes passed down from generations. Enjoy Italian classic cuisine from many regions of Italy and unique specials.  
 Pascone's offers an extensive list of international wines and innovative cocktails created by our mixologists.  
 Outside Garden Dining  
 Private Event Dining Available  
 HAPPY HOUR: 4:30-6:00 Everyday  
 HOURS: Monday - Sunday 5pm to 10pm  
 Call for reservations!  
**5239 University Pkwy, Sarasota**  
**941.210.7368 | pascones.com**



**PINCHERS**  
 Since 1997, Pinchers has local fishermen and crabbers leave our shores and guide their boats out into the Gulf of Mexico each morning. They return each night with the best that the Gulf has to offer and bring this precious catch to our local seafood facility - The Island Crab Company located on Pine Island. From there it is delivered to our Lakewood Ranch restaurant.  
 We deliver the best seafood in town to your table each and every visit. "You Can't Fake Fresh!®"  
 Hours: 11am-10pm 7 days a week.  
 Happy Hour: 2 for 1 All Day, All Night  
 KIDS EAT FREE!  
**10707 Rodeo Drive, Lakewood Ranch**  
**941.922.1515 | pinchersusa.com**



**SPACCO ITALIAN GRILL**  
 Spacco Italian Grill features fresh, authentic Italian cuisine in a casual, rustic atmosphere. Owner Costanza D'Angelo-Brown, with over 30 years of experience in the restaurant industry, prides herself on using only the freshest ingredients available in all her recipes. Homemade pastas, seafood, fork tender veal, pork Osso Buco, and of course the Bada Bing, are just a few of the savory dishes that await your palette. We are open seven days a week for dinner, with an early dining option everyday until 5:30. We have daily Happy Hour, an extensive wine list, and a full liquor bar. Takeout & delivery available.  
**6392 Lockwood Ridge Rd, Sarasota**  
**941.312.4452 | spaccoitaliangrill.com**



**SPEAKS CLAM BAR**  
 Fresh Seafood and house-made pasta makes this Seafood restaurant with an Italian Flair Stand out. Unique Prohibition era decor. Casual and Family Friendly. Open daily for Lunch and Dinner. Sunday's 12pm to 10pm, Monday thru Thursday 11am to 10pm, Friday and Saturday 11am to 11pm  
**LAKWOOD RANCH**  
**8764 SR 70, Lakewood Ranch**  
**941.232.7646**  
**ST ARMANDS CIRCLE**  
**29 N. Blvd Of Presidents, Sarasota**  
**941.232.7633**  
**speaksclambar.com**



**THE BIJOU CAFÉ**  
 This elegant restaurant is known for specialties such as their Rack of Lamb, Pepper Steak, Pommes Gratin Dauphinois and daily fresh seafood offerings. For more than 32 years, the Bijou sets the standard for enduring excellence in fine dining, with both locals and visitors flocking to enjoy their highly-rated and award winning cuisine influenced by owner Jean-Pierre Knaggs' South African and French heritage.  
 Make sure you also try their new Happy Hour and Bar Bites menus from 5-6:30 pm. With an expansive wine list, sumptuous lunch and dinner specials, and impeccable, friendly service, the Bijou Café remains a jewel in the heart of Sarasota's downtown Theatre & Arts District.  
**1287 1st St, Sarasota**  
**941.366.8111 | bijoucafe.net**



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Gordon Silver took this photo of the fountain at the Lakewood Ranch Golf and Country Club.



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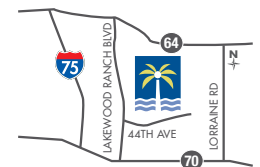
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