

An exclusive magazine serving the residents of Fort Myers Beach

July 2025

FORT MYERS BEACH

Living

HAPPY SECOND OF JULY!

Cover by Sandy Sandness

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FORT MYERS BEACH

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FEEDBACK / IDEAS / SUBMISSIONS

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

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

SUDOKU

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Answers on page 11

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Hello Friends & Neighbors!

Independence Day – The 4th of July!

In this issue, we explore the backstory of this monumental day in American history.

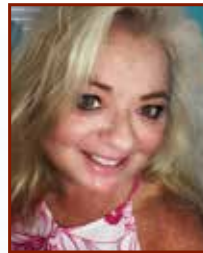
To me, it's a time to celebrate with family and friends—whether it's a sunny day at the beach with sand, surf, and your favorite beverage... a backyard barbecue with hot dogs, hamburgers, marshmallows, sparklers, and fireworks... or a relaxing day on the water catching fresh fish for dinner!

However you choose to celebrate, let's take a moment to be grateful for all we have, and for all those who came before us and helped bring us to this point.

As always, we encourage you to support our amazing advertisers—they make it possible to deliver Fort Myers Beach LIVING Magazine to you each month, free of charge. When you visit them, please mention that you saw their ad in our magazine. Your support helps keep this community-focused publication going strong!

Enjoy the morning parade along Estero Boulevard and the evening fireworks off the coast near Times Square.

Happy Fourth of July!



Sandy Sandness

Publisher

Fort Myers Beach LIVING

239-222-0129

ssandness@bestversionmedia.com

4th of July
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Happy Second of July

- By Gary Mooney -

WHAT?!

You can call John Adams not only one of our nation's Founding Fathers, but the Founding Father of Independence Day! Adams however thought that the celebration of the birthday of the United States would annually fall on the Second of July and not the Fourth!

Adams wrote a letter from Philadelphia to his wife Abigail in Boston, dated July 3, 1776, inaccurately predicting that July 2 would be the national holiday for generations to come. "The second day of July 1776 will be the most memorable Epoch, in the History of America. I am apt to believe that it will be celebrated, by succeeding Generations, as the great anniversary Festival. It ought to be solemnized with Pomp and Parade with Shows, Games, Sports, Guns, Bells, Bonfires, and Illuminations from one end of this continent to the other from this Time forward, forever more."

How did Adams get it wrong? It is true that the Second Continental Congress voted to declare its independence from Great Britain on July 2, 1776, but they spent the next two days editing the Declaration of Independence, primarily drafted by Thomas Jefferson, so they did not formally adopt it and send it to the printers until July 4, with the first public reading on July 8. It is the anniversary of the Declaration's publication that quickly became the preferred date.

Adams "Illuminations" prediction came true the next year, with fireworks in Boston and Philadelphia on July 4, 1777. In Boston, Colonel Thomas Crafts of The Sons of Liberty lit off fireworks and shells over the Boston Common. In Philadelphia, the nation's capital at that time, ships sailed the Delaware River firing their cannons thirteen times for the Original Colonies. That evening, the Founders celebrated with an elaborate dinner, with "toasts followed by a discharge of artillery and small arms, and with a suitable piece of music," before ending the night with bells ringing and "a grand exhibition of fireworks."

In 1783, Boston became the first city or town to designate The Fourth of July as an official holiday.

In early July of 1826, Jefferson, in the last letter he ever wrote, discussed the importance of Independence Day. "For ourselves, let the annual return of this day, forever refresh our recollections of these rights, and an undiminished devotion to them." A few days later, in an amazing historical happenstance, Jefferson and Adams – the last two of the Founding Fathers still alive -- both passed away on The Fourth of July, exactly 50 years after the printing of the Declaration!

A Black Flaky Powder

According to the American Pyrotechnics Association, fireworks were originally developed in the second century B.C. in Liuyang, China. The first natural fireworks were bamboo stalks thrown into a fire that exploded with a bang because of the overheating of the bamboo's hollow air pockets. The Chinese believed that these natural fireworks warded off evil spirits.

Around 800 AD, legend has it that a Chinese alchemist mixed potassium nitrate, sulfur and charcoal to produce a black flaky powder – the first gunpowder. The Chinese poured this concoction into a hollowed-out bamboo stick, and then later into paper tubes, making the first manmade fireworks.

Fireworks made their way to Europe in the 13th century. By the 15th century, fireworks were widely used for religious festivals and public entertainment. Italians were the first Europeans to manufacture fireworks and European rulers were especially fond of using them to "enchant their subjects and illuminate their castles on important occasions."

Early colonial settlers brought their love of fireworks with them to the New World that eventually made fireworks a part of the first Independence Day. Today, in addition to The Fourth of



July, Americans use fireworks year-round to celebrate festivals, special events, the birth of children, and major sporting events like the Olympics and Super Bowl.

“Fireworks Night”

Hundreds of years before American independence, the Encyclopedia Britannica states that fireworks were a common manner of celebration and thanksgiving, particularly to mark national triumphs, the restoration of peace, and royal pageantry. King Henry VII included fireworks at his 1486 wedding to Elizabeth of York, the first known use of fireworks at a national celebration, then again at his wife's November 25, 1487, coronation. Queen Elizabeth I so loved fireworks that she appointed a royal “Fire Master of England” to coordinate the displays. After the failure of the “Gunpowder Plot” to blow up Parliament in 1605, orchestrated by Robert Catesby, many English communities used fireworks to annually commemorate the event, called “Fireworks Night.”

By the time of the American Revolution, spectacular fireworks displays were already a popular way to celebrate national prosperity and patriotism. So, when Adams wrote Abigail about the use of “Illuminations,” he was simply invoking one of the most recognizable celebrations of nationhood to commemorate the founding of the United States of America.

Independence Day

The United States formally declared The Fourth of July to be “Independence Day” as a national holiday on June 28, 1870, but it did not become a paid holiday for federal employees until 1938. Roughly 16,000 US communities will host fireworks shows this year to honor The Fourth of July. According to the American Pyrotechnics Association, Americans in 2023 spent roughly \$15.5 billion on festivities for The Fourth of July, including over \$1 billion on fireworks. In addition to fireworks shows, many local celebrations initially included a reading of the Declaration of Independence, as well as picnics, barbecues,

watermelon and hot dog eating contests, speeches, parades, concerts, family gatherings, baseball games, historical reenactments and military demonstrations.

FMB Celebrations

Fort Myers Beach may be one of 16,000 communities hosting an Independence Day celebration, but ours is all island! The Fourth festivities begin with the “Independence Day Parade” at 10 a.m. FMB residents and visitors line Estero Boulevard in their Red, White & Blue Patriotic finery, with the Parade route from the Bay Oaks Recreational Center down Estero Boulevard to Times Square, necessitating the closure of the Matanzas Pass Bridge from 9 a.m. to approximately Noon. For more information, see www.fortmyersbeachfl.gov.

That evening, the Town in conjunction with the Seagate Development Group hosts the “Fourth of July Fireworks Extravaganza!” The display launches from a barge off the coast near Times Square, so bring a beach chair and enjoy the show. Fireworks start shortly after dark so roughly 9 p.m., causing the Matanzas Pass Bridge to close from 8:30 to roughly 11 p.m. For additional details, see www.fortmyersbeachfl.gov.

In between the Parade and Fireworks, visit our many bars and restaurants, patronize our fabulous stores and boutiques, or savor the day on our 7-mile sugar sand beach!

If you need more of a “fireworks fix” then just on The Fourth of July, the Fort Myers Mighty Muscles, the Low-A affiliate of the Minnesota Twins that play at Hammond Stadium at the Lee Health Sports Complex at 14100 Six Mile Cypress Parkway, hosts a fireworks display after every Friday home game.

While the Fourth of July is full of fun and entertaining events, please remember that, at heart, it is a day to honor and commemorate the freedom of living in the United States, from 1776 through today. Happy Second – er, um – Fourth of July! ■



Wendy Matura



Why Roof Maintenance Is One of the Smartest Investments You Can Make

- by Arry Housh, Arry's Roofing Services, Inc. -

When most people think about home or building maintenance, they often focus on landscaping, HVAC systems, or interior upgrades. But there's one critical system that quietly protects everything beneath it — your roof.

And yet, it's also one of the most overlooked.

As someone who works with roofing systems every day, I can confidently say: Annual roof maintenance and documentation isn't just a good idea — it's essential.

Why Roof Maintenance Matters

Your roof takes a beating 365 days a year. Sun, wind, rain, debris, heat, storms — all of it wears down your roofing materials over time. Without regular maintenance, small issues like loose flashing or a minor leak can quickly turn into major damage, affecting not just your roof but your entire home or business.

5 Key Reasons to Maintain & Document Your Roof Annually:

1. Extend Roof Lifespan

Regular maintenance can add years to your roof's life, delaying expensive replacements and maximizing your initial investment.

2. Prevent Costly Repairs

Catching issues early during a routine inspection can save you from surprise emergencies — and massive repair bills.

3. Protect Property Value

A well-maintained roof boosts curb appeal and property value. Buyers and inspectors notice when a roof is clean, documented, and in top condition.

4. Insurance and Warranty Compliance

Many roofing warranties and insurance policies require annual inspections and documentation to stay valid. Miss a year, and you could lose coverage when you need it most.

5. Peace of Mind

There's nothing like knowing your roof is solid, sealed, and ready for whatever the weather throws at it. You can sleep easier when you're not wondering what's going on above your head.

Documentation: The Unsung Hero

It's not enough to simply check the roof — you need to document everything. Photos, inspection reports, small repairs, and weather events all tell the story of your roof's health. If you ever need to file a claim, prove maintenance for warranty purposes, or sell your home, this record becomes a powerful asset.

At Arry's Roofing Services, Inc., we provide a complete maintenance package that includes:

- Thorough roof inspections
- Minor repairs and sealant touch-ups
- Debris removal
- Photo documentation and reporting
- Warranty tracking

We treat your roof like the long-term investment it is — and help you protect it that way.

Ready to Get on a Maintenance Plan?

If it's been more than a year since your last inspection, or if you've never documented your roof's condition, now's the time. Let's make sure your roof is ready for the next storm — and the next decade. ■

continued on page 11




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July

Saturdays

"American Boating Course"

@San Carlos Bay Squadron Classroom
The San Carlos Bay Squadron does not offer its basic boating class in July; the two-Saturdays sessions return on August 9 & 16 from 8:15 a.m. to Noon. See www.scbps.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.

Mondays Through Fridays Through July

Ostego Bay Summer Camps

@700 Fishermans Wharf
Attention future scientists & marine biologists! The Ostego Bay Foundation Marine Science Center is offering Summer Camps for grades K through Senior Year. Campers explore barrier islands and the Estero Bay while working with seagrass communities, plankton populations, mangrove tangles & bird-nesting areas. \$275-per-camper; Monday through Friday from 9 a.m. to 4 p.m. Camp sessions are July 7 to 11; July 14 to 18; July 21 to 25 & July 28 to August 1. For more information or to register, see www.ostegobay.org.

Mondays through Fridays Through 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>.

Tuesday, July 1

FMB Art Association

Summer Show: "Ripples"

@Tribby Arts Center
Marvel at 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.

Wednesday, July 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 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, July 3

FMB Chamber "Coffee Connection"

There is NO "Coffee Connection" in July due to The Fourth of July; the "Coffee Connection" will return in August. See www.fortmyersbeach.org.

Friday, July 4

HAPPY FOURTH OF JULY!

Friday, July 4

Independence Day Parade

The Town of FMB hosts its Independence Day Parade at 10 a.m. FMB residents and visitors line Estero Boulevard in their Red, White & Blue Patriotic finery, with the Parade route from the Bay Oaks Recreation Center down Estero Boulevard to Times Square, necessitating the closure of the Matanzas Pass Bridge from 9 a.m. to approximately Noon. For exact times, see www.fortmyersbeachfl.gov.

Friday, July 4

Fourth of July Fireworks

The Town of FMB hosts a fireworks extravaganza to commemorate The Fourth of July! The display will launch from a barge off the coast near Times Square, so bring a beach chair and enjoy the show. Fireworks begin shortly after dark, so roughly 9 p.m., causing the Matanzas Pass Bridge to close from 8:30 to roughly 11 p.m. For exact times, see www.fortmyersbeachfl.gov.

Friday, July 4

Fort Myers Mighty Mussels V. Bradenton Marauders

@Hammond Stadium, Lee Health Sports Complex
The Mighty Mussels, the Low A affiliate of the Minnesota Twins, take on the Bradenton Marauders of the Pittsburgh organization at 7:05 p.m.! Enjoy the largest fireworks display in Hammond Stadium history following the game, so Play Ball! The Mussels & Marauders play through July 6, with the Saturday game at 6:05 p.m. & Sunday at 12:05 p.m.; tickets \$10 to \$17. For details see www.mightymussels.com.

Sunday, July 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, weather permitting, from 4 to 7 p.m.! July 6: "Simply-Fi"; July 13: "Guilty Pleasure"; July 20: "Jacob's Ladder"; & July 27: TBA. See www.fortmyersbeach.org.

Monday, July 7

CROW Campus Tours

@Center for the Rehabilitation Of Wildlife
An in-depth look at what the animal patients experience, from intake to release, including the hospital and treatment process. The 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, July 9

Mound House Eco-Kayak Tours

@The Historic Mound House
Discover Florida's natural beauty on a guided kayak tour of the Estero Bay Aquatic Preserve. The Mound House 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. \$45-per-person includes MH admission with reservations necessary at www.moundhouse.org.

Thursday, July 10

FMB Chamber Membership Luncheon

@Bayside Sports Bar & Grille
Join your FMB Chamber friends to savor a scrumptious luncheon from Bayside Sports Bar & Grille while listening to Kayla McCurry from the Florida Repertory Theatre from 11:30 a.m. to 1 p.m. Lightning Restoration sponsors the July Luncheon. \$32 members & \$42 prospective members; see www.fortmyersbeach.org.

Thursday, July 10

FMB Art Association July Show: "Fireworks"

@FMBAA Gallery
Marvel at the Fort Myers Beach Art Association's July Show, "Fireworks," through July 30 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.

Friday, July 11

Welcome & Discovery Center

@Lovers Key State Park
The Welcome & Discovery Center educates and informs visitors about Lovers Key habitats through interactive displays Wednesdays through Saturdays from 10 a.m. to 2 p.m. The W&DC is FREE with the park entry fee; see www.friendsoflovkey.org.

Saturday, July 12

Second Saturday: "Florida's Art & Music"

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

Tuesday, July 15

FMB Woman's Club Monthly Social

@Coconut Jack's Waterfront Grille
Join the best club on the entire island! Food & drink for purchase from Coconut Jack's and all are welcome, including family and friends, at 5 p.m.; see www.fmb-wc.org.

Wednesday, July 16**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. Learn how this powerful and innovative Indigenous society thrived across our region for centuries, leaving an enduring legacy still visible today with their shell mounds. 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.

Thursday, July 17**FMB Chamber "Business After Hours"**

@FMB Town Hall at Bay Oaks Recreational Center

Join your FMB Chamber friends for a fun time at Town Hall at 2525 Estero 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, August 1-3**Mullet Madness**

The Mullet Toss Crawl hits Fort Myers Beach! Enjoy a weekend of red-neck-meets-coastal fun with mullet tosses, look-alike contests, live music and more, across participating bars and restaurants. \$20 entry includes tank top, crawl pass, and raffle entry. Mullet Required! The hairstyle not the fish! Pub passports go on sale Friday, August 1, 9 am at Tunaskin or FMB & Sun and Fun FMB.

Man of Steele!



- by Gary Mooney -

I recently learned with great sadness about the passing of former two-time Interim Town Manager Jim Steele.

I covered various incarnations of FMB Town Councils for over five years while with the Late Great "Island Sand Paper," with my time as Lead Reporter beginning within one Council Meeting of Jim becoming Interim Town Manager for the first time. In his own understated way, Jim was professional, engaging, friendly and as communicative as he could possibly be, considering our positions. While there were of course things he could not share with the press, he never vilified us as "Fake News" but always treated us with dignity, understanding, and friendship, with his sly smile letting us know, "I like you, too!"

After getting to know Jim throughout the following months, my respect for him grew and grew until I – like many others – begged him to take the Town Manager position fulltime but he was smart enough to know better!

My all-time favorite President is Harry Truman. At one of his birthday parties, the great General, George Marshall, said of Truman: "This man is nothing but integrity . . . It is not the courage of his decisions that will live, but the integrity of the man." I often thought of that whenever I spoke to or worked with Jim, and I think that often now as I remember him: Jim Steele was Pure Integrity.

My Deepest Condolences to FMB Vice Mayor Jim Atterholt and all of Jim Steele's family for the loss of this wonderful man, and I understand that if you wish to make a contribution in Jim's memory, do so through the Historic Mound House that meant as much to Jim as did his beloved golf game! Like the old saying goes, "We Shall Not See His Like Again." ■

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4th of July

SUDOKU

Answers from page 3

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2025



“OUR SOLE PURPOSE IS TO GIVE!”

FMB Community Foundation Distributes 2025 Awards

- by Gary Mooney -

The Fort Myers Beach Community Foundation hosted its annual Awards Program on Tuesday, May 6, at The Island Pancake House. “The FMB Community Foundation distributed \$107,820 to fourteen Non-Profits as well as providing scholarship funds to fourteen terrific students,” raves outgoing CF President Julie Fite! “On top of all that, we made contributions to the Florida SouthWestern State College Passthrough Program and the FMBCF’s Florida SouthWestern State College Endowment Fund. Last year, the CF awarded just over \$93,000 so there was a significant increase this year.”

The CF distributed awards from \$1,000 up to \$15,000 to the following organizations: Bay Oaks Recreational Center, Beach Kids Foundation, Estero Bay Buddies, Estero Island Historical

Society, FMB Art Association, FMB Marine & Environmental Resources Task Force, FMB Public Library, FMB Strong, Friends of Lovers Key, Friends of Matanzas Pass Preserve, Keep Lee County Beautiful, The Historic Mound House, Ostego Bay Summer Camps, and Support For Sailing.

“It feels great and humbling to distribute these much-needed funds,” explains Julie. “All our members work so hard and we cannot possibly express our appreciation to all the island residents and businesses who helped us to achieve this. The CF fortunately once again hosted for the first time since Jan our annual ‘Fashion Show’ in April and that brought in an additional \$16,000. Another new revenue stream occurred when the FMB Chamber of Commerce announced that it had available ‘American Sand Sculpting Championship’ parking spaces for groups who could run them so we stepped up. That brought in a nice chunk of new change!”



*We've weathered the storms with you.
We will be building back on the beach soon.
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Kelly's The Star!

A special Awards ceremony moment occurred when the FMBCF presented its "Star Award" to Kelly Smith. "No one deserves it more," gushes Julie! "Kelly was Vice President last year, is a previous CF Board Member, is at almost every fundraiser and program, and hosted many CF Board Meetings and socials at her home after Ian. She knows everyone in Town and her enthusiasm is contagious. The best part is that, when we made the presentation, Kelly was so surprised!"

The incoming 2025-26 CF officers are Amy Gillette & Jane McCloskey as the co-Presidents, with Annie Lump as Treasurer and Patti Coleman as Secretary. The new Board of Directors are Jan Falkum, Kathy Nash, Joy Sullivan and Ellen Vaughn.

With summer now firmly in place, the FMBCF takes a brief hiatus. "Our new Board of Directors is still putting the schedule together for the upcoming year," reports Julie. "We will most likely resume our Board Meetings in August or September and our Membership Meetings in October, on the third Wednesday of each month at The Island Pancake House from 5 to 7 p.m. The Island Pancake House is our traditional home for Membership Meetings, so we were thrilled when they finally reopened a few months ago. They are so generous and supportive of us, so we hope we are equally as supportive of them. As for our 2025-26 events calendar, let me tease you with this – Think Halloween! We will post all the details on our webpage soon at www.fmbcommunityfoundation.com so stay tuned."

Hail to The Former Chief

Julie reflects on her recently completed CF Presidential term that mostly coincided with the most recent two years following Ian. "It has been a challenging time but an interesting one," she says. "I was going to complete a one-year term but thought, 'I just learned it all; why not go for two!' When I became President, the CF was still distributing the \$500 gift cards through the 33931 Program, but then we reintroduced the annual 'Casino Night' and now we brought back the 'Fashion Show,' so it is great to return to some sense of normalcy. The people and businesses of FMB are all so generous, even after all they have undergone over the past three years, so that is mindboggling and amazing. Special thanks to The King Family Foundation who are now like family, and of course I cannot say enough about my fellow FMBCF members – what an awesome group!"

If you are not yet a member of this awesome group, Julie encourages you to join! "Simply speak with any member, fill out the application on our website at www.fmbcommunityfoundation.com or attend a membership meeting when they resume in the Fall. While the island has several worthwhile volunteer organizations, like the FMB Art Association and FMB Woman's Club, they are working to replace their bricks-&-mortar structures in addition to their giving initiatives but for the CF, our sole purpose is just to give! And we have so much fun! Between our socials and community events, as well as doing things like having a 'Pajama Party' during one of our monthly meetings, you will laugh and laugh, so please join us!" ■



A Labor of Love!

FOLK Seeking New Members

- by Gary Mooney -

The "Friends of Lovers Key State Park" (FOLK) is a volunteer group that assists the Lovers Key State Park professional staff in protecting, preserving and supporting the State Park just off the southern tip of FMB. For FOLK President Jim Remis, this is a labor of love that goes back to even before there was a Lovers Key State Park!

"I bought an FMB condominium in May of 1979," Jim recalls. "My wife and I were runners so we jogged on what eventually became the Lovers Key State Park beach, as well as the roads that were already there, as that property was to become a residential community before the preservation effort was successful in 1983, though it did not become a State Park until 1996. FOLK formed in 1996 as well, to assist park personnel in removing all the damage caused by the prospective residential development, as well as putting a plan together on how we could best assist the park in moving forward. I however did not become a FOLK member until 7 or 8 years ago."

Before Jim joined FOLK, the volunteer group concentrated mostly on small scale fundraisers, but when they decided to help sponsor the construction of the

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fabulous Welcome & Discovery Center (WDC), everything changed! “Up to then, FOLK basically sold cookies or t-shirts on the beach,” Jim remembers, “but the WDC caused us to refocus our mission. FOLK committed to the State that we would raise \$1.5 million for WDC necessities like the audio/visual equipment, electronics and all the incredible educational displays that explains Lovers Key’s diverse environment of Coastal Strands, Mangrove Swamps, Maritime Hammock, and Sand Dunes. We began recruiting new Board Members with fundraising experience, and in a previous life I did that, so I joined, to help current and future generations to know and appreciate Southwest Florida’s ecology.”

Ian’s Aftermath


When Hurricane Ian struck on September 28, 2022, it brought devastation to Lovers Key, as it did to FMB. “Since Ian, FOLK concentrates on helping Lovers Key to recover, as a 16-foot storm surge rolled over the park,” continues Jim. “It wiped out everything except for the new WDC that we built to withstand a Category 4 hurricane and fortunately it did. This presented FOLK with a new challenge – how to assist Lovers Key with its rebuilding in areas that the State or FEMA could not fund, as well as helping the park to withstand future natural catastrophes. For example, the storm surge destroyed all the vegetation around the WDC, so we not only replaced that with native vegetation but with varieties that can withstand saltwater damage. Future initiatives include building new storage facilities high enough to withstand storm surge and running parts of the park buildings on solar power, as even now the main building still operates off a generator.”

FOLK programming-wise is still regaining its footing after Ian. “While we held our annual Gala in 2024,” Jim says, “we decided because so many people are still recovering from their own personal devastation, to hold a free event in 2025, ‘Waves of Appreciation,’ for donors, volunteers and community leaders, to thank them for all their help since Ian. Fortunately, FOLK did reintroduce our Summer Camps in 2024 for children ages 6 to 16 and will do so again this year. We recently hired our first employee and soon plan to add a Special Events Coordinator.”

“That is Priceless!”

FOLK is now actively recruiting new members, Jim reports! “Like most beach organizations, we had our ups-&-downs since Ian. Prior to the hurricane, we had over 500 members but that dropped to around 150, as people moved away or had other priorities. Today, however, we once again have upwards of 250 members and climbing. A primary benefit to joining FOLK is that you receive 12 free park admissions and, at \$8-per-car per visit, the membership actually pays for itself through that alone! We have various membership levels, so there is one perfect for you; to become a FOLK member, go to www.friendsofloverskey.org and we will get in touch with you.”


For Jim, the best part of being a FOLK member is “I take great pride in being an integral part of a valuable team of Park Rangers and FOLK volunteers who do everything in our power to preserve and maintain this incredible gem of a park! Lovers Key is so much more than just a magnificent beach, but four unique barrier islands that provide a solitary refuge in our ever-changing world. Think about this: when you stand on the Lovers Key Beach and look behind you, this is one of the very few coastal regions left in Florida where you will not see row after row of tall condominiums but a true Florida natural environment and that is priceless!” ■



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