



COURTESY PHOTO

Run or walk to help provide school supplies for Immokalee

BY CINDY PIERCE

Ave Maria Sun Editor

The Lipman 5K Run/Walk for Backpacks returns to Ave Maria for the third year Saturday, April 1. The family-friendly race raises funds for the purchase of backpacks, bicycles, shoes and other back-to-school necessities that will be distributed to Immokalee students at Lipman Family Farms' 13th annual Backpack Giveaway just before the new school year starts in August.

"We had our best race last year and fully expect to have an even better one this year," says Jaime Weisinger, director of community and government relations for Lipman Family Farms. More than 400 participants helped raise more than \$80,000 at the 2022 event, she adds, which allowed for more than 2,000 backpacks, 200-plus bicycles and \$10,000 in gift cards to be distributed at the Backpack Giveaway.

New to this year's Backpack Giveaway, a team from Healthcare Network of SWFL will provide medical exams and vaccinations, all for free, for anyone in need. Dozens of other area nonprofit organizations will be on hand with information about the services they provide.

But back to the 5K Run/Walk for Backpacks.

Serious runners, weekend joggers and families with kids of all ages are invited to run/walk the race course that starts at Annunciation Circle and winds its way around the lakes of Ave Maria. Trophies will be awarded for the 5K winners in the following categories: Top Male/Female Overall and Top Male/Female ages 10 and under, 11-15, 16-20, 21-25, 26-30, 31-35, 36-40, 41-45, 46-50, 51-55, 56-60, and 61 years and older.

SEE 5K, A11 ►

TASTE of AVE

Inaugural
event
showcases
so much to
love about
the town



AMELIA CONTE / AVE MARIA SUN

BY ERICA FISH

Ave Maria Sun Correspondent

Laughter, sizzles, sips and guitar strokes ruled the day at the inaugural Taste of Ave, kicking off the town's 2023 season of events. Residents and visitors experienced the flavors, trends and activities that are the hometown vibes of this Southwest Florida borough known for its never-end-

ing engagement.

The day planned by Ave Maria's development team and businesses produced a hive of activity in the Town Center as a variety of fun and foods gave eventgoers the chance to experience what defines this town's history, impact and successes. One goal, according to Donna Marquez, event coordinator for Ave Maria Development, was for attendees to feel the togetherness the townspeople create during times of celebration. Consider that accomplished.

SEE TASTE, A24 ►



ABOVE: OASIS The Kitchen Lounge was recently named one of the top New and Best Restaurants in Southwest Florida by the Naples Daily News. **LEFT:** Vicky Bakery, opening late this summer in the Town Center, served a taste of what's to come.

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5K, 10K
and
marathon
runners hit
the streets.
A14 ►



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Ave Maria Sun

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From date night to every night, Ave Maria restaurants cater to romance and community

BY Nanci Theoret
Ave Maria Sun Correspondent

Arrive as a couple at OASIS The Kitchen Lounge and you'll likely be seated in the VIP room, a cozy space where hanging plants and the twinkling glow of basket chandeliers create an enchanting romantic setting. Those dining à deux at The Pub & Grill enjoy the quiet ambiance of the patio overlooking the fountain's dancing waters or in the dimly lit environs of the "dating room," so called for its tables for two.

Date night is done right at Ave Maria, which also offers idyllic outdoor destinations for sunset picnics along a lake and slow dancing in broad daylight courtesy of musicians performing every Tuesday and Saturday from 11 a.m. to 2 p.m. in Town Center locations through season.

Lozano's Mexican Restaurant is a go-to hangout for couples, especially for live music by Mr. Coco on Thursdays through Saturdays, and \$2 margaritas on Mondays. Families and patrons of all ages also find something to enjoy there, including family games and movies on Wednesdays.

General manager Mike Bennett says the most popular dishes at The Pub include the shareable crispy calamari appetizer and the Venetian penne pasta, the latter featuring



AMELIA CONTE / AVE MARIA SUN

Date night at Lozanos often includes a pair of margaritas.

mushrooms, fresh basil and a choice of grilled chicken, salmon or shrimp in creamy tomato sauce. He suggests ending the night on a sweet note by sharing a slice of Florida mango cake, a carrot cake-like confection with mangoes from the Immokalee farmers market and cream cheese frosting. Mangoes also star in the slow accompanying the restaurant's coconut shrimp.

At OASIS, couples tend to select the sam-

pler platter for starters, offering a taste of the restaurant's signature jumbo wings, homemade beef and chicken empanadas and three-cheese stuffed tequeños. Date-worthy entrées include osso buco and pistachio-crusted grouper topped with citrus beurre blanc.

"People enjoy the atmosphere which is breathtaking and quite different," says Phong

SEE DATE NIGHT, A4 ►

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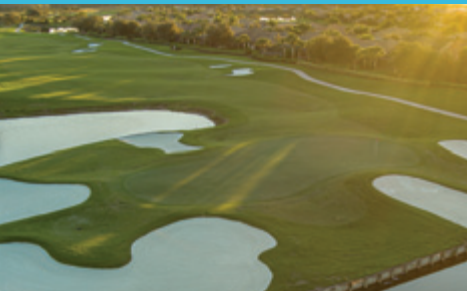
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“We’re really about keeping it local. We want Ave Maria to grow, and we know a rising tide floats all boats.” — **Daneé Williams**, Oil Well Craft Beer co-owner

DATE NIGHT

From page 2

Ho, co-owner of the restaurant that celebrated its first anniversary March 10. “The ambiance and mood are unique.”

Restaurants at Ave Maria also cater to family, friends and nights out with the girls and guys, offering things like games, karaoke and comedy nights, and themed ’70s and ’80s parties that bring out the dancing queen in even the most-reserved patron while providing an antidote for those ailing from disco or boogie fever. Owners and managers advise checking websites or Facebook for the latest information about special events.

Known for its live music scene and genre-defying mashup of country, classic rock and jazz, The Pub is the home stage of the Back Country Boys, an Ave Maria-based band fronted by the owner’s son. It also offers Friday night karaoke every few months and is hosting an encore Motown performance in April (it was a huge hit during the holidays), Mother’s Day brunch and the third-annual Memorial Day weekend luau Saturday, May 27, featuring facepainting and a Hawaiian menu of kabobs and Spam-fried rice.

OASIS hosts comedy nights, wine pairings and Miami-based DJs on occasion.

If it’s the first Saturday of the month, expect a rowdy crowd at Oil Well Craft Beer’s (OWCB) wildly popular Savage Bingo as winners steal prizes like T-shirts, glasses, free drinks and candles. The brewery also hosts trivia nights the third Monday of each month, with the most recent filling to capacity, says

co-owner Daneé Williams.

OWCB also offers monthly brew and paint parties (no set date) and family-friendly first Friday celebrations every other month. It’s also the hotspot for a journey back to the ’70s and ’80s, Latin nights and karaoke.

Ave Maria’s restaurants have earned a loyal following by offering great food, signature drinks, date night destinations and other special events. There’s also an overall atmosphere of conviviality, with each establishment ready to help the other in a pinch (Ms. Williams says The Pub rescued OWCB after a food truck failed to show, and the brewery has partnered with OASIS, trading bartenders for a day).

“We’re really about keeping it local,” she says. “We want Ave Maria to grow, and we know a rising tide floats all boats.”

Sip, sip hooray

Toast to a night on the town or an ordinary weekday with a signature violet-tinged concoction, an ice-cold draft from tap No. 18 or a smoothie-centric pomegranate pleasure. Restaurants in Ave Maria cater to the cocktail and craft beer crowd.

OWCB’s Well Water lager— always on tap No. 18 — is the No. 1 choice, says Ms. Williams, who co-owns the beloved hangout with husband, Matt, and her in-laws. She describes Well Water lager as reminiscent of macro-brewed Bud Light “but brewed with better ingredients and so much better for you.”

The lager is also the perfect accompaniment for spicy menu items from Latin and Creole food trucks that roll into town for special events and pairs well with OWCB’s popular sub sandwiches.

Some cocktail connoisseurs gravitate to the



COURTESY PHOTOS
ABOVE: Savage Bingo always draws a crowd at Oil Well Craft Beer.



ABOVE RIGHT: Lavender Lemonade is a popular cocktail at The Pub & Grill.



RIGHT: Date night at The Pub & Grill often ends with a shared slice of mango cake.

Empress gin-spiked Lavender Lemonade and 007-worthy vodka martinis at The Pub, while others prefer the Pomegranate Pleasure, a smoothie mixed with vodka that’s a bestseller at OASIS, according to Mr. Ho. 🌻



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Meet a Townmaker: Tom DiFlorio goes from enforcing the law in Philly to making Ave Maria a better place for all

BY SANDRA YEYATI

Ave Maria Sun Correspondent

Tom DiFlorio retired from a 25-year career as a patrol officer in Philadelphia to move to Ave Maria in 2009 with his wife Carol and toddler Danielle, fulfilling a promise he made when he proposed to his Jamaican bride in 2000: One day, they would leave the cold winters behind and create a new life in sunny Florida.

“When we first visited Ave Maria, it reminded me of when I was a kid growing up in Philly,” Mr. DiFlorio recalls. “Kids were out playing, shooting hoops, riding skateboards and running around the wide open green spaces.”

Philadelphia had toughened since his idyllic childhood, he shares. The streets had become dangerous. “We’d come home from school and work, lock the doors and not go out until the next day. Here in Ave, my daughter could come home, do her homework and then go out to play with her friends until we called her in for dinner. It was just like when I grew up,” he says.

The DiFlorios found Ave Maria in a round-about way after a Google search for the song by the same name. Music is a big part of their lives. Mrs. DiFlorio sang in church, performed in bands and even recorded a few songs. As a teenager, Mr. DiFlorio played

guitar and saxophone for a band called The Instrumentals. “When I moved here, I still had a lot of music equipment, and a friend of mine asked me to play some music at an anniversary party — that’s how my deejay business started,” he says.

Through his company, TCB Mobile Entertainment, Mr. DiFlorio has become the professional deejay of choice around town. He runs trivia nights, music bingo and karaoke at Oil Well Craft Beer; entertains folks on New Year’s Eve at The Club at Del Webb; and livens festivals and community celebrations in the Town Center, at the Water Park and other public venues. He also plays at weddings and corporate events all over Southwest Florida for a company called A DJ With Class. His wife often comes along to emcee.

Many people are shocked to learn that Mr. DiFlorio was a policeman for more than two decades. They just assume he’s been spinning records all his life. Part of his business plan includes charitable deejay appearances to benefit the Ave Maria Parish and Donahue Academy, which his daughter attended throughout grade school and high school. For more than a decade, he has provided music at church picnics and all of the school’s dances and events.

Mr. DiFlorio was one of the most involved parents the academy has ever seen. “I volun-

“When we first visited Ave Maria, it reminded me of when I was a kid growing up in Philly. Kids were out playing, shooting hoops, riding skateboards and running around the wide open green spaces.”



COURTESY PHOTO

Tom DiFlorio moved to Ave Maria in 2009 with his wife and young daughter.

teered for 12 years at Donahue from day one,” he says. “Every parent was required to have 25 hours of volunteer work. I had 200 a year. When my friend was the gym teacher, I’d go down there two or three days a week and help him out with the younger kids in the classes. I did whatever was needed.”

Since its inception, Mr. DiFlorio was part of the core committee that organized the annual Sunshine State Steak Cook-Off to raise money for the school. He was in charge of the live entertainment, permitting, security and other logistics. It was a colossal undertaking, and now that the Donahue Academy has ceded its role, Mr. DiFlorio has joined a new committee to keep the popular event going and growing.

In 2010, just one year after moving here,

Barron Collier Companies asked Mr. DiFlorio to join the Ave Maria Stewardship Community District (AMSCD). He was the first resident appointed to the five-member board and has served in that position ever since. The seat is now an elected position. He ran unopposed last August and is currently serving a four-year term.

Meeting monthly, the AMSCD accepts bids from vendors and makes decisions about public roadways, irrigation and landscaping improvements. Mr. DiFlorio takes his role seriously. “It’s good for a resident to be on the board, because we’re making decisions on the budget, and it’s our tax money that funds these projects,” he says. “They’ve just done a lot of tree and plant replacement along Ave Maria Boulevard. That was brought to us as a presentation. We voted to move forward and then got to pick a vendor to do the work from submitted bids.”

Mr. DiFlorio isn’t afraid to get involved and work to improve the community. He even served as a community patrolman for about 18 months in collaboration with the Collier County Sheriff’s Office. “I’m just trying to stay busy and, you know, stay young,” he jokes. “I’m not a golfer, so I have to occupy my mind somewhere else. Ave Maria is a good town with a lot of good people. I just enjoy this place, and I love to give back whenever I can.”

Speaking like a founding father of the town, he says, “It’s a lot different now than in the early days. When we moved here, Publix had just opened up. There was one restaurant. The growth has been amazing. So much has changed, and it seems like it was overnight, but I love it. The more, the faster, the better, because when more people move in, we’re going to get more services, more restaurants and more fun things to do.” 🌻



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Mercato at Ave brings local shoppers and vendors together

BY SANDRA YEYATI
Ave Maria Sun Correspondent

When Mercato at Ave co-owners Reina Del Mar and Jorge Arroyo cut the grand opening ribbon on Saturday, March 4, the doors opened on a new era in local commerce and entertainment. Accommodating 15 distinct businesses, the trendy marketplace is divided into kiosks Ms. Del Mar calls “casitas,” which in Spanish means “little homes.”

Featuring rustic wood accents, artsy signage and pendant lighting, the layout and decor resembles the vibe of Hoja de Menta, the couple’s fashion boutique two doors down. Local entrepreneurs rented every spot in just three days, and a long waiting list of others underscores the interest and need for this kind of retail space in the town.

On a stage outside, Latin party band BailaNow greeted shoppers entering the 2,660-square-foot market in the retail center behind Publix. Champagne corks popped and shopkeepers beamed as they displayed their wares and celebrated the realization of their small-business dreams. Many are Latin American immigrants, and they all live right here in Ave Maria.

Their products include eco-friendly candles, handmade purses by indigenous Colombian women, haircare products, quality perfumes, home décor, high-end jewelry and designer sneakers. Other merchants offer services like clothing alterations, jewelry and watch repair, dry cleaning and event planning. A UPS/FedEx counter will soon join the mix.

Indoor and outdoor seating is available for patrons to enjoy tasty treats such as smoothies, protein waffles and donuts, energy drinks,



Reina Del Mar cuts the grand opening ribbon with her husband, Jorge Arroyo, by her side. Cheering them on are members of the Immokalee Chamber of Commerce.

cookies and cakes, gelato popsicles and açai bowls. The Empanada Boutique serves savory, meat-filled pastries from Argentina, Bolivia and Colombia, as well as beer, wine, espresso and cappuccino. At the Stay & Play kiosk, kids can play games, learn crafts and make new friends under the supervision of a certified teacher.

There are two stages for live entertainment. Inside, the flatbed of a red pickup truck is an

SEE MERCATO, A8 ►

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Madi Kidder scoops ice cream at Mini Meltz.

SANDRA YEYATI / AVE MARIA SUN



Luis Fiol and Luis Parra serve customers at the Empanada Boutique.

MERCATO

From page 6

elevated spot for a singer and musician; the patio has room for a band plus several tables and chairs under cover of umbrellas for socializing. A kiosk outside provides kiddie rides on animal-shaped electric vehicles. Family games and other surprises are in the works to create a unique and engaging store front.

Ms. Del Mar, who is originally from Puerto Rico, believes Mercato at Ave will bring a Latin flavor to the community. “The majority of the time, the music here will be Latin, but we will have a variety of music,” she says. “We’re adding to the great places like The Pub, OASIS The Kitchen Lounge and Oil Well Craft Beer where residents love to bring their visitors and where

tourists can hang out, too.”

Phil Stocton, co-owner of Meltz ice cream shop in the Town Center, is excited to be selling snow cones and ice cream from a spot called Mini Meltz at Mercato at Ave.

“Reina and Jorge have their pulse on what people want to do and what we need in Ave, and I think their Mercato is going to an amazing place for fun and shopping,” Mr. Stocton says. “Their vision is to give owners of small businesses a way to market their products and services. Some people cannot afford the rent or can’t open a store because of limited retail space, so this is a way they can get their goods and services out to the public. Reina and Jorge started at the farmers market, and then they moved into a shop, and now they’re opening a second business. Maybe this Mercato will allow others to take their businesses to the next level, too. Plus, we need these businesses. There’s a

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BailaNow party band delivers high-energy Latin music on grand opening day.



Venezuelan seamstress Sonia Tello of Alterations USA has 30 years' experience altering and repairing all types of clothing, from wedding dresses to men's suits.

lot of things at Mercato that people have had to travel outside of Ave for that now they can get here under one roof.”

Ms. Del Mar and Mr. Arroyo were visibly moved, wiping tears of joy as they witnessed the hustle and bustle of grand opening day.

“It’s been a roller coaster, physically and mentally, because we built everything from a blank canvas,” Ms. Del Mar says. “But now, our baby is born, and watching all the residents supporting the locals is very gratifying. The cash registers are ringing!”

Open Tuesday through Sunday from 10 a.m. to 7 p.m., Mercato at Ave is at 5052 Pope John Paul II Blvd., Suite 102. For more information and event updates, visit the Instagram page @mercatoatave or www.mercatoatave.com. 🌟



ABOVE: Pure Beauty co-owners Dequila Davilmar and Marianne Pierre offer haircare products and accessories for all hair types.

RIGHT: Florangel Garcia, co-owners Fanexis Garcia and Ediver Barboza, and Andrea Barboza of Perfumesandrea, a purveyor of quality perfumes.



SANDRA YEVATI / AVE MARIA SUN

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FUN AROUND THE TOWN

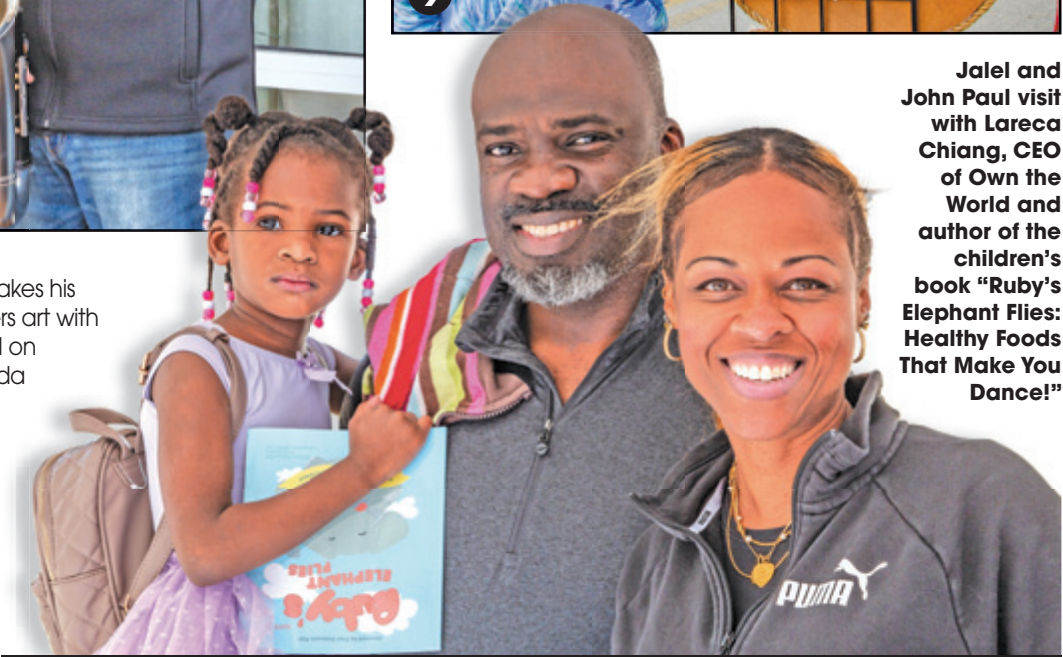
The 2023 Ave Maria Arts & Crafts Festival



SANDRA YEYATI / AVE MARIA SUN
(EXCEPT WHERE NOTED)

1. Jevon Olea, Alex Raecke, Gaston Sanchez, Santiago Herrera, Sebastian Mercader, JC Muñoz and Danny Abouekde are members of Vintage Vices, a Miami-based Porsche club.
2. Craig Kelly came from Port Charlotte to sell his handcrafted shell frogs.
3. Monica Cervera of Vikaas Art
4. Marlon and Candyz Forrester, owners of Eat 239, a catering and events company, display their candied apples and bread pudding.
5. Ken Adams of Oh Wow showcases his hand-poured candles made of 100 percent soy wax
6. Photo by Amelia Conte / Ave Maria Sun
7. Joe and Nancy Sustersic of Trades of Hope, a fair-trade company that empowers women worldwide to overcome poverty, human trafficking and other abuses.
8. Jim Blackburn provided a smooth jazz vibe.

9. Scott Kufske makes his Shells for Shelters art with shells collected on Southwest Florida beaches and donates his sales proceeds to Gulf Coast Humane Society and Animal Guardians of Florida.



Jalel and John Paul visit with Lareca Chiang, CEO of Own the World and author of the children's book "Ruby's Elephant Flies: Healthy Foods That Make You Dance!"

5K

From page 1

An award will also be presented for Best Decorated Stroller, with the winner receiving tickets to the Golisano Children’s Museum of Naples, so load up the little ones and make the morning a family affair.

In addition, there will be a 1-mile walking course for all ages and abilities (pets welcome, too) and a free fun run for ages 10 and younger.

Registration for the 5K and/or the mile walk is \$30 for adults, \$25 for students (ages 6-22) and \$25 per person when more than one is registered at the same time. Same-day registration opens at 6:30 a.m. on race day; scan the QR code to register through 5 p.m. Friday, March 31. As of press time, more than 100 people ages 9 to 72 have signed up online.



Pre-race packet pickup is available through 5 p.m. Friday, March 31, at Lipman Family Farms, 315 E. New Market Road in Immokalee.

Those who can’t participate in person on race day are encouraged to compete virtually from anywhere. Simply run 3.1 miles on your own course and post your results at the above website.

Sponsorship opportunities abound for individuals and businesses who want to support the cause. Sponsors to date include: Healthcare Network of SWFL, Morgan Stanley, Hole Mon-



COURTESY PHOTOS

The fun run proves to be a big hit with the 10-and-under crowd. These photos are from 2022.

tes, Ave Maria Mutual Funds, Gargiulo Farms, WestRock, GL Homes, Ave Maria Development, Interagro and PNC Bank. Visit www.lipmanfamilyfarms.com for information about how to become a sponsor.

There are also numerous volunteer opportunities for both the 5K Run/Walk for Backpacks and the Backpack Giveaway event, especially for the latter in early August. For more information

about lending your time and talent, call Maria Munguia at Lipman Family Farms, 239-657-4421, or email Maria.Munguia@lipmanfamilyfarms.com.

Finally, anyone can go to www.lipmanfamilyfarms.com and donate any amount to add to the coffers and help Lipman purchase much-needed backpacks and school supplies to fill them for the Backpack Giveaway. 🌻



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The National now offering social memberships to single-family homebuyers

BY Nanci Theoret
Ave Maria Sun Correspondent

With amenities under construction at The National Golf & Country Club at Ave Maria, builder and developer Lennar has introduced social memberships for homebuyers who purchase single-family executive and estate homes. The non-golf memberships give residents exclusive access to the future fitness center and clubhouse’s many planned amenities, including a resort-inspired pool, fine and casual dining, a tiki hut, pickleball and Har-Tru tennis courts and social events.

“Many homebuyers want the country club feel of living in the community but they’re not golfers,” says Scott Schilling, area sales manager for the national builder. “This is a new opportunity from Lennar for single-family buyers to enjoy all the social aspects and amenities of the country club besides golf.”

Lennar offers nine one- and two-story executive and estate floor plans in The National, with lakefront homesites available. The single-family homes boast modern coastal architecture and feature three to five bedrooms, two to four bathrooms and 1,850 to 3,473 square feet under air. Executive homes are priced from the upper \$400,000s; estate homes start in the low \$600,000s.

Mr. Schilling says sales in The National have been strong this winter season as Ave Maria, ranked the 18th fastest-selling master-planned community in the country, continues to attract new homebuyers. “Buyers like that The National has 24-hour manned security, a country club lifestyle and all these great amenities to come,” he adds. “People really like the small town feel of Ave Maria, and with all the new businesses and restaurants in the Town Center, they don’t have to leave town.”

As they open in The National during the next two years or so, the community’s planned amenities will entice residents to stay close to home. Lennar recently completed the golf club’s pro shop and golf cart barn. The championship Gordon Lewis-designed 18-hole golf course opened in January 2021 and features one of Southwest Florida’s longest par-five and shortest par-three holes.

Excitement is also building with the onset of clubhouse construction. The building will feature a fitness center with state-of-the-art facilities and saunas, a pool, a poolside bar and grill, a salon and wellness spa and lighted sports courts along a large lake.

The golf course and lakes provide the background for The National’s nearly 1,300 homes, which also include bundled-golf multifamily coach homes and terrace and veranda condominiums. Lennar has started construction of private pools for each multifamily neighborhood, Mr. Schilling says.

Eleven designer-furnished model homes showcase the range of buying opportunities in The National, where lawncare for all homes lends to a low-maintenance, lock-and-leave lifestyle. Models are open daily for viewing, highlighting open-concept floor plans and the premier builder’s Everything’s



COURTESY PHOTOS

A rendering of the entry to The National at Ave Maria.



The two-bedroom, two-bath Arabella II is the largest of three veranda condominium floorplans that are available in two-story buildings.



Included program that offers the latest energy-saving features and luxury upgrades.

Models include the ground-floor Birkdale, one of three terrace condominium floor plans, each featuring two bedrooms, two baths and up to 1,301 square feet of living space. The model has a serene neutral palette of light and darker grays, soft whites and sand tones and painted shiplap treatments

accenting the great room ceiling and the bed wall in the owner’s suite. The open floor plan blends the great room with the kitchen, which has a large island, and the adjoining dining area in a sun-filled corner. Sliding glass doors flow to the paver-finished lanai overlooking the golf course and a large lake. Terrace homes, starting in the high \$200,000s, are in four-story buildings with

30 residences each.

With 1,569 square feet, the Arabella II, a two-bedroom, two-bath veranda condominium, is the largest of three floor plans available in two-story buildings. Tile flooring installed on an angle enhances the openness between the kitchen, dining and great rooms, as do beige backgrounds paired with ebony and ivory. The ground-floor model



The two-story Bay Creek coach home has three bedrooms and two baths in 2,110 square feet of living space.





TOP AND ABOVE: The Birkdale is one of three terrace condominium floorplans available in four-story buildings and starting in the high \$200,000s.

TOP AND ABOVE: The Bougainvillea II is an estate home in The National that has three bedrooms plus a den, three bathrooms and a formal dining room.

offers stainless steel kitchen appliances and a breakfast bar island. Veranda homes feature lanais and start in the low \$300,000s.

Representing The National's coach homes, introduced a year ago and starting in the upper \$300,000s, the Bay Creek model features a second-floor aerie enjoyed from a large lanai offering space for alfresco dining

and sitting areas. The largest of two floor plans, it offers three bedrooms, two baths, 2,110 square feet of living space and a two-car garage. Its generous open floor plan easily accommodates a sectional sofa with a chaise in the living room, a dedicated dining room and a large kitchen island with seating for four. Shades of white and gray are carried

throughout the model. Coach homes feature four residences per building.

Single-family homebuyers can also view the Bougainvillea II, an estate home offering three bedrooms, three baths, a den and formal dining room. The model features wood-look plank tile flooring and light beige tones complemented by dark cabinetry in the kitchen

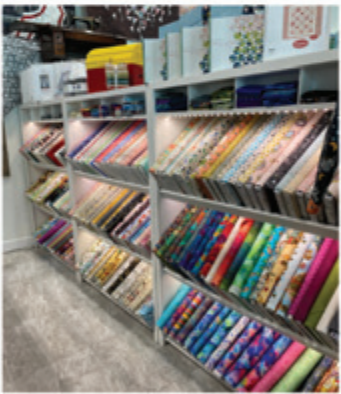
and the tiled owner's bathroom. Bay windows welcome natural light in the owner's bedroom and the breakfast nook adjoining the kitchen and great room. A large lanai offers destinations for dining and gathering.

To learn more, call 877-455-3662 or visit www.lennarswfl.com/lp/the-national-at-ave-maria/.





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FUN AROUND THE TOWN

Get ready, get set, go! The 2023 Ave Maria Marathon



- 1. Start of the 10K race
- 2. Michiganders Brenda Tally (5K), Curt Fenland (half marathon) and Collie Yan (5K)
- 3. Silverwood resident Benigno Sandoval with daughters Sarah and Yasely
- 4. Almost to the 5K finish line
- 5. Sarah Williams of Key West, the fastest female in the half marathon with a time of 1:45:50
- 6. Waiting for the start
- 7. Ave Maria residents Agnes Hernandez, Sheila and Bob Sommerville and Debbie Morrisette cheering on their friend Bill Boice in the 5K
- 8. Salvatore Vasile, 68, from Ave Maria, and Heinrich Theuretzbacher, 78, of Cape Coral, after completing the half marathon
- 9. Tommy Struzzieri, Alpha Win race director

SANDRA YEYATI / AVE MARIA SUN

FUN AROUND THE TOWN



10. Jack Kadlec at the refreshment stand
11. A marathoner in the homestretch
12. The Graham siblings, Veronica, Matthew and Emily, all Donahue

13. Volunteer Kathy Hicks directing runners
14. A half-marathon racer feeling no pain



SANDRA YEYATI / AVE MARIA SUN

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Biz Kidz helps young entrepreneurs turn their dreams into reality

BY Nanci Theoret

Ave Maria Sun Correspondent

It might seem harsh, but JD Ribali wants kids to know failure is always an option.

In fact, failure is cause for celebration through Mr. Ribali's Biz Kidz Expo and Biz Kidz Market programs, each designed for the youngest entrepreneurs in Ave Maria, Naples and other Southwest Florida communities.

"Our goal is to support kids and spark young entrepreneurs to sell their products and services," says Mr. Ribali. "We celebrate failures and talk about why products don't do well, ways to make it work, what works, how to make something better and what customers want."

Biz Kidz programs, offered under the newly minted nonprofit auspices of Mr. Ribali's Young Entrepreneurs and Rising Stars, or YEARS, provide free resources — thanks to partnerships with local businesses, nonprofits and other organizations — to empower young innovators and entrepreneurs and teach them the fundamentals of business. Participating kids can peddle their wares with market booths at Ave Maria events, a pitch day at Florida Gulf Coast University and the second annual expo this April at Coastland Center in Naples.

The programs are easily adaptable to communities across the U.S. with products and services far more sophisticated than lemonade stands or grass mowing. To date, local children-run businesses cover the gamut from baked goods, braided dog leashes and custom jewelry to teepee birthday and slumber parties (an all-night party planner is included) and even refurbished robotic toys.

"Children also learn about the up-front expenses of operating a business before making the first sale, from raw materials and signs to the mobile Cash App payment service for customers not carrying cash as well as factoring in the time spent on making the product or planning the service," Mr. Ribali explains.

The programs are targeted to ages 7 to 17, some who apparently didn't get the memo about failure.

One young budding Ave Maria entrepreneur, Izzy Gallegos, frequently sells out of his Big Boy's peanut butter cookies within two hours of setting up shop.

"He's such a good pitchman and really knows how to sell his business," Mr. Ribali says.

Thirteen-year-old Ella Lyman of Naples sold all but three of the hand-crafted dog leashes she brought to the inaugural Taste of Ave event and accepted an extra \$200 in custom orders. Many of her buyers, she said, aren't even dog owners.

Ella got the idea for her adjustable crossbody leashes while visiting Baker Park in Naples with her grandmother, brother and Chihuahua-corgi mix, Chicky. Her grandmother would check in by text to find out where she was and what she was doing. Ella, a two-thumb texter like most teens, realized it was difficult to respond while juggling a leash.

"I'm really creative and make the most random things," she says. "The leash is crossbody and hands-free. I thought it would be really helpful because a lot of people take business calls when they're walking their dog. It just clicked in my head."

Chicky is the muse and mascot of For Dogs Sakes, which specializes in cotton rope leashes that take Ella 60 to 90 minutes to braid and retail from \$25 to \$35.

Ella's father knows Mr. Ribali through the Ave Maria Business Networking group, which

"We celebrate failures and talk about why products don't do well, ways to make it work, what works, how to make something better and what customers want."

— JD Ribali
Young Entrepreneurs and Rising Stars



JD Ribali with two participants at one of his Biz Kidz Expo events that are offered under the nonprofit auspices of YEARS (Young Entrepreneurs and Rising Stars).

Mr. Ribali started shortly after moving to Ave Maria in 2016. Taking note of all the locally owned small businesses in his new hometown — including dozens of residents working from their homes — the group was created to give business owners the chance to connect and learn from each other.

The Biz Kidz programs were a natural spin off of Mr. Ribali's own entrepreneurial spirit, which also includes the umbrella Top Notch Connections and its subsidiaries: Top Notch Home Pros, Top Notch University, Top Notch Events and Top Notch Living.

The children-centric offshoots include the second annual Biz Kidz Expo coming up Saturday, April 15, from 11 a.m. to 4 p.m. at Coastland Center, and its precursor, the March 28 Biz Kidz Pitch Day at FGCU.

The latter, says Mr. Ribali, helps kids who aren't natural-born salespeople or extroverts coax out their sales skills, develop their entrepreneurial skills, generate ideas and create business, marketing and packaging plans and sales pitches through interactive questions and answers.

"Local businessmen and women coach kids through the process, ask questions and help them develop their pitch," Mr. Ribali explains, adding it's like "a nice 'Shark Tank.' Kids work with instructors in FGCU's entrepreneurial program explaining what they're offering and why it's different."

Pitch day prepares participants for expo judges and the opportunity to

win \$5,000 in prize money. So do special events like the December inventors fair at Miromar Outlets, which introduced shoppers to the robotic toys created by an industrious 14-year-old.

"He went to Goodwill and bought broken remote-controlled toys and anything with a circuit board," Mr. Ribali recalls. "He's one of those science-minded kids who knows his product but needed help developing his pitching and selling skills. He did great! One customer bought a robotic toy as a friend for a pet. It runs up and down and the pet chases it."

During the expo, which attracted 50 participants in its inaugural year and requires a \$35 registration fee, judges from sponsoring



Ella Lyman and Chicky, her grandmother's dog who is the muse for Ella's innovative leashes.



Nicole Marie Colette sells her original artwork at events around the town.



Homemade baked goods are a popular product among enterprising Biz Kidz entrepreneurs.

businesses interact with young entrepreneurs, learning about their marketing, how they're spending their dollars and their profit margins. This year, they'll meet Ella Lyman, who credits both parents for her innate business sense.

"I'm going to be an entrepreneur, I think," says Ella, who previously made \$800 selling hand-made pillows to her mom's coworkers. "I was nervous in the car on the way to Taste of Ave with my leashes. But I did great. I didn't realize how much I knew!"

Entrepreneurialism is likely in Ella's future, although she hopes to tie it into her love of horses, perhaps as an equine veterinarian or a show jumper. She's secretly braided a lead for her future horse, and she's been known

to check out the competition — realizing her products are often better made and better priced than those sold at local pet boutiques.

The sentiment was echoed by Ella's customers who Mr. Ribali spoke to for feedback. "They told me she really knows how to pitch her product," he says.

Mr. Ribali discovered his own entrepreneurial side at 7, selling cucumbers from his mother's garden door to door. "I understand just how important it is to instill a drive to succeed in our children when they are a young age," he says. "Biz Kidz programs give young people who have ideas and dreams a chance to turn them idea into reality and make it all become a success." 🌟

COURTESY PHOTOS



Avalon Park

About the community

From the \$400,000s - \$1,000,000+

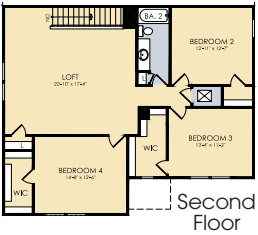
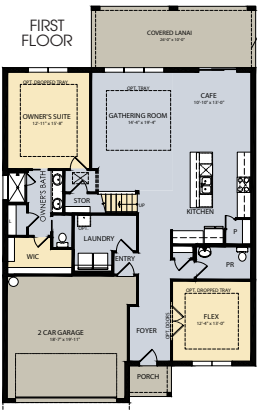
It's easy to stay active and have family fun at Avalon Park. Located within walking or biking distance to downtown Ave Maria, Avalon Park attracts families looking for exceptional schools, close proximity to neighborhood parks, and plenty of living space. Avalon Park offers spacious homesites, unique architectural exteriors, and 11 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 seven bedrooms and 6½ bathrooms in 5,000-plus 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.



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Del Webb[®] NAPLES

About the community

From the \$300,000s - \$1,000,000+

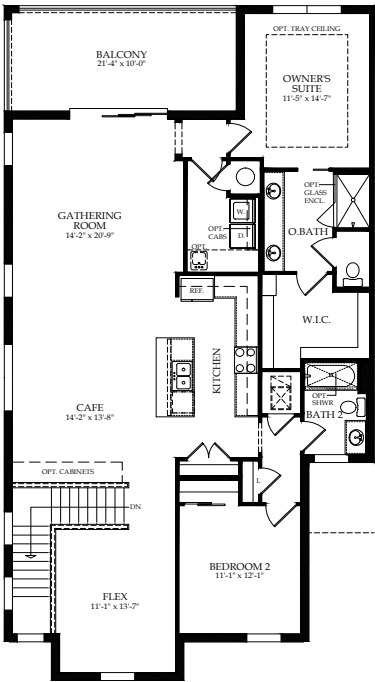
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Spoonbill

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About the community

Maple Ridge at Ave Maria is a thoughtfully designed community with a myriad of home designs, all of which combine beautiful curb appeal with impressive interior layouts built for modern lifestyles. CC Homes is the builder behind this community and they are among the many reasons Ave Maria has become such a rapidly growing neighborhood attracting new residents from the Gulf Coast, Southeast Florida and beyond. With more than 75 years of combined experience in South Florida real estate, Mr. Armando Codina and Mr. Jim Carr along with Mr. Andres Miyares have set a new standard for quality new construction homes in desirable communities, with a wide range of pricing from entry-level to prestigious exclusivity.

CC Homes communities throughout Florida have been recognized for their incredible market appeal, outstanding quality, and resident satisfaction time and time again, having built thousands of homes and residences. Homes built by CC Homes are designed to improve people’s lives. Modern features, smart floor plans, and upscale amenities combine for the ultimate Florida lifestyle. Homeowners at Maple Ridge 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.

New contemporary homes available now at Maple Ridge. Tour new models today.



Starting from the low \$400,000s

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.



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Maple Ridge
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About the community

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-inspired 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 master bathroom features double sinks with quartz vanity tops and a spacious shower.



Select homesites available. Inquire today!

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.



Huntington

- Model home is now open for viewing.
- 1,630 a/c square feet
 - Three bedrooms
 - Two bathrooms
 - His and hers walk-in closets in master bedroom
 - One-car garage

Maple Ridge
5009 Alonza Avenue, Ave Maria, FL 34142
833-729-1783 | www.MapleRidgeFL.com



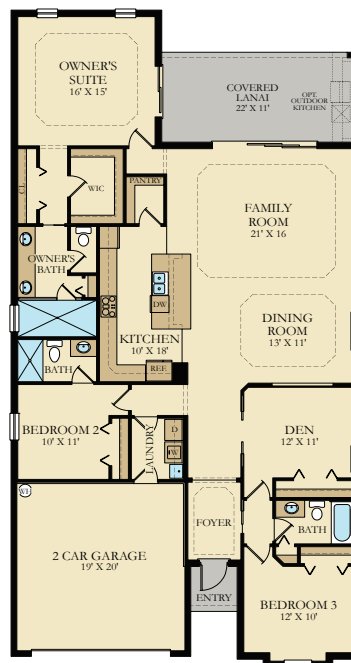
About the community

Lennar is excited to bring its popular Everything's Included® homes and resort lifestyle amenities to the charm, convenience, and values of Ave Maria. The National Golf & Country Club will offer a fresh coastal aesthetic throughout the home designs and on-site amenities including an 18-hole Gordon Lewis-designed golf course, complimented by world-class amenities for the entire family to enjoy. A variety of floorplans will be offered in Terrace and Veranda condominiums, coach homes, and executive and estate single-family homes.

The National Golf & Country Club will

feature its own clubhouse with a pro shop, formal and casual dining, a resort-style pool and spa, fitness center with yoga/aerobics room, spa treatment rooms and beauty salon. Active residents can take advantage of Har-Tru tennis courts, pickle and bocce ball, a putting green, chipping area, and a driving range. This all-encompassing amenity campus is designed to bring the community together, with spaces for friends new and old to gather.

Whether you are a seasonal resident or looking to lay down roots, The National Golf & Country Club has the ideal home for you.



Maria

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- Three bedrooms + den
- Three bathrooms

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The National Golf & Country Club
6090 Artisan Court, Ave Maria, FL 34142
888-214-1476 | www.TheNational-AveMaria.com

ALL AROUND AVE MARIA

Dates and details are subject to change. Visit www.ave maria.com and the www.ave mariamasterassociation.com calendar before venturing out and call the 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

Girls Just Want to Have Fun Fashion Show

Discover the latest clothing trends from 5-8 p.m. Saturday, March. 25, at The Grand Hall in Del Webb. Featuring men's and women's sporting apparel from Panther Run Golf Shop, as well as chic women's outfits from The Secret Ingredient Boutique. Proceeds benefit the Cancer Alliance Network, which assists Collier and Lee county residents battling cancer. The \$55 per-person cost includes a light dinner buffet. Bring your own beverages. For more information, contact Lucy Guevara at 239-455-2001 or LGuevara@hampton.golf.

Lipman 5K Run for Backpacks

People of all ages and abilities are invited to run or walk for a worthy cause from 8-10 a.m. Saturday, April. 1, starting and finishing in the Town Center. Sponsored by Lipman Family Farms. All proceeds go towards purchasing backpacks, bicycles, shoes and school supplies for Immokalee children. Race-day signups begin at 6:30 a.m. Cost is \$30 for adults, \$25 for students (6-22 years old). For early registration or questions, visit www.runsignup.com/Race/FL/AveMaria/Lipman5KRunForBackpacks.



RECURRING EVENTS

First Fridays

These free events on the first Friday of every month combine musical entertainment with family-friendly games and activities. The next event, from 4-6 p.m. on April 14 (because Good Friday falls on the first Friday this year) in the Town Center, will feature live deejay music and activities by Quest Mobile Experience. Afterward, enjoy happy hour specials, dinner at the local restaurant of your choice, ice cream from Meltz and game specials from Way Out Toys.

Farmers' Market in the Town Center

Every Saturday from 9 a.m.-2 p.m. through April 29, a well-curated selection of vendors set up their booths in the Town Center selling produce, plants, arts and crafts, clothes, honey, soaps, fresh baked goods and more. Admission is free. For more information or to become a vendor, call Dennis Strausbaugh with SW Florida Markets, LLC, at 239-293-6266.

Ave Maria Parish Tour

Every Tuesday through April 25 from 1-3 p.m., Ave Maria Catholic Church and the Knights of Columbus offer free, 30-minute guided tours of the parish. Participants learn about the building's architectural and historical details. For more information, call 239-261-5555. No reservations are required.



COURTESY PHOTO

The Ave Maria Farmers Market comes to the Town Center every Saturday through April.

Sightseeing Trolley Tours

Every Tuesday through April 25, Ave Maria Development conducts free, one-hour, guided trolley tours of the town. Guests receive a complimentary trolley bag with swag items and coupons. Tours depart at 11 a.m., noon, 1 p.m. and 2 p.m. Meet at the Welcome Center in the Town Center. Reservations are encouraged at 239-352-3903.

Live Music in the Town Center

Every Tuesday and Saturday from 11 a.m.-2 p.m. through April 29, live musical performances entertain passersby at various Town Center locations. Performers this year include the Mason Williams Duo, Eric Jacques, Gerald Augustin, Chris Stultz, Wendy Rene and Harmony 2. Admission is free.

MERCHANT EVENTS

OASIS The Kitchen Lounge

Ave Maria's popular hotspot regularly hosts special events, including comedy shows, DJ nights, themed parties, music bingo and wine socials. For dates, times and reservation information, check the schedule posted on the window outside or visit www.facebook.com/oasiskitchenlounge and www.instagram.com/oasis_kitchenlounge.

Tropical Smoothie Cafe

For a limited time through March 28, enjoy these delicious Rise 'N' Shine menu items: Cali Breakfast Flatbread with grilled chicken, Peanut Butter Banana Crunch Flatbread and the Super Sunrise Sunset Smoothie, made with tropical fruits.

Blue Boutique

The Goodwill-affiliated boutique is hosting a community donation drive from 10 a.m.-2 p.m. Saturday, April 15, in the parking lot behind the shop at 5076 Annunciation Circle, Suite 103. Those who donate gently used clothes, shoes and accessories will receive a coupon for 10% off their next Blue Boutique purchase.

On Memorial Day, Monday, May 29, Blue Boutique shoppers receive 25% off the purchase of secondhand goods at the store.

Oil Well Craft Beer

Enjoy **free bingo** organized by the always-entertaining duo Jackie and Dan Rategan of Cruise Planners, from 6-8

p.m. Saturdays, April 1 and May 6.

Celebrate **New Beer's Eve** on starting at 7 p.m. Thursday, April 6, as a brand new, handcrafted beer is launched.

To commemorate **National Beer Day** on Friday, April 7, all draft beer will be \$1 off from 11 a.m.-6 p.m.

Outsmart your friends at the **Speed Quizzing Trivia Night**, at 7 p.m. Mondays, April 17 and May 15. Admission is free.

Badger and Rose will perform live music on Saturday, April 22, from 7-10 p.m.

On Thursday, May 4, **National Firefighters Day**, retired or active firefighters enjoy \$1 off draft beer all day long.

Enjoy \$1 off a delicious sandwich on **National Hoagie Day** from 11 a.m.-3 p.m. Friday, May 5.

Dance the night away to **'90s music with DJ DiFlo** and help celebrate co-owner Danee Williams' birthday, from 8-11 p.m. Saturday, May 13.

The Secret Ingredient

On **National Purple Day**, Sunday, March. 26, shoppers wearing purple receive 20% off one item.

Every Monday in April, May and June is **55+ and Fabulous Day** when shoppers ages 55 and over save 10% off one regularly priced item.



ANNALEE HULL / AVE MARIA SUN

Blue Boutique, a Goodwill enterprise, hosts a donation drive on Saturday, April 15.

On **National Wear Your PJs to Work Day**, Sunday, April 16, all pajamas in the store are 20% off.

On **National Teacher Appreciation Day**, Tuesday, May 2, teachers enjoy 30% off one regularly priced item.

Enjoy a complimentary glass of moscato wine while shopping for the latest trends on **National Moscato Day**, Tuesday, May 9.

On **National Wine Day**, Thursday, May 25, shoppers enjoy a complimentary glass of wine, and all wine clutches are 10% off.

Hoja de Menta

To celebrate the boutique's second anniversary, Hoja de Menta will host a fashion show and afterparty at OASIS The Kitchen Lounge on Sunday, May 7. Trendsetters and fashionistas won't want to miss this exciting, see-and-be-seen event. Admission is free. Times and other details will be announced on social media at www.facebook.com/hojadementashop.

AVE MARIA UNIVERSITY ATHLETICS

Schedule is subject to change, check www.ave mariagyrenes.com for updates.

Thursday, March. 23

Lacrosse vs. SCAD, 1 p.m.

Friday, March 24

Baseball vs. St. Thomas, 2 p.m.

Saturday, March 25

Baseball vs. St. Thomas, noon
Baseball vs. St. Thomas, 3 p.m.

Tuesday, March 28

Softball vs. Warner, 3 p.m.

Wednesday, March 29

Softball vs. Warner, 1 p.m.

Softball vs. Warner, 3 p.m.

Friday, March 31

Women's Tennis vs. Southeastern, TBA
Men's Tennis vs. Southeastern, TBA
Beach Volleyball vs. Truett McConnell, 1 p.m.

Baseball vs. Southeastern, 2 p.m.

Beach Volleyball vs. St. Andrews, 3 p.m.

Saturday, April 1

Baseball vs. Southeastern, noon

Baseball vs. Southeastern, 3 p.m.

Men's Tennis vs. Warner, TBA

Women's Tennis vs. Warner, TBA

Thursday, April 6

Women's Tennis vs. Palm Beach

Atlantic, TBA

Men's Tennis vs. Palm Beach Atlantic, TBA

Tuesday, April 11

Baseball vs. Ft. Lauderdale, noon

Baseball vs. Ft. Lauderdale, 3 p.m.

Thursday, April 13

Lacrosse vs. Webber, 5 p.m.

Friday, April 21

Softball vs. Coastal Georgia, 2 p.m.

Softball vs. Coastal Georgia, 4 p.m.

Saturday, April 22

Sixth Annual AMU Golf Outing, 9 a.m.

Softball vs. Coastal Georgia, 1 p.m.

Tuesday, April 25

Baseball vs. Fort Lauderdale, noon

Baseball vs. Fort Lauderdale, 3 p.m.

Friday, April 28

Baseball vs. Webber, 2 p.m.

Softball vs. Southeastern, 4 p.m.

Saturday, April 29

Baseball vs. Webber, noon

Softball vs. Southeastern, 1 p.m.

Softball vs. Southeastern, 3 p.m.

Baseball vs. Webber, 3 p.m.



ALL AROUND AVE MARIA

■ AVE MARIA RESIDENTS ONLY

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

Living with Wildlife: Alligators

Learn how to safely coexist with alligators in this informative presentation by alligator trapper Beth Hamm of the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission from 6-7 p.m. Wednesday, March 22, in the AMMA meeting room.

New Homeowners Social and Orientation

New Ave Maria homeowners are invited to a social and informational event in the AMMA meeting room on Thursday, March 23, featuring a presentation by the master association about living in this community and the various organizations operating in Ave Maria. Social networking begins at 5:30 p.m. and the presentation starts at 6 p.m.



Power No. 9 Fitness and Wellness Day

It's time to get healthy in Ave Maria! This free event from 8 a.m.-noon Saturday, March 25, at South Park features a variety of fitness classes in the amphitheater, as well as vendor booths, family activities and food trucks on the lawn.

Fluid Art Paint Party

Artist Tammy DeCaro will teach participants how to pour paint onto canvas and coax it into abstract masterpieces from 1-3 p.m. Monday, March 27, in the AMMA events room. The \$60 per-person cost includes two canvases and paint supplies. Bring your own beverage. Pre-registration is required.

Embrace Life Series

Experience a free, virtual tour of Italy as wildlife photographer Patrick O'Flaherty presents a photographic montage set to music in the AMMA meeting room from 7-8 p.m. Thursday, March 30, and from 7:30-8:30 p.m. Tuesday, April 18.

Spring Festival

Celebrate spring Ave Maria-style from 10:30 a.m.-1:30 p.m. Saturday, April 1, in North Park, featuring the Easter Egg Dash, Bunny Hop and Candy Drop. A bunny parade kicks off the day, followed by egg hunt races for several age categories, an obstacle course for older kids and an egg stroll corner for children 3 and under.



2023 Cup Challenge Golf Tournament

Hosted by the Veterans Club of Del Webb, this golf tournament on Saturday, April 1, at the Panther Run Golf Club features course contests, an awards luncheon, a complimentary beverage



The Ave Maria Water Park celebrates summer on Saturday, May 20, with games, safety talks, snacks and more.

COURTESY PHOTO

age and a free gift for all players. 8:30 a.m. shotgun start. Registration for the two-person, handicap scramble is \$125 each. Sign up at the Panther Run Pro Shop or by emailing Mark Clayton at markclayton1956@yahoo.com.

Ave Maria Stewardship Community District (AMSCD) Meetings

Monthly AMSCD meetings are open to the public and held in the AMMA meeting room. Upcoming times and dates are 9 a.m. April 4 and May 2 and 6 p.m. June 6. Visit www.avemariastewardshipcd.org for more information and schedule updates.

Coffee with a Twiss

This casual gathering with AMMA Executive Director Kim Twiss held from 10-11 a.m. every second Thursday of the month allows homeowners to ask questions and get updates pertaining to the master association and community news. Next dates are April 13, May 11 and June 8.

Resin Art Class

Explore the creative possibilities resin presents in this popular, hands-on class from 6:30-8:30 p.m. Thursday, April 20, in the AMMA lobby. The \$70 fee includes all needed supplies and guidance to complete an 11x14 framed piece. Students are encouraged to bring their own embellishments to personalize their creation. No artistic skills are required. Bring your favorite beverage.

Boy's Day Out at the Water Park

Boys living in Ave Maria are invited to a free party from 9-11 a.m. Saturday, April 22, featuring snack breakfast items, games and a craft project. Boys must be accompanied by a parent or grandparent and are welcome to stay afterward to enjoy the pools and slides.

Paint Your Pet Party

Participants are invited to email a photo of their pet to mixed-media artist Tammy DeCaro who will draw an illustration of the pet on a 16x20 canvas. Students then meet from 6-8:30 p.m. Thursday, May 18, in the AMMA event room to color in their pet portraits while enjoying the company of friends. The \$65 fee includes all needed supplies. No artistic abilities needed! Bring your favorite beverage.

Splash into Summer

Celebrate the beginning of summer at the Ave Maria Water Park from 9-11 a.m. Saturday, May 20, with fun-in-the-sun games, safety talks and demonstrations and delicious snack breakfast items. This event is free and open to residents of all ages.

Memorial Day Ceremony and Picnic

Commemorating the brave men and women of the U.S. armed forces, this event from 10:30 a.m.-1 p.m. Monday, May 29, in South Park includes a mini-parade as well as a ceremony in the amphitheater featuring a guest speaker, tributes to fallen loved ones and a moment of silence. Afterward, residents will be treated to a free hot dog lunch sponsored by the Knights of Columbus of Ave Maria, live music, picnic games and a tower of water for kids to enjoy.

Adult Games Group



Adults looking for a friendly game of cards (Skip-Bo, Sequence and others) or Mexican Train (dominoes) are welcome to join the group from 1-3 p.m. Mondays and Thursdays in the AMMA card room.

SPORTS AND FITNESS (Residents Only)

Zumba Classes

Staying fit is pure joy at Zumba class in the AMMA event room. The high-energy workout mixing salsa, cha-cha and samba movements begins at 6:30 p.m. on March 21 and 6:15 p.m. on March 28. To sign up, email vanezumba@gmail.com.

Swimming Lessons

Beginning in April, the Ave Maria Water Park will offer an eight-lesson program sanctioned by the American Red Cross that teaches kids how to swim and

be safe in the water. The eight, 45-minute lessons are \$65 and grouped by age: water babies (6 months to 3 years old), preschoolers (3-5 years old) and youth (6-12 years old). Families must register in person at the water park. For more information, call 239-348-8384 or email kellie.powell@fsresidential.com.

Water Exercise Classes

The Ave Maria Water Park offers one-hour morning classes alternating between cardio and muscle strengthening routines Monday through Thursday and on Saturdays from 9-10 a.m. Residents aged 13 and above are welcome. \$5 per class or \$65 for 20 classes. All necessary equipment is provided, including resistance gloves, noodles, pool buoys and barbells. For more information, call 239-348-8384 or email kellie.powell@fsresidential.com.

Men's Pick-up Soccer

Players 16 and older looking for a good workout and team camaraderie are welcome to join these resident-organized games at 6 p.m. Wednesdays and Sundays on soccer field #2 in North Park.

Co-Ed Softball 55-plus

Friendly softball games for neighbors aged 55 and older are held from 12:30-3 p.m. at South Park on the following Sundays: April 2, 16 and 30; and May 7. Players at all levels are welcome to participate.

For more information, contact Artie Ginsberg at agins@hotmail.com or 516-314-1351.



Free Fitness Classes at South Park

These fitness classes led by Leon Fit Fam at the South Park Pavilion #3 start at 9:15 a.m. and at 6:45 p.m. Tuesdays and Thursdays. For more information, call Mr. Leon at 786-436-3323. Text the same number to register.

Tai Chi

Experience a meditative workout designed to relieve joint pain and improve cognitive function at 9 a.m. Wednesdays in the AMMA event room. For more information, email instructor Mylyn Vedel at myvedel@gmail.com or call 239-220-4181.

Quest Martial Arts Academy Classes

Led by Kenny Quintero, a 20-year veteran instructor, these martial arts classes at 5 p.m. Mondays and 9:30 a.m. Saturdays in the AMMA event room teach adults and kids discipline and self-defense techniques while honing their focus, having fun and getting fit. For more information, call Crystal at 239-371-6073 or visit www.questmartialartsacademy.com.



Steak cook-off carves another victory

BY SANDRA YEYATI
Ave Maria Sun Correspondent

Since 2010, the annual Sunshine State Steak Cook-Off has been a tremendously popular grilling competition and fundraiser for the Donahue Academy, involving thousands of steak dinners and lively musical performances in the Town Center. After the school announced last September that it would no longer spearhead the event, a group of Ave Maria residents and local businesses banded to donate their time, talent and resources to keep it alive.

Thanks to their efforts, nine teams fired up their grills at the Park of Commerce on a perfect Saturday in February, vying to become the 2023 champions. About 300 attendees were treated to meticulously prepared rib-eyes steaks. Capping the festivities, the Ave Maria Veteran's Association (AMVA) became the beneficiary of all proceeds, bringing the organization one step closer to building a veterans memorial on Ave Maria Boulevard just north of Clancy Avenue, overlooking Rosary Lake.

"Who doesn't like to eat steak? But it's even better when you get to do it for a cause," said Danee Williams, one of the principal organizers and co-owner of Oil Well Craft Beer (OWCB) with her husband, Matt.

The Steak X grill team won the first-place trophy, and in a heartwarming moment, champions David Altomare, Chris Cessna and Ron Fowler announced they would donate their \$500 prize to the AMVA. Second place went to High Steaks, a family team comprised of Chris and Roseanne Buccheri and their 13-year-old daughter, Sophia, the youngest competitor. The AMVA team took third place. In total, the event raised \$8,500 for Ave Maria veterans.

Competition steaks were critiqued on appearance, degree of doneness, tenderness, taste and overall impression by a panel of judges that included Daniella Jaenvega, co-owner of the Martin Fierro Argentine Steakhouse and OASIS The Kitchen Lounge; steak aficionado and small business owner Craig Barnes; and Publix manager Jasiel Machado.

Grill teams displayed a wide array of techniques. Some competitors used only salt, pepper and garlic powder, while others applied marinades, tenderizers, dry rubs, wet sauces and finishing butters. Mr. Buccheri, a former OWCB brewer, smoked his second-place steak with the bourbon-soaked oak spirals that he used for the brewery's Black Arrow anniversary stout.

Watching Steak X prepare their winning entry was like attending a masterclass. They bound their rib-eye with string into a perfect circle, slathered it with brisket mop sauce and let it marinate and tenderize for about 45 minutes. Then they hickory-smoked it in a small grill, making sure to maintain the right smoking temperature with the use of a grill thermometer, and later transferred it to a Big Green Egg set to 600 degrees to develop a tasty char, basting the beef sporadically with butter using a "brush" of fresh rosemary sprigs. Upon reaching the proper doneness,



Runner-up team, High Steaks: Roseanne and Chris Buccheri and their daughter, Sophia



Joe Gutierrez at the High Steaks team grill

the prized steak was removed from the fire and coated with a golden sauce made of butter, minced garlic, fresh rosemary and a secret ingredient.

Last year's winners — FlaMeanGirls (Laura Eads, Danielle Karlau and Debbie Fornwall) — employed the same recipe that clinched their victory in 2022. Ms. Fornwall massaged olive oil, five drops of a top-secret sauce, dry rub and kosher salt flakes into the meat, letting it marinate before placing it on the fire.

Eric Baker, Paul Rozelle and Jim Hess of Carnis Amatores (Latin for "meat lovers") have participated in almost every Sunshine State Steak Cook-Off. They won first place the first time they competed, in 2013. According to Mr. Rozelle, the secret to a fantastic steak comes down to good luck. "We've used the exact same recipe every single year, and we've been first and we've been last," he



Fire Commissioner Don Gunthner grilling for the Knights of Columbus team

quipped, adding, "It's fun to cook steaks and enjoy the good weather, all the attendees and everyone on the other grill teams. We've had family come from as far as California to spend the weekend and enjoy the cook-off."

Helmed by Argentinian Victor Treissa with



Ralph Petragnana

his energetic companions Tonia Fulkroad and Joel Cruz, the Grill Sergeant team are all avowed steak enthusiasts. "I've been doing this for seven years," Mr. Treissa said. "I want to see the people happy when they eat the steaks. That's more important than winning the trophy."

Mrs. Williams applauded the contributions of numerous supporters, noting that the scaled-down cook-off was a testament to what a community of neighbors and friends can achieve when they band together for a common goal.

Financial advisor Kristina Ribali of Mod-



The Carnis Amatores grill team: Eric Baker, Paul Rozelle and Jim Hess with their past trophies



Team Steak K: David Altomare, Chris Cessna and Ron Fowler showing off trophies from past competitions



Defending champs, the FlaMeanGirls: Laura Eads, Danielle Karlau and Debbie Fornwall

SANDRA YEYATI / AVE MARIA SUN

“Who doesn’t like to eat steak? But it’s even better when you get to do it for a cause”
— Danee Williams, co-owner of Oil Well Craft Beer



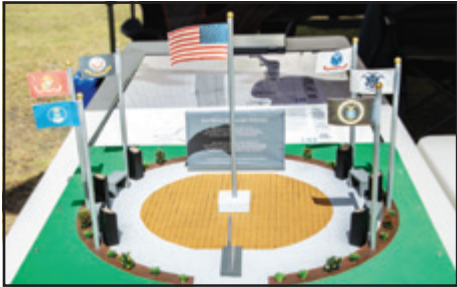
Steak X team member Chris Cessna butter-bastes steaks using a rosemary “brush” while David Altomare looks on.



Kristina Ribali of Modern Woodman Fraternal Financial presents veterans John Bestul and Bob Van Astin with a \$2,500 matching fund grant.



Lori Yard and her granddaughter, Alivia Lee



Birdseye view of the veterans memorial model



Site of the future veterans memorial

ern Woodman Fraternal Financial presented the veterans with a \$2,500 check, which represented a matching funds grant. “As a fraternal organization, we get to give back to our members and to the community here at Ave Maria,” she said. “We believe in supporting local and doing the most good in the neighborhood.”
Other notable sponsors included Publix, which provided 300 thick-cut rib eyes at a deep discount; Bernardo Barnhart, president of First Bank in Immokalee; Daniel Dix of 84 Real Estate; Jim Monterosso with Amerivest Realty; Jackie and Dan Rategan of Cruise Planners; Tom and Carol DiFlorio of DJ Services; Josh Barton, owner of Atlas Automotive; and Tom Dempsey, general manager of On Spot Dermatology.
Numerous veterans were in attendance, showing appreciation for the community’s

support and sharing their vision for the AMVA memorial, which began as a conversation among a handful of vets in 2018. The group hopes to complete the buildout by Veterans Day, this November, and has raised \$94,000 of their \$130,000 goal to fund construction and ongoing maintenance. Attend-



Dennis Hatmaker, Keith Fenwick, John Meyer and Edwin Meyer

ees had an opportunity to inspect a miniature model and engineering plans for the site.
“I like to call it a monument more than a memorial, because this is also for those of us who are still living here,” said AMVA past-president John Bestul, an Army reservist who served in Desert Storm and Bosnia. “We think it’s important to promote patriotism and recognize veterans who are from this community,” he added. “It’s nice to spend time with your peers and have that camara-

derie and tell war stories to others who can understand what you’re saying. The monument will be like a home for us and also add value to the Ave Maria community.”
Tom DiFlorio, one of the principal organizers of the Sunshine State Steak Cook-Off since its inception, reports the event will live to sizzle again. He is on a brand-new committee that has been assembled by Ave Maria Development for next year’s competition, which will return to the Town Center. 🌟



Carol and Danielle DiFlorio



Smoke & Shine band members Josh Proctor and Chris Wasko



Victor Treissa and Tonia Fulkroad of the Grill Sergeant team with their favorite grilling tools

SANDRA YEYATI / AVE MARIA SUN



Michael Jaenvega, co-owner of OASIS The Kitchen Lounge, cooked up a variety of the restaurant’s most popular dishes, including pineapple, pepper and chicken skewers, above, and empanadas. AMELIA CONTE / AVE MARIA SUN



Dancing in the streets was a daylong sight.

TASTE

From page 1

“For a first-time event it was exciting to receive the response our team and businesses had,” Ms. Marquez says. “Taste of Ave wasn’t just about tasting our many dining options; it was about showcasing the entire town — and not just our merchants, but also the people who live here. The energy at the event was wonderful, just like it is everywhere around the town.” People saw the life of the community and how it’s a constant rhythm of working together and building new ideas, she adds.

Ms. Marquez is confident Taste of Ave will continue to grow in participation and activities because of how well its debut was received.

“It showed the pride everyone has for our community,” she says. “And without a doubt, the day’s first-time visitors saw there’s a lot to do here.”

Belonging is a fundamental aspect of living in Ave Maria, and the town’s conveniences and connections create that sense, which was clearly the case at Taste of Ave.

“Our business is still fairly new, and the event was a great way to show off what we have to offer,” says Sabena Black, the owner of Kibitz N’ Play, an indoor play zone in the Town Center. She and her team brought the fun outside with a bounce house and a soft-play jungle gym.

“Having the opportunity to interact with kids and their parents brought many smiles,” Ms. Black says. “After Taste of Ave, I knew my business was a hit for the town because many of the people I met that weekend have

since come into our store to play.” Boutiques like Hoja de Menta, The Secret Ingredient and Stella Rose Way also displayed locally sourced jewelry, apparel and home décor and were popular shopping spots.

The seasonal favorite farmers market, which happens from 9 a.m.-2 p.m. every Saturday in the Town Center through April, stayed for the duration of the event for people to browse and purchase organic goods and handmade items. Young residents who are members of the Biz Kidz Expo sold their products as well.

It was the perfect mesh of supporting locals and enjoying the entrepreneurial accomplishments of community members who dream of bringing something to town that can be enjoyed by others.

There were lots of guilty pleasures to taste, too. From the queso-smothered bites at Lozano’s Mexican Restaurant to Vicky Bakery’s guava-infused pastries, the food choices from the eateries in Annunciation Circle made mouths water.

“I ate my way around the town and I’m not feeling guilty for doing it,” resident Serafin Sanchez says. “Everybody loved that we could support our local businesses by tasting all the different offerings that are available in the town.”

But it wasn’t just the food that Mr. Sanchez and his family enjoyed.

“The event gave us the opportunity to meet new people,” he says. “We spoke to a couple families that were not from Ave Maria, and it was great to share with them how family-oriented the town is. Ave is for all ages, and it’s comforting to live in a place where family means something to everyone, and where events like Taste of Ave make you feel welcomed and involved with your community and neighbors.”

A main reason why the town’s developer hosts large-scale events like Taste of Ave and

“For a first-time event it was exciting to receive the response our team and businesses had. Taste of Ave wasn’t just about tasting our many dining options; it was about showcasing the entire town — and not just our merchants, but also the people who live here. The energy at the event was wonderful, just like it is everywhere around the town.”

— Donna Marquez, event coordinator for Ave Maria Development



Outside diners at Lozano's Mexican Restaurant satisfied their appetites and their thirsts with nachos, burritos and bar specials.



ABOVE, LEFT and BELOW: Even off the dance floor, couples enjoyed the afternoon opportunity for a "date" that Taste of Ave provided.



Members of the Collier County Sheriff's Office

the crowd favorite Blues, Brews & BBQ Festival is the opportunity for visitors to experience the town's one-of-a-kind lifestyle. People from all over have gravitated to this special place where the quality of living stems from the momentous abilities of strangers befriending each other, families establishing their roots and business owners supporting one another.

Planting a seed and having it sprout into a garden of success is exactly what town bands Steinbeck Way and the Back Country Boys have done. Both groups played live music that prompted the crowd to swarm the square with contagious dance moves and applause.

"Steinbeck Way, from our name to our roots, is a part of Ave Maria," bandmember Chris Webb says, adding the band's name originates from the street in Emerson Park where several of its members live. "From the beginning, our purpose has been to be Ave's rock and roll band. Our home is here, and we are very thankful to be welcomed at the town's festivals and special events."

During the inaugural event, homebuilders in Ave Maria saw an increase in visitors to their sales centers. People were curious about homes and wanted to learn more after experiencing Taste of Ave.

"Festivities like Taste of Ave can impact a person's decision to see more of the town or live it themselves," says Carol DiFlorio, lifestyle director for the Ave Maria Master Association. Every aspect of community life can either enhance or suppress social well-being, and Taste of Ave embodied what makes a town known for its person-to-person interactions, culture and sense of purpose. "Our town is best known for its people and the enjoyable experiences they make for others," she adds.

For many Ave Maria homeowners, connection and relationship building have helped define the town since its founding. Signature events like Taste of Ave add to that sense of community.

"Ave Maria has so much to offer, and until people come out to see it, they don't realize how much the town has grown and how many businesses are here to sustain our growth," says Kevin Joyce, event trailblazer and owner of The Pub & Grill at Ave Maria. "We have a great balance of ages that invest in this community and that investment paid off during Taste of Ave. My hope is that everyone had a worthwhile experience and that the turnout for this event will only continue to grow." 🌻



ABOVE: The team from Meltz happily filling an order for a soft-serve treat

LEFT: A young fan of the soft-play jungle gym from Kibitz N' Play



Cheering on members of the Ave Maria University band



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Through the camera lens: Photographer Joe DiFlorio captures and shares Ave Maria’s natural side

BY Nanci Theoret
Ave Maria Sun Correspondent

Nature doesn’t wait for a photo op, as wildlife photographer Joe DiFlorio knows all too well. The Del Webb Naples resident has taken some of his best shots while still wearing his pjs.

Mr. DiFlorio’s home is tucked along the eighth fairway of the Panther Run Golf Course, where Nat Geo moments abound. Facing east with “spectacular sunrises,” his backyard is rife with prime opportunities to capture the waking world: birds beginning their daily foraging along lake banks, deer leaving fresh hoofprints in the dew-covered grass, the first brushstrokes of yellows and violets painting the morning sky.

“Half of the time I’m in my pajamas when I get a great shot,” he chuckles. “I enjoy photographing birds, alligators, wildlife and flowers. There’s plenty of everything here. I take a morning walk (once he’s dressed) for a couple of miles and will see 20 different types of birds.”

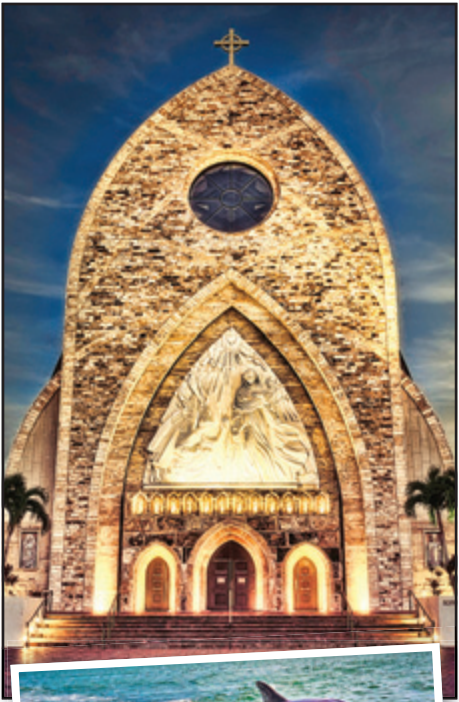
For Mr. DiFlorio, it wasn’t the animal kingdom but the Magic Kingdom that first piqued his interest in photography in 2008. He and his wife, Terry, avid Disney World fans, journeyed frequently from their Philadelphia home to Orlando and he decided to buy a simple point-and-shoot camera to document their next visit.

The photo bug bit.
Back in Philly, he joined a photo club and advanced to a digital SLR camera with multiple lenses.

“I’m self-taught,” says the retired casualty underwriter for an insurance company. “I



Sunsets in Ave Maria never fail to present a photo op for Joe DiFlorio, 365 days of the year.





Mr. DiFlorio captured this picture of dolphins in waters off Sanibel Island.

was reading books and watching YouTube videos. I was at one point shooting models, family events on occasion, and anniversary and birthday parties.”

The DiFlorios purchased their Ave Maria home in 2013 and moved full-time in 2017,

the year before Mr. DiFlorio retired. With a new hometown, the accomplished photographer traded in people and Philly skylines for shots of Florida’s unique flora and fauna and the opportunity to share his passion with neighbors.

Mr. DiFlorio co-leads Del Webb Naples’ 100-member photography group. The club meets monthly, often venturing out into Ave



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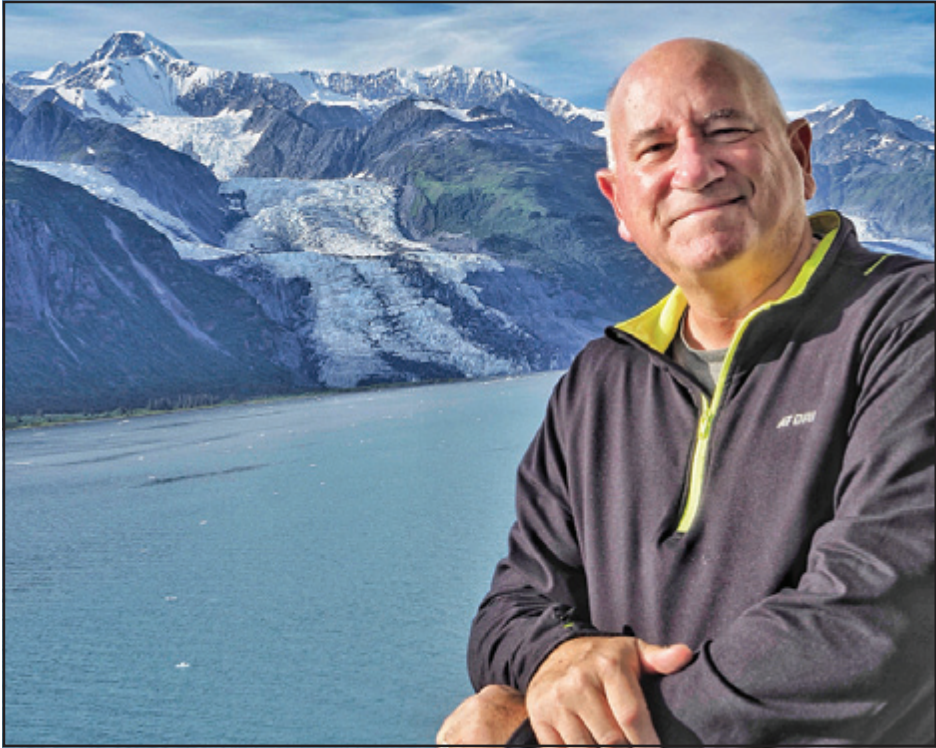
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In addition to taking pictures all around Ave Maria, Mr. DiFlorio documents his travels with photographs. Here he is on an Alaskan cruise.

Maria on photo walks or taking photo field trips to nearby Corkscrew Swamp Sanctuary, Naples Botanical Garden and other natural areas.

“We also have a club tradition of walking around town every Christmas and taking photos of the decorations,” he says. He is regularly asked to shoot town events like the annual holiday parade and Donahue Academy’s Sunshine State Steak Cook-off.

When he’s not capturing scenes of the town’s picturesque church, wildlife or sunsets, Mr. DiFlorio ventures to Lake Trafford for sunsets from the fishing pier or memorializes his travels, including cruises to Caribbean islands and last summer’s trip

to Alaska. He also sells his photographs online at www.joe-diflorio.pixels.com.

And he’s now experimenting with a new iPhone 14. “I’m just so impressed with the photos I can take with the phone,” he says. “There’s some great digital effects.”

Fifteen years since Mr. DiFlorio discovered the magic of photography, he’s still in awe of the camera’s ability to capture a moment in time, a story worth telling.

“The camera sees things the eye doesn’t,” he says. “You take a photo; people look at the scene and it tells a story.” 🌻

— The Ave Maria Sun welcomes photos of the town’s people, places, flora and fauna taken



This grackle and a pair of deer were spotted in Ave Maria.

by anyone who lives, works or visits here. If you have a photo you would like to see published, email a high-resolution jpeg of it, along with a sentence or two about how, when and where you took it, to editor Cindy Pierce at cpierce@floridaweekly.com.



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Ave Maria continues to attract doctors and medical businesses

BY Nanci Theoret

Ave Maria Sun Correspondent

Ave Maria’s growing community of doctors, dentists, hearing and eye specialists, health and medical service providers continues offering the conveniences of health care close to home. Physicians are hanging their shingles here for all the right reasons, providing thorough care with a hometown spin reminiscent of years gone by.

The recent arrivals of husband-and-wife chiropractors Duane and Stephanie Olson and Dr. Ana Garcia-Iguaran at Mater Dei Clinic, plus Dr. Emily Walkey’s transition to membership-based care for the town’s youngest residents at Little Flower Pediatrics, complement established practices helping patients see and hear better and smile brighter while also caring for seniors and the family pet.

“We’ve been very busy,” Ms. Olson says of **Family Chiropractic & Sport Rehab**, which recently opened in the Town Center’s new business suites above Tropical Smoothie. “There’s a lot of demand, especially for our wellness services. A lot of people use chiropractic care for keeping their body in optimal alignment and preventing problems,” she adds. “When the spine is in place and adjusted, the nervous system works better, the patient feels better and they sleep better.”

The office has three treatment rooms and offers a variety of therapies including dry needling, cupping, electric stimulation, muscle work and other modalities. Family Chiropractic also helps patients recover from injuries, manage migraines, back and neck pain and, to the joy of mothers-to-be and new parents, also provides relief for pregnancy-related back pain, colicky babies and children with earaches. Call 239-990-7068 or visit www.chiropracticsswfl.com.

For many physicians and business owners, the decision to serve Ave Maria is also a love story, one interwoven with a slower pace, often a new home and a mission of bringing needed services not just to town but the surrounding communities.

It happened to Sylvia and Craig Horgan. With 40 years in their field, they opened the full-service **Ave Maria Hearing** in 2016, a year after they moved to town. Ms. Horgan also owns Hearing in Paradise and Beautiful Hearing, both in Naples, and Bayside Hearing in Fort Myers.

The Ave Maria office provides audiometric evaluations, tympanometry which tests middle ear function and otoacoustic emission which evaluates the working condition of the inner ear, or cochlea. It also offers solutions for tinnitus, aka ringing in the ear, as well as digital hearing aids, custom ear molds and Bluetooth accessories. Call 239-455-4655 or visit www.avemariahearing.com.

Weston optometrist Luisa Del Toro knew



COURTESY PHOTO

The staff at Mater Dei Clinic welcomes new patients of all ages who need gynecological services.

she belonged in Ave Maria the first time she visited. When she discovered the town lacked an optometrist, she sold her busy South Florida practice, bought a house here and opened **Ave Maria Optical** in late 2020 in Town Center’s La Piazza.

“Ave Maria is like a big family,” Dr. Del Toro says. “Neighbors know each other and help each other.”

Ave Maria Optical provides full-service care for patients 2 years and older, including comprehensive 30-minute eye exams evaluating the health of the eye, Lasik consultations, cataract referrals, eyeglass and contact fittings, emergencies and infections. It also fabricates lenses in-house for expedited delivery. Call 239-658-5832 or visit www.avemariaoptical.com.

With a staff of four dentists, including one specializing in pediatrics, **Ave Maria Dentistry** offers preventative oral care for the entire family as well as restoration and cosmetic procedures. Overseen by Wisdom Akpaka, aka Dr. Wisdom, the office opened in 2016. Additional services include smile makeovers, invisible orthodontics, cosmetic bonding and treatments for complex dental issues. Call 239-919-6930 or visit www.avemariadentistry.com.

Drs. Emily Walkey and Garcia-Iguaran both traded large practices for a small-town patient-centric setting.

Disillusioned by the health care system, its emphasis on payment-centered care and insurance-dictated restrictions, Dr. Walkey, a pediatrician, opened **Little Flower Pediatrics** last year. Originally from Wisconsin, she has practiced in Ave Maria since 2017, founding the pediatric care program at the former Braden Clinic. As a direct primary care clinic, Little Flower introduces a new model of health care, giving members 24-hour access to Dr. Walkey via text and phone, and enhances the patient-physician relationship with plenty of face time — appointments last from 30 to

90 minutes.

Practice areas include same-day sick visits, well child checkups, sports physicals, simple procedures, lactation guidance and pediatric obesity with an emphasis on holistic health and integrative medicine. Flat monthly membership fees range from \$50 per child ages six to 24 and \$250 for families. Dr. Walkey also provides care for Ave Maria University students at \$199 a semester. Call 239-291-4210 or visit www.littleflowerpediatrics.com (at this time Little Flower Pediatrics is not accepting new patients).

Dr. Ana Garcia-Iguaran shuttered her busy South Florida OB-GYN practice for Ave Maria, attracted by the town’s values and the opportunity to make a difference in an area without women’s health services.

“I’ve been in an urban setting for 15 years and felt my practice was stifled in some ways,” she says. “When I realized Ave Maria was so close (to her South Florida home), had more diverse needs and wasn’t close to a tertiary care center, I felt I could provide care that wasn’t otherwise available.”

Located at the Town Center’s former Braden Clinic, **Mater Dei Clinic** allows Dr. Garcia-Iguaran to spend as much time as needed with each patient. The practice is open full-time, accepts insurance and is seeing new patients. It provides gynecological services for all ages, including natural family planning.

“I see this as a long-term commitment, an opportunity to become a hub for health care in and around town,” says Dr. Garcia-Iguaran.

Serving medical professionals and patients, **Olmi Medical Supply** at the Publix Retail Shops carries the typical offerings of a medical supply store: diagnostic instruments, pulse oximeters, braces for various parts of the body, compression socks and ambulatory supplies like walkers, canes and crutches. But, it’s also a one-stop shop for products targeted to

health and wellness, including skincare, personal hygiene, ear candles, vitamins, apparel, body-shaping corsets, Croc charms and even shiatsu massage chairs. Customers can also shop for fidget toys and baby rattles, plus anti-skid ladders, footstools and other home safety devices. Founded by Nicole Olmino in 2022, Olmi also rents knee scooters, wheelchairs and CPAP machines. Call 239-658-5611 or visit www.olmimedical.com.

Additional health care businesses at Ave Maria include:

■ **The Lakes Home Care** offers at-home caregivers, home nursing services, companion care, physical and occupational therapy, cognitive behavior therapy, respiratory therapy, social work and language pathology for the elderly. Certified as a high-quality homecare service provider by the Joint Commission International, a global leader in healthcare accreditation, The Lakes treats clients with honesty, respect and priority for aging with dignity. Call 305-817-3912 or visit www.thelakeshomecare.com

■ **Faithful Friends Animal Hospital’s** veterinarians Rob Fox and Stephanie Dowdy have more than 20 years of expertise providing quality and compassionate care for dogs and cats, including wellness and preventative services, nutritional counseling, behavior and pain management, geriatric care, dental services and some on-site surgeries. Call 239-324-4999 or visit www.avemariavet.com.

■ **DaVita Dialysis Center**, a Fortune magazine most-admired company for 15 years, offers at-home and in-center dialysis for end-stage kidney disease. Call 800-424-6589 or visit www.davita.com.

■ **NCH Immediate Care Center**, which plans to open in spring 2024 in Ave Maria’s new Midtown Plaza, will treat minor cuts, colds and infections seven days a week on a walk-in basis in its 6,000-square-foot facility.

■ **Immokalee Fire Control District Headquarters and Station 32** provides fire protection, ambulance, EMT and paramedic services from its Ave Maria station, which opened in June 2022 as an outpost of the Immokalee Fire District. Call 239-657-2111 or visit www.immfire.com.

■ **Ave Maria Chiropractic & Health Store** offers top-of-the-line medical treatments including physicals and medical check-ups by Scott Allan. Call 239-348-1696.

■ **A&J Care Services** provides one-on-one state-registered intermittent and continuous homemaker and companion services for clients in nursing homes, hospitals or at home, including light housekeeping, shopping assistance, personal hygiene, meal preparation and feeding. Call 239-658-5027 or visit www.aandjcareservices.net.

For information about additional medical practices and services in Ave Maria, visit www.AveMaria.com. 🌻





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Saint Patrick's fun for First Friday in the Town Center



1



2



3



4



5



Joaquina Avila with Enzo

- 1. The Quest Martial Arts Academy team: Leann Nardi, Kenny Quintero, Madison Abreau and Cristal Quintero
- 2. Irene Enad
- 3. Carrie Maas and her daughter Lauren playing Jenga
- 4. Stephen Stadler of West of Galway
- 5. Play-Doh artists Alani Rutowski, Ema Rodriguez and Luciana Mitsicosta

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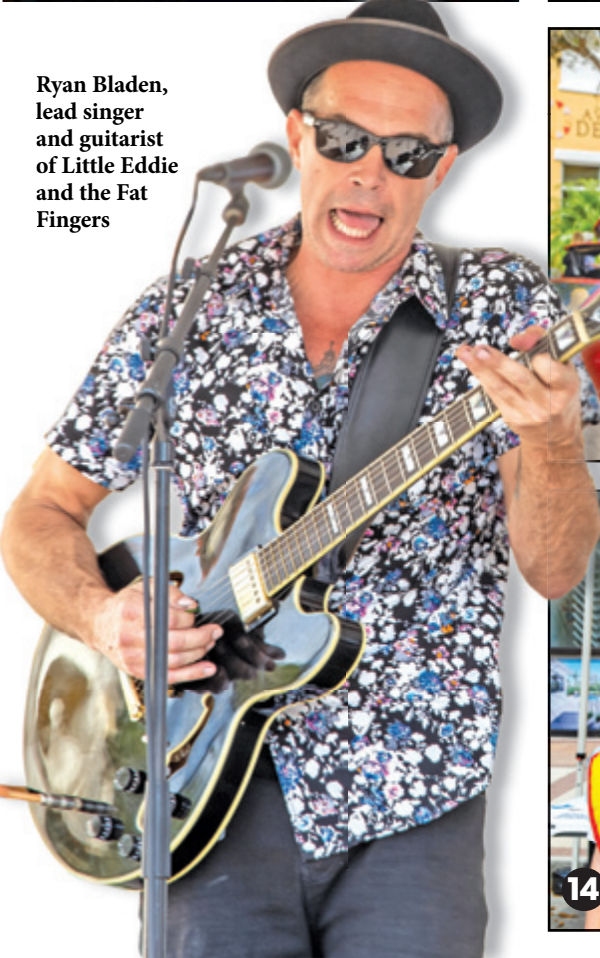
Another successful Blues, Brews & BBQ in the Town Center



- 1. Ernie Cantu, Andrew Ramos, Matthew Rongstad and Debra Biela of Deb & the Dynamics
- 2. Rhonda Aubert of Ave Maria hits her mark at Chuck It Axes.
- 3. John and Polly Tierney of Fort Myers
- 4. Charlie and Cindy Powell and Tracy and Dennis Raymond came from Labelle for the barbecue and fun.
- 5. The Donovan family from Ave Maria
- 6. Ron and Kathleen Peters of Marco Island with Limoncello and Jack Daniels
- 7. The Martin Fiero grill team cooking up some some barbecue
- 8. Anna and Bogdan Sztuka of Ave Maria
- 9. Old School thrills the crowd.



FUN AROUND THE TOWN



Ryan Bladen,
lead singer
and guitarist
of Little Eddie
and the Fat
Fingers



10. Thomas Morris of Deb & the Dynamics
11. Exotic cars line Annunciation Circle.
12. Román Newark and Felton Woulard, Ave Maria University football receivers
13. Face (and arm) painter local artist Manuela Cason at work
14. Grace Krzyminski, Graclin Grzenkowicz and Logan Weaver, helping to raise money for the Florida Special Olympics and Friends of Saint Margaret of Castello, which help people with intellectual disabilities



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Moved by the live music, young and old alike joyfully let their sense of rhythm take over. No doubt at least some of them were working off calories consumed at the food vendor booths nearby in Annunciation Circle.

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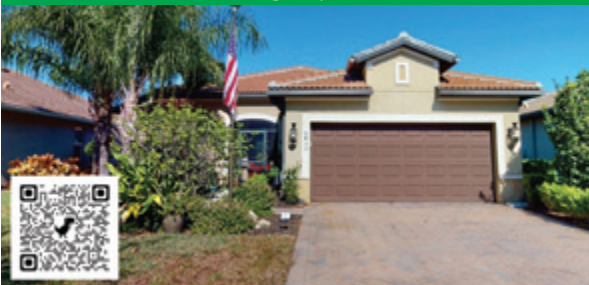
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