

An exclusive magazine serving the residents of Fort Myers Beach

January 2025

FORT MYERS BEACH



Sandy Sandness

The Woman Behind the Pages

Cover by Carol Sutto Pugliese

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FORT MYERS BEACH

A Best Version Media Magazine
An independently owned community 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.

Each column must contain the digits 1-9.

Each box must contain the digits 1-9.

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Answers on page 10



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Hello Friends & Neighbors!

Happy New Year, Welcome to 2025, and may it be a Hurricane-Free Year!

I felt that it was time to share my “back story” with all of you since that’s what the basis of Fort Myers Beach LIVING is, getting to know your neighbors to build a stronger community. Yes, my home is for sale but I’m not leaving the community/island I love so much!!

You will also read this month about the FMB Woman’s Club’s “Putt & Pub Crawl” as well as all the exciting events hosted by the FMB Community Foundation for the first half of 2025. The “Putt & Pub Crawl” is not only one of our island’s best fundraisers but it may very well be the most fun, as everyone looks forward all year to the inventive team names and colorful costumes worn by the golfers. As for the FMB Community Foundation, it is excited that they will be returning their much-beloved “Fashion Show” on February 15 for the first time since Hurricane Ian and only the second one since COVID-19, and their “Casino Night” on April 12 is an island tradition!

In reading about these upcoming charity events, I thought that no another community anywhere in the United States gives more of itself, not only in monetary resources but in volunteer hours, than Fort Myers Beach! For a small town with only about 5,000 fulltime residents, give-or-take, we contribute more financially to our community than seems possible, and all of our fundraisers enjoy tremendous attendance – I am trying to remember the last time an FMB volunteer group hosted a fundraiser that did not a sellout! Of course, it helps that all of these events are tremendously good times; I mean, who doesn’t love a swell round of “Putt-Putt,” a stylish Fashion Show or spending “quality time” at a casino wheel or card game?

But our volunteer work is much more than just the FMB Woman’s Club and the FMB Community Foundation. Remember our wealth of “Friends” groups, like the Friends of the FMB Public Library, Friends of Lovers Key State Park, Friends of Matanzas Pass Preserve and Friends of the Mound House, or invaluable support organizations like the Beach Elementary School Parent-Teacher Organization, FMB Kiwanis Club and the FMB Lions Club. And you do not need to be a volunteer group with a long island history to make a big difference, as evidenced by FMB Strong. Throw in all the volunteer committees who assist the Town of FMB, from the Local Planning Agency to CELCAB and BORCAB and all the rest, as well as more organizations, large and small, formal or informal, and you can see what I mean when I say it is hard to imagine a small town more wholeheartedly devoted to keeping our community the “Norman Rockwell” portrait that it is than FMB!

Speaking of keeping FMB a small-town “Norman Rockwell” community, please support our advertisers because we cannot deliver *Fort Myers Beach LIVING* to you free of charge without them. When you do visit, let them know you saw their ad in our magazine so we can continue to provide you with this original entertainment each month!

Have An Awesome Beach Day!



Sandy Sandness

Publisher

Fort Myers Beach LIVING

239-222-0129

ssandness@bestversionmedia.com



*We've weathered the storms with you.
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Sandy or GG loves spending time with her Grand God Children who live in St. Louis, MO.

Sandy Sandness

The Woman Behind the Pages

“FMB LIVING’s” Sandy Sandness

- By Gary Mooney -

Sandy Sandness is from Pilot Grove, Missouri, where she lived until she attended The University of Central Missouri in Warrensburg. After attending University Sandy moved to the Kansas City area living mostly in Overland Park, Kansas, before becoming an Island Girl in 2010! Sandy lives – for the time being – in the Shell Mound neighborhood in her little Pink House with her two Havanese dogs, ten-year-old Abner and Teddy, who is six.



The “Crew” of the 2024 Fort Myers Beach LIVING Shrimp Festival Parade float, made up of some of our “Feature Families”!

“I know that it sounds like a cliché but the first time I came to FMB, it was love at first sight,” Sandy recollects. “I came for a three-month stay in 2009 and discovered a whole different world that I never experienced in the landlocked Midwest! Not only was the Gulf of Mexico and the sugar-sand white beach beautiful, but I encountered entirely new species of plants and wildlife and that was awesome! I returned that fall and made the trip a permanent one, realizing that I had fallen in love with the island life and its people and that Fort Myers Beach was for me. I purchased my home in the Fall 2011 and became a full-time islander.”

Almost unbelievably, Sandy’s permanent move occurred on October 10, 2010, or 10/10/10! “To make this numerical coincidence even more bizarre is that the minute I drove over the Matanzas Pass Bridge, I looked at my car clock and it read 10:10 a.m. and I moved into 110 Jefferson Street! That’s when I knew that my becoming an islander was my destiny!”



Sandy’s passion for shells and art come together in masterpieces like these created by her.

The Moral Compass of Our Community

While still in Kansas, Sandy was a Sales & Advertising representative for Southwestern Bell Yellow Pages for 20 years, “so I hoped to do something similar on FMB. The late, great *‘Island Sand Paper’* needed an advertising person and a friend taped their ad on my front door so I knew I had to apply. I met with Bob Layfield, who co-owned the *‘Sand Paper’* with his wife Missy, and we hit it off and I became the Advertising rep for the paper. I am not sure what impressed Bob the most – my two decades of experience in advertising sales, that I was from the Midwest like he and Missy, or that the *‘Island Sand Paper’* just had to hire someone named ‘Sandy Sandness’ because my name suited the newspaper so well!”

Sandy raves about her *“Island Sand Paper”* experience. “Bob and Missy are fantastic! Working with them was an honest, honorable experience. They ran a real newspaper that did not play games with the lives of our fellow residents. I honestly believe that the *‘Island Sand*



Turning “60” isn’t so bad when you have a wonderful group of neighborhood friends to celebrate with you!

Paper’ was the moral compass of our community and I loved working for an entity that placed high morals standards above everything else. You might disagree with our stories but you could never say that we had an agenda or because our reporting had honesty and integrity. I thought that the newspaper’s tagline said it all: ‘Written By Islanders For Islanders!’ We had the trust of almost the entire FMB community and it was an honor to work there. I hope that is the vibe we give off with ‘FMB LIVING Magazine’ today.”

After Bob and Missy closed the “*Island Sand Paper*” in Summer 2020, Sandy began “*Fort Myers Beach LIVING*” roughly a year later. “When I first discovered Best Version Media, the national umbrella over hundreds of magazines similar to ‘*Fort Myers Beach LIVING*,’ who publish quality publications with a concept that I loved and felt that I could refine into one that would be perfect for Fort Myers Beach. I believe that Best Version Media shares the same moral high grounds encapsulated by the “*Island Sand Paper*” that was so positively community driven, and it personally gave me an outlet that allows me to remain intimately involved with the FMB community. ‘*Fort Myers Beach LIVING*’ gives me great personal pleasure, I am proud of the upbeat and positive features that we publish, and look forward to continuously growing and adding more features for our readers!”

“The Island Of Misfit Toys!”

When Sandy made her move to FMB, she purchased her beautiful home in the Shell Mound neighborhood. “During my first FMB stay, I rented in this area, got to know many of the neighbors who quickly became like family, and discovered that almost everyone else was a ‘Midwestern Misfit From Somewhere Else’ like me so it had a homey feel that made buying here a natural fit. It actually made me recall ‘The Island of Misfit Toys’ from ‘Rudolph The Red-Nosed Reindeer!’ It was like we were all searching for something that we discovered on FMB! Our neighborhood is still extremely tight, where we host progressive dinners and meet on the beach Friday nights to watch the sunset.”

But after a dozen years of savoring the “Salt Life,” Hurricane Ian struck FMB with a vengeance on September 28, 2022. “I evacuated inland to a friend’s home,” Sandy recalls. “While I was physically safe, Ian dealt my ‘Pink Palace’ a devastating blow, flooding it to almost complete destruction. As I wandered

back onto FMB for the first time, what I saw, not only to my personal home but our lovely island, was unbelievable, like something you would see for a movie set, and I wondered, ‘how will we ever come back from this?’ Yet like almost everyone else, I immediately determined that I would rebuild, as I love my home and this is my community. For most of the next year, I lived in my driveway, in a recreation vehicle a family member loaned me, while contractors rebuilt my home, before finally moving back inside for the 2023 Holiday season.”

I Want a Normal Life Again

Less than a year after moving back into her home and days after the final touches were complete, a double hurricane whammy struck FMB within eleven days in September and October 2024, with Hurricanes Helene and Milton, and Sandy reached her tipping point, making the agonizing decision to put her beloved home up for sale. “I rolled the dice reconstructing my ground level home,” explains Sandy. “With Helene I suffered a 12-inch storm surge, then another 24-inch surge with Milton. I intended to remain for Helene but that unexpected surge forced me to stay with friends and, like almost everyone on FMB, I evacuated a day in advance for Milton.”

The one-two punch of Helene and Milton was the final straw for Sandy. After cleaning out the muck of Helene and then Milton and realizing that “despite a storm being far offshore, with all of our local forecasters saying that this would not be another major event, flood water surged through my home again and again,” says Sandy. “If this can happen from a hurricane hundreds of miles away, I now believe that these events will happen more frequently. I want my life back again rather than living in a constant state of concern and repair. In our December cover feature, Bryan Thomas said that while he was rebuilding again, ‘a few of our neighbors are getting “Hurricane Fatigue,” especially those with ground-level homes, and you can see the exhaustion on their faces.’ I cannot put it any better. I am tired of moving everything in my home either up or out. I’m tired of living in a constant state of construction. I want a garden again and a normal way of life.”

While Sandy will move from FMB, she will not be far away. “I love Southwest Florida and hope to be within a few miles of the island, as this is where almost all of my friends live. I plan to stay involved with our community organizations because FMB is my home and you support your home! In addition to publishing ‘*Fort Myers Beach LIVING*,’ I enjoy arts & crafts, shelling, gardening and of course sunsets and the beach.”

A Truly Magical Place

What Sandy treasures the most today and will miss the most in the future “is the daily interactions with the people, my friends and neighbors of FMB! They love this island and its environment and they love each other. FMB brought us all together, from all over the nation & world, and we became family. Fort Myers Beach truly is a magical place; always was and always will be!” ■



The distinctive and colorful Team Costumes are a beloved "Putt & Pub Crawl" tradition!

Putt & Pub Partners

For the 2025 Putt & Pub Crawl, the following nine FMB bars and restaurants partner with the corresponding non-profits: La Ola Surfside Restaurant with The Friends of the Mound House; Lah De Dah Beach Bar in the Margaritaville Beach Resort with the FMB PTO; Lighthouse Tiki Bar & Grill for the FMB Lions Club; Nervous Nellie's Crazy Waterfront Eatery and the Friends of Lovers Key State Park; Petey's Upper Deck with FMB Revival; Smokin' Oyster Brewery and FMB Strong; Snug Harbor Waterfront Restaurant and the FMB Community Foundation; Wahoo Willie's Tiki Bar & Grill and the FMB Chamber of Commerce; and Yucatan Beach Stand with The Friends of the FMB Public Library; as well as the FMB Woman's Club as the overriding sponsor.

13th Annual Putt & Pub Crawl!

Island Fundraising Tradition Tees Off on January 18

- by Gary Mooney, photo by Sandy Sandness -

The 13th Annual "Putt & Pub Crawl," on Saturday, January 18 and hosted by the FMB Woman's Club, kicks off the island's 2025 social season and is one of FMB's most popular and fun charity events!

"Foursomes make their way to nine beach bars and restaurants, each featuring a unique putt-putt hole manned by an island nonprofit," explains Dawn Thomas, the FMB Woman's Club President and Putt & Pub Crawl Co-chair with Mari Torgerson.

"Every corresponding bar and restaurant creates a drink special while featuring a one-of-a-kind gift basket assembled by the non-profit that is full of terrific items. All 'Putt & Pub Crawl' golfers and fans need to do to win the gift baskets is to purchase tickets throughout the day for a raffle at the conclusion of the tournament and the non-profit keeps all those funds."

Registration begins at Bayside Park from 9 to 11 a.m., explains Dawn. "A few holes will open early at 10:30 a.m., with all holes available to the golfers at 11 a.m. There is no formal order to play the nine golf holes so every team makes up their own course. Each hole sponsor supplies the putters and golf balls for your team. You must complete your round by 4 p.m. and turn in your scorecard at Margaritaville by 4:30 p.m. Dinner and the gift basket drawings are at 5 p.m.,

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with the golfing awards at 5:30 and the day's events conclude at roughly 6 p.m. Golfing awards for this year are 1st and 2nd place for the Lowest Score, the 'Duffer Award' for the highest score, Best Team Costume, and Best Team Name. New this year is the 'Best Hole Award' with a cash prize for 1st, 2nd and 3rd Place, with the golfers voting on that."

Three Special Traditions

A Putt & Pub Crawl tradition is the unique gift baskets assembled by the non-profits. "Preview these marvelous gift baskets when you register,"

Dawn advises. "You can then view them at each hole throughout the day. Purchase tickets for these at the registration table or at each hole location for \$5 each or 5 tickets for \$20. The general public can buy these in addition to the golfers and the FMB Woman's Club will draw the winning tickets at the awards ceremony."

Equally beloved traditions, Dawn adds, "are the distinctive team names and colorful costumes! We encourage all foursomes to come up with an imaginative team name as well as to dress in unique costumes – the cra-

zier the better – as that is all a part of the fun. When you register online, provide your team name so put your thinking caps on in advance, as these are often slightly risqué and full of double entendres. These traditions help make the annual 'Putt & Pub Crawl' such a goofy time that so many people look forward to all year!"

Dawn says that "The Putt & Pub Crawl is a sell-out every year so to check for last minute openings go to the FMB Woman's Club homepage and scroll down to the 'Putt & Pub Crawl' link. In addition to that, for the first time the Women's Club is are offering a commemorative 'Putt & Pub Crawl' 'Are You Ballsy' t-shirt, with a limited supply, so list the sizes for your team. If you have any questions, the FMB Woman's Club webpage is chockful of information!"

For Dawn, the best part of the Putt & Pub Crawl is that "you get to support and benefit ten different island charities all at the same time while have a great fun doing it!" See you all there! ■



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January

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The FREE LeeTran Beach Tram runs every 35 minutes 7 days a week from the FMB Public Library to Bowditch Point Park and back, with the first tram each day leaving from the FMB Library at 9:30am and the last departing Bowditch Point at 10:35pm.
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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
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, with games, snacks & homework time. \$125 for FMB residents & \$175 for non-residents for the entire school year!

Wednesday, January 1
HAPPY NEW YEAR!

Thursday, January 2
FMB Chamber
"Coffee Connection"

@To Be Determined
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, January 2
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, January 2
AND EVERY THURSDAY,
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 Thursday, Friday & Saturday from 9am to 1pm. To verify the location, see www.41markets.com.

Friday, 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

Friday, January 3
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.

Saturday, January 4
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.

Sunday, January 5
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! January 5: "Jacob's Ladder"; January 12: "Joe Yeoman Band"; January 19: "Soapy Tuna," & January 26: "Thunder Beach." See www.fortmyersbeach.org.

Mondays, January 6 & 20
Caribbean Cruise-In Car Show

@Parrot Key Caribbean Grill
The largest FMB Car Show returns on the 1st & 3rd Monday of each month through April. Enjoy music, food and prizes while marveling at these fantastic cars! The free car show is from 3 to 6pm; see www.myparrotkey.com.

Wednesday, January 8
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. Please note the different day for this meeting.

Wednesday, January 8
FMB Town Council
Management & Planning Session

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

Wednesday, January 8
FMB Woman's Club Monthly Meeting

@The Island Pancake House
Join the best club on the entire island! Food & drink for purchase from the restaurant and all are welcome at 6:30pm; see www.fmb-wc.org.

Thursday, January 9
FMB Chamber Membership Luncheon

@To Be Determined
Join your FMB Chamber friends to savor a scrumptious luncheon from a local island restaurant as well as enjoying an informative guest speaker from 11:30am to 1pm. \$30 members & \$40 prospective members; for the location, see www.fortmyersbeach.org.

Friday, January 10
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.friendsofloverkey.org.

Tuesday, January 14
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.

SUDOKU

Answers from page 3

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Wednesday, January 15

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.

Wednesday, January 15

FMB Community Foundation Monthly Meeting

@The Island Pancake House
The FMB Community Foundation is the island's leading philanthropic organization, so join in on the fun from 5 to 7pm; see www.fmbcommunityfoundation.com.

Thursday, January 16

FMB Chamber "Business After Hours"

@To Be Determined
Join your FMB Chamber friends for a fun time while enjoying savory appetizers and a cash bar from 5:30 to 7pm. Members FREE & \$15 for perspective members; for the location, see www.fortmyersbeach.org.

Saturday, January 18

Putt & Pub Crawl

@Bayside Park
The "Putt & Pub Crawl" is a putt-putt fundraiser from 10am to 6pm including the awards ceremony and dinner at the Margaritaville Sun Deck. Groups compete for 1st and 2nd Place, the Duffer's Award for highest score, the Best Dressed Team and Best Team Name, but its main goal is to raise money for 10 FMB nonprofits! \$350-per-forsome & \$75 for each additional golfer; register at www.fmb-wc.org.

Tuesday, January 21

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. Town Council meets one day later than usual due to the Martin Luther King Junior Holiday.

Wednesday, January 22

FMB Community Foundation Social Get-Together

@To Be Determined
The FMB Community Foundation is the island's leading philanthropic organization, so join in on the fun from 5 to 7pm; for the location, see www.fmbcommunityfoundation.com.

Saturday, February 8th

2nd Annual MRS. ROPER'S BACK TO THE BEACH Caftan Crawl

@Bayside Park
Hang on to your wig, Helen! Grab Stanley, Jack, Janet, and Crissy—it's time to get the gang together! For just \$20, your ticket includes: Custom Finisher's Medal, Stadium Cup, Swag Bag & More! Don't miss out on this fabulous day of fun, laughter, and fundraising! Tickets available: <https://donorbox.org/roper-tickets>

Saturday, February 15

FMB Community Foundation "Fashion Show"

@"The Islander," Santini Marina Plaza
The FMB Community Foundation's "Fashion Show" returns at the Santini Marina Plaza breezeway adjacent to "The Islander" at 1pm. Marvel at and purchase fashions from "The Islander" and "Tunaskin Aquatic Apparel." A fundraising highlight are the marvelous gift baskets assembled by the FMB Community Foundation members. For tickets and more information, see www.fmbcommunityfoundation.com.

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Bayside Building has committed to donate a portion of each job's proceeds to FMBStrong as our way of assisting in post-storm humanitarian relief as long as it's needed in our area.



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Strawberry Spinach Salad

by Sandy Sandness



INGREDIENTS

FOR THE SALAD

- 6 cups baby spinach leaves
- 2 cups strawberries quartered
- 1/2 cup sliced almonds toasted
- 1/4 cup red onion thinly sliced
- 1 avocado peeled, pitted and diced
- 1/2 cup feta cheese crumbled

FOR THE DRESSING

- 1/2 cup olive oil
- 1/2 cup granulated sugar
- 1/4 cup apple cider vinegar
- 1 tablespoon poppy seed
- salt and pepper to taste

INSTRUCTIONS

FOR THE SALAD

- Place the spinach, strawberries, almonds, red onion, avocado and feta cheese in a large bowl.

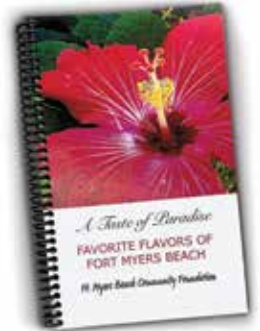
FOR THE DRESSING

- In a small bowl, whisk together the olive oil, sugar, apple cider vinegar, poppy seeds, salt and pepper.
- Pour the dressing over the salad and toss to coat. Serve immediately.

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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1,000 Trees Campaign

KLCB Sets An Ambitious 2025 Goal

- by Gary Mooney, photos by Tisha Bayne & KLCB -

Keep Lee County Beautiful, Inc., (KLCB) will kick off 2025 with its newest initiative, the “1,000 Trees Campaign!”

“KLCB formed in 1989,” says Communications & Special Events Manager Tisha Bayne. “Most people are aware of us because of our beach, roadway, and waterway cleanups, but one of our primary missions is to plant trees, mangroves and sea oaks that are vital parts of our ecosystem and over the last decade, we planted over 100,000. Everyone knows that the last couple of years have been tough on Lee County because of our numerous hurricanes, so to help the community rebuild and recover, KLCB has a goal to plant 1,000 new trees in a beautification project during 2025, to replace those lost to our various hurricanes. Not only are trees wonderful in establishing shade canopies but they are great for improving air quality and creating green spaces and corridors to benefit our citizens as well as wildlife. Each tree will play a critical role in ensuring a sustainable community for generations, especially if we can avoid more major hurricanes over the next few years!”

For KLCB to reach its ambitious goal, however, “that depends on funding,” states Tisha. “Fortunately, due to our long history, we work with local growers who charge us fair prices. To begin, we will plant these trees in public parks and related places throughout Lee County that lost trees from hurricane damage, though later in the program, we may be able to work with private property owners to replace their trees because in places like Fort Myers Beach, many of your sidestreet trees are gone. If you can help us with funding, please go to our website at www.klcb.org or on any of our social media sites and know upfront that your contribution, whether large or small, will stay right here in Lee County.”

Tisha stresses that all of the trees that KLCB plants are native species to our area. “Slash pines, live oaks, laurel oaks, cypress and red maples are excellent examples and we select which ones will go where based on the environmental condition of the various locations. KLCB works closely with our local parks

and recreation departments so that we ensure that the trees we plant will flourish in their locations, because it does no good to plant one that will not survive. KLCB is already in communication with the Town of FMB leaders and Lee County to plant some new trees in beach parks and recreation locations like Crescent Beach Family Park and Bowditch Point Park. Once we plant a tree, there must be a plan in place to care for it with things like proper irrigation so that they will grow rather than wither away.”

In 2024, for example, KLCB planted roughly 170 trees and 800 shrubs at sites like Lakes Regional Park and the Cape Coral parks, explains Tisha. “One particularly neat project was near Fort Myers Beach where we planted a garden and shrubs at the Welcome & Discovery Center at Lovers Key State Park. Acquiring the trees is just the first step in a very important process. As a non-profit, we rely on our volunteers to assist with plantings across the County. If it were not for our volunteers, we would not be able to finish the entire job. To join us, simply go to our website and sign up.”

Keep Lee County Beautiful relies not only on the dedication of its volunteers but also on the success of its fundraisers to support its many projects, explains Tisha. “Throughout the year, KLCB hosts a variety of events to achieve its mission of enhancing the community and environment. One upcoming event is the ‘Topgolf Challenge,’ scheduled for Thursday, February 20, and presented by Beach Talk Radio. Proceeds from this exciting event will directly support KLCB’s initiatives. Those interested in participating in this fundraiser or exploring other opportunities to contribute can visit www.klcb.org for more details and ways to become involved with us.”

Keep Lee County Beautiful, Inc., established in 1989, is Lee County’s largest volunteer-based community action and education organization. This local non-profit forms public-private partnerships and programs that engage individuals to take greater responsibility for improving our community environments. For more information, call 239-334-3488 or visit www.klcb.org. “KLCB is so much more than beach and roadside cleanups,” concludes Tisha. “Help us to ensure that Lee County remains the natural oasis that we all love and cherish!” ■

A Sense of Normalcy!

FMB Community Foundation Hosts Early 2025 Events

- by Gary Mooney -

"The FMB Community Foundation has quite a few events planned for the first part of 2025," raves Community Foundation President Julie Fite! "We begin on the morning of January 1 with our annual 'Beach Cleanup.' The big news, however, is the long-awaited return of our 'Fashion Show' on Saturday, February 15, at the Santini Marina Plaza at 1 p.m., in the breezeway adjacent to 'The Islander,' owned by Community Foundation member and former FMB Mayor Anita Cereceda!"

Julie states that the Community Foundation felt that this was the right time to return the "Fashion Show" for the first time since Hurricane Ian. "First, we needed the island's infrastructure to recover. Second, we had to wait for Santini Marina Plaza to recuperate from the hurricanes and it looks fantastic. Last and most important, it was dependent on when Anita reopened 'The Islander' and when she did that in late 2024, the time was right. Most of the clothes that you will see will come from either 'The Islander' or 'Tunaskin Aquatic Apparel' as they are the first two apparel stores to reopen since Ian, though we may include one or two more. In addition to the beautiful clothes, a fundraising highlight will be the marvelous gift baskets assembled by FMB Community Foundation members that we will raffle off. The Community Foundation is still putting the final details in place so we do not have a ticket price yet, but you can find that information at www.fmbcommunityfoundation.com."

One month later, the FMB Community Foundation hosts "The Dinky Pickleball Tournament" at the Bay Oaks Recreational Center on Saturday, March 15. "This event

is contingent on Bay Oaks reopening in time, but we had a terrific turnout last year and since this is so close to St. Patrick's Day, many players dressed in Irish-themed costumes and that is so much fun!"

While still a few months away, the FMB Community Foundation is already working on its annual "Casino Night" for Saturday, April 12, at the DiamondHead Beach Resort at 6 p.m. "We brought back the 'Casino Night' last year and everyone loved it so we had to do it again," emphasizes Julie. "It was relaxing and fun and those are things that we all need these days. We wrap up the first half of 2025 with our annual Awards Program on Tuesday, May 6, when we distribute funds to worthwhile FMB charities as well as scholarships to local students."

Julie happily announces the return of the FMB Community Foundation monthly meetings to their traditional home at the "Island Pancake House" on the third Wednesday of each month from 5 to 7 p.m., with this month on January 15. "The Community Foundation is thrilled to have our monthly meetings back not only on FMB but at the 'Pancake House!' Now that we are back there, with the return of events like the 'Fashion Show' and 'Casino Night,' we are experiencing a sense of normalcy again!"

"It Feels So Good!"

Julie calls the FMB Community Foundation's 2024 highlight "the distribution of over \$93,000 to island charities and non-profits, and this does not count the funds we contributed to our Endowment Fund at Florida SouthWestern State College! We contrib-



uted monies to such outstanding groups as the Bay Oaks Recreational Center, Beach Elementary School, Estero Island Historical Society, FMB Strong, Keep Lee County Beautiful, and many more. We are so proud of that amount, especially when you consider the circumstances endured the last couple of years."

For Julie, the best part of being in the FMB Community Foundation is "that it feels so good! I love that we host fun fundraising events so that we can make such generous monetary contributions to our island charities and non-profits, but just as important are the delightful social aspects. The FMB Community Foundation members are a great group of people who share the same mindset of making a positive difference for our island home." ■

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