

Ave Maria Sun

AUGUST 2025

www.AveMariaSun.com

Vol. V, No. 10

Small businesses, big hearts:

The local faces behind Ave Maria's shops and eateries
A8 ►



It takes a big kind of small town:

Joy, hope and an unshakable faith endure as a family and town rally behind a young man's remarkable resilience | A24 ►



Paddles, play and progress:

New additions at North Park spark joy, fitness and connection
A27 ►



MULTIPLE GENERATIONS

BURST WITH LIFE AT AVE MARIA



Grandkids, grandparents and good times—all in one neighborhood

BY SANDRA YEYATI
Ave Maria Correspondent

AVE MARIA IS A VIBRANT TAPESTRY WHERE PEOPLE of all ages coexist harmoniously. From children biking around their neighborhoods to retirees enjoying ice cream at the Midtown Plaza and families gathering at Town Center festivals, this big kind of small town embodies the spirit of intergenerational living.

SEE GENERATIONS, A18 ►

Esperanza Meléndez teaches her great-granddaughter Camila how to make salads.

A healthy start to a strong school year

NCH Ave Maria Immediate Care Center offers expert advice for a smooth back-to-school transition

BY LARRY ELL
Ave Maria Sun Correspondent

As the new school year approaches, parents and students alike are gearing up for a busy and productive year. However, the back-to-school season can also bring a range of health challenges, from germs and illnesses to stress and fatigue. To help families stay healthy and thrive, the community partners at NCH Immediate Care Center in Ave Maria offered their expertise on preparations for Collier County children as they get ready for a return to campus.

Possibly the biggest challenge facing kids is transitioning from their relaxed summer schedule to a more regimented school routine. So, getting back to an academic mindset and avoiding a summer slump may require a few calculated tweaks to the pre-school runup.

"Start transitioning back to school routines before the first day in regard to wake-up and meal-times," said Kathryn Kirk, APRN for the NCH Ave Maria Immediate Care. "Create a countdown calendar to build excitement, talk about goals and positive parts of the upcoming school year, en-



KIRK

SEE HEALTH, A11 ►



AVE MARIA DEVELOPMENT/ COURTESY PHOTO
Avalon Park residents enjoying a bike ride.

Editorial Advisors

Erica Fish
efish@barroncollier.com
Michelle Mambuca
mmambuca@barroncollier.com

Account Executives

Nicole Ryan
nryan@floridaweekly.com
Adam Schonberg
adam.schonberg@floridaweekly.com
April Swanson
april.swanson@floridaweekly.com

Administrative Assistants

Sarah Kiernan • Lizbeth Luna

Graphic Designers

Lindi Daywalt-Feazel • Jaimi DeVitto
Alex Hawkins • Caitlyn Newman
Chelsea Pumper

Graphic Design Team Leader

Scott Sleeper

Production Manager

Alea Feeley

Circulation District Manager

Michaelle Snider

Director of Content Operations

Alisa Bowman

Director of Advertising Operations

Megan Roberts

Published by

Florida Media Group LLC
2891 Center Pointe Dr., Suite 300
Fort Myers, Florida 33916
Phone: 239.333.2135

Homegrown and off to the races

Foot Loose Running Company turns passion into purpose—uniting Ave Maria one stride at a time

BY SANDRA YEYATI

Ave Maria Sun Correspondent

Foot Loose Running Company, founded by John Lanham and his wife Rachel, is lacing up to transform the local running scene here in Ave Maria. Named with a playful nod to the iconic film “Footloose,” the company is dedicated to promoting physical fitness, friendly competition and community connection, beginning with a series of 5K races this summer.

A family of runners

The Lanhams have integrated their passion for running into their family life. With three children aged 14, 5 and 3, they lead by example, encouraging their kids to embrace an active lifestyle. Their 14-year-old daughter has participated in cross-country running and track and field at Donahue Academy, while the younger boys are just beginning to explore their interest in running, with the 5-year-old attending a summer running camp.

John’s relationship with running is deeply personal. After facing health challenges in 2010, his physician encouraged him to return to the sport he cherished during his college years. This advice became a pivotal turning point.

“It took about a year before I could ac-

SEE **FOOT LOOSE, A4** ►

JOHN LANHAM / COURTESY PHOTO

John Lanham proposes to Rachel at a 5K.



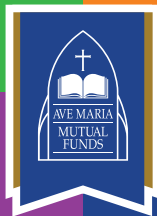
SERIOUSLY DIFFERENT

INDUSTRY LEADER
IN MRI... MORALLY
RESPONSIBLE
INVESTING

MORAL
SCREENS WITH A
ZERO TOLERANCE
POLICY

CATHOLIC
ADVISORY BOARD
OF PROMINENT
CATHOLICS

ACTIVELY
MANAGED WITH
CONTRARIAN
THINKING



1-866-AVE-MARIA

AVE MARIA
MUTUAL FUNDS

avemariafunds.com

Past performance does not guarantee future results.

Schwartz Investment Counsel, Inc., a registered investment adviser established in 1980, serves as investment adviser for Ave Maria Mutual Funds and invests only in securities that meet the Funds’ investment and religious requirements. The returns may be lower or higher than if decisions were based solely on investment considerations. The method of security selection may or may not be successful and the Funds may underperform or outperform the stock market as a whole. All mutual funds are subject to market risk, including possible loss of principal. Request a prospectus, which includes investment objectives, risks, fees, charges and expenses and other information that you should read and consider carefully before investing. The prospectus can be obtained by calling 1-866-283-6274 or it can be viewed at www.avemariafunds.com. Distributed by Ultimus Fund Distributors, LLC.

200-131-011524 | 16320271-UFD-02/22/2023

Del Webb®

NAPLES

Award Winning Lifestyle in Ave Maria from the Low-\$200s.

What are you waiting for?

Del Webb Naples Amenities

- 2 Clubhouses Totalling Over 30,000 Sq. Ft.
- Full-Time Lifestyle Director
- 18 Sports Courts: Pickleball, Tennis & Bocce
- Resort Pool & Spa
- Lap Pool
- Newly Refreshed 18-Hole Championship Golf Course, Panther Run (memberships optional)
- The Rusty Putter Bar & Grill
- Indoor Golf Simulator
- Fitness Center & Movement Studio
- Card & Game Rooms
- Activity Rooms for Community Events
- Catering Kitchens
- Café & Community Library

**6231 Liberty Street
Ave Maria, Florida 34142
(239) 842-9643**

DelWebb.com/Naples



At least one resident must be 55 years of age or better, a limited number of residents may be younger and no one under 19 years of age. Some residents may be younger than 55. Prices shown are estimated base prices, do not include lot premiums or options and are subject to change without notice. Community Association fees required. Additional terms, conditions and restrictions apply. Photographs are for illustrative purposes only, are not intended to be an actual representation of a specific community, and depict models containing features or designs that may not be available on all homes or that may be available for an additional cost. This material shall not constitute a valid offer in any state where prior registration is required or if void by law. Please see a sales associate for details. ©2025 Pulte Home Company, LLC. All rights reserved. CBC057850. 5-19-25



Special Financing!

30-Year Fixed Rate Offer as low as 4.99%/5.035% APR on Select Homes

Don't miss this exclusive, limited-time opportunity.



more life built in® Avalon Park at Ave Maria from the high \$300s

**9 Home Designs
2-6 Bedrooms | 2-6 Bathrooms
4,272+ Sq. Ft.**

Create a home that's uniquely you, inside and out.
An indoor haven or an outdoor oasis. A private retreat or room to entertain. A place to play or space to relax. Everybody defines home a little differently – and we're here to build a better home for you. With innovative, consumer-inspired home designs, opportunities for personalization, and versatile living spaces, a Pulte home offers the best in livability.

Pulte.com/AvalonPark
(239) 842-1657 | 4364 Washington Pl., Ave Maria, FL 34142

*Rate based on participation in the Affiliate Incentive Program, including financing through Pulte Mortgage LLC (NMLS 1791), and application of all incentives toward closing costs, including any discount points, based on a conventional 30-year fixed mortgage, sales price \$500,000, loan amount \$400,000 with a 20% down payment and interest rate of 4.99%/5.035% APR effective 4/22/2025. Rate based on FICO score of 780 and a primary residence. Higher rate or discount points may apply based on applicant characteristics at time of rate lock. Rate offer is on a first come first serve basis. Loans must be locked and closed by 7/30/25. Monthly payment of \$2,144 includes principal and interest only and does not include estimated taxes and insurance. Payment does not include HOA fees. Loans subject to lender approval. Rates, terms, and conditions subject to change without notice. This is an example, and offer may not be available in your area or for all homes. Pulte Mortgage is an Equal Opportunity Lender. Licensing information: secure.pultemortgage.com/information/contactus.aspx or www.nmlsconsumeraccess.org. This material shall not constitute a valid offer in any state where prior registration is required or if void by law. Please see a sales consultant for details. Pulte Homes® and More Life Built In® are registered trademarks of PulteGroup, Inc. and/or its affiliates. ©2025 PulteGroup, Inc. and/or its affiliates. All rights reserved. CBC057850. 5-19-25



From page 2

tually run decently, and ever since then—except for a couple of injury setbacks—I’ve been out there pounding the pavement,” John reflects. “When I’m healthy, I run three to four miles at least five days a week, and then if I’m gearing up for a marathon, I’ll start throwing six to 10 miles in.”

His dedication not only improved his health but also ignited a commitment to the running community. John volunteers with the Gulf Coast Runners, based in Naples.

Rachel, who is competitive by nature, shares John's enthusiasm for running, viewing it as a means of community connection and fostering healthy habits. The couple's shared passion led to a serendipitous meeting at a race in Naples in 2017, culminating in a race-day proposal a few months later and a pre-ceremony 5K run on their wedding day.

Foot Loose Running Company officially debuted with its first 5K on June 14, followed by races on July 12 and Aug. 9, marking the beginning of a new era for local runners. Recognizing the inconvenience of traveling an hour or more to Naples or Fort Myers for races, the Lanhams sought to bring the excitement closer to home. Their initiative fills a vital gap by providing runners of all ages and abilities a chance to compete, improve and bond right in their own backyard. Ave Maria offers 100 miles of scenic running paths, giving runners a beautiful way to enjoy both the sport and the outdoors.

The company's flagship event, the "No Pain No Gain Summer 5K Series," launched

with great success, attracting 90 participants from Ave Maria and surrounding areas, including Immokalee, Alva, Lehigh Acres, LaBelle, Naples and Fort Myers.

"During the summer, we're the only game in Southwest Florida," said John.

The series is designed to encourage participation by offering awards to overall winners and age-group top finishers. Every participant receives practical race-day goodies such as towels and hats to beat the summer heat. With precise timing technology, age-group awards and a welcoming environment that even accommodates walkers, Foot Loose Running Company ensures every participant feels valued. The series serves not only as a competitive platform but also as a community gathering, fostering friendships and healthy lifestyles.

Runners register online and pay a fee to participate, while advertising partners contribute to cover expenses.

"This is a business for the love of running," said John. "We're a low-budget operation. After 42 years working for the Social Security Administration in Naples, I'm happily retired now and living my best life in Hampton Village. Rachel and I are dedicated to getting people to love running as much as we do. Come out and try it."

Foot Loose Running Company plans to expand into a fall and winter series, aiming for nine races annually, starting and finishing in the Ave Maria Town Center. The company has secured permissions from Collier County and the Ave Maria Stewardship Community District to close portions of John Paul II Boulevard and Annunciation Circle for the finish line and participant routes around Ave Maria's beautiful neighborhoods.

For more information, race registration or volunteer opportunities, visit FootLooseRunning.com or email John@FootLooseRunning.com. 🌻



JOHN LANHAM / COURTESY PHOTO

Rachel and John Lanham.

Golf Membership Included with purchase of a New Condo

Enjoy resort-style pool, the Hammock
Bar & Grill, pickleball and more!



**Come tour
the amenities!**

Terrace Condominiums



Arbor Model



Birkdale Model



Carolina Model







STARTING FROM \$239,975 STARTING FROM \$239,975 STARTING FROM \$295,990



THE NATIONAL
GOLF & COUNTRY CLUB
AT AVE MARIA, FLORIDA

Call 239-208-6417 today
to schedule your VIP tour!

LENNAR

6098 Artisan Court | Ave Maria, FL 34142
TheNationalVIP.com

Welcome Home Center Hours:
Monday-Saturday 9am-6pm | Sunday 10am-6pm

ORAL REPRESENTATIONS CANNOT BE RELIED UPON AS CORRECTLY STATING REPRESENTATIONS OF THE DEVELOPER. FOR CORRECT REPRESENTATIONS, MAKE REFERENCE TO THIS BROCHURE AND TO THE DOCUMENTS REQUIRED BY SECTION 718.503, FLORIDA STATUTES, TO BE FURNISHED BY A DEVELOPER TO A BUYER OR LESSEE. Plans to build out this neighborhood as proposed are subject to change without notice. Please see your New Home Consultant and/or home purchase agreement for actual features designated as an Everything's Included feature. Features, amenities, floor plans, elevations, and designs vary and are subject to changes or substitution without notice. Items shown are artist's renderings and may contain options that are not standard on all models or not included in the purchase price. Availability may vary. Sq. ft./acreage/dimensions is estimated; actual sq. ft./acreage/dimensions will differ. Garage/bay sizes may vary from home to home and may not accommodate all vehicles. Models/lifestyle photos are for illustrative purposes only. Lennar does not guarantee the availability of homes within the price ranges above. Price subject to change without notice. Site plans, community maps and/or aerial photos are conceptual in nature and are merely an artist's rendition. They are solely for illustrative purposes, should never be relied upon, and are subject to change. This is not an offer in states where prior registration is required. Void where prohibited by law. Copyright © 2024 Lennar Corporation, Lennar, the Lennar logo, WCI, the WCI logo, Everything's Included and the Everything's Included logo are U.S. registered service marks or service marks of Lennar Corporation and/or its subsidiaries. LENNAR HOMES LLC CBC038894 and CGC1523282, LENNAR REALTY INC (CQ 1013633) 12/24.

BIG KINDS OF SMALL TOWN FUN

Ave Maria Elementary groundbreaking



▲ Marking a new beginning.



The long-awaited groundbreaking for Ave Maria Elementary was held on the morning of June 3, drawing community members together to celebrate a significant step forward for local education in Ave Maria. Situated off Anthem Parkway near the town's water park, the new school will accommodate up to 900 students and was designed with future expansion in mind. The 46-acre property was originally reserved by Barron Collier Companies and gifted to Collier County Public Schools in 2008, as the town of Ave Maria was just beginning to emerge. 🌟

Collier County Public Schools Chief Communication Officer Chad Oliver. ►

◀ **Impressive outpouring of community support.**

SEE **MORE GROUNDBREAKING PHOTOS, A10 ►**



SANDRA YEVATI / AVE MARIA SUN



Trunk or Treat
Saturday, October 25
3:00 - 6:00 PM

- Costume Contests
- Free Candy
- DJ Music
- Face Painting & Activities
- Town Center Business After Parties
- Salvation Army Canned Food Drive

Christmas Crawl
Around the World
Saturday, November 22
3:00 - 8:00 PM

- Free Photos with Santa & Mrs. Claus
- Family-Friendly Activities
- Holiday Treats & Drink Specials
- DJ Music
- Dance Performances



SAVE THE DATES
Summer Business Events

Ave Maria
A BIG KIND OF SMALL TOWN®



in the Ave Maria Town Center...

Events are subject to change.*

ALL AROUND AVE MARIA

Dates and details are subject to change. Call the Ave Maria Welcome Center at 239-352-3903 for more information. Follow Town Center businesses on social media for updates and special promotions.

OPEN TO THE PUBLIC

TRUNK OR TREAT

The 10th annual Trunk or Treat will be held on Saturday, Oct. 25, from 3 to 6 p.m. at the Ave Maria Town Center. Enjoy music, face painting, costume contests and special offers from shops and restaurants as well as after parties by the eateries. This is a family-friendly event so please keep costumes appropriate for all ages.

MERCHANT EVENTS

Ledo Pizza

ledopizza.com
The pizzeria serves fresh, made-to-order square pizzas with flaky crusts, signature sauce and smoked provolone, wings, pasta and more. Dine in, take out, order online or ask about their catering services for your next big event.
■ **Silver Saturdays:** The 55+ crowd receives a 15% discount on their check every Saturday. Just show your ID and mention the offer.
■ **Sunday Funday:** Mimosas and Bloody Marys are available for \$5 all day long every Sunday.

MELTZ

meltzicecream.com
Enjoy a variety of delicious ice cream, toppings, specialty and traditional sundaes and themed creations inspired by the youngest family members. MELTZ has customizable 100% organic Açaí bowls, boba teas, rolled ice cream and smoothies.
■ **Sundae Fundaes:** Visit Meltz in the Ave Maria Town Center for Sundae Fundae with discounted rates on the “Chocolate Love,” “Banana Split” and more!

The Secret Ingredient

shopthesecretingredient.com
This charming boutique brings effortless elegance to every season with handpicked women’s fashion, accessories, and gifts. The Secret Ingredient helps every shopper feel stylish, confident, and uniquely herself.
■ **Every Monday is 55+ and Fabulous Day.** Shoppers aged 55 and up save 10% off one regularly priced item.
■ **Every Tuesday, “Twosday”** shopping allows you and a friend to each receive 20% off one regularly priced item when shopping together.
■ **Every Thursday,** receive 15% off your entire purchase, including bag discounts and sale items. To qualify for the discount, shoppers must mention the “Retail Therapy Thursday” deal at checkout.

Way Out Toys & Games

wayouttoys.com
■ Every Monday, play Pokémon Pack Wars from 6:30 to 7 p.m., a fast-paced BINGO-style game for all ages! \$20 cash entry: Each player will receive three packs of Pokémon cards to keep and use for the event. 4 rounds of fabulous prizes to the winners!
■ Every Thursday, play Disney-Lorcana on Aug. 14 from 6 to 8 p.m., a great card game for all ages.

Oil Well Craft Beer

oilwellcraftbeer.com
With 20 taps, along with a great selection of bottles and cans, Oil Well strives to provide a great customer service experience while putting heart and soul into every beer served.
■ Stop in for Beer & Crypto on Aug. 13, Aug. 28, Sept. 10 and Oct. 8 from 7 to 8 p.m. and get the latest info on the happenings of the cryptocurrency market.
■ Brew & Paint on Sept. 1 and Oct. 1 from 7



AVE MARIA DEVELOPMENT / COURTESY PHOTOS

Trunk or Treat.

to 9 p.m., a fun evening with an instructor-led class that walks you through creating your own masterpiece
■ On Sept. 5 and Oct. 5 from 6 to 8 p.m. Oil Well Craft Beer is hosting its monthly BINGO night.

AVE MARIA UNIVERSITY ATHLETICS

For the latest updates and more information on away games, visit avemariagyrenes.com/calendar.
Saturday, Aug. 9
■ Volleyball vs State College of Florida, 3 p.m.
Wednesday, Aug. 13
■ M. Soccer vs Miami Dade, 4 p.m.
Friday, Aug. 15
■ Volleyball vs Georgetown, 12 p.m.
■ Volleyball vs Grace, 2 p.m.
Saturday, August 16
■ Volleyball vs Bethel, 10 a.m.
■ Volleyball vs Cumberland, 12 p.m.



Christmas Crawl.

Friday, Sept. 5

■ Volleyball at New College, TBA

Saturday, Sept. 6

■ W. Soccer vs Caroline, 11 a.m.
■ M. Soccer vs Warner, 1:30 p.m.
■ Football vs Lindsey Wilson, 7 p.m.

Wednesday, Sept. 10

■ Volleyball at Florida Memorial, 7 p.m.

Thursday, Sept. 11

■ M. Soccer at Texas College, 4 p.m.
■ W. Soccer vs Faulkner, 7 p.m.

Saturday, Sept. 13

■ M. Soccer at Paul Quinn, 11 a.m.
■ Volleyball at Southeastern, 2 p.m.
■ Football at Cumberland, 6 p.m.

Monday, Sept. 15

■ M. Soccer at Dallas Christian, 11 a.m.

Wednesday, Sept. 17

■ W. Soccer vs Keiser, 7 p.m.

Saturday, Sept. 20

■ M. Soccer at Pensacola Christian, 10 a.m.
■ W. Soccer vs Southeastern, 11 a.m.
■ Volleyball vs Warner, 2 p.m.
■ Football vs Fort Lauderdale, 7 p.m.

Thursday, Sept. 23

■ W. Soccer at Florida National, 3:30 and 6 p.m.

Wednesday, Sept. 24

■ Volleyball vs Keiser, 7 p.m.

Saturday, Sept. 27

■ M. Soccer vs Fort Lauderdale, 7 p.m.

Wednesday, Oct. 1

■ W. Soccer at Southeastern, TBA
■ Volleyball at St. Thomas, 7 p.m.
■ M. Soccer vs Southeastern, 7 p.m.

RESIDENT EVENTS

Organizers request preregistration for these resident-only events via avemariamasterassociation.com. For more information, call the Ave Maria Master Association at 239-867-4322.

Back to School Water Wars

Close out the summer with a Splash at North Park on Saturday, Aug. 9 from 10 a.m. to 1 p.m. This event is packed with interactive games and water-filled challenges for all ages! The cost is \$5 per person and free for kids 4 and under. Email jackie.Ventura@fsresidential.com for details.

Coffee with a Twiss

Coffee with a Twiss is a Q&A meeting with Kim Twiss, the executive director of the Ave Maria Master Association, held on the second Thursday of every month. The next meeting is on Aug. 14 at 10 a.m., held at 5080 Annunciation Circle, Ste. #101 and over Zoom. For more information, see avemariamasterassociation.com.

First Fridays Events

Get your competitive minds going for September’s Science & Suds with Glen Beitman at the Park of Commerce OWCB on Sept. 5, from 5 to 7 p.m. Whose tower will be built stronger and quicker? Can you engineer your ramp and win the challenge? Enjoy the fun with the community at this First Friday event.

AMSCD Stewardship District Meeting

Join the AMSCD Stewardship District Meeting at the AMMA Community Room on Tuesday, Sept. 9, from 4 to 5:30 p.m. or over Zoom. Meetings are open to the public and will be conducted in accordance with Florida law. For more information, see avemariamasterassociation.com. 🌟

FOOT PAIN?





SAME DAY APPOINTMENTS

AVE MARIA, HERE'S WHAT YOUR NEIGHBORS ARE SAYING

“Dr. Pelucacci and the entire staff were friendly, welcoming, and extremely professional. As a physician, I was impressed by the thoroughness of the exam and time spent including me in the decision making. What a great experience from check in to check out.”
– Dr. William B.

“I have some pain in my feet, and I asked my Primary Care Physician who he would recommend that I see, and he referred me to Dr Lam. I called and could have had an appointment the same day! Great experience!”
– Dan W.

“Dr. Jake Powers and his staff made my visit an absolute pleasure. Dr. Powers did a wonderful job explaining problem/procedure/ expected outcomes. I highly recommend this group for all of your podiatry needs!”
– Lindsey M.



DR. EILEEN RIVERO
DPM, ABPM

DR. KEVIN LAM
DMP, FACFAS, DABLES, DABPS

DR. KARAN MALANI
DPM, AACFAS

DR. ROBERT BELLO
DPM, FACFAS, DABPS



Surgical Podiatrist Serving Southwest Florida Since 2005

Marco Island • Naples • Estero • Cape Coral
Fort Myers • Port Charlotte • Sarasota

BOARD CERTIFIED IN RECONSTRUCTIVE SURGERY • BOARD CERTIFIED IN FOOT SURGERY

CALL TODAY!
(239) 430-3668(FOOT)

Or SCHEDULE ONLINE!
www.NaplesPodiatrist.com



KELLY'S

\$6.55

VALUE MEAL

ALL MEALS ARE SERVED WITH SIDE OF FRENCH FRIES AND A CHOICE OF 16OZ FOUNTAIN DRINK
ADD CHEESE FOR \$0.30 SIZE UP FOR JUST \$2





6" Hot Dog • Fried Chicken Sandwich
Kelly's Smash Burger • Fried Fish Sandwich

Domestic Bottled Beer - \$2.55
Red/White Wine - \$3.55
Small Cone/Frappe - \$0.55

 @KELLYSROASTBEEF_FL
KELLYSROASTBEEF.COM

8900 FOUNDERS SQUARE
DR, NAPLES
239.387.1988

GATEWAY SHOPPES 13585
TAMIAMI TRAIL N, NAPLES
239.799.1664

8465 DANI DRIVE, FORT MYERS, FL
(NEXT TO TOP GOLF) 239.347.2447



AVE MARIA DEVELOPMENT / COURTESY PHOTOS

The Secret Ingredient Team.

Small businesses, big hearts

The local faces behind Ave Maria's shops and eateries

BY ERICA FISH

Ave Maria Sun Correspondent

Where the charm of small-town living meets the energy of a growing community, a group of passionate business owners is making a lasting impact. From one friendly smile and a handcrafted coffee to a personalized boutique experience where a purchase benefits a local charity, Ave Maria business owners help make the town a special place.

And for many of these entrepreneurs, setting up shop in Ave Maria's Town Center was about more than just a business. It was about creating a professional legacy that reflected "home."

Five-year resident Francis Rowney said, "What I appreciate most is how many business owners know your name. When I walk into The Bean, they remember my order. At Salon d' Maria, they ask about my grandkids. It's personal. It's real."

It's this personal connection that has made the Town Center more than a retail destination; it's a gathering place where neighbors become friends.

"There's something special about the people here," said Danee Williams, boutique owner of The Secret Ingredient. "All of us merchants care about who we serve, and we want to build a lasting impression. We live here and contributing to the community is a significant reflection of who we are as neighbors who take pride of their town."

With that commitment to connection in mind, Ave Maria's small business owners have joined forces to create a series of festive, family-friendly events, each designed to foster community spirit while giving locals and visitors something memorable to look forward to.

The summer lineup kicked off with Christmas in July, where storefronts transformed into Floridian winter escapes – complete with decorations, exclusive dining and shopping specials, festive music and activities. And the best part? Santa and Mrs. Claus made a special visit to take Christmas wish lists early. Families roamed Annunciation Circle, enjoying sweet

treats and a raffle activity to enter to win baskets chalk-full of gift cards and other goodies from the businesses participating in the event.

"I wasn't expecting to feel so much holiday magic in the middle of July!" shared Bernitta Symms, a Marco Island resident who attended with her two teenage daughters, Tabitha and Mila. "The town is charming, and we ended up visiting two shops we will for sure be repeat customers for."

Coming next is Trunk or Treat on Saturday, Oct. 25, from 3 to 6 p.m. Founded by Oil Well Craft Beer 10 years ago, the festivity transitioned to being held in the Town Center in 2023 to host hundreds more. Ave Maria families decorate their golf carts and vehicles and hand out candy while the businesses team up with Ave Maria Development's Welcome Center and the Ave Maria Master Association for Halloween-themed activities, face painting and various costume contests.

Businesses will team up for their own version of Black Friday on Nov. 28, offering one-of-a-kind deals in a laid-back, stress-free environment reflecting the town's relaxed lifestyle. Shops including Stella Rose Way, The Secret Ingredient and Way Out Toys & Games are three businesses that will collaborate on holiday deals and in-store activities for early riser customers.

The series of business events will close with Christmas Crawl Around the World, happening Saturday, Nov. 22, from 3 to 8 p.m. Each participating business will represent a country and feature international holiday traditions, complete with treats, sips and cultural flair. The Town Cen-



It's snowing in Ave Maria at Christmas in July.

Curb Appeal Done Right



Locally owned
and operated for over
10 YEARS!

Landscaping • Maintenance • Pavers
Lighting • Irrigation • PestControl

EXPERIENCED LANDSCAPE DESIGNERS AND INSTALLERS

- Local Owners
- No hidden fees
- 100% guarantee

Nothing says "welcome to our home" like a perfectly manicured yard. Fresh cut grass. Smooth, clean edges. Healthy trees, shrubs and flowers.

At Cheney we make it our business to keep the exterior of your home looking perfect!

With over 20 years of experience, we know the area better than anyone else. We are experts in helping design, install and maintain breathtaking landscapes.



Cheney
Landscaping

239-919-9167

www.cheneylandscaping.com

ter will include a holiday lights display, live DJ music, face painting, Ave Maria Dance Academy performances and other family-friendly activities.

“Our events are meant as a testament to our collaborations and friendships we have as business owners,” Williams said. “We regularly connect to brainstorm new ways to engage and give back to the community, and it continuously results with visitors enjoying our small events which bring tons of enjoyment.”

Visitors and locals alike often remark on the feeling of “stepping into a Hall-mark town,” where every storefront has a story and every shopkeeper has a familiar face.

“We came out for one of last year’s events and stayed for the entire after-noon,” said Golden Gate resident Peter Wuollette. “Since then, we’ve shared with friends looking to move to Florida about considering Ave Maria. Golf is a plus for sure, but consider the change of pace here. That’s why we routinely come out and just enjoy the town for a day.”

Whether you’re vis-iting for the first time or you’ve called Ave Maria home for years, the Town Center invites you to be part of its ever-growing story. Here, small businesses with big hearts are not only shaping the local econ-omy – they’re creating lasting memories, one event, one smile and one order at a time. 🌟



COURTESY PHOTOS

ABOVE: A visit with Santa at Christmas in July.

LEFT: 2023 Trunk or Treat Family enjoying the festivities.

Residents are participating in the Christmas in July Bingo Card Raffle Activity.



Young Ave Maria residents play dress up in The Secret Ingredient.





YOUR PLUMBING OUR PRIORITY



From small fixes to full plumbing overhauls — we handle it all.

- ✓ Leaky Toilets
- ✓ Clogged Sinks
- ✓ No Hot Water

Your Home. Your Business. Your Pipes.
We keep it all flowing.

4.9 Stars
★★★★★
1029 reviews







CALL TODAY



GET A FREE QUOTE

Call 239.448.8277 or visit leecountyplumbing.com

BIG KINDS OF SMALL TOWN FUN

Ave Maria Elementary groundbreaking

Continued
from page 5



Collier County School Board Superintendent Leslie Ricciardelli.



Tom DiFlorio, Fire Chief Michael Choate, Erin Dever and Collier County Tax Collector Rob Stoneburner.



BCC CEO Blake Gable.



Collier County Public School officials, Principal Susan Barcellino, Executive Director of School Leadership Laura Mendicino, Chief Academic Officer Elizabeth Alves and Administrator Joy Alvarez.



From CC Homes, Alina Laureiro and Marketing Director Chelsea Kimmey.



Barron Collier Companies' newest interns.



Ave Maria Development Events Coordinator Donna Marquez, BCC Marketing Communications Specialist Erica Fish and BCC Marketing and Public Relations Manager Michelle Mambuca.



Collier County School Board Member Tim Moshier, Florida House District 82 Aide Kathleen Elrod and Debbie Moshier.



Domino's Farms Corporation President Paul Roney, Peninsula President of Engineering John English and BCC Chief Investment Officer Brian Goguen.



Collier County School Board Chair Kelly Mason.



Getting into the spirit of the groundbreaking.



Ave Maria stakeholders show their support.



The Pereira family

SANDRA YEYATI / AVE MARIA SUN

HEALTH

From page 1

courage reading or journaling to reignite focus and cognitive engagement or visit the school or meet the teacher, if possible, to ease first-day anxiety.”

One of the most important steps parents can take to protect their child’s health is to ensure they are up to date on all health evaluations, wellness visits to their physician and recommended vaccinations. Kirk said being proactive with medical issues is an important first step.

“Children are never too young to begin learning about their own health. Involving them encourages autonomy, builds responsibility and fosters a lifelong interest in staying healthy,” Kirk said. “Let them help pack their own lunch, remind them to take medications [with supervision], and teach them to speak up if something doesn’t feel right. Older children and teens should be encouraged to track their own sleep, hydration and screen time.”

Establishing an open and honest dialogue between parents and children is a crucial component to maintaining good health. Discussing things like hygiene and recognizing symptoms can lessen the onset, spread, length and severity of illnesses. Kirk recommends planning balanced school lunches that include lean protein, fruits, vegetables, and whole grains; reviewing basic hygiene habits like frequent hand washing, covering coughs/sneezes, and not sharing food or



COURTESY PHOTO

Kids ride through the Ave Maria Town Center as families ease back into school-year routines.

drinks; and stressing that kids wear helmets while riding bikes or scooters.

Getting enough sleep is crucial for maintaining good health and supporting academic performance. Depending on the student’s age, Kirk suggests setting time frames from 10 to 13 hours for the

youngest students to eight to 10 hours for high schoolers. Creating advantageous conditions like reducing screen time prior to bedtime, lowering the lights or taking a warm bath can also provide a solid foundation for restorative sleep.

“Sleep is essential for physical health, emotional well-being and academic performance,” Kirk said. “Begin reintroducing school-year bedtimes one to two weeks before school starts. Consistency builds healthy habits and helps reduce morning struggles.”

Staying focused on consistent rest can also help regulate feelings of stress for many children, especially those who are transitioning to a new school or grade level. Staying organized can help reduce stress and improve academic performance. Helpful tips include teaching students to use a planner or calendar to keep track of assignments and

deadlines and establishing a consistent homework routine.

Attention to well-being also extends beyond the classroom. Students involved in sports and after-school activities will be experiencing more physical exertion than others. Preparing for physical activity, especially during the hottest Florida months, can be a difference-maker. Staying hydrated is essential for maintaining good health and preventing fatigue. Health care professionals encourage children to drink plenty of water throughout the day, especially during physical activity during high temperatures. Water is essential for maintaining proper bodily functions and preventing dehydration.

Kirk recommends bringing a refillable water bottle and taking frequent breaks. If the activity involves spending time out in the sun, use a broad-spectrum sunscreen (SPF 30+) and reapply regularly,

and monitor for signs of heat exhaustion: dizziness, headache, nausea or confusion. If any symptoms appear, stop activity and cool down immediately.

“Trust your instincts,” Kirk said. “If you feel something, say something. Watch for unusual fatigue or irritability; persistent coughing or difficulty breathing; unexplained rash or headaches that don’t go away. If in doubt, consult your pediatrician for guidance.”

The back-to-school season can be a challenging time for families, but by following these health tips, parents can help their children stay healthy and thrive. By prioritizing vaccinations, good hygiene, a balanced diet, hydration, sleep, stress management and or-

ganization, families can set themselves up for a successful and healthy school year.

This article was contributed to by Kathryn Kirk, APRN for the NCH Ave Maria Immediate Care Center. 5360 Ave Maria Boulevard Ave Maria, FL 34142, (239) 624 - 0460 🌟

“Children are never too young to begin learning about their own health, involving them encourages autonomy, builds responsibility and fosters a lifelong interest in staying healthy.”

— Kathryn Kirk,
APRN for the NCH Ave Maria Immediate Care



NCH / COURTESY PHOTO

The NCH Immediate Care Center in Ave Maria, located in Midtown Plaza.



National Cremation SOCIETY®

Serving families since 1973 by providing simple and affordable cremation services.

**Visit Us Today
or Call (239) 475-5510**



13800 Tamiami Trl N Suite 106-107, Naples, FL 34110 • www.NationalCremation.com

From passion to business

The entrepreneurial journey of Zeleny Morales and Under Her Mantle

BY SANDRA YEYATI
Ave Maria Sun Correspondent

When Zeleny Morales moved from the suburbs of Chicago to Ave Maria in 2022 with her husband, Stephen Groves, and their two young children, Therese and Jeremiah, she carried more than family belongings. She also brought along an entrepreneurial spirit rooted in faith and creativity. Now, as a stay-at-home mom expecting their third child, Morales juggles the joys and responsibilities of motherhood with the excitement and challenges of running her own business, Under Her Mantle.

Planting the seed of entrepreneurship

Morales' journey into entrepreneurship was inspired by a desire to contribute financially to her family while engaging in something she deeply loved.

"I always wanted a small business to help my husband economically, and I wanted to do something that was handmade," she recalls. Discovering hand embroidery through Instagram videos ignited a creative spark. Armed with a simple embroidery kit, she crafted her first Catholic-themed hair bow featuring a delicate rosary design that resonated with her faith and fueled her passion.

Encouraged by positive feedback from friends and the community, Morales transitioned from hobbyist to entrepreneur. She began selling handmade bows locally and online, leading to the official launch of Under Her Mantle last year.

Navigating challenges and growth

Starting a business from scratch while managing a growing family presented its share of challenges. Time management became critical as Morales balanced homeschooling her children, household responsibilities and her small business.

"It's not easy," she admits. "I like that I get to stay at home with my kids, raise them and be an entrepreneur, but it's definitely a juggling act."

One significant hurdle was the time-consuming nature of hand embroidery.

"It would take me hours just to make one hair bow," she says.

Recognizing the need to scale, Morales pivoted her business model. She began designing products digitally on her iPad and collaborating with a manufacturer to produce items in larger quantities while maintaining her original artistic vision.

This strategic shift led to the introduc-

tion of her signature product: bamboo fabric pajamas for babies and children featuring embroidered rosary beads on the wrists.

"The idea was to help kids learn to pray the rosary at night," Morales explains. The soft, hypoallergenic material is gentle on sensitive skin, and the embroidered rosary serves as both a spiritual guide and a tactile learning tool.

Under Her Mantle's product line has since expanded to include handmade hair bows crafted from 100% linen, personalized baby blankets and pillows that can be customized with names or religious images and toddler dresses with embellished matching bows. While some items are mass-produced, Morales continues to embroider special pieces, fulfilling custom orders that reflect her artistic flair and personal touch.

Honoring faith and family

Morales' faith is the cornerstone of her business. Each design is infused with Catholic iconography from her original sketches and paintings. Her pajamas feature colorful depictions entitled "Saint Michael," "Divine Mercy," "Our Lady of Guadalupe" and "Pray."

"When I was praying to God while embroidering the first rosary, I asked Mary to cover me with her mantle and bless this business," she shares.

This spiritual foundation not only inspires her work but also connects her with a community of like-minded customers.

Her husband plays a pivotal role behind the scenes, managing the financial aspects of the business.

"He takes care of all the money side, the paperwork and the accounting," Morales notes, allowing her to focus on creativity and customer engagement.



COURTESY PHOTOS
▲ Zeleny Morales with her husband Stephen Groves and their two children, Therese and Jeremiah. Handcrafted dress and hair bow. ►

Marketing and community support

Growing the business requires thoughtful marketing strategies. Morales posts on social media platforms such as Facebook and Instagram, targeting Catholic groups and local Ave Maria communities. Word-of-mouth referrals and personal connections have also been instrumental in building her customer base.

The supportive Ave Maria community has been a source of encouragement and inspiration.

"The moms from the parish get excited and ask, 'When's your next product coming out?'" she said.

This enthusiastic feedback motivates



Morales to continue innovating and expanding her offerings.

Looking ahead

Morales envisions further growth for Under Her Mantle, exploring new ideas such as embroidered paintings embellished with beads, a creative fusion she is eager to develop after the success of a small piece made for her daughter.

"People have requested it, but I haven't done it yet. I need to feel inspired," she admits, reflecting the deeply personal nature of her artistry.

Despite the challenges of entrepreneurship, Morales finds immense satisfaction in her work.

"When I finish a bow, I feel excited and proud," she says. "It's a beautiful feeling to create something meaningful and know it brings joy to others."

For Morales, Under Her Mantle is more than just a business. It is a testament to faith, creativity and the power of community. To explore her handcrafted products, visit UnderHerMantle.co or reach out via email at pray@UnderHerMantle.co. 🌟



Jeremiah Groves modeling the Divine Mercy pajamas.



Handcrafted hair bow.



Therese Groves modeling the Pray pajamas.

Ave Maria Communities



AVALON PARK

More Quality Built-In.

From the mid-\$300,000s - \$700,000+

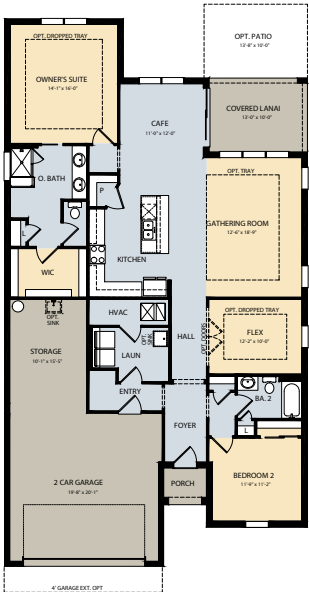
It's easy to stay active and have family fun at Avalon Park. Located within walking or biking distance to downtown Ave Maria, Avalon Park attracts families looking for exceptional schools, close proximity to neighborhood parks, and plenty of living space. Avalon Park offers spacious homesites, unique architectural exteriors, and nine consumer-inspired

one- and two-story single-family homes that combine Pulte Homes' signature quality construction and personalized design opportunities. With home designs including up to six bedrooms and six bathrooms in nearly 5,000 square feet of living space, you are sure to find your dream new home to fit your family's needs now and in the future.



"As one of the nation's largest and most respected homebuilders with more than 70 years of homebuilding experience, Pulte Homes offers numerous advantages, including greater efficiency, personalized options, and a world class warranty. With modern designs inspired by consumers, energy-efficient features, greener appliances, low maintenance, a 10-year structural warranty, smart home

technology, and financing perks through Pulte Mortgage Company, buying a new Pulte home tailored to your preferences ensures a convenient and sustainable living experience. Get peace of mind, great financing options and the quality craftsmanship you deserve with a new Pulte home. That's More Life Built In®, and that's exactly what you'll find at Avalon Park."



Mystique

- Starting from the low \$400s
- 1,889+ square feet
- Two to Five Bedrooms
- Two to Four Bathrooms
- 2-car Garage
- Loft Option Available

Avalon Park at Ave Maria
4364 Washington Place, Ave Maria, FL 34142
239-842-1657



Del Webb[®] NAPLES

We Believe You Will Love It Here From the low-\$200,000s - \$600,000+

Del Webb Naples brings premier resort-style amenities and a lifestyle nothing short of extraordinary to Ave Maria. Here, daily possibilities for new adventures await. Where every day is different – and entirely up to you. From a dip in the pool to a friendly game of pickleball, in Del Webb Naples you’ll find countless opportunities to grow, thrive, and enjoy those new passions you’ve been waiting to explore. Del Webb Naples provides amenities, programs, and support needed for health and wellness,

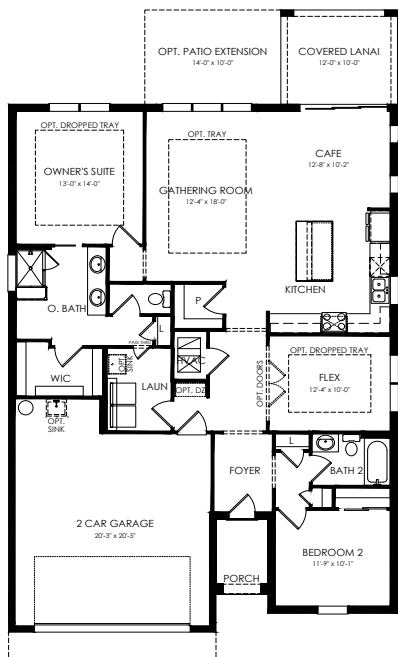
conveniently located right where you live. No matter how full or fulfilling you want your days to be, you’ll find a way to energize your mind, body, and spirit the way you’ve always wanted to. Enjoy golf, bocce ball, bicycling, dance instruction, art, endless ways to socialize, and opportunities to give back to the community that surrounds you. No matter one’s stage in life, in Del Webb Naples you’ll never cease to be amazed at how rich your days can be. We believe you’ll love it here.



Del Webb[®]

No one understands the importance of community like Del Webb. Del Webb communities are an extension of the homeowners who live there – a collection of passions and activities you love to enjoy with others. When you choose to build in a Del Webb 55+ active adult community, you get the benefit of more than six decades of homebuilding experience. With homes

designed for how you live, including the features that matter most to you, all backed by a warranty you can rely on, you’ll feel secure now and into the future. Our streamlined process makes it easy for you to build the home you’ve always wanted in the kind of vibrant community you’ve been looking for.



Prosperity

- Starting from the low \$400s
- 1,670+ square feet
- Two to Three Bedrooms
- Two Bathrooms
- 2-car Garage

Del Webb Naples
6231 Liberty Street, Ave Maria, FL 34142
239-842-9643



Designer-Appointed Homes for Modern Living



Nestled in the heart of Ave Maria, the stunning Maple Ridge community continues to attract homebuyers of all ages and life stages with its blend of modern living, timeless elegance, and smart home convenience. Built by CC Homes- a Codina-Carr Company, a Coral Gables-based private homebuilder with a four-decades-long legacy in South Florida real estate, Maple Ridge is one of the firm’s flagship communities. This best-selling neighborhood is known for its spacious floor plans and homesites, customizable finishes, and unmatched value. Whether you’re a young professional, growing family, or retiree looking for a peaceful yet active lifestyle, Maple Ridge offers a welcoming place to call home.

Beyond the homes themselves, the community’s resort-style amenities and lifestyle director set it apart. With a world class clubhouse, fitness center, swimming pool, playgrounds, walking trails, green spaces, and lakeside views - here, every day truly feels like a retreat. Maple Ridge continues to attract people from across the state, around the country, and even internationally. Each week, new families move to this vibrant, multigenerational community - where neighbors become friends and every lifestyle can flourish. With early delivery homes available and new homesites just released, now is an incredible time to make the move to a new home in Maple Ridge!

Save Thousands on Your Next Home with Special Incentives!



Starting from the mid-\$300,000’s - \$700,000’s

CC Homes is ranked as one of the top five new home builders in South Florida and Southwest Florida, offering affordable single-family luxury in Ave Maria’s Maple Ridge neighborhoods. Homeowners are pampered with high-end designer features included in

the base price. Maple Ridge neighborhoods include a brand-new clubhouse for residents with resort-style pool and cabanas, fitness center, billiard room, exercise park, concierge, coffee bar, exhibition kitchen and kids’ room.



Fairway

- 2,588 a/c square feet
- Three to Four bedrooms
- Two and a Half to Three Bathrooms
- Two Walk-in Closets in Primary Bedroom
- Covered Terrace
- 2 or 3-car Garage

Maple Ridge
5009 Alonza Avenue, Ave Maria, FL 34142
855-280-4648 | www.MapleRidgeFL.com



Final Opportunities for Preserve & Lake View Homesites on Agostino Way



As part of the highly sought after new home community, Maple Ridge at Ave Maria-Silverwood offers exciting residential choices to buyers. Silverwood provides homeowners the perfect home at a great value. All of these single-family homes are beautifully designed with Mediterranean, Coastal or Contemporary architecture and an inviting array of designer features included as well as some custom options available. Both Silverwood and Maple Ridge have a superb location within Ave Maria, so residents benefit from a great school district and sense of community.

Floor plan spotlight: The Huntington is a new construction, one-story home with three bedrooms, two baths, great room, eat-in kitchen, storage, master suite with walk-in closet and attached garage. Premium features included that are standard include designer brand faucets and fixtures, and tile flooring. Gourmet kitchens have stainless steel appliances, European-style wood cabinetry and quartz countertops. A spa-like primary bedroom features double sinks with quartz vanity tops and a spacious shower.



Buy New and Save Big!

CC Homes is ranked as one of the top five new home builders in South Florida and Southwest Florida, offering affordable single-family luxury in Ave Maria's Maple Ridge neighborhoods. Homeowners are pampered with high-end designer features

included in the base price. Maple Ridge neighborhoods include a brand-new clubhouse for residents with resort-style pool and cabanas, fitness center, billiard room, exercise park, concierge, coffee bar, exhibition kitchen and kids' room.



First Floor Plan



Second Floor Plan



Doheny

- 2,047 a/c square feet
- Three Bedrooms
- Two and a Half Bathrooms
- 2-car Garage
- Preserve view, Upstairs Laundry, Loft & More!

Maple Ridge
5009 Alonza Avenue, Ave Maria, FL 34142
855-280-4648 | www.MapleRidgeFL.com

ASK ABOUT OUR SOCIAL MEMBERSHIPS!



About the community

Experience resort-style living at The National Golf & Country Club in Ave Maria, where Lennar brings its signature, Everything's Included® homes to one of Southwest Florida's most desirable destinations. Centered around a stunning 18-hole championship golf course designed by Gordon Lewis, choose from a variety of thoughtfully crafted home options—two-bedroom terrace and veranda condos, three-bedroom coach homes, or spacious single-family residences—each one including a bundled social membership. That membership opens the door to more than just beautiful amenities. It invites you

into a lifestyle filled with events, activities, and opportunities to engage—from casual poolside gatherings and themed dinners to tennis matches and wellness sessions. With a resort-style pool and spa, full-service clubhouse, fine and casual dining, yoga and aerobics studio, treatment rooms, and even a beauty salon, everything is thoughtfully designed to help you make the most of each day. Whether you're here for the season or year-round, The National at Ave offers more than a home—it offers a place to belong. Come see the clubhouse and tour our model homes, open daily. You just might find your next best chapter here.

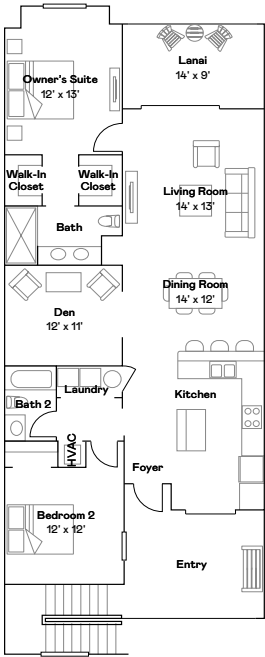


From the mid-\$200s to \$500+

Since 1954, Lennar has been building homes that combine quality, value and innovation. As one of America's leading homebuilders, Lennar is known for its Everything's Included® approach, offering modern features and finishes at no extra cost. We

simplify the homebuying experience by providing everything you need in one place—Lennar Mortgage, Lennar Title, and Lennar Insurance—taking the hassle out of the process, so you can focus on what truly matters: finding the home of your dreams.

Learn the possibilities of Everything's Included®



Bromelia II Condo

- Starting from the Mid \$200s
- 1,355 square feet
- Two Bedrooms
- Two Bathrooms
- 1-car Garage

The National Golf & Country Club
6090 Artisan Court, Ave Maria, FL 34142
239-208-6417 | www.TheNationalVIP.com

GENERATIONS

From page 1

When people of all ages are encouraged to interact, they all reap the benefits. Surprising friendships are able to blossom. Kids learn valuable insights from their elders, while retirees and grandparents feel energized by the exuberance of youth. It is a celebration of life where a sense of belonging abounds. At Ave Maria, these interactions occur organically by virtue of the variety of neighborhoods available for buyers.

Redefining retirement

For many retirees, finding the perfect place to settle down involves balancing tranquility with community engagement. Grace and Christopher McKnight discovered this balance at the 55-plus Del Webb community in Ave Maria.

“We visited several beautiful retirement communities, but something was missing. They felt too insular, like we’d be living in a bubble separate from the rest of the world. We didn’t want to feel like we were just marking time,” Grace explains. “Ave Maria offered a sense of belonging not just among retirees but within a diverse, active town.”

Traditional 55-plus communities cater exclusively to retirees, offering age-restricted neighborhoods focused on leisure, recreation and convenience. While these features promote an active lifestyle, they can also create an environment that feels isolated from the broader, more diverse society at large. What sets Ave Maria apart is the integration of Del Webb within an already thriving town. Here, retirees live alongside young families, college students, entrepreneurs and professionals, fostering daily interactions that enrich community life.

In Ave Maria, retirees aren’t limited to age-specific activities. Grace, for instance, enjoys pickleball, golf and aquatic classes, while Christopher finds fulfillment in golf and takes advantage of the walking paths. They have attended Ave Maria University sporting events, mingling with students and younger residents.

“One of our favorite memories is attending a town festival where we met a young family,” Grace recalls. “The kids were curious about our golf cart, and before you knew it, we were sharing stories with their parents. It’s those everyday interactions that keep us feeling vibrant.”

Unlike traditional retirement communities, where facilities can feel isolated,



Grace and Chris McKnight strike a pose at the Ave Maria Welcome Center.



COURTESY PHOTOS

Four generations gather at Mercato at Ave to celebrate the 60th wedding anniversary of Rafael and Esperanza Meléndez.



The Rodriguez family, from left, Jenniffer, Liam, Francisco and Giovanni.

Ave Maria’s design encourages natural interactions. Walkways, bike and golf paths weave through neighborhoods, connecting residents of all ages. The bustling Town Center offers coffee shops, restaurants and boutiques where all generations gather organically.

“In other places, you might have to leave your community to feel connected,” Grace notes. “Here, connection is built into daily life.”

Four generations of love

When Genesis North moved from Naples to Ave Maria at age 23 with her mother Nubia Meléndez, they weren’t just purchasing a home together in the Coquina neighborhood—they were laying the foundation for a multigenerational family story rooted in love, resilience and community. Their move in 2016 marked the beginning of a journey that would see four generations living closely together, their lives intertwined in daily interactions, shared traditions and an unbreakable bond.

“We had been shopping for homes in Naples for about six months, but inside, our hearts were breaking. Either the down payments were too high or the houses needed a lot of work,” recalls North. “But when we visited Ave Maria, everything clicked. The process was seamless, and the price was right. We bought a brand-new house the very same

day.”

A year later, North was planning to marry a general contractor from Naples. “I told William that I wanted to stay in Ave Maria to be close to my mom, and luckily, my husband-to-be fell in love with the charm of this town and the quality of the construction, so we bought a home in Maple Ridge, which was just two minutes away from my mom’s house.”

Today, the couple is fully immersed in the Ave Maria lifestyle. Their three children—Liam, 10; Lucas, 6; and Camila, 3 — attend nearby schools. North teaches Zumba classes to a devoted group of women at South Park and the Maple Ridge clubhouse, and her husband works as a general contractor in Naples and Ave Maria. Two years ago, North’s grandparents, Esperanza and Rafael Meléndez, who were in their 80s and from Venezuela, decided to move into her mother’s Coquina home. Since then, family bonding has been nonstop.

The children look forward to visiting their great-grandparents. They adore “Abuelita’s” special soup, and if one of their stuffed animals tears open, they

know that she will mend it for them. Their great-grandfather also likes to join the fun, eager to play games with the kids.

“My grandma is teaching my 3-year-old daughter to prepare traditional Venezuelan dishes like arepas and empanadas. It’s so cute to see my daughter at the kitchen counter using her kid-safe knives,” says North, adding that the duo also loves to plant flowers together in the backyard.

The family’s tightly knit bond has been a source of strength, especially during challenging times. After losing her son during the COVID

pandemic, North’s grandmother found comfort and healing in the lively presence of her great-grandchildren.

“Seeing my grandparents bond with my kids feels surreal. It’s like reliving my own childhood memories because they used to do the same things with me. I feel incredibly blessed. I know it’s rare to have four generations together. They’re all my best friends.”



Three-year-old Camila North learns how to make “arepas” (Venezuela-style flatbreads) from her grandmother Nubia Meléndez, left, and her mother Genesis North.

“In other places, you might have to leave your community to feel connected. Here, connection is built into daily life.”

— Grace McKnight

One voice for Ave Maria

New civic group bridges gaps between residents and government

BY LARRY ELL

Ave Maria Sun Correspondent

Positive interaction between government officials and their constituents fosters trust, promotes civic engagement and leads to more effective governance. To those noble ends, the Ave Maria Civic Association (AMCA) was formed to be an informational and guiding resource for Ave Maria residents. As governments and their associated agencies grow and become challenging to navigate, it can be difficult for John Q. Public to find the right avenues to address their particular issues. The AMCA promises to provide effective communication to address pressing problems and concerns, while giving members a strong voice in the process.

“There was a lot of confusion and frustration on the part of the residents when they contacted an agency for questions and were told that it belongs to another agency,” said AMCA President Kevin Schang. “These residents are interested in Ave Maria and the surrounding areas and if they have issues, they can be steered to the right people.”

Collier County Commissioner Bill McDaniel came up with the idea of establishing a civic association that would enable the community to have access to governance and get answers to questions affecting their subdivisions. With the goal of acting as an umbrella group for a united discussion of community issues, McDaniel envisioned the AMCA as a necessary midpoint for a community of Ave Maria’s size, which has yet to reach the incorporation or municipality stage, but still needs a mechanism for addressing the needs of residents.

“As Ave Maria continues to grow, there is a need for the community to have a voice,” McDaniel said. “There are numerous subdivisions, and often there is no way to communicate between one subdivision and another. This way, communities can come together and know where to turn with questions.”

McDaniel has lived in Collier County for more than 44 years and was in the



KEVIN SCHANG/COURTESY PHOTOS

Ave Maria Civic Association Board members are pictured from left to right: Secretary Ronny Lambotte, Director Gayle Marie Grace, President Kevin Schang, Vice President Joe Cortina and Treasurer Jeff Plys.

boardroom in 2002 when the Board of County Commissioners approved the town of Ave Maria. It’s been an interesting and eventful evolution, sometimes fraught with the frustration that comes with multiple districts, jurisdictions and homeowners’ associations. So, the AMCA was implemented to become a centralized conduit for communication.

“By the time we got it formed I think we were up to eight or nine homeowners associations within Ave Maria each with its own set of rules,” McDaniel said. “So this specific association allows for the community to come together and focus on community issues.”

In the short time since its inception, AMCA has continued to generate momentum with nearly 70 residents getting involved. Several of the initiatives the association has delved into include the expansion of Naples Airport. The

AMCA passed a resolution earlier this year opposing the project and Commissioner McDaniel introduced it at the Collier County Board meeting. Also, the AMCA has been researching the environmental impact of wastewater concerns in Ave Maria and the surrounding area, along with working with the Ave Maria Master Association and the Collier County Sheriff to preach education to both parents and children about bicycle, electric scooter and golf cart traffic safety.

“Community reaction has been positive as many realize that they do have a voice in what goes on in the community, and issues and concerns can be brought to the forefront and be an avenue to get the attention of community leaders, builders and developers,” Schang said. “The liaison between the county and the residents is important for the education and understanding innerworkings of

the government and the fact that government works at a very, very slow pace.”

By listening to citizens’ concerns and ideas, officials can make informed decisions and develop policies that truly benefit the people they serve. This strengthens community relationships, encourages citizen participation, and builds a more responsive and accountable government. One of the key roles of the Ave Maria Civic Association is to build relationships with county government officials. By establishing strong lines of communication, the association is able to advocate on residents’ behalf.

“We spend a lot of time investigating misinformation on social media and rumors about inaccurate information that is usually the result of hearsay,” Schang said. “Many well-meaning residents sometimes jump the gun before all facts are in. Often, we confirm a lot of issues, data, stories, etc., and members know we try to give verified facts instead of opinions.”

As the AMCA continues to get its legs, it will keep advancing toward the goal of building transparency in government as an essential component of fostering trust and accountability. By providing citizens with access to information about government activities, transparency enables them to participate in the democratic process and ensures that government actions serve the public interest.

“Transparency forces accountability and I’ve been an advocate of transparency virtually all my life,” McDaniel said. “This association assists with that and brings an aggregated voice for the community to come together. It’s an opportunity for my constituents to be able to reach out and tell me what they think.”

“We strive to inform both members and elected officials about issues that are important to the community,” Schang said. “This gives our elected officials a better handle on what is of concern to their constituents.”

By working together, County officials, residents and the Ave Maria Civic Association can make a positive impact on the community and ensure that Ave Maria remains a great place to live. 🌞

GENERATIONS

From page 18

Having grandparents for neighbors

Jennifer and Francisco Rodriguez moved from Hollywood, FL, to Ave Maria in 2020.

“My first son, Liam, was starting kindergarten, and we felt that Ave Maria was a great neighborhood for families,” Jennifer said, adding that her second child, Giovanni, is now 6.

Drawn by the charm of a burgeoning community, the Rodriguezes were impressed by Ave Maria’s friendly atmosphere, where kids played freely in the streets and neighbors greeted each other warmly.

“When we first got here, we noticed children on bikes, people on golf carts and everyone enjoying their time,” Francisco recalls. “It felt welcoming right away.”

Their initial attraction to Ave Maria was further solidified when they discovered CC Homes in Maple Ridge. “We fell in love with it,” Francisco recalls. “The price was great. We signed the contract in November 2019, and



COURTESY PHOTOS

The North family, from left, Camila, Genesis, Liam, Lucas and William.

our dream home was ready in just six months.”

The Rodriguez family’s love for Ave Maria quickly influenced others. After visiting several times, Francisco’s parents, Nilda and Richard, decided to make the move in 2023. Leaving behind a Hollywood apartment, they custom-built the retirement home of their dreams just a short walk from their grandchildren.

“We share the same lake with my in-laws, so they live right across from us. We can see their house—it’s wonderful,” said Jennifer.

This close proximity has transformed their family life. They enjoy Sunday dinners together and rotate hosting holidays like Thanksgiving and Christmas. Jennifer and Francisco feel comfortable going out on date nights knowing that the

kids will be looked after by their doting grandparents.

“Even though my parents lived in Hollywood when we lived there, they were in an apartment, and you had to drive 20 minutes to go visit them. Plus, in Hollywood, you don’t see any kids biking and going to the neighbor’s house by themselves,” said Francisco. “Having my parents nearby has been a blessing. They get to build a strong bond with our kids, watch them grow and be a part of their daily lives. The kids get to see their grandparents whenever they want. It’s just like the old days, with neighbors and family always close by.”

Despite being away from the hustle and bustle of a bigger city, the Rodriguezes find Ave Maria anything but boring. They attend local festivals, visit parks, take the kids to the water park and enjoy nights out at OASIS The Kitchen Lounge. “People think they’ll miss the nightlife, but we realize now that we didn’t go out that much before. Here, we enjoy a healthier, less stressful lifestyle,” Francisco noted.

Jennifer agreed, “This move has been life changing. Our kids have real friends, we have strong family ties and the community feels like an extension of our family. Ave Maria isn’t just where we live—it’s where we belong.” 🌞

BIG KINDS OF SMALL TOWN FUN

Christmas in July



On Saturday, July 19, from noon to 5 p.m., Ave Maria's Town Center shops and restaurants gathered to celebrate a special time of year and spread some mid-summer Christmas cheer. Community members started their holiday shopping and celebrated early while supporting local businesses in Ave Maria! The town was filled with Christmas-themed décor, holiday-themed music, activities and entertainment, along with food and drinks. 🌟



1. Everyone wants to have their picture taken with the Clauses.

2. Fatima La Rocca at the Blue Options boutique.

3. Kelly Clinger and Mason Williams perform holiday songs.

4. Joe rang the bell for the Salvation Army.
5. Looking festive.

6. Danee Williams reports that Mrs. Claus is a regular shopper at The Secret Ingredient

7. Cannon Collins hopes to be a football hero one day.

8. Gracy Busch, Isabella Busch, Emma Fulmer and Carmen
- Lendman enjoying the cool golf cart at the Ave Maria Welcome Cente.

9. The Lorne family enjoys the Florida snowstorm.

10. Christopher and Juliana Gergely.

BIG KINDS OF SMALL TOWN FUN



- 11. Young and old enjoyed the Florida snow.
- 12. Kathleen Coppola helps display the raffle baskets.
- 13. Dava Hirsch and Monie Schulling have their holiday shopping in the bag.



SANDRA YEYATI / AVE MARIA SUN



ASSISTED LIVING | MEMORY CARE

AMERICAN HOUSE NAPLES COLLIER COUNTY, WE'RE GROWING!

Schedule a visit today!



YOUR TRUSTED SENIOR LIVING PROVIDER HAS A NEW LOCATION.

Since 1979, American House has been enriching the lives of our residents, their families and our team members. We've spent many years serving South Florida seniors, and our quality care continues with the opening of **American House Naples**. Our friendly, supportive atmosphere mingled with resort-style surroundings provide a sense of community and comfort to our residents. Daily maintenance-free living includes lively events and outings, premium amenities and the delightful flavors created by our culinary team.

Make our House your home! Come visit and see how beautiful senior living can be.

Call (239) 448-3301 to schedule a visit today!

AmericanHouse.com/Ave-Maria





Celebrating
Meat Loaf
NATIONAL SONG WRITER
bat out of halloween
Singer and Musician GILLES JOHNSON



OCTOBER 17

TREY KENNEDY PRESENTS
THE RELATABLE
TOUR



NOVEMBER 13

FLOYD NATION



"WISH YOU WERE HERE"
NOVEMBER 15

The Lolas
BURLESQUE SHOW



NOVEMBER 21

AUSTRALIA'S
THUNDER DOWN UNDER
TEMPTATION
TOUR 2025



DECEMBER 6

AMERICA'S TOP MEDIUM
MATT FRASER



DECEMBER 14



UNITY™ JOIN UNITY BY HARD ROCK TODAY!
IT'S FAST, FREE AND EASY TO JOIN

RECEIVE A LIMITED EDITION T-SHIRT & UP TO \$200 ON US!

EARN POINTS FOR GAMING, DINING, SHOPPING OR STAYING AT OVER 150 LOCATIONS.

TICKETS ON SALE NOW AT MOREINPARADISE.COM

PLAYERS' EDGE OFFER ONLY AVAILABLE TO NEW UNITY BY HARD ROCK MEMBERS. TOTAL ACTUAL LOSS UP TO \$200 IN FREE PLAY OFFER PAID IN TWO EACH EQUAL TO 50% OF YOUR TOTAL LOSS. AMOUNT REDEEMABLE OVER TWO VISITS. OFFER IS UP TO \$200 IN FREE PLAY ONLY. FIRST FREE PLAY OFFER WILL BE AUTO LOADED ONTO YOUR ACCOUNT WITHIN 7-10 DAYS OF PLAYING AT YOUR FAVORITE SLOT MACHINE. ONLY ACTUAL SLOT LOSSES ON SAME DAY OF ENROLLMENT WITH YOUR UNITY BY HARD ROCK CARD WILL BE INCLUDED IN TOTAL SLOT LOSS AMOUNT. MUST BE AT LEAST 21 YEARS OLD TO ATTEND INDOOR SHOWS. MUST BE AT LEAST 21 YEARS OLD TO PLAY SLOTS AND TABLE GAMES OR TO RECEIVE UNITY BENEFITS. IF YOU OR SOMEONE YOU KNOW HAS A GAMBLING PROBLEM, PLEASE CALL 1.888.ADMIT.IT



FREE ENTERTAINMENT WITH NO LAST CALL

ZAG
LOUNGE



HUMMER EV GIVEAWAY



IMAGE MAY NOT REPRESENT ACTUAL VEHICLE.

SUNDAY, AUGUST 31

GRAND PRIZE HUMMER | MIDNIGHT
+
WIN \$1,000 FREE PLAY
ONE WINNER EVERY HALF HOUR • 7:00PM - 11:30PM

THE MORE YOU PLAY THE MORE CHANCES YOU HAVE TO WIN.

**MINUTES AWAY
FROM MORE**



It takes a big kind of small town

Joy, hope and an unshakable faith endure as a family and town rally behind a young man’s remarkable resilience

BY GLENN MILLER

Ave Maria Sun Correspondent

A.J. De La Rosa’s life was dramatically altered in the backseat of a sedan speeding along Ave Maria Boulevard the night of March 11, 2023.

That’s when the car crashed and the Ave Maria University soccer player’s spine was crushed. He has not walked since.

“It’s the best thing that has happened in our lives,” A.J.’s father, Sam, said. “That’s kind of hard to understand, but at this point, we took that situation and turned it into a treasure. It’s turned into a blessing.”

On a summer afternoon, A.J. sat around the dining room table with his dad and his mom, Monica, talking about the accident, faith and family, food and hopes and dreams.

As A.J. sat at that table in his wheelchair, the former soccer player echoed his father.

“I say it’s the best thing that has ever happened to me because before the accident, I guess my faith wasn’t the best,” A.J. said.

Losing use of his legs strengthened his faith.

“I just feel like I’m next to the Holy Cross,” A.J. said. “It’s the simplest way I can say it.”

The diagnosis

Sam De La Rosa recalls vividly how A.J. was told about the paralysis. A doctor walked into his hospital room and showed an image of A.J.’s spine on a screen.

“He’s never going to walk again,” Sam said, quoting the doctor.

A.J. looked up at the doctor, not believing the worst.

“He kind of had a smirk and said, ‘Can you give me a percent?’” Sam said.

The doctor then said, according to Sam, “I’m sorry, son.”

A.J. was not deterred by his belief in recovery.

“He looked at the doctor and he said, ‘It doesn’t matter what you tell me because I believe in miracles,’” Sam said.

Anybody arriving at the De La Rosa home will likely notice a shiny metal ramp leading to the front door.

That’s a clear sign somebody in the house uses a wheelchair. That would be



MONICA DE LA ROSA / COURTESY PHOTOS

▲ Nigel, Frankie, Mariana, David, Monica, Sam, Ryan, AJ and Viviana. A.J. playing soccer for the AMU team. ►



A.J., who turned 22 on July 10. Two days after that, he married Viviana Ponce, a recent Ave Maria University graduate with a nursing degree.

Although his ability to walk may have ended on March 11, 2023, his life has continued, thanks in part to community and university support.

A.J. helps his dad and brothers operate Divine Pools, an Ave Maria-based pool cleaning service. The brothers are Nigel, 29, David, 20, and 17-year-old Ryan.

The paralysis changed much in A.J.’s life, but not his love of sports. He’s taken up adaptive golf and roots for his favorite South Florida sports teams, the Dolphins, Heat, Panthers, Marlins and Inter Miami.

The night of the accident began with an informal gathering of students at North Park.

“I wasn’t even invited,” A.J. said.

He was sitting outside his dorm hanging out when somebody suggested joining the gathering.

“I went over there and really didn’t like it,” A.J. said.

He wanted to leave and asked somebody for a lift. The person had a Tesla.

“I’ve never been in a Tesla,” A.J. said.

He got in. The driver sped away, reaching 97 miles per hour at one point, said A.J. Then, the crash.

“I wasn’t supposed to be in that car,” A.J. said.

Now, he’s in a wheelchair.

He’s persevered. The community has rallied.

Now, A.J.’s focus is on his bride and helping Divine Pools and golf. He has not returned to school.

No more school

He treasures his time at the university.

“You know every single person,” A.J. said. “You’re friends with every single person.”

That’s not all he received from campus.

“The love from everybody,” A.J. said.

But he was not academically inclined.

“I was never a big fan of school,” A.J. said. “I was there for soccer and hanging out with friends.”

A.J. still loves Ave Maria University (AMU).

“Before the accident, I used to tell them [mom and dad] that it is the best place ever,” A.J. said.

His parents warned him that his grades threatened his status as a student/athlete. Despite his academic standing, A.J. never wavered in his love for AMU.

“You guys don’t understand,” A.J. told his parents. “The best thing ever. I would spend a million dollars to come back here. I don’t care about money.”

The aftermath of the accident opened his parents’ eyes, said A.J.

“They finally understood,” A.J. said. “The community, the backing of the university. All the love from everybody.”

He singled out university president Mark Middendorf for praise. So did his parents.

His parents recall the compassion and attention A.J. received from Middendorf. Now, two and a half years later, they are still moved.

“He called us,” Sam said. “He spoke with A.J. after the accident, the morning after.”

Middendorf is impressed with A. J.

“It has been a privilege to know A. J. De La Rosa and witness his incredible faith,” Middendorf said. The university president’s call wasn’t a one-time event.

“He called me almost every day to help in any way,” Sam said.

“It just doesn’t happen,” Monica said. The family was touched.

“For the president, who is so busy, to be checking on A.J.,” Sam said.

It wasn’t only the president who cared. They’ve heard from people around town.

“To hear people say they pray a rosary for you every day for a long period of time,” Sam said. “Now I know the power of prayer.”

Moving to Ave Maria; moved by Ave Maria

At the time of the accident, Sam and Monica resided in Homestead. Sam played soccer at Miami Archbishop Carroll High School. They moved across the state even though A.J. did not continue in college.

They started Divine Pools. The sense of community convinced the De La

Rosa family to sink roots here and make it home.

“Everybody talks to each other,” Sam said. “You run into your customers on a weekly basis, whether it’s at Publix or a game or at the park. It’s nice to see them smiling and know that you’re helping them out, not just by cleaning their pool, but you’re cleaning the patio. You’re knocking down cobwebs.”

Meanwhile, in addition to working on his golf game, A.J. has spoken about his journey to churches, schools and on a couple of podcasts.

A.J. has always been an athlete, and golf is now his athletic outlet. He thought about taking up pickleball.

“I definitely could have played pickleball, but golf is forever,” A.J. said.

Soccer was his first sports love. A.J. said he started playing soccer around the age of 4 and then played at Archbishop Carroll High School in Miami.

His family’s Catholic faith, as well as his soccer skills and passion, steered him to AMU and its soccer program. He played for the university for two years.

“Then got into my accident,” A.J. said.

In the wake of the crash, A.J.’s mom and dad endured worrisome moments.

“Things are going through your mind,” Sam said. “Is he ever going to have kids? Is he going to find somebody to have a relationship with? A big family was something he always wanted. My wife said he’s going to find somebody. It’s going to be okay. Somebody with a heart that you know is pure. It’s someone who is looking past the physical attributes, looking past that.”

A.J. found Viviana.

Sam talked about her faith, humble nature, and liking simple things such as Monopoly.

“She can play that every night,” Sam said of his new daughter-in-law.

The newlyweds live with Sam and Monica in that house with the shiny metal ramp outside the front door.

A.J. may no longer be a soccer player, but he’s the same young man his parents have known and loved.

“He goes to sleep happy,” Sam said. “He wakes up happy. I keep waiting for a crash, and in two and a half years, there’s been no sign of any type of him being down or sad or having regret or remorse for anything that has happened. He’s as happy as the day it happened.” 🌟



A.J. playing soccer as a young boy.

Making a splash

Ave Maria Water Park thrives with new director's guidance

BY GLENN MILLER

Ave Maria Sun Correspondent

Kelly Hood sat at a table, steps away from one of the Ave Maria Water Park's two pools on a serene July morning.

It had been four months since she started working as the director of this beloved gem of Ave Maria's lifestyle, and it had also been three months since the renovated, resort-style facility reopened.

Children splashed in the pool. Parents sat under the shade, keeping an eye on their little ones.

It's been a busy time for Hood, who commutes to Ave Maria from her Lee County home. "I hired a ton of life-guards," she said. "When I first started, there were less than 10."

Now, the number of lifeguards is well into double figures. Most are young, either in high school or college.

They're needed because this is the busiest time of the year with children out of school.

Hood hasn't instituted massive changes to the water park, which has been an Ave Maria community fixture for 16 years.

She said the summer schedule kicked in on the first Tuesday of June.

"Right after school got out," Hood said.

That's when a full slate of swimming lessons began with the seven instructors on staff.

The park's focus is on fun, safety and recreation. Hood supervises everything. "Every so often I give lessons, but

more frequently I just oversee them.”

The focus is not on building competitors. The water park is not part of USA Swimming, which oversees competitive programs and meets in the country.

At the water park, which is next to the community's northernmost recreation complex, North Park, the focus is on the basics, not winning medals. The children learn basic strokes and advance to what is called "progressive swimming."

What does that term mean?

"Progressive swim team means that we're still teaching the basics of stroke, and we're adding in elements of endurance," Hood explained. "This entails swimming full lengths of the pool. They're working on moving towards a competition level, though they're not there yet."

Hood said the age range of students learning about swimming is from 6 to 16. To advance to the progressive level, they must meet certain standards.

"The minimum requirements would be that they can swim 25 yards of front crawl and 25 yards of backstroke."

Hood said one of the park's two pools is designated for fitness and the other for activity. The park also features two water slides, which are easily visible as motor-



GLENN MILLER / AVE MARIA SUN

Kelly Hood, aquatics director.

ists approach the park along Ave Maria Boulevard.

But the names of the pools are essentially interchangeable.

"They're both recreational," Hood

said. "It's just that one has more stuff for kids to do."

There is a basketball hoop in one of the pools and residents also play informal water volleyball games.

The pool length is 25 yards one way and is open to adult swimmers interested in fitness.

"You get people of all ages coming in, so we get many lap swimmers," Hood added that the Ave Maria University (AMU) swim team uses the pool. The water park's staff does not instruct the collegiate team.

"They just use the facility," Hood said. "They provide their own coaches. They do their own program."

Another local school may, at some point, use the water park.

"We are also trying to see about Rhodora J. Donahue Academy using the complex," Hood said.

That has not been finalized yet, but if it happens, the water park's relationship with Donahue Academy will likely be the same as the one with the university.

"They would provide their own coach," Hood said.

But the Water Park will provide the water, as it has done for Ave Maria residents and their guests for more years to come. 🌻



OAR & IRON™
RAW BAR & GRILL

Summer Specials
Daily Specials Available
All Summer Long!

More For Monday
Earn double loyalty points!

\$5 Taco Tuesday
\$5 Taco menu

Wine Down Wednesday
Discounted wines 5pm-Close

Thirsty Thursday
\$10 cocktails, \$6 wine, \$5 beer

Fish Fridays
Fish & chips for \$15

Social Hour Saturday
Select food & drink menu

Smash Burger Sunday
Smash burger & fries for \$10

Sun-Thurs 11:30am - 9pm • Fri-Sat 11:30am - 10pm
8850 Founders Square Dr • 239.427.3335 • oarandiron.com





GOLF CARTS

FIND THE BEST ELECTRIC CART TODAY



EPIC E40L



EPIC FX60



ICON I40

 239-598-3130
  ZACHARY@HIOGC.COM

NEW & USED CART SALES | SERVICE | RENTALS
BATTERIES | TIRES & WHEELS | ACCESSORIES

WWW.HOLEINONEGOLFCARTS.COM

BIG KINDS OF SMALL TOWN FUN

Summer camps in Ave Maria



This summer, young athletes in Ave Maria stayed active and sharpened their skills at a variety of local sports camps. The National Golf & Country Club hosted a Youth Racquet Sports Camp, where kids learned tennis, pickleball and bocce ball fundamentals with certified coaches. Meanwhile, the Ave Maria Athletic Department offered 10 different camps covering football, volleyball, basketball, strength and athleticism for students ranging from first grade to junior college. From courts to conditioning, it was a season full of teamwork, training and summer fun. 🌞



1. A camper training for deadlifts at the Strength and Conditioning Camp.
2. The Basketball Camp, coached by Jamon Copeland and Paul Matthews, help kids with technique, run drills and spark a love for the sport.
3. A young camper is training with dumbbells.
4. Coach Jess Copeland trained campers on strength and form during the summer camp.
5. Campers using dumbbells to work on chest presses.
6. Coach Jamon Copeland trained campers on strength and conditioning exercises.
7. Basketball players practice their shooting during a game.
8. Enthusiastic campers show their love for basketball as they practice dribbling with the ball with smiling faces.



Certified coaches guided campers through hands-on instruction in tennis, pickleball, and bocce during The National's summer racquet sports camp.

BIG KINDS OF SMALL TOWN FUN



Young athletes take to the courts during the Youth Racquet Sports Camp at The National, where they practiced tennis under the summer sun.



A camper focuses on form during a tennis drill at The National's Youth Racquet Sports Camp, led by certified coaches.



ERICA FISH / AVE MARIA SUN

Paddles, play and progress

New additions at North Park spark joy, fitness and connection

BY GLENN MILLER

Ave Maria Sun Correspondent

Ave Maria residents Mike and Matt Metzger drove a golf cart recently into North Park on a sunny summer morning to check out the upgrades.

The brothers are originally from Indianapolis but now call Ave Maria home, and we're eager to see that the park has been enhanced with pickleball courts and a new baseball field designed for Little League.

Although they don't play pickleball and at 69, Mike, and 52, Matt, the men are too old for Little League, they wanted to see for themselves the changes being wrought.

"We wanted to see it," said Mike, a retired grade-school teacher.

They liked what they saw. On the July morning of their visit, workers were busy all over the park, taking care of the countless details, such as landscaping and a better drainage system, that go into making a park a welcoming place.

The brothers parked the cart near the pickleball courts and beyond the left-field wall of one of the baseball fields and surveyed the place.

"It's great," Mike said, glancing around. "It looks like it's ready to go."

The park will likely be humming like never before. More opportunities for pickleball and everything else.

That includes a better drainage system, new sod for fields and refurbished infields. The tot lot for young children is also improved.

These upgrades to North Park are yet another example of what makes Ave Maria a special place that is always getting more



COURTESY PHOTO



GLENN MILLER / AVE MARIA SUN

Mike and Matt Metzger.

special for residents such as Jim Walwalc.

"I think it's the closest thing to utopian paradise," said Walwalc, a resident for more than two years and an avid pickleball player.

The man overseeing recreational activities in town is Parks and Recreation Manager Joe Lampkin, who detailed some of the upgrades to the park in another telephone interview.

Those include new grass for baseball fields with a warning track along the outfield fences. New light poles have been installed as well as a batting cage.

Lampkin described the pickleball courts as "nice, blue, navy blue and light blue."

Most of the work was expected to be completed in early August, and the Little

League fields should be completed in September.

The improved facilities could bring more sports events and visitors to Ave Maria.

"It gives us opportunities to host tournaments for baseball and softball leagues," Lampkin said.

A dozen pickleball courts could also lure friends, families and other guests of Ave Maria residents to town to play, dine in local restaurants and shop in local stores. Walwalc is also a promoter of pickleball and what it can do to enhance the quality of life of residents.

"The reason being is that a lot of people exercise their mind," Walwalc said. "They'll play chess, play games, but they're



COURTESY PHOTO

not exercising their bodies."

He believes that pickleball players exercise their minds and bodies while playing by analyzing their opponents' shots and angles and determining how to counter them.

"Your mind and body (work) at the same time every time the ball is in play," he said.

But there is another reason to play pickleball, Walwalc believes.

"People play for community," he said. "Community is probably the No. 1 reason why people play. They play for exercise, fitness and they also play because it's very competitive, and it's so much fun."

That sense of community is now enhanced at North Park with more pickleball courts. As well as the fields devoted to soccer, baseball, softball and so much more. 🌟

We are local, national *and global*

Founded in 1958, John R. Wood Christie's International Real Estate is Southwest Florida's oldest major real estate brokerage. Family owned and operated, it is a nationally recognized company with more than 65 years of market experience and broad international exposure.



CHRISTIE'S
INTERNATIONAL REAL ESTATE

THE UNRIVALED LEADER IN REAL ESTATE

Family owned and operated since 1958

Contact us to market your home today | JohnRWood.com | (239) 262-1900