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Gulf Coast - South

BIRDS

A Winter Visitor Publication
February 2010

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Gen X Birds

By Randy Hamilton



My wife Sharon, two dogs, Jack and Jinjer, and I traveled for more than four years full-time in our 36-foot 1998 Cruisemaster motor home. When I was first asked by Snowbirds Gulf Coast to write an article about being Snowbirds, I was caught a little off-guard. I never really thought of us as Snowbirds, but just people who hated cold weather and drifted south until winter was over. Which come to find out, is EXACTLY what a Snowbird is. However, we were in our mid-30s and that put us outside the typical age bracket for

Snowbirds. Fortunately, our work allowed us to telecommute and make a living while on the road.

Our story started with losing our home on Pensacola Beach to Hurricane Ivan in 2004. Instead of seeing it as a setback, we viewed it as an opportunity to pursue a dream. We had always wanted to travel the U.S. in an RV, so we decided to purchase a motor home and hit the road. At first we just wandered around the Southeast, occasionally venturing up to Ohio and Maryland to see family, eventually taking the plunge and trekking out to California.

We began our treks slowly southward usually around Thanksgiving, staying two weeks here and there before settling down around the Sarasota area. Orlando was always a scheduled stop on the way south as we love the theme parks. We purchased a Thousand Trails membership our first year and we liked to stay just outside Orlando in Clermont where occasionally we spent two weeks enjoying the attractions.

We eventually made it to our destination, the Sarasota area. We bounced around between Encore parks and private parks. One of our favorites to stay was the Holiday Cove Resort in Cortez near the coast. It was a small, but very friendly place to call home for a bit. The proximity of Bradenton Beach enabled us to ride our bikes there in a matter of minutes. One place of note for us at Bradenton Beach was the Island Creperie. A small breakfast cafe located in the small downtown district on the beach. They had the best fresh crepes we have ever had still to this day. Bradenton Beach is a small quiet beach town with big charm and definitely a must-visit if you are staying in the Sarasota area.

Another great place nearby is Fort DeSoto state park. Located a short drive north of Sarasota, this is a fantastic place to enjoy the outdoors. There are wonderful bike paths and hiking trails. The beaches are not crowded and there is even a section that allows dogs off-leash. We are dog parents so anywhere that allows dogs is a plus.

Speaking of dog beaches, if you have a dog and like to take him or her to the beach,



there is another great off-leash dog beach located just south of Venice Beach, by the Venice Municipal Airport. Come early though as it can get pretty crowded during season on the weekends.

We really enjoyed our run at being Snowbirds for a few years but we have since settled down and been blessed with our baby girl Nora. The winter is still not our friend, hence we settled back down south in Pensacola. However it is not as warm as Sarasota so we occasionally still take trips down there in the winter to get a break from what we call cold, 50s and 60s. In addition we have downsized our transportation and no longer have the Cruisemaster. We now travel in a decked out mini van.

Reminiscing about our motor home adventures is something we do often. We aim to purchase another one in a few years to travel the U.S. with Nora before she starts school. Perhaps we will go with a smaller, diesel coach like a Safari Trek. It would be just big enough to live in for a while, yet small enough to store in our driveway. There was nothing like the freedom of traveling in an RV. Home was wherever the wheels stopped.

If you would like to read more of our adventures you can check out our website, www.oneshoediaries.com, where we blogged almost our entire journey for those years. You can read about interesting off-the-beaten-path places that we discovered along the way. You may even pick up a tip or two about RV'ing. We wish you safe travels!



One Shoe Diaries

These coffee-table-sized books are a photographically illustrated, collection of non-fictional short stories that became a cohesive short novel. All 3 volumes are interconnected but they each can also stand alone.

Volume 1 is about a physical journey traveling across the U.S. in a motor home after becoming homeless following a disastrous hurricane. Volume 2 picks up where Volume 1 left off by embarking on another physical journey in the motor home but evolves more into a mental and spiritual journey involving a parents' personal tragedy. And Volume 3 follows the struggle to get through that tragedy and find hope, eventually coming full circle with a Hollywood-esque ending. Interwoven

in all the volumes are amazing stories of coincidence and serendipity that surround the mysterious lost shoes littering the highways. Many of the discovered shoes become Lost Sole dedications to actual lost souls who passed away on the same day as the shoes were discovered.

The full-color, 56-page books are all photographed, written, and designed by award-winning artist, Randall Louis Hamilton. Currently they are only available for purchase online and at gallery showings. These books must be seen to be appreciated and ebooks can be downloaded for free at OneShoeDiaries.com. Be sure to check out the interactive map of all the lost soles Randy has discovered across the U.S. plotted out utilizing GPS coordinates.

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Welcome!

We started a new decade with high hopes and were delivered a cold blast of reality.

January's early freezing temperatures, rain and cold winds were a shock to many who winter in Florida. (It was even 25 degrees in Tampa!)

After all, that's the weather you get back at home, right? With snow and ice thrown in for good measure!

But eventually the cold weather cleared out and the sunshine returned.

Chances are you didn't panic because, well, you knew that would happen, didn't you?

Welcome to our second edition of Snowbirds Gulf Coast – South. Last month I explained that this is my fourth year publishing Snowbirds Gulf Coast along the northern Gulf Coast and I've decided to add a south edition in an area I lived as a teenager – the central Gulf Coast.

Each edition we try to provide useful information for your stay. We don't try to be a tourist guide – there are plenty of them available. But we seek out stories and information just for you.

This month our feature story is on a fun Snowbird event that takes place every Friday in Largo, Fla.. Contributor B.C. Manion describes the fun and camaraderie of the performers and audience who enjoy the delightful setting at the Largo Heritage Village and free performances of the "Country Snowbirds." Photographer Julie Busch captured the essence of the event with her beautiful work. As an aside, Busch is also a commercial photographer available for booking. Check out her website at www.juliebusch.com.

B.C. told me after attending the event she would love to chill out in the audience herself each week but alas, she's still a busy hard-working journalist making a living.

Those of us still in the workforce are a bit jealous of retirees but we know that you've worked hard to enjoy this time in life.

Wisconsin native Jahna Jacobson profiles Downtown Clearwater as the area goes through a revitalization. Jacobson also gives us a look at various Farmer's Markets throughout the region. Be sure to visit at least one market during your stay to sample the food, arts, crafts and entertainment unique to the Gulf Coast. Also, check out our expansive calendar of events which is full of fun things to do and see.

My 25-year-old nephew and I were on a wonderful journey of discovery last month as we traveled the region distributing copies of our debut edition. We enjoyed traveling the Sunshine Skyway – my first time going over the tall bridge that connects St. Petersburg/Tampa to the Bradenton/Sarasota area. What a view! The toll bridge was built during my high school days in the 1970s and I well remember the excitement it generated.

Our dining feature this month is what turned out to be a regional landmark, Captain Curt's on Siesta Key. There we sampled the conch fritters – a Florida specialty – and, of course, shrimp and grouper.

If you enjoy professional golf be sure to take a look at our list of upcoming events. One of the ways you can enjoy watching the pros up close and personal is to volunteer. Be sure to read our story on page 14.

We also do a short profile on the Tampa Bay Lightning, the area's professional hockey franchise. Be sure to support the hard-charging players who mostly hail from Canada and the northern U.S.

Our popular syndicated columnist Frank Kaiser is always the last word in our north and south editions and is a reader favorite.

Last month I had a chance to visit with our January cover couple, Sharie and Dick Gibbs of Newcomb, N.Y., and tour their newly purchased park model home at the Grand Lakes Golf and RV Resort near Ocala. The couple are having so much fun that their children are worried about them!

What about you? Are you having fun being a Snowbird? Share your thoughts at publisher@snowbirdsgulfcoast.com. Don't forget to become a Facebook fan of Snowbirds Gulf Coast. Your support is very much appreciated as we grow!

As always, we are glad you are here. **Now, go have fun!**

Best,

Karen Harrell

publisher@snowbirdsgulfcoast.com 850-291-1266

Dare to join Facebook?

“You have to join Facebook!” said one of my longtime friends. “It’s cool!”

By Karen Harrell

I hesitated because I thought it was just another social networking site for kids and as a busy, busy person I just couldn't imagine having anything else to keep up with.

That was around the New Year. When my friend returned home to Savannah, Ga., my email inbox suddenly got very busy.

She had referred me as a “friend” to dozens of journalists we had worked with through the years and the requests came pouring in.

What was I to do? Be rude?

So, I joined the site and “accepted” many friends.

And she was right. It is cool!

But my 16-year-old didn't think so.

The first thing she said was “you are NOT going to be my friend mom.”

I chuckled at that.

Little did she know that I was thinking the same thing about her. Why?

Because we need our space as much as our children need theirs - a place to be adults and maybe discuss things that happened in our lives before they came along.

So, what did she do?

Became a friend of my friends.

Sigh.

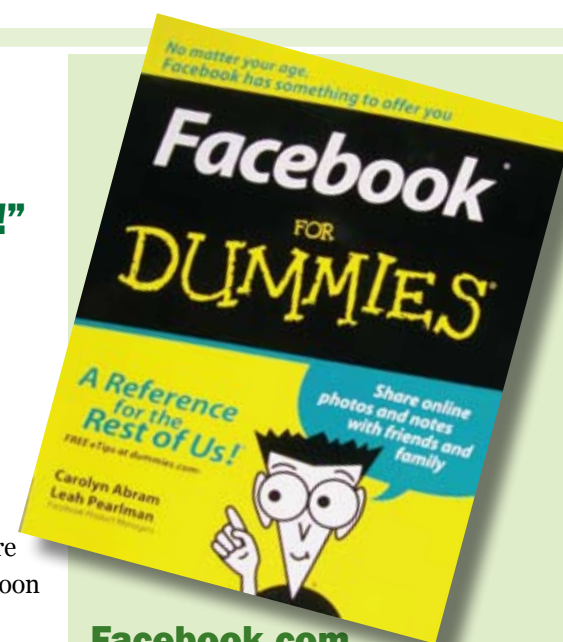
After the initial few weeks when I had a chance to drop a line to people I hadn't seen in several years I noticed that many organizations had joined the bandwagon and now had Facebook pages.

Every non-profit now also seems to have one. Chances are that you'll start noticing the invitations in your email inbox soon if you haven't already.

Most items posted aren't very long and it's a great way to keep up with people you care about but don't get to see very often. It's also an easy way to post photos and maintain a network.

So, guess what? I am inviting all of you to join our Snowbirds Facebook page. To find us, type Snowbirds Gulf Coast under groups. Make sure you put the complete name in to reach us directly. I am still learning all the ins and outs of managing Facebook but my intention is to use this as a common meeting place for our winter friends. I'll also post information that I think is useful to you all and we'll develop this as we go along.

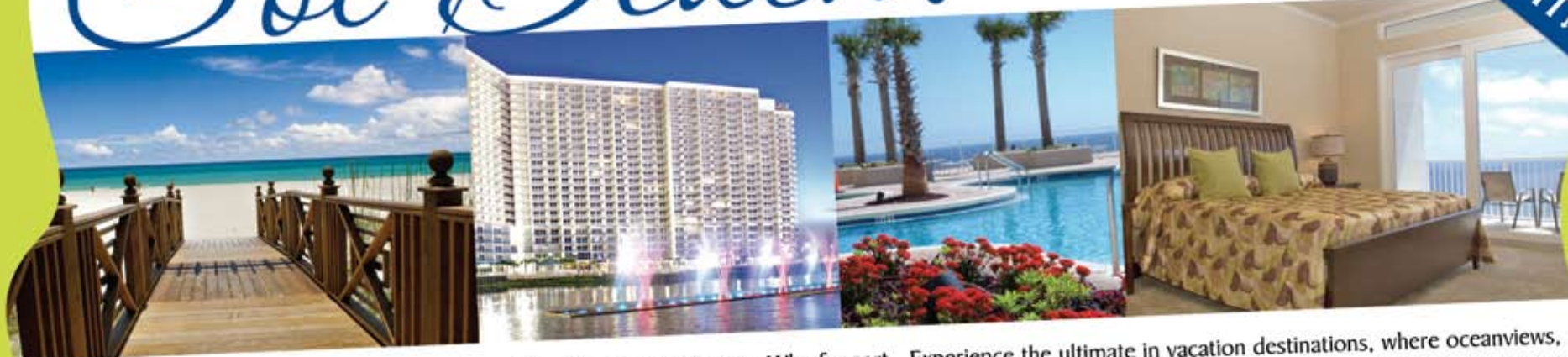
Won't you join us?



Facebook.com Safety Tips

1. Never share your password with anyone
2. Adjust your privacy settings to match your level of comfort, and review them often
3. Be cautious about posting and sharing personal information, especially information that could be used to identify you or locate you offline, such as your address or telephone number
4. Report users and content that violate our Terms of Use
5. Block and report anyone that sends you unwanted or inappropriate communications

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ON THE COVER Gen X Snowbirds Sharon and Randy Hamilton spent four years as full-time RVers after Hurricane Ivan destroyed their Pensacola Beach home. They chose the area around Sarasota as their winter home. They share their story with us.Page 3

MARCH

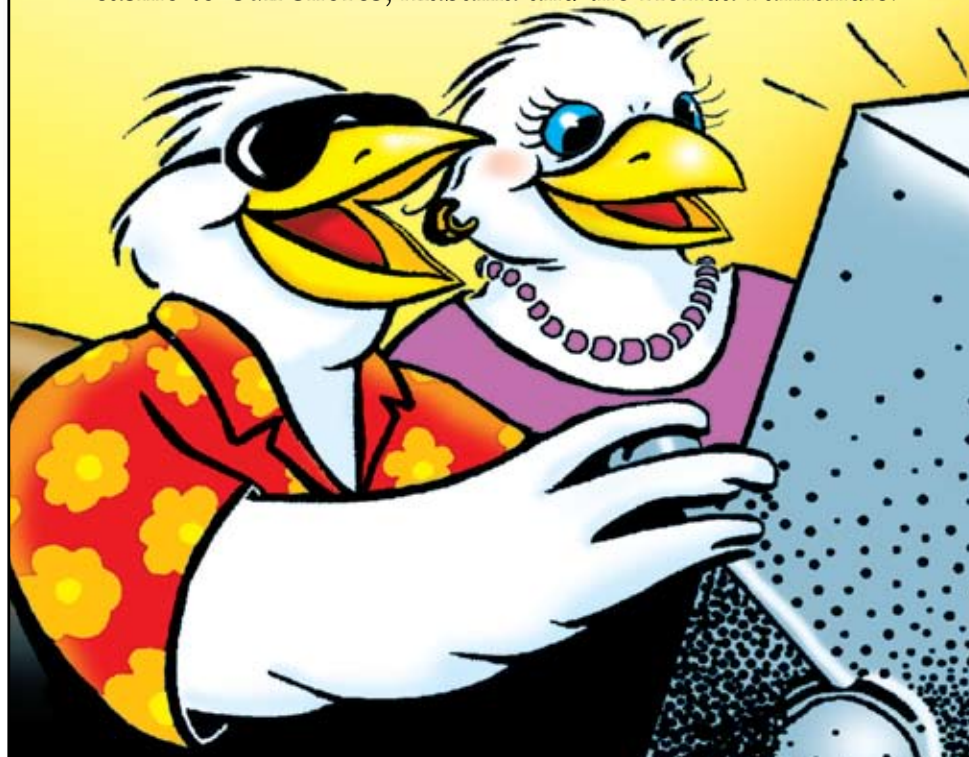
Play ball! We take a look at spring training in the region and history of baseball along the Gulf Coast.



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Live, Work, Play in Downtown Clearwater

By Jahna Jacobson

With new residences and downtown activity meshing with the seaside traditions that go with beach living, Clearwater is embracing history while revitalizing its downtown for a new phase of success.

The city was incorporated in 1915, the same year the first bridge was built linking the city with Clearwater Beach. Today, the city is home to more than 100,000 people who live along the white sand beaches of the Gulf of Mexico and Clearwater Harbor.

Today, downtown Clearwater is being revitalized into a city center with shopping, residential and commercial spaces with improvements to city infrastructure and a facelift for Cleveland Street, the core of downtown.

The process has been about 10 years in the making, said Courtney Orr, downtown manager for the City of Clearwater.

“We are enhancing the appearance of downtown, but maintaining the history and beauty and the authenticity,” Orr said. “We are refurbishing to keep that authentic.”

Renovations to the Cleveland Street District include street-scaping and making the area more accessible for traffic and pedestrians. The project is scheduled to continue expanding toward the main thoroughfare into downtown, Florida Highway 60, Orr said.

“In April, we’ll have 126 boat slips opening along the waterfront in downtown,” she added.

All of these improvements have been put in place not only to enhance Clearwater for current residents, but to help draw more people to living the downtown life.

Two residential towers were recently built in the heart of downtown: Station Square and Water’s Edge.

“From an everyday living standpoint, they are perfect for anyone who wants to be very close to the water with gorgeous water views,” she said. “Water’s Edge is just up from the boat slips.”

Housing prices have dropped considerably over the past couple years, Orr said, making Clearwater a very affordable place – even for those who dream of waterfront living.

The towers also make it easy to walk to downtown for shopping, dining or special events such as the monthly Fourth Friday festival, which brings live music and family fun to downtown.

Cleveland Street is also home to the Downtown Clearwater Farmer’s Market, which goes on 32 weeks out of the year and includes a variety of locally grown produce and



other foods along with shopping with artisans and live music.

Downtown is also graced with the Sculpture 360 project, which brings large, outdoor art into the city – and changes it out every year.

The city is also working to create the right mix of businesses for the growing downtown to create a vibrant destination for visitors and residents alike, Orr said.

The growing downtown offers many opportunities for volunteers, Orr said. The downtown revitalization effort uses many volunteers, and there are several organizations within the city that rely on senior volunteers and help place willing hands with the right work, she said.

“A lot of our successes have been many years in the making,” Orr said - and added there is still a lot of work ahead. “We are growing Cleveland Street District in downtown Clearwater, and it is beautiful. We have a lot of hope for what the district is going to become.”

Want to Learn More?

Clearwater Regional Chamber of Commerce

www.clearwaterflorida.org.

Residential Towers in the District

Station Square: www.stationsquare.smithandassociates.com/

Water’s Edge: www.yourwatersedge.com/location.html

Arts and Culture – Sculpture360 Program

www.myclearwater.com/gov/depts/parksrec/arts_culture/sculpture360.asp

City Volunteer Opportunities www.myclearwater.com/gov/depts/parksrec/volunteer.asp

Boat Slips

www.myclearwater.com/gov/depts/marine_aviation/ma_facilities/boatslips/index.asp

4th Fridays in Downtown Clearwater www.4thfridayclearwater.com/





Farmers Markets: Shopping made authentic

Farmers markets are taking shopping back. Before there were supermarkets, superstores and the information superhighway, weekly markets were the place to not only buy the freshest, locally grown foods and handmade items, they were the center of a community. Where you went for news, fun and even a little education. As we become more aware of the health benefits of fresh eating, and the economic impact of shopping local, the local open markets are once again a thriving part of many communities – especially in Florida, where temperate winters mean comfortable year-round shopping and a non-stop supply of varied seasonal produce. Add to that live music, cooking classes, arts and meals that are ready to go, and you have the markets that have become city centers in south Florida.

Saturday Morning Market Downtown St. Petersburg

290 First St SE, St. Petersburg, FL 33701
Al Lang Stadium parking lot/1st Ave. S-1st St.
Every Sat., 9 a.m. to 2 p.m., through May 29
727-455-4921

www.saturdaymorningmarket.com/

Live music, a close-knit community and a global tasting tour make The Saturday Morning Market in St. Petersburg more than a shopping trip.

Manager Gail Eggeman said that the last eight years have been an amazing success story for the market. It now includes more than 200 vendors each week, ranging from heritage citrus to seafood to crafts and homemade dishes from 25 different countries. Some are there every week, while others rotate through available spaces.

“We started with the spirit of community - for the community about community and everything we did would be respectful of the customers and of the vendors,” Eggeman said. “It makes a big difference.”

“We have a citrus vendor who grows oranges you can’t get in the stores anymore,” Eggeman said. “Last week he was here with four different kinds of tangerines. He has the Ruby Red Grapefruit, but he also has the Marsh Duncan grapefruits you can’t get at the grocery store.”

“And we have a vendor who creates tea-infused ketchups,” she added. “She has been featured on the Food Network.” The market itself has been featured in Delta Sky Magazine and the New York Times.

Offering healthy options is a big part of the market’s core philosophy.

Even the vendors making traditional

foods from around the world are willing to improvise for health, Eggeman said.

“We had a family that was making delicious empanadas, but they were fried,” she said. “We asked if they could bake them instead, and they brought two ovens and started baking. They are incredible – anyone who comes has to try the baked fig empanadas.”

There are vendors ranging from Cuba to Greece, with food that can be eaten on site or taken home, she added.

And, there are homemade crafts and home goods from local artists, greenery, bakery items and more, she said. The market also has live music every week.

“It’s all about the community, and educating people about food - and healthy food,” Eggeman said. “It’s also a great place for the community to come together.”

The Downtown Clearwater Farmers Market

500 block of Cleveland St.; between Garden Ave. and N. Ft. Harrison Ave.
9 a.m. to 2 p.m. each Wed. through May 26.
727-461-7674

<http://www.clearwaterfarmersmarket.com/>

In its 15th year of operation in the Cleveland Street District, every Wednesday, the farmers market takes over the Cleveland Street District for a day of shopping, arts, music and family fun.

“The market offers a collection of so many different things,” said Courtney Orr, downtown manager for the City of Clearwater. “There is so much great food – we have a baker who comes in from Port St.

Lucie, and everyone is in love with all of his bread.”

“Aside from the food portion there are arts and jewelry, and home gift items in the Station Square Park,” she said. “There are lots of vendors in that park, plus live music is played, have the food and things you can eat immediately.”

The Farmers Market at Circle Square Commons

8405 SW 80th Street, Ocala FL 34481
Every Thurs.; Nov. to March, 9 a.m. to 1 p.m.;
April to Oct.: 8 a.m. to 12 p.m.
352-854-3670

www.circlesquarecommonsfarmersmarket.com

The Circle Square Commons Market opened just two years ago, but has already become a lively and integral part of the Ocala community.

The mission is to provide healthy, fresh, seasonal local produce and other local and custom items as part of an effort to bridge the gap between consumers, farmers and artisans.

“We have Pete’s Produce, which is a favorite of locals,” said Gary Pierre, marketing coordinator. “People are familiar with him in the community. And we have Camari’s Organic Produce, which is also very popular.”

But more than just a place to pick up local produce and other flavorful favorites, such as artisan baked goods, Circle Square will show you how to use them.

The Farmer’s Market holds “Flavors of the Season” cooking demonstrations by On Top of the World chefs. The chefs use farm-fresh produce available at the market, along with other ingredients, to create mouth-watering meals. The demonstrations are held on Thursdays from 10 to 10:30 a.m.

“Also, every first Thursday we have live entertainment,” Pierre added.

“The market really captures the spirit of our community,” he said. “It’s our community-based market, with something that will appeal to everyone.”

Sarasota Farmer’s Market Vendors Inc.

4067A South Tamiami Trail, Sarasota FL 34239
941-536-6094

Every Sat., rain or shine, 7 a.m. to 1 p.m.

<http://www.sarasotafarmersmarket.org/>

One of the area’s longest running markets, The Sarasota Farmers Market was established in 1979. The market has a decades-long tradition of serving the community with local produce, plants, prepared foods and artisans. The full market includes 55 vendors and 5,000 square feet of produce and plants.

Local favorites include the dinners-to-go from the Alpine Gourmet and the produce from My Mother’s Garden, a family-owned, certified organic farm specializing in culinary herb plants, salad greens, edible flowers, organic vegetables and fruits, mainly in the winter season. Their market stand features organic and gourmet produce, fresh potted and cut herbs and more than 100 kinds of dried herbs and spices.

Those with a green thumb who want to take home a tropical touch can find specialty orchids and bromeliads, and tropical and subtropical foliage for indoors, landscaping or patios.

Sarasota is also home to the newly opened Philippi Farmhouse Market, located at Edison Keith Mansion Phillipi Estate Park, 5500 S. Tamiami Trail. Open each Wednesday from noon until dusk, the Farmhouse Market will feature produce and fruits from local growers and farms in Florida. The Farmhouse Market also will offer baked goods, prepared foods and sustainable products. Proceeds will support the renovation of the historic Edson Keith farmhouse. For more information, call 941-861-5000.

Siesta Key Market

Siesta Key Village Plaza

5124 Ocean Blvd

Sarasota, FL 34242

Sundays, 7 a.m. to 1 p.m. Oct. through May;
7 a.m. to 12 p.m. June to Sept.

<http://www.siestafarmersmarket.com/>

Siesta Key Village has a long history of being the place to meet friends, relax, shop and support local businesses. That tradition is carried on with the Siesta Farmers Market. A new Sunday morning tradition, the market brings raw foods, fresh fruits and vegetables, home-baked pastries and breads, fresh cut flowers, specialty cheeses, coffees, soaps, jellies and seafood, together with music, entertainment and more.

The market is centered around local, organic agriculture and awareness. Many vendors offer information about local resources and create awareness in natural health and the environment.

Sarasota Farms offers organic, heirloom produce, while Veggie Magic offers all vegan, raw and organic cuisine. The market also offers Earth-friendly products such as Ashjoi all-natural artisan soaps and Eco-Essentials “products for sustainable living.”



19-21 **Florida Carriage & Horse Festival.** The Florida Carriage Museum & Resort presents the Annual Florida Carriage & Horse Festival. This event is a combination of a Horse Festival and Pleasure Driving Competition. Features equine performances throughout each day. A great experience for both the horse and non-horse spectator. Event features food vendors, arts & crafts, breed barn, antique cars, pony rides and much more. Florida Carriage Museum & Resort, 3000 Marion County Rd., Weirsdale, FL 32195, 352-750-5500. Tickets \$10, Children 6-12 \$5 9 a.m. - 4 p.m. Saturday, Feb. 20th: Casino Night! \$25.00/pp, Reservations required. www.fcmr.org

Tuesdays-Saturdays

Guided Tram Tours of Boyd Hill Nature Preserve. Tour is a great way to see the preserve. Learn about our history, alligators, gopher tortoises, birds and wild flowers. Cost: \$3 admission plus a \$2 tram fee. 1101 Country Club Way S., St. Petersburg. Tues. through Sat. 1 p.m. and Sat. at 10 a.m. and 1 p.m., 727-893-7326, www.stpete.org/boyd

Tuesdays & Thursdays

Awaken Yoga at Sunken Gardens. Join us for AWAKEN YOGA, Breathe in and relax! Sunken Gardens, 1825 4th S. N., St. Petersburg, 10-11a.m., \$8/class or \$28/monthly, 727-551-3102, www.sunkengardens.org

First and Third Wednesdays

Tea Dance. Enjoy a relaxing afternoon dancing. 535 4th Ave. N., St. Petersburg, 11:30-3:30 p.m., 727-892-5202, www.stpete.org/coliseum

Wednesdays

International Folk Dancing. Learn dances from around the world. No partner needed. Beginners welcome. Cost: \$5. Bayfront Community Center, 803 N. Tamiami Trail, Sarasota, 941-923-2431, 7 p.m.

Yoga at Boyd. Breathe in the fresh air and the beauty of Boyd Hill Nature Preserve with a 60-minute relaxing yoga practice. Appropriate for all levels of physical fitness. Boyd Hill Nature Preserve, 1101 Country Club Way S., St. Petersburg, Noon, 727-893-7326, www.stpete.org/boyd

Thursdays

Scottish Country Dancing. Enjoy an evening of Scottish Country Dancing. No partner needed. Bayfront Community Center, 803 N. Tamiami Trail, Sarasota, 941-923-2431, 7 p.m., \$5

Fridays

Salsa Dancing. Salsa dancing inside Captain Al's Waterfront Restaurant. Come early at 8:30 p.m. for free Salsa lessons. Have fun dancing the night away. The Pier, 800 2nd Ave. N.E., St. Petersburg, 727-821-6443, www.stpetepier.com.

Jazz Club of Sarasota Jazz at Two. Two hour live jazz concert featuring area musicians. Bayfront Community Center, 803 N. Tamiami Trail, Sarasota, 941-923-2431, 2 p.m., \$9; \$5 Jazz Club members, www.jazzclubsarasota.org

St. Pete Shuffle. Come out and enjoy a hip twist to an old game under the stars. All equipment is provided and instruction is available. The "World's Largest Shuffleboard Club" promotes and sponsors year-round competitive and recreational outdoor shuffleboard play on 65 courts. 559 Miror Lake Dr, St. Petersburg, 7-11p.m., 727-822-2083, www.stpeteshuffle.com

Saturdays

Guided Hikes. Guided hikes through coastal mangrove and upland ecosystems of the Weedon Island Preserve. Bring water and a snack for this two-hour hike. A hat and closed-toe shoes are also recommended. Pre-registration required. Weedon Island Preserve, 1800 Weedon Dr. N.E., St. Petersburg, 9-11 a.m., 727-453-6500, www.pinellascounty.org/environment

Walking Tour of Historic Downtown.

Participants see the jewels of St. Pete's past while learning about the founding of St. Petersburg and its historic architecture. All tours start at the Detroit Hotel (Condos) northwest corner of Central Ave and Second St, a \$5 donation is requested, which may be applied toward membership if you join that day. Reservations requested but not required. 727-824-7802

Through

21 **The Marvelous Wonderettes.** Set in 1958 Springfield High School prom where we meet the Wonderettes - four girls with hopes and dreams as big as their crinoline skirts and voices! Golden Apple Dinner Theatre, 25 N Pineapple Ave, Sarasota, 941-366-5454, Times vary: \$43, www.TheGoldenApple.com

1 **The Wedding Singer** The hilarious film comedy about a down-on-his luck wannabe rocker comes to the Broadway stage! Based on the 1998 comedy which starred Adam Sandler and Drew Barrymore engaged to be married to the wrong people. The Lakeland Center, 701 West Lime St, Lakeland, FL, 7:30 p.m. \$45.

1 **Girls Night: The Musical.** Follow five friends as they re-live their past, celebrate their present and look to the future on a wild and hilarious karaoke night out. Van Wezel Performing Arts Hall, 777 North Tamiami Trail, Sarasota, 8 p.m., 941-953-3368, www.vanwezel.org

2-3 **Dionne Warwick.** International music icon, Dionne earned the admiration of her fans with Grammy Awards for her

songs "Do You Know the Way to San Jose?"(1968), "I'll Never Fall in Love Again"(1970), "I'll Never Love This Way Again"(1979), "Deja vu" (1979), and "That's What Friends Are For" (1986). The Lakeland Center, 701 West Lime St, Lakeland, FL, 2/2 (7:30 p.m.) 2/3 (2:30 p.m.) \$40 & \$65, www.ticketmaster.com

4 Band of the USAF Reserve. With 50 full time professional musicians who are assigned to perform in at least three ensembles. The Lakeland Center, 701 West Lime St, Lakeland, FL, 7 p.m., FREE admission with ticket. Details: www.usafreserveband.af.mil/events/index.asp

5 **Al Di Meola World Sinfonia.** Four time winner as Best Jazz Guitarist in Guitar Player Magazine's Reader Poll. Al and his band will deliver the highest quality jazz fusion you have ever experienced! 8 p.m., LARGO CULTURAL CENTER, 105 Central Park Drive, Largo, FL, 727-587-6793, www.aldimeola.com

5 **10th Annual Greek Festival.** Two Fun Filled days of All Things Greek, including Food, Music and Dance. Blessed Trinity Church, 5 SE 17th St and SE 3rd Ave, Ocala, FL, 3:30-9 p.m. 352-622-1378, greekfestivalocala.com

5 **A taste of Palm Avenue and Walk.** Enjoy gallery openings, dining, antiques, specialty shops and live performances by members of the Palm Ave Arts Alliance. Downtown Sarasota, 6 p.m., www.historicpalmavenue.com/

5 **Get Downtown First Friday Music Series.** Get downtown and get down with the fun and great jazz, , right in the heart of downtown. Central Ave. btwn. 2nd and 3rd St., St. Petersburg, 5:30 p.m., 727-393-3597, www.breakfastoptimist.org

5-7 **The Motown 60s Revue.** Celebration of the music of Motown, the sound that changed America! Hear the most popular songs of all the great 60s Motown artists like Diana Ross & The Supremes,

Does your group sponsor a Snowbird Club or Event?

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Send to : Publisher@SnowbirdsGulfCoast.com or call 850-291-1266.



Stevie Wonder, The Temptations, The Four Tops, Marvin Gaye, & more. Art Center Sarasota, 707 N. Tamiami Trail, Sarasota, show times vary, 941-366-1505, www.wbttroupe.org

5-9 Swimming For Adults Afraid in Water. Beginning swim class for adults. Eight 3-hour sessions, one hour on land followed by 2 hours in the water. The Arlington Park Pool, 2650 Waldemere St., Sarasota, FL 34239, 9 a.m., 941-921-6420, www.miracleswimming.com

6 16th Annual Siesta Key Craft Fair. A tradition in Sarasota. Held along Ocean Blvd and Beach Rd features handmade jewelry, ceramics, stained glass, paintings and much more. Siesta Key Village, 5124 Ocean Drive & Beach Road, Siesta Key (Sarasota), 10 a.m.-5 p.m., Free, 954-472-3755, www.artfestival.com

6 The Sarasota Open Ballroom Dance Competition. The 2nd Annual Sarasota Open Ballroom Dance Competition is a one day competition featuring Amateur, Pro/Am and Pro. competition events. Hyatt Regency Hotel, 1000 Boulevard of the Arts, Sarasota, 941-923-3923, 6 p.m., Admission: \$30, \$60, \$150

6 Tracy Lawrence. With 17 number-one singles and more than 7-million albums sold, Tracy Billboard Magazine's "Top New Male Vocalist of the Year in 1992. Natures Theme Park, 5656 E. Silver Springs Blvd. Silver Springs, FL 34488, 3 p.m. 352-236-2121

6 Gaither Homecoming Tour 2010. Hosted by Bill Gaither, event includes the best-loved voices in gospel music. The Lakeland Center, 701 West Lime St, Lakeland, FL, 3 p.m., www.ticketmaster.com

6 Duke Ellington Orchestra. Winner of 12 Grammy awards as one of the most influential jazz bands of all time. Hits include: Take the A Train, It Don't Mean a Thing (If it Ain't Got that Swing), and Mood

Indigo just to name a few. 2 p.m. & 8 p.m., LARGO CULTURAL CENTER, 105 Central Park Drive, Largo, FL, 727-587-6793, www.dukeellington.com/tourschedule.html

6 International Fine Wine & Food Gala, An Evening in Paris. Romantic event features fine food and wine selections, auction packages, raffle drawings, French Cuisine. Win a trip to Paris! \$25 The Nielsen Company, 501 Brooker Creek Blvd, Oldsmar, www.utbcef.org, 6p.m.-10p.m., 813-300-0019,

6-7 2nd Annual Women's Show of Central Florida. Grab your stilettos, sandals, and sneakers and make a beeline for The Lakeland Center on Fri. Feb. 6 from 10 a.m.-5 p.m., Sat., Feb. 7 from 10 a.m.-4 p.m. Vendors from all over the area are waiting to enhance your life. The Lakeland Center, 701 West Lime St, Lakeland, FL, 10 a.m. - 4 p.m. \$3 Admission, \$7 Parking.

7 Photography Hike. Capture the beauty of Weedon Island Preserve. Pre-register. 1800 Weedon Dr. N.E., St. Petersburg, 8a.m.-noon., www.weedonislandpreserve.org, 727-463-6500.

7 Green Market and Street Fair. Fun, music and great shopping. Enjoy a festive atmosphere and stroll through an eclectic variety of antique, retail shops and restaurants. Grand Central District, 2400 Central Ave., St. Petersburg, 11 a.m.-3 p.m., 727-328-7086, www.grandcentraldistrict.org

8 Dan McMillion Jazz Orchestra. Tribute to the Big Band Era, Largo Lions Club Spotlight Series. Grammy nominee Dan McMillion takes his blockbuster pays tribute to the great "Big Band Era." LARGO CULTURAL CENTER, 105 Central Park Drive, Largo, 727-587-6793 2 p.m. & 7 p.m.

11-14 Fabulous Art Boutique. Exhibit and Sale from the Sarasota Area. Craft Guilds who work in traditional American art forms. Hand dyed silks /wovens, bags, jewelry, baskets, hand turned wood, paper arts and more.

Art Center Sarasota, 707 N Tamiami Trail, 941-365-2032, \$5, times vary, www.manasotaweaversguild.com

12-14 Sarasota Shell Show. Shell enthusiasts from all over the world see scientific & artistic competitions, rare shells, jewelry, arts, crafts, and demos. Hourly door prizes. Sarasota Municipal Auditorium, 801 N Tamiami (US 41) Trail Sarasota, Fri 12:30-5 Sat 10 a.m.-5 p.m. Sun 10 a.m.-4 p.m. \$5/12- free

13 America, Multi-platinum selling artists in 1972. "A Horse with no Name" galloped across the international airwaves, and America became a household name with a string of hits. Silver Springs, Natures Theme Park, 5656 E. Silver Springs Blvd., Silver Springs, FL 34488, 3 p.m. 352-236-2121

13 9th Annual Sarasota Exotic Car Fest. The Ferrari Owners Club-Florida Region international "kick off" event for the season. Circle Park of St. Armands. Over 80 exotic cars competing for the coveted "Best of Show". St. Armands Circle, Sarasota, 941 388-1554, www.FerrarisAndExotics.com

14 Say I Do Again. Celebrate a renewal of wedding vows along the beautiful Siesta Key Beach sunset. Judge Becky Titus performs the non-denominational service promptly at 6 p.m. Pre-registration required by Feb. 11. Call 941-861-9930 to register. \$5 per couple. Siesta Key Beach, 946 Beach Rd., Sarasota, 941-861-5000, www.scgov.net/calendar

14 Neil Diamond Tribute. Jay White recreates the look, sound, and mannerisms of "The World's Classiest Rock Star". 941-861-1380 or 941-861-5000, Venice Community Center, 326 S. Nokomis Ave., Venice, 7p.m., \$20, \$25, 941-861-1380, www.scgov.net/calendar

15 The Rat Pack is Back Swingin' Big Band. If you're nostalgic for the good old days and a swinging night at the Copa, you're in luck. The next best thing to seeing the original Rat Pack themselves. The Lakeland Center, 701 West Lime St, Lakeland, FL, \$45-\$60, 7:30 p.m., www.ticketmaster.com

18 Third Thursday Stroll. Monthly event featuring live entertainment and special offers. Downtown Venice, 5:30 p.m., Free, www.venicemainstreet.com

20 Going Green "The Musical", Play 'N Around Theatre Company. Penelope Jane is back learning the importance of "Going Green." LARGO CULTURAL CENTER, 105 Central Park Drive, Largo, FL 727-587-6793, 11 a.m., www.playnaround.com

20 Rocky Mountain Memories. Ron Rich and his five piece band are known as the top John Denver tribute in the U.S. LARGO CULTURAL CENTER, 105 Central Park Drive, Largo, FL 727-587-6793, 2 p.m.

20 22nd Annual Downtown Sarasota Festival of the Arts. A top 100 Fine Art Shows by Sunshine Artist Magazine. Downtown Sarasota, from 5 Points-Selby Park to Orange Ave. Some of the best artists in the nation, displaying their art. Main St, Sarasota, FL, 10 a.m.-5 p.m., 954-472-3755, Free, www.artfestival.com

20 Classic Car Show. Quarterly Classic Auto, Bike and Truck Show from 11 a.m.-4 p.m., 727-821-6443, www.stpetepier.com

20 Pop Series: A Tribute to Ray Charles - legendary singer and pianist who put soul into anything with a melody. Progress Energy Center for the Arts, Mahaffey Theater, 400 1st St. S., 8 p.m., 727-892-5798, www.mahaffeytheater.com

20-21 Inspired by the Stage. Wagner's Siegfried-Idyll, Prokofiev's Peter and

Wolf, Barber's Adagio for Strings; Dimitri Shostakovich's Suite from Halmet, Op. 32., Ocala Symphony Orchestra, 416 SE Fort King St, Ocala, FL 34471, 352-351-1606, www.ocalasymphony.com

23 The Kingston Trio. Hits include: "Tom Dooley" and "Where Have All the Flowers Gone?" LARGO CULTURAL CENTER, 105 Central Park Drive, Largo, FL 727-587-6793, 7:30 p.m.

25 American Voices with Crystal Gayle, Larry Gatlin, and Andy Cooney. A celebration of country, heritage, faith, and friendship for a night of American Voices. The Lakeland Center, 701 West Lime St, Lakeland, FL, \$40-\$125, 2:30 p.m. & 7:30 p.m., www.ticketmaster.com

26 Ricci Martin. An Evening of Dean Martin Music and More/His Son Remembers. LARGO CULTURAL CENTER, 105 Central Park Dr., Largo, 727-587-6793, 8 p.m.

28 The Four Freshmen. Open-harmony vocals build on the barbershop tradition. LARGO CULTURAL CENTER, 105 Central Park Dr., Largo, 727-587-6793, 2p.m.

27-28 Cracker Days Native Plant Sale. Rainbow Springs State Park. Experience Florida's original Cracker lifestyle with period exhibitors. Visit a Cracker Cow and Trapper Camp. Rainbow Springs State Park, 19158 S.W. 81st Place Rd., Dunnellon, 10 a.m. - 4 p.m., 352-465-8539, www.floridastateparks.org/rainbowsprings

26-28 Big Ten/BIG EAST Baseball Challenge. Event features Illinois, Indiana, Iowa, Michigan, Michigan State, Minnesota, Northwestern, Ohio State, Penn State, Purdue, Louisville, Rutgers, Villanova Cincinnati, Connecticut, Notre Dame, St. John's, Seton Hall, USF and West Virginia. Games daily in St. Petersburg at the Raymond A. Naimoli Complex. Games in Clearwater at Jack Russell Stadium, www.bigtenbigeastchallenge.com



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Largo Country Snowbirds

By B.C. Manion

It's a sunny Friday afternoon, and the three ladies are sitting around a table, playing cards, while a gentle breeze stirs a canopy of pines and music fills the air.

They've come prepared.

They brought their lunches and they plan to play cards for a couple of hours, while their musician husbands – from Connecticut, Pennsylvania and New Hampshire, entertain the crowds.

These women, Marguerite Frenette, Helen Zeiser and Robbie Blais, know the drill. They've been listening to the Country Snowbirds for years.

Marguerite's husband, Roger, plays harmonica. Helen's husband, Drue, plays rhythm guitar and Robbie's husband, Joe, plays electric guitar.

The men gather each winter to make music together, and to jam with whatever musician cares to join them on stage.

The group's current venue is Heritage Village, at 11909 125th Street N. in Largo, a 21-acre living history museum. Its collection of historic buildings includes a school, church, railroad depot, sponge warehouse and general store, as well as a log cabin and a Queen Anne-style house.

A crowd of roughly 60 people recently gathered in the village to kick back and relax in their lawn chairs, while listening to country tunes.

They came from all over the globe.

Mary Lumadue, 66, of White Pigeon, Mich., said she and her group make the circuit, listening to music wherever they can during their winter visits.

She was enthused by the Country Snowbirds, but not so much by Florida's recent prolonged cold snap.

"I came to Florida to get warm," she complained, mockingly. "But it's better than home," she quickly added.

Heather Williams, of Halifax, Nova Scotia, said she and her husband, Brian, were disappointed by the spate of cold weather – but were determined to enjoy themselves anyway.

They, and their dog, Dixie, seemed to be doing just that while the band played.

"This Heritage Village – what a great spot," Williams said.

Besides its interesting collection of buildings, the village is part of a larger complex which includes Florida Botanical Gardens, with an impressive collection of plants within its 30 cultivated acres, and habitat for wildlife within 90 acres of natural space.

Despite Florida's big chill in early 2010, the weather was pretty much perfect when the Country Snowbirds recently played.

Most of the crowd came just to watch, but a few musicians dropped by, ready to play.

Carol Van Hine, of Largo, Fla., who goes by the stage name "Ragtime Annie," brought her banjo and played "You Are My Sunshine."

The 70-year-old coaxed the audience to sing along. Tentative at first, their voices grew stronger as the song went along.

Sixty-eight-year-old Roger Noel, another Largo resident, carried his acoustic guitar to the stage where he sang, "My Heart Won't Let Me Love No One but You."

Noel is no stranger to the Country Snowbirds. He's been jamming with them for at least a half-dozen seasons, he said.

Allen McMann, the band's fiddle player, has been with the group 15 years – the longest among current members.

"Due to our ages, they come and go," explained McMann, who is 72.

"Some pass away. Some move," said another band member Bob Lohrman, who plays the guitar. A former Snowbird from Dresden, Ohio, he now makes his permanent home in Pinellas Park, Fla.

Most of the band has been playing together for years.

Debi Sullivan, the sole exception, made her debut in January.

Band members aren't paid for their gigs. They play for the sheer joy of it.

"I've been playing 55 years. I started when I was 14, with my dad," Lohrman said.

Musicians stepping up from the crowd get a similar thrill.

"Look at this day. It's perfect," said Van Hine, aka, Ragtime Annie. "This is what life should be about: Open-air, great music and to be with your spouse, or your friends."



If You Want To Go

The Country Snowbirds will be jamming from 1 p.m. to 3 p.m. every Friday through April 9 at Heritage Village, 11909 125th St., N. in Largo. Bring a lawn chair and a musical instrument if you want to play.

To learn more about Heritage Village, the FloridaBotanical or events at either site, go to: www.pinellascounty.org/heritage



Captain Curt's

By Karen Harrell

As a longtime travel writer, I prefer visiting areas in the same way that my readers do.

This generally means I'll do some research before arrival but I prefer to explore along the way.

This is how I discovered Captain Curt's Crab and Oyster Bar at Siesta Key, Fla.

It was my first time on the island and I had driven nearly its length stopping several times in the morning to browse the shops and peer into windows.

But by 1 p.m. the stomach was growling and we decided to stop at a non-descript restaurant located in an aging shopping center.

My experience has been this can either be a quality find or well, a real dive.

Actually, it was a bit of both.

Newer restaurants try hard sometimes to recreate a "dive" atmosphere.

You know – to have people believe they've been there forever.

But Capt Curt's is the real deal.

And, it was packed. That's always a good sign.

Later I discovered the restaurant was established in 1979 and a 30-year old history just can't be recreated.

We entered the restaurant and could see the hostesses and wait staff were buzzing around.

The atmosphere was dark and décor simple and old school with fish nets and giant crabs dominating the scene. We immediately noticed the sign that proclaimed the restaurant took top honors at the Great Chowder Cook-Off in Newport, RI. – which made them internationally famous. A cup of clam chowder is a reasonable \$3.49.

Accompanied by my strapping 25-year-old nephew, he immediately took umbrage at the ample Ohio State memorabilia. An over-the-top Alabama fan, I urged him to one day open his own restaurant where he too could decorate as he pleased. An Auburn grad, I was about tired of the BAMA banter.

After just a few minutes we were seated and took a look at the menu.

We first ordered the conch fritters (\$7.99) as an appetizer. This item usually isn't available on menus in Florida panhandle restaurants where I live. In fact, the nephew had never heard of conch fritters and I explained they were similar to a hush puppy but filled with a seafood called conch which actually is a sea snail.

The conch fritters were tasty and light and helped knock off the hunger pangs.

For a main dish I ordered the Grouper Caesar salad. From experience, I know that a quality restaurant will provide an ample piece of fish with a Caesar salad at a fraction of the price for a dinner – and I wasn't disappointed.

The broiled grouper was tasty but not too heavily seasoned and the salad was fresh and satisfying. The listed salad is listed as "market price" which was \$10.99.

The nephew ordered the fried shrimp platter (\$14.99) which came with boiled new potatoes and slaw. The dozen shrimp were large enough to fill him and neither of us had room for dessert.

Non-seafood eaters can choose from chicken, burgers and baby back barbeque ribs. Most items range from \$9.99 to \$15.99. The kids menu features usual fare including macaroni and cheese and is family-friendly at \$5.49.

We saw that there was a small bar in the back room of the restaurant which features live entertainment from professionals and non-professionals who enjoy karaoke. We browsed the gift shops in the adjacent shopping center in search of a long-sleeved t-shirt but didn't find anything to our taste. Maybe next time.



If You Go



What:

Captain Curt's Crab and Oyster Bar

Location:

1200 Old Stickney Point Road, Siesta Key, FL

Details:

941-349-3885 or
www.captaincurts.com

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Clearwater Dock., 25 Causeway Blvd., Slip 55, Clearwater, FL, Details: 813.223.7999, www.yachtstarship.com

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Pro Golf *Want to Volunteer?*

Like to watch professional golfers in person that you saw on television in their heydays?

Like to volunteer?

Like to play golf?

Like to eat Outback food?

If you, dear Snowbird, answered yes to any of these questions, then becoming a volunteer at the Champions Tour Outback Steakhouse Pro-Am from April 16-18 in Tampa is the place to be.

And if you answered yes to all four, well, then you might be in heaven.

Volunteers are a big part of any professional golf tournament. Just ask Mary Margaret Schexnayder, the volunteer coordinator for the Outback Steakhouse Pro-Am.

"Without them we couldn't do the tournament," she said. "They are a vital part of our event. And a lot of them are Snowbirds."

Schexnayder keeps a database list of volunteers and the Snowbirds are the one with two mailing addresses — one with their Florida home and the other with their home up north.

The Outback Steakhouse Pro-Am uses about 1,300 volunteers and about 800 are return workers. "We actually have a waiting list for volunteers," she said. "This is a great problem to have."

Duties range from walking with the golfers, holding the scoreboard to clubhouse security.

To become a volunteer, you have to pay an \$80 fee. But that includes a lot: logo golf shirt and jacket, 6 tickets to the tournament for friends, lapel pin, a free round of golf at TPC, lunch from Outback or related restaurant each day at the course, plus a \$25 gift card to Outback.

"The package deal pays for itself," Schexnayder said. "We have a great thing going."

Nick Price is the defending champion of the Outback Steakhouse Pro-Am, which has been going on for 22 years. To volunteer: Mary Margaret Schexnayder at (813) 265-4653 or marymargaret@outback.com

Remember, every tournament uses volunteers to make the event happen.



Loren Roberts



Hal Sutton



Mississippi Gulf Coast Resort Classic at Fallen Oak Golf Club in Biloxi, Miss., is the newest event on the Champions Tour. Dates are April 30-May 2.

Here is a list of golf tournaments held in Florida this spring.

Champions Tour

Feb. 12-14	The ACE Group Classic, Naples
Feb. 19-21	Allianz Championship, Boca Raton
April 16-18	Outback Steakhouse Pro-Am, Lutz

PGA

March 4-7	The Honda Classic, Palm Beach Gardens
March 11-14	World Championships, Miami
March 18-21	Transitions Championship, Palm Harbor
March 25-28	Arnold Palmer Invitational, Orlando

Check out: www.pgatour.com for information on individual tournaments.

Tampa Bay Lightning



Snowbirds who grew up with ice hockey and watching the National Hockey League in their home area in the north can see the same quality hockey in south Florida.

The Tampa Bay Lightning have been a part of the Southeast Division of the Eastern Conference in the NHL since 1992.

They play in the Ice Palace in downtown Tampa.

Led by captain Vincent Levalle and Martin St. Louis, the Lightning are battling for a playoff spot and the regular season runs through April 11. The team is led by first-year coach Rick Tocchet.

A variety of ticket packages are available, including a 10-game flex pack for as low as \$120. Another option is the "Big Night Out" package that includes two tickets, two hot dogs, two beers or sodas and a parking pass that starts at only \$44.

You can order tickets through Ticketmaster or call 813-301-6600.

At many of the games, giveaways offer fans a chance to receive something from a T-shirt to a hat. Check the team's Web site at www.lightning.nhl.com for details.



Rick Tocchet

Remaining Tampa Bay Lightning Home Games

Jan. 29	vs. Ducks	7:30 p.m.
Feb. 4	vs. Islanders	7:30 p.m.
Feb. 6	vs. Flames	7 p.m.
Feb. 9	vs. Canucks	7:30 p.m.
Feb. 11	vs. Bruins	7:30 p.m.
March 2	vs. Flyers	7:30 p.m.
March 6	vs. Thrashers	7:30 p.m.
March 14	vs. Penguins	5 p.m.
March 16	vs. Coyotes	7:30 p.m.
March 18	vs. Sabres	7:30 p.m.
March 20	vs. Capitals	7:30 p.m.
March 23	vs. Hurricanes	7:30 p.m.
April 2	vs. Rangers	7:30 p.m.
April 6	vs. Hurricanes	7:30 p.m.
April 8	vs. Senators	7:30 p.m.
April 10	vs. Panthers	7:30 p.m.

Tickets: 813-301-6600 or www.lightning.nhl.com.



SCOTT AUDETTE/GETTY IMAGES



Melanoma risk factors include:

light skin color, family and/or personal history of skin cancer, presence of atypical moles and freckles and history of severe sunburn occurring early in life. Skin cancer is the most common form of cancer in the United States. More than 1 million skin cancers are diagnosed annually. One in 5 Americans and one in 3 Caucasians will develop skin cancer in the course of a lifetime. More than 90 percent of all skin cancers are caused by sun exposure. A person's risk for skin cancer doubles if he or she has had five or more sunburns.

Estimated New Cases of Melanoma by State *

1. California – 6,680
2. Florida – 4,380
3. Texas – 3,860
4. Pennsylvania – 3,120
5. New York – 3,070
6. Ohio – 2,390
7. New Jersey – 2,210
8. Michigan – 2,080
9. Illinois – 2,050
10. Massachusetts – 1,820

Source: www.skincancer.org

Guarding your life

By Karen Harrell

Richard Berg, 68, spent eight summers of his youth as a lifeguard in Long Island, N.Y.

He freely admits to using baby oil and iodine “to tan” and gave little thought to the threat of skin cancer. Berg also spent much of his 20s and 30s in the sun coaching athletic teams and administering games.

He didn't transition from suntan lotion to wearing sunscreens until they were made widely available when he was in his 40s.

By then, it was too late. In the past 10 years, Berg has had 14 skin cancers removed but is fortunate that none have been malignant.

“I've had quite a few on my shoulders, several on my legs and four on my face,” said Berg, who formerly coached basketball at Hofstra University and recently retired as athletic director at the University of West Florida in Pensacola.

Early unprotected and long exposure to the sun's rays is not uncommon among today's seniors who grew up playing outside and often worked on farms or in family gardens.

“Most people don't realize that skin cancer is the most common cancer in the world,” said Pensacola dermatologist Kevin Welch, who owns the Medical Center Clinic Skin Care Center. “I see it almost every day in my practice.”

Welch said contrary to popular perception skin cancers are usually flat and dark in color and are often red or a mix of colors. He said another danger sign is when a dark spot or mole bleeds when washed.

Berg gets regular six-month checkups and is diligent about wearing protective clothing, hats and sunscreen with UV protection when he is in the sun. But that hasn't stopped him from enjoying yard work, spending time on his boat or a favorite family tradition – watching the Blue Angels fly over Pensacola Beach each July. His wife, Sandy, also has to be careful in the sun because of adverse reaction to the medication she takes.

“We are just careful,” Berg said. “Before we leave we put the top up on the boat and we stay in the shade. If we are at the beach and get in the water, we reapply our sunscreen.”

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Pet Savvy



The Senior Pet

By Michelle Harrell

As I watched this past year my star performer, Cupid, tumble off the edge of the stage (unhurt thankfully), I realized he was getting older. Cupid has begun to lose some vision and has developed chronic canine bronchitis. Both require changes in the routine for our stage act as well as everyday life.

Since we travel about six months out of the year, it's extremely important that I pack enough of the required medication. That's simply because many vets cannot administer drugs for out of state prescriptions

Being that I have an incredible, hands-on vet, she also taught me how to make a traveling nebulization system so that Cupid would always get the treatments when needed.

Learning how to be mobile with four dogs is difficult enough, but this year, I learned more about traveling with the senior pet. I'd like to pass on some tips for those of you who are caring for an aging furry friend as well.

Take care of your fur babies and appreciate all the years of love that they give us!

1. Always ask for a hotel room on the first floor to make it easier for those pets with arthritis.
2. Put a friend at home in charge of picking up and mailing any extra medication in case of emergency.
3. Pack a doggie ramp or stairs to make it easier for them to get into the car or onto the bed.
4. Remember to be their guide and that fading sight and unfamiliar territory can be frightening for them.
5. Pack lots of doggie pads, things may not be working like they used to and they may not be able to make it outside.
6. Be patient, their walk might be slower and take longer.
7. To be present, aware and in the moment. Make sure to bring their favorite doggie bed or blanket, this will make them feel safe and calm.
8. Always know where the nearest 24-hour emergency vet is located, with a map from your hotel ready.
9. Be aware of new plants and vegetation, know what's poisonous to your pet.
10. Be the best friend to them that they've always been to you.

Take care of your fur babies and appreciate all the years of love that they give us!

Until next time.....Happy Trails and Tails

Michelle Harrell, otherwise known as "PoodleMama" travels and performs at specials events, festivals and fairs throughout the country with her four beloved poodles - Cupid, Blondie, Emilio and Pirouette. She also performs as a Living Statue. Check out her website at www.statueviva.com.

A Gulf Coast Road Trip



Mobile Mardi Gras

While many people make the trek to New Orleans to celebrate Mardi Gras each year, history buffs know the annual celebration actually originated about two hours east in Mobile, Ala.

A trip to the William & Emily Hearin Mobile Carnival Museum provides visitors with the look and feel of Mardi Gras with its colorful and historic displays and pictorial hallway filled with photos of each year's fabulous Mardi Gras celebrations.

The Mobile Carnival Museum opened in 2005 and was an immediate success as visitors came in large numbers to learn more about the history of Mardi Gras in the Mobile area.

The museum offers 14 gallery rooms, a pictorial hallway, theater, den (social gathering area) and gift shop. In addition, the home is registered as a historic building and affords visitors the opportunity to enjoy detailed crown molding, pine floors and exquisite chandeliers.

Judi Gullede has been with the museum since 2006 and as executive director, has first-hand experience as to why people love to visit the local Mardi Gras museum.

"The Mobile Carnival Museum seeks to highlight the history of Mardi Gras in Mobile," said Gullede. "Mobile is referred to as the birthplace of Mardi Gras. Mardi Gras in Mobile has been described as being the largest, family-orientated street party celebration in America."

Mardi Gras in Mobile features a two-sided celebration, as does the museum. One part focuses on the huge street party and the fun celebrated by the people and the other part focuses on the royal aspect and the history of the royals celebrating Mardi Gras."

Families of monarchs have donated royal robes, crowns and scepters to the museum. Members of local mystic organizations donated emblem costumes, favors and doubloons. The items are beautifully displayed throughout the museum

The Mobile Carnival Museum greets you with a full-size float that you can explore and even throw candy to your friends below just like the Mardi Gras maskers do during annual parade celebrations.

"The Mobile Carnival Museum is historical and whimsical," said Gullede. "As soon as you step inside; you step into Mardi Gras madness and you become an instant part of the celebration."

The Mobile Carnival Museum is located at 355 Government Street and is open to the public on Monday, Wednesday, Friday and Saturday from 9 a.m. to 4 p.m. The museum is closed on Tuesday, Thursday and Sunday. Admission to the museum is \$5 for adults, \$2 for children 12 and under and kids under three are admitted free of charge. If you want to experience Mobile Mardi Gras in person this year, parades run almost daily through Feb. 16.

If you Go

What: William & Emily Hearin Mobile Carnival Museum
Where: 355 Government St., Mobile, AL
Details: 251-432-3324 or www.mobilecarnivalmuseum.com

Mardi Gras Gulf Coast-South

What: Mardi Gras in Dunedin

Admission is free. Event includes parade, arts and crafts, entertainment.

When: Feb. 16, 5 p.m. - 11 p.m. Parade at 7:30 p.m.

Details: 727-488-4509 or www.delightfuldunedin.com/mardigras

What: Mardi Gras 2010 at Universal Studios Florida

Where: Universal Studios Florida®, Universal Orlando®, Orlando, Florida

When: Feb. 6 - April 17

Details: 407-363-8000, 1-800-837-2273 or Mardi Gras is included in admission to Universal Studios. Guests can save by purchasing tickets online in advance. Visit www.universalorlando.com/mardigras.

Celebrate Mardi Gras at Universal Studios If you want to get a taste of Mardi Gras, head over to Universal Studios Florida in Orlando where the streets of the theme park come alive for the largest Mardi Gras celebration outside of the Big Easy – featuring spectacular parades with colorful floats, extravagantly costumed characters, a live concert series that boasts some of today's hottest musical performers, delicious New Orleans-style cuisine and plenty of beads to throw around. Mardi Gras at Universal Studios Florida® festivities run on select nights from mid-February to early April. Admission is included with a regular Universal Studios Florida® ticket.



Saturdays nights February 6 -April 17

Feb. 6	KC & The Sunshine Band	8:30 p.m.
Feb. 13	Heart	8:30 p.m.
Feb. 14	Kool & The Gang	8:30 p.m.
Feb. 20	Blondie	8:30 p.m.
Feb. 27	Dierks Bentley	8:30 p.m.
March 6	Akon	8:30 p.m.
March 13	Aretha Franklin	8:30 p.m.
March 20	Miranda Lambert	8:30 p.m.
March 27	3 Doors Down	9:30 p.m.
April 3	Beach Boys	9:30 p.m.
April 9	Sheryl Crow	9:30 p.m.
April 10	Flo Rida	9:30 p.m.
April 17	Chicago	8:30 p.m.

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By Frank Kaiser

From Plugs to Rugs: A Geezer's Guide to Baldness



It may begin when folks start calling you "Mr. Clean." Or when no one asks to borrow your comb anymore.

Or perhaps you've noticed that you're getting more samples of Rogaine than free AOL disks.

You're getting bald, my fellow geezer, and there's no way around it.

Or is there? After I wrote my column, "Got a License for that Comb-over?" explaining how some men even use their ear and nose hairs to camouflage bald spots, I got almost 200 reader responses, many sending photos of their proud and shining chrome-domes.

One short letter, in particular, intrigued me.

I can help you. Give me a call. Mike Kuz

Mike, it turns out, is in the hair replacement business. Has been most of his 66 years. Mike's A-Hair-1 store is here in Clearwater, so yesterday, in the cause of wrinklie research, Carolyn and I stopped by to learn what he could do for one pathetic follically challenged 69-year-old coot.

Looking and sounding like a short, thin Reginald Van Gleason, Mike explained that his "hair-loss service" specialized in "perimeter-bond systems" that stay on your head day and night, swimming or skydiving, for five to six weeks at a time.

Then, as your real hair grows up under the rug, unless you want to look like Frankenstein with a low forehead you have Mike remove the "system," cut your hair, and re-glue the head-falsie back on for another five to six weeks.

Of course, Mike would never use the vulgarisms "rug" or "head-falsie." This is serious business.

Costly, too. But consider: Isn't looking like Fabio worth \$650, plus a \$35 wash, cut, and glue every few weeks? According to Mike, that's but a quarter the price charged by some of the national dome-doily companies.

Mike himself prefers his personal sky-piece with teeny combs that grab what little original hair he has left. That way, he can take it off at night, giving it a well-earned rest.

It's not easy being a "system." Made in China with human hair, they're subject to bruising and bumping, even bleaching in the Florida sun. Not to mention the sheer torment involved in bungee jumping, scuba diving and other gonzo activities that, according to an infomercial Mike showed me, everyone with "new hair" tries at least once.

Such hair-raising adventures prove how far we've come since those Depression days when barbers applied huge, sucking vacuum machines to balding noggins, hoping to stimulate the scalp and promote hair growth.

Then there were the painful plugs that, mercifully, faded with Frank Sinatra.

Finally, in a country where there's a pill for every perversity, daily doses of minoxidil (Rogaine) — results may vary — provided peach fuzz after four months or so. Unfortunately, it also provided fluid retention, chest pain, dizziness, even blistering inside the mouth.

All things considered, a "system" seems the way to go.

Suddenly Trivia:

Who won a 1997 poll asking "If you could have anyone's hair, who's would it be?"

a) Fabio, b) Dolly Parton, c) Marge Simpson, d) Albert Einstein.

Yet the more I think about it, the more I realize that I'm just too sexy for my hair.

Consider:

Is a man's scent sexy? His voice? His muscles? His one-track mind? Of course they are! So, I ask you, how can male-pattern baldness be anything less than manly? Less hair means there's less to compete with everything that is good about a man's face. His eyes are stronger. His jaw, firmer. His smile, far sexier.

Think of baldness as growing taller than your hair.

Let me make this bald statement:

For me, treatment of hair loss is a loser's game. If anyone asks, I tell 'em that my hair rubbed off after hitting the headboard too often. I am BaldMan!

Eat your heart out, Fabio.

Of course, if you look like you were abducted by aliens who did some creepy experiment on your head, or if you're always thinking about what other people are thinking about your much higher than usual forehead, go see Mike or someone like him. My God, man, you have nothing else to lose.

Suddenly Trivia Answer:

c) Marge Simpson won with 26 percent of the votes. Albert Einstein lost by a hair at 25 percent. Fabio claimed only 11 percent. And poor Dolly Parton? She got but 7 percent.

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