

Ave Maria Sun



COURTESY PHOTO
CC Homes residents can use a spacious clubhouse and community pool for events and gatherings. Model homes are open daily to tour.

Ave Maria’s Ninth Consecutive Sand Dollar Award for Community Excellence

BY Nanci Theoret
Ave Maria Sun Correspondent

Ave Maria continued its reign as the region’s top community, earning a ninth consecutive Sand Dollar Award from the Collier Building Industry Association in October. Recognizing the town and developer Barron Collier Companies, the coveted Community of the Year trophy, in the category of homes priced under \$500,000, was determined by an independent panel of industry experts who evaluated home sales, overall amenities, lifestyle, recreation and “Home to More” experiences Ave Maria residents enjoy every day.

“We are honored to receive this award nine years in a row,” said Cee Cee Marinelli, director of development for Ave Maria. “Our town’s amenities enhance the sense of community by providing an instant source of leisure activities and socialization for neighbors and friends.”

Ave Maria’s 55+ age-restricted community, Del Webb Naples and a single-family home, the Bougainvillea II, built by Lennar were also singled out as the best in the annual contest which honors homebuilders, developers, interior designers and other industry professionals demonstrating excellence.

Ave Maria’s vibrant small-town vibe, big-town conveniences and attainable home prices appeal to a variety of homebuyers – from young professionals, growing families and retirees. It’s the fastest-selling new-home master-planned community in Collier County, a “Top 20 Place to Retire” and a certified Blue Zones Community. Ranked as the 19th top-selling community in the country based on the 2023 mid-year sales report, the town has sold 605 homes year to date – unprecedented in its 16-year history.

Miles of walking, biking and hiking paths

SEE COMMUNITY, A24 ►



AVE MARIA’S VETERANS MEMORIAL RISES TALL WITH COMMUNITY BACKING



SANDRA YEYATI / AVE MARIA SUN

BY Nanci Theoret
Ave Maria Sun Correspondent

A collaborative effort involving various segments of the Ave Maria community came together to bring the new veterans memorial to life.

Children enthusiastically donated spare change to the Ave Maria Veterans Association’s (AMVA) during community-wide events.

A total of 440 town residents proudly displayed the American flag in front of their homes or generously purchased flags for neighbors through the Flagpoles for Veterans initiative.

Local businesses in Ave Maria actively participated in raising both funds and awareness for the memorial.

Vendors and area contractors contributed by either donating or providing discounted materials such as pavers, sod, landscaping and services.

Families and foundations made substantial financial contributions to support the cause.

Barron Collier Companies, the developer, played a pivotal role by leasing the nearly quarter-acre site for \$1 over the next 99 years.

Even local students painted patriotic-themed murals on the site’s power boxes, and utilized the memorial’s benches for study sessions just days before the official

SEE VETERANS, A10 ►

▲
CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT: Wreath ceremony for the fallen. • Heartfelt salute by a veteran. • A veteran pauses for a moment of contemplation beside the monument wall. • Ave Maria residents display their support for U.S. veterans.

Unearthing Our Forgotten History

Discovering Ave Maria’s Fort Doane A19 ►



Dance Academy Embraces New Direction

Academy soars to new heights with fresh leadership A22-23 ►



Emma Schweitzer

First National Player of the Week in Ave Maria’s Soccer Program History A33 ►



Ave Maria Sun

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ALL AROUND AVE MARIA

Dates and details are subject to change. Call the Ave Maria New Home & 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

Ave Maria Marathon

On Saturday, Feb. 10, from 7:00 a.m. to 1:30 p.m., experience a day of fitness and fun! Athletes of all levels can participate in the Friends & Family Mile, 5K, 10K, half marathon or full marathon. The races commence and conclude in the Town Center, and don't miss the vendors' expo from 6 a.m. to 2 p.m. For additional details and registration, visit alpha.win/event/ave-maria-fl.

Family Fun First Fridays

These monthly free events, held on the first Friday of each month, blend musical entertainment with family-friendly games and activities. The January event will embrace a Winter theme, featuring princesses, Way Too Tall Torrie the stilt walker balloon artist, DJ music and more. For the heart health commemoration on Feb. 2, attendees are encouraged to wear red for women's health, and the live musician Paul Demaris will perform from 5:00 to 7:00 p.m. at Oil Well Craft Beer in the Park of Commerce. Save the date for the St. Patrick's-themed celebration on March 1 in the Town Center, which will showcase a dance performance by the Celtic Spirit Dance Academy, music,



COURTESY PHOTO

Crafting memories and marking Bingo cards at Oil Well Craft Beer's lively Bingo night.

face painting, and activities from 4:00 to 6:00 p.m.

MERCHANT EVENTS

Oil Well Craft Beer

Every Monday through Saturday from 5-8 p.m. there is at least one food truck at the Park of Commerce serving scrumptious food to go with Oil Well Craft Beer's libations.

Don't miss the annual Ave Maria Veterans tailgate fundraiser on Saturday, Dec. 9 from 11:00 a.m. to 3:00 p.m.

The Secret Ingredient and Oil Well Craft Beer invite guests to the ultimate

English Afternoon Tea experience on Sunday, Dec. 10 from 6 to 9 p.m. So, get those fascinators ready! Ticket sales for this event will be available closer to the event date. Follow Oil Well Craft Beer on social media for updates.

Celebrate the spirit of the season at the Christmas Bazaar on Saturday, Dec. 16, running from noon to 4:00 p.m. Attendees can discover extraordinary gifts crafted by local vendors, enjoy free entry and ample parking, and contribute to the toy drive benefiting a women's shelter in Naples. Artisans can secure a 6-foot ven-

SEE AROUND, A4 ►

For unto us a child is born, unto us a son is given; And the government will be upon His shoulders. And His name will be called Wonderful, Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.
Isaiah 9:6

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ALL AROUND AVE MARIA



COURTESY PHOTO

Santa and Mrs. Claus visited from the North Pole to attend the recent Christmas Boutique Crawl, organized by town business owner Daneé Williams.

AROUND

From page 4

- Sunday, Dec. 17**
W. Basketball vs. #1 Campbellsville (Ky.), 2 p.m.
- Thursday, Dec. 28**
W. Basketball vs. Florida National, 5 p.m.
- Friday, Dec. 29**
W. Basketball vs. Lawrence Tech (Mich.), 2 p.m.
- Saturday, Dec. 30**
W. Basketball vs. Saint Mary-of-the-

- Woods (Ind.), 12 p.m.
- Saturday, Jan. 6**
W. Basketball vs. RV Southeastern, 2 p.m.
M. Basketball vs. RV Southeastern, 4 p.m.
- Wednesday, Jan. 17**
W. Basketball vs. Florida Memorial, 5:30 p.m.
M. Basketball vs Florida Memorial, 7:30 p.m.
- Saturday, Jan. 20**
Swimming vs. Barry, TBD
- Wednesday, Jan. 24**
W. Basketball vs. Webber, 5:30 p.m.
M. Basketball vs. Webber, 7:30 p.m.

- Saturday, Jan. 27**
W. Basketball vs. Coastal Georgia, 2 p.m.
M. Basketball vs. Coastal Georgia, 4 p.m.
- Saturday, Feb. 3**
RGB South Florida Club, TBD
- Wednesday, Feb. 7**
W. Basketball vs. Warner, 5:30 p.m.
M. Basketball vs. Warner, 7:30 p.m.
- Saturday, Feb. 10**
RGB Miami Club, TBD
W. Basketball vs. Keiser, 2 p.m.
M. Basketball vs. Keiser, 4 p.m.
- Saturday, Feb. 17**
W. Basketball vs. St. Thomas, 2:00 p.m.
M. Basketball vs #14 St. Thomas, 4 p.m.
- Saturday, Feb. 24**
RGB Eckerd Club, TBD
- Monday, Feb 26**
Lacrosse vs. Cumberlands (Ky.), 6 p.m.
- Monday, March 4**
Lacrosse vs. Marian (Ind.), TBA
- Wednesday, March 6**
Lacrosse vs. Madonna (Mich.), 6 p.m.
- Friday, March 8**
Lacrosse vs. Lawrence Tech (Mich.), 6 p.m.
- Monday, March 11**

- Lacrosse vs. Franciscan (Ohio), 6 p.m.
- Thursday, March 14**
Lacrosse vs. Georgetown (Ky.), TBA
- Monday, March 18**
Lacrosse vs. Oglethorpe (Ga.), 6 p.m.
- Saturday, March 23**
Lacrosse vs. Warner, 1 p.m.
- Saturday, March 30**
RGB Millenia Atlantic, TBD
- Wednesday, April 3**
Lacrosse vs. Keiser, 6 p.m.
- Saturday, April 6**
Lacrosse vs. Life (Ga.), 1 p.m.

■ AVE MARIA RESIDENTS ONLY
Organizers request pre-registration for these resident-only events via the Ave Maria Master Association (AMMA) calendar at avemariamasterassociation.com. For more information, call 239-867-4322.

AVE MARIA WATER PARK NEWS
Beginning Monday, Jan. 8, the Water Park will have partial park closures while undergoing segment renovations. Residents should look out for updates and information on water exercise classes in their Friday Flash E-blasts.
American Red Cross Lifeguard train-
SEE AROUND, A8 ►

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ALL AROUND AVE MARIA

AROUND

From page 6

ing classes will be held from Thursday, Jan. 4 through Sunday, Jan. 7 at the Water Park. Please call 239-348-8384 for more details.

Ave Maria Stewardship Community District (AMSCD) Meetings

Monthly AMSCD meetings are open to the public and held in the AMMA meeting room Tuesday, Jan. 9 at 6 p.m., Wednesday, Feb. 7 at 9 a.m. and Thursday, March 7 at 6 p.m. Visit avemariastewardshipcd.org for more information, such as monthly meeting books and schedule updates.

Embrace Life Series

Photographer and resident Patrick O’Flaherty DDS presents inspiring wild-life photography series set to music in the AMMA meeting room on Tuesdays, Jan. 16, Feb. 20, March 19 and April 16, from 7 to 8 p.m. This presentation covers amazing wildlife shots taken on his voyages, showcasing enlightening photography in places he has visited with Alliance for Smiles Mission in countries all over the world. Admission is free.

Community Yard Sale and Services Day

Providing Ave Maria residents with a chance to sell gently used items and offer services to neighbors, this community-building event takes place from 9 a.m. to 1 p.m. on Saturday, Feb. 24, in North

Park. Enjoy DJ music, family-friendly activities, food trucks and more. For more information like booth reservations or table and chair rentals, please visit avemariamasterassociation.com.

Spring Festival

Celebrate spring Ave Maria-style from 10:30 a.m. to 1:30 p.m. on Saturday, March 23, in North Park, featuring the annual Easter Egg Dash and Bunny Hop. The day begins with a bunny parade, followed by egg hunt races across various age categories, an obstacle course for older kids, a designated egg stroll corner for children aged 3 and under, and even a lollipop drop! Vendors and information booths will provide entertainment and education. Admission is \$5 per child, and parents, as well as kids aged 2 and under, can attend for free. Pre-registration is required and will be available on the avemariamasterassociation.com website calendar.

New Homeowners Social & Orientation

New Ave Maria homeowners, as well as those who have not attended one before, are invited to a social and informational event in the AMMA meeting room. This event features a presentation by the master association director, providing valuable insights about living in the Ave Maria community and an overview of the various organizations operating within. For dates and times, please check the AMMA website calendar. The next orientation is scheduled for Thursday, Dec. 14, starting with a social at 5:15 p.m., followed by the orientation at 6 p.m.

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 to 3 p.m. Mondays and Thursdays in the AMMA card room.

SPORTS AND FITNESS (RESIDENTS ONLY)

Swimming Lessons

Beginning Monday, March 11, 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 to 5 years old) and youth (6 to 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.

Free Fitness Classes at South Park

These biweekly fitness classes at South Park start at 9:15 a.m. on Tuesdays and Thursdays. For more information for these and other class locations, text instructor Nicolas Leon at 786-436-3323.

Tai Chi Fitness

Experience a meditative workout that increases strength, mobility and much more at 9 a.m. Wednesdays in the AMMA event room. For more information, contact instructor Mylyn Vedel at myvedel@gmail.com or 239-220-4181.

Yoga Fitness

Yoga instructor Alexandra Salazar is back with specialized classes designed for senior adults. The classes will take place at 10 a.m. every other Friday. For more information or to register, please reach out to salex2009@gmail.com.

Quest Martial Arts Academy Classes

Led by Kenny Quintero, a 20-year veteran instructor, these martial arts classes for kids to adults, start at 5 p.m. Mondays and 9:30 a.m. Saturdays in the AMMA event room, teach students 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 questmartialart-sacademy.com.

Ave Maria Little League

Check out the Spring season information for this home-based and very first official league in Ave Maria who continues to have a winning history! League play includes baseball, tee ball and softball for kids aged 4 to 14. For detailed information and registration instructions, visit avemarialittleleague.com or contact avemariabaseball@gmail.com.

Sports Leagues & Organizations

There are various seasonal independent sports leagues and organizations operating in Ave Maria, so for more information on current availability, please visit the Ave Maria Master Association Website Calendar for any approved fitness and sports conducted by independent contractors. 🌟



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Collier County Commissioner Rick LoCastro energizes the crowd.



Maryann Stuart holds a photograph of her late husband John who served in the Coast Guard.



A proud U.S. marine.



Raising of the American flag.

VETERANS

From page 1

Nov. 11 dedication and grand opening. Anderson Richardson, president of the Ave Maria Veterans Association and a 26-year U.S. Army veteran, expressed gratitude, stating, “This was a whole community effort, and the memorial could not have happened without full community support behind it. We received donations from little kids to \$25,000. The memorial is not just for veterans, it’s for the entire Ave Maria community. We proposed the memorial and the town just ran with it.”

Situated alongside a large lake, the Veterans Memorial stands at 4840 Ave Maria Boulevard. The American flag, a literal and figurative centerpiece atop a 4-foot-tall black pad, was raised to its full 25 feet for the first time in November. Surrounding the 60-foot circle are the flags of the six U.S. armed forces – Air Force, Army, Coast Guard, Marine Corps, Navy and Space Force – with the surface adorned in 8-by-8-inch pavers honoring loved ones.

The memorial boasts additional features, including a steel sculpture of a kneeling sol-



An appreciative audience.

dier in silhouette donated by resident Marc Moreau, and a 9-foot-tall, 15-foot-long wall showcasing colored granite service medallions of each military branch. The wall also features expressions of gratitude recognizing U.S. veterans for their heroism and sacrifice, with the poignant phrase, “We don’t know them all, but we owe them all.”

The Veterans Association successfully raised \$140,000 for the memorial. Funds

were collected through various channels, including weekly farmers markets, contributions from local businesses, the ongoing Flagpoles for Veterans program (which generated \$23,000), and proceeds from two charity golf tournaments. The third annual scramble, the Association’s primary fundraiser, takes place on Friday, Dec. 8, at Panther Run golf course in Del Webb Naples.

Generous donations were made on behalf

of the William and Patricia LaMothe family foundation, the Del Webb Veterans Club, and Michael Schwartz of Ave Maria Mutual Funds. Schwartz’s \$15,000 contribution included 35 brick pavers dedicated to each U.S. conflict or war since the Revolutionary War. Additional support came from the 2023 Sunshine State Steak Cook-Off, with matching funds provided by Modern Woodman.

The Ave Maria Stewardship Community and Ave Maria Development played crucial roles by providing an easement on the land and assisting with permitting, design elements and electrical service.

David Genson, president of development for Barron Collier Companies, emphasized the town’s unity, stating, “Through this process, it has been incredible to witness the town come together in support of our veterans and townspeople to make this a reality. As the developer of the town of Ave Maria, we see the value the Veterans Memorial brings to our community members.”

Thomas Schlessinger, vice president of the Veterans Association and memorial project manager, said, “Over the course of the last four years, we raised enough money to fund the memorial. People have gone above and beyond to support the project and recognize



From left, Erin Dever of Senator Rick Scott’s office, Kim Hayes of the American Gold Star Mothers of Southwest Florida and Senior Vice Commander Tony Reyes of the Veterans of Foreign Wars.

veterans and the sacrifices they’ve made.”

The value of total community support exceeded \$200,000, according to Schlessinger, including donated materials, in-kind services and pro-bono hours from engineering and design professionals.

The idea for the memorial emerged shortly after the founding of the Veterans Association in 2018. Despite initial challenges with no funding or design, the fledgling flagpole project, which allocated \$35 from every private home installation to the organization, showcased Ave Maria’s patriotism. Residents actively participated by purchasing flagpoles for veterans and their neighbors.

Paver sales, available at avemariavets.org, continue to fund ongoing maintenance.

Schlessinger discovered a heartening reversal in sentiment from companies eager to provide free or heavily discounted materials in support of the effort; a stark change from public sentiment following his return from the Vietnam War.

“For the longest time, veterans didn’t get recognition. People are so appreciative and thankful today, and it makes you feel good,” expressed the veteran Marine. “For me, this is an opportunity to provide recognition for my generation, the generations before me and after me, to help other veterans get the recognition they deserve. The people at Ave Maria are very supportive of veterans and first responders. 🌟



Audience enjoys Mitzy Seijo’s rendition of “America the Beautiful.”




From left, Larry and Deb Fornwall and Jackie and Dan Rategan



From left, Collier County Deputy Sheriff Paul Cabral and Fire Chief Michael Choate.



“Taps” was played on the trumpet.




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Erin and Chad LMCU Members

REAL STORIES OF AVE MARIA

Steinbeck Way, Ave Maria’s Homegrown Rock Band

BY Nanci Theoret

Ave Maria Sun Correspondent

Being in a band takes on a unique beauty as you age, a truth realized by the members of Ave Maria’s Steinbeck Way. Wisdom and maturity naturally temper the ego and irrationality of youth when you hit ages 50 and 60. Forget overcrowded garages; as homeowners on Steinbeck Way in Ave Maria, their practice space is now a much nicer place.

Lead singer Jack West humorously noted that the music remains constant in his nearly 50-year hiatus: “I was in bands in the 70s, and it’s the same music today. The only difference now is it hurts more tearing down the equipment and lifting the cases.”

The Naples-based blues, rock and soul cover band, focuses on music from the ‘50s to the present. With three distinct singers covering different styles, they create a unique blend of sounds, specializing in playing upbeat dance music.

Expressing a deep love for song and sound, the band draws inspiration from the greatest rock musicians, recreating their heroes’ best tunes while injecting their unique style. Their classic rock repertoire covers iconic bands like The Beatles, BTO, Cream, The Eagles, Golden Earring, Janis Joplin, Lynyrd Skynyrd, Pat Benatar, R.E.M., The Stones, ZZ Top and more.

Steinbeck Way is more than a band; they are a group of musicians and friends with a story that began long ago, crafting individual styles and waiting for the right moment. In April 2022, talents intersected, and the band was born. Those early days were exploratory, but slowly, they discovered their sound, audience, and purpose. Today, they play in and around Naples and Ave Maria, constantly adding to their setlist, determined to give their audience a great time.

“Our name is founded on our origin and the drive we each share to be a part of our community and the well-being of our neighbors and friends. For us, Steinbeck Way is also our attitude. Our songs, you see, we play the Steinbeck Way,” shared West.

“We take people back on a trip through time... When we play songs like Golden Earring’s ‘Radar Love,’ they remember what they were doing when the song first came out and dance. That’s what makes our show. We’ve done our job,” West said.

Steinbeck Way also includes founder and lead guitarist Chris Webb, singer and supporting instrumentalist Mitzy Seijo, drummer Glenn Dove and bassist Drew Turner. The band has been playing since April 2022, brought together by the randomness of chance encounters and karaoke. Karaoke nights at Ave Maria’s in-town pub and brewery brought West and Seijo to Webb’s attention.

“We all just clicked. We became a family in a short time,” said West, whose non-band decades were focused on career and family. “It couldn’t work any other way.”

“Everyone has different backgrounds and we all just connected,” said Dove, a lifelong professional musician who toured with Ram Jam for two years in the late 70s during the height of the group’s “Black Betty” single.

Dove moved from New York to Ave Maria in 2021, allotting six months to get acclimated before venturing into the local music scene. Dove’s wife happened upon Webb’s online message looking for a drummer, and to confirm his experience, Dove sent Webb a photo of the ten sets in the drum room of his Del Webb Naples home.

Steinbeck Way was named not as an ode to the famous author, but a location. West and Webb, as they soon found out, live only five houses apart on Steinbeck Way, and Turner is two blocks away. Despite volleying through hundreds of possible band names, the group eventually settled on the two words consistently referenced in texts detailing the next practice session at Webb’s home.



AVE MARIA & KENNETH REDDING PHOTOGRAPHY

Band standing proudly next to the Steinbeck Way street sign, where their dreams began.

Since landing their first gig at Oil Well Craft Beer in June 2022, Steinbeck Way’s fanbase and dance card have expanded exponentially. The band has performed throughout Ave Maria, for intimate audiences at private parties and restaurants, and for larger crowds during town-wide events and in the Grand Hall at Del Webb Naples. Steinbeck Way is making an encore appearance at Taste of Ave Saturday, Feb. 4.

“I love that, playing downtown in front of all your peers at Taste of Ave,” said West. “The bigger the venue, the better.”

For Dove, who’s appeared on the same bills as Steppenwolf and Molly Hatchet before audiences of 10,000 or more, performing in a hometown band, in Florida versus New York City is obviously different, sometimes comically so. Smaller stages provide a personal connection between musician and music lover.

“When you play really big shows you don’t see the audience,” he said. “There’s also the joke that at Ave Maria and Del Webb, we only play until 9 p.m. With some of the newer venues, we’re scheduled until 11 p.m. or 1 a.m.—in New York City you were at a club until 3 a.m.”

Word of mouth and Steinbeck Way’s reputation for danceable, universally appealing music are also driving its success.

For more information about the band, visit their Facebook page and website steinbeckway.com. 🌟



BIG KINDS OF SMALL TOWN FUN

Fun Unfolds at the Annual Fall Festival



Ave Maria residents enjoyed a day filled with festivities at the annual Fall Festival hosted by the Ave Maria Master Association on Saturday, October 22. The event featured vendors and crafters, live music, an obstacle course, pumpkin painting, food trucks, a petting zoo, pony rides, and more, providing a fun-filled day for the community.



Calendar of Events

SPECIAL EVENTS	ONGOING EVENTS
Sunshine State Steak Cook-Off / Arts & Crafts Festival Saturday, Jan. 27 • 2:00 PM - 6:30 PM	Farmers Market Every Saturday, Nov. 4 thru April 29 • 9:00 AM - 2:00 PM
Taste of Ave Saturday, Feb. 3 • 12:00 PM - 5:00 PM	Trolley Tours Every Tuesday, Jan. 16 thru April 23 • 11:00 AM - 2:00 PM
Blues, Brews & BBQ Festival Saturday, Feb. 17 • 12:00 PM - 5:00 PM	Live Music in Town Center Tuesdays & Saturdays • 11:00 AM - 2:00 PM
Margarita & Taco Festival Saturday, March 16 • 12:00 PM - 5:00 PM	

AVE MARIA COMMUNITIES



AVALON PARK

About the community

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

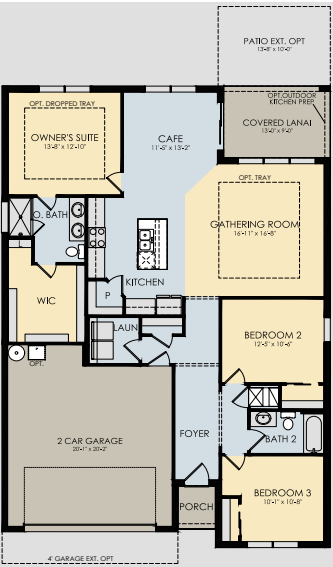
It's easy to stay active and have family fun at Avalon Park. Located within walking or biking distance to downtown Ave Maria, Avalon Park attracts families looking for exceptional schools, close proximity to neighborhood parks, and plenty of living space. Avalon Park offers spacious homesites, unique 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 6 1/2 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.



As one of the nation's largest and most respected homebuilders with more than 70 years of homebuilding experience, Pulte Homes takes pride in putting that experience to work for you. With insightful, consumer-inspired home designs, Pulte houses offer the best in livability, with personalization options and

versatile living spaces to make everyday moments easier and more enjoyable. With a clear focus on quality construction and a simplified buying experience, Pulte Homes will help you get into your dream home easily. That's More Life Built In®, and that's exactly what you'll find at Avalon Park.



Cedar

- Starting from the low \$400s
- 1,662 square feet
- Three bedrooms
- Two bathrooms
- Two-car garage

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



About the community

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

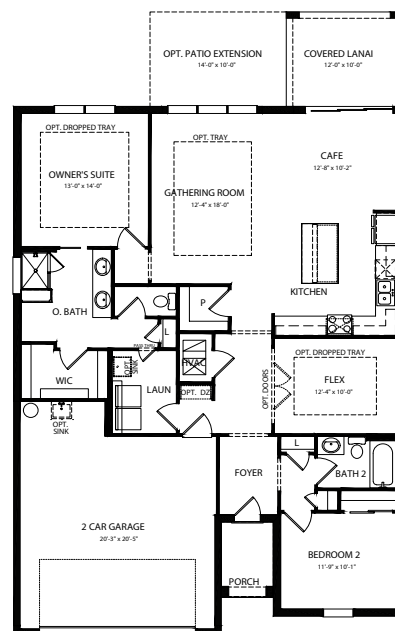
Del Webb Naples brings premier resort-style amenities and a lifestyle nothing short of extraordinary to Ave Maria. Here, daily possibilities for new adventures await. Where every day is different – and entirely up to you. From a dip in the pool to a friendly game of pickleball, in Del Webb Naples you'll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

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



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

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



Prosperity

- Starting from the mid \$400s
- 1,670+ square feet
- Two to Three bedrooms
- Two bathrooms
- Two-car garage

Del Webb Naples
6028 Victory Drive, Ave Maria, FL 34142
239-842-9643



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.



Harbour

- 3,522 a/c square feet
- Four to six bedrooms
- 3½ to 5½ bathrooms
- Ground floor owners suite
- Two- or three-car garage



Starting from the \$300,000s

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.

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



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

NOW SELLING GOLF AND NON-GOLF SOCIAL MEMBERSHIPS



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.



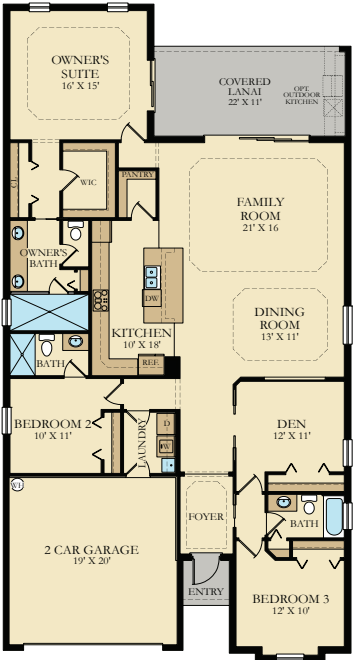
From the upper \$200,000s - \$800,000s+

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Simplify your home buying experience by including everything you need in a new home and community. And once you find your perfect home, our family of companies are there to assist you every step of the way with your mortgage, title and insurance needs for an enjoyable and hassle-free closing.

Learn the possibilities of Everything's Included®

The National Golf & Country Club
6090 Artisan Court, Ave Maria, FL 34142
239-867-9090 | www.TheNationalVIP.com



Maria

- Starting from the \$500,000s
- 2,247 square feet
- Three bedrooms + den
- Three bathrooms

Unearthing Our Forgotten History: Ave Maria’s Fort Doane

ERICA FISH

Ave Maria Sun Correspondent

Nestled in eastern Collier County, Ave Maria’s stunning landscapes and vibrant communities have become sanctuary for many of Florida’s most notable animals and native plants, and with thousands of acres of preserves surrounding Town, a historic past remains protected in the area’s mix of royal palms and swamps.

Located west of Town is the site of Fort Doane, a former U.S. military supply camp and army depot during the Second Seminole War, which served soldiers on reconnaissance missions for up to two days at a time. The camp was garrisoned by the 8th Infantry: Companies B, C, D, E and I under the command of William Jenkins Worth. The fort’s scouting parties consisted of 30 to 40 soldiers, with 10 to 20 men remaining as guard during infirmity leave.

The Seminole Wars – spanning across 1816 to 1858 – were among the longest and costliest conflicts in United States history, having imprinted a forever mark on the legacy of present-day Collier County and the surrounding regions. Eight army forts were built near what would geographically now be called our county: Old Fort Foster, Fort Poinsett, Fort Harell, Fort Keias, Fort Doane, Fort Keys, Fort Simon Drum and Fort Cross. Local historians, like Dr. Emily Thompson, have uncovered evidence suggesting this Southwest Florida area became a significant battleground during the Second Seminole War (1835 – 1842), as the U.S. Army aimed to remove Seminoles from the southern lands and place them in western reservations.

Established during the second war’s Big Cypress Campaign on Dec. 21, 1841, Ave Maria’s fort was named in honor of Sergeant John Doane of the same infantry, who died in combat the day prior – a fellow soldier killed the same day, Private William Foster – would be honored by Old Fort Foster, the earliest military post in Collier County. But, by January 1842, the Doane camp was abandoned after one month of militant use. Background research suggests several trails were used in a transportation network which linked various forts in the Big Cypress vicinity including Doane with neighboring camp, Fort Keias, located near Immokalee’s Lake Trafford.

In 2003, Florida historian Dr. Knetch documented that “Fort Doane’s manifest would have consisted of food and ammunition [balls and caps for Mississippi percussion rifles]. These supplies would have arrived at the fort site via wagons pulled by mules and stored either in a log or plank enclosure, with tarpaulin tents providing shelter when troops rested.”

As awareness grew, efforts were underway to preserve and interpret the site. In 2004, Barron Collier Companies (BCC), developer of Ave Maria, proposed the site require a thorough archaeological survey – field work began that following May, covering close to 5,000 acres.

“The purpose of the historic site campaign was to locate and identify any prehistoric and historic period sites or structures located within the Ave Maria property,” said author Ralph Van Blarcom of “Seminole War Artifacts & A History of the Forts of Florida.”

Intensive metal detecting and subsurface archeological testing were conducted in the effort, and as a result, no evidence was found, determining the abandoned fort area as a “general vicinity location historic archaeological site,” with address labeled: NE 2 miles County Road 858, 6 miles W of State Road 29. There is no public access to this location.

“Although no physical evidence of the Seminole War’s Fort Doane installation

or any 19th century occupation was found within the project area, BCC recognizes the importance of Seminole War history to Collier County and Southwest Florida,” said Ron Jamro, former director of Collier County Museums.

After construction of Ave Maria’s Town Center began in February 2006, some debate rumbled post-archeological dig, as historians and historical societies disagreed with the State of Florida’s conclusions and believed the Fort Doane site of the Second Seminole War was moved and became active again during the Third War.

“The site of Fort Doane was first identified in the 1940s by D. Graham Copeland as the site of Fort Keias, although his own notes indicate that he may have been misled by local traditions... A review of the contemporary maps of this period indicates the site is indeed Fort Doane,” stated the 8CR660 Florida report.

It was soon determined that Fort Doane, originally situated near Ave Maria, was relocated five miles northwest when recommissioned for duty during the Third Seminole War. The new location placed it in proximity to the bustling army installation known as Camp [Fort] Keias, positioned northeast of Doane’s initial site.

The coordinates for Fort Doane during the Second Seminole War were 81°27’100° longitude and 26°16’500 latitude, while during the Third Seminole War, the coordinates shifted to 81°30’900° longitude and 26°19’550 latitude.

In his journals, Copeland observed the site as “a series of trenches from six inches to one-foot-deep running partly at angles eastward from the Cypress and thence southerly and easterly a distance of about 500 feet thence westerly about 200 feet to the Cypress.”

The discovery and preservation of Fort Doane and its land serves as a reminder that lying deep in our marshes is a complex Florida history deserving of recognition. As the years progressed, it remained a duty to the Barron Collier Companies and Ave Maria Development to guard the fort site, having permanently staked the area once led by artillery-filled wagons and commands.

Sources

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PHOTOS FROM JAMES HAMMOND’S, “FLORIDA’S VANISHING TRAIL”

A Civil War military map from 1850 highlights Fort Foster, Fort Doane and Fort Simon Drum in modern Collier County. The present boundaries of Collier County encompass Big Cypress Swamp, where Seminole Native Americans, led by their last chief Billy Bowlegs, withdrew after the Billy Bowlegs Wars (1856-57). In 1857, Chief Billy and 160 tribe members were captured in the swamp, and on May 4, 1858, they were shipped to Native American reservations in the West.



Rand McNally & Company’s 1880 map shows the location of army forts during the Third Seminole War. The latest research shows Fort Doane during the Second Seminole War to be 5 miles southeast of the location marked.

FLORIDA WEEKLY PRESENTS

4TH ANNUAL

Rockabillagoue
Florida 2024

SATURDAY, JANUARY 20TH

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STARTS AT 11 AM

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CONTESTS
VENDORS, & MORE

featuring
JO MCPHERSON
HILLBILLY MOON
EXPLOSION

BIG SANDY & HIS FLY-RITE BOYS
DEKE DICKERSON & THE WHIPPERSNAPPERS
MESSER CHUPS | RECKLESS ONES
PETER & THE WOLVES | THE ROCK-A-SONICS
ABBY GIRL & THE REAL DEAL | THE CENTURIES
THE MCCHARMLYS

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A portrait of Marie Osmond with long brown hair, wearing a red top and large hoop earrings.

MARIE OSMOND
AN ORCHESTRAL CHRISTMAS
DECEMBER 12

A photograph of purple and white fireworks exploding in a dark night sky.

**CELEBRATION
IN THE SKY**
FREE FIREWORKS SHOW
JANUARY 13

A black and white photograph of two men, AJ Croce and another musician, sitting and playing acoustic guitars.

50TH ANNIVERSARY TOUR
AJ CROCE PRESENTS
**CROCE PLAYS
CROCE**
JANUARY 28

A photograph of a woman wearing a black hat, sunglasses, and a green sequined corset.

**THE LALAS
BURLESQUE SHOW**
FEBRUARY 2

A close-up photograph of Willie Nelson's face and hands as he plays an acoustic guitar.

**WILLIE NELSON &
FAMILY**
JANUARY 28

A portrait of Aaron Lewis, a man with glasses and tattoos, wearing a black t-shirt.

AARON LEWIS
2024 ACOUSTIC TOUR
FEBRUARY 8

A photograph of the three members of the band The Lettermen, dressed in red suits and white shirts.

THE LETTERMEN
FEBRUARY 9

The logo for the band Blood Sweat & Tears, featuring a stylized eye and the band's name in a decorative font.

**BLOOD SWEAT
& TEARS**
FEBRUARY 15

A collage of six images showing various food items: the exterior of 1st Street Deli, a cup of coffee with pastries, a grilled steak, a slice of cheesecake with a strawberry, a sandwich, and a plate of stir-fry.

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**MINUTES AWAY
FROM MORE**





The Dance Academy ribbon cutting was well-attended by students, teachers, family and friends.

SANDRA YEYATI / AVE MARIA SUN

Dance Academy Embraces New Direction

BY SANDRA YEYATI
Ave Maria Sun Correspondent

In August, Maple Ridge residents Okkie and Charl Van Wyk purchased the Town Center's Ave Maria Dance Academy and have been setting the place abuzz for the past three months with strategic renovations, a fresh slate of instructors, expanded class offerings and numerous plans for the future.

According to Okkie, this labor of love came to pass in large part because her daughter Adryan has been studying dance since she was three years old. "We've experienced firsthand the joy of dance. It has shown my daughter growth, strength and confidence throughout the years," she explained. "From a parent's perspective, I can bond with my daughter as a backstage mom, driving her to recitals, helping her with costumes and makeup. I've seen her grow into a beautiful, mature dancer and independent person. This could be a legacy that we leave her, a studio where she will be able to continue her passion for dance and offer others the opportunity to dance."

A freshman with a dance scholarship from Ave Maria University (AMU), Adryan performs on the Gyrenes Dance Team. She is also one of the dance academy's eight new instructors, most of which are AMU undergrads and lifelong dancers. The academy is looking to hire a few high school students as teaching assistants, offering leadership and mentoring experience for the right candidates.

"Dance teaches you skills that you wouldn't necessarily get otherwise, like how to do your makeup for dancing, how to get your cos-



Members of the Gyrenes Dance Team.

tume ready, learning choreography quickly, learning a routine, memorization and musicality, leadership, discipline and confidence," Adryan shared. "It's also a fun sport that allows self expression and friend making. Dance creates a lot of opportunities and memories, and there's always a chance to take it with you, whether you're young and taking dance classes or in college on the dance team, or when you're older, you can teach dance... There's no age limit. You can always pursue and grow and learn new skills. Overall, it's

just a great way to keep your body active, and it teaches you a lot physically, but also mentally. You have to be hardworking and dedicated."

Under the Van Wyks' management, the academy has added daytime courses three times a week for homeschoolers, beginning with a mommy-and-me session at 9 a.m. (daddies also welcome), followed by hourly classes until noon for older kids up to age 18. "This is for children who are homeschooled or day classes for children who want to learn dance but do not want to perform in a recital," Okkie noted. "It has been exciting to see the cute 18-month or 2-year-olds with their tutus. I also enjoy seeing all the children's excitement of dance and seeing them progress."

The academy offers evening and Saturday morning classes in ballet, tap, jazz, theater jazz, lyrical, pointe, hip-hop, modern, tumbling and fitness. Weekly ballroom dancing for couples is slated to begin in January, and the academy is also expanding its offerings to adults with the addition of adult ballet, as



Adryan and Okkie Van Wyk in the academy's store.



Charl and Okkie Van Wyk

"Dance creates a lot of opportunities and memories, and there's always a chance to take it with you, whether you're young and taking dance classes or in college on the dance team, or when you're older, you can teach dance... There's no age limit."

— Adryan Van Wyk

well as strength and conditioning courses. The ballet curriculum has been restructured into eight levels so that students can progress from one level to the next based on skill, irrespective of age.

According to Okkie, the most dedicated,

hardworking and passionate dancers will be invited to join and perform with the Ave Maria Dance Company at community centers, nursing homes and events throughout the year. “We’re collaborating with the Immokalee Chamber of Commerce and the Ave Maria Master Association to get our performers out into the community. The Dance Company is the face of Ave Maria Dance Academy,” she remarked. “It’s something for younger girls to work toward. They take more dance classes, are expected to learn choreography very quickly, and will generally work harder.”

With a focus on optimizing the space and making dancers comfortable, academy renovations include a modern, pleasing color scheme, new flooring in the lobby and dance studio, ballet barres on the walls to expand studio space and functionality, a dancers’ lounge for relaxing and making friends, bathroom upgrades and a dedicated store with leotards and dance supplies.

The Van Wyks plan to open the space for multiple uses when classes are not in session. They will be offering birthday party packages next year. Dance-and-dine parties in collaboration with area restaurants are also in the works. The academy is a proud sponsor of the Gyrene Dance Team and makes the space available to them. “We are excited for more dancers to join the Ave Maria Dance Academy family,” Okkie said. “The studio invites anyone interested in dance to reach out.”

Ave Maria Dance Academy is located at 5068 Annunciation Circle #103. For more information, call 239-261-2606, email info@avemariadanceacademy.com or visit avemariadanceacademy.com. 🌟



The Van Wyk family.

COURTESY PHOTO

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COURTESY PHOTOS

Unlock retirement bliss at Del Webb Naples, offering a vibrant lifestyle with championship golfing and over 15 miles of scenic walking trails.

COMMUNITY

From page 1

are woven throughout Ave Maria, connecting residents to parks, picnic pavilions, preserves and lakefront sitting areas. Parks encourage outdoor recreation and activities, offering a variety of gathering and play places, including a playground, dog park and sports venues with ballfields, basketball, tennis and bocce courts, and disc golf. The town also has a popular water park, home to waterslides, a lap pool, splash area, water aerobics and beach volleyball.

The team at the Ave Maria Master Association also coordinates a year-round calendar of community-wide recreation, activities and signature can't-miss events.

Residents of the town's distinct neighborhoods also enjoy private amenities, from grand country club-inspired clubhouses, championship golf, tennis and pickleball courts, resort-style pools and their own social schedules. Ave Maria's growing business and commercial establishments provide on-site convenience for groceries, everyday essentials, restaurants, entertainment, shopping and healthcare. The town also offers A+ academics with Ave Maria University, classic K-12 Catholic education at Rhodora J. Donahue Academy and a preschool for children 2 to 4. A public Collier County elementary school is also in the works.

Del Webb Naples, which features the

most comprehensive Del Webb amenity campus in Southwest Florida, won the Community of the Year Sand Dollar in the \$500,001 to \$1 million category. The community offers two clubhouses, including the 15,000-square-foot Grand Hall, where three adjoining social halls accommodate 350 guests and sweeping outdoor verandas, gathering areas and the Rusty Putter Restaurant with an alfresco bar elevating Florida's outdoor lifestyle.

The Oasis Club, also spanning 15,000 square feet, is the community's destination for health and wellness, offering a fitness center, resort-inspired pool, lap pool and 18 courts for pickleball, bocce and tennis.

"Every day at Del Webb Naples brings new opportunities for personal growth, social inter-

action and a sense of belonging," said Joshua Millward, Del Webb Naples' onsite lifestyle director who organizes a year-round social calendar of events and activities, including concert outings, art classes and gardening workshops. "Here, residents can embrace the joy of retirement while enjoying an array of activities, fostering new friendships and relishing a life of leisure and fulfillment."

Del Webb Naples also offers over 15 miles of walking trails and optional membership at Panther Run Golf Club, featuring 18 holes of championship golf.

With over 1,000 homes closed and a new phase now available, this active adult utopia offers condominium carriage homes, villas and single-family homes overlooking rolling

golf fairways and lakes.

Lennar won the Sand Dollar for product design under \$1 million for an estate residence in The National, its golf community at Ave Maria. Representing the three-bedroom, three-bath Bougainvillea floor plan, the home emphasizes flowing open main living spaces connecting to an oversized covered lanai with a fully equipped outdoor kitchen, tongue-and-groove ceiling, stacked stone backsplash, and a pool and spa.

Ave Maria offers new homes priced from the high \$200,000s to \$800,000s. For more information, visit AveMaria.com or call the New Home & Welcome Center at 239-352-3903. 🌞



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BIG KINDS OF SMALL TOWN FUN

Spooktacular Fun at Trunk-or-Treat



On Saturday, Oct. 28, from 3 to 6 p.m., Ave Maria came alive with Halloween fervor as community members donned their favorite costumes, toting treat bags for an evening of candy, games, and a spirited costume contest in the Ave Maria Town Center. The event, known as Trunk-or-Treat, featured themed live music, a DJ setting the vibe, delicious food and beverages, along with lively after parties.



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Wheels of Resilience: Ave Maria’s Bike Club

BY GLENN MILLER
Ave Maria Sun Correspondent

Bicycles are ubiquitous in Ave Maria, seamlessly blending into the landscape alongside palm trees and pickleball courts, serving various purposes from basic transportation to recreation and exercise.

Paul Klempert, 71-year-old founder of the Ave Maria Bike Club, sat outside The Bean in late October, reflecting on the early days of the Bike Club, previously known as Flat Tyres.

“People are interested in other activities here besides just tennis, pickleball and bocce,” Klempert remarked. Undeterred by Florida’s scorching summer days, Klempert continued to ride, making a concession to the heat by advising, “Just bring two water bottles.”

Klempert delved into his passion for cycling, the club, and his remarkable comeback from what initially seemed like a death sentence - a Stage 4 pancreatic cancer diagnosis.

Fortunately, Klempert clarified that it was a misdiagnosis, crediting the Sylvester Comprehensive Cancer Center in Miami for determining he didn’t have cancer but instead had pancreatitis. This determination set him on the path to recovery, both in terms of health and pedaling the roads of Ave Maria on one of his three Trek bicycles.

“Thank God for the Sylvester Cancer Center,” Klempert said. Experiencing symptoms such as jaundice, itching on the arms, and a lack of energy, his weight dropped from 241 pounds to 169 pounds over roughly a three-week span. Having since added a few pounds, he underwent regular check-ups, with his last one in August.

Club vice president John Hibler fondly recalled meeting Klempert on Oil Well Road three years ago, a moment that forged a lasting connection. As Hibler pedaled along, he noticed Klempert seemingly stranded on the roadside, initially thinking it was due to a flat tire. However, to his surprise, Klempert’s tires were in good condition, and the stop was for an entirely different reason. This encounter marked the beginning of a friendship rooted in their shared enthusiasm for the Bike Club.

Hibler, reflecting on the Ave Maria community and the club, described it as a very warm and welcoming place where friend-



COURTESY PHOTO
Left to right: Terrell Bryant, Zaida Hernandez, Lisa Gentile, Paul Klempert, Angela Cherkis, Sandy Shemp, Jeriel Cambell and Rick Johnson

ships effortlessly take root. “You just meet more people on the bike,” Hibler said, emphasizing the camaraderie within the club and highlighting the ease of forming connections compared to traditional activities like golf. According to Hibler, the Bike Club provides a natural environment for meeting new people.

Fellow club vice president John Hibler, who encountered Klempert on Oil Well Road three years ago, shared his perspective on the community and the club. “It’s a very warm, welcoming community,” said Hibler.

Describing it as a place where friendships easily form, he emphasized the camaraderie within the club, stating that making friends there is more natural than in a golf setting. “You just meet more people on the bike,”

Hibler said.

Hibler, a retired dermatologist, eagerly anticipates returning to Ave Maria from chilly Ohio, looking forward to the warmth, bicycle rides and the community. The Ave Maria Bike Club, as Tom Nuttle emphasizes, is about supporting each other on the roads of town.

Nuttle, the current vice president, expressed his gratitude for founding the club and acknowledged Klempert’s role in its growth. “I’m really glad I found Phil,” Nuttle said.

Despite being smaller than some Ave Maria organizations, the Bike Club boasts an estimated 35-to-38 members, reflecting the community’s interest in activities beyond

traditional sports.

“We try to get as many members as we can to go out,” Klempert said. “We’ll maintain a steady pace like 10 or 11 miles an hour so that we can all talk.” Stronger riders can reach speeds of up to 22 or 23 miles per hour.

Under Klempert’s leadership, the club extends its focus beyond riding. Plans include a benefit cancer ride in February for the Sylvester Cancer Center, covering 39 miles and open to riders of various ages and skill levels. Klempert’s weekly routine involves individual rides on Tuesdays and Thursdays and group rides on other days, exploring Ave Maria and occasionally venturing onto Oil Well Road. 🌞

“We try to get as many members as we can to go out. We’ll maintain a steady pace like 10 or 11 miles an hour so that we can all talk. Stronger riders can reach speeds of up to 22 or 23 miles per hour.”

— Paul Klempert, 71-year-old founder of the Ave Maria Bike Club



Inaugural Pickleball Winterfest Open Brings Competitive Spirit to Our Courts

BY GLENN MILLER

Ave Maria Sun Correspondent

The undeniable popularity of pickleball in Ave Maria, and specifically within the Del Webb community, is evident everywhere you look.

A visit to the Del Webb Naples sales center in October would have greeted you with a stack of printed October 2023 Activities Calendar on the coffee table. A brief perusal through the 31 days of October revealed pickleball activities scheduled for each day, all 31 of them.

While Del Webb Naples offers an array of activities, including bocce, tennis, canasta, water volleyball, mahjong, Ping Pong and more, it's clear that pickleball reigns supreme.

No wonder a significant pickleball tournament is on the horizon for Del Webb in January. The inaugural Winterfest Open is scheduled for Jan. 13-14 at the Del Webb Pickleball Center.

Event organizers Bill and Phyllis Olex, both avid pickleball players and Del Webb residents, have set the stage for competitive mixed doubles play. Bill, a Del Webb sales consultant, was initially resistant to the pickleball craze that swept the country a few years ago.

"Like most people, I fought it tooth and nail," Bill, 58, confessed. "Now I'm addicted."

The goals for the community's inaugural Winterfest are straightforward.

"We want to showcase our Del Webb community," Bill said. "We want to bring more people in to see how nice it is. We have 12 pickleball courts."

He refers to 12 courts within Del Webb.



COURTESY PHOTO

Residents embrace the pickleball craze, delivering a smash hit performance on the courts as they engage in friendly and spirited play.

Although other pickleball courts exist in greater Ave Maria, this event will be held exclusively in Del Webb.

Bill believes the tournament will contribute to selling potential buyers in his community.

"We're hoping to bring people in to buy homes," Olex said.

This underscores another power of pickleball.

Phyllis is a pickleball instructor who also gives lessons. The Olex duo plays in a pickleball hotbed with over 300 pickleball members in their club.



The January event isn't confined to Ave Maria or Southwest Florida; it aims to attract participants from other states as well.

"We're hoping to bring people in from other states," Phyllis, 65, said, with an anticipated turnout of about 200 participants.

The original plan for the event called for an October timeframe, but considering that snowbirds typically arrive in January, the decision was made to maximize player and spectator attendance with a winter event.

The Winterfest will offer different age divisions and skill levels, with age divisions ranging from 20-to-49, 50-to-65, and 66-plus.

The fact that the event will be in a 55-plus community doesn't limit who can participate or watch.

"We didn't want to limit it to adults 55 and over," Bill said.

Various skill levels will be showcased, likely ranging from 3.0 to 4.5-plus. The highest rating on the USA Pickleball website is 5.5-plus.

An exhibition of professionals is scheduled for noon on the Sunday of the tournament, providing free entertainment for spectators.

Local pickleball pro Mae Brown will be at the helm of the event.

While most pickleball tournaments span three or four days, the inaugural Winterfest will be a two-day event.

"We have residents here that use those courts, so we have to shut them down for the tournament," Bill said. "So, we're trying to be respectful of the people who live here. I think two days for our first event is about right."

Potential expansion to a three-day event (Friday to Sunday) may be considered if the Winterfest proves successful.

Tournament skill/age bracket winners will receive gold, silver and bronze medals. There will also be paddle raffles and tournament player giveaways. 🌟

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BIG KINDS OF SMALL TOWN FUN



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SANDRA YEYATI / AVE MARIA SUN



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Ave Maria’s Signature Events Promise Unforgettable Moments

BY SANDRA YEYATI
Ave Maria Sun Correspondent

Winter in Ave Maria is awesome, not just because of the perfect weather, but because of the humongous festivals, live musical performances, shopping extravaganzas, trolley tours and delicious feasts the folks at Ave Maria Development organize and sponsor.

“We always try to make events better and better, year after year,” said events coordinator Donna Marquez. “We have an amazing team of people that come together to make things happen, including our events and marketing teams, the lifestyle staff at the Ave Maria Association, all of the interesting vendors and entertainers, and scores of wonderful volunteers, including the student volunteers from Ave Maria University.”

This Big Kind of Small Town sure knows how to have a good time. Here are the 2023-2024 Ave Maria Development Signature Events:

Farmers Market

Every Saturday, November 4 to April 27

This year, the Ave Maria Farmers Market is the biggest ever, with over 50 vendors from 9 a.m. to 2 p.m. It’s fun to socialize with neighbors, shop for the freshest, locally sourced foods and support the many small business owners that live in the area. Live music from 11 a.m. to 2 p.m. adds to the festive vibe.

Numerous artisanal food vendors offer delights you won’t find in any store, such as European-style breads and pastries; home-made jellies, jams, guacamole and flavored oils; and premium meats and seafood. This is also the ideal place to get to know your farmers at the two produce booths and to purchase plants and flowers to beautify your home.

Also in the mix are purveyors of creative products, such as handcrafted soaps and beauty supplies, Indigenous home goods, t-shirts with fun sayings and inspiring quotes, fashion-forward accessories and beautiful works of art. Expect an array of local service professionals, too—people you can meet and talk to about real estate, interior design, financial planning, solar energy or Earth-friendly cleaning supplies.

Free Music, Trolley Excursions & Church Tours

Every Tuesday, January 16 to April 23

Every Tuesday in season, tourists and first-time visitors of Ave Maria are treated to 1-hour guided trolley tours running hourly from 11 a.m. to 2 p.m. Led by knowledgeable local historian Joe Marinelli, the excursion begins at the Ave Maria New Home & Welcome Center, located on the Town Center’s Annunciation Circle, and travels to all of the neighborhoods and interesting spots around town.

A rotating slate of musical entertainment lives up the Town Center from 11 a.m. to 2 p.m., with exciting performances by saxophonist Jim Blackburn, the Jeff Hughes interactive band, songstress Wendy Renee, the Kelly and Mason jazz duo, Latin singers Harmony 2, folk band Patchouli, singer and acoustic guitarist Chris Stultz, and the Caribbean steel drum band Steely Pan!.

As a companion activity the same day, the Ave Maria Catholic Church offers free, 30-minute guided tours of its famous parish from 1 to 3 p.m., helping visitors learn about and explore the architectural and historical details of this intriguing building. Visitors are also encouraged to check out the Mother Teresa Museum at Ave Maria University, as well as the many wonderful shops and restaurants in the Town Center, Park of Commerce and Publix Retail Shops. Tuesdays are super fun in Ave Maria. Make a day of it!

Taste of Ave

Saturday, February 3

This year’s inaugural Taste of Ave was a great success, proving that Ave Maria residents have everything they need right here in



COURTESY PHOTOS

Groovin’ at the Blues, Brews & BBQ Festival! The grounds are alive with beats, barbecue delights and vibrant energy of community celebration.



Tuesday tunes and trolley tours!



Savoring the flavor at Taste of Ave! Food vendors line Annunciation Circle, offering a feast for the senses during this community culinary extravaganza.

the community. It returns to the Town Center in 2024 from noon to 5 p.m.

The popular event will include booths for small businesses, local charities and Ave Maria University, as well as the Biz Kids Expo, a showcase of products and services by 20 to 25 emerging entrepreneurs that call Ave Maria home. The Collier County Sheriff’s Office and Fire Department will be on hand to meet residents and offer safety advice.

Expect live music by everyone’s favorite hometown bands, Steinbeck Way and the Back Country Boys, as well as face painting, balloon artistry, Adam’s Animal Encounters

and a photo booth for a free family memento of the day.

This is a fantastic opportunity to boost the local economy and forge meaningful relationships within the community. Whether you’re looking for an interior decorator, financial planning advice or homemade cookies, chances are very good that one of your neighbors is an expert and can fulfill your needs.

Blues, Brews & BBQ Festival

Saturday, February 17

Each year, thousands come from far and wide to enjoy full sets by Southwest Florida’s biggest names in blues entertainment. It is a massive party with finger-licking-good BBQ, quenching libations and thrilling performances by Deb & The Dynamics, Old School, and Little Eddie and the Fat Fingers. Bring your lawn chairs and dancing shoes for Ave Maria’s biggest in-season party from noon to 5 p.m.

Family-friendly activities include face painting, the Fluff N’ Stuff booth where kids can build their own stuffed animal, airbrush tattoos, balloon art, mechanical bull rides, the Cool Cruisers car show and delicious mocktails for children of every age by the Tippy Horseshoe. Be sure to stop by the photo booth to get a special portrait to commemorate the event!

Margarita & Taco Festival

Saturday, March 16

Ave Maria embraces a Tex-Mex vibe at this year’s festival from noon to 5 p.m., featuring two outstanding country-music performances by Outta Hand Band and the Austin James Band. You might want to wear your boots and brush up on your line-dancing moves. This event promises to be a honky-tonk good time.

Several food trucks and many of the town’s restaurants will be serving Latin cuisine, as well as delicious cocktails for adults and mocktails by the Tippy Horseshoe for the kids. The Town Center will be vibrating with entertainment, including Lucha Libre wrestling Adam’s Animal Encounters, face painting, balloon artistry, the Fluff N’ Stuff booth where kids can build their own stuffed animal, airbrush tattoos and a free photo booth. Your face will hurt from smiling so much! 🌮

BIG KINDS OF SMALL TOWN FUN

Comedy Nights at OASIS The Kitchen Lounge



Laughs echo through OASIS The Kitchen Lounge during regularly performed Comedy Nights hosted by Ave Maria and Southwest Florida's most popular comics. Visit oasisthekitchenlounge.com for more information about upcoming events.

COURTESY PHOTOS

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An Anthem Parkway Extension is Coming

BY SANDRA YEYATI
Ave Maria Sun Correspondent

As the fastest-growing community in Southwest Florida and one of the top-selling master-planned communities in the United States, Ave Maria is actively adding new neighborhoods, commercial space and recreational amenities. With this growth comes the need for added infrastructure.

In November, construction began on Anthem Parkway (Phase 5A), involving two roadway extensions near North Park and the Water Park at the intersection of Ave Maria Boulevard and Anthem Parkway. This added infrastructure prepares the area for growth in the next few years, including the addition of a public school. No significant traffic disruptions are expected with this work, which is estimated to take about a year to complete.

While work on both roadway extensions will occur simultaneously, it is anticipated that an 850-foot northbound extension of Ave Maria Boulevard will be completed first to provide direct access to North Park. Workers will then complete the 3,600-foot extension of Anthem Parkway from the intersection at Ave Maria Boulevard moving eastward and ending with a roundabout that will connect to Hudson Way, in Avalon Park. It will include two lanes in each direction.

This roadway project will alter the access configuration to both North Park and the Water Park. Notably, the current northbound left-in access from Anthem Parkway to North Park will be eliminated, with direct access from the south to be replaced by the previously mentioned Ave Maria Boulevard extension, which will connect to the North Park's northwest access point.

Twelve-foot, asphalt multi-use pathways running parallel to Anthem Parkway and Ave Maria Boulevard extensions will also be installed for pedestrians, bicyclists and golf carts, along with the lush landscaping that Ave Maria residents have come to expect and enjoy.

Phase 5A will provide access to the future Ave Maria Elementary school on the north side of Anthem Parkway from land currently owned by Collier County Public Schools, and also offer full connectivity to another, yet-to-



COURTESY RENDERING

The future expansion of Ave Maria is seen through this Anthem Parkway Phase 5A overview map.

be-permitted extension of Anthem Parkway called Phase 5B, which would continue the parkway to Pope John Paul II Boulevard and provide additional access to the northern, as-yet-undeveloped areas of Ave Maria.

According to Dan Hartley, vice president of engineering for Peninsula Engineering, “During construction, maintenance of traffic will be adjusted as needed, based on construction sequencing by the contractor. Those details have not been finalized at this time, but this is in an area of Ave Maria that does not have any through traffic, and access will be maintained to the existing parks, other than during potential short-term closures to

complete the required improvements. I don’t anticipate any long-term closures to existing roadways. Appropriate maintenance of traffic will be provided during the construction activities.”

Peninsula Engineering obtained county permitting for Phase 5A and will continue to be involved throughout construction, inspecting the work for conformance to the design plans. As the construction project manager for Ave Maria Stewardship Community District (AMSCD), Peninsula Engineering will also assist the district engineer, Agnoli Barber and Brundage, in construction management.

“The community is growing in leaps and bounds,” said Sal D’Angelo, director of operations for AMSCD. “My understanding is that by fall of 2026, the elementary school will be open, and at some point in the future, a public middle school, and they are going to be part of this growth and expansion for Anthem Parkway. It’s exciting! I know 5A is what they’re going to be working on first, and then that 5B component. Once they complete all that, then it becomes part of the district’s inventory for operations and maintenance and upkeep, which is my world. More growth is coming. Stay tuned.” 🌞

BIG KINDS OF SMALL TOWN FUN

Panther Run Kiss Cancer Goodbye Tournament



BRENT KIRCHNER

Participants recently teed off at Del Webb Naples' Panther Run golf course, taking part in the 'Kiss Cancer Goodbye Tournament' to raise funds for the Cancer Alliance Network.

Emma Schweitzer Becomes First National Player of the Week in Ave Maria’s Soccer Program History

BY GLENN MILLER
Ave Maria Sun Correspondent

Ave Maria University goalkeeper Emma Schweitzer excels in her element when opponents approach, poised to unleash shots at the net. Far from being intimidated, she revels in the pressure.

“I love the fearless aspect,” Schweitzer recently remarked. “I love diving. Not only that, I like being the leader on the field.”

The world of NAIA women’s soccer is becoming acquainted with Emma Schweitzer, a Tampa Catholic High School graduate who made her move to campus in early August.

Two months into her journey at Ave Maria, Schweitzer earned recognition as the NAIA National Defensive Player of the Week for her outstanding performance against perennial powerhouse Keiser University on Sept. 27.

Keiser, a two-time national champion ranked No. 11 in the nation, had never suffered a loss or tie against the Gryenes. Schweitzer, with 14 remarkable saves, played a pivotal role in securing the Gryenes’ first tie against the Sun Conference rival.

“I just remember on the sidelines jaws dropped to the floor and gasping,” said senior teammate Gabby Decker. “We wanted to run on the field but couldn’t. It was really exciting. Hard to put into words.”

The honor deeply touched Schweitzer. “I was very joyful,” she expressed. “I was very appreciative of the award.”

Schweitzer made history as the first member of Ave Maria’s soccer program to win a national player of the week award.

The tied match earned a crucial point in the conference standings, propelling the Gryenes into the Sun Conference playoffs for the first time in three years, according to Coach Tyler Rosser.

The coaching staff consider themselves fortunate to have a goalkeeper of Schweitzer’s caliber, inheriting the position from the accomplished Maddie Samuelson. Beyond athletic prowess, they sought a player with character and dedication.

“It’s like finding a needle in a haystack to find a really dedicated player who could pick up and build on what Maddie did,” Rosser said.

Then came an email from Schweitzer. “We could just tell from her email how dedicated she is,” Rosser recalled. In the email, Schweitzer expressed her genuine desire to come to Ave Maria and play soccer.

Upon reviewing Schweitzer’s playing style, captured in film, and a subsequent visit a couple of months later, the coaching staff knew she was the keeper they would rely on for the next three years.

The coaching staff remains impressed not only by Schweitzer’s saves but also by her joy and leadership off the field. “She spreads that



COURTESY PHOTOS

In her element on the field, Emma Schweitzer is at her prime, making history for Ave Maria’s soccer program.

to everyone she meets,” Rosser added.

Thalia Meza, assistant coach, noted Schweitzer’s attentiveness and dedication during warm-ups, practices, and interactions with coaches. Since her arrival, Schweitzer has continued to improve under the guidance of goalkeeping coach Eddie Villarreal.

Beyond the field, Schweitzer maintains a close connection with her parents, Craig and Linda. Her first call after receiving the news about the national player of the week award was to her mom.

A critical element in the team’s transition to a freshman goalkeeper, according to Meza, is the grace displayed by senior goalkeeper Ariana Dale. “She’s been really wonderful,” Meza said. “You can imagine being a senior and then a freshman coming and doing all this, and she’s just been so humble. I think you can imagine the opposite happening, being resentful and jealous.”

Not with the Gryenes.

Emma Schweitzer has truly earned glowing accolades. “Probably one in a million in terms of what we’re looking for as a keeper,” Rosser said.

And she’s only a freshman. 🌟

Ave Maria University NAIA National Athletes of the Week

- » **Trentyn Jackson** - Football Defensive Player of the Week- October 3, 2018.
- » **Derek McCormick**- Football Special Teams Player of the Week - October 30, 2019
- » **Devyn McCormick** - Football Special Teams Player of the Week - September 28, 2020
- » **Nicholas Hofmeister** - Men’s Tennis National Player of the Week - March 31, 2021
- » **Orianna Eldridge** - Lacrosse National Defensive Player of the Week - February 27, 2023
- » **Bruno Duarte** - Men’s Tennis National Player of the Week - March 16, 2023
- » **Emma Schweitzer** - Women’s Soccer National Defensive Player of the Week - October 3, 2023





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The National Golf & Country Club’s Amenities and Events Flourish

BY Nanci Theoret
Ave Maria Sun Correspondent

A sold-out meet-and-greet for 60 guests and happy hours in Town Center this fall, plus cardio tennis clinics and pickleball programs are giving residents a taste of the dynamic community-centric lifestyle dawning at The National Golf & Country Club as more amenities make their debut and Angie Gore gets to work breaking the ice.

“I’m all about the fun,” said Gore, community relations and lifestyle director, who hosted The National’s inaugural resident event in November – Wine Down Wednesday. “I want residents and future residents to mix and mingle, enjoy live music, have a good time and meet their neighbors. My goal is to offer two to four events a week, both onsite and offsite.”

And she’s getting creative, using model homes as entertainment venues as well as restaurants and other businesses around Ave Maria while Lennar continues development of the gated community’s expansive lakefront amenity campus.

“We’re thrilled to offer residents a lively social scene at Ave Maria right now while the clubhouse amenities are nearing completion,” said Ashley Shenk, director of marketing for the national homebuilder.

Activity on The National’s newly finished court complex foreshadows the future lifestyle awaiting sports enthusiasts. Lighted Har-Tru tennis and pickleball courts are open daily and offer a full schedule of tennis clinics targeted to tots, teens, adults and all skill levels and introduce neophytes to pickleball – America’s fastest-growing sport. The programs are complemented by a tennis pro shop, staffed by a team of knowledgeable experts and stocked with must-have merch.

On The National’s Gordon Lewis-designed 18-hole championship golf course, the rolling greens hosted a battle between North and South (Team Canada vs. Team USA) and scrambles of the Halloween and holiday kind as league and tournament play gears up for high season. Open since January 2021, the course features one of Southwest Florida’s longest par-five and shortest par-three holes. The golf experience also includes an aqua driving range, putting green and pro shop.

Gore was also planning a holiday-themed celebration, hoping to showcase The National’s lifestyle and homes in three furnished models, one for appetizers, another for entrée-style hors d’oeuvres and a third for desserts, as well as a possible large-scale get-together in the golf cart barn.

“I want to create fun events,” she said. “And I’m also going to survey residents for input on events they’re interested in.”

Update! These amenities are now open!

Next up is completion of the community’s resort-style pool, which will include cabanas channeling a vacation-everyday vibe, plus a nearby tiki hut, so quintessentially casual Florida you can almost hear the steel drums, is expected to open in spring 2024, immediately teleporting residents to a far-flung tropical island.

The clubhouse, featuring fine and casual dining and places to gather and socialize, is also progressing.

Gus Spatharos, area sales manager at Lennar, said, “The National Golf & Country Club offers a lifestyle of leisure and luxury with its resort-style amenities, an impeccable 18-hole golf course and a state-of-the-art clubhouse coming soon. With condos starting in the high \$200,000s and single-family homes starting in the low \$500,000s, The National offers more than a home – it offers the best of Florida living.”

Planned for 1,300 homes, the community’s 18 floor plans include single-family executive and estate homes, coach homes, veranda condominiums and terrace condominiums overlooking golf and water, with the option of a bundled golf or social membership. With residences featuring two to five bedrooms, two to three bathrooms and 1,120 to 3,473 square feet in one and two stories, buyers are sure to find the right-sized home for their needs. Lawn care is provided for all homes, enhancing a low-maintenance lifestyle.

Designer-furnished models, open daily, highlight the range of buying opportunities in The National, where Lennar’s Everything’s Included® delivers unprecedented value by incorporating quality features and finishes homeowners want and need at no extra charge.

Quick move-in homes are also available for immediate and near-immediate occupancy.

For more information about The National Golf & Country Club at Ave Maria, visit TheNationalAtAveMaria.com or call 888-214-1476. 🌞





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