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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.

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- By Gary Mooney -

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Each row must contain the digits 1-9.

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Answers on page 8

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Hello Friends & Neighbors!

Happy Easter!

Easter Sunday is April 20 and as we all know, that is the unofficial end of "Season!" The windup actually began a few weeks ago, as Season ends in layers. The first group to depart occurred at the end of March, when the Spring Training fans of the Boston Red Sox and Minnesota Twins headed North. Around that same time, Spring Break vacations ended, as kids and college students get ready for the home stretch of their academic years. After that are the thousands of area Grandmas who want to be home in time for Easter and the Grandpas who return for the start of their golf leagues. Finally comes the constant trickle of Seasonals who leave for their Summer homes, with the majority gone by the Memorial Day Holiday Weekend. By Easter, however, we mostly have our island home all to ourselves again!

April features the return of two FMB institutions, the first full month of the Fort Myers Beach Public Library re-opening! If you missed the Grand Re-Opening Ceremony on March 16th, make sure to stop in and see all the beautiful new features added and the famous elevator with one of the most elusive parts in the world! Check out a book or movie; add a few pieces of the community jigsaw puzzle; see the fantastic new mural in the Children's Area; and stroll through its marvelous collection of eclectic exhibits and displays. I speak for all islanders when I say that we are stoked to have the FMB Public Library open again.

Saturday, April 12, is "Vegas Night," sponsored by the FMB Community Foundation, at Diamond Head Beach Resort at 6:30 p.m. This was a locals favorite last year and tickets to this longtime FMB fundraiser are \$100 per person. While you enjoy the Casino-style gaming tables, scrumptious heavy hors d'oeuvres, live music and dancing, savory dessert buffet and the terrific array of wonderful prize and "stay-cation" packages, remember that this fundraiser helps the FMB Community Foundation to continue to benefit island nonprofits through their generous contributions as well as providing local students with much-needed scholarships funds.

Speaking of beloved FMB institutions, please continue to 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 that you saw their ad in our magazine so we can continue to provide you with this original entertainment each month!

"Happy Easter," & Have An Awesome Beach Day!



Sandy Sandness

Publisher

Fort Myers Beach LIVING

239-222-0129

ssandness@bestversionmedia.com



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This is Our Home!

Heidi & Bruiser Jungwirth

- By Gary Mooney, Photos by Sandy Sandness and Heidi & Bruiser Jungwirth -

Heidi and Bruiser Jungwirth are from the Badger State of Wisconsin. "I am originally from Marshfield," says Heidi, with Bruiser adding that he is from Oshkosh. As for his unique moniker, "'Bruiser' is obviously not my real name but I prefer to keep it to myself; only a few people know my real name!"

They first met while working for FedEx Ground but their real relationship began at a party. "Heidi has bright red hair so you couldn't miss her," recalls Bruiser. "Friends threw a party but I already had another date for that evening. After my date went home, I went to the party and Heidi was there. We struck up a conversation and the rest is history!" They married in 2010 in Eagle River, Wisconsin, at the Butternut Lake Lodge, and they lived in Eagle River until relocating to FMB in 2012.

Bruiser began visiting FMB all the way back in 1985 and always enjoyed it. Back home, however, was a different

story. "I worked a FedEx Ground route during some horrible winters, near Lake Superior where it would snow for up to 28 days in a row," he recollects. "Finally, in 2012, I had enough of that and we decided to relocate to Florida. At first, we were looking in the Pensacola area but discovered that it can still get really cold there and sometimes even snow so we wanted someplace further south than that. I said that we should check out FMB, as I had been coming here since the 1980s and always liked it."

"Unlike Bruiser, that was my first time seeing FMB," adds Heidi, "and for me, it was love at first sight! While waiting for our rental car, we received a job offer so that told us that this was meant to be." They began managing the Surf & Us Beach Resort, then eventually opened their own vacation rental business.

Anywhere in Ten Minutes

Bruiser and Heidi live in the Bayside Estates, just off FMB. "We were on the

island until July of 2022, so just two months before Ian," Heidi says. "We began by renting at Bayside, then liked it so much that we decided to buy. I love this area because it seems like we can get to wherever we want to go in ten minutes! We are right down from the beach and close to the grocery store and some terrific restaurants. Buying here checked a lot of boxes."

"I still go to the beach every day so this neighborhood is convenient for me," adds Bruiser. "Bayside Estates is getting better every day, just like the beach is getting better every day, but both remain works in progress. We would like to live on FMB again at some point in the future but it would have to be the right opportunity." "I don't know about that," laughs Heidi. "I'd say the odds for me are 50/50; you just don't know anymore and I am not alone in feeling that way."

As to if they have any apprehensions about living so close to the Gulf, "we are not afraid," says Bruiser. "I happen to think that another storm like Ian will not hit FMB for 20 years or more; it was more of a fluke than a pattern." "Even though we live on a canal, I feel pretty safe here," agrees Heidi. "I do admit, however, that it is now more stressful being a homeowner than when we were renters."

The Need is Still There

Heidi manages FMB Strong at 820 Buttonwood Drive, the local nonprofit founded by survivors of Hurricane Ian, dedicated to helping fellow Ian survivors, along with those impacted by other disasters. "I love what I do because I get to help people every day and see that we are changing their lives for the better; that we really do make a positive difference. I have been with FMB Strong from our first day. Our vacation rental office was in 820 Buttonwood that was mostly a golf cart rental building back then. Almost immediately after Ian, the owner, Tim Ryan, began FMB Strong and it was chaotic. Tim said to me that he needs someone who can jump right in and get everything not only up and running, but running smoothly, so I jumped right in!"

More than two years after Ian, “unfortunately, the need is still there,” she explains. “It even picked up more after Helene and Milton last year. You repair your home and along comes another flood and you are down on your luck again. Just when it seems like things are getting back to a sense of normalcy and people think they can breathe a little easier, something else always seems to come along.”

Bruiser keeps his foot in the rental property business along with doing odd jobs here and there. “I’m a ‘Grunt Man,’ he laughs! “The property management business is way different than before Ian. Back then, we had 37 units and that dropped all the way down to three. Today it is back up to six.”

“We Like Beer!”

Bruiser’s “hobby” is brewing his own beer. “We like beer,” exclaims Heidi! “I began doing my own microbrewing about 10 years ago,” explains Bruiser. “I came up with the ‘Lazy Coconut Brewing Company,’ along with Tre Gillette of the former ‘Tuckaway Café’ and FMB Mayor Dan Allers, that we were just getting ready to open inside the ‘Tuckaway’ on the island but then Ian happened. Folks seem to like our beer way more than anything they buy from the store.”

Such as Special Place

Heidi is a member of the Fort Myers Beach Woman’s Club as well as the FMB Community Foundation. “They are phenomenal clubs but of course it is the members who make them phenomenal. My fellow members are an amazing group of people who are always there for the island community, through thick and thin.” Bruiser volunteers at FMB Strong “all the time, but sometimes it is not ‘volunteer,’ it is ‘Volun-Told!’” They give back to their community for a simple reason: “This is our home and you do that for your home,” philosophizes Bruiser.

When they contemplate what Fort Myers Beach will look like five years, “I think that it will be pretty cool,” Bruiser says enthusiastically. “There will be more restaurants on the beach and more things to do. As for the traffic, it is what it is and there is nothing you can do about it so deal with it. FMB will probably no longer be a quaint little beach town anymore and there will be a lot of big condominiums and hotels but there will still be neighborhoods too so it will be a nice mixture. I think it will be pretty cool when most of the rebuilding is done.” “There will be a lot more tall buildings,” predicts Heidi, “so I hope FMB does not lose its smalltown charm. This community shows such resilience and that is a wonderful testament to its people; they are what make it such a special place.”

On that, Heidi and Bruiser agree: “We stay here because of the people,” he offers. “We have so many friends and everyone we meet are terrific. It’s not the architecture that makes a town but its people.” “FMB has a true sense of community and that is why we are still here,” concludes Heidi. “There are other places in which we could live but the people and their sense of community keep us here.” ■



Heidi and Bruiser are from the Badger State of Wisconsin, with she from Marshfield and he from Oshkosh.



Bruiser began visiting FMB in the 1980s while Heidi fell in love with it at first sight in 2012!

April

EVERY DAY

FREE LeeTran Beach Tram

@FMB Public Library to Bowditch Point Park
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 9:30 a.m. and the last departing Bowditch Point at 10:35 p.m. See www.leegov.com.

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 6 p.m., with games, snacks & homework time. \$125 for FMB residents & \$175 for non-residents for the entire school year!

Tuesday, April 1

AND EVERY TUESDAY & THURSDAY THROUGH MAY

Santini Marina Plaza Market

@Santini Marina Plaza
This FMB South End Market offers fresh produce, artisan foods, arts, crafts, clothing and more EVERY Tuesday & Thursday through May from 9 a.m. to 1 p.m.; see www.41markets.com.

Wednesday, April 2

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 9 a.m. to 4 p.m. with Grounds daily from 7:30 a.m. to 6 p.m. Adults \$15, Students \$8, Kids 6 to 12 \$5, & 5 & under free; Grounds free.

See www.moundhouse.org.

Wednesday, April 2

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 6:30 p.m.; see www.fmb-wc.org.

Thursday, April 3

FMB Chamber "Coffee Connection"

@Kava Culture
Start your day with your FMB Chamber friends at Kava Culture for networking with complimentary coffee, tasty breakfast items and free kava samples from 8 to 9:30 a.m.; see www.fortmyersbeach.org.

Friday & Saturday, April 4 & 5

AND EVERY FRIDAY & SATURDAY THROUGH MAY

Fort Myers Beach Market

@Santini Marina Plaza
Hurricanes Helene & Milton forced the relocation of this Downtown FMB Market to Santini Marina Plaza. The FMB Market offers fresh produce, artisan foods, arts, crafts, clothing and more EVERY Friday & Saturday through May from 9 a.m. to 1 p.m. To verify the location, see www.41markets.com.

Friday & Saturday, April 4 & 5

AND EVERY FRIDAY & SATURDAY THROUGH MAY

Moss Marina Farmer's Market

@Moss Marina
Savor scrumptious food items, along with lovely arts & crafts, every Friday and Saturday at 450 Old San Carlos Boulevard through May from 9 a.m. to 1 p.m.; see www.mossmarina.com.

Saturdays, April 5 & 12

"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 8:15 a.m. to Noon; see www.scbps.com.

Sunday, April 6

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 7 p.m.! April 6: "Soapy Tuna"; April 13: "Limited Edition"; April 20: "Guilty Pleasure"; & April 27: "Riverside." See www.fortmyersbeach.org.

Mondays, April 7 & 21

FMB Town Council Meeting

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

Mondays, April 7 & 21

Caribbean Cruise-In Car Show

@Parrot Key Caribbean Grill
The largest FREE FMB Car Show concludes this month, with the two April shows the final ones of 2024. Enjoy music, food and prizes while marveling at these fantastic cars! 3 to 6 p.m.; see www.myparrotkey.com.

Tuesday, April 8

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 9 a.m.; see www.fortmyersbeachfl.gov.

Tuesday, April 8

Fort Myers

Mighty Mussels Opening Day

@Hammond Stadium, Lee Health Sports Complex
The Mighty Mussels, the Low A affiliate of the Minnesota Twins, take on the Tampa Tarpons of the New York Yankees organization in the first of 66 home games for 2025 at 7:05 p.m.! The Mussels & Tarpons play through Sunday, April 13, with weekdays at 7:05 p.m., Saturday at 6:05 p.m. & Sunday at 12:05 p.m.; tickets \$11 to \$14. For details see www.mightymussels.com.

Wednesday, April 9

FMB Town Council

Management & Planning Session

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

Thursday, April 10

FMB Chamber

Membership Luncheon

@Margaretville Beach Resort FMB
Join your FMB Chamber friends to savor a scrumptious luncheon from Margaritaville FMB while listening to Jenn Walla from the Lee County VCB from 11:30 a.m. to 1 p.m. Grand Aire Services sponsors the April Luncheon. \$32 members & \$42 prospective members; see www.fortmyersbeach.org.

Thursday, April 10

FMB Art Association Potluck

@Fort Myers United Church of Christ
Bring a dish to share as well as your own utensils, plate, cup, & beverage, as the FMBAA

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

provides the coffee & dessert. The potluck begins at Noon followed by the Membership Meeting with the election of the 2025-26 Officers. The FM United Church of Christ is at 8210 College Parkway and all are welcome; see www.fortmyersbeachart.com.

Friday, April 11

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 10 a.m. to 1 p.m. The W&DC is FREE with the park entry fee; see www.friendsoflovkeyskey.org.

Saturday, April 12

"Vegas Night"

FMB Community Foundation Fundraiser

@DiamondHead Beach Resort

Enjoy the Casino-style gaming tables, scrumptious heavy hors d'oeuvres, live music and dancing, savory dessert buffet and the terrific array of wonderful prize and "stay-cation" packages. This FMB Community Foundation provides generous contributions to island nonprofits as well as to its scholarship fund. \$100-per-person, 6:30 to 11:30 p.m. For more information or to purchase tickets, see www.fmbcommunityfoundation.com.

Monday, April 14

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 11 a.m.; \$25-per-person with advance registration and payment necessary at 239-472-3644, x-229 or reservations@crowclinic.org.

Wednesday, April 16

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 11 a.m. \$50-per-person including MH admission with reservations necessary at www.moundhouse.org.

Wednesday, April 16

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 7 p.m.; see www.fmbcommunityfoundation.com.

Thursday, April 17

FMB Chamber "Business After Hours"

@Buffalo Grill

Join your FMB Chamber friends for a fun time at Buffalo Grill, adjacent to Times Square, while enjoying savory appetizers and a cash bar from 5:30 to 7 p.m. Members FREE & \$16 for perspective members; see www.fortmyersbeach.org.

Friday, April 18

Beach & Estuary Walk

@Lovers Key State Park

Join a park ranger on a guided hike along the Black Island Trail from 10 to 11:30 a.m. Free with park entry fee but reservations required at www.friendsoflovkeyskey.org.



Sunday, April 20 HAPPY EASTER!

Wednesday, April 23

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 10 a.m., Noon & 2 p.m. 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.

Wednesday, April 23

FMB Community Foundation Social

@To Be Announced

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

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DAY

FMB Public Library Reopens! Community Treasure Survives Ian

- by Gary Mooney -

"The beloved Fort Myers Beach Public Library reopened on Sunday, March 16, almost 2-1/2 years after Hurricane Ian," relates Jan Fleming, the Secretary of the Board of Directors for "The Friends of the FMB Public Library." "We waited a long time for that magical day!"

Jan explains the main reasons for the lengthy delay. "The primary one was the significant repairs necessary to the

FMB Library's signature elevator. The Library must be in ADA-compliance, even if many of our patrons could use the staircase, or we would be a liability risk. A further complication arose because the company that installed the elevator is no longer in business so we had to find another one, and then it took a long time to acquire the necessary parts. Anyone who lives in an FMB condominium knows the struggles of reactivating elevators, as some island condos have yet to repairs theirs. While it was frustrating for our patrons, no one wanted to reopen the Library faster than our fantastic staff."

In addition to the elevator repairs, the Library required an extensive mitigation process. "The mitigation team discovered a small leak in the roof, but fortunately little water came inside the



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building. Unfortunately, the storm surge destroyed the Children's Area as well as all our staff offices. The mitigation team immediately set up all sorts of hoses and generators, to get the air conditioning going, to preserve as much of our printed materials as possible. A lot of work went into our reopening."

Jan says that patrons will notice a few new attractions when they first visit the FMB Public Library. "We commissioned local artist Summer DeSalvo to do a beautiful new mural in the Children's Area based on the kids' book, 'Rainbow Fish,' and it is so cute! On a somber note, the Town donated to the Library the plaque listing the names of all the islanders we lost to Hurricane Ian, including the Library's own beloved greeter, Mitch Pacyna. We all terribly miss Mitch and dedicated the plaque in his honor."

Proud About What He Built

When the Library's late Director, Dr. Leroy Hommerding, oversaw its significant 2013 expansion, he proudly proclaimed

that no matter how powerful a future hurricane, the new Library would survive! So how did Dr. Leroy's prediction hold up?

"Well, the Library still stands," exalts Jan! "Except for the storm surge damage, the Library held up and we were able to repair it under the 50% Rule so I would say that Dr. Leroy's prediction came true! I truly believe that as Ian struck FMB, Dr. Leroy was watching over us and was proud of what he built."

What We Can Accomplish

The FMB Public Library at 2755 Estero Boulevard is open Mondays through Fridays from 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. and on Saturdays from 9 a.m. to 1 p.m.; closed Sundays and Holidays. For more information telephone 239-765-8162, email Library@fmb.lib.fl.us or see www.fmb.lib.fl.us.

For Jan, the greatest aspect of the FMB Public Library is that "it is such a great community building and a destination site! It brings together diverse groups from throughout the island and beyond.

For instance, the Estero Island Garden Club decorates our Christmas Tree year-round, with a different motif each month. Islanders and tourists alike flock to the Library to see our distinctive and beautifully painted elevator. People love to view our aquariums, see the gigantic dollhouse or to take part in assembling our community jigsaw puzzles. The 'Friends of the FMB Library' operates the 3rd Floor 'Used Book Store' where vacationers can acquire great used books for just a few dollars. There is truly something for everyone at the FMB Public Library!"

As to what it means to have the FMB Library open again, "oh my gosh, it feels like another step toward FMB getting back to normal," Jan exclaims! "Every time another island institution like the FMB Public Library returns, it is another baby step toward a revitalized FMB. While the Fort Myers Beach that most of us fell in love with will never be the same, by working together in moving forward, it shows everyone on the island what we can accomplish!" ■

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Deviled Eggs

by Sandy Sandness

CLASSIC DEVILED EGGS: A TIMELESS FAVORITE

Deviled eggs have long been a beloved appetizer, perfect for gatherings, picnics, or a simple yet elegant snack. This easy-to-follow recipe stays true to tradition, using easy and flavorful ingredients like mayonnaise, mustard, and pickle relish for the perfect bite.

PERFECTLY HARD-BOILED EGGS

The secret to flawless deviled eggs starts with properly cooked and easy-to-peel hard-boiled eggs. Try one of these foolproof methods:

- **Stovetop Method:** Place eggs in a pot of cold water and bring to a boil. Add 1 teaspoon of baking soda — a trick that makes peeling a breeze — then cover and remove from heat. Let sit for 12 minutes before transferring the eggs to an ice bath.
- **Instant Pot Method:** Pour 1 cup of water into the Instant Pot, place eggs on a wire rack, and cook on high pressure for 5 minutes. Allow a 5-minute natural release before transferring eggs to an ice bath for another 5 minutes.
- **Oven Method:** Preheat the oven to 325°F. Place each egg in a muffin tin and bake for 30 minutes. Once done, cool in an ice bath for 10 minutes.

MAKING PERFECT DEVILED EGGS

The secret to flawless deviled eggs starts with properly cooked and easy-to-peel hard-boiled eggs. Try one of these foolproof methods:

1. **Peel & Slice:** Once cooled, gently remove the shells and slice the eggs in half lengthwise.
2. **Prepare the Filling:** Scoop out the yolks into a mixing bowl. Add mayonnaise or a mix of mayo and Greek yogurt, along with pickle relish, mustard, salt, and pepper. Mash and mix until smooth, adjusting seasoning to taste.
3. **Fill the Egg Whites:** Spoon or pipe the creamy yolk mixture back into the egg whites. Chill until ready to serve. For a finishing touch, sprinkle with paprika for color and a hint of spice.

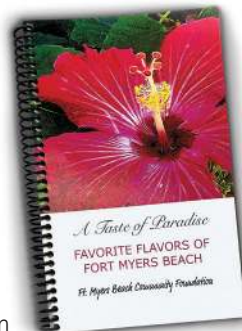
SERVING & VARIATIONS


These classic deviled eggs are a guaranteed crowd-pleaser, but feel free to customize! Try adding crispy bacon bits, a dash of hot sauce, or a sprinkle of fresh herbs for a unique twist.

Whether served at brunch, holiday parties, or summer cookouts, deviled eggs never go out of style. Enjoy this timeless treat today!

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



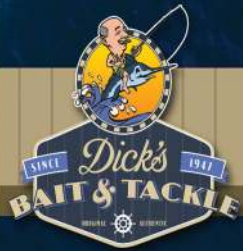


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Vegas, Baby!

Fort Myers Beach
Community Foundation



FMB Community Foundation Hosts “Vegas Night”

– By Gary Mooney –

The Fort Myers Beach Community Foundation (FMBCF) hosts its annual “Vegas Night,” sponsored by The King Family Foundation, on Saturday, April 12, at the DiamondHead Beach Resort at 6:30 p.m. “The tradition of the FMBCF hosting some type of ‘Vegas Night’ fundraiser goes all the way back to when we were still the Pilot Club, almost two decades ago,” says longtime FMBCF member and “Vegas Night” Chairperson Alicia Steinhagen. “It’s been a few titles over the years, like ‘Casino Night’ and ‘Viva Las Vegas,’ but ‘Vegas Night’ is the same concept.”

“Vegas Night” attendees receive a \$2,000 voucher to play casino-type games like Craps, Blackjack, three- and five-card Poker and Roulette, with multiple tables for many of those. Patrons win “gaming chips” that they redeemed for tickets to place in raffle boxes to win fabulous gift baskets and prize packages from leading local businesses, restaurants and resorts. Near the end of the night, the FMBCF draws the winning ticket for each prize at roughly 10 p.m. “Don’t worry if you lose your entire \$2,000 voucher,” laughs Alicia. “You can buy more, either to continue to

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play the games, or to place tickets into the raffle boxes for the gift package drawings.”

Alicia adds that there is so much more to “Vegas Night” than just the casino-style games. “The evening features scrumptious heavy hors d’oeuvres and a lavish dessert table. There is a signature cocktail as well as a cash bar. There will be a live band and you will marvel at all the tremendous gift baskets and ‘stay-cations’ for experiences like golfing and nearby attractions.”

A Great Vibe!

In 2024, the FMBCF hosted their casino-style fundraiser for the first time since Hurricane Ian and it was so positive that there was no question they hold it again in 2025. “The reaction was overwhelming,” recalls Alicia! “People were ready for something light and fun, that rekindled a slice of normalcy. Folks dressed up just like they would for Las Vegas and reveled in going from gaming table to gaming table, while dancing to the music and savoring the food. The entire evening was a lot of fun, with a great vibe!”

While “Vegas Night” is literally fun and games, there is a serious reason behind the evening. “This is a Community Foundation fundraiser,” reminds Alicia. “We will raise thousands of dollars and will use every penny to benefit those in need in our island community. The FMBCF has a long history of supporting organizations like the Bay Oaks Recreational Center, Estero Island Historical Society, and the FMB Art Association as well as many others, along with our own scholarship fund for local students.”

“Vegas Night” tickets are \$100-per-person; to purchase yours, go to the FMB Community Foundation webpage at www.fmbcommunityfoundation.com. “Last year’s event sold out,” cautions Alicia, “so buy yours ASAP.”

For Alicia, the best part of the last year’s “Vegas Night” was that “I never played three-card Poker in my life and I couldn’t stop winning, so I kept exclaiming, ‘I LOVE THIS GAME!’ By the end of the night, no one else had any chips while I had a big stack so I told everybody, ‘here – take some of mine!’”

Tremendously Talented Group of People

If you are not an FMB Community Foundation member, Alicia encourages you to join. “I first became a member all the way back when the CF was still the Pilot Club and I have done everything from being on the Executive Board to an officer to serving as a Chairperson for events like the ‘Vegas Night,’” advises Alicia. “We all do our parts because when everyone does just a little, great things happen! There is no better feeling than knowing that we are all a part of something bigger than ourselves and, despite everything the beach endured, there is still such a tremendous gift of giving from the beach community. On top of that, we all have so much fun, so for membership information, see www.fmbcommunityfoundation.com or, better yet, attend one of our monthly meetings at the ‘Island Pancake House’ on the third Wednesday of each month from 5 to 7 p.m. The FMBCF is a tremendously talented group of people who are always there for the beach community and that is the best part of being an FMBCF member!” ■

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