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An exclusive magazine serving the residents of Fort Myers Beach

June 2025

FORT MYERS BEACH

Living

Barb & Jack Mezeske
"Get to Know Us Better!"

Cover by Sandy Sandness

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FORT MYERS BEACH

A Best Version Media Magazine
An independently owned community magazine.

PUBLISHER..... **Sandy Sandness**
239-222-0129 • ssandness@bestversionmedia.com

CONTENT COORDINATOR **Gary Mooney**
239-898-7905 • gmooney@bestversionmedia.com

CONTRIBUTING PHOTOGRAPHER **Sandy Sandness**

DESIGNER..... **Joe Kelly**

For Sponsorship Information

CONTACT | **Sandy Sandness**
Email | ssandness@bestversionmedia.com
Phone | **239-222-0129**

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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Lee County Parks & Recreation: 239-533-7275
Beach Elementary School: 239-463-6356
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Expert Contributors



Insurance

Wendy Matura
RTI Insurance
239-314-1307
wendy@trustrti.com



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Arry Housh
Arry's Roofing Services Inc.
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- By Gary Mooney -

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SUDOKU

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Hello Friends & Neighbors!

This month's edition of "FMB LIVING Magazine" is jammed packed with interesting people and terrific events! It would be hard to describe what a fun experience it was interviewing and photographing our June Feature Story couple, Barb & Jack Mezeske. Their hope is that, through their cover feature, you get to know them better and, in return, they get to know you as well, so if you see them out-&-about this Summer, stop over and say "Hello!" When you do so, congratulate Barb on her recent election to the Presidency of the FMB Woman's Club.

We are thrilled about the reopening of the Fort Myers Beach Art Association's new gallery! Although the location is currently off-island, the FMBAA remains dedicated to eventually rebuilding on their original Fort Myers Beach property. Read their inspiring story in this edition of FMB LIVING Magazine, and make the short trip to visit the new gallery, support these talented artists, and discover outstanding local art.

It is with trepidation that we acknowledge that we are once again in "Hurricane Season." This is truly an example of the old adage: "Prepare for the worst but hope for the best." We all know by now what these devastating storms can do to the lives of an entire beachfront community so please don't let your guard down in 2025. **DO NOT BE COMPLACENT: PREPARE AS IF YOUR LIFE DEPENDS ON IT, AS IT JUST MIGHT!**

Finally, please pay particular attention to "A Positive Note on Unity & Respect" in this month's "Chamber

Chatter" column by FMB Chamber President Jacki Liszak. I wholehearted echo Jacki's sentiment about being polite and respectful in our interactions with others, particularly in online forums that can be especially vicious and vulgar. I know that, almost three years now after Ian and the flooding from last year's two major storms, that everyone's nerves are still ragged, especially about the island's changing landscape that continues to evolve, but we are all neighbors on our seven-mile strip of Paradise. Remember The Golden Rule: "Treat other people the way you want them to treat you."

Speaking of treating others nicely, please continue to support our advertisers because we cannot deliver "Fort Myers Beach LIVING Magazine" to you free of charge without them. When you visit, please let them know that you saw their ad in our magazine so we can provide you with this community-oriented original entertainment each month!

Happy Father's Day to all the Dads out there on Sunday, June 15, & Have An Awesome Beach Day!



Sandy Sandness

Publisher

Fort Myers Beach LIVING

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- By Gary Mooney, Photos by Sandy Sandness and Barb & Jack Mezeske -

"Get to Know Us Better!"

Barb Mezeske, who many people call "Barbie", was born and raised in Muskegon, Michigan. Jack is also from Muskegon, but lived just outside the city in the Township of Fruitport. "That's why we get along so well", jokes Barb. "We are a combination of urban and rural!"

They met when Barb was 19 and Jack was 21 years old. "He was a barber and I was a hairdresser," she recalls. "Both businesses shared a building & back

storage room, so that's how we got to know each other. We worked together "side-by-side" for the next five years. Obviously, I had no romantic interest in him up to that point, but one day back in 1971, when I had a stressful day and was 'less than quiet' while cleaning up my workstation, Jack peeked his head around the corner from the barber shop and said, "What's going on?" I started to tell him, but he stopped me and asked if I wanted to go somewhere to have a drink and unwind. I agreed and the rest is history!! "

For Jack, however, it WAS love at first sight! "I was very bashful," he explains, "and carried a torch for Barbie for five years!" Barb chimed in, "Suddenly, I saw Jack in a completely different light after that night," Barb continues. "It finally hit me that right beside me was a really good friend and a nice guy... who listened patiently during my rant and offered words of advice without judgment. I knew I wanted to see him again – and not just at work!!" Jack said, "I not only talked her out of her doldrums, but Barb finally recognized my 'Animal Magnetism,'" laughs Jack! They married a year later, at a small family wedding at her sister Shirley's home on March 11, 1972. Jack was 26 and Barb was 24 and just celebrated 53 years together!

They have two children: Daughter Melissa Wasno, owner of Coconut Jack's Waterfront Grille, Sweet Melissa's Ice Cream Shoppe, and Waterside Realty Group in Bonita Springs, and who is married to former Marine Biologist at FGCU Vester Station, Bob Wasno. Son Michael Mezeske is a Master Electrician for a large corporation in Michigan and married to Cheri, a Supervisor for Otta-wa County Public Schools. They have 2 children – Hunter (24) & Allison (23).

Fort Myers Beach Took My Breath Away!

While it was not love at first sight for Barb over Jack, it was for FMB! "In the mid-1970s, my parents moved to Florida and I visited them often during the cold winter months. Even though Lake Michigan has beautiful beaches, once



"Our number one hobby is each other!"



"Like Jack, I love anything to do with outdoors, the beach and boating," raves Barb!.

I saw the beautiful beaches of SW Florida, I knew I would someday live in the warmth and glow of sunny Florida!"

Barb's first visit to FMB was with her 3 sisters – Arthea, Shirley & Jan. They went to lunch at the Pink Shell Beach Resort! "The minute we drove north over the Big Carlos Pass Bridge, the water view & beaches of FMB was utterly breathtaking" gushes Barb. "We lived in Naples at the time, but I never forgot the beauty of FMB after that day! In 2000, when we decided to make the move to FMB, we began the search for a waterfront home with a dock & pool. We found a cute little bungalow that needed a lot of renovation, but we were up to the task! The home today is not majestic, but it is a comfortable place where family and guests always feel welcome."

Still My Boyfriend!

Barb was a hairdresser, an HR manager, and legal secretary in Michigan. Upon moving to Florida, she traveled

with American Airlines and was a freelance court reporter. In 2003, she earned a Florida real estate license, a Florida Brokers license in 2005, an E-Pro Designation, a GRI designation (Graduate Real Estate Institute) and a Senior Real Estate Specialist (SRES) designation. She sold real estate on FMB until taking the position of Managing Broker at Waterside Realty Group, Inc. in Bonita Springs where she still practices today.

When contemplating their hobbies, "our number one hobby is each other," enthuses Jack! "I enjoy the beach, travel, fishing, boating, hunting and basically anything outdoors, as well as schmoozing!" "I am a mediocre golfer," laughs Barb, "and like Jack, I love anything outdoors. I couldn't agree more that our main hobby is each other. Jack is still my boyfriend! I look at him across a crowded room and he is still the one I want by my side every day for the rest of my life. The secret of making our mar-

riage work for 53 years? We respect each other, we agree to disagree, and we make each other laugh even on the worst days."

Early Years

In Michigan, Barb & Jack always wanted to work and build a business together. "So in 1978", Jack said, "we bought some acreage and built the "North Pole Ice Cream Store"! Later, we added twin 18-hole miniature golf courses, batting cages with 12 pitching machines, a pizza and sub shop, a 6-bay carwash (Northern Pole) and The North Pole Game Room. Our kids' first jobs growing up were on the premises with us whenever they weren't in school or playing sports. We also started a trophy & silkscreen business which led to an interior/exterior sign shop that eventually overwhelmed everything else! So, we sold all the businesses and moved the sign shop and newly added wood shop to a 300,000-square-foot building in the city."

continued on page 11

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Wendy Matura

Weathering the Storm:

Protecting What Matters Most in Fort Myers Beach

— by Wendy Matura, RTI Insurance Services —

Fort Myers Beach isn't just a place—it's a lifestyle. From sunrise walks along the Gulf to sunset dinners overlooking the water, life here is truly something special. But as locals know all too well, living in paradise also comes with unique risks, especially when it comes to protecting your home, family, and assets.

With storm season always on the horizon, now is the perfect time to revisit your insurance coverage—and make sure it's as rock-solid as your love for this beach town.

Living on the Coast: Beauty with Risk

Fort Myers Beach is no stranger to the power of Mother Nature. Hurricane Ian was a stark reminder of how quickly life can change. In just hours, homes were damaged or destroyed, businesses closed, and lives disrupted.

But what the storm couldn't wash away was our sense of community. We rebuilt. We helped our neighbors. We kept moving forward.

Still, as we rebuild stronger, smarter, and more prepared, one of the most important pieces of that resilience puzzle is having the right insurance in place—before the next storm comes.

The Basics: What Every Homeowner Needs

Whether you're a full-time resident, a snowbird, or you rent out your property seasonally, having the proper insurance coverage is essential. Let's break down the basics.

Homeowners Insurance

Standard homeowners insurance covers your structure, personal property, liability, and additional living expenses if you're forced out due to a covered loss. However, in coastal areas like Fort Myers Beach, it's not always so straightforward.

Many policies here carry separate wind and hurricane deductibles—often a percentage of your home's value. That means a \$500,000 home with a 2% hurricane deductible



*We've weathered the storms with you.
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could require you to pay \$10,000 out of pocket before your policy kicks in.

Also, standard homeowners policies do not cover flooding. That brings us to...

Flood Insurance

Even if you're not in a high-risk flood zone, flood insurance is a must in Fort Myers Beach. FEMA estimates that just one inch of water in your home can cause more than \$25,000 in damage.

There are two main options:

- National Flood Insurance Program (NFIP) – Backed by FEMA, with set coverage limits.
- Private Flood Insurance – May offer higher limits and additional coverage options.

Flood zones change, so make sure to review your property's flood zone status regularly—especially after new FEMA maps are released.

Wind Insurance

Depending on your carrier, wind coverage might be part of your homeowners policy or it might need to be written separately through a specialized carrier. This is especially true for homes closest to the Gulf.

Condo Owners

If you live in a condo, your HOA's master policy only covers common areas and the exterior structure. It's your responsibility to cover the inside of your unit—walls in, including flooring, cabinets, and personal belongings. That's where an HO-6 condo policy comes in.

And yes, even condo owners need separate flood insurance.

What About Rental Properties?

If you rent out your home or condo, even part-time, you need to tell your insurance company. A homeowners policy assumes owner-occupancy. Rental activity could invalidate your coverage if not disclosed.

Consider:

- Landlord Policies for long-term rentals.
- Short-Term Rental Insurance for platforms like Airbnb and Vrbo.
- Liability Coverage in case a guest gets injured on your property.

Make sure your policy includes loss-of-rent coverage in case your property becomes uninhabitable after a covered event.

Auto Insurance in a Storm-Prone Area

If your vehicle is damaged in a hurricane, you're only covered if you have comprehensive insurance—not just liability. Comprehensive covers flood damage, fallen trees, and flying debris—common risks during a storm.

Living in Fort Myers Beach, comprehensive coverage isn't a luxury—it's a necessity.

Fort Myers Beach LIVING



Local Agents Know Local Risks

Insurance isn't one-size-fits-all, especially in a unique coastal community like ours. Online quotes may seem convenient, but they can leave dangerous gaps in coverage.

Working with a local, independent insurance agent ensures you get:

- Personalized advice based on your exact location and exposure
- Access to multiple carriers and competitive pricing
- Guidance before, during, and after a claim

Most importantly, you'll have someone who understands what it's like to live here—and who's invested in helping our community stay strong.

Storm Prep + Insurance: Your Coastal Safety Net

Insurance is just one part of a solid hurricane preparedness plan. Here are some things to review annually:

- Are your home and flood policies active and up-to-date?
- Do you know your hurricane deductible?
- Do you have a current home inventory (photos, receipts, videos)?
- Are your policies stored in a safe, accessible place—digitally and physically?
- Have you reviewed your evacuation plan?

A little preparation goes a long way toward peace of mind when the weather turns rough.

Final Thoughts: Fort Myers Beach Strong

Our town has proven time and again that we're resilient, resourceful, and ready to rise above any challenge. But staying strong means staying prepared. The right insurance isn't just paperwork—it's a promise that when the skies clear, you'll have the means to rebuild, recover, and keep living the life you love on Fort Myers Beach.

Whether you've been here for decades or just moved in, it's never too early—or too late—to have the right protection in place.

Stay safe, stay covered, and stay beach strong. ■

June

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.

Monday through Friday in JUNE & JULY Lovers Key Summer Camps

@Lovers Key State Park
Experience the "Real Florida" as you explore the beach and mangrove estuaries of Lovers Key, while learning about the local ecology and environmental stewardship along the way! \$300-per-session, register in advance at <http://LoversKey.Eventbrite.Com>.

Sunday, June 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, weather permitting, from 4 to 7 p.m.! June 1: "Phenomenal Animal"; June 8: "Joe Yeoman"; June 15: "Remedy"; June 22: "Limited Edition"; & June 29: "Soapy Tuna."
See www.fortmyersbeach.org.

Mondays, June 2 & 16 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.

Wednesday, June 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 9 a.m. to 4 p.m., with Grounds daily from 7 a.m. to 6 p.m. Adults \$15, Students \$8, Kids 6 to 12 \$5, & 5 & under free; Grounds free. See www.moundhouse.org.

Thursday, June 5 FMB Chamber "Coffee Connection"

@Santini Marina Plaza Coffee Shop
Start your day with your FMB Chamber friends for networking with tasty complimentary coffee and breakfast items. The FREE "Coffee Connection" is 8 to 9:30 a.m.; see www.fortmyersbeach.org.

Thursday, June 5 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, June 5 FMB Art Association June Show: "Splash"

@FMBAA Gallery
Marvel at the Fort Myers Beach Art Association's June Show, "Splash" at their new Gallery at 13451 McGregor Boulevard, Unit #1, in Cypress Square in Fort Myers, near the Prawnbroker Restaurant & Fish Market. The Gallery is open Thursdays through Saturdays with free admission from Noon to 6 p.m.

Saturdays, June 7 & 14 "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.

Saturday, June 7 FMB Art Association Summer Show: "Ripples"

@Tribby Arts Center
Experience the FMBAA's Summer Show, "Ripples" at the Tribby Art Center at Shell Point at 17281 On Par Boulevard! "Ripples" runs through Saturday, July 19. "Ripples" is FREE and all are welcome; see www.fortmyersbeachart.com.

Monday, June 9 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.

Tuesday, June 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 9 a.m.; see www.fortmyersbeachfl.gov.

Wednesday, June 11 Mound House Eco-Kayak Tours

@The Historic Mound House
Discover Florida's natural beauty on a guided kayak tour, weather permitting, of the Estero Bay Aquatic Preserve for ages 12 & up. The Mound House provides all equipment and participants must wear shoes and bring water. The Eco-Kayak Tours are every Wednesday through Saturday from 9 to 11 a.m. \$45-per-person includes MH admission with reservations necessary at www.moundhouse.org.

Thursday, June 12 FMB Chamber Membership Luncheon

@Smokin' Oyster Brewery
Join your FMB Chamber friends to savor a scrumptious luncheon from Smokin' Oyster Brewery while listening to Blake Hampton of The Hampton Law Firm from 11:30 a.m. to 1 p.m. Sanibel Captiva Community Bank sponsors the June Luncheon. \$32 members & \$42 prospective members; see www.fortmyersbeach.org.

Friday, June 13 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.friendsoflovesskey.org.

Saturday, June 14 "Second Saturday": Environmental Exploration

@The Historic Mound House
Spend the day at the Historic Mound House for our "Second Saturday": "Environmental Exploration!" Check out a variety of family-friendly activities, games and crafts from 10 a.m. to 2 p.m. Mound House admission is on us, but the guided tours cost \$5-per-person at 11 a.m. and 1 p.m. No reservations necessary; for more information see www.moundhouse.org.

Sunday, June 15 HAPPY FATHER'S DAY!

Tuesday, June 17 FMB Woman's Club Monthly Social

@Grace's Café at The Lani Kai Island Resort
Join the best club on the entire island! Food & drink for purchase from Grace's Café and all are welcome at 4 p.m.; see www.fmb-wc.org.

Wednesday, June 18 Calusa Tours

@The Historic Mound House
Discover the incredible history of the Calusa, the original stewards of Southwest Florida, on this 30-minute guided outdoor tour. Explore how the Calusa shaped their environment and uncover the stories revealed by archaeologists through hands-on activities such as an atlatl demonstration. "Calusa Tours" are Wednesday through Saturday at 11 a.m. & 1 p.m. \$15 includes Mound House admission; see www.moundhouse.org.

Father's Day

Thursday, June 19
FMB Chamber
"Business After Hours"

@Hampton Inn & Suites
 Join your FMB Chamber friends for a fun time at Hampton Inn & Suites at 11281 Summerlin Square Boulevard, 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, June 20
Fort Myers Mighty Mussels
V. Lakeland Flying Tigers

@Hammond Stadium, Lee Health Sports Complex
 The Mighty Mussels, the Low A affiliate of the Minnesota Twins, take on the Lakeland Flying Tigers of the Detroit organization at 7:05 p.m.! Enjoy fantastic fireworks following the game, so Play Ball! The Mussels & Flying Tigers play from June 17 through 22, with Tuesday & Saturday at 6:05 p.m.; Wednesday & Sunday at 12:05 p.m.; and Thursday & Friday at 7:05 p.m.; tickets \$10 to \$17. For details see www.mightymussels.com.

Sat. June 28th 9am-noon
Ostego Bay Foundation Annual 4th of July Kids Fishing Tournament

@Moss Marine 450 Harbor Ct., FMB
 A FREE Catch & Release Tournament. Ages 3-15
 Registration Begins at 8:30am, FREE HOTDOG LUNCH! For Information Contact Joanne at 239.470.4993

continued from page 7

Volunteers

Barb was a longtime member of FMB Pilot International and after it evolved into the FMB Community Foundation, she served terms as President, Secretary, and Membership Chair. She also volunteered as an Instructor at the Fort Myers Board of Realtors where she taught "Ethics" classes to new incoming realtors. She volunteered on the FMB Town Safety Committee for 2 years. "I have been a member of the Woman's Club for 3 years and was a Board Member at Large last year. I was recently elected as the new President for 2025-2026 and am honored to represent The Woman's Club and all its dedicated members!" As far as Jack's volunteering, he says, "I volunteer every minute of every day for my wife and daughter!"

Go High to Be Safe

When Barb contemplates what FMB will look like in five years, "Improved," she speculates. "All the new improvements mean that we are rebuilding better and safer." "Nothing stays the same," says Jack. "I know there are a few who want us to return to the intimate small town of our past, but those days are sadly gone. FMB will still be a magnificent place to be, but because of the price of real estate, new building standards and hurricane threats, we can no longer build small and low but must build high to be safe. Following Ian, all our lives changed...no doubt about that."

As to what makes FMB so special, "the people," says Jack, "along with the location, weather and the beach. When we return to Michigan, there are a lot of cloudy days, but here the weather is more consistent with sunshine, and the outdoor lifestyle appeals to us." "Definitely the people first, the beach, boating, water and nature," agrees Barb. "I love this place! We've made some great friends here and we are living the dream in our forever home!" ■

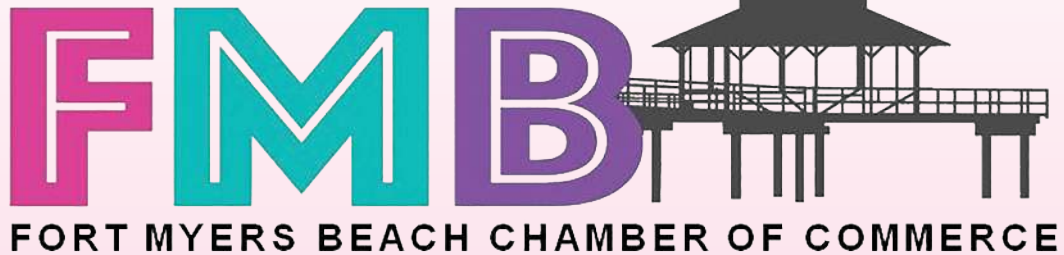
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Answers from page 3

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Chamber Chatter!

Welcome to The Offseason!

Fort Myers Beach has officially transitioned from Tourism Season to Offseason! What's the difference?

In winter, visitors – known as Snowbirds and Seasonals – flock here from across the US and around the world, making FMB a national and international destination. In summer, however, our “Drive Market” takes over, with guests coming from across Southwest Florida and nearby major

cities like Miami, Orlando, and Tampa. Years ago, we also saw a strong influx of international visitors, especially from Germany, during the summer. While those numbers haven't fully returned post-COVID, there's a positive trend: major airlines are reinstating Florida routes, so we're watching a continued growth in that segment.

To better understand where our visitors are coming from, the FMB Chamber

is collecting zip code data at The Roxie, our Visitor Information Center in Times Square. Once we've gathered enough information, we'll compile the results – along with visitor feedback – and report them in an upcoming edition of “Chamber Chatter.” One early insight: visitors are asking fewer questions about hurricane damage and more about classic vacation activities, like where to get the best seafood or how to book a dolphin tour. That shift is a great sign for both locals and our tourism industry.

Marketing FMB

You may be surprised to learn that neither the FMB Chamber nor the Town has a formal tourism marketing team. Instead, we rely on the Lee County Visitor & Convention Bureau (VCB) to promote our area nationally and internationally. Its current



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campaign, "Just Feels Right," is live at www.visitfortmyers.com. Last Summer, the VCB ran the "Save Our Shores" campaign to support local businesses and we hope to see a similar push again this year.

In the meantime, once we analyze our zip code data, the FMB Chamber is planning to launch a targeted social media campaign to build interest for our 2025-2026 season.

Support Local During the Offseason

Our local community – especially residents of Lee, Charlotte, Collier and Hendry Counties – is critical to sustaining Fort Myers Beach business through the summer. Now that traffic is lighter and the crowds smaller, it's the perfect time to plan a beach day or a weekend "Stay-cation." Enjoy the shops, rent a wave runner or bike, and treat yourself to breakfast, lunch and dinner at one of our many fantastic restaurants.

For year-round residents, this is your time! Your favorite table is open, boat rentals are available, and the beach is peaceful and inviting. While the 2024-25 season marked significant improvement, we're not fully back to normal yet so please invite your family and friends to visit and support our island businesses.

A Positive Note on Unity & Respect

As we continue through our recovery and revitalization, it's important to acknowledge that challenges still arise. The process of rebuilding personally and professionally can sometimes feel overwhelming. In these times, it's natural for stress to build up, and occasionally frustrations can surface. Many of us find ourselves in moments of disagreement on how our recovery should unfold.

If you ever find yourself in one of those moments – and let's face it, we all do from time to time – let's remember the value of staying respectful and understanding in our conversations. The ease of online communication can sometimes make it tempting to share opinions more harshly than we would in person. While everyone has a right to their viewpoint, kindness and empathy should always guide our discussions.

Before sending that quick response or voicing a strong opinion, take a moment to pause and reflect. We are all in this together as one island family, working toward the same goal: a stronger, brighter future for Fort Myers Beach. A little patience and kindness can go a long way to creating the supportive environment we all need. After all, the foundation of community is built upon unity. The FMB Chamber Office is open Monday through Friday, 9 a.m. to 4 p.m., on the 3rd floor of 100 Lovers Lane. Our satellite office, The Roxie in Times Square, next to the Trolley Stop, is open daily from 10 a.m. to sunset. Interested in volunteering at The Roxie? Contact us at info@fmbchamber.com or call 239-454-7500.

On behalf of our 400-plus FMB Chamber members, remember:
Island Life; It's Our Business! ■

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

Fort Myers Beach LIVING



FMB Art Association Opens New Gallery

- by Gary Mooney -

The Fort Myers Beach Art Association (FMBAA) opened its new Gallery at 13451 McGregor Boulevard, Unit #1, in Cypress Square in Fort Myers, near the Prawnbroker Restaurant & Fish Market, on May 1. This new location is a temporary home for the FMBAA while they figure out how to rebuild their building at 3030 Shell Mound Boulevard that Hurricane Ian destroyed on September 28, 2022.

"The FMBAA operated out of the Fort Myers United Church of Christ since that devastating day," explains Star Sherwood, who began her new two-year term as FMBAA President on April 1. "They graciously let us use their Fellowship Hall for our board meetings, member events, classes and workshops. Other nearby venues, like the Alliance for the Arts, were equally gracious in allowing us to use their spaces for our art shows and exhibits, but that brought challenges, like paying a larger share of our artist's commissions than they were formerly paying. The obvious solution was to once again have our own gallery."

Star explains that "the FMBAA is not yet in a financial position to rebuild on our island home property, so we

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looked around FMB, as that is where we want to be, but we could not find anything that was large enough, that we could afford, or was high enough off the ground, as we still fear future flooding. The next best option was to find someplace as close to the island as possible, and we came across the beautiful Cypress Square location. It is lovely, with a magnificent courtyard and offers good foot traffic, so we signed a three-year lease."

The new gallery displayed the FMBAA's first Exhibit, "Spring Fling." "We then hosted a 'soft opening' on Thursday evening, May 1," Star offers. "The formal opening will occur when our new season starts in the Fall, on Saturday, November 1, so we hope the entire beach community joins us! The new FMBAA Gallery is open to the public on Thursdays through Saturdays with free admission from Noon to 6 p.m. After October 15, we will open six days a week."

The FMBAA will not wait until Fall however to inaugurate its new gallery. "We are filling our display walls with a series of month-long Summer exhibits," Star says. "'Splash' is from June 2 through 28, followed by 'Fireworks' from July 7 through 30, 'Summer Sizzle' from August 1 to September 19, then our 'Plein Air' show from September 25 through October 24." In addition to these non-juried exhibits, the FMBAA hosts its Summer show, "Ripples," at the Tribby Arts Center at Shell Point from May 17 to July 19.

Still Our Dream


While the FMBAA is now off-island, its long-term goal is to come back to FMB. "We retain our Shell Mound Boulevard property and it is still our dream to return. Fundraising is extremely difficult and rebuilding is more expensive, as we must go higher to avoid future floods. Our Board of Directors decided to move forward with our rental space because we need a place to hang our hats, sell our artwork, and offer classes and workshops. For more information, see www.fortmyersbeachart.com."

In addition to the new gallery, the FMBAA hopes to reinvigorate its membership. "Pre-Ian, we had roughly 150 members,"

relates Star. "Some left FMB while others are rebuilding their lives, so today we have 111 members, but with our new home, we are hoping that our membership increases. The FMBAA is very much a working artists group, so stop by and watch us work and ask questions, as we would love to see you."


To join the FMBAA, "go to www.fortmyersbeachart.com, click on Membership, fill out the information and pay your dues online through PayPal," Star recommends. "Better yet, come see us at the gallery and you can immediately begin! FMBAA members receive discounts on our workshops and classes, along with the free use of our gallery where you can paint every day. You will learn so much from our members and have an exciting time doing it."

Star became an FMBAA member roughly 9 years ago, shortly after she retired and moved to FMB. "I was looking for volunteer opportunities and was riding my bicycle past the gallery. The door was open and I saw people inside, so I stopped to ask if they needed any help, like cleaning the gallery. They all laughed and suggested I try my hand at art instead and I immediately became a member! The greatest aspect of the FMBAA is its members, as we all care about each other, work together and treat each other like family. Even though our current home is off-island, we still maintain a large presence on FMB. You will see our artist-members all over the island, as the FMBAA is still a part of it all!" ■



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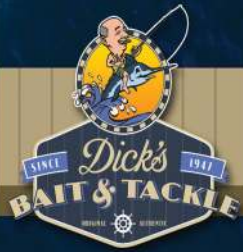
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