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December 2024

FORT MYERS BEACH

Living

BULLISH ON FMB'S FUTURE!

Dawn & Bryan Thomas

Cover by Sandy Sandness

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FORT MYERS BEACH

A Best Version Media Magazine
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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.

IMPORTANT PHONE NUMBERS:

- Emergency: 911
- Lee County Sheriff's Office: 239-477-1000
- 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
- Florida Power & Light (FPL): 1-800-226-5885
- CenturyLink: 239-335-3111
- Comcast Cable Company: 239-432-9277
- FMB Chamber of Commerce: 239-454-7500

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SUDOKU

- By Gary Mooney -

SUDOKU RULES:

Each row must contain the digits 1-9.

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Each box must contain the digits 1-9.

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Answers on page 10



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Hello Friends & Neighbors!

In our cover article on Dawn and Bryan Thomas, who are most assuredly remaining on FMB, Bryan talks about those who are or may be making the difficult decision to leave our island community, after our multitude of hurricanes over the past two years. "FMB is home and we are not going anywhere," expresses Bryan, before adding: "A few of our neighbors, however, are getting 'Hurricane Fatigue,' especially those with ground-level homes, and you can see the exhaustion on their faces."

Bryan could be talking about me! After Helene and Milton flooded my ground level home twice in eleven days, just days after the final items were completed from Ian, I reached my personal point of no return and recently listed my house for sale. Despite my love of FMB, its wonderful residents and terrific neighbors, and our marvelous businesses, I long for a sense of normalcy. I do not want to live in fear of every weather forecast from June through November. I do not want to start over again and again and again. I want to come home and not see my furniture stacked on the side of the street. I am tired of mops and buckets, squeegees and disinfectants. I want to live a simple life again, as the Salt Life has wore me out.

My breaking point, oddly enough, was neither the devastating Ian nor the monstrous Milton but the non-descript Helene. Despite never being closer to FMB than 300 miles away, with all of our local forecasters telling us time and again that this would not be another Ian, flood water surged through my home that evening. If this can happen from a hurricane hundreds of miles away, at what point will we soon see floods in conjunction with full moons and high tides or "Sunny Day Floods," much less from our increasingly stronger and more frequent major hurricanes.

This is just me, though. Every single islander must make these personal decisions on their own. If you live in

an elevated home or just choose to rebuild for the second, third or fourth time, that's fantastic! If you are like me and feel like you must live on the other side of the bridge, I understand that, too. This isn't a game and there is no right or wrong answer; each of us will do what is right for each of us.

I may be moving but I'm not going far! The people whom I have gotten to know over the past 15 years are really great people and make up my "adult life" family!!!! I am so grateful for every day that I have lived on "the beach". I want to be able to spend a lot more of my days creating Art.

And "Fort Myers Beach LIVING Magazine" will continue, stronger than ever! We feel that this monthly magazine is an important thread in the lives of our beach community, made even more so since the storm. So, no worries, we're not going anywhere

'Tis the season of giving and we have some really great businesses on the island and beyond who can help you fill the presents under the tree. I look forward to seeing you at one of the many events this month - from Christmas Trees, to the Boat Parade and my FAVORITE the Pedals & Presents Christmas Bike Parade, Christmas and then another New Year!

Enjoy a Blessed Holiday Season & Have An Awesome Beach Day!



Sandy Sandness

Publisher

Fort Myers Beach LIVING

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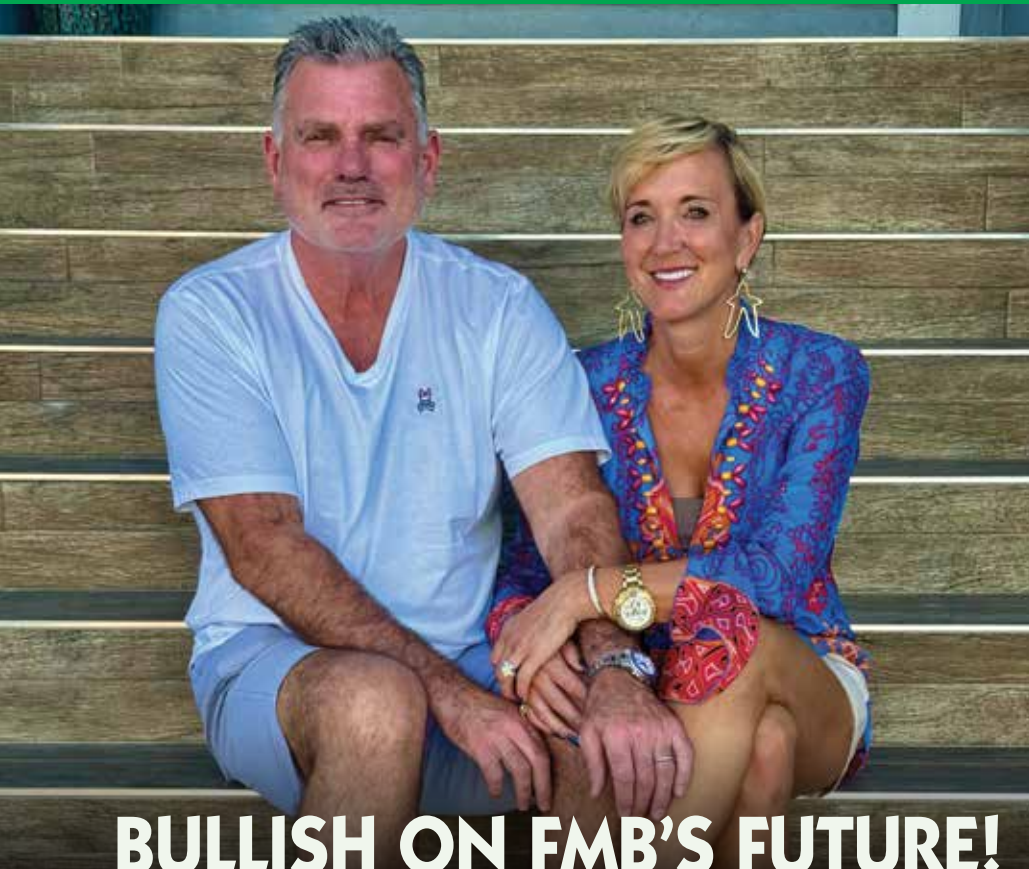
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BULLISH ON FMB'S FUTURE!

Dawn & Bryan Thomas

- By Gary Mooney -

"Bryan and I met at a college football game in Madison, Wisconsin," says Iowa City, Iowa native Dawn Thomas, about her husband, who was born in Roseville, Illinois. "I was living in Madison while Bryan resided in Champaign, Illinois. The game was the University of Illinois versus Wisconsin University, where my Dad, Barry Alvarez, was the athletic director and former head football coach. Meeting Bryan was most definitely not love at first sight, as it was one of those introductions where you say, 'it is nice to meet you,' then you move on."

For Bryan, however, Dawn stuck in his mind, though not romantically. "She was interesting, with a neat personality." Three years later, they reconnected but did not rush their relationship, as Dawn had kids in Wisconsin, while Bryan's children were in Illinois, so when they eventually began to date, it became an 8-year long-distance relationship. They finally wed on FMB in 2019, with just their four children – Joe, Danielle, Jake and Dylan – in attendance. "Joe in fact married us," says Dawn! Joe

lives in Newport Beach, Jake in Dallas, and Dylan and Danielle along with her husband, Kyle, all reside in Chicago.

Our Original Plan

While their relationship was not love at first sight, their FMB introduction was! "Our original plan was to own a Chicago brownstone while having a small Naples condo," Dawn recalls. "In September 2016 we began looking in Naples, then worked our way north to Bonita Springs and Sanibel. A realtor friend suggested FMB and once we came onto the island, we immediately loved it. We eventually found Palermo Circle, where we fell in love with a five-bedroom home and bought it that Thanksgiving, so now we have our big home here and a small Chicago condo. We completely flipped our original plan."

Bryan is the CEO of a third-party administrative company, CCMSI, based in Illinois, with offices in 33 states. "We manage casualty insurance claims for corporations, governmental entities, trade associa-

tions and public employers. I work from home or on the road. Interestingly, while the entire world wants to work remotely, I began doing so 29 years ago so I started the trend. I have terrific clients and I love what I do – I am extremely fortunate." Dawn retired as a Sales & Marketing Vice President for a Wisconsin Bank after 17 years, then ran her own FMB consulting firm, "but now I concentrate on community activities. I just finished my term on the Town's Public Safety Committee and am President of the FMB Woman's Club."

Three Hurricanes To Get Smarter

Bryan and Dawn were in Chicago when Hurricane Ian struck. "We had 10 feet of storm surge that wiped out our lower level that we already jokingly called our 'Hurricane Room,'" recalls Dawn. "Fortunately, we have an elevated home so water did not reach our 2nd and 3rd floors." "We were beyond fortunate," agrees Bryan. "We returned to FMB 10 days after Ian, and there are no words to accurately describe the condition of the island. Fortunately, we stayed at Dawn's parents' Naples condo until we regained power that November and completed our remodeling in February 2023."

Dawn and Bryan were on FMB for Helene, “as we returned for the Island Hopper Songwriter’s Festival,” she offers. “We moved what we could upstairs and elevated heavy things, like couches, as best we could on the lower level. We got five inches of water that ruined our baseboards but we hosed off everything else. By Milton, we were back in Chicago so we did not experience those 16 inches of flooding. Before we left, we moved everything, like the refrigerator and workout equipment, to the second floor, so that minimized our damage.” “As we revamp after Milton, we will replace things like the lower-level drywall with cement, so all we have to do going forward is powerwash everything,” Bryan explains. “It took us three hurricanes to get smarter but now we have a hurricane plan.”

After three hurricanes, are Bryan and Dawn near “The Point of No Return?” “Not even close,” raves Bryan. “FMB is home and we are not going anywhere. A few of our neighbors, however, are getting ‘Hurricane Fatigue,’ especially those with ground-level homes, and you can see the exhaustion on their faces. We love this island and its good people, but even we admit it can now be a challenge to live here, more so than when we first bought not that long ago. These storms are monsters, so we now have a better appreciation of why places like FMB are known as ‘Barrier Islands!’ As we continue FMB’s rebuild, we must do a much better job in preparing for future hurricanes.”

It’s In Our Blood!

Dawn and Bryan love to travel and enjoy sports. Because of Dawn’s Dad’s background, football is important to them. “All our boys played football through college,” she explains. “Joe and Jake for Wisconsin and Dylan for Illinois so we are actually a house divided. Now Jake is in the NFL and is the starting tight

*“All our boys played football through college . . .
Now Jake is in the NFL so we travel often to see him play.”*



Fort Myers Beach LIVING

end for the Dallas Cowboys, so we travel often to see him play. Weekends for us means football – it’s in our blood! You can see all of our team flags flying proudly on our pool deck.”

Volunteering is important to them. “I became an FMB Woman’s Club member in 2018,” Dawn says. “I joined to make new friends, but quickly became involved in the Club activities. With my marketing background, I was the Marketing Chair, became a Board member and in March 2023, President. There are so many great people in the Womans’ Club and I am tremendously proud of that organization.” Bryan recently became Chair of the Town’s Audit Committee after 4 years as a member. “I can say without hesitation that even after three hurricane emergencies, the Town is in a strong financial position. Our Town Council and Town Manager, along with their staff of consummate professionals, do phenomenal jobs. I am very bullish on FMB’s future.”

What will that future look like in five years? “We will obviously have a lot of new development, but the fear that some have that we will become the next Miami or Naples is unfounded,” Dawn predicts. “We may have more highrises and higher-end restaurants but this will forever be a flipflop community. I welcome our new growth; I really do!” “While Ian was a tragedy, community-wise it may actually help us in the long run,” rationalizes Bryan. “We were looking a little ragged around the edges and probably needed a 25 to 30-year renovation plan. Ian forced us to now implement a 5 to 10-year one.”

When Bryan and Dawn contemplate FMB, “the lifestyle stands out to me,” he says. “My standard outfit is a V-neck, shorts and flipflops and if someone sees me in a polo shirt, they assume I have a meeting. We are a wonderful small resort town with little crime.” “For me, it is the people,” concludes Dawn. “Not only the islanders, but most of our visitors are terrific. There is an old saying that you want to be a florist delivery driver because everybody smiles when you show up and the same thing applies to living on a beach; everybody smiles! We are lucky that we found our own little slice of Paradise and that goes for our kids, too; whenever they visit, they always say, ‘we hope you never move!’” ■

Dawn & Bryan wed on FMB in 2019, with just their four children – Joe, Danielle, Jake and Dylan – in attendance. “Joe in fact married us,” says Dawn!





Christmas Tree Festival & Auction

Returns to Woman's Club Campus

7th Annual Event December 13 & 14

- by Gary Mooney, photo by Sandy Sandness -



The BEST bartenders Nan Williams and Angie Deters serve up the holiday spirit!



A favorite each year - The Wine Bottle Tree!

One of the island's most beloved Holiday traditions returns, with the 7th Annual FMB Woman's Club "Christmas Tree Festival" & Auction on Friday & Saturday, December 13 & 14, with "Festival" raffle tickets now available to the general public. This year's Festival will be held at the Bay Oaks Recreational Center, 2731 Oak St. FMB.

The "Christmas Tree Festival" highlights an array of beautifully decorated and one-of-a-kind holiday trees and wreaths for attendees to bid on and take home, with all auction proceeds going back to the Non-Profit that created the trees. It starts on Friday, December 13, with the "VIP Reception" from 4:30 to 5:30 p.m., with the doors opening to the general public for FREE from 5:30 to 8:30 p.m. On Saturday, December 14, the event begins in conjunction with the "Vendor's Market" and "Christmas Treat & Bake Sale" at 1 p.m. The always popular "Chili Tasting & Cook-Off" starts at 4:30, with chili-tasting tickets just \$10. The FMB Woman's Club will conclude the "Festi-

val" by announcing the Christmas Tree Auction winners, "Chili Cook-Off" winner and Grand Prize winner at 8 p.m.

The raffle's Grand Prize is the winner's choice of three options valued at \$3,500: a Lake Tahoe getaway, a "Heart of Hawaii" trip or a "Canadian Culinary Experience." Raffle tickets are \$20 each or 6 for \$100; go to www.fmb-wc.org to purchase tickets online or see any "Christmas Tree Festival" committee member. Winners need not be present to claim their prize, with each entry eligible for all drawings. The FMB Woman's Club, a 501c3 organization, will sell a maximum of 5,000 "Christmas Tree Festival" raffle tickets. Additionally there will be a 'Mystery Gift Wall' with gift-wrapped boxes to select from for \$25, \$50 and \$100, as well as 'Mystery Gift Boxes' for kids for \$10 to \$20, with a \$250 "Early Bird" drawing on December 2. There will be ten \$100 drawings at the "Christmas Tree Festival," with a \$500 drawing at the "VIP Event" on December 13 and the Grand Prize Drawing on December 14.

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BRING A NEW UNWRAPPED TOY FOR THE BEACH KIDS FOUNDATION!

A True Community Event

“The annual ‘Christmas Tree Festival’ is such a beloved FMB Holiday tradition because it is so unique,” raves FMB Woman’s Club President Dawn Thomas! “It is a true community event where everyone participates and everyone reaps the benefits. It is a wonderful opportunity for all of our marvelous island Non-Profits to come together as one and

the perfect entertainment forum where you can support them all at once, while sharing in the festive Yuletide spirit.” Dawn especially enjoys two “Christmas Tree Festival” aspects. “I love all the decorated trees, as the Non-Profits go all out, transforming them into stunning and unique creations. Then, selfishly because I am a horrible baker, I love the Saturday ‘Holiday Treat & Bake Sale’ where I can purchase all those delicious goodies!”

The Alex King Group is this year’s “Festival” Event Sponsor, with support from Suncoast Beverage and the Sanibel Captiva Community Bank. The FMB Woman’s Club encourages all attendees to bring a new and unwrapped toy for the Beach Kids Foundation. To purchase “Festival” raffle tickets, for more information, and how to become an FMB Woman’s Club member, see www.fmb-wc.org.

If you are not yet an FMB Woman’s Club member, Dawn invites you to join! “There are so many worthwhile Non-Profits on this island and the Woman’s Club is the perfect outlet to support them, so you give back to the entire island and not to just one or two groups. On top of that, you will meet a dynamic and fun group of women who soon become friends, so join up, get involved, and have fun all at the same time!” ■



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December

**Monday Through Friday
Bay Oaks Recreational Center**

@Bay Oaks Recreational Center
As of press time, The Bay Oaks Recreational Center remains closed following Hurricanes Helene & Milton. To learn its current status, see www.fortmyersbeachfl.org.

CLUB REC!

@FMB Public Library
Despite Hurricanes Helene & Milton, Bay Oaks continues to host this incredible "After School Program" for Beach Elementary School students EVERY Monday through Friday throughout the academic year from 2 to 6pm, with games, snacks & homework time. \$125 for FMB residents & \$175 for non-residents for the entire school year!

**Sunday, December 1
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! Dec. 1: "Phenomenal Animal"; Dec. 8: "Mockingbird"; Dec. 15: "Riverside"; Dec. 22: "Limited Edition" & Dec. 29: "Guilty Pleasure." See www.fortmyersbeach.org.

**Mondays, December 2 & 16
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.

**Wednesday, December 4
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.

*Visit our Gift Shop
for Unique
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Adults \$15, Students \$8, Kids 6 to 12 \$5, & 5 & under free; Grounds free. See www.moundhouse.org.

**Thursday, December 5
FMB Chamber "Coffee Connection"**
@TBD

Start your day with your FMB Chamber friends for networking with complimentary coffee and tasty breakfast items. The FREE "Coffee Connection" is from 8 to 9:30am; for the location, see www.fortmyersbeach.org.

**Thursday, December 5
FMBAA Fall Juried Show:
"Dreams to Wings"**

@Bonita Performing Arts Center
As the FMB Art Association works to rebuild its iconic gallery destroyed by Hurricane Ian, its annual "Fall Show," entitled "Dreams to Wings," is FREE at the Bonita Performing Arts Center on 10150 Bonita Beach Road SE through January 2, 2025. Weekdays 8am to 5pm but closed on the Holidays; see www.fortmyersbeachart.com.

**Thursday, December 5
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.

**Thursday, December 5
AND EVERY THURSDAY THROUGH
APRIL
Santini Marina Plaza Market**
@Santini Marina Plaza
This FMB South End Market offers fresh produce, artisan foods, arts, crafts, clothing and more EVERY Thursday from 9am to 1pm; see www.41markets.com.

**Thurs., December 5
FMB Art Association Holiday Potluck**
@Fort Myers United Church of Christ
Bring a dish to share for our buffet table as well as your own plate, utensils, glass & beverage, with the FMB Art Association providing the coffee and dessert! FREE at Noon, with spouses welcome and reservations not necessary. See www.fortmyersbeachart.com.

**Friday & Saturday, December 6 & 7
AND EVERY FRIDAY & SATURDAY
Fort Myers Beach Market**
@Santini Marina Plaza
Hurricanes Helene & Milton forced the relocation of this Downtown FMB Market to Santini Marina Plaza. The Beach Market offers fresh produce, artisan foods, arts, crafts, clothing and more EVERY Friday & Saturday from 9am to 1pm. To verify the location, see www.41markets.com.

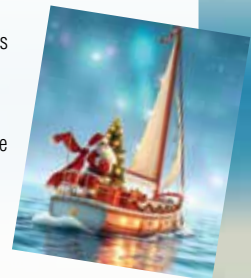
**Friday, December 6
Welcome & Discovery Center**
@Lovers Key State Park
The Welcome & Discovery Center educates and informs visitors about Lovers Key habitats through interactive displays Wednesday through Friday from 10am to 1pm.

The W&DC is FREE with the park entry fee; see www.friendsofroverskey.org.

**Saturday, December 7
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 includes MH admission with reservations necessary at www.moundhouse.org.

**Saturday, December 7
"Christmas Boat Parade"**

@Salty Sam's Marina
Light Up the Night with the return of this annual island Holiday tradition from 6 to roughly 8 pm! Watch a flotilla of Holiday-decorated boats that will circle the Parade route twice! For the complete "Christmas Boat Parade" route, see the "Chamber Chatter" article in this edition. People's Choice Voting takes place all along the parade route; see www.fortmyersbeach.org



**Tuesday, December 10
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.

**Wednesday, December 11
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 90-minute tour is Monday through Friday at 11am; \$25-per-person with advance registration and payment necessary at 239-472-3644, x-229 or reservations@crowclinic.org.

**Thursday, December 12
FMB Chamber
Membership Luncheon**
@Nervous Nellie's Crazy Waterfront Eatery
Join your FMB Chamber friends to savor a scrumptious luncheon from Nervous Nellie's, including a guest speaker, from 11:30am to 1pm. JR & Company Roofers sponsors the December Luncheon. \$30 members & \$40 prospective members; see www.fortmyersbeach.org.

**Friday, December 13
7th Annual "Christmas Tree Festival"**
@Bay Oaks Recreation Center
The auction of these one-of-a-kind Christmas Trees handcrafted by FMB Non-Profits is an island Holiday tradition! The VIP Reception is from 4:30 to 5:30pm, then the Preview Party opens to the public for FREE from 5:30 to 8:30pm. Bring a new unwrapped toy for the Beach Kids Foundation. See www.fmb-wc.org.



SUDOKU

Answers from page 3

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Saturday, December 14

7th Annual "Christmas Tree Festival"

@Bay Oaks Recreation Center

The "Christmas Tree Festival" returns for its final day! Shop the "Vendor's Market" from 1 to 6pm; savor the "Christmas Treats & Bake Sale" from 1 to 8pm; and partake in the "Chili Cookoff & Tasting" from 4:30 to 8pm, with Chili Cookoff tickets \$10. The FMB Woman's Club announces the Christmas Tree Auction winners, "Chili Cook-Off" winner and Grand Prize winner at 8 p.m. Bring a new unwrapped toy for the Beach Kids Foundation; see www.fmb-wc.org

Wednesday, December 18

FMB Community Foundation Holiday Party

@TBD

Enjoy the Holiday Party of the FMB Community Foundation, the island's leading philanthropic organization, from 5 to 7pm. For the Holiday Party location, see www.fmbcommunityfoundation.com.

Thursday, December 19

FMB Chamber "Holiday Hop!"

@FMB Chamber Office

Join your FMB Chamber Friends as we "hop" around the Chamber building at 100 Lovers Lane, sharing Holiday cheer with our neighboring businesses! Each business will have a signature Holiday drink and cheerful snacks, with

raffles and an Ugly Sweater Contest. In addition to the FMB Chamber, attendees will visit the Alex King Realty Group, Sea Gypsy Vacation Rentals, State Insurance USA & Access Title Agency from 5:30 to 7pm. FREE to Everyone; see www.fortmyersbeach.org.

Saturday, December 21

PEDALS & PRESENTS Annual Christmas Bike Parade

@Bayside Park

4-6pm: Pre-ride gathering at Bayside Park

6pm: Ride bikes to DiamondHead, turn around

7:15pm: Arrive at Margartitaville, head upstairs

7:30-10pm: Ben Allen Band (finalist from NBC's "The Voice")

WEAR YOUR BEST COSTUME & RIDE YOU DECORATED BIKES!!

Please bring a new unwrapped gift! Free to the public and all ages welcome!



Wednesday, December 25

Merry Christmas!

Tuesday, December 31

NYE 5K

@DiamondHead Beach Resort

Wrap up 2024 with a run on the beautiful sands of FMB at the 2nd Annual "NYE 5K" cosponsored by Beach Talk Radio and the DiamondHead Beach Resort at 8am! There is a "Fun Run & Walk" as well, and you can even participate virtually! All proceeds to the FMB Woman's Club to help build its new clubhouse. Registration includes a race shirt with medals to the top 3 finishers in each age category at \$35-per-person. To register, see www.beachtalkradionews.com

Wednesday, January 1

Happy New Year!

Fri., January 3

FMB Art Association Winter Art Show "Between Worlds"

@Cape Coral Art Center

"Between Worlds" runs through Thursday, January 30 in the Side Gallery of the Cape Coral Art Center at 4533 Coronado Parkway Mondays through Saturdays from 9am to 4pm. FREE; see www.fortmyersbeachart.com.

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Chamber Chatter!

Happy Holidays & Merry Christmas!

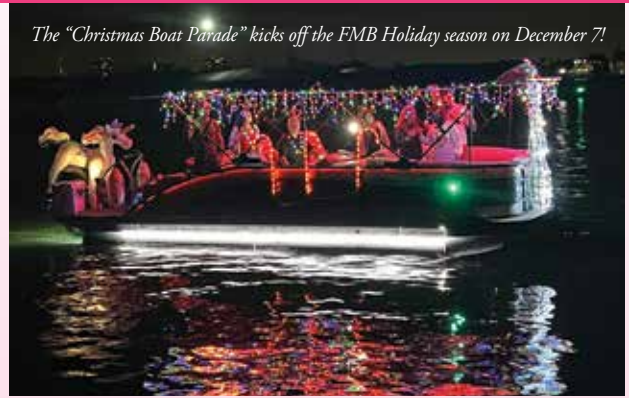
There are many wonderful things that occur on Fort Myers Beach during this time of year, and being that we are now officially "In Season," not only Christmas Bells are ringing, but so are the bells on our cash registers!

After the Fall we all endured, everyone on FMB is ready to do a bit of celebrating! We are donning our Holiday finery and decorating our homes and boats in bright lights and Christmas ornaments. Even Santa Claus has promised to put on his "Board Shorts!" During this time of year, many of us host and reconnect with family and friends from near and far because they, like us, love FMB's festive Holiday season atmosphere. We would like to welcome back our Snowbirds and vacationers who will enjoy spending Christmas with us on our seven miles of pure Paradise!

With Christmas right around the corner, FMB has a multitude of events that will put the "Ho Ho Ho" into your Holidays!

The "Christmas Boat Parade" kicks everything off on Saturday evening, December 7. To give the audience extra viewing time of the boat fleet, beautifully decorated in Holiday lights and a Christmas motif, the parade will circle the back basin area from Salty Sam's to the Pink Shell Beach Resort twice! The "Christmas Boat Parade" launches from Salty Sam's Marina at 6 p.m. and will proceed down the Back Bay, passing some of FMB's most popular waterfront restaurants that provide the best viewing locations. It cuts around the US Coast Guard Station along San Carlos Island, popping out from the Getaway Marina area and cutting across the Bay toward the Pink Shell Beach Resort. The Boat Parade turns south along Estero Island, back under the Matanzas Pass Bridge, cutting across the mooring field then repeating the loop a second time. People's Choice Voting locations will be along the parade route, where guests can download a QR Code or sign up at one of the viewing spots. Come early and grab a front row table, enjoy a savory dinner from one of our scrumptious restaurants, and kick off your Holidays with the festive "Christmas Boat Parade."

Next is the 7th annual "Christmas Tree Festival" hosted by the FMB Woman's Club at the Bay Oaks Recreation Center on Saturday & Sunday, December 13 & 14. The "Christmas Tree Festival" highlights an array of beautifully decorated and one-of-a-kind Holiday trees and wreaths for attendees to bid on to take home, with all auction proceeds going back to the Non-Profit that created the trees. It starts on Friday, December 13, with the "VIP Reception" from 4:30 to 5:30 p.m., and the general public is welcome for FREE from 5:30 to 8:30 p.m. On Saturday, December 14, the event begins in conjunction with the "Vendor's Market" and "Christmas Treat & Bake Sale" at 1 p.m. Following this, the always popular "Chili Tasting & Cook-Off" starts at 4:30 p.m., with chili-tasting tickets just \$10. For more information, please reach out to the FMB Woman's Club at www.fmb-wc.org.



The "Christmas Boat Parade" kicks off the FMB Holiday season on December 7!

fmb-wc.org.

Kick Into High Gear!

It's the FMB Chamber's turn to ring in the Holidays on Thursday, December 19, when we cohost the "Holiday Hop" at the Chamber office at 100 Lovers Lane from 5:30 to 7 p.m. The FMB Chamber shares Holiday cheer with you and the neighboring businesses in our building. Each business will have a signature Holiday drink and cheerful snacks, with raffles and an Ugly Sweater Contest. "Holiday Hop" cohosts are the Alex King Realty Group, Sea Gypsy Vacation Rentals, State Insurance USA & Access Title Agency. This Yuletide event is FREE for everyone, so please mark your calendars and get ready to kick your Holidays into high gear!

The Town of FMB "Poinsettia Christmas Tree" will make a return to Times Square; the "Bayside Park Concert Series" continues throughout the Holidays each Sunday from 4 to 7 p.m.; the "Beach Kids Foundation" Holiday Gift Distribution for island children will be on Tuesday, December 17, from the Liki Tiki BBQ Restaurant from 4 to 7 p.m.; the "Christmas Bike Parade & Ugly Sweater Party" will be on Saturday, December 21, leaving Bayside Park at 6 p.m.; and the Town's December 31 Birthday Celebration will commence in Times Square. Don't forget about the many FMB restaurants and bars that will have live entertainment and Holiday celebrations not only throughout December but who will also be hosting New Year's Eve parties.

Remember that the FMB Chamber Office is open on the 3rd floor of 100 Lovers Lane, Mondays through Fridays, from 9 a.m. to 4 p.m. In addition to our Lovers Lane location, the Chamber operates our Times Square visitor information satellite office from "The Roxie," located next to the Trolley Stop, open daily from 10 a.m. to sunset.

May you all enjoy a safe, happy & healthy Holiday season and, during this time of "Peace On Earth & Good Will," please extend grace and be kind to one-another. Merry Christmas, Happy New Year, and on behalf of our 400-plus FMB Chamber of Commerce members, remember . . . "Island Life; It's Our Business!" ■

*Jacki Liszak, President
Fort Myers Beach Chamber of Commerce!*



"The FMB firefighters are terrific BKF partners: You cannot tell the BKF story without the FMB firefighters who deserve as much credit for our success as anyone."



"The Beach Kids Foundation (BKF) is a Non-Profit dedicated to assisting FMB children and their families."

The Beach Kids Foundation

Making Holidays Happier for FMB Children!

- by Gary Mooney -

"The Beach Kids Foundation (BKF) is a Non-Profit dedicated to assisting FMB children and their families," explains Bridgette Myers, who is a BKF Board Member & Past President. "We formed over 25 years ago with the mission to advance community development activities that support the kids of FMB through charitable, educational and civic activities. For the vast majority of our more than quarter-century existence, our primary venue to do so was through the Beach Elementary School, but since Hurricane Ian devastated the Beach School and now Helene and Milton forced the kids off-island once more, we are concentrating on individual children and their families outside of the school focus."

Like most FMB Non-Profits, the BKF is learning new ways to serve the community, emphasizes Bridgette. "Prior to COVID and the hurricanes, the BKF hosted an annual large-scale fundraising gala, 'The Spirit of The Holidays,' on the first weekend each December. Those were terrific, as not only did the community come together as one to celebrate the Christmas Season but we reliably raised roughly \$40,000 each year. Though we are not yet back to \$40,000 annually, we are doing well enough to continue to buy gifts for our island schoolchildren."

Bridgette reports that the BKF entry in the "2024 Christmas Tree Festival" theme is "Deck The Palms!" "This year we really wanted to incorporate the students of Beach Elementary and honor the island, so the students made ornaments that will adorn our tree along with shells collected by over five generations of families who stayed at the Red Coconut RV Resort. My family and I always shelled as a hobby and wanted to use some to make homemade ornaments for our Tree this year. While it is hard to part with these little treasures, knowing they will ultimately go towards fundraising to buy Christmas gifts for our Beach Kids is a decision well-made. We are so excited for everyone to see our Tree this year, as the work put in is truly an act of love for

our island and its children."

New Techniques

In years past, Bridgette reports, "the FMB Fire Department loaded up the toys on a big firetruck on Christmas Eve and along with Santa delivered them directly to the homes of all the 'Beach Kids'. Now, however, with kids and families spread out over a larger geographic area, we will host a pick-up event at the Liki Tiki BBQ Restaurant side room at 17650 San Carlos Boulevard on Tuesday, December 17, from 4 to 7 p.m. We hope the FMB Fire Department will again help us distribute the gifts and bring one of their firetrucks for the kids and their families to tour and photograph. The FMB firefighters are terrific BKF partners, and you cannot tell the BKF story without the FMB firefighters who deserve as much credit for our success as anyone."

To donate a new unwrapped toy, Holiday gift card, restaurant gift card or popular presents like bicycles, you can do so in care of TriPower Vacation Rentals at 2085 Estero Boulevard, FMB. Bridgette says that "We anticipate needing Holiday gifts for roughly 100 Beach Kids, and if that projection holds true, history tells us that we will need 25 to 30 bicycles." If you know of anyone we should include for the 2024 Holiday Season, please contact Deborah Groll at summerinoh@gmail.com.

Herself a "Beach Kid" and now 23, Bridgette appeals to other youthful community members to join her on the BKF. "Our grandparents and parents founded the BKF a quarter-century ago and now it is our turn to uphold it," she rationalizes. "Younger people on our Board will continue our traditions while implementing new methods that work better today and beyond, such as improved fundraising opportunities to reach current and future generations, to optimize what we can do for our Beach Kids. To join us, please email fmbkids-foundaton@gmail.com and we will respond. I have spent my entire life volunteering for the BKF and it is the most personally fulfilling thing that I do!" ■

Mistletoe Margarita

by Sandy Sandness



INGREDIENTS

- 2 1/2 cups orange juice
- 2 1/2 cups cranberry juice
- 2 cups 7-up (or lemon-lime soda)
- 2 cups silver tequila
- 1 cup maraschino cherries (with juice)
- 1/4 cup lemon juice (freshly squeezed)
- Ice cubes
- Fresh cranberries and rosemary sprigs (for garnish)

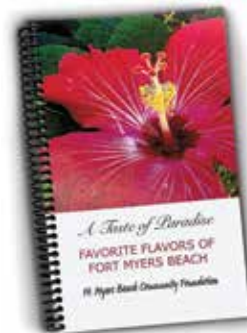
INSTRUCTIONS

- In a large pitcher, combine the orange juice, cranberry juice, tequila, lemon juice and the juice from the maraschino cherries.
- Stir everything well until fully combined.
- Just before serving, gently stir in the 7-Up to keep the carbonation. **Cheers!**

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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