

THE FIRST ✨ THE ONLY

Vero Beach

Magazine®

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THEY DO!

Meet three couples who have shared their Vero Beach weddings with us



KELLY ROGERS

Lessons learned while surfing can serve as guidance for conversations in the professional world.

PHILANTHROPY

Locals Only

WITH TIME AND THE RIGHT ATTITUDE, NEWCOMERS TO ANY SETTING CAN FIND ACCEPTANCE



BY JEFFREY R. PICKERING

Depending on the country, the state, or the consistency level of the waves, surfers around the world know the phrase “locals only” as the equivalent of a “Keep Out” sign posted by the owner of private property. It is a clear message that if you were not born here, or if you have not paid your dues by paddling out on a daily basis for many years, you are not welcome.

Legendary surf breaks like Pipeline on the Hawaiian island of Oahu’s north shore, Steamer Lane in Westside Santa Cruz, and First Point at Malibu’s Surfrider Beach are three of the most well known among surfers for their fierce localism. The massive crowds at Malibu or the freezing water temperatures, strangling kelp beds, and lurking great white sharks at Steamer Lane are

enough of a deterrent to keep newcomers out. Beyond the actual risk of drowning, “Pipe” has its own extra measure of protection in Da Hui, a black-shirted, heavily tattooed gang of braddahs who will make strangers in the lineup paddle in to the beach under threat of “getting pounded.”

As a teenager growing up in the Central Florida town of Winter Park, an hour’s drive

INDIAN RIVER INSIGHTS



KELLY ROGERS

Surf conditions at Sebastian Inlet State Park can attract world-class surfers along with protective locals.

away from the beach, the inlet at New Smyrna Beach and the pier at Cocoa Beach were the surf spots I frequented that were most protected by locals. We surfed there anyway, pushing our luck for the chance of riding better waves than we could find at other nearby beach breaks.

Two hours southeast of Winter Park, First Peak on the north side of Sebastian Inlet was my childhood mind's-eye equivalent of Pipeline. Traveling that distance usually meant camping overnight at Sebastian Inlet State Park in order to be in the water for a few uncrowded waves on dawn patrol. Within one hour after sunrise, another 50 to 100

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Attorney Anthony Guettler and accountant Will Schlitt encouraged Jeff Pickering to lead the Indian River Community Foundation in 2015.

surfers may have paddled out.

With every set of waves, grizzly old-timers and towheaded young rippers scratched and clawed their way into some of the best waves on the entire East Coast. Stare-downs and shouting matches were common, and most days ended with at least one fist-fight. It was the crucible that forged eventual 11-time world champion Kelly Slater. For me, however, it became a symbol of everything I wanted to avoid while pursuing a future in which surfing could remain a significant part of my life.

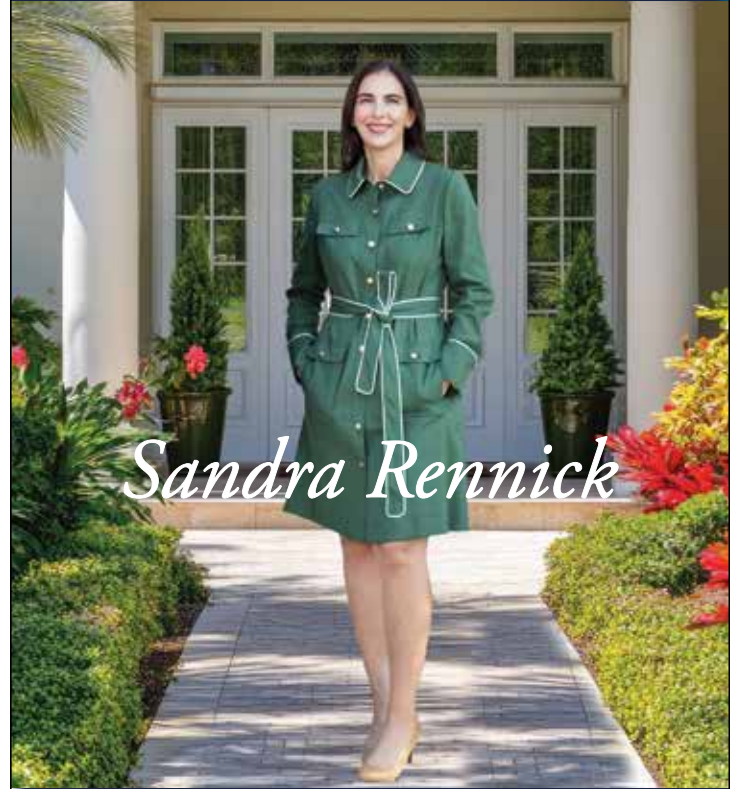
These memories of a “locals only” outlook were the first thoughts that came to mind when I was contacted by the recruiter who eventually convinced me to move my family from California to become Indian River Community Foundation’s president and CEO in 2015. In a business like mine that depends heavily on referrals from local attorneys, accountants, and financial advisers to grow and build relationships with philanthropic clients, I was concerned about my outsider status and the difficulty of fitting in with the local

professional community. Boy, was I wrong.

One of the first signs I received that there was something special about Vero Beach and its professional adviser community came during a conference call arranged by Scott Alexander, retired Northern Trust market president and past IRCF board chair. Six busy future colleagues with young families of their own spent time sharing their experiences of living and working in Indian River County with Stephanie and me. Attorneys Rebecca Emmons, Anthony Guettler, and Troy Hafner, investment professionals David and Amy Johnson, and accountant Will Schlitt offered encouraging examples of collegiality as well as hopeful insights about raising young children here. The early support and readily available advice from peers like these gave me the confidence I needed to “paddle out” into unfamiliar waters.

This confidence continued to grow as I became more engaged in my new community, although it took some time for me to stop looking

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INDIAN RIVER INSIGHTS

One of the first signs I received that there was something special about Vero Beach ... came during a call arranged by Scott Alexander.

over my shoulder and second-guessing the sincerity of the professional relationships I was building. Regular visits with respected civic and philanthropic leaders like Alma Lee Loy and Ellie McCabe helped me to break those habits. So did wise counsel from established attorneys such as Todd Fennell and John Moore; expert advice from accountants Vince Boyle and Andrea Thurn were also helpful in overcoming these uncertainties.

"You're an expert in philanthropy, so it's okay to start acting like one," I was advised. "Just don't be a jerk about it, because that doesn't go over well in this town"—sound advice that applies as much in the water as in the office.

Perhaps the most humbling endorsement of my place among trusted local advisers

is the honor of being presented with the 2024 Pinnacle Award by the Planned Giving Council of Indian River and the Indian River Estate Planning Council. The award recognizes an active, retired, or deceased professional adviser (attorney, CPA, trust officer, CLU, CFP, or other estate planning adviser) for outstanding voluntary service to local nonprofit organizations in promoting charitable giving through estate planning and gift planning. Past recipients beginning in 2008 include Robin Lloyd, Sam Block, John Moore, Rebecca Colton, Vince Boyle, Bill Stewart, Sue Tompkins, Will Kirk, Dick Johnson, Michael Kmetz, Lois Appleby, Scott Alexander, and Todd Heckman.

Knowing the names of these esteemed past recipients, and also being aware of some who had not yet been honored, my initial response to the phone call from the chair of the award selection committee was a polite "No, thank you."

"The committee expected that response," he replied, and then he began to share some of the kind words submitted by colleagues as part of my nomination. By the end of the phone call, I agreed to accept the award, albeit with the commitment to continue working to make our community better—to paddle harder. There were more waves to ride.

"How many of the prior



Lois Appleby is a past recipient of the Pinnacle Award.

award recipients had a similar response to mine?” I asked the committee chair on the morning of the Pinnacle Award breakfast. “All of them,” he answered with a knowing smile.

I felt a shift, from being one of *them* to one of *us*.

Fellow surfers like my friend and colleague, Maine native Ronnie Lawn, know this feeling. For years we paddle out into the lineup, size up the pecking order, watch the locals catch the set waves, hear the groms gripe that conditions were better yesterday. We find our satisfaction somewhere on the shoulder, away from the crowd, but with every intention and capability to ride our own



KELLY ROGERS

Anglers and surfers learn to respect each other's space at Sebastian Inlet.

perfect waves. Ronnie has built and run a successful law practice in much the same style.

Upon learning of Ronnie's nomination as the next recipient of the Pinnacle Award, I stopped by his office to congratulate him for the recognition by our peers.

“I have to be honest,” he told

me. “When I got the call, my first response was to respectfully decline.” He offered the same rationale I had. I knew where this was headed.

Kindness, tolerance, empathy, expert knowledge, sound advice, humility, being a mentor to others: I knew these were just a few of the

characteristics our colleagues and I offered with Ronnie's nomination—some from relative newcomers like me, and others from Vero Beach natives. The “locals only” mentality was nowhere to be seen or heard, but there were plenty of waves of congratulations to go around. 🌿



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