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LAKEWOOD RANCH AREA'S COMMUNITY, NATURE, STYLE

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The neverending pursuit of joy



Courtesy photo

What better way to experience joy than a cold glass of wine paired with Atria's sourdough crust pizzas?



Marie Kondo made an entire movement (and multimillion-dollar business) out of focusing on what brings you joy. It resonated because, aside from being great fodder for a TV show, deep down we know that to experience joy, you need to give it space.

The humdrums of everyday life — laundry, dishes, groceries, etc. — can monopolize our time and our attitudes if we let them.

There's always another thing that needs to be done. Which is why it's so important to seek out the things that liven our spirits. These are different for everyone, of course, but part of our mission at *LWR Life* is to help in that endeavor.

This issue has a lot of joy. On Page 72, we feature a couple who have filled nearly every available space in their home with their jukebox collection

— something that has brought them many years of joy. It's contagious.

Or there's the joy that two organizations — the Sarasota Audubon Society and the Conservation Foundation of the Gulf Coast — seek to bring to everyone who experiences the preserved Celery Fields (Page 46). Many a study has proven that being outdoors boosts our mood, lowers our stress levels and helps us feel more connected to the world around us.

As we learned in our Table Talk feature on them on Page 104, the owners of Truman Tap & Grill get joy out of running the restaurant as a family business, and they seek to share that love with their patrons every day.

We can all relate to the joy of enjoying a good meal at a new restaurant (Page 30), and the joy of live performances and connecting with neighbors (Page 38).

And, for the cynics, we have

something that will no doubt crack your crusty hearts: pizza. If you don't get joy out of enjoying a steamy, doughy, cheesy slice of pie, I've got nothing for you. Time to talk to someone about that, my friend. For the rest of you, sample some of the top offerings in the area on Page 62.

Lastly, although most of us do not have the pleasure of living in a home as luxurious as the couple in our Haven feature (Page 91), listening to them talk about the project is inspiring. It's clear from their comments that they cared deeply about creating something of beauty. And boy did they succeed.

So it doesn't matter if you're facing a home renovation or just deciding your next culinary adventure. Make sure you're intentional about your decision. Doing so is your gateway to more joy.

Kat Wingert
Executive Editor



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BUZZ

NEWS, HAPPENINGS AND PEOPLE

Tune up your palate for a heaping helping of new local eateries.

PAGE 30



Look Who's Coming to Town

The Lakewood Ranch region is attracting a host of new restaurants, including those with popular followings in downtown Sarasota.

BY EMILY LEINFUSS | CONTRIBUTOR

Foodies, rejoice. After three years of pandemic delays, several new restaurants have come (or are on their way) to the Lakewood Ranch region. Here's a sneak peek at what's on the menu.

NOW OPEN!

Like **Owen's Fish Camp** in downtown Sarasota, the new Owen's at Center Point is the place to go for flopping fresh fish, fish camp vibes and the brand's inventive take on regional cuisine. The first inkling that this iconic restaurant was opening a second location was in 2020 when the Caragiulo family — owners of the original Owen's — announced their Lakewood Ranch debut. What sparked their decision to get cooking here? According to co-owner Mark Caragiulo, it was their close relationship with Casto, Center Point's developer. "The developer gave us the opportunity to do our own interpretation in a free-standing building," says Caragiulo, adding that the biggest difference between the two venues is size and décor. The downtown Sarasota version is more intimate and reflects Florida's fish camp history. The Lakewood Ranch-based Owen's features an Adirondack-style lake house ambiance adorned with



Above: Co-owner Rob Caragiulo is part of the team that created Owen's Fish Camp — one of the most popular restaurants in Sarasota. **Right:** Chef Collin Blakeman pulls out a tray of savory tomato tarts.

rustic canoes, vintage glass nautical lanterns, fishing poles and a schooner, and a spacious outdoor entertainment area and much larger kitchen. "That gives us the opportunity to create a broader menu," says Caragiulo. **Don't miss:** The vegan heirloom tomato tart.

If You Go: 6516 University Parkway, Lakewood Ranch; 941-951-5052; OwensFishCamp.com.



Continued on Page 32

Photos by Lori Sax

It's only Natural

The appeal of Wild Blue at Waterside by Stock Development is perfectly natural. With its prime Lakewood Ranch location, incredible amenities, and luxury single-family homes by some of the area's finest builders, this waterfront community is the perfect blend of back-to-nature fun and resort-style living. Discover outdoor adventures at the 13-acre sports complex, and relax at the social clubhouse, with indoor and outdoor dining, two pools, a movie theater, fitness center, and a 9-hole premier putting course.

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Forked at Waterside celebrated its grand opening on May 31, although its long road to ribbon-cutting began in 2020. “I was looking for a place to live in Lakewood Ranch when I heard about Waterside,” says Michael Kemsley, the majority owner. He adds that he not only found the “perfect” place for Forked; he also found the perfect place to live — in Country Club East. What’s Forked’s secret formula? Breakfast, lunch and cocktails served up in a light-filled, welcoming environment. “The first thing you see when you enter is our neon message: ‘Be the reason someone smiles today,’” says Kemsley. **Don’t miss:** Fried chicken and waffles, starring Cajun-coated chicken breast, bacon and spicy syrup. Looking for something, er, strong to start your day? Forked’s Bourbon for Breakfast, made with Horse Soldier Bourbon, Lavazza cold brew and Amaro Montenegro will kickstart the morning.

If You Go: 7600 Island Cove Terrace, Waterside Place, Lakewood Ranch; 941-355-3672; ForkedEats.com.

Rocco’s Tacos and Tequila Bar offers a creative take on traditional Mexican fare and a spirited 6,200-square-foot, open-air restaurant and bar to enjoy it in. There’s live entertainment, 300 varieties of tequila, and an all-you-can-drink weekend brunch menu. **Fun fact:** Owner Rocco Mangel (who owns nine other restaurants) didn’t want to open the “typical Mexican restaurant with a pinata, a skeleton on the wall, where you would be playing the Mexican Hat Dance. I’m half Italian and half Jewish, but I wanted to embrace the Mexican culture.”

If You Go: University Town Center, 243 N. Cattlemen Road, Sarasota; 941-477-8226; RoccasTacos.com.

Owner Gary Blake describes his **Adolfo’s Italian Market and Pizzeria** in the San Marco Plaza as a “one-stop shop for authentic Italian meats, cheeses, pizza, wine, beer and grocery goods.” Blake’s great-grandfather, Leopoldo Colantuono, came from Naples, Italy, and passed on time-honored family recipes that are used in Adolfo’s signature offerings, including the pastries, pizza dough and breads, which are made by Blake’s uncle in



St. Petersburg and delivered fresh daily. **Don’t miss:** Paulie’s succulent meatball parm (yes, that Paulie).

If You Go: Adolfo’s Italian Market & Pizzeria, 8225 Natures Way, Unit 111, Lakewood Ranch; 941-388-8701; AdolfosLWR.com.

WORTH THE WAIT

As of press time, **Osteria 500** had just opened. Co-owner Carmine Ussano says the initial delays were pandemic-related but adds that the slow pace is also because they’re importing key items from Italy, including the pizza oven, furniture and tiles. The menu offers up fresh seafood and pasta dishes, pizza and steaks cooked on a Brazilian charcoal grill. **Fun facts:** The owners flew a Fiat Cinquecento in from Naples, Italy, and placed a pizza oven on top of it. Oh — and the cocktail bar is a blue Citroen truck.

The first news about **Tsunami Sushi & Hibachi Grill** — the popular Japanese restaurant in downtown Sarasota — coming to the Ranch was in 2021. According to co-owner Jeffrey Karasawa, the opening has been delayed because of supply chain issues and Hurricane Ian, “when some of our contractors left to go do projects (on places with hurricane damage).” At press time, in June, Karasawa said Tsunami would open by the first of August. **Don’t miss:** The restaurant



Photo by Lesley Dwyer

plans to transform from a family-friendly vibe during the day into a live music and entertainment spot at night.

IN THE WORKS

The Mexican-inspired restaurant and tequila bar **Agave Bandido** will dish out contemporary Mexican cuisine in a lively space at Waterside Place, plus more than 250 tequilas and mezcals. AgaveBandido.com.

Slated to open sometime this year at Waterside Place, **Deep Lagoon Seafood & Oyster House** specializes in seafood. The restaurant will feature both indoor and outdoor bars, a patio with lake views, and spacious dining rooms. DeepLagoon.com.

Osteria 500’s co-owner Andrea De Dominicis says that the Fiat they imported from Naples, Italy, is so heavy that a forklift tilted when moving it to its current spot.

Top: Forked’s Ariana Allen serves up A Bit of Heaven — crepes filled with strawberry cream cheese, fresh strawberries, blueberries, bananas and berry compote.

Photo by Lori Sax

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Back in the Spotlight



Photo by Jay Heater

The Concession, east Manatee County's premier golf course, will host the most famous players from the Champions Tour in a Ryder Cup-like event.

The Concession Golf Club will once again receive worldwide attention when it hosts The World Champions Cup in December.

BY JAY HEATER | CONTRIBUTOR

Most of the time, it's quiet while walking the pristine 18 holes of The Concession Golf Club.

Moving through the meadows, wetlands, pine forests and oak hammocks provides a wilderness feel, except for the occasional hoot or holler from a golfer who sinks a long, undulating putt.

It's a private community course, with no signs of the community. When Tony Jacklin and Jack Nicklaus talked about designing the course, it was done with the understanding that houses at The Concession would be built somewhere else. And they were.

Aside from Golf Digest crowning The Concession as the Best New Private Course in America when it opened in 2006, fanfare has been kept to a minimum. It can be tough to be private if everyone is lining up at the gate to get a glimpse.

It's safe to say now, though, the hidden gem is no longer hidden. The 2021 World Golf Championship took care of that, bringing the best golfers in the world to the course, and now comes the World

Champions Cup, a Ryder Cup-style event for seniors, in December.

The World Champions Cup is a new event, sanctioned by the PGA Tour Champions, that will match U.S., European, and international teams.

"It is cool we are hosting the inaugural event," says Brian Weimann, general manager of The Concession Golf Club. "The (LPGA) has the Solheim Cup, the (PGA Tour) has the Ryder Cup and the Presidents Cup, and this was the missing piece of the puzzle. They want it to be a 100-year event."

It will be a first for The Concession in that it will be hosting throngs of fans, who will be expecting to see legends of the game among the six-player teams.

While the 2021 World Golf Championship drew 47 of the top 50-ranked players in the world, fans were not allowed on the course due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Only invited guests and those who lived at The Concession were allowed to attend.

However, the message was delivered through the media, including NBC and its affiliates, with worldwide coverage of the event. The Concession was introduced to golf fans all over the world, in a good way.

PGA Tour player Billy Horschel compared the greens to Augusta National, the revered course that hosts the Masters. Patrick Reed, now playing on the LIV Golf tour, called the course "awesome" and Rory McIlroy said he couldn't wait until another PGA event was scheduled there.

Jim "Bones" Mackay, the current caddy of PGA Tour star Justin Thomas, coined a phrase by saying The Concession "had several places around the course where you could lose a few strokes, and a few places you could lose a limb."

His statement was in reference to the alligators that often caught the attention of the television cameras.

But then the PGA Tour packed its bags and left, and golf fans had to wonder if the world's best golfers would return. The only reason The Concession was able to host the World Golf Championship was because COVID-19 forced cancellation of the event in Mexico City.

On Dec. 7, 9, and 10, the wait for a world-class event comes to an end. Already committed to the event are the three teams' playing captains Ernie Els

IF YOU GO

What: The World Champions Cup

Where: The Concession Golf Club

When: Dec. 7, 8, 10

TV coverage: ABC, ESPN

Format: Team International, Team Europe, Team USA will battle over three days and 24 matches (eight per day) to determine a winner. The matches will be in team and individual formats. There will be no close-out of a match, meaning points will be awarded for all nine holes played. Each team will have six players.

Captains: Ernie Els, Team International; Darren Clarke, Team Europe; Jim Furyk, Team USA.

Purse: \$1.35 million (\$100,000 to each player on winning team; \$75,000 per player on second-place team; \$50,000 per player on third-place team.)

Website:

WorldChampionsCup.com

Continued on Page 36



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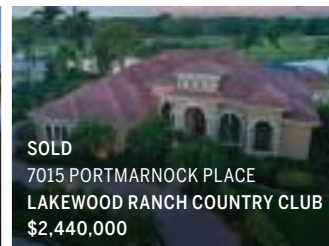
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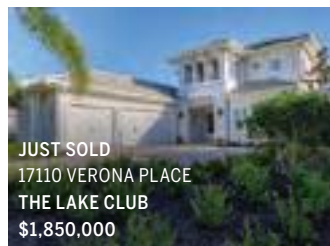
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Continued from Page 34

(Team International), Darren Clarke (Team Europe), and Jim Furyk (Team USA). All are majors champions.

And this time, fans can buy tickets (which go on sale on Labor Day) to attend.

"The first time I saw Concession was during the WGC," says Jason Langwell, the executive vice president of Intersport, which owns and will promote the World Champions Cup. "It is a classic, incredible golf course. It is fan-friendly with a beautiful clubhouse. If you are a fan on the back nine, there are places where you can just turn your head and see action on three different holes.

"Could we create an incredible experience here? Yes."

Weimann and his staff are busy with preparations to create that incredible experience, even though he says the course needs little work.

"Golf-wise, in between the ropes, we don't have to change anything," Weimann says. "We pride ourselves on being tournament-ready every day. I've always wanted to see a match-play

event on this course. It sets up well for it because it is a very strategic course, a second-shot course."

However, with 3,000 to 7,000 golf fans expected each day, Weimann and his staff will need to alter some areas of the course to provide the fans with seating and the ability to move from hole to hole.

"Logistically, it is a different feel," Weimann says. "We are going to have bigger crowds and the numbers make it more of a challenge. But the staff is focused on this, and it is a fun challenge. I enjoy it, but these things do take a long time to plan."

Weimann calls it the next step in The Concession owner Bruce Cassidy's desire to host a major. Cassidy has spoken of his desire to make a bid to host the 2031 U.S. Open. However, that event is in June, so it might be a tough sell in Florida. The PGA Championship is held in May and has site commitments through 2030 (and 2034).

"This will be similar to the (World Golf Championship) in that it will showcase the club throughout the country, and internationally," Weimann says of the World Champions Cup. "It

is another chance for The Concession to be seen by the masses. It is our next step to the future."

The match-play event will be played on the back nine holes of The Concession, which will be called holes Nos. 1 through 9 for the event. Those holes normally are Nos. 10-18.

"Our No. 18 is a great finishing hole, so logistically, it made sense (to use the club's back nine)," Weimann says.

After this event, Weimann says The Concession will continue to be in the market for "one-offs." He says the club doesn't want annual events that would take over the course at the same time each year. Examples of "one-offs" would be the U.S. Open, the PGA Championship, the Ryder Cup, the Presidents Cup and other events that change venues each year.

Langwell says Intersport is interested in a long-term relationship with The Concession, although he says it hasn't been decided how the future schedule will look. That will be a topic the day after this event is finished.

"These are people you want to lock arms with," he says of Weimann and Cassidy. "We love The Concession."

DID YOU KNOW?

The Concession was named in honor of Jack Nicklaus' gesture of conceding the final putt of his match against the European team's Tony Jacklin in 1969. The concession led to a tie in that year's overall Ryder's Cup match.



Photo by Jay Heater

Brian Weimann says The Concession doesn't have to make many changes to host The World Champions Cup because it is in tournament-shape every day.



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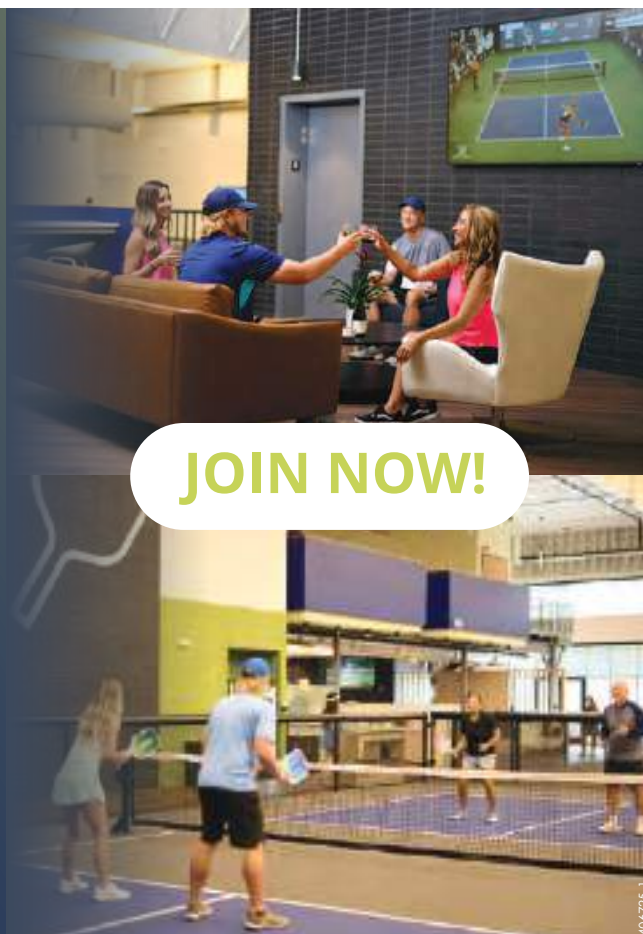


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It's Showtime at Waterside Place

Sights + Sounds at Waterside Place is a monthly series showcasing performances by area arts groups.

BY LESLEY DWYER | CONTRIBUTOR

From inception, Lakewood Ranch was designed to be so all-encompassing that residents wouldn't have to travel far for anything. But there was one thing missing — close access to arts and cultural events.

Sights + Sounds at Waterside Place, a monthly performance series created by Nicole Hackel, aims to fill that gap.

"Lakewood Ranch has a large community that supports and celebrates arts and culture," says Hackel, who also serves as the events and resident experience manager for LWR Communities. "This series is mutually beneficial for Lakewood Ranch residents and for local arts groups. Sights + Sounds gives arts groups an opportunity to promote what they do to Lakewood Ranch residents. And staging performances at Waterside Place means that Ranchers don't have to travel far to enjoy and support the arts."

Sights + Sounds started informally in May 2022, when Hackel scheduled one performing arts program at the pavilion in the plaza at Waterside Place to measure response.

The reaction was fabulous. Audiences loved the location, which overlooks scenic Kingfisher Lake. Because the performances are in the evening, guests can enjoy sunsets during the show. "People come early to shop, enjoy dinner, and stay late for a nightcap or game of cornhole after the performance," says Hackel.

Hackel also found that regional arts groups were eager to participate.

The Players Centre for Performing Arts was the first to perform in May 2022 with its touring production of "Broadway on the Lake." The following May, the community orchestra, Strings Con Brio, arranged a special tribute to Rodgers and Hammerstein just for Sights + Sounds. Only 40 members of the 60-person orchestra performed, but the pavilion is large enough to hold the entire group, including their instruments. Hundreds of people came to see the performance.

"To have had that type of response was delightful," says Monica Sirocchi, executive director of Strings Con Brio.

Other area organizations that presented events during the inaugural season included Sarasota Orchestra, Florida Studio Theatre, Sarasota Opera, Hermitage Artist Retreat and Lakewood Ranch Wind Ensemble.

The series breaks for the hottest month of the year — August — and resumes in October. Among the newcomers for the upcoming season are Westcoast Black Theatre Troupe and Sarasota Ballet Studio Company.

The series' popularity continues to grow. About 50 people attended the first performance. Before the series' summer break, the monthly events drew more than 300 people.

"I'm happy to give the opportunity to any arts organization that has an interest in performing — from large-scale professional organizations to high school performing arts groups," says Hackel.

Students from Easter Seals and Everyone Rocks paired up for a "Rock the Spectrum" concert in July, and students from the Out-of-Door Academy will be performing a special holiday



Photo by Lori Sax

Nicole Hackel, the events and resident experience manager for LWR Communities, started Sights + Sounds at Waterside Place to offer Ranchers a close-up look at area arts events.

program in December. Members of the school's chorus, band and orchestra will perform "Sounds of the Season."

What's next for the series?

Hackel says she'd love to add visual art exhibitions to the mix. She also encourages arts groups in the tri-county area to reach out to her for future programming.

"Now that Sights + Sounds is getting popular, I hope groups that are interested in performing in Lakewood Ranch will approach us."

COMING THIS FALL

■ **Sept. 15:** Westcoast Black Theatre Troupe.

■ **Oct. 13:** The Sarasota Ballet Studio Company and students from The Margaret Barbieri Conservatory will present a special performance featuring excerpts from classical and contemporary repertoire.

■ **Nov. 17:** Asolo Rep with the FSU/Asolo Conservatory for Actor Training.

■ **Dec. 15:** The Out-of-Door Academy: Members of the school's chorus, band and orchestra will perform "Sounds of the Season."

IF YOU GO

Sights + Sounds performances start at 6 p.m. and are normally an hour long. They are free and take place at Waterside Place, 1560 Lakefront Drive. Guests are encouraged to bring their own seating and enjoy food and refreshments from the surrounding merchants. For the fall schedule, visit LakewoodRanch.com/Sights-Sounds/.

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PULSE

THE HEART OF THE COMMUNITY

Two groups collaborate to bring threatened land back to nature.

PAGE 46



Jeanne Dubi and Christine Johnson have partnered to protect and restore the Celery Fields area.

class act

Making Her Mark

The Lakewood Ranch resident and executive director of Meals on Wheels of Sarasota finds her calling creating meaningful connections.

BY MARK GORDON | CONTRIBUTOR

Rhonda Leiberick knows the importance of community-based libraries firsthand. She used to take her two toddlers, Brody and Cooper, several times a week to the Fruitville Public Library. The trip was 15 miles from her home in Riverwalk Meadow — but it was worth every mile. She would get a little break while the boys participated in library programs, including art, puzzles and music. “It was our morning adventure,” she says. “It’s where my children were able to socialize with other kids before they even went to preschool.”

That was back in the mid-aughts. Now, some 15 years later, Leiberick remains a fan of libraries. She is proud to serve on the board of Friends of the Lakewood Ranch Library — a nonprofit support arm for a new library being built in Lakewood Ranch. Leiberick is a firm believer that libraries are a must-have for any thriving community. A library is a sacred space “where people can forge deep human connections,” she says.

Connecting with others and making a difference for those in need is vital to her. Leiberick, 48, had initially moved to Sarasota from Connecticut in 1994 to study graphic design at Ringling



Photo by Lori Sax

As executive director of Meals on Wheels of Sarasota, Rhonda Leiberick has found work that is deeply meaningful.

Continued on Page 44



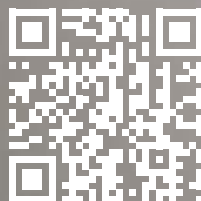
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Continued from Page 42

College of Art and Design and worked in that field following graduation. But she yearned to find a career with deeper meaning. Eventually, Leiberick found the perfect opportunity at Habitat for Humanity in Sarasota, where she served in community outreach and as a program director for eight years.

But she started feeling an itch to run a nonprofit and felt confident in her skills to do so. "I had a plan five years ago that I wanted to lead an organization that needed to be transformed," she says. "I wanted to make my mark."

Leiberick found her calling at Meals on Wheels of Sarasota. She started there as interim director in 2022 and was officially appointed executive director in February. The organization, which was founded in 1971, serves 160,000 to 180,000 meals yearly to home-bound seniors, veterans, and physically and mentally disabled people of all ages. The service is often why clients can remain in their own homes instead of relocating to a nursing facility. The nutritious meal, friendly visit and safety check help them cope with three

of the biggest threats of aging: hunger, isolation and loss of independence.

For Leiberick, her work at Meals on Wheels fulfills her longing to make a positive difference in people's lives. "The feeling you get when you help people, and get the gratitude back, that makes it all worth it," she says. Leiberick says she loves arriving at work each day around 7 a.m., when the kitchen staff begins prep work on the meals. She then handles operations and manages the paid staff of six, while also keeping an eye on bigger-picture challenges. That includes a plan to upgrade the organization's technology, its mapping logistics for routes and, most importantly, figuring out ways to serve more people to meet an increasing demand.

How did Leiberick end up a Rancher?

It starts with another deep connection — to her heart. Leiberick met her husband, Kevin, in 1998 and they married two years later. When they were expecting their first child, in 2005, they started the search to put down roots and find their forever home.

That's when they discovered Lakewood Ranch.

According to Leiberick, it was the perfect place to raise a young family. "We wanted a small town feel, and we feel we have that here. There were plenty of other families with children, lots of parks and great schools," she says, adding that they specifically chose Riverwalk Meadow because of its proximity to Main Street. Back then, Leiberick joined the Lakewood Ranch Mom's Group. "My oldest son was nine months old, and this group was our saving grace."

Connecting with community and their neighbors remains a constant for the Leibericks — especially when they're not working.

Their favorite go-to place is Truman's Tap & Grill on State Road 70, where they play bingo on most Thursdays. They're big sports fans, especially of the Tampa Bay Rays, attending games in person whenever they can. And they do their best to explore the parks and trails nearby, along with Lakewood Ranch's burgeoning restaurant scene. They also recently rediscovered a pastime they were into before kids: golf.

"It's much easier," says Leiberick, "now that the kids are older."



Photo by Lori Sax

Rhonda and Kevin Leiberick enjoy Lakewood Ranch for its growing restaurant scene, parks and walking trails.



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KEEPING THE WILD THINGS WILD

The Sarasota Audubon Society and the Conservation Foundation of the Gulf Coast have collaborated to rewild the Quad Parcels at the Celery Fields. The project will create new habitats for birds and provide more opportunities for wildlife viewing.

Photo by Lori Sax

Jeanne Dubi and Christine Johnson are long-time friends and allies, and their organizations have regularly partnered over the years. This project is their most consequential undertaking.

BY ERIC SNIDER | CONTRIBUTOR

In the coming months, 33 acres of Sarasota County's surplus land — land it didn't want and didn't know what to do with — will start to undergo a dramatic transformation. The tracts, known as the Quad Parcels, provide a vital buffer zone between the 440-acre Celery Fields and light industrial property to the west.

It could have turned out differently. The county had put the land up for

Continued on Page 48

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Continued from Page 46

sale, paving the way for potential commercial development. But quick and decisive action by a few environmental groups persuaded the Sarasota County Commission to protect it from development — in perpetuity. If all goes as planned, a “rewilding” project will begin in the fall.

A joint effort between the Sarasota Audubon Society (SAS) and the Conservation Foundation of the Suncoast, the project will include the beautifying of a stormwater retention pond, major reforestation to accommodate a wide array of animals and plants, particularly birds, an observation platform, birding trails, a children’s natural play area, picnic pavilion, parking lot and other basic amenities.

SAS and the Conservation Foundation — which were instrumental in lobbying to save the land — have partnered to lead the rewilding project, which will cost an estimated \$4 million. “We have to do some major earthwork there,” says Jeanne Dubi, president of SAS. “There will be some major plantings. This is not a chump-change project.”

The two organizations have taken on fundraising responsibilities, as well. According to Dubi, as of late May they had amassed roughly \$1.5 million, including \$75,000 to each of the nonprofits from the Gulf Coast Community Foundation; \$100,000 from William G. and Marie Selby Foundation; \$100,000 from Charles & Margery Barancik Foundation; and \$250,000 from an anonymous donor. “The big money will start to come in when we actually see shovels in the ground,” Dubi says. “We’re expecting a surge in donations.”

The Quad Parcels — located at the junction of Palmer Boulevard and Apex Road, near I-75 — had languished for a couple of decades. When Sarasota County ultimately put up “For Sale” signs about five years ago, a grassroots activist group called Fresh Start began to push back. Soon SAS and the Conservation Foundation marshaled their considerable influence. “We went to town on the county commission,” Dubi says.

Christine Johnson, president of the Conservation Foundation, says it

didn’t take much arm-twisting for the commission to recognize the wisdom of preserving the Quad Parcels from development. After all, it abuts the Celery Fields, which has become a mecca for birding, drawing people from all over the world to experience its array of mostly wetland species.

“I don’t think [county government] anticipated that the Celery Fields would be so popular with the public,” Johnson says, by way of explaining the commission’s attempt to sell the property. “The community pushed to change their plans, and the commission deserves credit for being receptive.”

The five commissioners voted unanimously to approve the measure in October 2020. As it stands, Sarasota County continues to own the Quad Parcels; SAS has signed on to manage the property and the Conservation Foundation owns the conservation easement, a legal agreement guaranteeing that the land will never be built on.

Dubi and Johnson are longtime friends and allies, and their organizations have regularly partnered over the years. This project is their most consequential undertaking.

The blue chip nonprofits complement each other.

The Conservation Foundation, formed in 2003, is an accredited land trust with a paid staff of 16, an annual operating budget of \$2 million and \$35

million in total assets. Over the years, Johnson says, the organization has protected 19,200 acres of environmentally sensitive lands. Its signature achievement is Orange Hammock Ranch in North Port. The 5,777-acre tract, established in 2020, connects the RV Griffin and Longino preserves, creating a 120,000-acre conservation corridor between the Peace and Myakka rivers and Charlotte Harbor. Old Hammock Ranch protects drinking water, preserves wildlife habitat and offers public access for myriad outdoor recreation.

The all-volunteer SAS, a 35-year chapter of the National Audubon Society, is dedicated to the protection, conservation and enjoyment of birds. The organization holds birding excursions and acts as the preeminent local resource for avian enthusiasts. SAS is headquartered in the heart of Celery Fields at The Nature Center, which it owns and operates.

The Quad Parcels rewilding project aims to provide a stopover for several species of migratory birds. “They require a more specific habitat for them to rest and refuel on their way north and south,” Dubi says. “So, we’re planting for those specific birds, all of which are on Florida’s endangered species list.”

Once the rewilding effort gets underway, both Johnson and Dubi expect the project to be completed in a year to 15 months.



Photo by Lori Sax

Renderings show how the Quad Parcels will look once they’re rewilded. With more than 250 species, the Celery Fields is an internationally recognized birding destination and vital to water quality and flood protection in the region.

“As of late May, the two organizations had raised roughly \$1.5 million for the project.”



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calendar fall 2023

SEPTEMBER

SEPT. 1 MUSIC ON MAIN

This monthly event returns on Lakewood Ranch's Main Street from 6-9 p.m. Enjoy a free concert by the Taylor Opie Band, food vendors, beer trucks and kids' activities. Proceeds will benefit Manatee Children's Services.

■ Visit LakewoodRanch.com.

SEPT. 3 THE MARKET AT LAKEWOOD RANCH

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

■ Visit TheMarketLWR.com.

SEPT. 8 MOVIE IN THE PARK

Enjoy a free movie night at Waterside Park, 7301 Island Cove Terrace, Lakewood Ranch. The event begins at 7 p.m., and a family-friendly movie will begin at approximately 8 p.m. The event is sponsored by Grace Community Church. The first 300 to attend will be given a free popsicle from Siesta Pops. Seating is available on a first-come, first-served basis. Those who attend are welcome to bring a blanket and lawn chairs. Concessions will be available from We B' Poppin Popcorn and Kettle Corn. Face painting and inflatables for the kids will be available from 7-9 p.m. Continues every second Friday of the month.

■ Visit LakewoodRanch.com.

SEPT. 14 LWR 101: NEW RESIDENT ORIENTATION

This event introduces you to Lakewood Ranch's history, clubs, governance and other features of the community. It will be held virtually on the Lakewood Ranch Community Activi-



File photo

ties Facebook page from 6-6:30 p.m. Also takes place Oct. 12 and Nov. 9.

■ Visit MyLWR.com.

SEPT. 15 SIGHTS + SOUNDS AT WATERSIDE PLACE

The Soul Men of Westcoast Black Theatre Troupe will give a concert featuring the soul men of the 1960s. The performance is from 6:30-7:30 p.m. at Waterside Place, 1560 Lakefront Drive, Lakewood Ranch. Seating is limited.

■ Visit LakewoodRanch.com

SEPT. 21 DESIGNER BAG BINGO

The Sisterhood for Good is holding a night of fundraising bingo with designer bags as the prizes. Doors open at 5:30 p.m. at Gold Coast Eagle Distributing, 7051 Wireless Court, Sarasota. Tickets are \$150 and include three bingo games, wine and beer, a buffet dinner and dessert.

■ Visit SisterhoodForGood.org.

UTC NIGHT MARKET

UTC's monthly night market is 6:30-9:30 p.m. at The Green at UTC, 125 N. Cattlemen Road, Sarasota. Enjoy live music and more than 35 local vendors selling gifts, jewelry, art, handmade goods and more. Continues on Oct. 19 and Nov. 16.

■ Visit MallAtUTC.com.

SEPT. 23 CENTERSTONE LIFE;STORY RUN/WALK

Run or walk in Centerstone's 21st annual 5K/10K at Nathan Benderson Park, 5851 Nathan Benderson Circle, Sarasota, to raise awareness of depression, share that suicide is preventable and erase the stigma around mental illness. On-site registration begins at 5:30 a.m. The kids race begins at 7:15 a.m., an opening ceremony is at 7:30, the 10K run starts at 7:45 a.m., and the 5K run and walk starts at 7:50 a.m.

■ Visit Centerstone.org.

Runners speed away from the start of the 2021 Turkey Trot's Kids Dash.

Continued on Page 52



live brighter

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TidewellFoundation.org

Tidewell Foundation is grateful to our sustaining annual corporate partners for their ongoing sponsorship of the Foundation's work.

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Continued from Page 50

LUAU 5K, 10K, & HALF MARATHON

U.S. Road Running Race Club hosts its Luau races at 8 a.m. at Heritage Harbour Park, 700 River Heritage Blvd., Bradenton. Registration is \$27 for the 5K, \$40 for the 10K and \$65 for the half-marathon. All finishers will receive a themed medal.

■ Visit RunSignup.com.

REAL MEN WEAR PINK FASHION SHOW

The Mall at University Town Center will unveil its Real Men Wear Pink of Sarasota and Manatee candidates during this high-energy fashion show benefiting the fight against breast cancer. The event is from 6-7:30 p.m. at The Mall at University Town Center, 140 University Town Center Drive, Sarasota. Admission is \$30.

■ Visit Cancer.org.

OCTOBER

OCT. 1

STUFF THE BUS

A food drive, hosted by Meals on Wheels Plus of Manatee, will be from 9 a.m. to 3 p.m. at all Publix locations across Manatee County. Donations of nonperishable food items — such as canned fruits and vegetables, macaroni and cheese, peanut butter, and boxed rice and pasta — are accepted. All proceeds and food collected will stay in Manatee County.

■ Visit MealsOnWheelsPlus.org.

OCT. 4

RANCH NITE WEDNESDAYS

This weekly event returns to Waterside Place from 6-9 p.m. every Wednesday through May. Enjoy food, drink and dessert, live music, a night market, and the largest recreational cornhole league in the nation.

■ Visit LakewoodRanch.com.

OCT. 6

MUSIC ON MAIN

This monthly event returns on Lakewood Ranch's Main Street from 6-9 p.m. Enjoy a free concert by RJ Howson & Friends, food vendors, beer trucks and kids' activities. Proceeds will benefit Cardinal Mooney High School Lacrosse.

■ Visit LakewoodRanch.com.

OCT. 8

OUT OF THE DARKNESS WALK

The Out of the Darkness Walk, a journey of hope and support, begins at 9 a.m. at Nathan Benderson Park, 5851 Nathan Benderson Circle, Sarasota, benefiting the American Foundation for Suicide Prevention. Registration is free; donations are accepted.

■ Visit AFSP.org.

OCT. 11-15

OKTOBERFEST AT EDELWEISS

Restaurant Edelweiss, at 611 Manatee Ave. E., Bradenton, hosts its annual Oktoberfest, featuring live German entertainment, vendors, and plenty of German food and beer. Admission is free.

■ Visit EdelweissBradenton.com.

OCT. 13

SIGHTS AND SOUNDS AT WATERSIDE PLACE

The October event of the new Sights and Sounds cultural series features The Sarasota Ballet Studio Company and students from The Margaret Barbieri Conservatory presenting excerpts from classical and contemporary repertoire. The performance begins at 6 p.m. at Waterside Park, 1560 Lakefront Drive, Lakewood Ranch. Seating is limited.

■ Visit LakewoodRanch.com.

OCT. 14-29

HUNSADER FARMS PUMPKIN FESTIVAL

Hunsader Farms hosts its 32nd annual pumpkin festival from 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. Saturdays and Sundays at 5500 County Road 675, Bradenton. In addition to pumpkins, the festival features crafts, live music, hayrides, food, chainsaw sculpting and more. Admission is \$15 for adults and free for children 10 and under. Parking costs \$5.

■ Visit HunsaderFarms.com.

OCT. 21

MAIN STREET MARKET

From 10 a.m. to 2 p.m., visit Lakewood Main Street to shop from more than 60 vendors featuring local art, jewelry, retail, food, plants and more. Event continues Nov. 18.

■ Visit MainStreetMarketLWR.com.

WATER LANTERN FESTIVAL

Enjoy the magic of hundreds of lanterns lighting up the lake at Na-



File photo

than Benderson Park, 5851 Nathan Benderson Circle, Sarasota. Enjoy food trucks and live music starting at 4:30 p.m., and at 7 p.m. you can design your own eco-friendly lantern. Lanterns launch at 7:30 p.m. Tickets are \$36 or \$46 after Oct. 13.

■ Visit WaterLanternFestival.com.

OCT. 27

BOOFEST

Time to get spooky with your best costume during BooFest. With music, performances and people giving out treats, the whole family will have fun. The event will be held 6-9 p.m. at Main Street at Lakewood Ranch, 8100 Lakewood Ranch Blvd., Lakewood Ranch.

■ Visit MyLWR.com.

OCT. 28

HAUNTED 5K, 10K, & HALF MARATHON

U.S. Road Running Race Club hosts its Haunted races at 8 a.m. at Heritage Harbour Park, 700 River Heritage Blvd., Bradenton. Registration is \$27 for the 5K, \$40 for the 10K and \$65 for the half-marathon. All finishers will receive a themed medal.

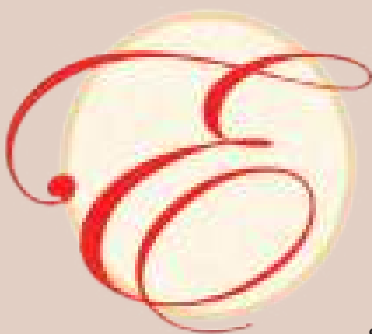
■ Visit RunSignup.com.

Eli Kern and Sophia Kern race through the hay maze at the 2022 Hunsader Farms Pumpkin Festival.

Continued on Page 54

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SCAN ME

Continued from Page 52

OCT. 29
FLORIDA INLINE SKATING
MARATHON AND 5K RUN

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

■ Visit FloridaInlineSkatingMarathon.com.

NOVEMBER

NOV. 3
EMPTY BOWLS

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

■ Visit MealsOnWheelsPlus.org.

MUSIC ON MAIN

This monthly event takes place on Lakewood Ranch's Main Street from 6-9 p.m. Enjoy a free concert by The Black Snake Bayou Band, food vendors, beer trucks and kids' activities. Proceeds will benefit the Streets of Paradise.

■ Visit LakewoodRanch.com.

NOV. 4-26
SARASOTA MEDIEVAL FAIR

Runs each Saturday and Sunday from 10 a.m. to 5:30 p.m. at Woods of Mallaranny, 29847 State Road 70 E., Myakka City. Visitors can enjoy the medieval era through a wide range of family-friendly activities. Features include local artisans and craft demonstrations, live performances, food vendors and a children's area. A single-day ticket is \$24 for adults; \$21 for students, seniors and military; \$13 for children age 5-10; and free for children 4 and younger.

■ Visit SarasotaMedievalFair.com.

NOV. 5
GULF COAST CYCLEFEST

The Sarasota Manatee Bicycle Club offers this family-friendly ride, and riders can choose fully supported routes of 16, 36, 62 or 100 miles. Registration opens at 7 a.m. on Main Street in Lakewood Ranch. Advance registration is required. Cost is \$60 or \$70 after Sept. 30.

■ Visit SMBC.us.

NOV. 9
THE SOIREE AT THE RANCH

Support The Lakewood Ranch Community Fund at its signature Soiree at the Ranch event. Enjoy dinner, live entertainment, live and silent auctions, and a raffle. The evening begins at 5:30 p.m. at Lakewood Ranch Golf and Country Club, 7650 Legacy Blvd., Lakewood Ranch. Tickets are \$275.

■ Visit LWRFund.org.

NOV. 11
SUNCOAST FOOD AND
WINE FESTIVAL

The Rotary Club of Lakewood Ranch hosts the 21st annual event at Premier Sports Campus, 5895 Post Blvd., Lakewood Ranch. Tickets include a sampling of wine and food from dozens of the area's finest restaurants, as well as live music, cooking demonstrations and vendor booths. Proceeds to benefit charity through a grant process.

■ Visit SuncoastFoodAndWineFest.com.

NOV. 18
LAKEWOOD RANCH MINDFUL
TRIATHLON

A community-wide triathlon experience with a unique twist focused on health and wellness. Consists of a 5K run/walk, followed by yoga and a meditation session. Held from 8-11 a.m. at Waterside Place, 1561 Lakefront Drive, Lakewood Ranch. Registration is required.

■ Visit lakewoodranch.com

NOV. 19
PONIES UNDER THE PALMS

Stroll through an array of Mustangs and Fords during the Mustang Club of West Central Florida's annual car show from 8 a.m. to 3 p.m. on Main Street at Lakewood Ranch.

■ Call 920-944-8137.



File photo

NOV. 23
FLORIDA TURKEY TROT

Spend your Thanksgiving Day morning burning pre-feast calories while raising funds for The Big Bill Foundation. This 5K run/walk will be held at Nathan Benderson Park, 5851 Nathan Benderson Circle, Sarasota. Participants will receive a race shirt and a finisher's medal. Registration for the 5K starts at \$30; kids dash is \$20.

■ Visit RaceRoster.com.

NOV. 24
GOBBLE GAUNTLET

Camp Gladiator's Island Challenge Series presents its third and final chip-timed fitness race at Nathan Benderson Park, 5851 Nathan Benderson Circle, Sarasota. Participants will receive a race T-shirt and medal upon completing the race. Registration is \$54.

■ Visit RaceRoster.com.

More than 100 wines are available to taste at the Suncoast Food and Wine Fest.



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Maximalism Embrace the Excess

Why be muted when you can be extra? The “less is more” aesthetic is a classic way to style and has commanded the fashion scene for the last few years. While we support our minimalist friends, there are some of us who want to live life a little ... louder. So, when it comes to styling with a maximalist approach, there is only one rule: the limit does not exist.

BY HEATHER SABA | CONTRIBUTOR

Elysian Fields

8207 Cooper Creek Blvd.
941-893-5787
ElysianFieldsGifts.com

Crystals? Yeah, those are cool. A larger-than-life agate butterfly? Now that's what we call a statement piece. You can find these stunning decor pieces at the recently opened Elysian Fields near Lakewood Ranch. Handcrafted with a variety of agate slices, these butterflies do more than style a room; agates are a grounding stone and are said to enhance mental function and concentration, as well as create balance and harmony wherever they are placed.

Agate butterfly, large (57 inches x 35 inches):
\$1,650

Agate butterfly, small (22 inches x 16.5 inches):
\$875



Marmalade

1561 Lakefront Drive, Suite 108,
Lakewood Ranch, 941-358-5683
MarmaladeLifestyle.com

Keychains are the most obvious way to spice up your key ring, but why stop there when the key itself can be the flair? These gold key necklaces (available in multiple varieties) can be worn as just that — or live like a maximalist and have a locksmith grind you the most extra house key.

Is everyone still tending to the plants they bought in 2020? Great. Now it's time to upgrade your planters. This woven shell planter is perfect for housing your most prized hanging plant. Your plants want to live an over-the-top life, too.



Sherlock
Key Co.: \$14

Aloha Hanging
Basket: \$34

Mary Frances Life in Color
crossbody bag: \$380



Federika Padula
feather butterfly
earrings: \$115

Monkee's of Lakewood Ranch

1561 Lakefront Drive, Suite 104,
Lakewood Ranch, 941-358-8868
MonkeesOfLakewoodRanch.com

"Maximalism meets classic" comes to life at Monkee's of Lakewood Ranch, and nothing screams "more is more" quite like a blend of textures, rainbow colors and gemstones. This Mary Frances "Life in Color" crossbody in the shape of a vintage camera will take any outfit to the level of MAX.

Incorporate feathers into anything fashion and you have the definition of an aesthetic of excess. Factor in the vibrant emerald color emerging from the gold butterfly stud and these earrings elevate even the most minimalist look.

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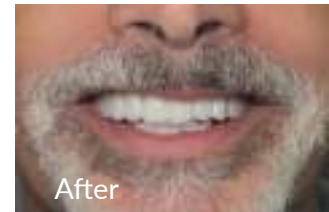
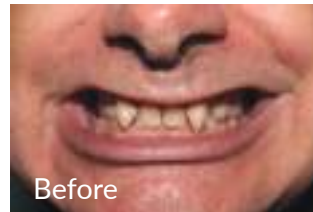
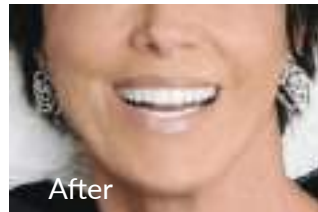
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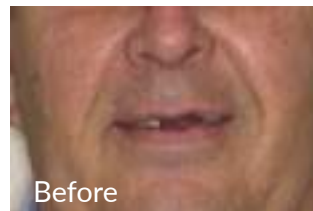
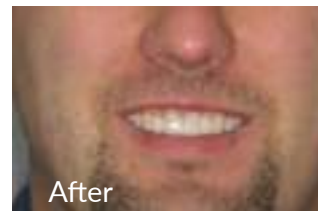
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Pie in the

In Lakewood Ranch, the sky is the limit for pizza possibilities.

BY SU BYRON AND MARTY FUGATE | CONTRIBUTORS

‘Pizza.’

Just say the word and the Pavlovian response kicks in. A slice of pizza fills your mind’s eye and makes your mouth water. So much power in one simple word! Ah, but pizza’s not that simple. Because there’s no such thing as a generic pizza. Italy’s diverse pizza styles are shaped by region and tradition. In the United States, our pizza is a mix of Italian imports (Neapolitan, Sicilian, Roman) — and stateside inventions (Chicago-style, New York-style, New Jersey-style). Any way you slice it, the spectrum of pizza is vast. Here are a few variations in the pizzerias of Lakewood Ranch.



Photos by Nancy Guth
Adolfo's pizza chef Benny
Scotto prepares one of the
many hand-tossed pizzas
they will sell that day.



Sky

IF YOU GO

Adolfo's Italian Market & Pizzeria, 225 Natures Way, Unit 111, Lakewood Ranch; 941-388-8701; AdolfosLWR.



Adolfo's Italian Market & Pizzeria

Chef/owner Gary Blake founded Adolfo's to honor the Italian legacy of his mother's side of the family — the Colantuono lineage from Naples, Italy. The pizza here is hand-tossed with a thin, crispy crust topped with fresh and simple ingredients. "Naples is the place where pizza started," says Blake. "Neapolitan immigrants like my grandfather came over to America — and brought their pizza recipes with them. They opened pizzerias — first in the northeast, and then the whole country. People keep trying to 'reinvent' pizza. But nobody's improved on the original. Neapolitan pizza is light as a feather."

Blake shared some insights with us recently about the world of pizza.

What sets Neapolitan pizza apart?

The secret is the dough. It's semolina dough, not white dough. Once people taste our pizza, they absolutely fall in love with it. But it's not what they expected.

Where did you learn the secret of making authentic Neapolitan pizza?

My great-grandfather, Leopoldo Colantuono, came from Naples and immigrated to America when he was 12 years old. He passed on his recipes to our whole family.

And now you're serving them up for a new generation of pizza lovers.

That must be a source of pride.

Absolutely. I was very close to my grandpa, Alberto Colantuono — who also came to this country. My mom, Vicenza, was named after my great-grandmother, who came from Italy as well. We've always been a very close-knit, loving family. I'd always told my uncle that if I ever opened my own pizzeria, I'd name it after my grandfather's middle name, "Adolfo." He loved the idea, and that's what I did.

So, Adolfo's is a family affair. Family is the reason this place exists?

Yes, that's true. We're here because I wanted to bring our family traditions to the Lakewood Ranch area — and

Continued on Page 64

Continued from Page 63

for anything Italian, including fresh breads, pastries, meats, cheeses, wines, grocery goods and olive oils.

What makes a great pizza?

Pride. And the love of making it.

Aside from your pizza, what others stand out for you?

I'd say it's a tie between Sally's Apizza and Frank Pepe's in New Haven, Connecticut. Pepe's is one of America's oldest pizzerias; their ovens still use coal.

Can you share an interesting Adolfo's anecdote?

Sure. One night, a lady came in with her elderly father. After awhile, he started crying, because the ambiance at Adolfo's made him start talking about his Italian heritage. Later, she told me, "Gary, he hadn't talked about it for such a long time. We really missed that about our dad! We're so happy your place brought back those memories and got him talking about it." It was such a loving moment.

Most Popular Pizza:

According to Blake, "It's a tie between the Margherita and the Bianca. They're both authentic Neapolitan classics."



Photo by Nancy Guth
Adolfo's owner Gary Blake honors the Italian legacy of his mother's side of the family with time-honored family recipes.

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Atria Café

Lakewood Ranch residents Jim and Weyli Angus wanted to create a unique gathering and dining space for Ranchers. In 2020 they did — and Atria Café was born. By day, this intimate café offers house-made, artisanal sourdough bread and pastries, specialty coffees and sandwiches. In the evenings, they're all about pizza. At any time of day, it's a hub of constant creation. "Apart from laying the eggs and milking the cows, we make everything in-house," says Jim, who'd been a chef for 12 years before launching Atria with Weyli. "Food is something that brings people together," he adds. "We wanted to create a space for local people enjoying local products and connecting with neighbors." What makes Atria's pizza so deliciously different? Jim was happy to share his pizza-making philosophy.

Fun Fact:
Atria's sourdough bread and pizza crust are made with fresh milled flour, filtered water and sea salt and then fermented for 24 hours. That's all there is to it.

IF YOU GO

Atria Café serves artisanal pizzas, fresh salads and wine and beer, 5-8:30 p.m., Tuesdays through Saturdays. 4120 Lakewood Ranch Blvd., Lakewood Ranch; 941-751-1016; Atria.Cafe.com.

What's the advantage to using sourdough for the pizza base?

The first big advantage is flavor. Sourdough yeast gives you a flavor that you just can't get with commercial yeast. It's hard to describe, but there are different levels and degrees. Sourdough products taste fuller and richer — and that definitely applies to pizza. The second advantage is nutrition and digestibility. Unlike commercial yeast, there's a lot of nutrient density in each sourdough grain. It also cuts up the long chains of gluten protein, which makes it easy for your body to digest. People with gluten sensitivities can eat our bread, pastry, and pizza with very few issues.

What's the secret sauce to your toppings?

We've got the same usual suspects you'd find in any pizza place — mushrooms, tomatoes, prosciutto, pepperoni, and greens like arugula. But all our toppings are in their freshest, purest, simplest form. We use Old World methods to inject flavor and texture into our ingredients before they go on into the pizza. So, instead of just slicing our tomatoes, we blister their skins and then

cook them in a mild chili oil. We take the same approach with mushrooms. We slowly cook our mushrooms in garlicky oil and then take the stems and shallots and create a mushroom-infused oil that we soak the mushrooms in. Our "Fun Guy" pizza is perfumed with this rich, deep mushroom flavor.

Atria's goes the extra mile with ingredients and culinary wizardry. Do you need to educate your customers so they understand the difference?

Not really. Once they taste the difference, they get it.

Above: Jim and Weyli Angus are passionate about merging Old World methods and modern vision to create high-quality foods and beverages served in a warm, welcoming environment.

Inset: After 5 p.m., Atria serves artisanal pizza and natural wines and craft beers.

Right: Atria's pizza toppings are all made in-house with top ingredients.



Courtesy photos

EXPLORING THE PIZZA SPECTRUM

NEAPOLITAN. This offspring of Naples, Italy, is famed for its thin, soft, chewy crust. It is traditionally topped with fresh mozzarella, San Marzano tomatoes, basil and olive oil.

NEW YORK-STYLE. The streets of New York City fold in on themselves. New York-style pizza does as well. (That's handy when you're on the go. It also cuts down on dry cleaning bills.) We're talking crisp, chewy crust and heaping helpings of melted mozzarella and tomato sauce.

CHICAGO DEEP DISH. The City by the Lake does not think small. Chicago-style pizza is a fine example of its more-is-more philosophy. This deep-dish delight boasts a thick, buttery crust and layers of cheese, toppings, and chunky tomato sauce. Traditionally, this pizza's also cut into squares and rectangles, not triangular slices. Why? Why not? That's the Chicago way.

DETROIT-STYLE. The auto industry put this city on the map. This motor-city marvel reflects that heritage. Back in the 1940s, Detroit-style pizza was originally baked in square automotive parts pans. Today, the factories are long gone. But any square pan will do.

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Michelangelo Pizzeria Cucina

The popular Michelangelo Pizzeria Cucina boasts four area locations; its Lakewood Ranch venue opened in 2004. Owners Jon Allen and Joe Sciulara got on board in 2020. Its claim to fame? When it comes to pizza, it's its hand-tossed New York-style pies. The name, says Allen, is a nod to the artistry of the restaurant's Sicilian family founders. "They immigrated here from Sicily to New York and started out with bakeries and pizzerias," he says. "When they moved to South Florida, they brought their family recipes and traditions and created

the perfect neighborhood Italian restaurant." Today, Michelangelo's pizza masterpieces take many forms. Allen took some moments to share the passion that drives this painstaking art.

Everyone we spoke to described your pizza as "amazing."

(Laughs) Who am I to argue?

What makes it so amazing?

Because of our old-school methods. A lot of pizzerias try to modernize and automate the whole process — the national chains especially. At Michelangelo, we still make our pizza the traditional way — with our hands. That means more than making a big show about tossing the dough. It demands high stan-

Continued on Page 70

IF YOU GO

Michelangelo Pizzeria Cucina, 11517 Palmbrush Trail, Lakewood Ranch; 941-739-5656; MichelangeloPizzaRestaurant.com/Lakewood-Ranch-FL



Photo by Nancy Guth

Chef Jay Nicolosi puts finishing touches on Michelangelo's artistic creations.

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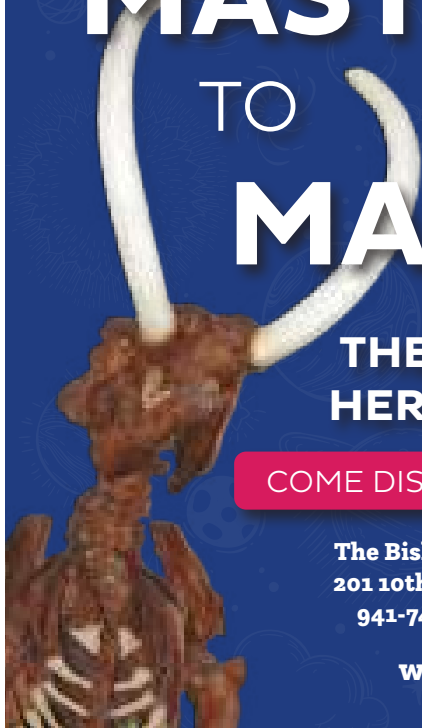
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Continued from Page 68

dards, zero compromise, and a laser-focused attention to detail every step of the way. That includes what we put into our pies and we're very picky about selection. We use the best ingredients we can find and handpick the tomatoes and cheeses to find the right salt content, the right melt, the right color. We make all our own dough. Then we hand-stretch the dough, sauce it and cheese it. In the next-to-the-last step, we bake all our pies in a brick oven.

What's the last step?

Enjoying a great pizza pie!

What's your signature pizza?

Our artisanal Grandma's Sicilian pizza is probably our signature pizza. It's one of my personal favorites. It goes back to one of the recipes our original owner brought to this country.

Who was this "Grandma"?

This "Grandma" is like everybody's grandma. See, the concept of "Grandma's Pizza" started in Europe. It's the kind of pizza



Photo by Nancy Guth

Matt Mullen serves up a "Grandma's Sicilian" pizza.

your grandma would make for you at home from leftovers she had on hand. It's rustic, hearty, not curated. We use focaccia-style bread dough, which gives it kind of a leopard pattern. We put the sauce on top of the cheese, not underneath like a typical American pizza. It's the pizza you'd expect your Sicilian grandmother to make you.

Extra Slices

There's no pizza shortage in Lakewood Ranch. In case you're still famished, here are a few extra slices.

Rico's Pizzeria

Thick-crust Sicilian pizza is Rico's crowd-pleaser. They load it up with peppers, onions, anchovies, tomatoes, herbs, strong Sicilian cheeses, or whatever your heart desires. Just ask and you'll receive. Feel like thin-crust pizza? You can ask for that, too. 14435 E. S.R. 70, Lakewood Ranch; 941-758-9999.

Jersey Brothers Pizza

When you're looking for a slice of New Jersey in Bradenton, this is the place to be. This pizzeria is the creation of brothers Bob and Bill Nehila, who are from New Jersey. What makes a Jersey-style pizza

stand out? Like a New York-style pie, its thin crust is made to be folded and eaten on the run. But since most Jersey-style pies are cooked in a stone, brick or coal-fired oven, you get a charred and more crispy crust. 8744 E. S.R. 70, Bradenton; 941-782-8820; JerseyBrothersPizzaandPasta.com.

Main Street Trattoria

Chef/owner Sergio Di Sarro's signature flatbread pizza is perfect for a light treat; the shrimp flatbread with mozzarella and vodka sauce is delicious. For those who prefer a classic pizza, Main Street Trattoria offers them every which way, including the Buffalo Chicken, with the restaurant's signature buffalo sauce. 8131 Lakewood Main St., Lakewood Ranch, Suite 101; 941-210-4101; MainStreetTrattoria.com.

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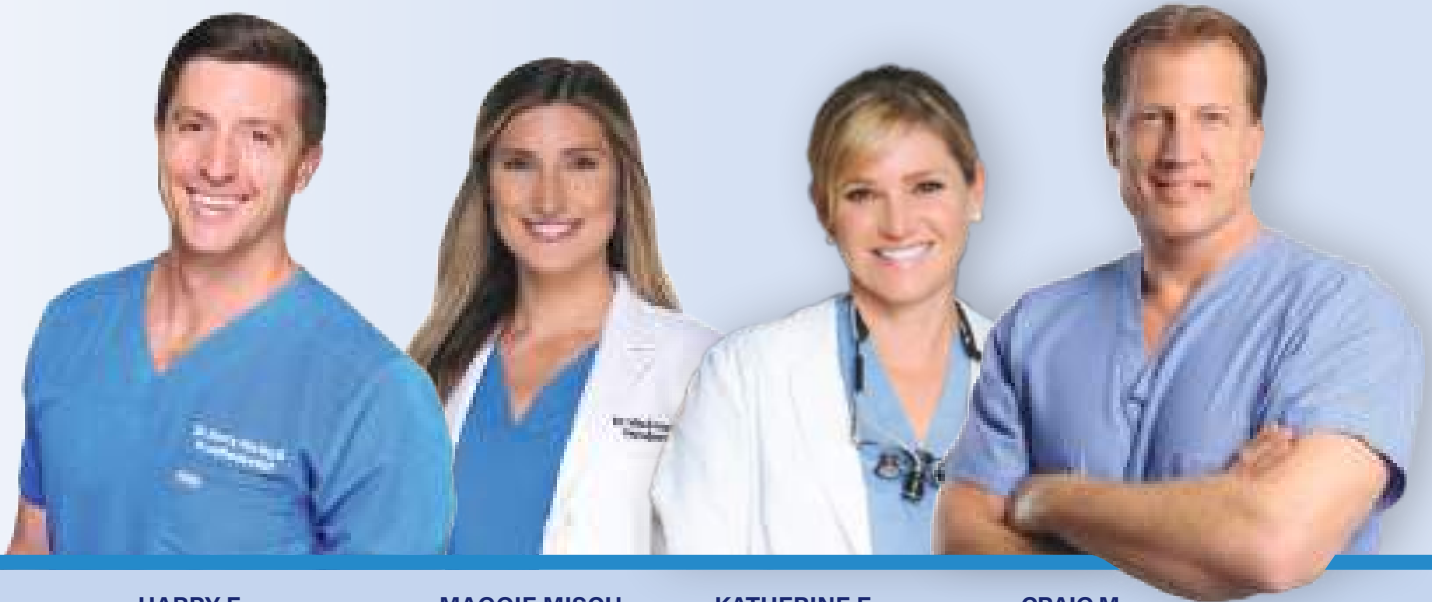
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Jukebox Heroes

When a jukebox in a store window caught Vickie Compton's eye, she had to have it. That led to four decades of collecting and restoring them with her husband, Rodger.

BY ERIC SNIDER | CONTRIBUTOR

The first house on the left inside the leafy Braden Pines neighborhood is a multilevel ranch, earthy brown in color, sitting on a meticulously landscaped acre of land. A long driveway arcs around the front. The placid exterior gives no hint to the delights within.

Vickie Compton opens the front door with a shy smile. She's tall and thin, wears her dark hair long, with bangs. Her faded bell-bottom jeans, embroidered on the bottom, are topped by a white, off-the-shoulder peasant blouse.

The melancholy strains of Roy Orbison's "Only the Lonely" fill the foyer. We walk a few steps into a sunken living room — a living room like you've never seen. Antique jukeboxes occupy virtually every inch of wall space. Some shimmer with multicolored lights, with bubbles oozing through tubes. Some are made with rich wood and lots of chrome. Some are just ... really, really old.

The only reasonable response to this cornucopia is: Wow! If you could somehow airlift the home to a location on a main drag — presto! — a museum. All

you'd need is a sign and a parking lot.

And it's not just jukeboxes. The high walls are festooned with framed posters evoking vintage Americana, two Stratocaster guitars, a big Sears, Roebuck and Co. sign, and lots more.

Vickie's husband, Rodger, greets us. He's 72, with a full head of white hair pulled back into a tight ponytail. A matching Fu Manchu mustache frames his mouth. If Vickie, 70, and Rodger are proud to show off their remarkable menagerie, they don't let on. The couple is soft-spoken and matter of fact.

A short time later, as they sit in barber chairs while I interview them, I ask: "So, what is it, exactly, about jukeboxes?"

Vickie, after a pause: "The music."

"And the design," Rodger chimes in. "They don't make 'em like that

anymore. The wooden cabinets — it's a lotta work, craftsmanship."

Sometimes words don't do justice.

The living room is just the introduction to an emporium that encompasses two buildings — roughly 5,000 square feet fit to burst with 97 jukeboxes and all manner of artifacts, knick-knacks, bric-a-brac and memorabilia, including barber's poles, cigarette machines, sheet music, a dummy dressed in a Superman costume standing in a phone booth, a mannequin wearing Rodger's Army uniform from Vietnam, and a pinball machine that plays black-and-white footage of The Beatles. Some 5,000 records — 45s, plus a wall of LPs.

If you're beginning to think hoarder, stop. The massive collection has been thoughtfully curated and organized.

Continued on Page 74



The Comptons' 1955 Select-O-Matic by Seeburg was the industry's first 200-selection jukebox.



Photos by Heidi Kurpiela

When Chicago Coin Band Boxes first came on the market in the 1950s (like this one, mounted above a 1942 Wurlitzer 950), they functioned as extra speakers and helped boost revenue for jukebox operators at bars and restaurants.

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Y'know, like a museum — with the jukeboxes as the main attraction. Vickie reckons that 80% of them are in working order. Most don't require coins. The oldest is from 1928, a Holcomb & Hoke Electramuse, which plays 78 RPM records but doesn't allow you to make selections. A Mills Panoram from the early 1940s shows a flickering 16-mm film of a woman dressed in an old-timey waitress outfit singing a vintage tune while dancing. Four decades before MTV.

For my money, the wackiest is the AMI Automatic Hostess. Back in the '40s, these behemoths were placed in taverns. The user inserted a coin, then spoke into a microphone, which connected them to an operator, who would locate the patron's music selection and play it. It hardly needs saying that this Automatic Hostess is purely decorative.

Most of the rest are not as exotic. We stop by the Comptons' most prized

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A Seeburg W from 1953 (left) and a Seeburg KD200 from 1957 (right). Seeburg was the first manufacturer to introduce a jukebox that could play 45 RPM records.



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Continued from Page 74

item, a Wurlitzer 850 from 1941. It's rare. And magnificent. I peruse the 24 song options, arrayed on strips of paper behind glass, press a button and watch the jukebox machinations cue up "He's So Fine," a 1963 "girl-group" classic by The Chiffons. It's not just music that envelopes the room, but a warm wave of nostalgia.

Vickie drives the couple's jukebox infatuation. She peruses internet sites over her morning cereal, looking for finds and deals, nevermind that their space is just about used up. "I'm always thinking there's got to be room for one more, that somehow we can move things around to make room," Vickie says, then adds with a touch of rue, "until we get past that point. We're close."

Before jukeboxes, there was the music. Vickie vividly recalls when her world changed from black and white to Technicolor. It was Feb. 9, 1964, and she was playing with Barbie dolls in her bedroom in Lawrenceville, Illinois. Vickie's mother beckoned her to the living room, where the TV was showing four fresh-faced British lads performing "All My Loving" over the shrieks of teenage girls. It was, of course, The Beatles, who were making their landmark debut on "The Ed Sullivan Show." Like so many boys and girls of the era, Vickie was gobsmacked. "I never played with Barbies again," she says. "After that, I spent all my allowance on records."

When Vickie landed her first job, an after-school gig cashiering at a local drug store, she bought an Admiral console record player. Her grandfather built a cabinet to house it. Vickie's first concert was The Byrds at Mesker Amphitheatre in Evansville, Indiana, in the late '60s. Her grandparents took her. On Saturdays, Vickie and her sister would head over to their grandparents' house, watch "American Bandstand" and cue up some rock albums they'd bought. "I don't know if they liked them," Vickie recalls, "but they listened."

By age 19, Vickie had grown weary of the bleak Lawrenceville winters. She visited a cousin in Sarasota a few times and, in 1974, packed up her records and headed for warmer climes.

Continued on Page 78



The iconic American-made Rock-Ola — one of a handful of manufacturers hailing from the "Golden Age of Jukeboxes" — is a favorite among collectors. The company, which was founded in 1927, is still in business today.



The Wurlitzer 750 was the first jukebox to feature the company's signature domed cathedral top, setting a standard for the industry that continued throughout the 1940s.



This rare 1941 "Peacock" Wurlitzer 850 was once considered the biggest, showiest and most "jukeboxy" of all the machines on the market.



Seeburg's 1951 Model B was among the first jukeboxes that could play 45 RPM records.



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A year later, she landed a job at Davidson Drugs in Midtown Plaza, and rose to store manager, a job she held for about 30 years. (She stepped down in 2013, but still works at the Siesta Key locations a couple days a week.)

Vickie met Rodger at The Playground nightclub on Feb. 6, 1981. They became an instant item and married on Dec. 29, 1984. A few months later, she and a girlfriend were strolling around a now-defunct shopping center on Fruitville Road when they passed a locally owned video store. Something in the window caught Vickie's eye: a sleek jukebox with a brightly colored arch top and bubbles running through tubes. A 1946 Wurlitzer 1015. The owner was asking \$4,000.

Vickie returned home and ran the purchase by Rodger. He gave a thumbs down; they couldn't afford it. A few weeks later, unable to shake the jukebox out of her head, "I actually went to a local bank and took out a loan for it," Vickie says. "I paid it off quickly. Rodger decided he liked it."

A flame was lit. The Comptons steadily bought jukeboxes, most of them in working order but in rough shape, and refurbished their shells on weekends, leaving the tech work, when necessary, to specialists. They spent vacations hunting jukeboxes. They went to auctions seeking jukeboxes. They bought a trailer so they could haul the jukeboxes home. Over the years, the Comptons have never been in a rush. That could've sapped the fun out of it. They worked on one box at a time, enjoying the process as well as the result. The couple does not sell or trade. They collect. Vickie has no real idea what the monetary value of their menagerie might be. And she doesn't care.

By the early 2000s, the house had run out of space, so they built a 4,000-square-foot structure in the back. It helped that Rodger co-owned Manatee Lumber. (He sold his stake in the mid-2010s, and now designs roof trusses for contractors, part-time.) The finished room is tricked out with a bar and pool table, not to mention row after row of jukeboxes and walls coated with memorabilia. It's where Vickie and Rodger adjourn on Friday nights after eating out. They pour a libation, fire up various jukeboxes and play tune



Last year, the Comptons hosted a Christmas party for Rodger's lumber company inside their home. "You wouldn't believe how many of the guests told us our house should be in a magazine," Vickie says. "I know we have a lot of jukeboxes, but I never thought the collection was magazine worthy."

THE EVOLUTION OF THE JUKEBOX

Inventor Louis Glass's "nickel-in-the-slot phonograph" debuted at San Francisco's Palais Royale Saloon on Nov. 23, 1889. Since amplification had not yet been developed, users had to listen to the music through one of four tubes, which resembled stethoscopes. The machine could only play one wax-cylinder recording at a time.

Such were the crude beginnings of the jukebox, that gleaming totem of Americana. Over the decades, the machines have mirrored the technological breakthroughs and design trends of the times, and in turn had a palpable impact on American culture.

In fact, it wasn't until the early 1940s that the term "jukebox" came into wide use. The catchy moniker was likely taken from "juke joint," the name for nightlife gathering spots in African American communities in the Southeast. Many manufacturers and sellers, especially in the South, resisted the term, not wanting their machines to be associated with the Black community.

Nevertheless, "jukebox" would not be denied — perhaps because it had a better ring to it than "coin-operated phonograph."

Let's hit pause for a brief timeline:

- In 1918, a jukebox that could automatically change records was introduced.
- Starting in the mid-1920s, 78 RPM records became the common source materials in jukeboxes.
- With the end of Prohibition in 1933, legal bars, roadhouses and juke joints sprang up throughout America, with jukeboxes

becoming an all but mandatory amenity.

- By the mid-'40s, three quarters of the records produced in America went into jukeboxes.
- The advent of the more portable 7-inch 45 RPM record in 1949 caused another surge in jukebox popularity. The Seeburg "Select-O-Matic" offered 100 song choices.

The jukebox's peak decade was the 1950s, with an estimated 750,000 in circulation. The machines spread into the malt shops and bowling alleys of white America, exposing teenagers to the music of Black artists like Chuck Berry, Little Richard and Bo Diddley. As such, the jukebox played a significant role in the integration of Black and white music styles — which propelled the rise of rock 'n' roll — as well as the mainstreaming of Black music in general.

In the '60s, the proliferation of affordable stereo sound systems caused young people to move most of their music listening into homes. The jukebox's popularity waned, but slowly. In 1989, Wurlitzer introduced the compact-disc jukebox. But such units had little chance when compared to the convenience, privacy and portability of the Sony Discman.

These days, used jukeboxes are popular collector's items, as evidenced by the Comptons' emporium. One U.S. company, Rock-Ola, which has been manufacturing jukeboxes since 1927, still makes new ones that play vinyl records (along with digital connectivity). Their new jukeboxes look like old jukeboxes.

after tune. Sometimes another couple will join them, and sometimes a daughter or two. (They found time to have twins, Cheyenne and Chanel, now 28.)

Lately, an end game of sorts has emerged. In the spring, Vickie won an online auction and paid \$19,000 for a dazzling 1942 Rock-Ola Commando, which was due to arrive in August. No refurbishing necessary. She has two more jukeboxes on her gotta-have list, both from the 1940s: a Seeburg Concertmaster and a Filben Maestro. They're rare, and as of our interview in June she had no tangible leads.

Vickie doesn't expect either one to pop up for sale online. She'll have to find them through her contacts of jukebox lovers. When she does land them, that'll make 100 jukeboxes, although Vickie says the number is coincidental. Still, an epic figure to round out an epic collection. Or not.

"I get so bored when I'm not working on a box," Vickie muses. She balks when asked if No. 100 will be the final acquisition. One suspects she'll uncover some nooks and crannies to fit a few more.



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Photo by Lori Sax
Tara Poulton has the perfect
pairing of personality and
work ethic for her job.



The Go-To Person

With a cool-under-pressure personality mixed with a get-stuff-done work ethic, Tara Poulton is the right fit as the new district director for Lakewood Ranch's only U.S. Congressman.

BY MARK GORDON | CONTRIBUTOR

There was a time when Tara Poulton's nearly hour-long, 41-mile commute home to Lakewood Ranch from work was an oasis of sorts. She would listen to the occasional audiobook, and then, with a Sirius-XM subscription, she happily drove along listening to the "Today Show."

COVID-19, among all the other pieces of destruction it left in its wake, crushed that comfort zone for Poulton. A senior-level division director for DeSoto County when the pandemic hit, Poulton shifted from Savannah Guthrie to fielding and returning phone calls as she cruised west on State Road 70. She was on her way home to the Greenbrook neighborhood, coming from the county administrative offices in Arcadia.

The strain of the day, in her role heading up community services and economic develop-

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Continued from Page 83

ment for DeSoto County, would then give way to more stress during those calls, talking to people about the vaccine rollout.

“People were really mad, angry and scared,” Poulton says. “They really thought their loved ones were going to die if they didn’t get the vaccine.”

Even for someone with both personal and work experience in community and civic service — the daughter of a police lieutenant, Poulton was on an HOA board in her 20s — those post-work, lump-in-the-throat calls turned into a teachable moment. Under difficult conditions, Poulton, 45, learned, or relearned, everything from navigating a bureaucracy to getting-to-yes customer service. “You have to really be a good listener and you also have to really want to help people,” she says.

She didn’t know it in early 2021 but those calls also put Poulton in a position to capitalize on her next career milestone, which she began to ponder as this past spring turned to summer: being named district director for the office of U.S. Rep. Vern Buchanan, R-Longboat Key. Poulton was appointed to the position in mid-June and was expected to start in mid-July. She replaces Buchanan’s long-time district director, Sally Shely, who is retiring. Shely is one of the first congressional hires Buchanan made when the now nine-term Congressman won his first election to the House, in 2006.

“(Tara’s) communications skills, combined with her passion for public policy and heart for constituent services make her the ideal person for this position,” Buchanan says in a statement announcing the hire. “I look forward to working with her in the years ahead to seize the incredible opportunities we have to improve our quality of life and tackle the many challenges facing our district.”

CHASING DOWN ANSWERS

Born in New York, Poulton moved with her family to Sarasota when she was 4. A graduate of Riverview High School in Sarasota and USF in Tampa, Poulton has lived in Greenbrook for 12 years. She lives with her husband, Bill Poulton, a PepsiCo executive who oversees global procurement for



Photo by Lori Sax
Tara and her husband, Bill, have lived in Greenbrook for 12 years.



Tropicana in Bradenton and is a past chairman of the Manatee Chamber of Commerce. They have a daughter, who is in fourth grade, and Tara is a stepmom to Bill's three children, two teenagers and a 20-year-old, from a previous marriage.

One of the biggest questions Poulton gets a lot is simple: what does a U.S. Congressional district director do?

The answer is both simple and complicated.

The simple answer is to get the people who live in the areas Buchanan represents, which stretches from all of Manatee County and Lakewood Ranch north to Brandon, Hillsborough County, answers. Getting those answers is where the complication lies.

That's because in a district of more than 500,000 people, the questions, not to mention complaints, vents and rants, come in a wide variety of forms. (There are some compliments, too.) Sometimes the problems are not

something the federal government has jurisdiction over. Other times the government's reach is more open-ended.

Shely, in some specific examples, has helped put on more than 70 town hall events so constituents can speak directly to Buchanan, including established awards programs honoring district law enforcement officers, firefighters, teachers and veterans. She also helped lead the congressman's response to important issues, including Piney Point and red tide.

"You have to be there and be out in the community," Shely says. "And if we're not the place they need to be we will help get them to where they need to be."

In addition to the constituent work, a large swath of the job is representing Buchanan at public and community events in the district. That's where Shely, who, like Poulton, started her career in TV news, met two women whose teenage children died from a

HOME SWEET RANCH

Tara Poulton, after a dozen years of living here, says, "We love living in Lakewood Ranch. What's not to love?" She cites a few favorites: checking out new places in Waterside, walking the trails in Adventure Park, which is near their house, and having a glass of wine with friends at one of the many restaurants.

fentanyl overdose. After learning their stories, Shely briefed Buchanan, who then worked with his policy team to craft legislation designed to "help keep deadly synthetic drugs off the streets," according to a statement.

Buchanan introduced the Federal Initiative to Guarantee Health by Targeting (FIGHT) Fentanyl Act in May 2021.

The bill, co-sponsored by Congress-

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man Chris Pappas, D-Manchester, New Hampshire, turned a temporary classification of fentanyl-related substances as Schedule I drugs into a permanent classification. That classification, in turn, allowed federal law enforcement authorities to bring criminal actions against individuals who manufacture, distribute, or handle fentanyl-related substances.

That the FIGHT bill was born from a conversation Shely had with two grieving moms is something she takes great pride in. “It was some of the most rewarding work I’ve ever done,” she says.

A question that comes up about what a district director does is how someone in that position handles the political side of the gig. The job is designed to be apolitical, not a campaign operative. But in the current hyper-partisan political times, it’s hard not to be aware that your boss could lose his or her job every other November.

Shely says what she has done, and what she advises Poulton to do, is to maintain a focus on customer/constituent service while manifesting a thick skin. “We have to remember that he was elected to serve everybody,” Shely says. “It doesn’t matter who you voted for, whether they are Republicans, Democrats or Independents.”

Poulton, speaking in late June, says she was relieved to be starting while Shely was still there, learning from her. Prior to Buchanan, Shely held similar director positions with U.S. Rep. Katherine Harris, R-Sarasota and U.S. Sen. Mel Martinez, R-Orlando. “I’m excited to learn so much from Sally,” Poulton says. “It’s really big shoes to fill. I’m just going to be a sponge.”

NEW FOCUS AND NEXT STEPS

Poulton’s most recent job before this opportunity was with the Manatee Chamber, where she was vice president of public policy and workforce partnerships. She took that job after four years at DeSoto County. Poulton wasn’t in the market for something new, but she knew Shely for years, and when the longtime Buchanan aide reached out to meet for coffee, she agreed.

Shely hadn’t mentioned that the coffee chat was going to be a soft recruitment and interest-gauging session.



But Shely says she knew they had the one. “I texted the Congressman right after and said she is who we have to hire,” Shely says.

That not only speaks to Poulton’s resume and penchant for service, but her ability to handle multiple tasks while maintaining her composure and thinking quickly and creatively during trying times. (Read: the pandemic.)

Another skill? Work ethic. Poulton has been taking online classes to earn a master’s in public administration from Florida State while working at the chamber full time. Many nights, Poulton says, she would be tapping away at her computer from 9 p.m. to 11:59 p.m. doing work after bedtime for their daughter and right up until the midnight homework deadline. Poulton is scheduled to earn her master’s in August.

Poulton, while not looking for a new job, says what Shely dangled in front of her represented many of the things she has sought to do at other career spots — and at a larger scale. “Every job I’ve ever had I’ve been recruited to — it’s an unbelievable compliment,” Poulton says. “When I think about this job, it’s everything I’ve loved in my career.”

That includes a start in TV news, going as far back as college, when she cleaned floors and changed light bulbs at USF’s public TV station. After that she got a job as a producer for ABC7 in Sarasota. “I grew up watching Heidi Godman and Scott Dennis, and that’s what I always wanted to do,” she says. “And then I got there.”

Next came an on-air reporter position for WB38 in Tampa. Poulton loved that job, too, and could have chased a career in the business. But the grind grew tiresome. “I loved being in the news business, but it was a 24/7 job.”

Seeking something more stable, Poulton next took positions with the United Way in Bradenton, the Bradenton Area Convention and Visitors Bureau and the Southwest Florida Water Management District. Then came DeSoto County, where she supervised a team for one of the first times and, she says, “was able to wear a lot of hats.”

With the new role coming into focus, Poulton is ready for those hats, and whatever else comes with the job.

What are her next steps?

“I’m really excited to get out and start talking with constituents,” she says.

Photo by Lori Sax
Getting answers is a big part of Tara Poulton’s role as district director for U.S. Rep. Vern Buchanan.

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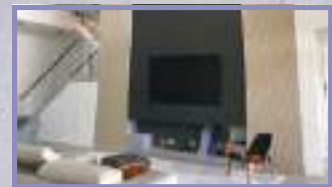


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SPOTLIGHTING LIFE ON THE RANCH

Glitz and glamour dazzle in a
Country Club remodel. **PAGE 92**



Photos courtesy of Renee Preininger,
Sarasota Trust Realty

A classic exterior only hints at the
splendors inside this 6,600-square-
foot home recently renovated by
Nick and Nora Berente.

— THE — WOW FACTOR

A home in the Country Club
is designed to impress —
and boy, does it.

BY ROBERT PLUNKET | CONTRIBUTOR

A fireplace surround
crafted of Venetian plaster
and designed by Nick
Berente sets the tone for
the home — dramatic
yet simple and refined.







The home's spacious informal living area offers many choices for both entertaining and family life. The high-end kitchen is to the right.

As someone who writes about beautiful homes, I am careful not to say the word “wow” when I enter a room. That’s strictly for amateurs. My insights must be on a slightly higher, more articulate level. But I found the wows coming out loud and clear as I toured this home in the Country Club. Every room contained at least one gorgeous surprise, one glamorous touch. I finally gave up and let the wows flow forth naturally. Even the laundry room got a wow.



Photo by Nancy Guth
Nick and Nora Berente with
their canine companions,
Bruno and Bindi.



Left: The formal dining room opens to a private garden complete with koi pond. The twig-like chandelier adds a whimsical touch.

The home is the creation of Nick and Nora Berente who, like the fictional Nick and Nora of movie fame, are masters of their craft. This time, though, it's not crime solving but house flipping at which they excel. "Most people run away from ugly houses," says Nick. "We run toward them."

The house in question is a large (6,600 square feet) model by the prestigious builder Arthur Rutenberg. It was a rambling well-built home with a good layout and a particularly nice setting — almost half an acre overlooking a pond and the Legacy Golf Course. But the home was constructed in 2003 and was starting to show its age. The study, for instance, was painted a dark red and full of heavy wood trim and paneling. Quite the rage back then but now hopelessly dated. The Berentes

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stripped it down to its bones, painted it white, installed lighted shelves all around and turned it into the perfect workspace to plan their next flip.

The first wow comes upon entering. You see before you a vast amount of space, with one area flowing into the next. There is a formal living area with a dramatic fireplace of Venetian plaster. There are transom windows everywhere, letting in a light that makes the whole place glow. In the distance something catches your eye — a large round crystal chandelier, maybe eight feet across. It beckons you to come and see what's going on.

So, you walk through an informal dining area, past the spectacular kitchen (all high-end Miele appliances and a cleverly hidden pantry) and arrive at an informal seating area set around a fireplace feature and an enormous flatscreen TV. The house has eight TVs and plenty of places to watch them, including at an outdoor bar. But



The outdoor living area offers plenty of amenities — a pool, spa, sun shelf, and outdoor kitchen — plus a view of the Legacy Golf Course.

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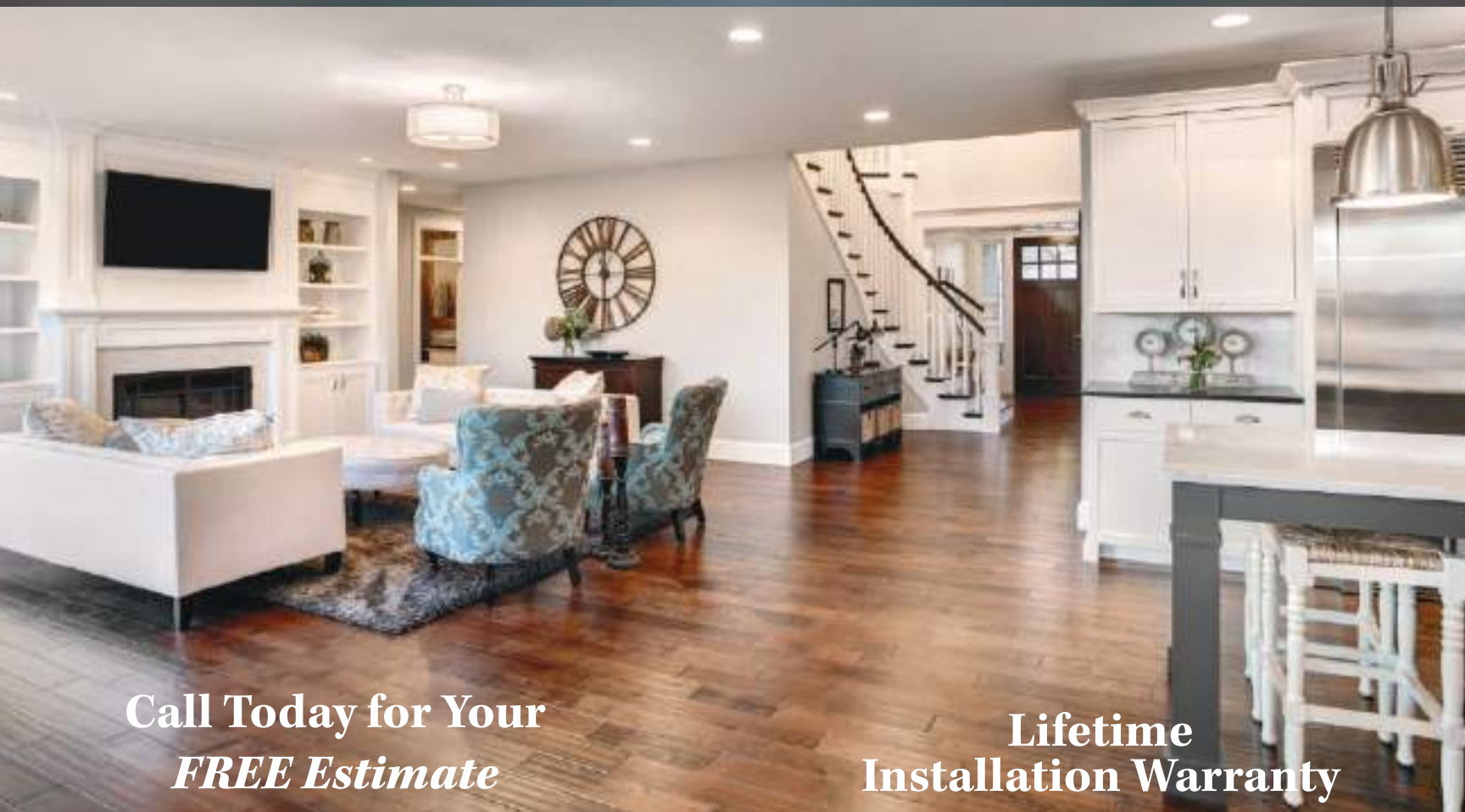
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this TV (100 inches across and custom-made) is the preferred place to watch.

The Berentes describe the home's style as "luxurious glamor." Gone is the original Tuscan look, replaced with a glittering contemporary design that suggests a celebrity home you might see on a reality TV show. The palette is simple — white walls and ceilings, with engineered wood floors, not too dark. Most of the furniture is done in contrasting shades of charcoal and dark grey with gold tone accents here and there, particularly the lighting fixtures. Most of them — plus many of the furnishings — come from Restoration Hardware, the high-end design company known for its refined, subtle look.

While planning the home, much thought was given to entertaining. The Berentes recently hosted 70 guests, and the place accommodated them beautifully, with friends moving through the living area and out to the pool, where there were even more seating areas — I counted six — and a sun shelf and spa. There's also an outdoor kitchen. The couple says Nick is the real cook in the family, though Nora still prepares many of her mother's Hungarian specialties.

The wow factor intensifies as you enter the primary suite. Here, an aura of Hollywood glamor takes over. The ceiling is 14 feet high and the beautifully precise lighting, some of it recessed and half hidden, gives the room a multidimensional feeling. A wooden accent piece above the bed warms the space up and the bed faces another 100-inch TV and a high-tech fireplace, which adds another lighting source. At the far end of the bedroom, you'll discover an intimate multi-sided seating area. It's so unexpected that it gets a wow of its own.

Another wow was the primary bath. It was also unexpected, with white used as an accent color this time. It's a masculine space, grey and natural wood, with stacked stone inset walls, a large walk-in shower and a black soaking tub.

The Berentes say their love of creating beauty — and expensive beauty at that — comes from their childhoods in Hungary. Both grew up under communism and there wasn't



much beauty around. When the Iron Curtain collapsed in 1989, they took the chance to leave Hungary and chase their dream. First it was 10 years in New Zealand, where they began honing their skills and started a successful paint company. Along came two daughters, now grown. One just got married and the other is studying to be a vet.

Nick says the most important thing to look for in a potential home is a good layout. Here they had an excellent plan to begin with and the removal of a counter near the informal dining

area made it even better. "We tried to bury the Tuscan," he states. "Our aim is to always compete with new construction."

Exactly who does what in the Berente enterprise is a little hard to define because the couple works as a team. Nora oversees the interior look. She aims for simplicity and quality, with nature as her inspiration. Much of the art reflects shapes and forms found in nature; look for a faux-twig chandelier in the formal dining

Top: The secluded primary bedroom is a luxurious retreat complete with custom TV and fireplace. At the far end a seating area overlooks the pool.

Bottom: The primary bathroom has a Zen-like atmosphere, where carefully chosen wood and stone accents create a feeling of calm and refreshment.

Continued on Page 100

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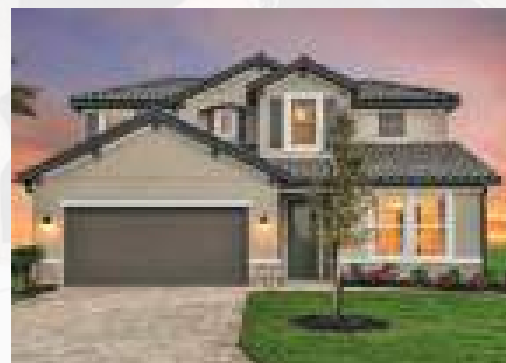
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room, where French doors open to a courtyard with a fountain and koi pond.

Nick takes care of the business. They have a team of 70 contractors and craftsmen, and quality is the Berentes' most important concern.

"We overspent wildly," Nick admits, but he and Nora have no regrets. The house is their masterpiece, and they wanted every extra luxury, including a huge wine cellar, with space for hundreds of bottles and a center high-top table for tastings. There's also a full-size, state-of-the-art gym, converted from one of the two garages, with every possible workout machine. And, in the other garage, perhaps the biggest wow of all — a brand new, gleaming white electric Bentley.

With their daughters no longer at home, the Berentes are putting their showplace on the market. "We don't want to move," Nick says, "but it's time for something smaller." They haven't found their next project yet, but one thing is certain — it's going to be a wow.



Among the home's unexpected perks — a full-size gym and an elaborate wine cellar, above, with room for hundreds of bottles and the perfect atmosphere for tasting parties.

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A New Home for the Music

Sarasota Orchestra is building a state-of-the-art campus on 32 acres near Lakewood Ranch. CEO Joseph McKenna couldn't be happier.

BY SU BYRON AND MARTY FUGATE
CONTRIBUTORS

Founded in 1948, Sarasota Orchestra has the longest unbroken run of any orchestra in Florida. Its stellar programming has led to a fierce fan base and a constantly expanding audience. Over the last two decades, SO experienced profound growth — and growing pains. By the dawn of the 21st century, the orchestra had long outgrown its original home at the Beatrice Friedman Symphony Center in downtown Sarasota. To perform its ambitious Masterworks and Pops concert series, it makes do by renting space at the Van Wezel, Sarasota Opera House and other large-capacity auditoriums. In 2018, SO's new site search began in earnest. It finally ended in May, when the orchestra purchased a 32-acre lot at 5701 Fruitville Road west of Lakewood Ranch with plans to have the campus completed by 2028. After nearly a decade, the orchestra's new home is on the horizon. CEO Joseph McKenna couldn't be happier, and he was happy to tell us why.

Sarasota Orchestra's quest for a new location has dragged on for almost a decade. Now your destination is finally in sight. How does it feel?

It feels great. In 15 or 25 years, Sarasota Orchestra's new home will be the



Sarasota Orchestra President & CEO Joseph McKenna at the Orchestra's new site off Fruitville Road.

crossroads of this region. It's exciting to own a piece of land where our vision can unfold in the 21st century.

What was your original wish list for the orchestra's new home?

We'd envisioned a music center that supported every aspect of the orchestra's mission, including education, rehearsal space and offices. But a concert hall was always the heart of our vision. We've been privileged to perform at wonderful venues across the region. But they were all in theatrical auditoriums and not true concert halls designed for musical performance.

What's the key difference between a theater auditorium and a concert hall?

A theater has a proscenium arch with an implied invisible "fourth" wall defining the edge of the stage. The performers are tucked up in a box on one side of the wall; the audience is on the other. So, in a theater, the audience and performers are separated in two different rooms. With a concert hall, the idea is that the audience and musicians sit in the same room together.

Now that you have the site, how will you plan out this structure?

For a concert hall, the design process is a three-legged stool. We've already got two of the legs — an acoustician and a theater planner. The right architect is the only missing element. We'll be conducting a national search by year's end.

What are the key features of any great concert hall?

Great acoustics are obviously vital. That hinges on the cubic volume of space in the auditorium. Our acoustician determined that a height of 110 feet would be the sweet spot. The resulting volume would allow us to do both intimate chamber music as well as big works by Beethoven, Mozart and Strauss. The full spectrum of musical possibilities will become available.

Ah. We take it that ownership is a key feature of your new concert hall.

Definitely. Renting other facilities was always a temporary solution. There's really no substitute for owning your own land — especially when the zoning allows you to realize your vision on that site.

Courtesy photo

According to some architects, every concert hall has its own sonic personality. Do you agree?

Completely. In a sense, it's the "instrument" that orchestra musicians collectively play. Sarasota Orchestra is now approaching its 75th anniversary. During all that time, we haven't had our own instrument to play. In just a few years, we will. We're all filled with anticipation.

Is it true that a big chunk of the facility's site will be set aside for natural spaces?

Yes. We'll be reserving 12 acres out of our 32-acre property. Sarasota Orchestra's new music center and nature will be in perfect harmony.

How will nature add to concertgoers' experience?

The outdoor areas will help define the music center as an oasis, a refuge, and a very special place. We believe that nature's beauty will be as important as the facility itself. We'll be hiring a landscape architect to make sure we do it right.

Your new facility will be six miles away from Sarasota Orchestra's current headquarters. Lakewood Ranch and East County residents will expand your audience. But will your existing Sarasota-based audience be willing to go that distance?

We'll be expanding our audience by being located in the future center of Sarasota County. Because it's a short distance to travel for a world-class concert experience in a fantastic acoustic space, we are confident our existing downtown audience won't think twice about making the drive.

Sarasota Orchestra is known for its joint efforts with other area arts groups. Will you continue those collaborations on the new campus?

Absolutely! We'll not only maintain them, we will also expand them. That was our goal from the beginning. During our planning process, we interviewed some 30 different music organizations seeking performance and rehearsal space. Their input was important to us. We see the music center as a cultural asset that will benefit the whole region for decades to come. It'll be Sarasota Orchestra's new home. But it will also be a resource for the entire arts community.

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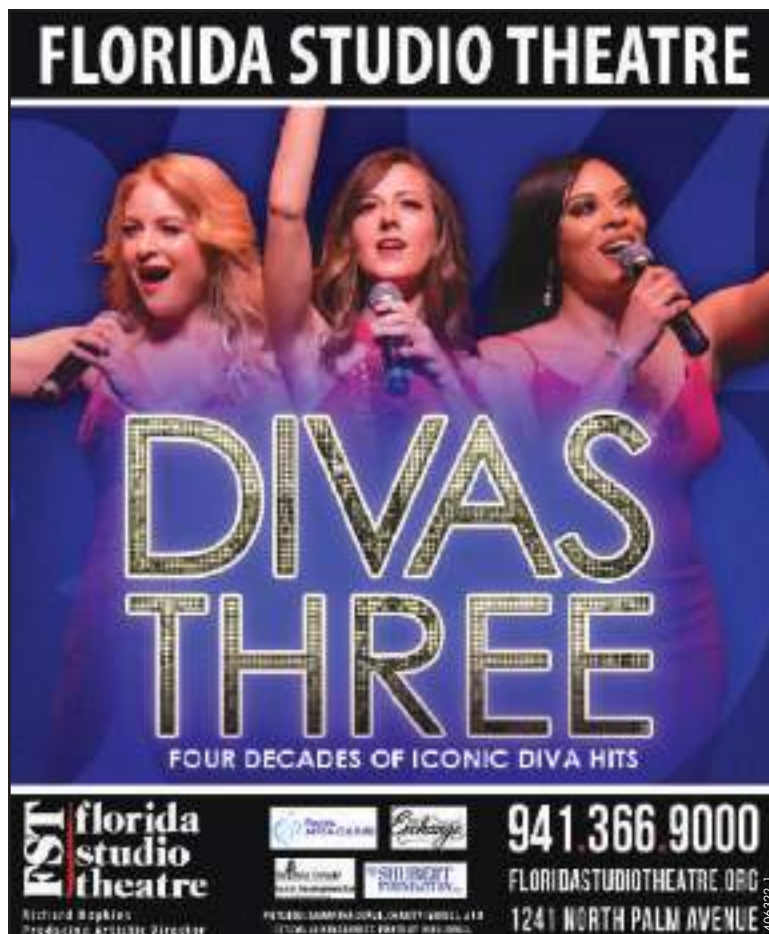
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KEY MILESTONES

- **2014:** Needs assessment and market analysis projects commence.
- **2017:** Space program determined.
- **2018:** Site search begins.
- **2021:** Due diligence completed for 5701 Fruitville Road.
- **2022:** Intent to purchase announced; zoning approval process begins.
- **2023:**
 - Sarasota County approves zoning amendments.
 - Land purchase completed.
 - Fundraising feasibility study (anticipated).

FOOTPRINT

Approximately 20 of the site's 32 acres will be dedicated to the music center, and additional building for possible future expansion and related parking facilities. The remaining 12 acres will be dedicated to wetlands, water features, natural parks and trails.



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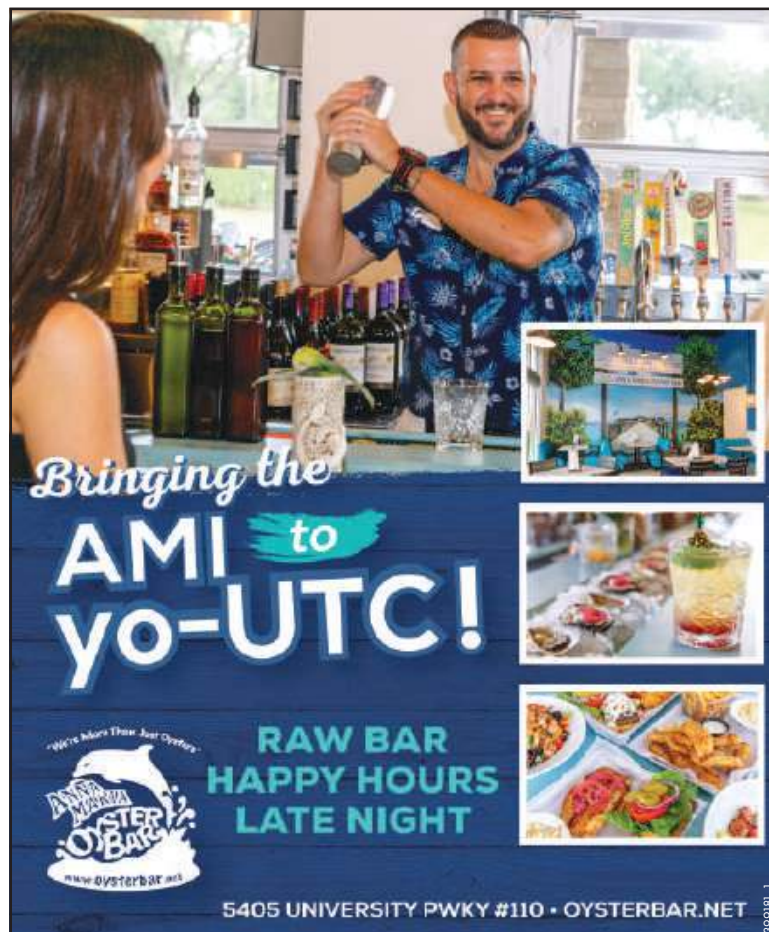
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table talk

Carrie Leitzman of Truman's Tap & Grill

At Truman's, the spirit of giving is what sets this family business apart.

BY MARTY FUGATE | CONTRIBUTOR

Carrie and Jason Leitzman are the proud proprietors of Truman's Tap & Grill in Lakewood Ranch. Their three adult children are also co-owners. Truman's is considered a sports bar — but that's like saying the Missouri Tigers is a college football team. Both statements are true but fall short of the whole truth. For the Leitzmans, Truman's is an extension of their home, a bridge to their community, and an expression of family values passed down across the generations. Those values mean a lot to their whole family. Carrie's father was a small town newspaper publisher; her grandfather was Red Wade, the All-American collegiate football player and legendary football coach at Northeastern Missouri Teacher's College (now renamed Truman State University). Both stressed the importance of teamwork and giving. Carrie was happy to share how much these values mean to her — and how she puts them into action at Truman's every day.

Your capsule description of Truman's is ...

It's a place where you can go and always feel welcome.

Did you name the pub Truman's as a nod to President Harry Truman?



No. The original owners named it after “Truman the Tiger,” the University of Missouri football team's mascot. When our family bought the pub, we knew we had to keep the name. Truman State University is such an important part of our family's history.

Got it. And I love the fact that you named your restaurant after a tiger! They're such an iconic symbol of power — and not just on the football field. What power would your tiger symbolize?

I'd say Truman stands for the power of teamwork, community and family. Those shared values hold us all together. They're what our tiger means to us.

I'd like to explore your shared values. Let's start with teamwork. What can you tell us about your staff?

They're a great team of people who work together to give guests an enjoyable experience. We're in a service industry after all. Their job is literally making other people happy. We don't take their devotion for granted — and we support their family life outside of Truman's. For example, our staff used to work through the weekends. They're all on the young side. And in the summer, that cut into their family time because their kids were out of school. Once we realized that, we closed Truman's on Sundays in the summer.

Photo by Lori Sax

For Carrie Leitzman, co-proprietor, Truman's is an extension of her home, a bridge to her community, and an expression of family values passed down across the generations.

Continued on Page 106



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Continued from Page 104

Giving back to the community has always been Truman's style. Why?

It's the way Gary and I were raised. In my own family, my father ran the local newspaper. It was a very demanding responsibility, but it never stopped him from giving back. He was a volunteer firefighter for 53 years and rode a Harley for the annual Salvation Army Toy Drive. He was also a Rotary member to the core and deeply committed to their good works. My dad drilled a philosophy of giving into our heads. I don't know any other way to be.

So community and family aren't really separate for you.

No, they're not. I don't know how they could be.

Please tell us about the two "Word Walls" at Truman's. You've got two walls packed with inspirational words. What ties them all together?

They're the words that our family lives by. One day, we all got together and wrote down a list of what's important

to us. It goes back to our shared values — and shared history.

Don't leave Truman's without trying

The bourbon chicken stir-fry is absolutely my personal favorite. You can have it grilled; you can have it fried; and if you're feeling a little bit self-indulgent, we can serve it with shrimp.

My favorite type of customer is
... everyone who walks in the door!

When I'm not working I'm ...

... probably needlepointing and spending time with my family. Either that, or I'm on the phone catching up with one of my friends. The restaurant business is very busy, but I make time. I value those connections.

What do you want people to know about Truman's?

We value our guests. Truman's is not a chain; we're a family business. Everything we do is highly personal. And every person we're privileged to serve is important to us.



Photo by Lori Sax

Truman's bar manager Maggie Levanduski welcomes guests with a warm smile. The agave margarita at Truman's refreshes mind, body and spirit.



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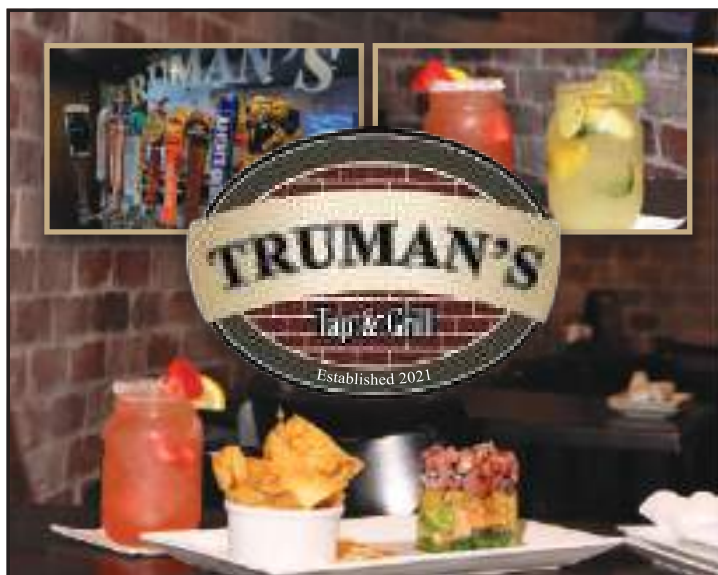
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A full-page photograph of a sunset over a body of water. On the left, a large, dark tree with dense foliage hangs over the water. In the middle ground, a small boat is docked at a wooden pier. The sky is filled with soft, orange and pink clouds, and the water reflects these colors. The overall mood is peaceful and serene.

PARTING GLANCE

Wendy Bond took this photo at Portosueno Park in Bradenton, a little inlet where Manatees hang out all day.

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