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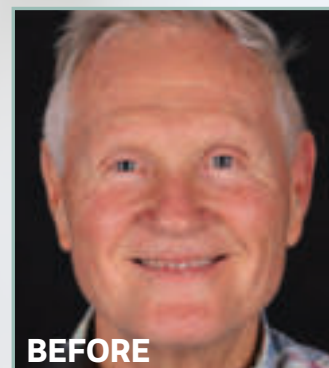
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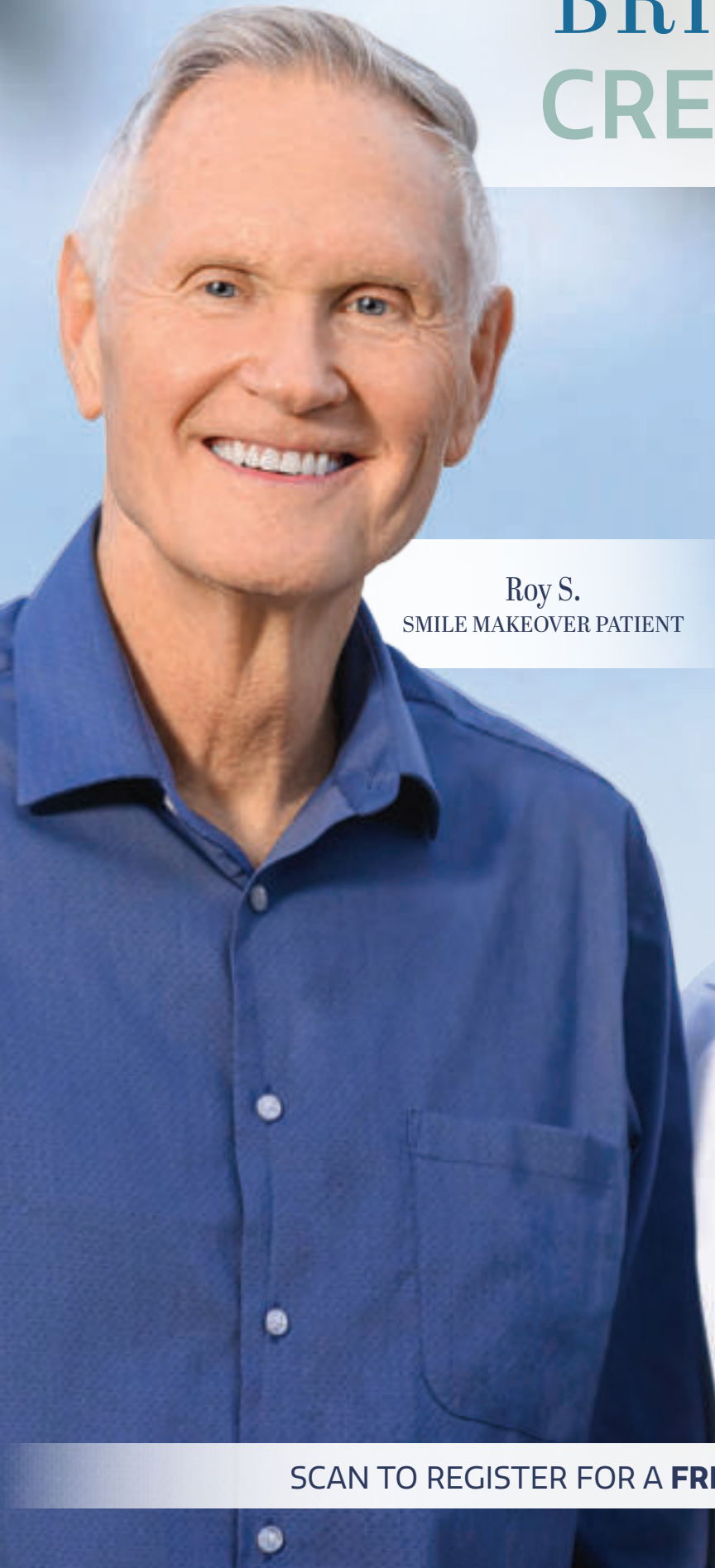
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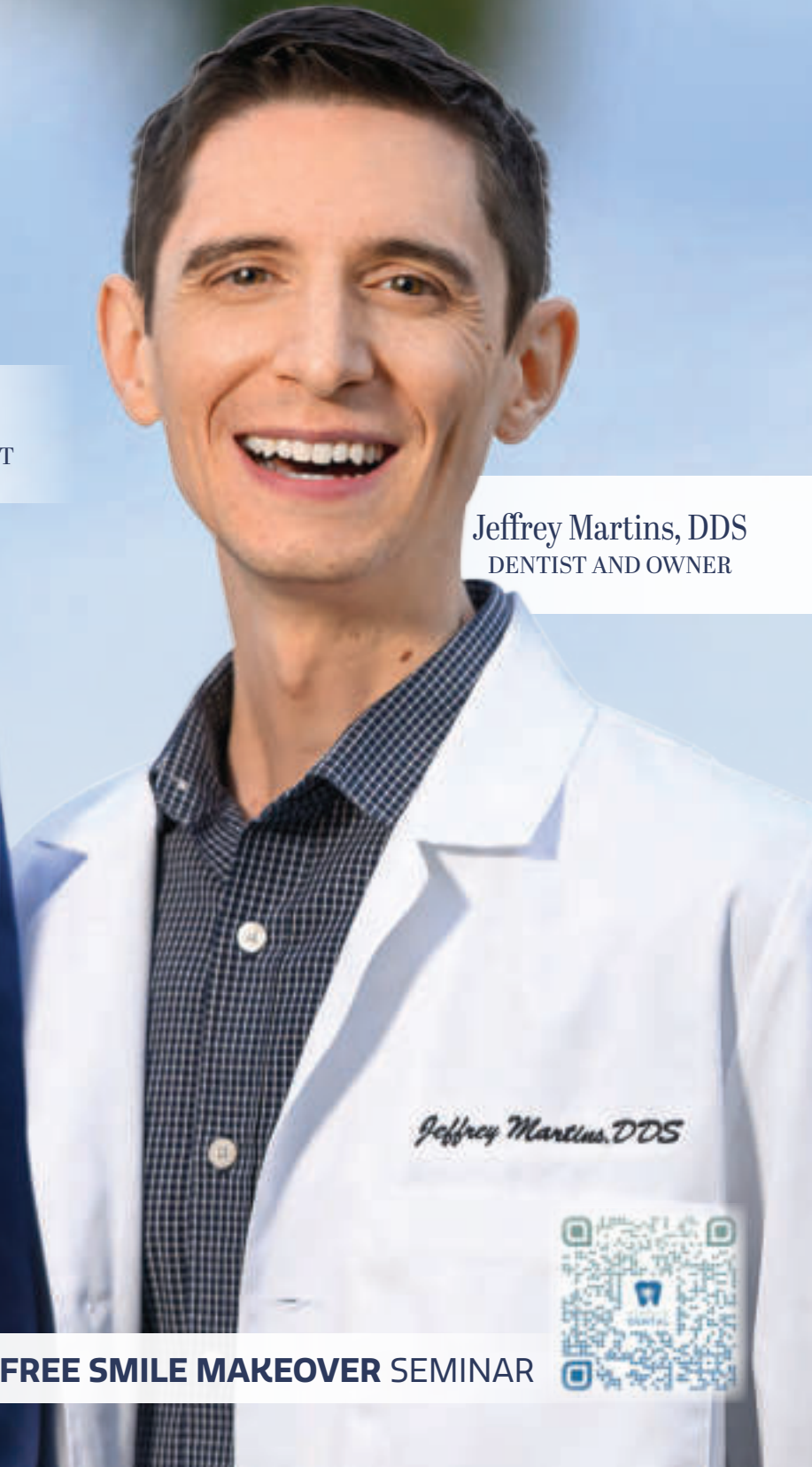
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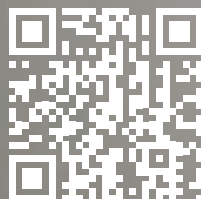
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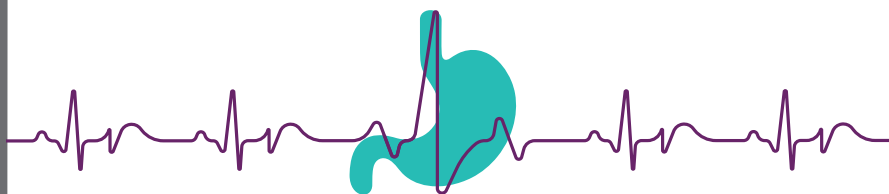
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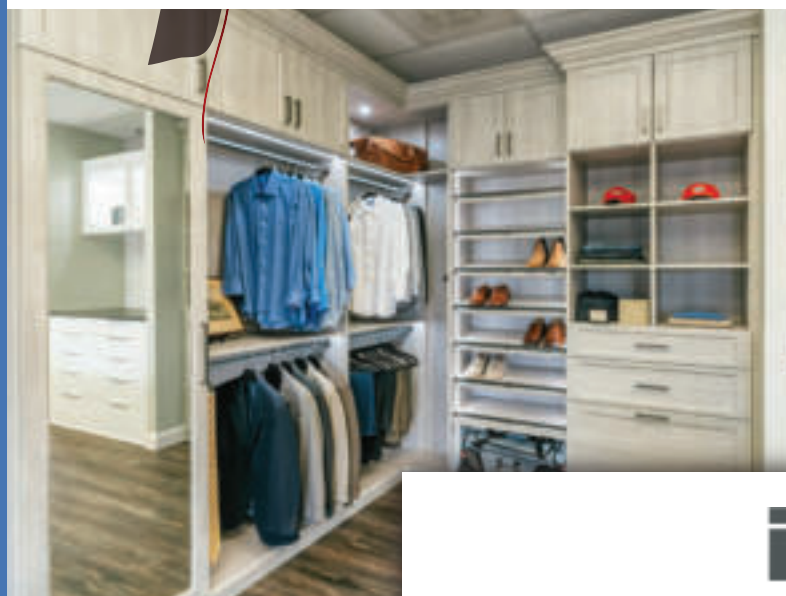
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Left to Right: Samuel Yelverton, MD, David Dexter, MD, FACS, and Alexa Kinder, MSPAP, PA-C

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# LWR LIFE

LAKEWOOD RANCH AREA'S COMMUNITY, NATURE, STYLE

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*L-R Standing: Ryan P. Johnson, Jared Hermann  
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# *Dare to be different*



Heidi Kurpiela

In addition to enjoying a tour of Solomon's Castle, left, you can also enjoy a nice meal at the ship on the property.



When I first heard about Solomon's Castle, I actually wondered if the person telling me about it was playing a joke on me.

Some eccentric guy built a shiny silver castle ... in Hardee County?

I Googled it to see it for myself. Sure enough, it's a thing.

But that left me with more questions: Who was this guy? Just how did he build this thing?

And, of course: WHY?

After several years of pondering these questions, I'm happy to say that they'll finally be answered in this issue. Starting on Page 86, you'll get to learn all about Howard Solomon, the visionary artist behind the property until his death in 2016. You'll also hear the "how," which includes several additions over time, the clever use of spent

printing plates on the outside to give the castle its characteristic sheen and the key part the county's junk played in the construction of the castle's attractions as well as the art within.

As for the why? That's probably the simplest answer. Because the 40 acres Solomon bought was so prone to flooding, he had to build up instead of out. That fact, coupled with Solomon's creativity, led to the three-story, 65-foot-high structure that stands there today.

It's a testament to Solomon that his whimsical works still delight tourists today. There's nothing like a dose of the unusual to act as an antidote to the routines of everyday life.

Although the castle is one of the odder things in our area, our feature on Mark and Michele Schlossberg is about something far more normal: nail salons (Page 78). But what makes their salons unusual is that they don't use

products loaded with toxic chemicals.

Their idea resonated. Since they launched their first Paint Nail Bar nine years ago, the Schlossbergs have expanded, with 40 franchises across the country.

Our last feature samples another thing that's not like the others — a smattering of delicious dishes where vegetables are the star. No matter the reason, eating less meat has benefits.

But, we wondered, is it hard to dine out in Lakewood Ranch sans the meat? The answer, starting on Page 68, is not a bit. Whether it's an Impossible Burger at Libby's Neighborhood Brasserie or veggie risotto at Paris Bistrot, there is truly something for every taste.

So go ahead, try the weird, the new, the unusual. Dare to be different.

Kat Wingert  
Executive Editor



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Fatima Andere and Antonio Cangiano

Photo by Ben McKeown, courtesy of the American Dance Festival

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# BUZZ

NEWS, HAPPENINGS AND PEOPLE

Lakewood Ranch welcomes its  
newest community space for all.  
**PAGE 34**



Photo by Harry Sayer  
The new Lakewood Ranch  
Library features 45,000  
items, including books,  
audiobooks, musical  
instruments and DVDs.



# The People's University

Tiffany Mautino shares why libraries remain relevant — and why they are key in the fight for intellectual freedom.

LESLEY DWYER | CONTRIBUTOR

Pamella McDonald spent \$50 a month on comic books in the early 1990s when the cover prices were still around a buck a piece. She didn't keep them as collectibles, but it was money well spent.

"That was what I would read," her daughter Tiffany Mautino says. "I did a book report on a comic book in the fourth grade, and I got an F. My mother marched into the elementary school and protested. She was a very early advocate that comic books were a gateway drug into reading."

Mautino is an avid reader now. In fact, she has such an interest in books and reading that she was hired last year to serve as the branch manager for the new Lakewood Ranch Library.

Mautino grew up in Kansas City, Missouri. Her childhood dream was to become a comic book artist. As an adult, she found that her passions for both art and reading met at the library.

Mautino started out as a part-time employee creating display installations for the Mid-Continent Public Library System in Kansas City, and rose to the position of manager at the South Independence branch. She also became a nationwide speaker on the topic of intellectual freedom — a core value of librarianship. Mautino was a founding member of the Intellectual Freedom Committee within her own library system and served as chair for the Missouri Library Association's Intellectual Freedom Committee. In 2013, she started presenting an intel-

*Continued on Page 36*



Tiffany Mautino is the branch manager for the new Lakewood Ranch Library. She's also a nationwide speaker on the topic of intellectual freedom.

Photo by Harry Sayer



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Continued from Page 34

lectual freedom workshop for library frontline staff in Missouri. Over the past two years, she's presented the workshop at conferences nationwide.

"Tiffany is really good at training staff," Manatee County Library Services Manager Tammy Parrott says. "Intellectual freedom is making sure staff are prepared to be in that neutral place in the community and not put their own values on any of their work. Tiffany wouldn't recommend a book to me because she liked the book. She'd think about what I wanted in a book."

We spoke to Mautino recently about what she was reading, the relevancy of brick-and-mortar libraries and her wishes and challenges.

*What books are on your nightstand right now?*

"Sandman Slim" by Richard Kadrey — an urban fiction fantasy novel. I've got "Fourth Wing" on there, which is not normally my style, but it's the big, new book for young adults. I've also got the last "Outlander" book by Diana Gabaldon.

*What's the last great book you read?*

The last really, really great book I read was part of a nine-book series called "The Expanse" by James S. A. Corey. It's a space opera that follows the crew of the Rocinante, which is their spaceship. There are multiple narrators and viewpoints. The last book finished up, and it was an epic taking place across multiple universes. There were zombies in it at one point, and obviously, aliens and wormholes.

*How can we inspire kids to pick up a book?*

Don't pigeonhole them. They don't have to read "Huck Finn" or "The Chronicles of Narnia." Find out how they want to read. If it's comic books, great; if it's audiobooks that they can follow along with or if they're more interested in reading blogs, why not? We probably need to focus on expanding our idea of what literature is.

*Are brick-and-mortar libraries still relevant?*

Tammy calls us the "People's University." That's why we'll always be relevant. We're not charging people or re-



Photo by Harry Sayer

The 25,000-square-foot Lakewood Ranch Library recently celebrated its grand opening.



Photo by Lesley Dwyer

People gather at the grand opening of the new library on Jan. 12.

quiring anybody to purchase anything or even be a cardholder to enjoy the fact that we have a space that's inclusive for everyone. Libraries allow you to come in and explore for yourself without anyone saying you should be doing this or that, like in school. That's a very guided education. In libraries, it's freeform.

*What are your top wishes for this library?*

The community has been waiting for this library to open for years, so my first wish is that we exceed everybody's expectations for what a modern library in Manatee County can be. Beyond that, my wish is that we can foster a culture around customer service and community. I want to make sure that

we provide programming that represents everybody in our community.

*What challenges do you anticipate?*

We can make projections, but they're just projections, so the largest challenge is going at it a little bit blind and hoping we're hitting the marks close enough that we can make adjustments as we go along.

## IF YOU GO

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## FAST FACTS

■ The 25,000-square-foot Lakewood Ranch Library celebrated its grand opening on Jan. 12. Planning began in 2018 with a \$5.14 million budget, which grew to a final cost of \$17.6 million.

■ The shelves are currently stocked with about 45,000 items, including books, audiobooks, musical instruments and DVDs.

■ The space features separate areas for children and teens. The children's library includes an outdoor play space and a private nursing area for mothers.

■ For adults, there's a "makerspace" that includes 3D printers, sewing machines and podcasting equipment. The equipment will be expanded over time according to customer feedback.

■ The community spaces include a conference room, an indoor event space and a rooftop terrace.

■ The building has a second floor that's unfinished. Manatee County hasn't decided what the space will be used for yet, but study rooms are among the options, which are about the only thing missing from this modern library.



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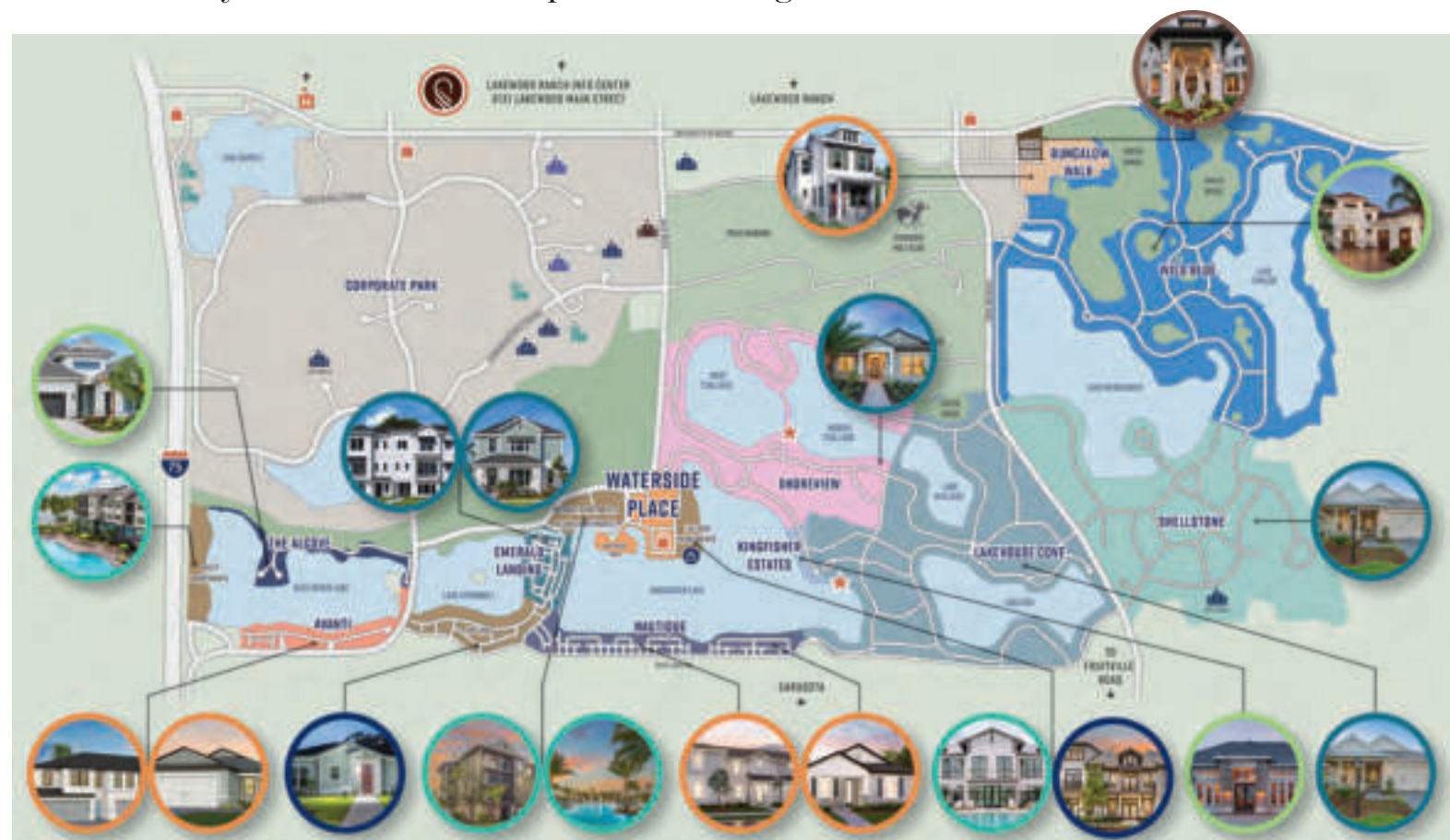
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# Waking up in Waterside

The community continues to take shape with new neighborhoods.



● Townhomes/cottages ● Family/move-up ● Custom/semi-custom ● Apartments ● Single-family rental ● Senior living

BY MONICA ROMAN GAGNIER  
CONTRIBUTOR

It's a big year for Lakewood Ranch. For one, the master-planned community is celebrating its 30th anniversary this year. What's more, The Ranch has maintained its No. 1 ranking among master-planned communities nationwide for the sixth consecutive year, according to independent real estate consulting firm RCLCO.

"Lakewood Ranch's stellar performance this past year is a testament to its dynamic market segmentation strategy, superior marketing, appealing lifestyle, great execution and the professionalism of the development team," said Gregg Logan, managing director at RCLCO, in a statement.

*Continued on Page 40*

## AVANTI AT WATERSIDE

**The basics:** 166 homesites offering the opportunity to own a high-quality, cost-effective home in Lakewood Ranch

**What's special:** Walking distance to Waterside Place and easy access to I-75 and University Avenue

**Where is it now?** 101 homes sold; 65 remaining, including 28 single-family homes and 37 townhomes.

**Contact:** Pulte.com

## EMERALD LANDING

**The basics:** 193 townhomes, rear-load cottages and front-load single-family homes ranging from 1,496 square feet for cottages to 3,249 square feet for lakeside residences

**What's special:** Pool, pickleball courts, fire pit, dog park, boat dock with water taxi to town center walking and jogging trails

**Where is it now?** Townhomes and single-family lakeside homes now selling. Cottage model is open for tours.

**Contact:** DavidWeekleyHomes.com

## SHELLSTONE AT WATERSIDE

**The basics:** Set on approximately 400 acres, the initial phase of Shellstone is under construction and will include 345 home sites on a mix of 52-foot and 65-foot widths.

**What's special:** Shellstone is located on an approximately 250-acre lake. Amenities include a sports park with tennis and pickleball courts, dog parks and a lawn. There is also a resort-style pool and a clubhouse with a fitness center.

**Where is it now?** Pre-sales began at the end of January.

**Contact:** HomesByTowne.com

## WILD BLUE AT WATERSIDE

**The basics:** A 550-acre waterfront community featuring single-family luxury homes and estate homes ranging in size from over 2,300 square feet to over 4,500 square feet

**What's special:** A verdant waterfront environment, quality design and construction, and abundant amenities, including a resort-style clubhouse, sports complex and lots of outdoor activities

**Where is it now?** After a successful first phase, Phase 2 was recently released with 71 additional homesites. The first on-site models will be open in February.

**Contact:** WildBlueLWR.com



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Continued from Page 38

And, despite higher interest rates, Lakewood Ranch achieved the second-highest sales year in its history in 2023, logging 2,257 sales — a 22% gain over 2022. What is noteworthy is that more than a third of the new homebuyers were already living in Lakewood Ranch or elsewhere in Manatee or Sarasota counties.

“Many of these sales were attributed to renters seeking permanent residency after experiencing limited choices during the pandemic,” says Laura Cole, senior vice president of Lakewood Ranch. “Other local sales came from buyers who experienced a life change, precipitating the desire or need for a new home in our community.”

In just 30 years, Lakewood Ranch has grown to more than 66,000 residents on approximately 33,000 acres. Residents are attracted to The Ranch for its nature parks and recreational programs, top-rated schools, an acclaimed medical center, lively retail and dining spots, a sports campus, the Sarasota Polo Club and three town

centers — Main Street, The Green and Waterside Place.

Some of the newest neighborhoods are being developed around Waterside Place, a 36-acre lakefront town center that features upscale retail and dining, a performing arts and music series, a bustling farmers market and an 8-acre park with nature trails.

In March, Lakewood Ranch newcomer Dream Finders Homes plans to break ground in Waterside on a project called Bungalow Walk. The development’s “lock and leave” single-family homes are targeted at young professionals and affluent empty nesters, says Joe Sabella, Tampa Division president.

With porches in front of the houses, Dream Finders wants to create a community where neighbors interact with each other and socialize in dog parks and landscaped open areas with benches.

Bungalow Walk is just one of the up-and-coming developments in Waterside. Others currently selling are Avanti by Pulte Homes, Emerald Landing by David Weekley Homes, Shellstone by Homes by Towne, Kingfisher

“

*In just 30 years, Lakewood Ranch has grown to more than 66,000 residents on approximately 33,000 acres.*

Estates by John Cannon Homes and Wild Blue, which features single-family homes by some of the area’s most acclaimed builders, including Anchor Builders, AR Homes, Lee Wetherington, John Cannon and Stock Luxury Homes. (See summary on page 38.)

With Emerald Landing, David Weekley Homes is stressing easy accessibility to retail, dining and entertainment at Waterside Place.

“Emerald Landing is convenient to Waterside Place whether residents choose to walk, bike or travel by the soon to come water taxi,” says Jennifer Cole, senior marketing director of David Weekley.



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Christopher and Emmy Treston and Janice and Michael Novello look forward to the new parish activity center and rectory.

Photos by Liz Ramos



Peter Grabowski has been a parishioner at Our Lady of the Angels since its inception.

# A Matter of Faith

Bucking nationwide church attendance trends, Our Lady of the Angels Catholic Church embarks on its second expansion in six years.

BY LIZ RAMOS | CONTRIBUTOR

Janice Novello remembers sitting at Living Lord Lutheran Church at 1 p.m. Feb. 7, 1999.

She didn't know many of the 50 or so people sitting around her during Our Lady of the Angels' first Mass.

The Catholic church didn't yet have a place to call home, so parishioners were leasing space from the Lutherans.

But it wasn't long before they outgrew that space. Novello remembers

spending an Easter Mass sitting on the floor of the vestibule because they ran out of seats in the church. They got to the point where they started putting chairs in the parking lot and kept the doors open to accommodate everyone.

Our Lady of the Angels went from being a church with a few hundred parishioners when it opened its first multipurpose church on White Eagle Boulevard in 2003, to a congregation of about 3,100 families that's now in need of a new parish activity center and rectory to expand its services.

The \$9.7 million project is expected to take 12 to 16 months. The church will build a new 12,580-square-foot, one-story building that will house 10 rooms of various sizes for its ministries and programs. A two-unit rectory also will be constructed on campus for the priests who currently live nearby in Rosedale Country Club.

It's an impressive project for any nonprofit organization, let alone a religious institution.

But then consider this: nationwide,

church membership among adults in the U.S. has fallen below 50%. According to a 2020 Gallup poll, 47% of Americans said they belonged to a church, synagogue or mosque.

So, at a time when church membership and attendance is falling, how does Our Lady of the Angels explain its seam-busting growth?

Peter Grabowski, a member of Our Lady, says part of it is a self-fulfilling prophecy. The more vibrant a church, the more people it attracts. He says people seeing the church full of energy draws more people because they "want to be part of something special."

Grabowski says the growing congregation is in stark contrast to the churches he sees in Connecticut, where he spends summers.

"In the Northeast, the churches are empty," he says. "To be at a church that's growing and vibrant and the pews are filled really makes it a much more spiritual place to be because there is a lot of

## BY THE NUMBERS

**1999**

Year Our Lady of the Angels was founded

**2003**

Our Lady of the Angels opens its first church

**2018**

Our Lady of the Angels opens new church

**\$9.7 million**

Cost of current expansion project

**500**

Children receiving religious education at the church

**10**

Rooms in the planned parish activity center

**12,580**

Square footage of planned parish activity center

**2,910**

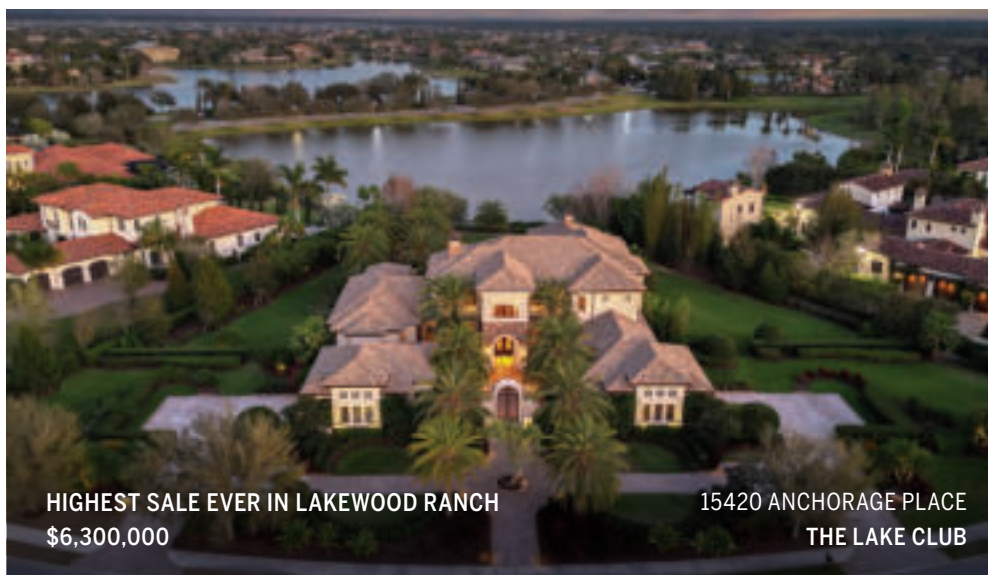
Square footage of planned rectory

*Continued on Page 44*



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19436 NEWLANE PLACE Represented Seller  
8353 LINDRICK LANE Represented Buyer  
17238 SALERNO DRIVE Represented Seller  
500 SOUTH PALM AVENUE #81 Represented Seller  
709 TREASURE BOAT WAY Represented Seller  
14770 COMO CIRCLE Represented Seller  
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16502 CORNWALL LANE Represented Buyer  
16206 CLEARLAKE AVENUE Represented Buyer  
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6626 THE MASTERS AVENUE Represented Buyer  
6353 ISLA DEL RAY AVENUE Represented Buyer  
3576 SANTA CATERINA Represented Buyer  
4588 HADFIELD DRIVE Represented Buyer  
7454 MONTE VERDE Represented Seller  
16333 HIDDEN OAK LOOP Represented Buyer  
3650 SANTA CATERINA Represented Buyer  
13319 SWALLOWTAIL DRIVE Represented Seller  
6481 INDIGO BUNTING PLACE Represented Seller  
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1117 UNDERWOOD DRIVE Represented Seller  
17731 HICKOK BELT LOOP Represented Buyer  
12508 THORNHILL COURT Represented Seller

9722 CARNOUSTIE PLACE Represented Buyer  
8701 MIDNIGHT PASS ROAD #204A Represented Seller  
17726 BARLEY DRIVE Represented Buyer  
5572 BILBAO PLACE Represented Seller  
4500 GULF OF MEXICO DRIVE #202 Represented Seller  
7340 RIVIERA COVE Represented Seller  
8735 MIDNIGHT PASS ROAD #406B Represented Seller  
14520 WHITEMOSS TERRACE Represented Seller  
1930 HARBOURSIDE DRIVE #136 Represented Buyer  
5047 SERATA DRIVE Represented Seller  
256 GREYING COURT Represented Buyer  
2758 BUTTERFLY JASMINE TRAIL Represented Buyer  
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12403 BLUE HILL TRAIL Represented Seller  
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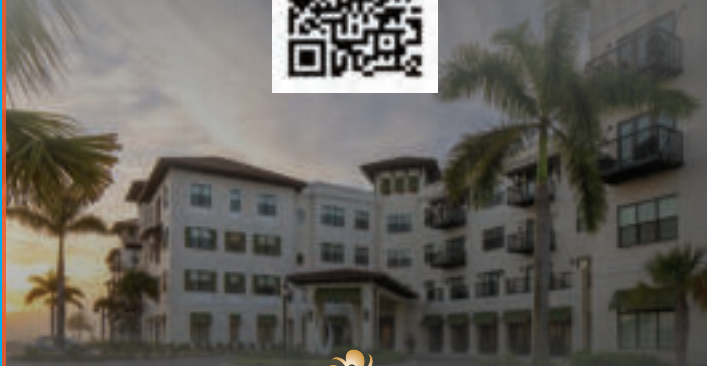


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*Continued from Page 42*

energy. There is a sense of pride in seeing that none of us knew exactly what we were going to build to now having a beautiful church that's filled all the time and we need more space."

Another thing that makes Our Lady of the Angels different? In an area where new mega-churches appeal to today's Christian congregants with more modern offerings, including ditching pews for comfy chairs and hymnals for live bands, the Catholic church offers a more traditional experience.

Novello says Our Lady of the Angels works to be timeless. The congregation keeps to the traditions of the Catholic church and the traditions Our Lady of the Angels has created, but it also isn't afraid of trying new things.

"We're not set in our ways," she said. "We start with our traditions, but then we try to expand so everybody has something they can find at the church."

She says the liturgy of the faith forms the foundation of the church, which provides continuity from one generation to the next.

And, as she points out: "It's lasted more than 2,000 years, so it must be doing something right."

Of course, one large reason for the church's growth can't be overstated: The area's growing population. Yet Our Lady of the Angels has kept pace by making sure it listens and responds to the community's unique needs.

Michael Novello, Janice Novello's husband, said as the church has grown, the number of ministers and Masses has increased. Our Lady of the Angels now has two priests, three visiting priests and four deacons. There are now seven Masses held each weekend.

The church also has more than 47 ministries. The parish center and meeting rooms are constantly in use. Some ministries have to meet off campus due to the lack of available space.

"The growth to me is a testament to how welcoming we are," Christopher Treston said. "When we started, we had very few young people or children. We've grown into a multigenerational parish. There's a ministry for just about anything you want ... If you have Christianity in your heart, fellowship in your heart, love in your heart, there's some place that's right for you to join and participate in the church."

## GROWTH STORY

Founded in 1999, Our Lady of the Angels had to wait until 2003 for its own church to be built off White Eagle Boulevard, on land just north of State Road 70 already owned by the Diocese of Venice.

At that time, the church consisted of an all-purpose building, which is now the church's parish center and offices. Janice Novello recalls a portable altar in the shape of a hexagon that was placed in the center of the room that everyone surrounded during Mass.

The congregation outgrew those facilities, and in 2018, Our Lady of the Angels celebrated the opening of a new church on the same land.

Now it's undergoing another expansion, which will begin with the removal of the three mobile buildings that serve as meeting space. It's a long way from where it started, with small barbecue gatherings and nametags that had everyone's name and where they're from.

The church has grown to provide faith formation for more than 500 children.

"Not only the current generation but the generations down the road are going to recognize that Our Lady of the Angels is a parish that not only their parents went to but they went to and their children are going to go to," member Bill Jarema said. "It's going to be an amazing legacy."



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# PULSE

THE HEART OF THE COMMUNITY

One veteran has made it his mission to heal parrots — and then use them to heal others. **PAGE 52**



Photo by Lori Sax  
Casey is a blue-  
and-gold macaw  
at Sarasota Par-  
rot Conservatory.

*class act*

# When Push Comes to Shove

As board president of the Lakewood Ranch Community Foundation, Mark Clark knows how to motivate, energize and keep connection with community strong.

BY JAY HEATER | CONTRIBUTOR

**T**he thump, thump, thump from above echoed through the Mark Clark household in Lakewood Ranch's Greenbrook community, and since no plumber was working in the upstairs bathroom, there was only one explanation.

The grandkids were having a wonderful time.

It should be noted that it was only a portion of the grandkids who were upstairs. A dozen in all, others were to the left, and to the right, and underfoot.

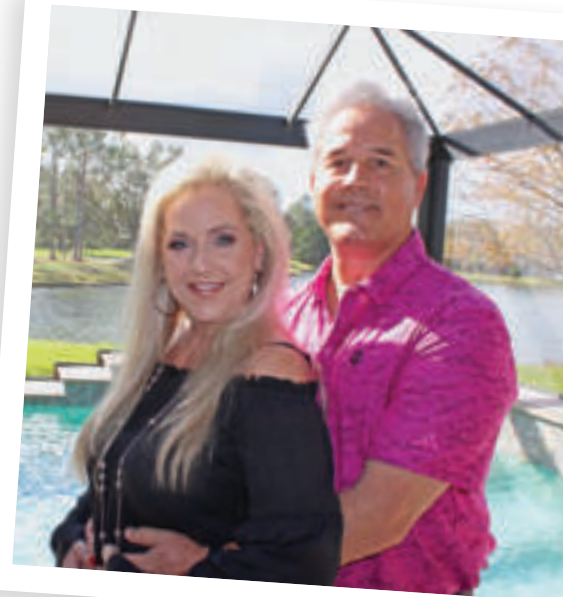
Clark would not have it any other way.

It was a madhouse in which nobody was actually mad. Mark and wife, Tonna, love their Sundays, when as often as possible, their three daughters and their son bring their families to see Pop and Gia (Tonna's personal grandma name). The ensuing "pure chaos" is like a Disney ride: the wilder, the better.

Mark Clark, quite content to be on the bottom of a dog pile or watching his grandkids do gymnastics in his living room, shows in an instant that the patriarch of this family could control the tornado when need be.

"Let's go! Now!" he barks.

*Continued on Page 50*



Photos by Jay Heater

**Top:** Mark Clark and his wife, Tonna, say faith and family are the keys to everything for them. **Middle:** Jeremy Keller and Mark Clark are managing partners of Prestige Planning in Lakewood Ranch. **Bottom:** Mark Clark enjoys Sunday afternoons at his Greenbrook home with his 12 grandchildren, even if it turns into a wrestling match at times.





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In an instant, daughters and sons-in-law and grandkids answer the call, knowing a family photo is going to be taken. The grandkids, ages a few weeks to 13 years, assemble in minutes.

It was a display of why Mark Clark, 59, has been a force as president of the board of directors for the Lakewood Ranch Community Foundation: solid values, passion, a sense of humor and leadership skills. Under his watch, the foundation has gone through some enormous changes, from a name change (Lakewood Ranch Community Fund to Lakewood Ranch Community Foundation), to breaking away from the Manatee Community Foundation to control its assets, to pushing forward on a strategy of organizing more events and having a greater presence in the community. The foundation has had a paid executive director in Adrienne Bookhamer for more than a year. She is the first paid employee the foundation has had since its inception in 2000. Northern Trust was chosen in 2023 to manage the foundation's funds.

With all that swirling around him, Clark isn't that much different running the foundation than he is hosting and directing a dozen grandkids. He is fun-loving and laid-back, but when it comes to reaching goals, he is willing to stand up at board meetings and say, "Let's go! Now!"

Just as his grandkids take notice, so do those associated with the foundation. The 14 other members of the board have differing talents and specialties, as well as differing opinions about the best ways to run an organization that distributes grants to the region's nonprofits. When push comes to shove, and after hearing everyone out, Clark is OK with making a decision and pointing out the direction, and the other members fall in line to do whatever it takes to fill community needs.

Clark, who joined the foundation in 2020, doesn't mind saying that the values he uses to keep his family together help drive his decisions as both a businessman (he and fellow managing partner Jeremy Keller run insurance and financial planning firm Prestige Planning in Lakewood Ranch) and as the foundation president.

"Our core values start with how im-

portant our faith is," he says. "Faith is the foundation at the end of the day, and when the chips are down, you pray about it."

His core values brought Clark to the foundation. He would have come sooner, but running a large family and establishing security can take a lot of energy, too.

"There is a season for everything," Clark says.

It's a new season for the Lakewood Ranch Community Foundation and Clark says the name change was a major step. Using "foundation" in the title means it's an organization that has a job of impacting the community when the need arises.

More than \$100,000 is expected to be granted in 2024, with those grants being awarded quarterly — another first. The thought is that the foundation will be better positioned to help in times of need.

Part of the foundation's growth has been the Builders Give Back program. Seven regional builders — Pulte Homes, Anchor Builders, Homes by Towne, John Cannon Homes, Lee Wetherington Homes, AR Homes, and Stock Luxury Homes — all have jumped aboard to provide a \$100 donation for each home sale. Schroeder-Manatee Ranch matches each of

those donations up to \$10,000 a year. The program began April 1, 2023.

Clark started his insurance career when he was 33 after 10 years working in corporate America.

All along the way, family has been his top priority.

"We just pour everything into the kids," he says. "Where did I get that from? It is just who Tonna is. If you don't have a family, what do you have?"

Tonna was asked why all their kids chose to live together in East County.

"This is friggin' paradise," she says. "But it is a chance to do life together. We go to Disney together. We go on vacation together. Maybe we are the glue. When the sisters have fights, arguments, normal disagreements, they call me. I tell them, 'You need to fix it.'"

Mark Clark says that love and devotion is returned.

"I go to put up Christmas lights and out will come two of my sons-in-law. It is a special kind of thing. We're all in. If you need help, it comes in truckloads."

When it comes to the Lakewood Ranch Community Foundation, Clark hopes that help comes in truckloads as well.

"The foundation is kind of like a family. You take care of your family like you care about no one else."



The entire Clark family lives within a few miles of each other, which makes it convenient to take family photos.

## AT A GLANCE

### Who:

Mark Clark, president of the board of the Lakewood Ranch Community Foundation

### Lives:

Greenbrook

**Wife:** Tonna (married in 1986)

**Kids:** Amber Maltby, Morgan Parlseau, Emily Drake, Logan Clark

### Born:

Canton, Ohio

### Did you know?

Mark Clark's grandfather, Ray Keim, painted the interior of the Pro Football Hall of Fame in Canton.





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## charity snapshot

# A Bird on the Shoulder

Greg Para's special relationship with parrots helped him through a harrowing period in his life — and inspired him to form the Sarasota Parrot Conservatory.

BY ERIC SNIDER | CONTRIBUTOR

**H**ow does an Afghanistan war veteran go from considering suicide to running an emerging nonprofit from his home in Myakka Springs?

Short answer: Parrots.

Most of us are familiar with support dogs and equine therapy that help people cope with chronic illness, PTSD, depression and other mental and physical health challenges. Goats and pigs, too. Less so, parrots. Kind of makes sense, though, does it not? Parrots are beautiful. They're funny. And they can talk.

Greg Para's intimate relationships with the colorful birds helped him through a harrowing period in his life — just after he returned from a war zone in Afghanistan. The healing he experienced while playing, nuzzling and chatting with parrots inspired him to form his own nonprofit, the Sarasota Parrot Conservatory. Its mission is essentially two-pronged: to take in unwanted or rescued birds and provide them a home for life — he does not offer an adoption service — and to create mutually nurturing relationships between the parrots and emotionally scarred combat veterans, as well as other people suffering from PTSD. "I want to have birds here that are residents forever," says the affable



Photo by Lori Sax

Greg Para with Forest, a green-winged macaw.

61-year-old with a pillowy white beard that's creeping down to the middle of his chest. "That way, the therapy can continue to develop as the birds create relationships with the people."

Para, who lives with his partner, Lori Ludwig, has outfitted about half of his 5-acre property with enclosed aviaries and pens. The compound houses 78 parrots (as of mid-December), three dogs, a cat, three pigs, a horse, a donkey, two African sulcata tortoises, and Wallace, a playful warthog.

Para runs the operation with help from volunteers. He does not charge for his services. His current budget is around \$65,000, which pays for the care and feeding of the animals. He doesn't take a salary, instead covering his own expenses with veterans benefits from his 100% disability that encompasses both physical and mental issues. Para plans to increase his fundraising in the coming year so he can add on to the facility.

Parrots have the intellect and cognitive skills of a 5-year-old child, Para says, and they're capable of rudimentary verbal communication. Some are highly empathetic. His combat-veteran clients are drawn to the facility's avian therapy in part because it does not involve clinicians or medications. Those entering the program meander through the aviary and, in time, organically pair up with a parrot, developing a kinship that gives them a break from the torment swirling around in their heads.

"They're very affectionate," Para says of his birds. "They'll kiss, they'll climb on you, nestle in your neck, talk to you, joke with you, pester you." As time goes on, "the vets will step into a place where they're actually telling the bird what happened [in the war zone]. They're telling the birds things that they could never tell a soul."

When Para reactivated his status in

*Continued on Page 54*





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*Continued from Page 52*

the Navy reserves in his mid-40s to fulfill a goal of earning an officer's commission, he did not expect to be deployed to the Middle East. "No, that wasn't the plan," he says with a rueful chuckle. Nevertheless, in 2011 he found himself a lieutenant junior in the Navy Cargo Handling Battalion 13 that supported the army operations in the Hindu Kush mountains of Afghanistan. While not directly involved in combat, he experienced his share of incoming fire and roadside bomb explosions. During Skype calls home with family, he'd chat with his parrot, Bella, which lifted his spirits a bit.

After a one-year tour, Para came home a wreck, anxious and hypervigilant in public places. He couldn't drive. "I wanted to be dead," he says. He was 49, with a wife and four kids, living in a residential neighborhood in Sarasota. He tried talk therapy and medicines but found the most solace at two local nonprofits specializing in avian rescue: Birds of Paradise Sanctuary and Save Our Seabirds. He volunteered at both. While at Save Our Seabirds, Para encountered a blue-and-gold macaw named Chico. Having been abandoned in a St. Petersburg apartment with no food and water for 10 days before being rescued, she had plucked out all the feathers on her chest. He adopted the bird in 2013, the same year he founded the Sarasota Parrot Conservatory.

That was also the year Para took over a program in the 12th Judicial Circuit Court called Courts Assisting Veterans, where he advocated for at-risk vets who had gotten themselves in trouble with the law. Para toiled long hours and was on call 24/7. "Most people don't have a crisis unless it's after hours or on the weekends," he says.

In 2019, Para relocated to his current Myakka City location, less than 20 minutes from Main Street in Lakewood Ranch. After 10 years running Courts Assisting Veterans, he retired in 2023 and turned his full attention to the Sarasota Parrot Conservatory. This year, he plans to raise enough money to hire a full-time caretaker for the animals.

These days, Para — surrounded by his menagerie of creatures, including Chico — is feeling pretty good. "I'm not hypervigilant anymore on the property," he says. "I can relax and feel at home, but I still don't have much desire to go too many places."



Photos by Lori Sax  
Greg Para with Sonny,  
a sulfur-crested cockatoo.



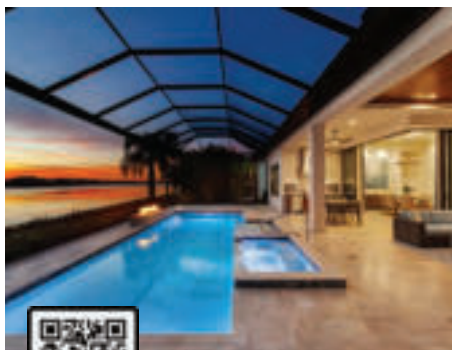
Sarasota Parrot Conservatory  
also houses two African sulcata  
tortoises.

*The  
compound  
houses  
78 parrots,  
three dogs,  
a cat,  
three pigs,  
a horse,  
a donkey,  
two African  
sulcata  
tortoises,  
and Wallace,  
a playful  
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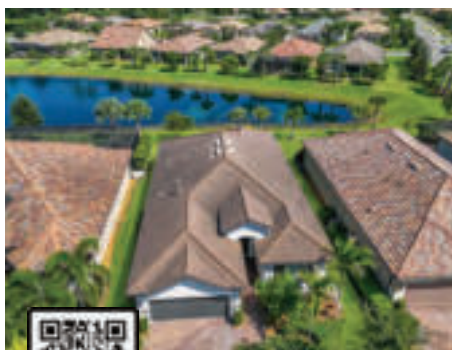
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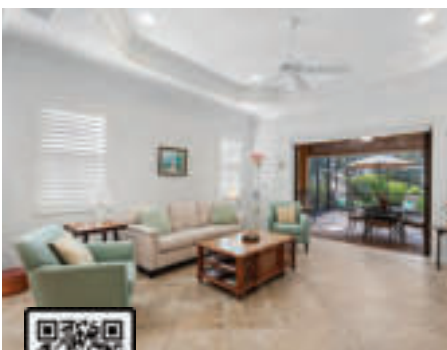
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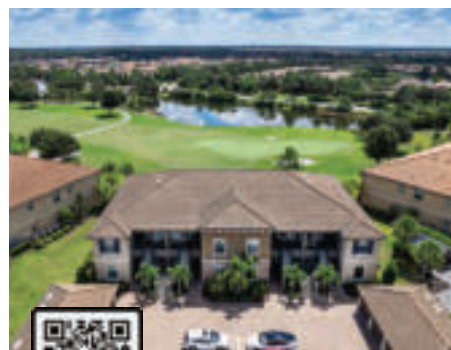
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# calendar spring 2024

## MARCH

### THROUGH MARCH 10 CIRCUS SARASOTA

Circus Arts Conservatory presents its Circus Sarasota 2024 show. See award-winning international artists perform under an iconic red and white Big Top at Nathan Benderson Park, 5851 Nathan Benderson Circle, Sarasota. Tickets are \$30-\$80; parking is \$10. ■ Visit [CircusArts.org](https://CircusArts.org).

### MARCH 1 MUSIC ON MAIN

This monthly event returns on Lakewood Ranch's Main Street from 6-9 p.m., celebrating Agricultural History Month. Enjoy a free concert by Eireann's Call, food vendors, beer trucks and kids activities. Proceeds will benefit Manatee Children's Services. ■ Visit [LakewoodRanch.com](https://LakewoodRanch.com).

### MARCH 2 MAIN STREET MARKET

From 10 a.m. to 2 p.m. on Lakewood Ranch Main Street, more than 70 small and local businesses will be out with gifts, candles, baked goods, hand-crafted jewelry and more at the boutique market, hosted by Main Street Market LWR. ■ Visit [MainStreetMarketLWR.com](https://MainStreetMarketLWR.com).

### SUNCOAST WALKATHON

Enjoy a day out with your pooch at Nathan Benderson Park, 5851 Nathan Benderson Circle, Sarasota, for Southeastern Guide Dogs' biggest fundraiser of the year. Two- and four-legged friends and neighbors are invited to participate and raise funds for a 3K walk, which begins at 10 a.m. The event includes live music, food, vendors, live music and a raffle, with the drawing at 11:30 a.m. ■ Visit [GuideDogsWalkathon.org](https://GuideDogsWalkathon.org).

### MARCH 3 YOGA IN THE PARK

Join a gentle yoga session from 9-10 a.m. at Waterside Park, 7301 Island Cove Terrace, Sarasota. Continues every Sunday. ■ Visit [LakewoodRanch.com](https://LakewoodRanch.com).



Photo by Ian Swaby

### FARMERS MARKET

Far from the typical farmers market, The Farmers' Market at Lakewood Ranch is a curated gathering of the best flavors in the region, cooking demonstrations and more. Visitors can purchase produce, meat, poultry, seafood, breads, pasta and other prepared foods from more than 60 vendors from 10 a.m. to 2 p.m. at Waterside Place, 1561 Lakefront Drive, Sarasota. Event runs every Sunday. ■ Visit [TheMarketLWR.com](https://TheMarketLWR.com).

### SARASOTA POLO

Come out to enjoy an afternoon of tailgating and polo. Gates open at 10 a.m., and matches start at 1 p.m. at the Sarasota Polo Club, 8201 Polo Club Lane, Lakewood Ranch. General admission costs \$15 for adults, and children 12 and under are free. Polo matches will be held every Sunday through April 7. ■ Visit [SarasotaPolo.com](https://SarasotaPolo.com).

### MARCH 6 RANCH NITE WEDNESDAYS

This mid-week community Ranch Nite

event features food trucks, corn-hole, live music and a mobile bar by Cornerstone and Co. The event is 6-9 p.m. at Waterside Place, 1561 Lakefront Drive, Lakewood Ranch, every Wednesday through May 29. ■ Visit [LakewoodRanch.com](https://LakewoodRanch.com).

### CLASSIC CAR SHOW

Come to Lakewood Ranch Main Street from 5-8 p.m. for a car show celebrating the "classics." All are welcome to participate for just \$10 per vehicle, and there are no restrictions on year, make or model. Continues April 3 and May 1. ■ Visit [CollectorCarsTV.com](https://CollectorCarsTV.com).

### MARCH 8 MOVIE IN THE PARK

The family-friendly free movie night runs the second Friday of each month at Waterside Park, 7301 Island Cove Terrace, Lakewood Ranch. The event begins at 6 p.m. and the movie will begin approximately at sunset and is sponsored by Grace Community

The Sarasota Polo Club mascot for 2022, Mason Chukker, gets a belly rub from Alex Jeanroy, the Lakewood Ranch co-area coordinator for Southeastern Guide Dogs at the 2022 Suncoast Walkathon.

*Continued on Page 58*



# BECAUSE COMMON IS A CONCEPT UNKNOWN TO LUXURY



By Mark Dalton



Continued from Page 60

Church, which will provide a free popsicle from Siesta Pops to the first 300 attendees. Seating is available on a first-come, first-served basis. Bring a blanket or lawn chairs. Concessions will be available from We B'Poppin Popcorn and Kettle Corn. Face painting and inflatables will be available for the kids. Continues April 12 and May 10. ■ Visit [LakewoodRanch.com](http://LakewoodRanch.com).

### MARCH 9 IRISH CELTIC FESTIVAL

For those of Irish Celtic descent or those who just want to be Irish for the day, this event features the luck of the Irish with traditional food, craft beers, hard ciders, live music and dance performances from 11:30 a.m. to 4 p.m. at Greenbrook Adventure Park, 13010 Adventure Place, Bradenton. ■ Visit [MyLWR.com](http://MyLWR.com).

**MARCH 9-10  
FESTIVAL OF THE ARTS**  
Runs from 10 a.m. to 5 p.m. March 9 and 10 at Main Street at Lakewood Ranch. Shop an outdoor gallery of handmade fine arts and crafts including paintings, glasswork, woodwork-ing and more. Admission is free. ■ Visit [ParagonFestivals.com](http://ParagonFestivals.com).

**MARCH 14  
SUNSET POLO HAPPY HOUR**  
Come out to enjoy an evening of tailgating and polo at Sarasota Polo Club, 8201 Polo Club Lane, Lakewood Ranch. Gates open at 4:30 p.m., and the match begins at 5:30 p.m. General admission costs \$15 for adults, and children 12 and under are free. Runs Thursdays through April 11. ■ Visit [SarasotaPolo.com](http://SarasotaPolo.com).

**HERMITAGE SUNSETS  
@ NATHAN BENDERSON PARK**  
Hermitage Artist Retreat gives audiences a sneak peek at works, such as plays and operas, that often eventually appear on renowned stages with its Hermitage Sunsets program. The final event of the program's debut season begins at 6:30 p.m. at Nathan Benderson Park Circle, Sarasota. Folding chairs are provided, but guests are welcome to bring their own chairs and blankets. Registration is \$5 and required. ■ Visit [HermitageArtistRetreat.org](http://HermitageArtistRetreat.org).

**MARCH 23  
WALK MS**  
Advocate for additional MS research with National Multiple Sclerosis Society's fundraising walk. The program starts at 8:15 a.m., and the walk kicks off at 8:30 a.m. from the Nathan Benderson Park pavilion, 700 N. Cattlemen Road, Sarasota. A 1-mile route and a 3-mile route are available. Participants who raise at least \$100 will receive a T-shirt. ■ Visit [NathanBendersonPark.org](http://NathanBendersonPark.org).

**PURIM MASQUERADE PARTY**  
Celebrate Purim with Chabad of Bradenton & Lakewood Ranch at a masquerade party starting at 8:45 p.m. at the Chabad House, 5712 Lorraine Road, Lakewood Ranch. Enjoy Megillah readings, drinks, music and a masquerade. Admission is free. ■ Visit [ChabadOfBradenton.com](http://ChabadOfBradenton.com).

**SPRING ART SHOW AND SALE**  
Creative Arts Association of Lakewood Ranch presents its annual Spring Art Show and Sale from 9 a.m. to 4 p.m. at Lakewood Ranch Town Hall, 8175 Lakewood Ranch Blvd., Lakewood Ranch. Browse art from a variety of mediums including acrylics, jewelry, ceramic and mixed media. Admission and parking are free. ■ Visit [CAALR.com](http://CAALR.com).

**EGGSTRAVAGANZA**  
Bring your baskets and kids to Lakewood Ranch's longest-running egg hunt 9:30-11:30 a.m. at Waterside Park, 7301 Island Cove Terrace, Lakewood Ranch. More than 25,000 eggs will be spread across the field and separated by age to maximize the excitement. Participant tickets are \$10 for residents and \$20 for nonresidents; parents free. ■ Visit [MyLWR.com](http://MyLWR.com).

**MARCH 26  
NEWCOMERS MEETUP**  
From 10-11 a.m., learn about the Lakewood Ranch community, its parks and its events with other new residents. Free for residents; \$10 for nonresidents. Continues April 23 and May 28. Location varies by date. ■ Visit [LakewoodRanch.com](http://LakewoodRanch.com).

**MARCH 30  
MY HOMETOWN FEST**  
This regional food and craft beer



File photo

sampling event at Nathan Benderson Park, 5851 Nathan Benderson Circle, Sarasota, features food, beer, children's activities, vendor booths, exhibits and live music. Gates are open from noon to 5 p.m. Ticket information to come. Proceeds benefit Sertoma Club of Greater Sarasota and Sertoma Kids. ■ Visit [MyHometownFest.com](http://MyHometownFest.com).

## APRIL

**APRIL 2-7  
ROWING OLYMPIC TRIALS**  
USRowing holds U.S. Olympic and Paralympic rowing team trials for the women's single sculls, women's pair and men's pair events at Nathan Benderson Park, 5851 Nathan Benderson Circle, Sarasota. The winners of each event will be nominated to the 2024 U.S. Olympic Team. ■ Visit [NathanBendersonPark.org](http://NathanBendersonPark.org).

**APRIL 5  
MUSIC ON MAIN**  
This monthly event returns on Lakewood Ranch's Main Street from 6-9 p.m. with a "Flashback to the '90s" theme. Enjoy a free concert by Mojo Filter, food vendors, beer trucks and kids activities. Proceeds will benefit Suncoast Charities for Children. ■ Visit [LakewoodRanch.com](http://LakewoodRanch.com).

**APRIL 6  
YOUTH FISHING SEMINAR**  
Children can learn the basics of fishing with the help of the Lakewood

Alice McCarthy, Emma McKeon and Campbell McCarthy find their spot to start the egg hunt at 2023's Eggstravaganza.



Photo by Ian Swaby

Manatee Technical College student Paula Cardenas creates watermelon and feta offerings at My Hometown Fest on March 25, 2023.

Continued on Page 60





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Continued from Page 58

Ranch Angler's Club in preparation for the Youth Fishing Tournament. The seminar will be held at Summerfield Park, 6402 Lakewood Ranch Blvd., Lakewood Ranch. Sessions are at 10 a.m. or 1 p.m.

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

#### APRIL 13 YOUTH FISHING TOURNAMENT

Cast those lines, and reel in the fish! Youth ages 5-18 can test their fishing skills and compete for prizes during Lakewood Ranch's annual Youth Fishing Tournament, from 9 a.m. to noon at Lake Uihlein, 8175 Lakewood Ranch Blvd. Bring your rod, reel, chair and sunscreen. Bait will be supplied, but participants can bring their own. Fee is \$5 for residents and \$15 for nonresidents.

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

#### APRIL 18-21 LECOM SUNCOAST CLASSIC

Begins at 8 a.m. each day at Lakewood National Golf Club, 17605 Lake-

wood National Parkway, Lakewood Ranch. The Korn Ferry Tour's LECOM Suncoast Classic offers golf fans an opportunity to see future PGA Tour stars. Enjoy Lakewood National Golf Club's views and watch some of the world's best golfers compete for a \$1 million purse. Activities, food trucks and vendors will be on site throughout the weekend. Single-day tickets are \$20; children 17 and younger, military, first responders and teachers free.

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

## MAY

#### MAY 3 MUSIC ON MAIN

This monthly event returns on Lakewood Ranch's Main Street from 6-9 p.m. with a theme of "Appreciating Nature." Enjoy a free concert by Brigade, food vendors, beer trucks and kids activities. Proceeds will benefit Camelot Community Care.

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

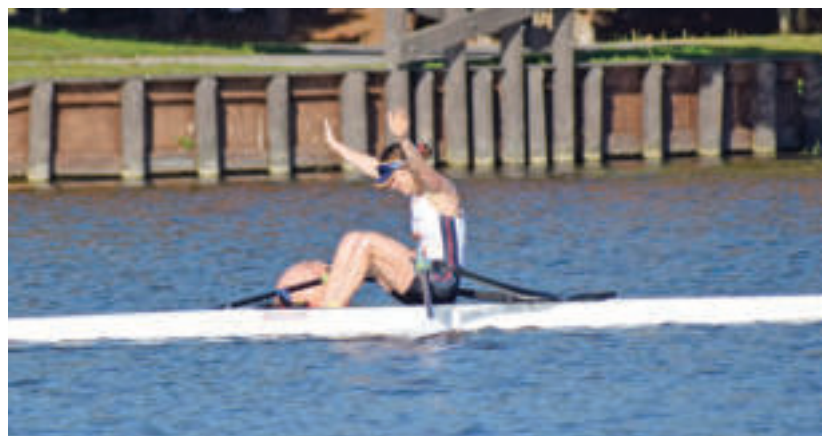


Photo by Jay Heater

#### MAY 4 SUP & RUN 5K

Dine and drink rum in a libation lounge after this SUP and Run 5K event benefiting veterans group Operation Second Chance and RUCK9. Admission is \$45-\$50. Paddleboards are available for a \$55 rental fee. The handcycle and wheelchair division has free admission. All races start at 8 a.m. at Nathan Benderson Park, 5851 Nathan Benderson Circle, Sarasota.

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

Kara Kohler celebrates at Nathan Benderson Park after she wins the U.S. Olympic Trials' women's single sculls competition on Feb. 26, 2021.



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# Sparkle, Sparkle

Lakewood Ranch shops offer an assortment of unique, fun, and fabulous jewelry pieces for every style and budget — some of it found in surprising places.

BY KELLY FORES | CONTRIBUTOR

Skylar Paige "Believe" morse code bracelet: \$25



## Gifts and More at The Paper Store

125 North Cattlemen Road, Unit 101, Sarasota  
941-355-4718, [ThePaperStore.com](http://ThePaperStore.com)

Share a special message with your loved ones through jewelry. Skylar Paige's morse code bracelets spell out "believe," "celebrate," "shine," and more in sparkling glass beads. The Metal Alchemist line puts it out there in plain English with these "love" rings (and cuff bracelets, too), and they offer more subtle bangle bracelets with messages like "go forward bravely."

Metal Alchemist "Love" trialchemy ring: \$138-\$178



Belle Étoile cuff bracelet: \$550

Gold and diamond Breuning necklace: \$4,400



## Vanessa Fine Jewelry

8131 Lakewood Main St.,  
Suite 104, Lakewood Ranch  
941-373-6311,  
[VanessaFineJewelry.com](http://VanessaFineJewelry.com)

Owners Don and Vanessa Baugh have been in the Sarasota/Manatee area since 1999, offering both exquisite jewelry and customer service. The Belle Étoile line features enamel in bright, bold patterns accented with shining stones. The 14-karat gold and diamond necklace by European jewelry manufacturer Breuning is absolutely stunning.





Flower earrings:  
\$3.99

Vintage bee pin:  
\$12.99

Turquoise and sterling  
silver necklace: \$34.99

Vintage gold-tone  
choker: \$6.99

### Goodwill Manasota Ranch Lake

8750 E. State Road 70,  
Bradenton, 941-405-1850,  
[ExperienceGoodwill.org](http://ExperienceGoodwill.org)

Discover all kinds of interesting jewelry in the Treasure Island section of Goodwill. Scan the display and you're bound to see something that catches your eye. Recently spotted: a turquoise and sterling silver necklace, two-tone flower-shaped earrings, a vintage bee pin, and a vintage gold-tone choker. You never know what treasure you'll uncover.

### Monkees of Lakewood Ranch

1561 Lakefront Drive, Suite 104,  
Sarasota, 941-358-8868

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

Lakewood Ranch resident Emily Hovermale has built a vibrant, welcoming shop that recently celebrated its one-year anniversary. Here you'll find everything you need to accessorize like a pro. If you're into vivid, colorful jewelry, check out the Holst + Lee line – a fusion of art, texture, and fresh design.



Holst + Lee Matisse earrings: \$56



Holst + Lee colorblock bracelet:  
\$110

*Continued on Page 64*

## Wish Boutique

257 N. Cattlemen Road, Sarasota, 941-907-9125

[Wish-On-Main-Inc.Business.Site](http://Wish-On-Main-Inc.Business.Site)

Wish Boutique is an adorable shop that successfully showcases home accessories, gift items, clothing and jewelry in its smaller footprint without crowding the space. It carries a variety of jewelry lines, including Iskin Sisters, which features leather in their bold pieces; and Chanour, which is handmade and great for layering.

Iskin Sisters earrings: \$58



Chanour necklaces: \$56 each



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My name is John Maben and I am the owner of **Pegasus Coin & Jewelry**. I've been in the business of buying and selling precious metals along with rare coins and unwanted gold jewelry full time since 1978. I was the owner of an internet based coin and precious metals company that had 42 employees with over 100 million in sales annually until I sold that business in 2015. I was also a grader at PCGS and a grading Finalizer and Vice President at Numismatic Guaranty Corporation (NGC). As a member of the prestigious **Professional Numismatists Guild (PNG)** since 1985, I sat on the board of that organization for two years and was instrumental in creating the PNG sub-organization - **Accredited Precious Metals Dealers (APMD)** of which I am a founding member. Enough about me, but if you want to learn more Google me and look at our Google Reviews.

During times of uncertainty, inflation, and questions surrounding the ability of the U.S. Dollar to retain its place as the world currency of choice, more and more people are turning to **Gold, Silver, and Platinum** to better balance their portfolio. The biggest questions are, "Where do I go?" and "Who do I trust"? Unfortunately, many immediately turn to the companies they hear advertising on the radio and cable networks assuming they are legitimate and reputable because they are on air and often have paid celebrities - even the show hosts themselves - attesting to their practices. **BE CAREFUL!!!** Also, **NEVER** put precious metals into an IRA until you know the reasons why you should not do so!

I have been around a long time and I know just about everyone, but I **don't know** 95% of the countless companies advertising heavily on air. It is well known among insiders that the vast majority claiming to be #1, trust verified, the largest, are none of the above. They are marketing companies with dozens of scripted salesmen who sit in a room filled with cubicles. They may or may not be commissioned but they all have high pressure sales goals and we've had clients tell us they will

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say almost anything to potential clients, *especially what they want to hear* in order to gain trust. Most have almost no hands on or earned knowledge, in fact you could be speaking with someone that was working in a convenience store or selling cars the week before. These companies will typically do a fair deal on the first transaction and then relentlessly hound the customer to make more purchases that are far higher yielding in profits. We've seen instances of pricing that by industry norms were 40% to 100% too high in a business



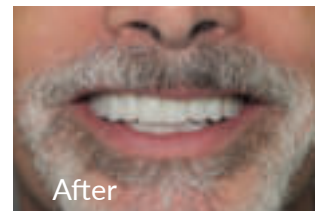
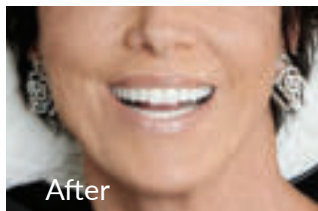
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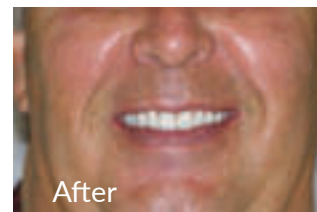
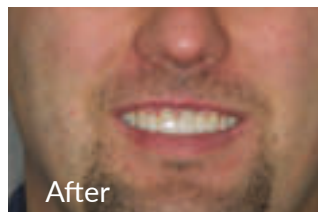
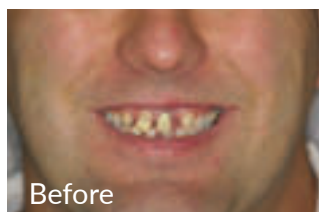
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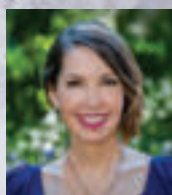
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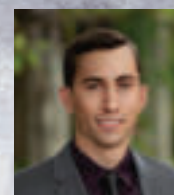
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# EAT YOUR VEGETABLES!

**Meatless masterpieces are on the menu in Lakewood Ranch.**

BY SU BYRON | CONTRIBUTOR

**S**o, you want to save the planet? Eat your vegetables! We all know the reasons why. Plant-based diets require less land, water and energy compared to their meaty counterparts. And their production and distribution result in fewer greenhouse gasses, decreased deforestation, and more biodiversity. But eating green is also good for you. A diet rich in fruits, vegetables and whole grains reduces your intake of saturated fats and lowers the risk of heart disease, diabetes and other chronic conditions. Oh, and there's another fabulous reason to keep meat at a minimum: Vegan and vegetarian dishes are simply delicious. These restaurants in the Lakewood Ranch region boast a tasty selection of meatless masterpieces.

*Continued on Page 70*





Photo by Lori Sax  
Grove's avocado tacos are  
stuffed with black beans, corn  
and cotija cheese and topped  
with fresh pico de gallo salsa.





# Grove

Grove is a magnet for savvy diners attracted by its contemporary ambiance, lively happy hour and inventive global fusion cuisine. Not a meat eater? Not a problem. You won't go hungry here. Terry Daniels, Grove's chef and general manager, suggests four vegetarian-friendly dishes for your dining adventure. Start with the **watermelon poké** — a creative twist on the classic ahi tuna tower. With pickled watermelon, creamy avocado, sushi rice, vegan yogurt, and a drizzle of balsamic vinegar, this perky (and vegan) *amuse-bouche* prepared our palate for Daniels' delicious, protein-packed **bean burgers**. They're made in-house (bun included) and embellished with provolone and basil mayo. **Avocado tacos** were up next — stuffed with black beans, corn and cotija cheese and topped with fresh pico de gallo salsa. To accompany the burgers and the tacos, we ordered the **Thai cauliflower** appetizer — crisp, tempura-coated cauliflower bathed in a luscious peanut sauce and generously sprinkled with crunchy peanuts and sassy scallions. How filling was all that? Put it this way: We had to pass on the peanut butter pie — our fave Grove dessert.

**If You Go:** 10670 Boardwalk Loop, Lakewood Ranch; 941-893-4321; [GroveLWR.com](http://GroveLWR.com).



Photos by Lori Sax

The bean burgers at Grove are protein-packed and delicious.



Grove's Thai cauliflower appetizer is bathed in a luscious peanut sauce and generously sprinkled with peanuts and scallions.



Juan Sarmiento and Terry Daniels show off some of Grove's hearty vegetarian offerings.

# Apollonia Grill

Apollonia Grill is truly a family affair. Both locations (University Town Center and Sarasota Landings) are deftly managed by Eddie Yzeiri, his wife, parents and brother. You can taste their devotion to Mediterranean cuisine in their many meat-free options. "Our dinner table at home is always filled with vegetables," says Yzeiri. "It's a major part of our diet — as it is for most people in the Mediterranean region." We're talking abundant vegetarian choices here. It was hard to choose, but we narrowed it down to three tasty selections. We started with the carefully crafted **zucchini croquettes**. According to Yzeiri, the process begins by grating and draining zucchini, blending it with fresh herbs and manouri cheese, shaping it into "meatballs," coating with panko breadcrumbs, and frying to golden perfection. Served with dill yogurt infused with lemon and garlic, these croquettes are a robust meal all in themselves. We also feasted on **eggplant rollatini**, created with roasted, thinly sliced eggplant that's stuffed with a blend of feta and spinach, baked to perfection, topped with marinara sauce and finished with a sprinkle of feta and mozzarella cheese. Finally, we shared a dish of **spanakopita** — crispy on the outside, tender within, and bursting with the richness of cheese and earthy spinach. Apollonia's menu also features a plethora of sides, including sautéed spinach, roasted veggies and grilled asparagus. Even a die-hard vegetarian can have a hearty meal here.

**If You Go:** 8235 Cooper Creek Blvd., University Park; 941-359-4816; [ApolloniaGrill.com](http://ApolloniaGrill.com).



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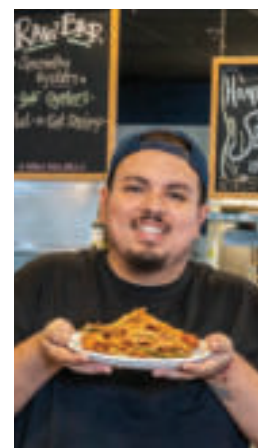
Courtesy photo

The Rocket salad at Lucky Pelican is adorned with mango slices.

## Lucky Pelican Bistro

Let's deal with the pelican in the room: Folks flock to Lucky Pelican for its fresh seafood and not specifically for its vegetarian offerings. Luckily, vegans and vegetarians don't dine here in vain. While your tablemates feast on oysters, lobster rolls and sake-glazed sea bass, you can fill your gullet, too. With what? Manager Petra Demko helped us choose a wickedly fulfilling meal, starting with the crispy, super-delicious **veggie pancakes**. They're made with zucchini and other veggies and lightly fried. (Like to slather sour cream on your potato latkes? Try it on these.) We also added **tempura veggies** and **garlic spinach** to our feast, along with the **Rocket salad**, which is dressed up with mango slices. Depending on when you're there, lucky vegetarians might also find collard greens spiced with Creole seasoning; sweet cream corn cooked with dark rum; and fried Brussels sprouts with pecans and cranberries. Lucky? You bet!

**If You Go:** 6239 Lake Osprey Drive,  
Sarasota; 941-907-0589;  
LuckyPelicanBistro.com.



Lucky Pelican's Ceasar Sanchez welcomes vegetarians to try dishes other than the seafood favorites, like tempura veggies



Fill up on the crispy, super-delicious veggie pancakes at Lucky Pelican.





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# Paris Bistrot

You have a rendezvous with friends at one of the best French restaurants in town —Paris Bistrot. The menu tempts with iconic French dishes, including beef Bourguignon, bouillabaisse, and canard à l'orange. Pop open a bottle of Laurent Perrier Cuvée Brut and relax. Plenty of tantalizing vegetarian options await you, too. Chef and co-proprietor Jean Christophe Nebra suggests three, starting with **buckwheat crêpes**. Chef Nebra fills these savory (and vegan) crêpes with a colorful medley of ratatouille (eggplant, zucchini, tomato and onion), mushrooms, spinach and house-made tomato sauce. The crêpe's tender envelope lets these robust flavors shine through without overwhelming the palate. **Veggie risotto** is Nebra's next taste treat — a soul-satisfying mix of creamy rice with Parmesan cheese, topped with ratatouille, mushroom, spinach and bell pepper. (Note to vegans: Nebra is happy to prepare this sans the cream and Parmesan cheese.) A grand cru Saint-Emilion pairs perfectly with your third classic — **veggie quiche**. This rich pastiche of colorful vegetables and mozzarella is savory and satisfying. If you still have room for sweets, don't miss Chef Nebra's astonishing selection of dessert crêpes.

**If You Go:** 8131 Lakewood Main St., Suite 103, Lakewood Ranch; 941-388-0564; [ParisBistrotLWR.com](http://ParisBistrotLWR.com).



The risotto at Paris Bistrot is a soul-satisfying dish.



Chef Nebra's savory crepes are filled with ratatouille, a colorful rustic stew made with a medley of vegetables.



The veggie quiche at Paris Bistrot cradles a pastiche of colorful vegetables.

## FAST FACTS: THINGS TO KNOW ABOUT CHOOSING A VEGETARIAN DIET

### Nutrient power:

Vegetables are packed with vitamins, minerals, fiber, antioxidants, and other essential nutrients.

### Lower risk of chronic disease:

Studies correlate vegetarian diets with a reduced risk of chronic diseases. These include heart disease, hypertension, Type 2 diabetes, and certain cancers.

### Weight management:

Vegetarian diets are typically lower in calories and saturated fats. If you want to fight fat, that's a good thing.

### Improved digestion:

Plant-based foods are high in fiber. That supports digestive health, prevents constipation, and promotes a healthy gut microbiome.

### Environmental impact:

Plant-based diets require fewer resources, produce fewer greenhouse gas emissions, and contribute to overall sustainability.

### Ethical considerations:

A vegetarian diet is an ethical choice when it comes to animal welfare. It reduces the demand for factory farming and minimizes harm to animals.

### Lower cholesterol levels:

Vegetarian diets are associated with lower levels of cholesterol, particularly low-density lipoprotein (LDL) cholesterol, contributing to better cardiovascular health.

### Increased longevity:

Some studies suggest that vegetarian diets may be linked to increased life expectancy.

### Biodiversity conservation:

For cows to graze, you have to cut down forest to give them a field. Vegetable farmers tend not to do that. That cuts down on practices that contribute to habitat destruction.



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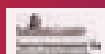
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**If You Go:** 8445 Lorraine Road, Sarasota; 941-357-1570; [LibbysNeighborhoodBrasserie.com](http://LibbysNeighborhoodBrasserie.com).



Photo by Lori Sax

**Did You Know?** Compared to beef, the Impossible Burger requires 96% less land, 87% less fresh water, generates 89% less greenhouse gas emissions and results in 92% less pollution to freshwater ecosystems.

# Station 400

This go-to spot has plenty of meat-free breakfast and brunch options to delight both vegetarians and their carnivorous companions — but what about lunch? Chris Schnizel, the general manager, confirmed what we'd been eyeing: the **falafel wrap**. It's a rarity in these parts, but they definitely do it right. Their falafel is a crispy, crunchy, aromatic delight, made with a blend of chickpeas, herbs and spices. Station 400 al-

so adds field greens, cucumbers, tomatoes, roasted red pepper, hummus, and a generous drizzle of tzatziki sauce for a flavorful treat. (I prefer a lemony garlic tahini sauce to tzatziki but to each their own.)

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# Polished Perfection

Lakewood Ranch residents Mark and Michele Schlossberg launched Paint Nail Bar nine years ago. It has since become a nationwide brand.

BY MONICA ROMAN GAGNIER  
CONTRIBUTOR

**B**efore giving birth to her daughter 13 years ago, Michele Schlossberg decided to get serious about limiting her exposure to toxins. Schlossberg had majored in nutrition in college and had long eaten healthy food and exercised to stay in shape. As a former employee of Estee Lauder Corp., she marketed the hypoallergenic skincare and cosmetics line Clinique. Now, Schlossberg focused her attention on her nails.

“When I was pregnant and trying to have a viable pregnancy, I was very particular about what I was eating, what I was putting on my body,” she

says. “It felt that if you went to get your nails done, whether it was at The Ritz-Carlton or at a strip mall, you had to turn a blind eye.”

Although they didn’t realize it at the time, Michele and her husband, Mark Schlossberg, were gestating a brainchild — a chain of clean, toxin-free nail salons that treated staff well and made customers feel like guests in their Lakewood Ranch home.

That baby, Paint Nail Bar, will turn 9 years old in March. The Schlossbergs own two Sarasota-area Paint Nail Bars — one in downtown Sarasota near Whole Foods, the company’s flagship location, and the other in Waterside Place in Lakewood Ranch.

There are more than 40 franchisees nationwide whose owners look to the Schlossbergs for training, staff development, product recommendations and store design. At each salon, the Paint Nail Bar logo is written in all capital letters and the spaces are awash in different hues of pink.

Before co-founding Paint with his wife, Mark spent 25 years as a Huntington Learning Center franchisee in suburban Washington, D.C. Mark says he built his business into the No. 1 Huntington franchise through the excellence of its staff and its tutoring service, which was skills-based.

*Continued on Page 80*

Photo by Lori Sax  
Mark and Michele  
Schlossberg  
founded Paint  
Nail Bar nine  
years ago.





Family members, friends and consultants helped shape the image of Paint Nail Bar. Some of these people prefer to remain anonymous, like a mystery billionaire who invests in franchises and gave them access to analytics. Other supporting actors are Michele's mom, Ashley Koshinski, who is the director of franchise operations, and beauty industry consultant Marci Krempel, to name just a few.

Mark's father, Stephen Schlossberg, a labor leader and civil rights activist, didn't live to see Paint Nail Bar. The former United Auto Workers general counsel and Labor Department official died in Sarasota in 2011. But his lifelong commitment to the rights of workers is why a chain of nail salons pays its employees what Mark calls an "ethical wage" and treats them with respect.

"The safety and well-being of our employees is our No. 1 concern," Mark says. "Without them, we don't have any customers."

Like many people who move to Sarasota, the Schlossbergs came here with plans to retire and enjoy the fruits of Mark's labors from the Huntington franchise, which he sold. But like many other transplants, they didn't stay retired. The Schlossbergs had been kicking the Paint Nail Bar concept around for a while and, after six months of relaxation at the beach, they decided to take the plunge with the business.

One of the reasons they chose their First Street location downtown, the Schlossbergs say, is the landlord was willing to lease it to them after a face-to-face meeting. Despite their financial wherewithal and business experience, they were turned down several times for leases because they had never run a nail salon before, Michele says.

When a reporter notes that it makes sense to have an organic nail salon around the corner from organic food purveyor Whole Foods, Mark sets the record straight. "There's no such thing as organic in nails. Organic nail products don't exist. Our products are non-toxic, non-carcinogenic, free from animal cruelty," he explains.

Still, the people shopping for nutritious food at Whole Foods are likely to be interested in having their nails groomed in a safe, sanitary environment with good ventilation. Mark agrees and says what he calls "co-tenancy" is very



Photo by Lori Sax

Paint Nail employee Mahogany Poinsettia works her magic at the Lakewood Ranch location.

important to Paint Nail Bar and its franchisees. "You'll never see a Paint Nail Bar next to a Dollar Tree."

It wasn't long after Paint opened in downtown Sarasota in March 2015 that snowbirds were asking how they could get the same level of service and safety back home. With Mark's franchise experience, it was a no-brainer to begin offering franchises. The first was in Lubbock, Texas, home of Texas Tech.

A university town in east Texas might strike some as an odd place for the first Paint Nail Bar franchise, but Mark says the location came to their attention because the franchisee's sister lived in Sarasota and was a customer.

"There are lots of nail salons in Lubbock, and that's what we look for. A huge mistake people who are not versed in business don't understand is there is no such thing as competition. People either help you grow your business or put you out of business. There are no competitors of yours. Lubbock has 47 nail salons, so we know there is a market for Paint," he says.

Opened in 2018, Lubbock's Paint Nail Bar was a great success. The Schlossbergs recently bought it back because its owner got an opportunity in Big Pharma.

As they did in Lubbock, the Schlossbergs initially franchised their Paint Nail bar location in Lakewood Ranch but ended up buying it back from the owner. Although they considered opening a salon in University Town Center, they opted for Waterside Place, which was in the early stages of development when they signed their lease.

Although Covid and ensuing supply-chain shortages slowed down the development of Waterside Place, which now boasts an impressive array of tenants, the Schlossbergs say it was the right place for them. They credit Kirk Boylston, retired president of Lakewood Ranch Commercial Realty, for his flexibility and patience. "Kirk was really easy to work with," says Mark.

One of the main selling points of Lake-

## BY THE NUMBERS

45

Locations nationwide

9

Locations in Florida

3

Locations locally

45

Employees locally

2018

First franchise opened, in Lubbock, Texas

Every 2 weeks

How often regular customers come to Paint Nail Bar for services

Continued on Page 82



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Continued from Page 80

wood Ranch is it's where the Schlossbergs live. When they first moved to Sarasota, the Schlossbergs lived on the water for two years. They moved out to Lakewood Ranch because Mark loves to raise and ride horses. They live "country club-ish," Mark says, declining to be more specific.

The Paint Nail Bar in Lakewood Ranch officially opened in February 2022, but because of Covid and delays in the development of Waterside Place, it only had a handful of commercial neighbors, including Kilwins and Good Liquid Brewing Co., for many months.

The relaxed start in Waterside Place gave the Schlossbergs the opportunity to build their team, which Mark calls the most "cohesive" of any Paint Nail Bar location. There are about 45 employees between the Lakewood Ranch and downtown Sarasota locations.

According to Mark, the downtown Sarasota location does about 24,000 services a year, versus 18,000 for Lakewood Ranch. By contrast, the Miami franchise does about 27,000.

## GREAT EXPECTATIONS

Whether you walk into a Paint Nail Bar in Lakewood Ranch or in Ann Arbor, Michigan, some things are the same. There is a reception desk where you are greeted in a friendly manner and get checked in. If you have to wait, you are invited to sit down on a big, comfortable couch. You can shop for jewelry, loungewear and gift items if you choose.

With the exception of its Dazzle Dry quick-dry coating, Paint doesn't sell nail polish, which it sources primarily from a manufacturer in Toronto that Michele and her mom discovered at a trade show.

Although a customer may not realize it, there's a lot of emphasis on ergonomics and traffic flow in the layout of each Paint Nail Bar. There's also a lot going on safety-wise that is not immediately apparent. There is a state-of-the-art ventilation system that promises "zero fumes." All tools used during a manicure or pedicure have been cleaned with soap and water, dried, sealed in an envelope and sterilized the way instruments are at a hospital.

Missing are the whirlpool pedicure



Each Paint Nail Bar offers jewelry, clothing, gifts and accessories.

"thrones" found in many salons. According to Paint's website, the plumbing and whirlpool jets can be breeding grounds for bacteria. Instead, the company uses ceramic pedicure basins that can be cleaned thoroughly between clients.

With its emphasis on safety and its commitment to paying its employees a living wage that can reach \$60,000 annually and giving them access to health insurance, one might expect that Paint's manis, pedis and other services are more expensive than at other salons.

Not so, says Mark. "When we go into a market, we do the analytics on all the providers from the strip malls to The Ritz-Carlton, and we set our price in the middle. We don't want to be the highest, but we don't want to be the lowest."

In downtown Sarasota, the classic Uptown Girl manicure costs \$36 and the Uptown Girl pedicure goes for \$45. There are other services and price points, including Lickety-Split

30-minute mani (\$24) and pedi (\$29) — treatments that don't use water — and the luxe Talk of the Town manis (\$48) and pedis (\$68) for those who want to indulge themselves.

To gel or not to gel? Talk it over with the Paint personnel. There are lots of options.

Like all service businesses, Paint Nail Bar was hit hard by Covid. Mark recalls how he and Michele shut down all the franchises for between six and eight weeks beginning in March 2020 so they could figure out how to adjust to the new environment. In the end, most Paint Nail Bar salons only had to install Plexiglass screens at the manicure stations because existing safety protocols were already robust.

Even when the salons reopened, some customers stayed away, particularly older ones. Mark's mom, Nancy Schlossberg, an author and aging expert who is now 94, was one of them, he notes.



Photos by Lori Sax

“*The safety and well-being of our employees is our number one concern. Without them, we don't have any customers.*”

MARK SCHLOSSBERG

Continued on Page 84



A photograph of a modern outdoor furniture set, including a white sofa, two armchairs, and two large grey ottomans, arranged on a light-colored stone patio. The set is positioned next to a swimming pool with a metal ladder. In the background, there is a body of water with a boat, palm trees, and a clear blue sky. The text "LIVE YOUR best FLORIDA LIFE™" is overlaid on the image.

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Continued from Page 82

But in the end, the business bounced back better than ever. “It sounds cruel and insensitive to say this because we lost people during Covid, but the pandemic was the best thing that ever happened to us because it opened up people’s eyes to the need for safety in salons,” Mark says.

Paint Nail Bar isn’t the only nail salon franchise in the country — according to Mark there are six or seven similar concepts. But it’s the top one when it comes to service and safety, according to the Schlossbergs. Testimony to the franchise’s allure is the fact that its owners don’t spend any money on marketing it to franchisees.

“We have not spent a penny to market the franchise company,” says Michele. “All of our franchise growth has happened organically. Our customers or their relatives often become franchisees in other locations. For instance, our Ann Arbor, Michigan, franchisee was a client in Lakewood Ranch.”



Photo by Lori Sax  
Mark Schlossberg’s father was a prominent labor leader and civil rights activist.

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Courtesy photo  
Howard Solomon  
was a prolific  
artist, inventor  
and builder.



# HOME SWEET CASTLE

Solomon's Castle is a gleaming monument to the weird, wacky and wonderful.

BY ERIC SNIDER | CONTRIBUTOR

In the early 1970s, a short, skinny fellow from New York started building a castle on a 40-acre tract of land in rural Hardee County. Some of the locals — most of them country folk — were suspicious, disapproving, maybe even a little hostile. The man had a beard, for goodness' sake. But one thing was certain: Everyone was curious.

*Continued on Page 88*







Photos by Heidi Kurpiela  
The gleaming structure is 65 feet high, three stories, and 12,000 square feet inside.



"The townspeople just thought, 'What's this crazy New York Jew doing out there, building a castle?'" says Alane Solomon, talking about her father, Howard Solomon, who died in 2016. She owns and runs what has long been known as Solomon's Castle, a quirky roadside attraction way off the beaten path, 20 miles east of Myakka City in the town of Ona. Sitting at a table in a landlocked wooden boat Howard Solomon built to serve as a restaurant for visitors, Alane, 62, is reminiscing about her father's early days in Hardee County.

He was a charismatic man, she explains, quick with a quip or pun, ready to engage with anyone. So, when a local Realtor invited him to speak at a Rotary Club meeting in Wauchula, the county seat, Solomon readily accepted. He won over the roomful of muckety-mucks and word quickly got out that Howard Solomon was, to use Alane's words, "fairly normal." Still, the provincial community had a delightful oddball in its midst.

During the Rotary Club meeting, members asked Solomon when they could come by for a look-see. He suggested the last Sunday of the month. Weeks went by and he forgot about his invitation. The locals didn't. One Sunday morning, a few cars pulled up. Then a few more. "I would say there were about 40 people in all," Alane recalls. "Dad says, 'Well, we gotta give 'em a tour,' so we pushed breakfast aside. Dad took one group and I took another."

Alane was 11 years old at the time. Subsequently, curious people showed up on any given Sunday, then Saturdays, then weekdays. Solomon always gave them a tour, and didn't charge anyone, although many visitors offered donations. After years of showing folks around, Solomon realized it was disrupting his real work: making art. He asked his daughter to take over the tours. "Dad said, 'anything you make above the electric bill you can have,'" Alane recalls. "I think we charged a dollar-fifty. I did that for a while and then turned it into a business."

By this time, the early '80s, Solomon had covered the castle with discarded printing plates that he bought from the Wauchula Herald-Advocate for a quarter a piece. They gave the building its



Alane Solomon now owns and runs Solomon's Castle with her husband, Dean.

chrome-like exterior, accented by 90 stained-glass windows that Solomon made. By then, a steady flow of people was turning up to see the shiny castle in the woods.

### A PROLIFIC ARTIST, A MADCAP MUSEUM

The gleaming structure — 65 feet high, three stories, 12,000 square feet inside — is the attraction's eye-catcher and biggest draw. But there's more. While exploring the grounds on a blustery day in mid-December, I encountered a menagerie of random amusements:

a facade of The Alamo flanked by a cannon; a barn-turned-museum that houses Solomon's vast collection of antique cars dating back to 1915; a rusted-out, '50s-era truck sitting by its lonesome on a lawn (elsewhere it's scrap; here it's art).

And then there's the smaller works, some 300 of them, arrayed throughout the complex but concentrated on the first floor of the castle. They represent Solomon's wild-



Courtesy photo Alane Solomon with her father, Howard.

Continued on Page 90





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**TIDEWELL FOUNDATION**

Continued from Page 88

ly eclectic interests. They are made all or in part from found objects — junk, if you like — such as oil drums, bicycle chains, beer cans, coat hangers, musical instruments, rebar, blue jeans he stole from his daughter's closet. And wood, lots of wood.

During my visit, a folksy tour guide who goes by “Uncle Jimmy” explains that, from the outset, Solomon did not need to go digging for raw materials: “Hardee County didn’t have a landfill until 1985. Back in those days, if something broke you just drug it into your back pasture. But when word got around that Howard would take their junk, people started showing up and chucking it over his gate.”

Solomon used this gifted treasure to make art, mostly sculptures — many of them very large — but also montages, stained-glass pieces, papier-mâché and more. They include whimsical representations of planes, trains and automobiles; suits of armor; marionettes;

Continued on Page 92



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*Continued from Page 90*

jazz musicians; all kinds of animals, including a 6-foot-high elephant made from sections of oil drum (with manatee ribs for tusks); and even an image of Heisenberg, Walter White's alter ego in "Breaking Bad." The highly professional work is fun and sometimes outright funny.

Solomon was certainly prolific. After my two tours, I was left wondering: How did one guy make all this? Alane says that her father did not work from dawn to dusk, as one might expect. He managed his time well and had the rare talent of envisioning things three-dimensionally in his head, so he didn't need to draw or map out his creations. An idea would come, he'd grab some materials and tools and make it.

During and after my visit, another question stuck with me: Why, back then, a castle? Alane explains that after purchasing the land, Solomon soon discovered it was prone to flooding. "He realized he couldn't build out, so he had to build up," she says. "Then the artist part of him kicked in, and he saw a tower here, a tower there, and before you know it — a castle."

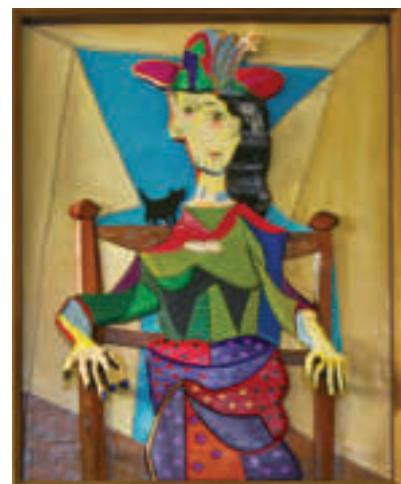
While Solomon and the occasional work crew built the structure, Alane, who lived with her paternal grandparents in St. Petersburg, visited on weekends, staying in a double-wide trailer with her father. As a pre-teen, she moved to the property and eventually into the castle, with a bedroom on the third floor of the south tower.

For Alane, living in a budding wonderland amid the wilds of Florida was a love/hate affair. "I mean, I was living in a castle," she says in a what's-not-to-like tone. "Did it have a canopy bed and all the fairy tale stuff? No. But I was with my father."

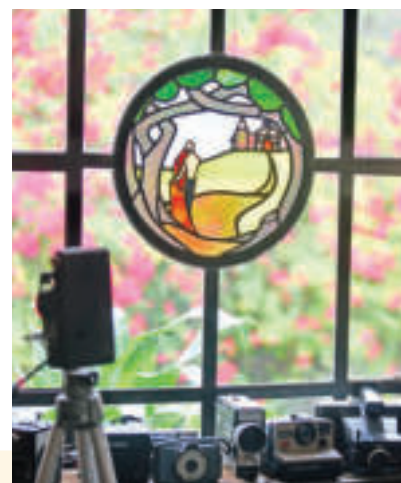
Still, there were hardships for a teenage girl. During her first couple of years, the property had no phone service. TV reception was spotty. Living so remotely, Alane had few friends, and just getting to and from school by bus took hours, she says. But there came a silver lining. She met her boyfriend, Dean Murphy, who many years later became her husband. They've been married 26 years and run Solomon's Castle together. The couple lives on the grounds in a big brown structure called the Chocolate House.



"Eddie Peabody Playing Heavy Metal."



Artwork inspired by Picasso's "Dora Maar and Cat."



A collection of vintage cameras and Howard Solomon's "Picture Window."





Dean Murphy, also known as her "knight in shining armor," is Alane Solomon's husband and co-proprietor of the property.

## A HANDS-ON MAN

Howard Solomon grew up in Rochester, N.Y., among a clan of tradesmen. He quit high school to focus on working with his hands. He moved with his first wife, Alane's mother, to St. Petersburg, where he set up a business making cabinets. The marriage ended in divorce after six years.

One day a woman came into his shop wanting a stereo cabinet. The craftsman and the customer hit it off. Gwen, who was moderately wealthy and almost 20 years older than Solomon, uttered a simple phrase that altered his life. "You're not a cabinet maker, you're an artist," Alane recounts.

Solomon and Gwen married and, soon after, packed up and moved to Freeport, Bahamas, seeking adventure and opportunity. Solomon continued to make cabinets and expanded into designing sets for nightclubs and the like, as well as making his own art. The couple stayed in the Bahamas for seven years. Alane and her brother, who were living with their mother in upstate New York, visited once. But once was all it took. Solomon jumped

at the opportunity to take in his kids full-time and they moved to the Bahamas.

Solomon returned to Florida with an itch to own a sizable chunk of land. He earmarked the rural areas east of Sarasota/Bradenton. With the help of a Realtor, Solomon hunted for property. It took seven months until they came upon the tract in Hardee County. It had everything he was looking for. Although deep in the woods, the acres were just close enough to growing metro areas, which gave birth to his catchphrase, still in use today, "We're not in the middle of nowhere; we're in the middle of everywhere." The property was so ideal that Solomon was curious if it had just come on the market? No, the Realtor told him, and apologized for not showing it to him sooner. "Well, it turns out he didn't show it to him because it floats, and I guess he was waiting for it to dry up," Alane says.

Flood-prone or not, Solomon now owned it. Gwen died suddenly of a heart attack not long after the castle

*Continued on Page 94*

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Continued from Page 93

build began. Solomon considered leaving the property but ultimately pressed on. He moved into the castle and, over time, added more buildings, and steadily grew his kingdom to its current 93 acres. At one point, he realized an opportunity. "Visitors would say, 'We love this place, but now we have to find someplace to eat,'" Alane recalls. So, Solomon built The Boat in the Moat, a restaurant that has provided important cash flow.

The boat, which usually sits in a shallow stream, never floats, but it has been waterlogged. As has the castle, which has flooded 15 times, and survived several major storms. The most devastating was Hurricane Ian in 2022, which poured in more than six feet of water. Smartly, the bottom sections of the walls are made of Styrofoam, which is easily replaced. Getting Solomon's Castle up and running again after Ian was a Herculean task. Friends, family and the small staff worked long hours seven days a week, repairing and cleaning up. The

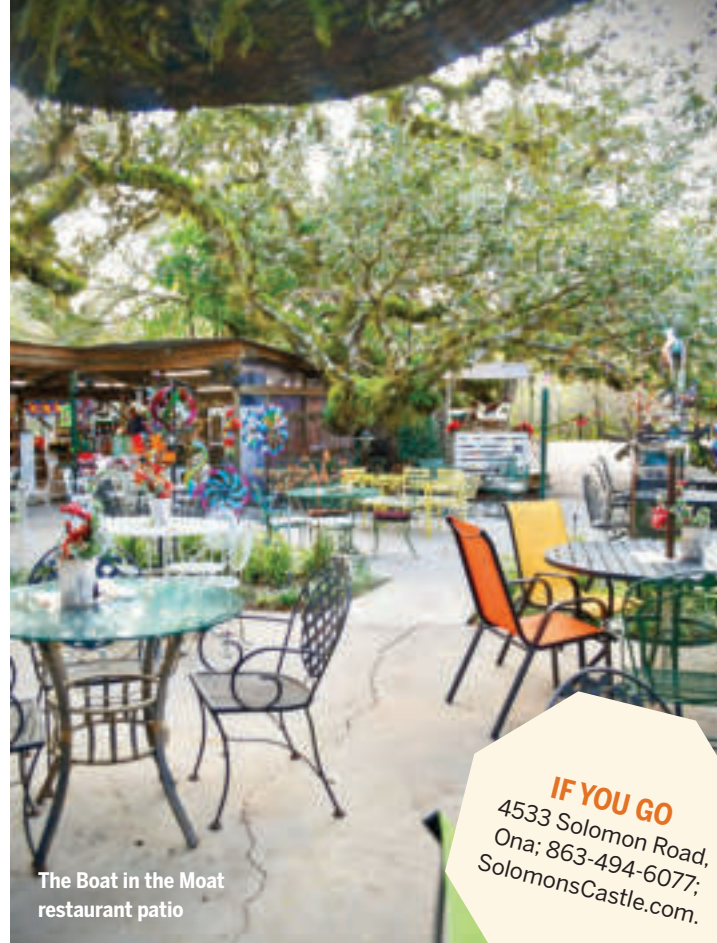
artwork suffered very little damage. It took less than two months to reopen the gates, Alane says, adding, "I still can't believe what we accomplished."

Howard Solomon had heart trouble for much of his adult life but remained productive until he died at age 81. In his later years, he spent a lot of time with family, worked the cash register at an alcove in the castle, mingled with customers and showered them with jokes. He continued to make art until the end.

A full, colorful life, all told. With a devoted daughter. "My Dad was my best friend," Alane says.

Solomon never achieved acclaim as a front-rank fine artist. His work is not found in museums or in the homes of rich folk. "I feel that he was a hidden treasure," Alane says. "He didn't do the New York or Los Angeles circuit. He was more real than that. He wanted to make a living selling his artwork, and he did that, and he could've continued that. But one day he said, 'Well, what do I need to sell it for? People are paying me to come and see it. I'm gonna keep it.'"

His work ended up in a museum after all.



The Boat in the Moat  
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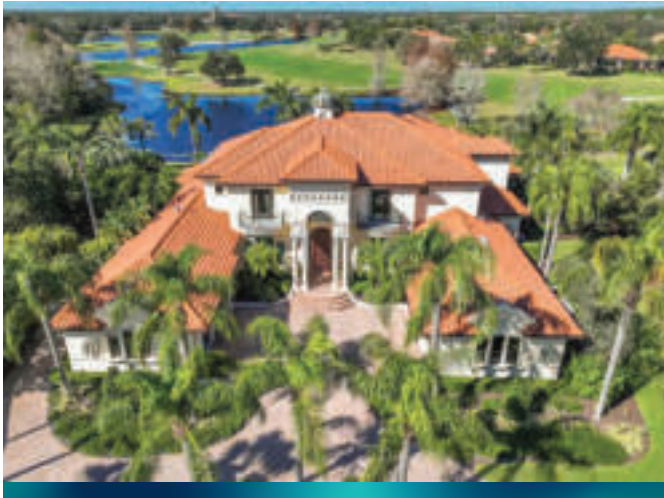
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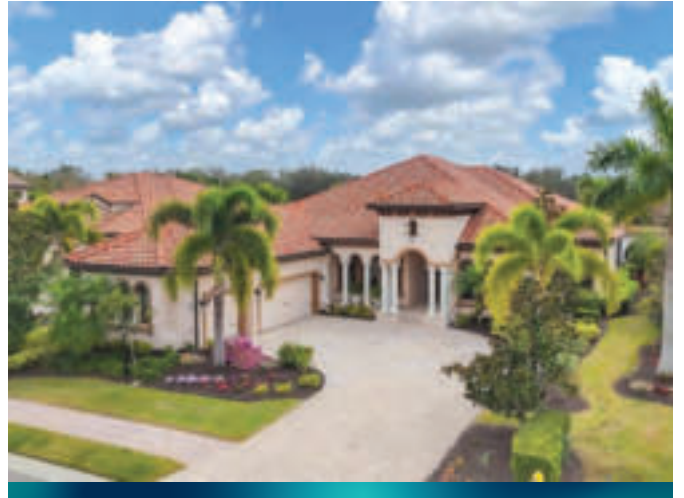
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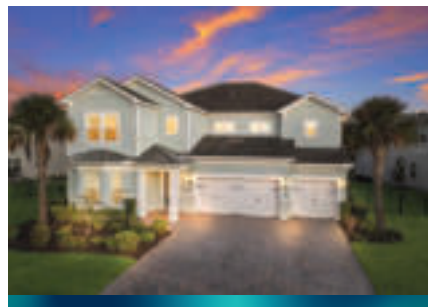
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# HAVEN

SPOTLIGHTING LIFE ON THE RANCH

Lifestyle lessons from a luxurious  
Lake Club home. **PAGE 100**

Photo by Filip  
Cvjeticanin and Peter Le

A large outdoor  
living and dining  
area provides a  
perfect location for  
entertaining and  
daily life.





# Peaceful Sophistication

David Ahrens and Kirk Beckwith's home in The Lake Club shows a keen understanding of their shared past and their present way of life.

BY ROBERT PLUNKET | CONTRIBUTOR





Photos by Filip Cvjeticanin and Peter Le

A model by Stock Builders, the home provides almost 3,000 square feet of living area.



Setting up a household is one thing, creating a lifestyle quite another. It takes a strong visual sense and a keen understanding of what is important to the family members. It should be designed to ease and enrich their lives. And of course, it doesn't hurt if it looks sensational.

The home of David Ahrens and Kirk Beckwith in The Lake Club is an outstanding example. Carefully planned and thought out, it has a refined eye guiding its aesthetic choices, and contains just about every amenity the owners could desire, with Charlie the family Labrador an important part of the equation.

The two men met in San Francisco 10 years ago and have been a couple ever since. Three and half years ago they moved to Florida and established a new home base. The home they built in The Lake Club is the second they have created together and it shows a keen understanding of their shared past and their present way of life.

They knew the look they wanted. "Our style is a fusion of mid-century and modern," David explains. "Clean lines, a simple canvas with some great statement pieces." The dramatic feature wall in the living room exemplifies the feeling. Created with the help of decorator Linda Hendershot, it gives the home a chic, sophisticated personality. A ceiling-high wall of dark concrete is softened by a subtle interplay of geometric lines. Wood accents warm the space up — along with the fireplace — and niches accommodate vases and sculptural pieces the men have collected over the years. There's even a bench with pillows.

The rest of the home takes its design cues from the drama in the living room, yet everything remains calm and peaceful, with the view providing the

*Continued on Page 104*



**Top:** The dining area's mid-century vibe reflects the owners' time spent in California.

**Center:** A dramatic feature wall in the living room provides a fireplace, seating, and displays for art.

**Bottom:** The view from the lanai through the living room also shows the couple's home office, at left.





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Continued from Page 102

real drama. The home faces south and looks out over a lake, a constant source of inspiration for David and Kirk.

Cooking and entertaining are important to the couple. “We love that the kitchen is totally open to the living and dining areas,” David says. “It’s a gathering place for family and friends.” The space is well thought-out in terms of form and function, with plenty of surface area and a pantry so big it’s known as “the Costco store.” Kirk is the chief cook but the extra-large island is great when David joins in the food prep. “We do love joint creations,” he says.

Healthy eating is an important part of the couple’s life. Both are tall and lean and remarkably fit, and while not exactly vegetarians — they seek out grains and fruits and vegetables — diet is especially crucial for David’s active lifestyle. He is an Ironman champion, an extremely competitive endurance event that includes swimming, biking



Charlie, the beloved Labrador, enjoys his home in The Lake Club with his human companions, David Ahrens and Kirk Beckwith.

Continued on Page 106

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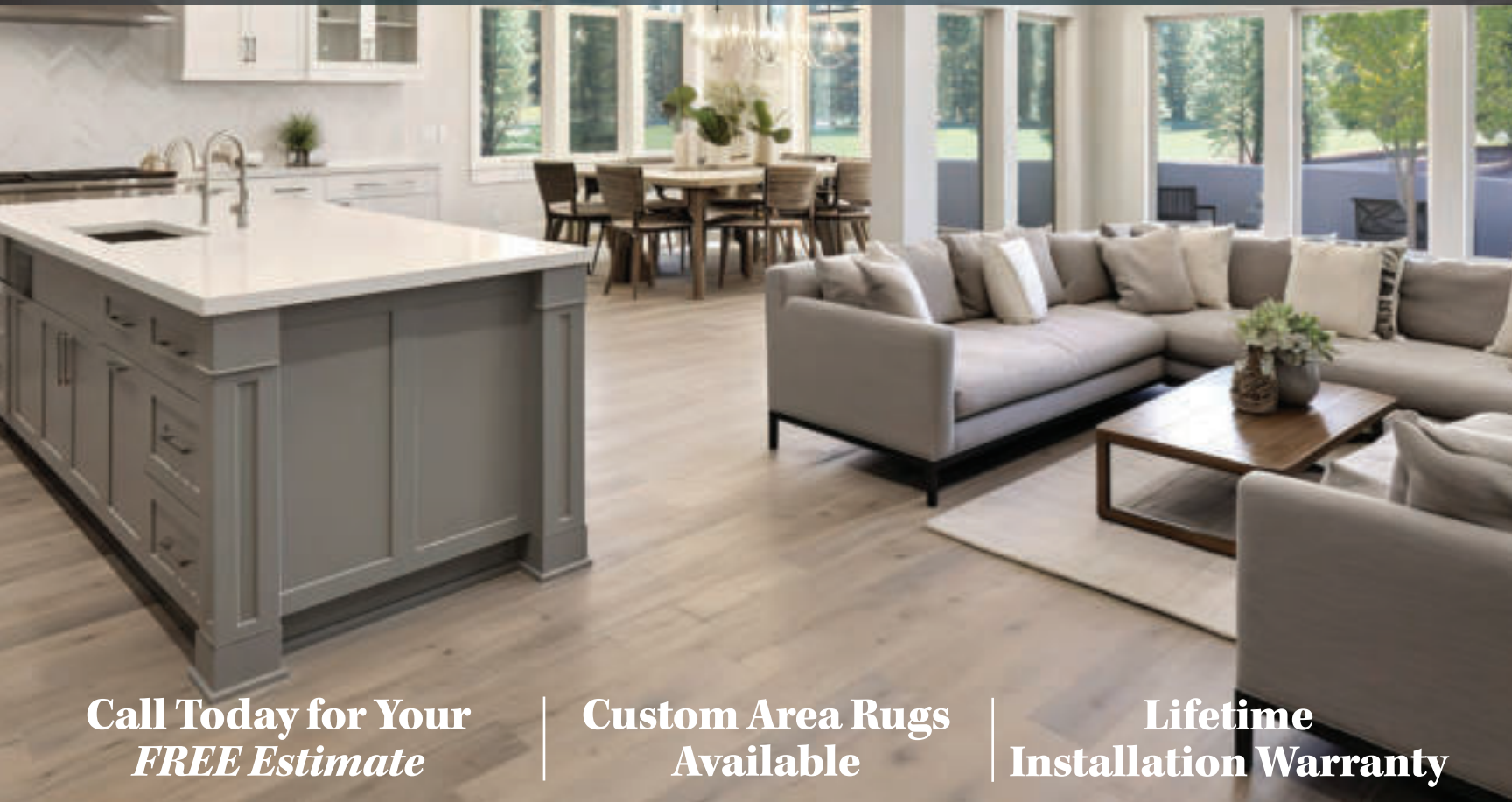


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Continued from Page 104

and running — all completed in one day. He has competed in 19 Ironman events over the past two decades. “My last was at the Ironman championships in Kona, Hawaii, in 2022. That was my swan song, and I enjoyed every minute of it.” These days training is not so extreme, but David still participates in various races, including a triathlon in Fort Myers last March. “I surprised myself by taking the win for my age group and 19th overall. Not bad for 53!”

For such an active couple, the home — and The Lake Club — are ideal. They both enjoy biking and yoga. There’s a gym at the clubhouse and the main pool is perfect for swimming laps. Their home’s outdoor living area, a spacious 1,100 square feet, means that nature is always a part of their lives. And that includes Charlie. Like many Labs he’s a water dog and his webbed feet means he can spend much time in the water. “He knows how to



Something is always going on in the busy kitchen. If guests are lucky, it’s Kirk’s famous meatless lasagna.

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DAVID AHRENS

Continued on Page 108

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Continued from Page 106

ask us to go in the pool,” Kirk says. “When we say ‘OK,’ he jumps right in.”

“Life is good for Charlie,” David adds. Indeed, the pup is one of the lucky Ranchers who head north each spring, trading a lakefront home in Florida for a lakefront home in Canada. Come late April, David and Kirk pack up the SUV for the two-day trip up to Buckhorn, Ontario. David, who is a Realtor for Re/Max Platinum, sells property in both locations. He admits he’s just as competitive when it comes to business as he is with his athletic endeavors. He occasionally flies back and forth as needed to handle clients and transactions. “It’s fairly seasonal, so it works out great. We sometimes stop in North Carolina where Kirk’s family is located. It’s always great to catch up with them.” Kirk, by the way, is a retired anesthesiologist.

Despite their international lifestyle, The Lake Club has become the focus of

Continued on Page 110



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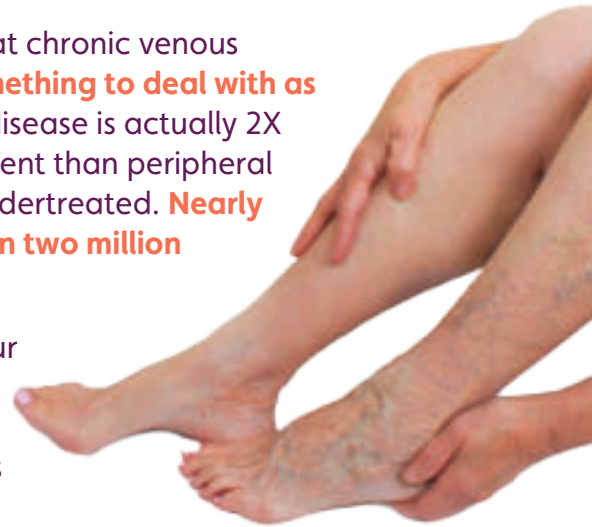


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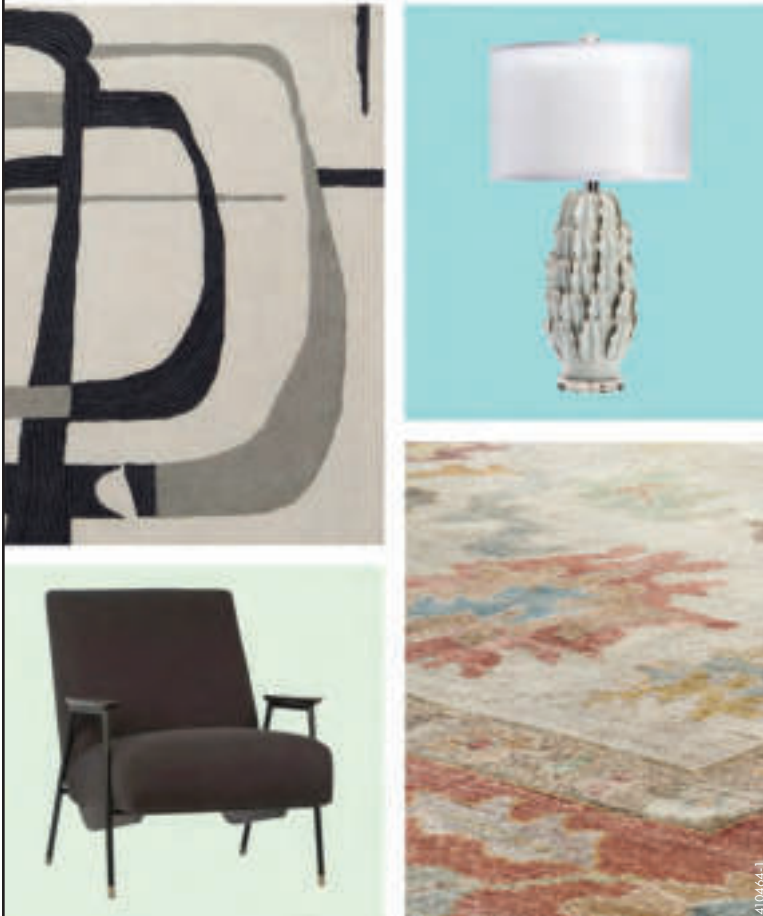
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**Top:** The primary bath boasts a large walk-in shower and a stand-alone soaking tub.

**Bottom:** Most major rooms open to the 1,100-square-foot outdoor living area. Here, the family room offers access to the open-air kitchen.

*Continued from Page 108*

their lives. The men have become active in the community, taking advantage of the special events at the clubhouse. They are particularly involved in the annual Turkey Trot event each Thanksgiving; David, in fact, serves as one of the race's directors. There are three race distances, and it has become The Lake Club's largest single event in terms of participants — over 250 signed up last year. The \$12,000 raised went to the Food Bank of Manatee, a cause the couple feel strongly about. "Each year we tweak something to make it better and better."

Both men love the self-contained nature of The Lake Club. "We never have to leave the community — but

*Continued on Page 112*

*The rest of the home takes its design cues from the drama in the living room, yet everything remains calm and peaceful, with the view providing the real drama.*



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Continued from Page 110

we do.” Experiencing all that Sarasota has to offer is a priority: the arts scene, restaurants, shopping, museums. Frequent foreign travel is also an important part of their lives. Recent trips have included Thailand and Cambodia, Europe and the Galapagos Islands. “We’re also avid scuba divers, so we do at least one dive vacation per year to Hawaii, Belize, Honduras or Bonaire.”

Still, it’s hard to beat the atmosphere at home. It will be lunch on the lanai, then maybe cooking dinner at the outdoor kitchen, accompanied by sunset over the lake. “We’ve made some longtime friends here,” they say. “The community offers a real mosaic of people from all corners of the country, with diverse backgrounds and different experiences. It’s an incredible quality of life in an incredibly beautiful environment. Who could say no to that?”

Certainly not Charlie. In addition to his own pool, he has his own dog park up by the clubhouse. Not a bad lifestyle for a Labrador.



The outdoor living area offers all the elements necessary for a perfect Florida lifestyle, with an emphasis on entertaining, cooking and friendship.

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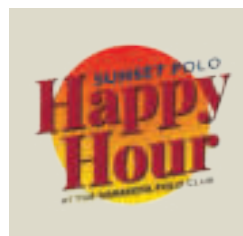
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# art and about

# On with Opera!

Sarasota Opera's winter season spans timeless classics and forgotten gems — and it's all happening right now.



Photo by Herb Booth

BY SU BYRON  
MANAGING EDITOR

Opera. There are some people who can't get enough of it. There are others who think the art form is snooty and elitist. But Groucho Max was an opera buff, and snobbery just wasn't his style. As his character in "Night at the Opera" once said, "And now, on with the opera. Let joy be unconfined. Let there be dancing in the streets, drinking in the saloons and necking in the parlor." Does that sound elitist to you? No. Me, either. And consider this: Sarasota is one of less than 200 communities in the United States to have a resident company with its own dedicated opera house. So what are you waiting for? Never been and want to try? Sarasota Opera's Winter Opera Festival is here. The following is a quick glance.

## 'CARMEN'

Music by Georges Bizet; libretto by Henri

Meilhac and Ludovic Halévy.

"Carmen" is everybody's favorite opera (and a great one to start with if you're new to opera) about a fickle gal and a jealous bullfighter's unfortunate love for her. As this opera's iconic song, "Habanera," points out, "Love is a rebellious bird no one can tame." No bull. (Feb. 17-March 22)

## 'LUCIA DI LAMMERMOOR'

Music by Gaetano Donizetti; libretto by Salvatore Cammarano.

A bride in Scotland takes the low road when she's promised to a nobleman and not the man she loves. Murder, madness and music ensue, aye. (Feb. 24-March 23)

## 'LUISA MILLER'

Music by Giuseppe Verdi; libretto by Salvatore Cammarano.

Luisa and Rodolfo are unlucky in love and tragedy is their fate. What did you

See Opera on Page 112

## RICHARD RUSSELL

Sarasota Opera's general director shares insights on the company's current season and opera's enduring appeal.

*Sarasota Opera has presented "Carmen" five times before. Will its 2024 production have a new take?*

Yes, in many ways. Victor DeRenzi will be conducting this production of "Carmen," and he always takes a fresh approach. He'll be doing a few things differently with the musical text. We'll also have an all-new cast, and the singers will bring something of themselves to their roles. With any new ensemble of artists, there's always a new chemistry.

*Why did Sarasota Opera decide to present Haydn's "Deceit Outwitted?"*

Because we want our audience to experience works they might not have seen. Although Haydn is a major composer, his operatic work isn't well known. "L'infedeltà delusa" languished in a castle library until after World War II. It wasn't until the 1950s and '60s that it was performed, and the last professional performance was in 1979. So, many people will be seeing it for the first time on our stage.

*What's your underlying criteria for putting a season together?*

We always seek out relatively popular works. We also look for operas we haven't done too frequently and that our audience might not have seen. At the same time, we don't want these selec-

See Russell on Page 112



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expect in an opera? A happy ending? (March 9-24)

### 'DECEIT OUTWITTED'

Music by Joseph Haydn; libretto by Marco Coltellini.

Sandrina's in love with a poor peasant, not the rich farmer her father wants her to wed. In Haydn's comic opera, love conquers all, for a change. (March 15-23)

**If You Go:** 61 N. Pineapple Ave., Sarasota; 941-328-1300; SarasotaOpera.org.

### OPERA ETIQUETTE: WHEN TO APPLAUD

Operas employ silent pauses to build dramatic tension, so exercise caution when applauding. If uncertain about when to clap, simply watch the audience and follow its cues. Otherwise, applaud post-overture, following an outstanding aria or duet, at the culmination of a particularly emotive scene and when singers are on stage for a bow or as the final curtain falls.

### Russell from Page 110

tions to cover the same ground. It's like putting together a big puzzle, because we run the four winter operas simultaneously.

*Let's say somebody can't stand opera — although they've never actually seen one. How would you change their mind?*

I firmly believe that you can't say you don't like something before trying it at least once. Of course, this art form is a lot to take in for a newbie. Opera can be overwhelming to the senses initially. It's really the first multimedia experience because it encompasses music, drama, sets, costumes, and sometimes dancing — as in the case of "Carmen."

*That reminds me of something the late June LeBell observed as The Observer's music critic. She*



Photo by Matthew Holler

*said the word "opera" derives from "to work" in Italian. So, when you go to an opera, you literally get "the works."*

That's a great way to put it! I miss June. She was a great lady — and she's absolutely right.

*I assume that you and Maestro DeRenzi have a wish list of operas for the Sarasota Opera stage?*

Yes, and it's a long one. There are so many great operatic works that we'd be thrilled to do — or bring back. We'd love to do Verdi's "Otello" again — and several other Verdi works, as well. Sarasota Opera hasn't done Puccini's "The Girl of the Golden West" in a long time, and we'd definitely like to reprise that. But, again, we have to make our choices work in our big puzzle of a season.

*What's the biggest opera myth that you'd like to debunk?*

The myth that opera is elitist. Although the very first operas were written for noble families, it became a form of popular entertainment in Italy and Germany by the 19th century. Everybody went out to the opera back then. And everyone should in our century.

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JAN. 12 AT LAKEWOOD RANCH LIBRARY



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future  
readers.

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Robertson  
tries self-  
checkout for  
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Library.  
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Skylar  
Kocourek  
looks on.



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Lakewood Ranch offers some tips to  
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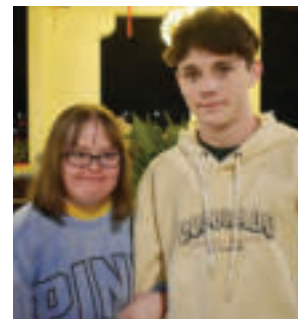
Kayla Morgan and Lance Morrison bring their 9-week-old puppy, Layla, to Ranch Nite Wednesday.



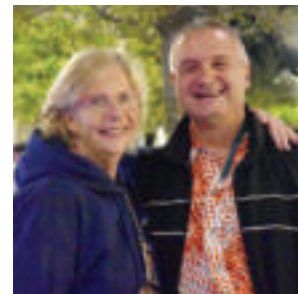
**Above:** Chloe Quesada, Sofie Quesada and Addison Fierro bring 2-week-old goats to Ranch Nite Wednesday. They're yoga goats.



**Left:** Anniel Gonzalez, owner of King of All Guacamoles, hands out samples of his guacamole and salsas.



Siblings Ella and Dylan Quaid enjoy the music after eating a burger and lobster roll from the food trucks.



Tara residents Debbie and Jerry Archer are regulars at Waterside Place. They love Ranch Nite Wednesdays and the Farmers Market.



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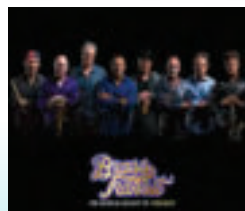
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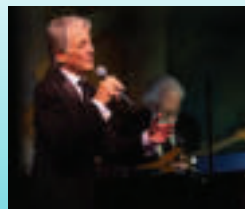


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*table talk*

# Evan Percoco of Peculiar Pub

Reinvention is on tap and on the menu at Peculiar Pub.

BY MARTY FUGATE | CONTRIBUTOR

**P**eculiar Pub is a magnet for beer enthusiasts. The watering hole's previous incarnation as Craft Growlers built that following with a diverse craft beer line-up, inventive cuisine and wicked-cool live music. The pub's new owners are keeping close to that winning formula with more than 20 beers rotating on tap, hand-selected wines from small vintners, and a creative menu with small bites, sandwiches, tacos, salads and sides. We recently spoke with Evan Percoco, one of the owners. The taste of the new is both his passion and his specialty. As a graduate of the Culinary Institute of America, Percoco served as the executive chef at four diamond hotels across the United States. Adept at culinary reinvention, he's on a constant odyssey to seek ways to perfect the hospitality experience. We spoke to him recently about his new adventure.

## **The name Peculiar Pub originated with . . .**

. . . John Breiner, the original owner. We liked the new name and decided to keep it.

## **My partners Jay Zeller and Jay Saucier . . .**

. . . are all peculiar in our own way. We all really get that "peculiar" brand.



Photos by Lori Sax

## **What makes Peculiar Pub "peculiar" is . . .**

. . . our commitment to quality, our dedication to pushing the boundaries of flavor, and our unwavering belief in the power of community.

## **We keep about 23 microbrews on tap that come from . . .**

... both close to home and across the nation. But what's on tap today might be gone tomorrow. We rotate our tap selection so it's never the same-old-same old. We like to mix it up. You'll always find

amazing lagers, brown ales, stouts, porters, and IPAs. Depending on seasonal availability, we'll also have Oktoberfest German beer or English stout on tap.

## **I've traveled the globe for years . . .**

. . . creating new concepts for hotels and restaurants. After a lifetime of experience, I've learned a thing or two. I can't narrow it down to one big secret of why a restaurant works. Countless technical details go into creating the

A culinary entrepreneur, Evan Percoco traveled the globe for years creating new concepts for hotels and restaurants.

*Continued on Page 124*





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Continued from Page 122

Peculiar Pub experience, and we have to pay attention to every last one. The guest doesn't have to understand the details to enjoy it. We do.

#### **My capsule description of Peculiar Pub is ...**

... "peculiar" as in "unique." We take the road less traveled. We don't want to follow a formula, phone it in, or repeat ourselves. Surprise and delight is our goal. Sometimes we'll see a guest trying a lager for the very first time. Then they'll get a big smile on their face. That makes us happy.

#### **Don't leave Peculiar Pub without trying ...**

... our hand-carved pastrami that's super-tender and delicious. We slow-braise it for hours — until we can carve it like water. That's just one of our hidden gems.

#### **Peculiar Pub's typical customers are ...**

... adventurers with good taste. They're hungry for something new and different — and they know that's what we serve. That's why so many beer connoisseurs love to visit us. They come here for unique beers they've never had before. A lot of them keep track of all the beers they've tried in their lifetime. We help them try a few more.

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#### **When I'm not at work, I love to ...**

... make Neapolitan-style pizza. I can't do it here, so I make it at the house. We've got a beautiful pizza oven in the backyard. I also love hanging out with my two children, Stella and Nicholas, and my beautiful wife, Laurie. They love pizza, too.



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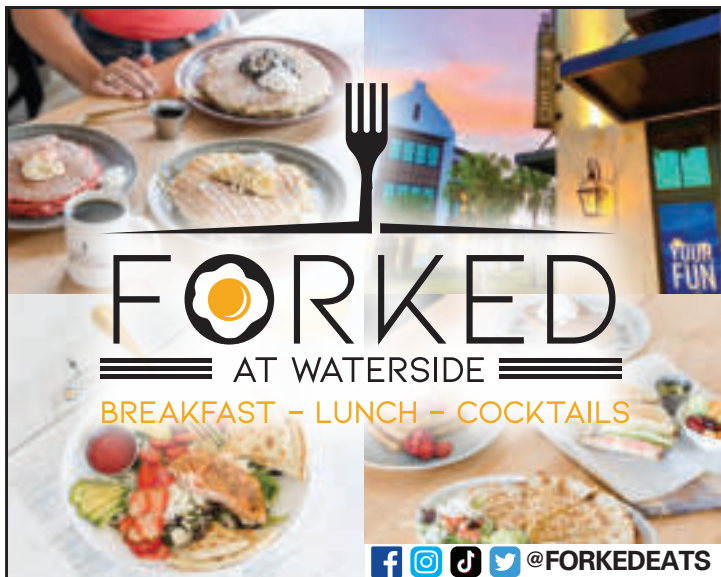
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LOBSTER, SHRIMP, HADDOCK & COD – OH MY! LOTSA LOBSTER is a Maine and New England seafood market providing fresh haddock, cod, swordfish, tuna, salmon, sea scallops, mussels, steamers, stuffed clams, crab cakes and LOTSA more! We have Chilean sea bass, smoked salmon, halibut, trout, cherry stones and quahogs. Did someone say CHOWDA? Try our clam chowder or Lobster bisque. But wait there is more... freezer treats include frog legs, octopus, salt cod, sardines and crawfish. For land lovers we have a variety of savory marinated meats from Danvers Butchery. Don't forget to preorder for the upcoming holidays - Easter Sunday on March 31st, Mother's Day on May 12th and Memorial Day on May 27th. Come on in or call ahead.

8780 S Tamiami Tr, Sarasota  
941.918.2529 | LotsaLobsterSarasota.com

419932-1



## MCGRATH'S IRISH ALE HOUSE

Experience a taste of Ireland in Lakewood Ranch; where our community is family. Enjoy a mix of family inspired Irish offerings, as well as everyone's favorites like a Chopped Salad, a Pub style BLT, Traditional Shepherd's Pie, and Fish & Chips. Alongside dinner, enjoy a Kilkenney, Guinness, or choose from our wide range of whiskeys and cocktails that will transport you to the heart of Ireland, all from Lakewood Ranch Main Street. At McGrath's, we believe that no dish can be better than its ingredients. Nightly live music and entertainment.

Mon thru Thurs 11am to 10pm • Friday 11am to 11pm  
Sat 10am to 11pm • Sun 10am to 10pm  
Brunch served every Sat and Sun from 10 to 3

8110 Lakewood Main St, Lakewood Ranch  
941.210.4398 | www.mcgrathsirish.com

416279-1

DINING OUT

418190-1



## STATION 400

Breakfast & Lunch Daily



## STATION 400

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

Specialty Mimosas, Seasonal Menu, GF & Vegan options.

Voted 2023 Best Local Breakfast Spot

**LWR Ranch**  
8215 Lakewood Main St.

**Downtown Sarasota**  
400 N. Lemon Ave

[www.Station400.com](http://www.Station400.com)

402747-1



## THE TOASTED YOLK CAFE

IT'S NEVER TOO EARLY TO GET TOASTED! Breakfast, Boozy Brunch, Lunch, and Drinks. The restaurant features a full menu of made-from-scratch menu items, focused on exceptional quality at reasonable prices.

**941-444-0049**

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

NEW Sarasota Location now open!

**3750 S. TAMIAMI TRAIL**  
**SARASOTA, FL 34239**

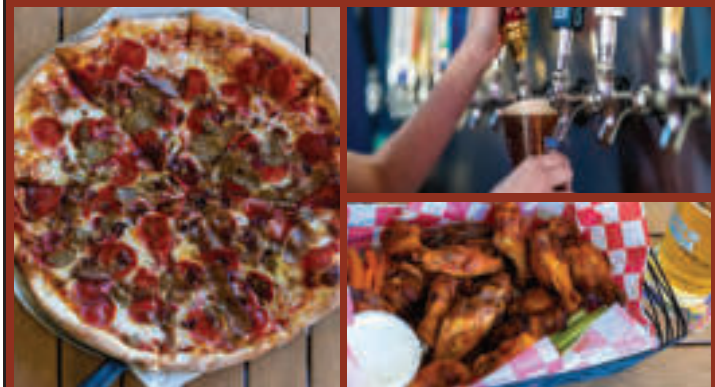
**Mon-Sun 7am-3pm**  
**(Bradenton location opening soon!)**

419955-1

## WOLVES HEAD

PIZZA • COLD BEER • WINGS

EST. 2014



## WOLVESHEAD

When Wolveshead opened in 2014, we dreamed of becoming the neighborhood hangout. Now, that dream has become reality - and we have grown year over year!

Whether you've come for our Hand-Tossed Pizzas, one of our 22 Ice Cold Draft Beers, or our signature Charbroiled Wings, you're sure to be back for more. Thank you to our wonderful staff, as well as all of our regulars, for helping to create the Wolfpack Family - we appreciate each and every one of you!

Cheers!

**1837 Lakewood Ranch Blvd, Lakewood Ranch**  
**941-251-4028 | [www.wolvesheadpizza.com](http://www.wolvesheadpizza.com)**

413980-1

418670-1

DINING OUT



# *PARTING GLANCE*



Valerie Voutsas took this photo of an egret taking flight in Lakewood Ranch Country Club.



# INTEGRITY • *Tenacity* • EXPERIENCE

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

Specializing in luxury properties in both Sarasota and Manatee counties, Stacy's award-winning service gives you the results you require and the experience you expect.

Connect with Stacy Haas today to discuss your goals. Her professionalism and commitment remain unmatched.

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- **Over \$90 Million in Sales Volume in 2023**
- **#1 Michael Saunders Agent in Lakewood Ranch in 2023 & 2022**
- **Five Star "Best in Client" Award 2007-2024**
- **Certified Luxury Home Marketing Specialist**
- **Master Certified Negotiation Expert**
- **Million Dollar Guild Elite (GUILD Elite) Recognition**
- **Over 30 Years' Real Estate & Interior Design Experience**



**Stacy Haas**  
REALTOR®,  
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**Sold Over \$645 Million  
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**COLDWELL  
BANKER**