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The Koss Family Exemplifies FMB

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Cover Photo By Sandy Sandness



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 \$899,000 720 ESTERO BLVD	 \$899,000 96 HERCULES DR	 \$899,900 111 COCONUT DR	 \$1,249,000 716 ESTERO BLVD	 \$1,295,000 4431 ESTERO BLVD	 \$1,299,000 61 FLAMINGO ST	 \$1,375,000 22491 BUCCANEER LAGOON ST	 \$1,850,000 5585 AVENIDA PESCADORA
 \$1,999,990 5246 ESTERO BLVD	 \$2,399,000 470 MADISON CT	 \$2,995,000 1750 ESTERO BLVD	 \$2,999,000 711 ESTERO BLVD	 \$3,449,000 8010 ESTERO BLVD	 ASSEMBLAGE OF 3 PARCELS : \$4,629,999		

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 \$699,000 7700 ESTERO BLVD #403	 \$774,000 6620 ESTERO BLVD #1103	 \$799,000 7390 ESTERO BLVD #503	 \$899,000 2532 ESTERO BLVD #508
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SCAN ME

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134 Spanish Main	\$426,000	427 Lazy Way	\$1,090,000
6665 Estero BLVD #121	\$480,000	261 Ostego Dr	\$1,150,000
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140 Bahia Via	\$645,000	265 Mango	\$1,800,000
5551 Estero BLVD	\$750,000	260 Flamingo St	\$2,650,000
6900 Estero BLVD	\$750,000	4137 Bay Beach Ln #5H4	\$2,850,000
4192 Bay Beach LN Unit 835	\$815,000	6060 Gulf Rd	\$3,150,000
180 Curlew St	\$852,500	757 San Carlos Dr	\$3,174,000
157/159 Connecticut St	\$1,025,000		

OUR 2024 SOLD BUYERS

134 Spanish Main	\$426,000	4192 Bay Beach LN Unit 835	\$815,000
110 Mid Island Dr	\$513,500	4192 Bay Beach LN #882	\$925,000
207 Redfish Dr	\$554,900	261 Ostego DR	\$1,150,000
19003 San Carlos Dr	\$600,000	2621/2623 Estero	\$1,200,000
107 Albatross	\$650,000	21591 Widgeon Ter	\$1,400,000
6662 Estero #509B	\$660,000	948 San Carlos Dr	\$2,300,000
4753 Estero BLVD #705	\$749,000	291 Randy Ln	\$2,700,000
3321 Estero BLVD	\$750,000	4137 Bay Beach Ln #5H4	\$2,850,000

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FORT MYERS BEACH

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FEEDBACK / IDEAS / SUBMISSIONS

Have feedback, ideas or submissions? We are always happy to hear from you! Deadlines for submissions are the 20th of each month, 6 weeks in advance of publication. Email your thoughts, ideas and photographs to gmooney@bestversionmedia.com. Submissions must be original and exclusive to *Fort Myers Beach LIVING*, at a maximum of 500 words. *Fort Myers Beach LIVING* reserves the right to edit submissions for clarity, space limitations and spelling.

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- FMB Fire Department: 239-590-4200
- FMB Town Hall: 239-765-0202
- FMB Public Library: 239-765-8162
- Lee County Parks & Recreation: 239-533-7275
- Beach Elementary School: 239-463-6356
- FMB Water Department: 239-463-9914
- Trash Collection: 239-334-1224
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- By Gary Mooney -

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Answers on page 10



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Hello Friends & Neighbors!

When I was a kid growing up in Missouri, the unofficial end of the summer was the Labor Day Holiday Weekend, because that meant that we started school a day or two later. Now children begin classes in the middle of August and if they take part in any kind of sporting activity like football or club like debate, their practices start even earlier.

The new 2024-25 academic school year kicks off on Monday, August 12, and for those who cherish the Beach Elementary School (BES), this is a special occasion! The last time all of our island children, teachers and support staff gathered all together as a school family to debut a new academic year was August 2022, about six weeks before Hurricane Ian decimated much of FMB, including the Beach School. From September 28, 2022 onward, for most of the next year-and-a-half, our children and the Beach Elementary School staff were like nomads and vagabonds, headquartering at various other Lee County educational institutions while FMB residents fought and ultimately were successful in keeping our beloved school.

In this issue, the Koss Family discusses their passion for the BES and why they worked so hard to keep it on our island. As John Koss says, "The BES always ranks in the top five in Lee County, with outstanding teachers, and no other community anywhere embraces its local school like FMB; it is truly the heart of our community. If we lose it, we lose the reason why families move to FMB." In another story this month, BES Principal Traci Kohler became emotional when saying, "when it looked like the School District might permanently close the BES after Ian, the entire island made it clear that for FMB to have a future, it must keep the BES because we give everyone hope for the island's future." FMB

Chamber of Commerce President Jacki Lyszak correctly states that "you cannot be a vibrant community without a first-class school."

As for me, families are the generational blocks of this island's foundation. As part of the agreement to retain the BES, children who live off-island can now attend our fantastic school, so we must collectively spread the word that not only can our bartenders, wait staff and support workers send their children to the BES but so can all Lee County residents, so FMB can continue to keep the doors to the BES open. Tell your friends that if they want their kids to attend the absolute best elementary school anywhere, the Beach Elementary School is for them!

Speaking of the absolute best anywhere, please support our advertisers because without them, we cannot provide *Fort Myers Beach LIVING* to you free of charge. When you do visit them, say that you saw their ad in our magazine so we can continue to supply you with this monthly original entertainment.

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*"Family is the Number
One aspect of our lives."*

"WE ARE TRULY BLESSED!"

The Koss Family Exemplifies FMB

- By Gary Mooney -

John Koss is from Collingswood in southern New Jersey, while his wife Bettina is a native of Braunschweig in northern Germany, meaning that it took a chance encounter on FMB to bring them together. So, was it love at first sight?

"John would say 'Yes,'" laughs Bettina! "It absolutely was," agrees John. "We met at 'The Cottage' bar & restaurant 13 years ago. Bettina just moved to Florida while I was contemplating a move to Florida or South America. My younger brother, who lived in Naples, was talking up South Florida so he found me a place on FMB to check out the area. It was near 'The Cottage' so on my second night I heard music and went over. My former college roommate was with me, and in exchange for me paying for his visit, I made him promise two things: that I make it home safe from the bars and to not let me settle down with any woman I meet here! Then Bettina entered and I said to him, 'my new next wife just walked in!' We made eye contact and she could tell we were talking about her so she came over to say 'hello' and the rest is history."

As for Bettina, while she had an immediate attraction to John, "the first thing I noticed about this former American wrestler were his cauliflower ears! I soon gave up a well-paying corporate position with the Marriott group in Germany to take a job with the Flamingo Inn to be near John." "On the second day after we met," John continues, "we were talking about spending the rest of our lives together." They married in 2013, on the beach near where they met. "John better never forget our wedding anniversary," jokes Bettina: "September 28!"

FMB is home as well as to their two sons, nine-year-old John Charles, better known as "JC," and Carter who is four, along with their dog Parker. "JC is in the 4th grade at Beach Elementary School (BES)," John offers. "Everybody who encounters JC says he is an awesome kid and an old soul. He made his first All-Star team in Little League this year and he and I recently finished our third annual 'Father / Son Fishing Trip' to Alaska. As for Carter, he thinks he is the boss! Even though JC is five years older than Carter, he has so much patience in mentoring

his younger brother and I can honestly say they are best friends."

Family is Number One

John owns "Beach Boys A/C" while Bettina is with the Alex King Realty Group. "Compared to many FMB service industry companies, 'Beach Boys A/C' survived Ian mostly in good shape," he reports. "Even before Ian, we were already talking to Alex about Bettina joining his team and after the hurricane devastated the Flamingo Inn, she began her real estate exam courses. While we enjoy our careers, however, our family is the Number One aspect of our lives."

They live in the Laguna Shores neighborhood at the island's south end. "We moved into our former home seven years ago and bought it two years later," explains John. "The south end appeals to us because it is so peaceful. I know everyone says this, but our neighborhood is the island's best! The kids play on their bicycles and scooters and someone waves to you from like every third house. After we lost our home to Ian, we never considered rebuilding anywhere else; this is where our roots are now."

When Ian made its initial approach, John planned to stay on FMB while evacuating Bettina and the boys, but she overruled him to stay together. "I have extensive military training so I thought I could survive whatever happened," he rationalizes. "On the evening before Ian, however, with the forecast becoming increasingly dire, I told Bettina, 'get the kids in the car and let's get out of here!' It was already a hairy situation weather-wise and we may very well have been the last people to cross the bridge. We drove to a friend's house on Jensen Beach that usually takes three hours, but we were on the road for seven, in a real white-knuckle drive! The only things we took were my little brother's ashes, our important paperwork and the boys' favorite stuffed animals."

While in Jensen Beach, it amazed John how well he could monitor the



“John better never forget our wedding anniversary,” jokes Bettina: “September 28!”

FMB situation. “It stunned me how well cellphones functioned,” he relates. “I was getting a play-by-play from several friends and neighbors. When I learned that people had to jump out of their homes and swim for it, I was so glad we evacuated as I could not imagine doing that with a 7- and 2-year-old. A neighbor said the water was up to our roof so I knew that Ian devastated our home.”

Bettina and John chose to rebuild on their Laguna Shores lot. “Fortunately, our great friends Steve and Shannon Diener, from whom we purchased our house, let us live in their place for well over a year, then we shifted into a travel trailer for several months on another friend’s property. We moved into our new home last month and it feels wonderful! While around half our neighbors rebuilt, it is heart-wrenching to see all the empty lots. That makes me nervous as to what our community will eventually look like but life is about change so you embrace that while doing your best to influence those future decisions.”

The Heart of The Community

In addition to rebuilding, their priority was reopening the Beach Elementary School. “When it looked like the Lee County School District might permanently close it, I became a committee member to ensure that would not occur,” John recalls. “Negotiations were difficult but we saved it. The BES always ranks in the top five in Lee County, with outstanding teachers, and no other community anywhere embraces

its local school like FMB; it is truly the heart of our community. If we lose it, we lose the reason why families move to FMB.”

“When it looked like the BES might not reopen, that was the only time we considered rebuilding off-island,” adds Bettina. “If FMB loses the BES, then the Bay Oaks Recreational Center would soon follow and we would not have family events like holiday parades or Little League; FMB would lose its charm and become just another resort town.”

To Bettina, the best part of FMB is its community vibe. “Whenever we walk the kids and dog, we always run into friends who treat each other the right way. When we go to dinner, we know the waitstaffs. We never worry about the kids playing outside because all our neighbors keep their eye on them – we have an island-full of Grandmas!”

John believes that his family best exemplifies why people love FMB. “Like so many others, we found a different type of happiness here, where people really get it. It does not matter if you are a billionaire or a dishwasher; everyone treats you with a high level of respect.” “Sure, we have a seven-mile-long beautiful beach and wonderful nature,” concludes Bettina, “but none of that would ever matter without a caring community. Despite Ian, we have our children, health, careers, school and each other – we are truly blessed!” ■



Carter & JC with Parker: “I can honestly say they are best friends,” says their Dad.



“Like so many others, we found a different type of happiness here, where people really get it.”



John & JC recently finished their third annual “Father / Son Fishing Trip” to Alaska.



NAVIGATING FLOOD INSURANCE: A Quick Summary

- by Wendy Matura -

As we know, our homes on Fort Myers Beach are in a great area. Our beautiful island community is known for its sandy shores and coastal charm but it is no stranger to the risks posed by flooding. Despite the evolving landscape of insurance policies and ratings, flood insurance remains available and accessible on the island.

The market is changing relative to flood insurance so it is important to work with an expert who has been through the storms. There are several important items to know about today's flood insurance market.

The National Flood Insurance Program (NFIP) introduced Risk Rating 2.0, a new pricing methodology. This was a significant update to the flood insurance rating system. This new system aims to deliver rates that better reflect a property's unique

flood risk. The 2.0 rating considers multiple factors, including flood frequency, distance to a water source, and property characteristics such as elevation and cost to rebuild. Prior to the implementation of the 2.0 rating, glide path policies were established to ensure a smooth transition to the new system. These policies capped the annual increase in base rates, ensuring that policyholders would not face sudden and steep hikes in their premiums.

The residents of Fort Myers Beach can take comfort in knowing that flood insurance remains available to them. If done correctly the 2.0 rating system offers a more equitable approach to determining premiums. The glide path policies ensure that the transition to these new rates is more manageable, reflecting our community's dedication to protecting its members from the financial impact of flooding.

Flood insurance remains a vital safeguard for homeowners and businesses on the island, ensuring protection against the unpredictable forces of nature. Despite changes in policies and ratings, there is availability of flood insurance options. It is very important to know that not all programs are created equal. It is extremely important to work with an expert knowledgeable about the Fort Myers Beach area to make sure you get the best possible program tailored to your exact needs.

Wendy Matura with RTI Insurance Services has been serving our island community for over 24 years. She is a flood expert and has been through numerous storms, making sure clients are well protected and taken care of. You can reach Wendy at 239-314-1307 or wendy@trustrti.com. ■



*We've weathered the storms with you.
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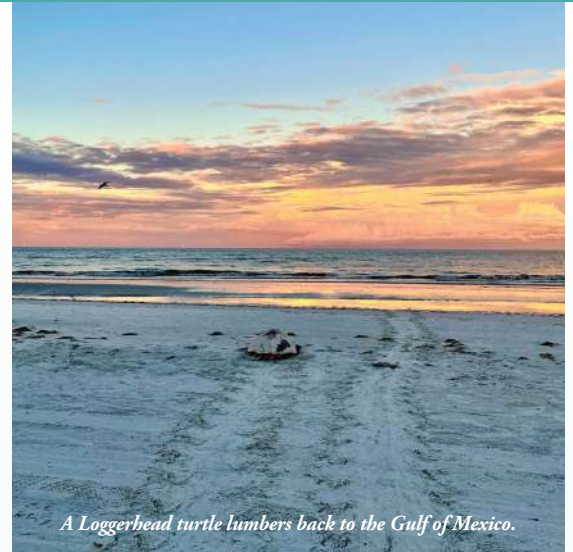
It's Turtle Time!

- by Gary Mooney -

The all-volunteer non-profit Turtle Time, Inc., begun by Eve Haverfield in 1989, benefits marine turtles on Fort Myers Beach as well as Big Hickory Island and Bonita and Bunche Beaches. Florida's nesting sea turtle season runs through October 31. FMB is the almost-exclusive domain of Loggerheads, though Turtle Time found its first few documented Green nests over the last few years.

"2024 is an average sea turtle nesting year so far," reports Eve. "Loggerheads tend to nest every other year, so we compare numbers to 2022. In that year, up to this point, we had 78 nests and so far we have 77 so we are on track to match 2022's total of 109, meaning it is a routine season so far. With the beach renourishment happening we have relocated any nests out of harm's way and ultimately there will be a better and higher beach with proper dunes for nesting.

Turtle Time encourages residents to proactively protect sea turtles and hatchlings. Switch to turtle-friendly Amber LED lights, close drapes and blinds after dark, never shine a flashlight or use flash photography on sea turtles, move boats or furniture behind beach vegetation nightly, keep dogs on a leash, and fill in any holes dug into the sand as hatchlings



A Loggerhead turtle lingers back to the Gulf of Mexico.

and adult turtles can fall in and die. If you accidentally hook or catch a sea turtle, or find one in distress or dead, immediately contact Turtle Time at 239-481-5566 or www.turtletime.org, the FWC Hotline at 888-404-3922, or the Town of FMB at 239-765-4222. "I want to thank the many beachfront residents and volunteers who make this turtle nesting season as good as it can be," concludes Eve. ■

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August

Every Thursday
WASTE MANAGEMENT PICKUP

@FMB Neighborhoods
Lee County now collects FMB garbage, recycling and yard waste all on the same day, on each Thursday; for questions telephone Waste Management at 239-334-1224 or see www.southwestwastefl.com.

Monday Through Friday
Bay Oaks Recreational Center

@Bay Oaks Recreational Center
The Bay Oaks Recreational Center is open and back to full operation! Attend fitness classes, indoor pickleball, open gym, after-school care, weight room & more. Monday through Thursday 7am to 7pm; Friday 7am to 8pm. See www.fortmyersbeachfl.gov.

Beginning Monday, August 12
CLUB REC!

@Bay Oaks Recreation Center
Bay Oaks hosts this incredible "After School Program" for Beach Elementary School students EVERY Monday through Friday throughout the academic year from 2 to 6pm. Staff picks up the kids directly from Beach Elementary and brings them to Bay Oaks for games, snacks & homework time. \$125 for FMB residents & \$175 for non-residents for the entire school year!

Mondays, July 29 through October 7
Advance Men's Basketball League

@Bay Oaks Recreational Center
Lace up your basketball shoes and play hoops every Monday for ten weeks. In addition to great exercise, teams vie for monetary prizes. \$750-per-team; for information or to register contact Shanette at 239-460-7991 or sthomass@FMBGOV.com.

Thurs., August 1
FMB Chamber "Coffee Connection"

@FMB Strong
Start your day with your FMB Chamber friends for networking with complimentary coffee and tasty breakfast items at FMB Strong at 820 Buttonwood Drive. The FREE "Coffee Connection" is 8 to 9:30am; see www.fortmyersbeach.org.

Fri., August 2
"First Friday"

@The Historic Mound House
Spend the day at the Mound House with complimentary admission on the "First Friday" of each month from 9am to 4pm! Enjoy a variety of family activities, games, crafts & tours. This month's theme is "Water Quality!" Learn the importance of clean water, what makes water dirty or clean, and what you can do to help through family fun activities and games. See www.moundhouse.org.

Fri., August 2
Welcome & Discovery Center

@Lovers Key State Park
The Welcome & Discovery Center educates and informs visitors about Lovers Key habitats through interactive displays Wednesdays through Fridays from 10am to 1pm. The W&DC is FREE with the park entry fee; see www.friendsoflovesskey.org.

Sun., August 4
AND EVERY SUNDAY
Bayside Park Concert Series

@Bayside Park
Relax while listening to fantastic tunes from local musicians at these FREE weekly outdoor concerts from 4 to 7pm! Weather-permitting; for details see www.fortmyersbeach.org.

Mon., August 5
Spin with Sue Anderson

@Bay Oaks Recreational Center
Increase your cardio, burn fat, gain leg strength, build muscular endurance & more with Sue EVERY Monday & Friday at 8am. No reservations necessary; classes cost \$15 with discounts available if you pre-pay for ten. For information see www.FMBGOV.com.

Mondays, August 5 & 19
FMB Town Council Meeting

@Town Hall, Bay Oaks Recreational Center
The FMB Town Council continues its work to rebuild FMB at 9am; see www.fortmyersbeachfl.gov.

Mon., August 5
Zumba Class with Jian Tang Heinel

@Bay Oaks Recreational Center
Join Jian and experience the most fun you will ever have while exercising EVERY Monday & Wednesday at 10:15am. No reservations necessary; classes cost \$12 or five for \$50. For information see www.FMBGOV.com.

Tues., August 6
Body Pump with Sue Anderson

@Bay Oaks Recreational Center
Get tone and stay fit with Sue EVERY Tuesday & Thursday at 8am. No reservations necessary; classes cost \$15 with discounts available if you pre-pay for ten. For information see www.FMBGOV.com.

Tues., August 6
Senior Pump & Tone with Sue Anderson

@Bay Oaks Recreational Center
Sculpt & define all muscles with barbells and hand weights in this 60-minute class set to music to increase your metabolism, boost your energy and make you feel great! "Senior Pump & Tone" is EVERY Tuesday & Thursday at 9:30am. No reservations necessary; \$15-per-class with discounts available if you pre-pay for ten. For information see www.FMBGOV.com.

Wed., August 7
30/30 with Sue Anderson

@Bay Oaks Recreational Center
Do 30 minutes of Spin then 30 minutes of Body Pump with Sue EVERY Wednesday at 7:30am. No reservations necessary; classes cost \$15 with discounts available if you pre-pay for ten. For information see www.FMBGOV.com.

Wed., August 7
Mound House Museum, Grounds & Store

@The Historic Mound House
Built in 1921, the Mound House is the oldest standing structure on FMB. It is a multi-level museum that displays Calusa artifacts, interactive exhibits and the one-of-a-kind 1,600-year-old underground shell mound attraction. Wednesdays through Saturdays 9am to 4pm with Grounds daily from 7:30am to 6pm. Adults \$15, Students \$8, Kids 6 to 12 \$5, & 5 & under free; Grounds free. See www.moundhouse.org.

Wed., August 7
CROW Campus Tours

@Center for the Rehabilitation Of Wildlife
An in-depth look at what the animal patients experience, from intake to release, including the hospital and treatment process. The 45-minute tour is Monday through Friday at Noon; \$25-per-person with advance registration and payment necessary at 239-472-3644 or reservations@crowclinic.org.

Thurs., August 8
FMB Town Council Management & Planning Session

@Town Hall, Bay Oaks Recreational Center
The FMB Town Council continues its work to rebuild FMB at 9am; see www.fortmyersbeachfl.gov.

SUDOKU

Answers from page 3

5	4	3	9	6	8	7	2	1
8	1	6	2	7	5	4	3	9
2	9	7	3	4	1	8	6	5
7	6	8	1	9	4	3	5	2
1	2	9	5	3	7	6	4	8
3	5	4	6	8	2	1	9	7
6	3	5	7	1	9	2	8	4
9	8	1	4	2	3	5	7	6
4	7	2	8	5	6	9	1	3

Thurs., August 8

Mound House Eco-Kayak Tours

@The Historic Mound House

Explore the winding mangrove creeks and hidden backwaters of the Estero Bay Aquatic Preserve on this 2-hour tour. The MH provides all equipment; ages 12 & up, weather-permitting and participants must wear shoes and bring water. The Eco-Kayak Tours are every Wednesday through Saturday from 9 to 11am. \$50-per-person including MH admission with reservations necessary at www.moundhouse.org.

Thurs., August 8

FMB Chamber Membership Luncheon

@Nervous Nellie's Crazy Waterfront Eatery

Join your FMB Chamber friends to savor a scrumptious luncheon from Nervous Nellie's Crazy Waterfront Eatery and enjoy a presentation from Eric Eikenberg of "Everglades Restoration" from 11:30am to 1pm. Lightning Restoration sponsors this month's luncheon. \$30 members & \$40 prospective members; see www.fortmyersbeach.org.

Fri., August 9

Iyengar Yoga with Susan Carter

@Bay Oaks Recreational Center

Focus on creating space and alignment in the body and the careful sequencing of poses EVERY Friday with Susan at 9:15am. No reservations necessary; classes cost \$15 with discounts available if you pre-pay for ten. For information see www.FMBGOV.com.

Friday, August 9

Shell Mound Tours

@The Historic Mound House

Discover the archaeology and history of the Mound House and learn clues uncovered about this 1,600-year-old shell mound on this 30-minute tour every Wednesday through Saturday at 10am, Noon & 2pm. This hands-on tour explores the environment and cultural history of the site and features replica artifact demonstrations. \$5-per-person plus MH admission; see www.moundhouse.org.

Saturdays, August 10 & 17

"American Boating Course"

@San Carlos Bay Squadron Classroom

This 2-day, 8-hour basic boating class includes Florida navigation rules and how to deal with water emergencies. \$65-per-person & \$20 each additional person from 8:15am to Noon; see www.scbps.com.

Thurs., August 15

FMB Chamber "Business After Hours"

@"The Roxie" at Times Square

Join your FMB Chamber friends for a fun time while sponsors Extreme Florida Roofing, Lake Michigan Credit Union, and Waste Management provide delicious complimentary appetizers and a cash bar from 5:30 to 7pm. Members FREE & \$15 prospective members; see www.fortmyersbeach.org.

Fri., August 23

FMB Local Planning Agency Meeting

@Town Hall, Bay Oaks Recreational Center

The FMB LPA, appointed by Town Council, continues its work to rebuild FMB at 9am; see www.fortmyersbeachfl.gov.

Fri. & Sat., August 23 & 24

FSW "Battle of The Beach"

Volleyball Tournament

@Suncoast Credit Union Arena

The Florida SouthWestern State College Lady Buccaneers are the reigning 2022 & 2023 Junior College Volleyball National Champions. They begin their "three-peat" quest by hosting their annual "Battle of The Beach" tournament! Friday matches are at 12:30pm & 5:30pm with Saturdays at 9am & 2pm; \$8 to \$10-per-person. See www.fswbuocs.com

Fri., August 23

St. Raphael's Memorial Garden Dedication

@St. Raphael's Episcopal Church

St. Raphael's invites the FMB community to witness Bishop Doug Scharf's dedication of their Memorial Garden featuring a plaque with the names of all the people FMB lost to Ian. The dedication takes place in the late afternoon so for the exact time see www.straphaelschurch.org or email srec@comcast.net.

Fri., August 30

Fort Myers Mighty Mussels v. Clearwater Threshers

@Hammond Stadium, Lee Health Sports Complex

The Mighty Mussels, the Low A affiliate of the Minnesota Twins, take on the Clearwater Threshers of the Philadelphia Phillies organization at 7:05pm. Following the game is the final 2024 fireworks extravaganza of the 2024 season, so Play Ball! The Mussels & Threshers meet again on Saturday, August 31 at 6:05pm with the regular season concluding on Sunday, September 1 at Noon; tickets \$10 to \$17. See www.mightymussels.com.

Fri., Sept. 6

AND EVERY FRIDAY

Fort Myers Beach Market

@Times Square

This Downtown FMB Market offers fresh produce, artisan foods, arts, crafts, clothing and more EVERY Friday from 9am to 1pm; see www.41markets.com.



Museum open Wednesday to Saturday, 9:00am to 4:00pm
Closed Sunday to Tuesday

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FMB'S BEST KEPT SECRET!

- By Gary Mooney,



Beach Elementary School Begins New Year

"It is wonderful to have our entire school family reunited at the Beach Elementary School (BES) to start the 2024-2025 academic year," gushes Principal Traci Kohler. "We all look forward to that feeling of continuity, especially for the kids."

Traci, who became BES Principal three months before Hurricane Ian struck, quips that "they don't teach you in 'Principal School' how to weather a natural disaster! The students had only been in class for six weeks when Ian hit. My home fortunately suffered minimal damage so I could concentrate on our students and staff and their families. I soon learned that no other community anywhere supports their local school like FMB!"

BES staff returns on Friday, August 2, reports Principal Tra-

ci, "for a week of preservice, then the students arrive on Monday, August 12. All our excellent and caring instructors return, though a few will switch grades. We still have some combination classes for Kindergarten and 1st grade as well as 2nd & 3rd grade, with single classes for 4th & 5th grades. An immediate goal is to increase enrollment to where we can fully return to the traditional format of one teacher per grade."

Principal Traci raves about the BES teachers! "They are amazing, with a true passion for FMB. Once a teacher joins our family, they tend to spend the rest of their careers here. A major reason for that is the unparalleled community support we receive from the students' families as well as everyone on the island, making the BES a truly special place!"

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While the teachers, support and custodial staffs return intact, the BES will add several positions, reports the Principal. “Briana Sosa joins our team as our para-educator to aid our combo K-1st grade class. We have a new technology specialist who will support our robotics and coding activities. We hope to add a once-a-week music instructor and once-per-week art teacher, along with a two-days-a-week Special Education instructor and a once-per-week intervention specialist.”

FGCU & Mound House Partnerships

Principal Traci is enthusiastic about a new Florida Gulf Coast University (FGCU) partnership to create an environmental and marine focus for BES students. “We have exciting partnerships with FGCU’s Water School, along with the Whitaker Center that provides programs to promote public awareness of local and global issues related to science, the environment, engineering and mathematics. BES students will do all-encompassing studies like following a drop of water from the forest through the wetlands and eventually into the Gulf of Mexico. Our kids will learn about organisms that live in the water, will test for things like salinity, and study marine life. On top of that, we will do quarterly field trips to places like the Vester Marine Science Field Station and Six Mile Cypress Slough Preserve.”

In conjunction with the FGCU partnership, the BES will work with the Historic Mound House. “The Mound House will focus on our local history and environment through programs like ‘Mound House Water-Wise Wednesdays’ and related field trips,” explains Principal Traci. “Mound House staff will come on campus for hands-on activities, so we are excited not only for these partnerships but others we will cultivate, like with the Otsego Bay Foundation Marine Science Center to understand FMB’s biodiversity.”

We’re #1!

Families who do not live on FMB can now send their kids to the BES. So, why should they? “The BES is the #1-ranked K through 5th grade Lee County school based on State Progress Monitoring Assessment data. We have a supportive and caring staff who love our kids, and our Parent-Teacher Organization is outstanding! BES class sizes are extraordinarily small, so the attention our students receive from their teachers is awesome! Our after-school program with the adjacent Bay Oaks Recreational Center is top-notch. On top of all that, we now have a ‘bus hub’ at the San Carlos Boulevard Walmart Supercenter where parents can drop off and pick up their children without ever driving on FMB.”

To Principal Traci, the best part about the BES “is our supportive community that responds to any need we have. The best example I can give is when it looked like the School District might permanently close the BES after Ian, the entire island made it clear that for FMB to have a future, it must keep the BES because we give everyone hope for the future. The Beach Elementary School is the best kept secret on FMB and we must let that secret out!” ■

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Chocolate Swirl Peanut Butter Blondies

by Tammy Garro



INGREDIENTS

- 2 ½ cups of all-purpose flour
- 1 ½ tsp baking powder
- ½ tsp salt
- 3 squares or 3 ounces of semisweet chocolate, chopped
- 1 square or 1-ounce unsweetened chocolate, chopped
- 1 cup creamy peanut butter
- ½ cup butter or margarine softened
- 1 ¾ cups packed light brown sugar
- 3 large eggs
- 2 tsp vanilla extract
- 1 package, 6 ounces semisweet chocolate chips (1 cup)

INSTRUCTIONS

Preheat oven to 350°.

In medium bowl, combine flour, baking powder, and salt.

In heavy 1-quart saucepan, melt semisweet and unsweetened chocolates, stirring frequently until smooth.

In large bowl, with mixer at medium speed, beat peanut butter, butter, and brown sugar until light and fluffy for roughly 2 minutes. Add eggs and vanilla, mix until blended. Reduce speed to low, add in flour mixture just until blended (dough will be stiff).

Place 1/3 of dough (about 1-¾ cups) in a separate large bowl, stir in melted chocolate until blended.

With hand, pat half of remaining peanut butter dough onto bottom of ungreased 13" x 9" baking pan to form a thin layer.

In random patterns, drop chocolate dough and remaining plain peanut butter dough on top of peanut butter layer and lightly pat. Sprinkle chocolate chips on top and lightly press into dough.

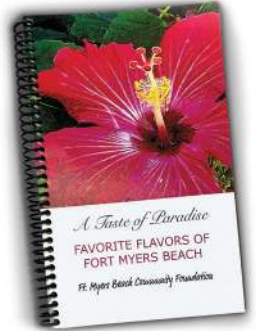
Bake until toothpick inserted in center comes out clean (about 25 minutes).

Cool completely in pan or on wire rack.

When cool, cut lengthwise into 4 strips, and then cut each strip crosswise into 6 pieces: yields 24 bars.

A Taste of Paradise

If you love to cook, the Fort Myers Beach Community Foundation's cookbook, *A Taste of Paradise: Favorite Flavors of Fort Myers Beach*, is full of delicious recipes from the kitchens of our locals! It is available for purchase at



www.fmbcommunityfoundation.com

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