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Magazine[®]



A couple's riverfront John's Island home is an oasis of

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Everyday Anchors

TRADITIONS, BELONGING, AND GRATITUDE FORM LINKS IN THE CHAIN THAT GROUNDS OUR COMMUNITY



BY JEFFREY R. PICKERING

One of the characteristics I have come to love about living in Vero Beach and Indian River County is the community's commitment to small-town traditions. Several are community wide and involve many, while others are associated with a local charitable organization or a specific place and draw their own familiar audiences.

When the 24-7 flow of news, noise, and next-season sales starts to blur the lines between the days and months on the calendar, I find comfort in the reliability of neighbors and friends who ensure that these special annual events continue. These are opportunities to connect, give back, and, most important, be reminded that we live in a place that provides

many opportunities to feel like we belong to something greater than ourselves.

As a father of three children, the youngest of whom is halfway through the fifth grade, I tend to think of the calendar in conjunction with the schedule followed by our local schools. Sometime in mid-August, my internal clock gets reset, prompted by the

INDIAN RIVER INSIGHTS

YSF Community Sailing summer campers and counselors

last-minute scramble to find a collared shirt that fits following my son's summertime growth spurt, or a belt that is dress-code compliant. By the time the roughly 20-year-old Mulligan's Skim Jam is held on the beach in front of Sexton Plaza around Labor Day, I am forced to accept the reality that summer is officially over.

By October, the rat-a-tat drumline sounds from the Crown Jewel Marching Band Festival have me in correct time. Founded in 1981 by James Sammons and Gordon Popple, this annual competition draws students, parents, and other music lovers from



around Florida. In 2024, Fort Pierce Central High School claimed Overall Best Band, and the Overall Best Percussion award went to our own Sebastian River Sharks. This is a labor of love made possible,

in part, by the volunteers and donors of the nonprofit Fighting Indians Marching Band Boosters.

Following election day in November, the Veterans Council of Indian River County pro-

vides us with an opportunity to honor the service and sacrifice of our community's veterans. On Veteran's Day 2024, the new World War II Tribute was dedicated during the annual celebration at Veteran's


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INDIAN RIVER INSIGHTS



YSF summer camp sailors take to the water in their catamarans.



Olivia, Grant, and Jeff Pickering attend Swim to the Wreck on the Fourth of July.

Memorial Island Sanctuary.

When Veteran's Council executive director Cynthia Ryan offered the memorial as a reminder of the cost of our freedoms, I remembered my grandfather, Pop, who was stationed at Pearl Harbor with the U.S. Navy, and I wished for the safe return of my nephew, Sam, a first lieutenant in the U.S. Army currently serving in Syria.

Thanks to Sunrise Rotary Vero Beach, for almost four decades families have gathered along Ocean Drive to

kick off December's holiday festivities with the Vero Beach Christmas Parade. In the weeks that follow, McKee Botanical Garden carries on the spirit by hosting Jungle Lights, the annual celebration that drew more than 17,000 visitors last year. Both activities are a labor of love made possible by dozens of dedicated volunteers and hundreds of generous donors.

Not to be outdone, Fellsmere and Gifford both hold special events in January, each of which honors its com-

munity's culture and heritage. The Fellsmere Frog Leg Festival holds two Guinness World Records for drawing the world's largest crowds and for serving the most frog legs in a single day—head, shoulders ... and legs ... above the French. Qui savait? Now that you know, you must go.

Gifford's annual Martin Luther King Jr. Day Parade celebrates the civil rights leader and his vision for a more just and equitable world. Hundreds of people and organizations from all parts of Indian River County march down the main streets of the historically Black community. It is encouraging to see so many of the Gifford-based charities that are funded by Indian River Community Foundation and its clients represented each year, including Crossover Mission, Float

Hope, Gifford Youth Achievement Center, and Gifford Youth Orchestra.

The whirlwind of "season" between February and May brings too many events to name. This is the time of year, however, when our community's collective tradition of giving is center stage. From Vero Beach Museum of Art's stand-alone annual gala to the collaborative Dancing with Vero's Stars held at Riverside Theatre and benefiting mothers and babies served by Indian River Healthy Start Coalition, generosity is on full display. By the time the final note is played at May Pops to benefit Cleveland Clinic Indian River Foundation, tens of millions of dollars will have been raised for local charities that play a critical role in bringing health, prosperity, and overall quality



Jeff Pickering and Michael Kint



JIM WILSON

The Christmas Parade on Ocean Drive is an annual Vero Beach tradition.

of life to our county's residents.

When the event lights dim and the snowbirds fly north, summer brings its own set of traditions that are beloved by those of us who live here year-round. One of my favorites is the annual Swim to the Wreck held on the Fourth of July. Located 300 yards off the coast, immediately in front of the Ocean Grill, the S.S. *Breconshire* shipwreck, or "boiler wreck" because the boiler used to protrude above the water, is where swimmers, kayakers, paddleboarders, inner-tubers, and other ocean lovers gather at sunrise to kick off the Independence Day festivities. Last year, my son Grant, my daughter,

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A gift today will provide families working to make ends meet with full plates and full hearts!

Olivia, and I made the journey along with a few hundred of our closest friends. 'Merica!

By the time the last few sessions of Saint Edward's School's Jolly Roger Adventures or the Youth Sailing Foundation's summer camps wrap up, I feel mixed emotions: sadness and gratitude.

Sad that another year has passed so quickly. Sad that the lazy days together with kids home from college are ending. Sad that traffic on State Road A1A, now known as the Jimmy Buffett Memorial Highway, will soon return to a crawl.

But grateful to live in a place where people care enough to carry on traditions. As a recent recipient of

the Richardson Community Spirit Award presented at the United Way of Indian River County's annual Community Leaders' Breakfast, and the Pinnacle Award from the local estate planning and planned giving councils, I appreciate the ceremony of being honored through a ritual started by someone who came before me, as well as the responsibility to give forward.

Grateful to work with clients and colleagues who don't just talk about our community's problems but dedicate resources and work for meaningful solutions; who do more than talk about pollution in the lagoon but finance the acquisition and preservation of land

that surrounds this fragile ecosystem; who face the potential threat of losing a community hospital and secure a world-class alternative instead; who are not satisfied with mediocre performance in our schools but recruit and support leadership that produces grade-A results; who witness the crushing effects of poverty and housing instability that keep hundreds of vulnerable families down and respond by starting and supporting local charities that provide a meaningful, dignified hand up.

In 2011, the late Alma Lee Loy started a tradition by making the first bequest from her will to the Community Foundation. To recognize this

bold and unprecedented act, the Alma Lee Loy Legacy Society was named in her honor. Since then, 100 individuals and families have followed her lead, planning to leave hundreds of millions of dollars to continue her tradition of giving forward to sustain the causes they love.

Well into the future, children, adults, and seniors in need; our waterways and coastline; animals; and the arts will benefit from gifts made by people who lived here and loved this place. I consider it a sacred privilege to be a witness to such generosity and to carry on a tradition that we can celebrate, now and forever. ❄️

The 2025 Saint Edward's School

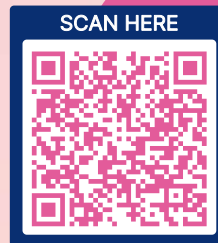
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