

# Ave Maria Sun

DECEMBER 2024

www.AveMariaSun.com

Vol. V, No. 6

**Gyrene nation:**

How Ave Maria athletes balance passion and purpose  
A10 ►



**Interactive venue:**

New Ave Maria Welcome Center fosters connection and engagement  
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**Lasting tribute:**

Renaming Massa Way to Peek Way  
A31 ►



## NORTH PARK EXPANSION

New sports fields, pickleball courts and playground upgrades



AMELIA CONTE PHOTOGRAPHY / COURTESY PHOTO

An Ave tween playing a solo game of basketball on North Park's court.

BY ERICA FISH

Ave Maria Sun Correspondent

**A**VE MARIA'S NORTH Park is set for a major transformation in the coming months, with several new additions and upgrades designed to enhance recreation opportunities for residents of all ages. From new sports fields to pickleball courts and playground improvements, the expansion project promises to revitalize this popular community hub. A portion of the upcoming improvements in Ave Maria will be funded through a recent impact fee agreement with Collier County. Under the arrangement, the Ave Maria Master Association (AMMA) will collect community and regional park fees from new home permits, which are typically paid directly to the county. This initiative aims to support local parks developments while enhancing amenities for residents, ensuring that growth in the area is matched with infrastructure upgrades.

SEE NORTH PARK, A4 ►

## Residents find peace of mind in Ave Maria during hurricane season

BY ANDREA STETSON

Ave Maria Sun Correspondent

Peter and Judy Clouet lived near Miami and used to fear approaching hurricanes. Now that fear is gone. Three years ago, they moved to Del Webb Naples in Ave Maria where they feel very safe from storms. This fall when Hurricane Milton was approaching and people all over Southwest Florida were evacuating and setting up sandbags, the Clouets simply took down their flag and some outdoor decorations, and they were ready for some rain and wind.

"We bought this place because it is 24 miles inland," Peter said. "We just stay in the house and watch the wind blow. We have no fear at all."

With the state of Florida having some of the strongest building codes in the country, Ave Maria makes no exception when it comes to its builders and their homes. Being so far inland means the Gulf is not sending water down their streets and there are no rivers to overflow into homes. Residents also rarely lose power and if they do, it is quickly restored. Ave Maria is an inland community with underground power lines, a highly effective approach.

"In areas that are inland like Ave Maria underground facilities are ideal," said Karen Ryan, public relations director for Lee County Electric Cooperative (LCEC). "Some coastal areas do not have it underground and that is not ideal. Some of those areas are the last to be restored because water and electricity do not mix. Like in the city of Marco Island, it is difficult to restore underground in a water area with all the salt water. And on the

SEE PEACE, A22 ►



AVE MARIA DEVELOPMENT / COURTESY PHOTO

Homes in Ave Maria's Maple Ridge, built after the changes to the 1992 building codes following Hurricane Andrew, adhere to higher standards since the community is less than two decades old.



# BIG KINDS OF SMALL TOWN FUN

## Ave Maria Fall Festival



1



2



3

The Ave Maria Fall Festival was held in October at North Park. The event featured a carnival, games, activities and a variety of food trucks for residents. 🌻

SANDRA YEYATI / AVE MARIA SUN



4



5



6



7



8

1. Happy duo painting pumpkins
2. Petting the chickens
3. Fun on the hayride
4. Pony ride

5. Lily and Judy Thorpe
6. Inflatable fun
7. Goat love
8. Pumpkin patch cutie

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From page 1

In addition to the new sports fields,



**ABOVE:** An aerial view of Ave Maria's current baseball fields at North Park. **RIGHT:** Ave Maria Little Leaguers lined up and ready for pitch practice, gearing up for the evening game.

As part of the ongoing improvements,

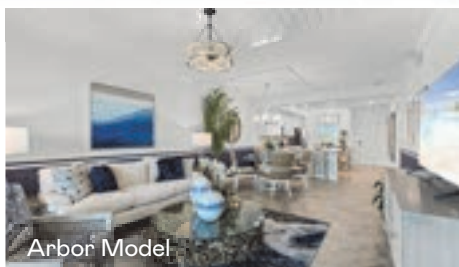


the existing basketball court at North Park will undergo resurfacing. This project aims to enhance the quality and safety

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of the court, ensuring a better experience for players. The resurfacing is expected to take place alongside the upgrades to the sports fields and pickleball courts, providing a comprehensive refresh of the park's athletic spaces.

**South Park tennis courts and benches**

Not to be left out, Ave Maria's South Park will also see some tailored upgrades. The tennis courts will be resurfaced, offering a smoother and more durable surface for players. Additionally, new benches will be added throughout the park to provide more seating options for visitors. These improvements will ensure that both North and South Parks continue to serve as key recreational spaces for community members.

**Playground overhaul coming to North Park's tot lot**

For families with young children, there's exciting news regarding North Park's tot lot. On Nov. 11, work began to remove the former playground equipment in the tot lot. This overhaul will feature new, modern play structures. As the old equipment is removed and the new pieces installed, a portion of the playground will be closed temporarily, but the project is expected to be completed by the beginning of 2025. This upgrade is part of the ongoing effort to improve North Park as a family-friendly destination for all ages.

Kim Twiss, executive director for the Ave Maria Master Association (AMMA), emphasized the importance of the tot lot renovation, "The renovation of the tot lot was absolutely necessary, because as our community grows, it's essential that we

provide up-to-date, accessible playground equipment. This new tot lot is bright and provides a lot of interaction for youngster's curiosities."

**Phase 2: New multipurpose field**

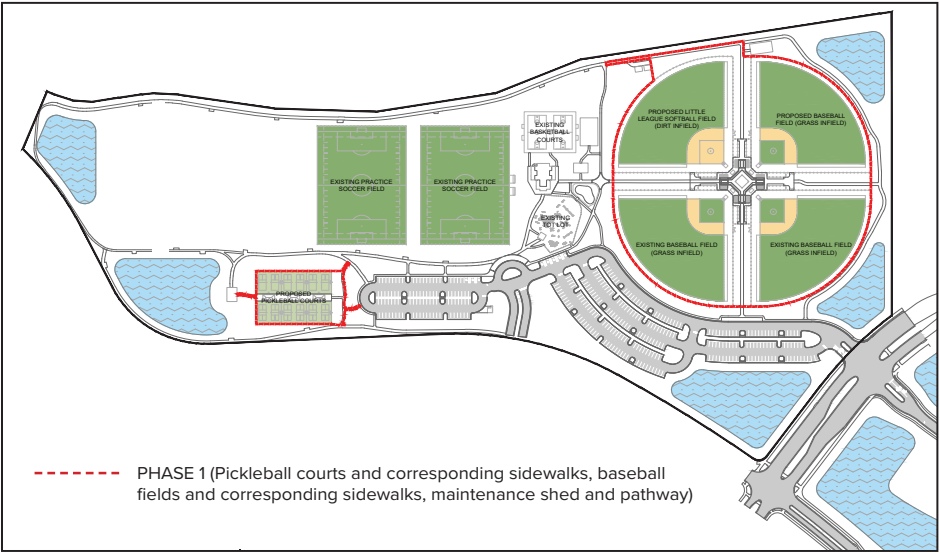
As part of the ongoing expansion of North Park, Phase 2 will introduce a large multipurpose field located to the west of the current soccer fields. This new addition is designed to accommodate a wide range of sports and recreational activities, offering a versatile space for the community. The multipurpose field will be large enough to host regulation soccer games, as well as football, lacrosse and other field-based sports.

Anticipated to be completed in the next couple of years, Phase 2 aims to enhance the park's capacity to support both organized leagues and casual recreation. The new field is expected to not only benefit local sports teams but also provide an important resource for school programs, community events and larger tournaments organized by the AMMA parks & recreation management team, plus organized sports groups like the Ave Maria Little League.

With these exciting upgrades, North Park and South Park will continue to serve as vital community gathering spaces. Whether you're a sports enthusiast, a teenager looking to join a sports club, a parent looking for a fun spot to family picnic, or someone who enjoys outdoor recreation, these improvements are sure to enhance the quality of life and Blue Zone standard in Ave Maria. As the construction moves forward, residents can anticipate a revitalized park system that offers something for everyone. 🌟



Ave Maria residents enjoying a lively game of friendly pickleball.



The draft exhibit map for the North Park expansion.



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Lauren is an LMCU member and was compensated for her time. LMCU NMLS #442967





# BIG KINDS OF SMALL TOWN FUN

## Kiss Cancer Goodbye Golf Tournament



The Kiss Cancer Goodbye Golf Tournament is a lively annual event focused on raising awareness and funds for the Cancer Alliance of Naples. This exciting gathering brought together community members, athletes and supporters for a day filled with competitive fun and camaraderie. Participants engaged in various sports and activities while enjoying live entertainment, delicious food and local vendors. The event provided essential support services, resources and financial assistance to those affected by cancer in the local community. 🌟



1. The teams gathered in front of a hole that was decorated with a special flag featuring the breast cancer ribbon.
2. Participants enthusiastically decorated their golf carts with all kinds of pink decorations.
3. Wearing bright pink outfits is a way to show unity and support in the fight against cancer.
4. Teeing off.
5. Ladies sitting in their golf cart sharing a lighthearted moment.

AVE MARIA DEVELOPMENT / COURTESY PHOTOS



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**Sunshine State Steak Cook-Off**  
Saturday, January 25 • 2:00 PM - 6:30 PM

**Taste of Ave**  
Saturday, February 1 • 12:00 PM - 5:00 PM

**Blues, Brews & BBQ Festival**  
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**Shamrock Festival**  
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**Margarita & Taco Festival**  
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# Fellowship Church prepares for their new home and hope

BY ANDREA STETSON  
Ave Maria Sun Correspondent

The beginnings of Fellowship Church in Ave Maria weren't easy. They shared a space with Mafa Martial Arts in a Park of Commerce storefront attached to the Mobil gas station, so every Sunday about an hour and a half before the service began, they had big preparations to make.

"We would come in at 3:30 p.m. and pick up all the sweaty mats," described Pastor Timothy Pigg. "There was a punching bag in the middle of the room that we had to work around."

Three years later, they had the space to themselves allowing the church to put down carpet, move walls and have the sweaty mats and punching bags permanently gone. Now they are planning even bigger and better things as they get ready to break ground on a new stand-alone church. Tremendous growth in the community and the congregation has sparked the need to keep expanding.

Fellowship Church began in Ave Maria in 2017 with about 40 members. And now about 135 people congregate into the facility every Sunday. The nursery and children's rooms are small and cramped too. That's why Pigg and his congregation are planning for the new church building. Fellowship Church is buying 5.5 acres of land from Pulte in an area behind the Bellera community in Del Webb. They are currently designing the new church that Pigg said will be much more than a place to worship. It will be a place for the

community.

"When you walk into a home, you want to feel like you are at home," Pigg said. "You want it to be relaxing. We will have a seating area to relax, sit on the couch and have a cup of coffee. The foyer we designed to be like a massive living room. The goal is to even have places where members can have coffee almost like an internet café. The hope is that the cafe area is open to the public all day long, almost like a small business center for digital nomads to come and work."

Members are excited about the future with a new church campus.

"It is going to be awesome," Worship Pastor Micah Meffen said. "We want it to be a comfortable gathering place, not just on Sunday morning. We envision being able to come into the lobby and sit with your friend, share a cup of coffee and open your Bible. We envision it as a space where you can be surrounded by friends."

Pigg is also excited about enhancing and expanding the children's area.

"It will be a second to none," he described. "The children's area will have activities with themes at an appropriate level, so our kids are learning at a very



The current Fellowship Church is located in a storefront next to the Mobil gas station.

early age to love God."

Jeremy Breitag is one of the pastors who oversees the children's area. He said the new nursery and school rooms will have more space for volunteers, decorations and activities.

"Just to have those upgraded and new rooms for the families. I can't wait for that," Breitag said. "The current rooms are a little older and out of date. The new rooms will be so exciting. It will be great to see new younger families have a place to worship. The building will be bigger so there is the opportunity for more people to come and worship together."

It will also give them room to possibly add schoolchildren someday. Currently, 53 students attend the Fellowship School on their Immokalee campus. That school grew from just six students in 2019, and Pigg expects it to continue to grow, making it possible to expand the school to Ave Maria.

"We anticipate being able to use the

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new building for education from pre-school all the way up to college work and postgraduate,” he said. “We don’t know if we will relocate the school, but as it grows, it allows us to have greater expansion.”

The new 15,000-square-foot church will have room for 350-400 in the sanctuary, up from the 175-180 they can accommodate now. It won’t have any stained-glass windows, but it will have a lot of clear glass.

“It is going to be a design that invites you and makes you feel comfortable to come in,” Pigg explained. “There will be a lot of glass in the front because we want you to see what is going on inside.”

Outside, Pigg envisions a courtyard with picnic tables, a playground and areas for worship nights and concerts under the stars.

“We really hope to use the new property in a way that is integrated into the life of Ave Maria,” Pigg stressed. “We don’t want to be set apart. We want to be part of the community.”

Being part of the community is the reason Pigg believes Fellowship Church has been growing so quickly. He said that while Fellowship Church has a great relationship with the Catholic Church, some people want other options for worship.

“Not everyone is Catholic. By giving people another option to find the Lord, we found it an excellent opportunity to move in here. We have all of those that come from all different backgrounds of Christianity that are part of the church family, and it is a wonderful thing,” he said.

Pigg points to community outreach as another reason for the church’s popularity. He said church members are very involved in the area as part of everything



**The church now in a store front has comfortable chairs instead of hard wooden pews. Pastor Timothy Pigg plans to have these same comfortable chairs for his congregation in the new church.**

ANDREA STETSON / AVE MARIA SUN



**Timothy Pigg, Pastor at Fellowship Church in Ave Maria gives his sermons every Sunday.**

from Little League, golf clubs and Rotary Club to participating in festivals and annual cook-offs.

Pigg said the goal is to encourage even more members at both their Ave Maria and Immokalee campuses. He would like to have 700 members by 2027 and 1,000 people across both campuses by 2031.

Church members and pastors are excited about how far they have come since the church began and they are hopeful for the future.

“Obviously, we have made do with little,” Maggie Meffen said, who is part of the worship team. “Our goal is not to have flashy things, but our goal is to have more space. We are excited to expand

our resources, to be able to not only worship God but to reach the community.”

“It was a fun time when we started,” her husband Micah Meffen added. “It was the start of something new and a lot of wonderful people ended up joining. It is crazy to think that in the last seven years we went from sharing it with a karate studio to now. I consider myself really blessed to have seen the growth and the people it has impacted.”

Groundbreaking for the new church building is expected to happen during the first quarter of 2025 and church officials hope to have the church built and ready for the public by Easter 2026, or at the latest, the summer of 2026. 🌟

“We envision being able to come into the lobby and sit with your friend, share a cup of coffee and open your Bible... a space where you can be surrounded by friends.”

— Timothy Pigg,  
Pastor at Fellowship Church

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# Gyrene Nation

## How Ave Maria athletes balance passion and purpose

BY ROGER WILLIAMS  
Ave Maria Sun Correspondent

On a weekday evening late in the supper hour, Ava Murphy is talking to a reporter. Patiently, intently, with no sense of urgency or haste, as if she has nothing better to do.

A starting guard for the Gyrenes and a senior from Kansas City studying health sciences at Ave Maria University, Murphy is in women's basketball, not boot camp. That doesn't alter the fact she's been up since about 5 a.m. to make the 5:30 to 7:30 a.m. practice for coach Alex Moorehead before attending an 8:15 a.m. class followed by two other classes during the day and putting in afternoon work time for her job at the campus store.

What about studying? What about carrying on off-the-court conversations with teammates, friends and professors? What about having a social life — maybe going out for a pizza or a full meal at a restaurant in the university town? What about just stopping to breathe and think, read an unassigned book, maybe stare at videos on the internet? Sure, all that, too, is part of a sports education here.

As it turns out, sports at Ave Maria University (AMU), an NAIA school in the Sun Conference, is learning. Sports are life. Sports are a part of the whole human being, just as academics are. That's why about half of the on-campus student body of 1,400 or so takes part in team sports, competing against other colleges and universities. More than 25 sports are offered for men and women at the university.

In addition, many students who aren't competing in those programs nevertheless participate in intramural and club sports.

By comparison, University of Florida data shows one in 70 or about 1.4% of the student population are participating in a varsity sport at the Division 1 school in Gainesville. There, Ben Hill Griffin Stadium holds 88,458 seats for people who like to sit and watch a football game where 22 other people compete at any one time.

For Murphy and most fellow athletes, perhaps, all of its comparatively easy. Coach Moorehead, after all, has two small children ages 3 and 1 to worry about at home, and he made the 5:30 pre-dawn practice too — as always, appearing poised, fresh and ready to go, his players say, whether or not he feels that way.

That's probably not that easy. And after practice, he jumps into his day as director of the university's intramural and club sports programs.

Lesson one: If you're going to lead, lead.

"Participation in competitive or intramural sports teaches the discipline, teamwork and perseverance you need in all of



MOOREHEAD



COURTESY PHOTOS

**ABOVE: Senior Ava Murphy. RIGHT: Senior night for the women's basketball Gyrenes, celebrating their win against St. Thomas, 66 to 62. That victory put them in first place in the Sun Conference standings.**

life," said Moorehead. "I talk with team members about grace under pressure. We're developing and fostering strong qualities in the classroom and in life, not just on the basketball court."

The son of two career military veterans of the Air Force from Oklahoma, Moorehead played college basketball himself and went on to play overseas, where he also earned a master's degree in Ireland.

Now, he's pursuing a doctorate from Concordia University Chicago, a Lutheran school, he said.

To apply for the job at Ave Maria, Moorehead did a virtual interview from the hospital room where his first child had just been born in Oklahoma City. His future employers at Ave may only have seen him from the waist up in that interview — a brand-spanking-new father in a hospital room with his wife and his firstborn — but he did it right because that's what commitment means.



"I wore a full suit, anyway," he recalled. Lesson two: No matter what you do in life, do it right. Bring everything you have and do it with everything you have.

### Gyrene nation

That's as important a lesson as anything anywhere, insists Wil Hampton, associate director of Athletics.

A sportscaster in Indiana for 25 years who also worked for the Indianapolis Colts in the AFC of the National Football League, he said, "One of my major goals here is to improve the overall experience for student-athletes. What they're doing is as big as what they're doing at Notre Dame."

Arguably bigger if "big" is defined as the big picture in life for every student and student-athlete, not just the numbers in the win/loss column.

One of the things Hampton does himself — for students and any other listeners — is join Head Football Coach Joe Patterson to host an on-air show, Gyrene Nation, every Thursday. The show can be found either by going to the website [avemariagyrenes.com](http://avemariagyrenes.com) and clicking on "media" or by a search for "Gyrene Nation" on YouTube.

"Gyrene" is a nickname that traditional-

ly describes U.S. Marines, with whom Ave Maria founder Tom Monaghan once saw service.

Sports at Ave Maria are paradoxical: they are both lighthearted and playful but also deeply serious and intense, said athletes, coaches and administrators.

"We love to be challenged. People love to strive for excellence. People love to push themselves to overcome obstacles. And born out of the gaming is resiliency in life," said Vice President of Student Affairs Kimberly King, who came to Ave Maria after her days as a distance runner at Division 1 University of Richmond. That competitive beginning was followed by 22 years as a coach and later athletic director at the State University of New York at Binghamton.

Her son, Jacob King, who was head of the Marathon Club during his undergraduate days at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, is now an assistant track and cross-country coach under Alan Webb, the head coach. Webb happens to be one of the finest distance runners the United States ever produced, a Michigan-der originally who held the American record in the mile run at 3:46.91 for 16 years, from 2007 to 2023, and won the World



**Their football team coaches focus on developing both athletic skills and valuable life lessons for student-athletes.**



Championship in the event.

A sports team at Ave Maria “is a community, working toward common goals held by people with shared values and interests — almost like a family would be,” Kim King added. “Your teammates are your closest relations.”

When she talks about sports here on the college level — when other coaches and athletes at Ave Maria reflect on their vocations — there is no mention of NIL, the Name, Image, Likeness rules that now allow college athletes to benefit financially, sometimes in huge amounts, by selling themselves to promote a business or product.

They aren’t against it, some say, they just don’t see it as fundamental to sports.

“A lot of it here is aligned with the growth of the human person. It’s about formation,” King added. “These are great opportunities to form the whole person.”

In the most pragmatic sense, a lot can come anyway of what happens on a football field, a soccer field, a basketball court, a cross country course, a track, a baseball or softball field, in a swimming pool, on a tennis court or (take a deep breath), in golf, pickleball, rugby, lacrosse, ultimate Frisbee, beach volleyball or dance, to name some.

“Employers are looking for people such as athletes. It’s because of the ways you must learn to get along, to be around people who don’t always have the same personality or background. Doing that can help your work, it can help your marriage, it helps in raising children,” King said. “It teaches you how to be more selfless. There’s a huge amount of resilience in this generation that’s missing.”

**People who work together**

But not missing at Ave Maria, apparently.

Describing the reason she puts so much into basketball — aside from the fact that her father also played college basketball, and her parents are proud of her — Murphy quotes scripture, one of her favorite



COURTESY PHOTO

**With a swift glance at her teammate cutting towards the goal, the lacrosse player steadies her stance, cradles the ball with precision and prepares to unleash a perfectly timed pass.**

passages she keeps in her room on campus, from Proverbs.

“Iron sharpens iron, and one man sharpens another. It’s cool here we can be so open about our faith,” she said. The line reminds her of one of her closest friends in sports, school and life, she revealed — fellow basketball guard Elena Barnes, a junior from Milwaukee.

That thinking is by no means confined to Ave Maria, or for that matter, to one generation.

In 2020, for example, Catholic apologist John Clark, writing for The Catholic Register after attending an October football game at Ave Maria where his daughter, Philomena, was going to school, offered the following observation:

“Vince Lombardi, the Green Bay Packers coach often considered to be the greatest ever, as well as a daily communicant, once observed, ‘People who work together will win, whether it be against complex football defenses or the problems of modern society.’ After speaking to AMU’s coaches and seeing their teaching styles,

they are trying to develop persons rather than simply players.”

Clark pointed to football coach Patterson, who graduated from Villanova University before teaching literature and coaching football at St. John’s College High School in Washington, D.C., for 19 years and earning a master’s in Catholic leadership from The Catholic University of America. He came to Ave Maria to build not only the football program but additional sports programs, as well. He is now also the director of Athletics and a vice president at the university.

“Many of the lessons learned on the competitive field are going to translate into life, and so at Ave you have a chance to pursue those lessons in a manner that is consistent with the faith,” Patterson said.

He added, “Controlling the line of scrimmage isn’t just about football; it’s about life. It’s about developing yourself so you can protect those you love; it’s about courageously taking the field to make a statement. And if you’re truly blessed, you have coaches and teachers who can help

you accomplish those remarkable things in a beautiful place to learn them.”

Patterson hasn’t stopped teaching, either. He hosts an online course, one of a number offered by the university in its “Pursuit of Wisdom” series, in this case called “Athletics and the Virtues.”

“The discussion is framed within the context of the three bedrock principles of the Ave Maria Athletics Department: effort, toughness and love,” according to the course description.

That’s how Murphy, a basketball player who probably hasn’t spent a lot of time on the gridiron, may see both sporting and living, too — how many in sports view the place of games in their lives.

She transferred from the University of Missouri at Kansas City, where she played Division 1 basketball.

“I had no faith, and in my freshman and sophomore years, I was finding out who I was on the court. Transferring allowed me to get a bigger picture (of life) than basketball, to be a leader for the other girls in different ways, on and off the court,” she said.

How?

“I had to lower my ego — it doesn’t matter what division you’re playing in. Being here at Ave taught me that. It allowed me to appreciate things. My ego may have been bigger coming out of high school, but the Lord kind of humbled me. I fell in love with the game again, kind of. I could play more freely.”

So, what comes next for her? Because the final season of her final year at Ave isn’t going to last forever, even if love does.

“I can’t see myself away from the game,” she said. “I’m thinking graduate school in health science and coaching.”

It’s a choice, a choice in the game of life, perhaps — one she’s learned how to do well as an athlete for AMU.

Lesson three: Collect yourself. Make your choice. Pursue your vocation. 🌟

# Sports CLUB of Naples expanding to Ave Maria

BY AMY MAZUROWSKI

Ave Maria Sun Correspondent

In exciting news for families and residents of Ave Maria, Sports CLUB of Naples announced plans to launch a capital campaign to fund a new, state-of-the-art recreational facility near Ave Maria’s aquatic center. The facility will offer a variety of programming for residents of all ages, further expanding the organization’s reach in Collier County.

“Ave Maria will continue to grow, and with that, we’ve been able to attract more interest from businesses wanting to be a part of the community. Bringing Sports CLUB to Ave Maria is a win for residents looking for more recreational opportunities and after school and summer childcare close to home,” said Cee Cee Marinelli, vice president of commercial real estate for community developer, Barron Collier Companies.

Founded in 1999, Sports CLUB is a non-profit organization that began as a summer camp program aimed at introducing children to multiple sports in an engaging way. Since then, the program has grown into Collier County’s largest after-school care program. Programs are currently held at the main headquarters facility in North Naples and 10 satellite locations at Collier County elementary schools. Over 1,000 students participate in enrichment activities each week.

In addition to after-school care, Sports CLUB programs include summer camps, K6 Sports, gymnastics and a Friday Parent’s Night Out. Each program aims to provide an opportunity for children to engage in physical activity while also helping them



COURTESY RENDERING

**The new building will feature advanced sports facilities and flexible spaces designed to support a diverse range of programs for children and adults. Disclaimer: The images shown are for illustration purposes only and may not be an exact representation of the facility.**

develop socially, emotionally and intellectually. They emphasize sports and games, sportsmanship and social values as well as rules and strategy.

The new facility in Ave Maria will offer a wide range of programs, including after-school care, summer camps, gymnastics and sports leagues. While plans have not been finalized, Sports CLUB intends for the facility to include multi-purpose sports fields, an indoor sports complex, classrooms and community spaces, all designed to support the physical, educational and social development of children. In addition, the facility will introduce evening programming for adult sports leagues, giv-

ing adult residents more opportunities to stay active and engaged. Prior to the new facility, Sports CLUB is bringing their K6 Basketball League into the community.

“We have planned a bigger and nicer version of our Naples headquarters that will accommodate continued growth in the local area,” Sports CLUB Founder and CEO Lane Beatty added. His mission has always been to provide a safe, supportive environment for children to learn, play and grow. The new Sports CLUB facility is expected to be a valuable addition to Ave Maria, helping to meet the needs of the growing community while creating job opportunities and enrichment opportunities for families

for years to come.

Sports CLUB’s interest in expanding into Ave Maria was driven by the area’s rapid growth and the community’s need for more recreational programs. “Ave Maria is a fast-growing, family-focused area in need of expanded recreational programs that Sports CLUB offers,” Beatty said. “We are excited to have the opportunity to bring our programs to the community.”

In the near future, a community information session will be held for residents to hear future details about Sports CLUB plans to serve the Ave Maria community.

For more information about Sports CLUB, visit [sportsclubnaples.org](https://sportsclubnaples.org). 🌟



# Backwoods Feed & Grooming pampers your pets naturally

BY SANDRA YEYATI  
Ave Maria Sun Correspondent

Like children, pets need nutritious food, good hygiene and plenty of fun to keep them happy, healthy and looking beautiful. The experienced and caring team at Backwoods Feed & Grooming in the Park of Commerce is devoted to helping Ave Maria pet owners take excellent care of their furry best friends. In addition to a well-curated selection of high-quality products, they provide reliable grooming services for dogs and cats, welcome the opportunity to answer questions, help people make the right choices and adopt the best practices.

Owner Misty McWilliams is an avowed animal lover who grew up on a West Virginia farm with cows, goats and chickens. “Ever since I was a young child, I’ve always cared about animals, both domesticated and wildlife. You name it, I could bring them home,” she recalled. “Animals give back to me never-ending love. They love me no matter what.”

McWilliams’ biggest mission is educating people about healthy pet foods and proper grooming practices—the two most important ways to help pets live their best lives. “Backwoods is a neighborhood shop,” she noted. “We like to help people solve problems. I want them to know that we’re here for their needs, no matter what those needs are.”

### Organic raw food

McWilliams is on a quest to improve pets’ diets. “We called ourselves Backwoods Feed because I’m from the woods and because dogs and cats need to go back to eating the way they did in the woods,” she explained. “They don’t need to eat processed food, just like we shouldn’t.”

The shop carries A-grade, organic, raw and freeze-dried pet food made in the United States with all-natural ingredients, as well as a few options from Canada because of their stringent food regulations. “Natural, raw food is key. Once you cook it and add flavorings, it takes a lot of the nutrients out,” Brandy Contreras, a shop assistant and groomer, said.

Even the treats at Backwoods are healthy—from calming, lavender dog biscuits to jerky strips made with 100 percent Florida grass-fed beef. The store also carries organic chicken feed, healthy horse treats and high-quality food for smaller pets like guinea pigs, hamsters and rabbits. Additional items not found in the store can be special ordered upon



Owner Misty McWilliams; Groomers Jade Chipps, Marbelis Ojeda and Brandy Contreras; and Volunteer Louann Tankersley.

request. Also available are fresh eggs and non-pasteurized goat milk produced at McWilliams’ Golden Gate Estates home, where she fosters a family of chickens, seven French bulldogs, a tiny kitten and a rescued bunny named Poof.

### Shampoos and fluff

According to McWilliams, regular grooming is important not just for aesthetic reasons, but also for a pet’s health

and wellbeing. Dogs should be brushed daily and fully groomed at least every three to four weeks, she suggests. The idea is to prevent matting, which is very painful and causes irritation and sores.

With three well-trained groomers on staff, Backwoods provides full grooming for dogs and cats, which involves a bath, blowout and thorough brushing, as well as nail clipping and a full haircut if wanted or needed. They have a selection of shampoos, face washes and conditioners for different needs and preferences, including hypoallergenic and medicated products, with or without scents. Every animal receives a bandanna and/or bow as a decorative touch. Prior reservations are required, and the turnaround is an average of about three hours.

Pets with serious matting will probably have to be shaved down.

“It’s very painful for the pet to brush out the matting when it’s severe, and it can traumatize them to not want to be groomed again, so we try to make it as good of an experience for the pet and the owner as possible,” Contreras explained.

Backwoods is well-stocked in grooming products for those who are comfortable bathing their pets at home, including shampoos, conditioners, brushes, combs and clippers. Be sure to ask about more specialized products for itch relief, flea and tick protection, digestive support, calming aids and other nutritional supplements.

Standout brands include Silver Honey, designed to heal skin conditions with natural ingredients and protect against infection without antibiotics. Shniff products transform dull and tangled coats into silky, shiny and revitalized manes. Their products come in a wide array of spellbinding scents. The groomers rave about Shniff’s facial fluff, which magically dissolves eye boogers and other impurities, leaving the pet smelling terrific and looking even better.

### Toys, leashes and bowls

Backwoods also happens to be a toy store for pets, with balls, squeaky toys, fluffy stuffed animals, colorful leashes, snazzy pet clothes, decorative food and water bowls, comfy beds, carriers and strollers. There are items for humans, too, including pet-themed greeting cards, home decor, tote bags, shirts, hats and tumblers—a true celebration of pets and the joy that they bring.

### Here to help

When McWilliams first opened this business in 2016, it was called Dog Gone Cleaners, and it offered pet boarding in addition to grooming. A year ago, she discontinued the kenneling services to spend more time with family, reducing the shop’s square footage and rebranding the operation to its current iteration.

“We are the first pet grooming place in Ave Maria,” Contreras boasted. “We’re local! Occasionally, if someone needs help with transport, we’ll just go over and pick up their dog for them. We always try to help our neighbors as much as we can.”

Located at 5334 Ave Maria Boulevard, Suite 900, Backwoods Feed & Grooming is open from 9 a.m. to 6 p.m. Monday through Friday and from 9 a.m. to 3 p.m. Saturday. They are closed on Sunday. For grooming reservations or more information, call 239-455-5530 or email backwoodsfeedllc@gmail.com. 🌞



Backwoods Feed & Grooming offers everything from organic food and pet toys to pet grooming services.





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## Trunk-or-Treat in Town Center



**Michael Jaenvega as Beetlejuice.**

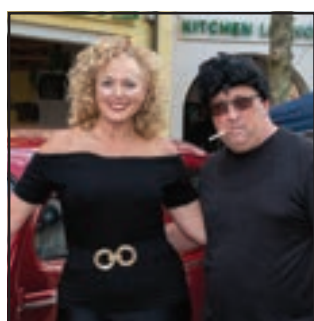
The Trunk-or-Treat at the Ave Maria Town Center was fantastic. Attendees dressed up in their favorite costumes and brought their treat bags to enjoy an evening filled with candy, games and lively contests. The atmosphere was enhanced by themed live music and a DJ, creating a great vibe for everyone. Delicious food and beverages were available, and the after parties were a hit too! 🌟



### Matt and Daneé Williams



**Kristina and JD Ribali as Sandy and Danny from Grease.**





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# Capturing beauty: The art of Sue Ellen Miller

BY SANDRA YEYATI  
Ave Maria Sun Correspondent

There is no better way to learn about an artist than visiting their studio. Sue Ellen Miller's creative refuge is a converted den in her Ave Maria home where blank canvases lean against the wall and two large worktables are piled high with acrylic paint, bangles, bottles of craft paper, feathers, illustrated napkins, jewels, Mod Podge, ribbons, shells, stickers, trinkets and more—the building blocks of her artwork.

Completed paintings adorn the walls and half-finished throw pillows await final touches amid stacks of art books and reference magazines. Taking center stage is a 40-year-old Artograph projector that Miller acquired when she was in college and still uses to enlarge sketches or existing images up to 200 times their original size. By tracing a projected image onto a canvas, she can maintain the correct proportions of the 1950s-style female figures that dominate her pieces. Although all her paintings are untitled, she refers to them as “my ladies.”

Hanging in a guest bedroom is one of her most treasured compositions, meant to honor her father who passed away last Christmas Eve—a golden-haired archangel in a white gown and bejeweled crown. “Usually, my ladies fight me, but this angel was the only painting that didn’t fight me at all,” Miller said. “I wanted her to be fierce. She came out perfect and will forever be the best. I thought about my father the whole time I painted her. It felt like a release. I knew she was finished when I looked at her and spontaneously said, ‘Thank you.’”

What sets her paintings and pillows apart are the three-dimensional embellishments applied after the last brushstroke, including feathered corsets; colored stones and costume jewelry around the waist, wrist and head; and hairpieces made with paper flowers and hand-crafted crepe paper. One of her favorite decorations is made of coffee filters that she paints with watercolors and bakes in the oven at very low heat to set the pigments. “I’m all about repurposing,” she said proudly, adding that she learned this technique watching a YouTube video.

When Miller was 8 years old, she sold her first painting to her third-grade teacher. Her art has evolved after about 10 years of honing her skills with the help of private art tutors. She has published a series of arts-and-crafts instructional articles for Better Homes & Gardens magazine and has also auctioned her art for the Make-A-Wish Foundation. Today, her larger canvases start at \$2,000. “Some paintings I don’t want to sell because they are a part of my heart,” she said.

In everything she does, Miller seeks beauty. Having previously dabbled in interior design, she loves to rescue home decor and furnishings from the trash or secondhand stores—her favorite being Blue, the Goodwill boutique in the Ave Maria Town Center. When someone comes to visit, she proudly points out the marble console table by the front door acquired for only \$50, an antique textile enhanced with tassels that hangs on the bedroom wall and the sparkling broche—a family heirloom—encased in a shadowbox frame as a work of art. “I like to make things pretty with paint and imagination,” she said. “If you have beauty in your heart, you spread it all over the world.”

This season, Miller intends to sell be-dazzled sketchbooks, journals, home decor, paintings, jewelry and greeting cards at the Ave Maria Farmers Market every



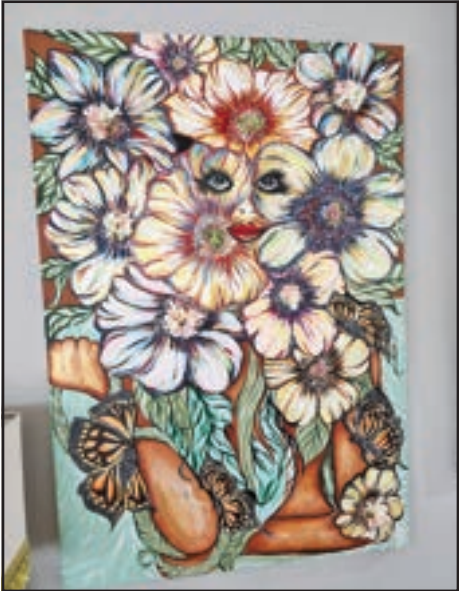
SUE ELLEN MILLER / COURTESY PHOTOS  
**Sue Ellen Miller in her studio surrounded by some of her work. Miller refers to the 1950s-style female figures in many of her paintings as “my ladies.”**

Saturday. Her art is also available at The Secret Ingredient in Town Center. According to owner Daneé Williams, “Her paintings and pillows are so colorful and unique. It always features a lady with such depth in her eyes and these incredible headpieces that are just gorgeous. I’ve sold three of her higher-end pieces so far and only have a couple of bracelets left. My favorite right now is an original pillow that has a hand-painted woman with opal jewels attached around her face.”

After retiring from a career as a hematology technician, Miller moved to Ave

Maria two years ago to be closer to her sister, who lives in Bonita Springs. “I love my neighbors. All of my doctors are here. I drive my golf cart everywhere. I have a pool. It’s a nice lifestyle. Now that I’m here in Ave Maria, I have no interest in going on vacation. I already live in paradise,” she said.

Miller is available for private commissions and interior design consulting. “Give me your budget and let’s see what we can do,” she said. “If you need help decorating, we can use what you already have.” To reach her, send a text to 574-315-4757. 🌸





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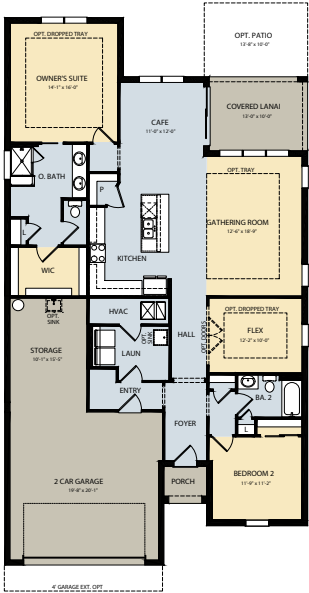
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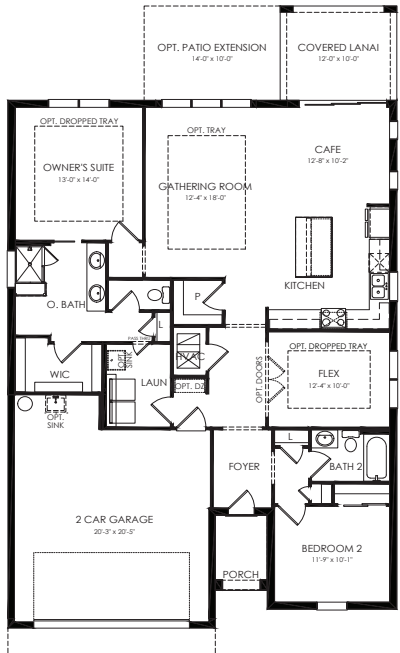
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# About the community

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.

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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, Coastal or Contemporary architecture and an inviting array of designer features included as well as some custom options available. Both Silverwood and Maple Ridge have a superb location within Ave Maria, so residents benefit from a great school district and sense of community.

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



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First Floor Plan



Second Floor Plan



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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.

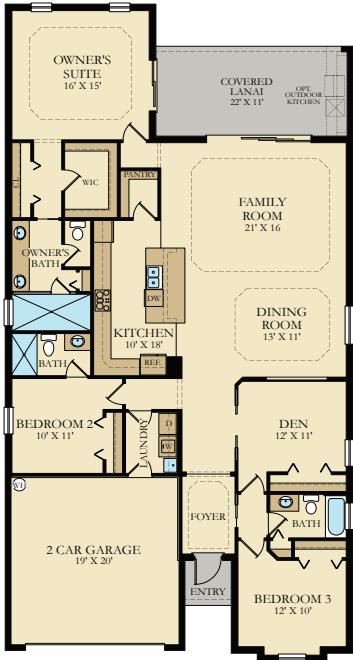


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# Remodeled Welcome Center opens its doors

BY SANDRA YEYATI  
Ave Maria Sun Correspondent

After a four-month closure, the renovated Ave Maria Welcome Center is complete and open to the public. This makeover is bold in scope and execution—an impressive upgrade for the town.

When the Ave Maria Development (AMD) team set out to reimagine this space, they dreamed big, hoping to create a location that was joyous, welcoming and engaging for all visitors, including potential home buyers, residents and their families, vacationers and festivalgoers. The idea was to invigorate that corner of Town Center and turn it into a hub of friendly interaction that reflects the active lifestyles and vibrant communities in Ave Maria.

“We wanted to capture the essence of Ave Maria and have people understand the town better by visiting the space,” said Michelle Mambuca, marketing and public relations manager of town developer, Barron Collier Companies (BCC). “The new welcome center showcases the beauty of Ave Maria and the fun atmosphere we have in town. Visitors will receive a colorful, vibrant welcome with an invitation to have a snack and talk about what it’s like to live in the community, what the best places to eat and shop are, and what all the builders offer.”

Upon entering, visitors are greeted by a resplendent blue and white hospitality bar called Square One, where they can enjoy a cold beverage or cup of joe while chatting with one of the Welcome Center staff members, all of whom live in Ave Maria. “We named it Square One because this is where you start when you come in. It’s an important connection point with our staff to ask questions and be comfortable like you’re at home,” Mambuca said. “Our staff members are very friendly and love to get to know people. They live right here in the communities. It’s a chance to ask a resident, ‘Hey, how do you like living here?’ and get their honest opinion.”

To the left of Square One, a dynamic wall with orange, green, yellow and blue accents feature photos of Ave Maria resi-



AMEILA CONTE PHOTOGRAPHY / COURTESY PHOTOS

**The design of the Welcome Center features an inviting atmosphere with trees overhead and park benches, creating a neighborhood feel that embraces Florida’s outdoor beauty.**

dents playing pickleball, shopping in Town Center, splashing at the Water Park, playing golf and dining at one of the many amazing restaurants. A brochure tower and two monitors feature the different builders and home styles, as well as information about upcoming events.

“The Ave Maria team wanted something that was fresh and exciting and inviting for the community and enticing for potential buyers,” said Jenelle Lovings, Senior Interior Designer of Creative License International. “We focused mainly on the athletic amenities that are offered throughout the community. Pickleball has been one of the hot sports for the last few years, so you’ll see touches of that theme throughout the space. Golfing is another major draw, so those amenities helped to guide some of the decisions that we made. We also wanted it to feel like you’re walking through a neighborhood with trees overhead and park benches to stop and take a break. Being outside in Florida is always beautiful, so we brought that feel into the interior of the space in a

functional and fun way.”

The wall art was put together by creative agency Milesbrand, which has been working with Ave Maria Development for many years. “They know our brand well, and they have been working on our new Real Stories campaign, which highlights actual residents and their stories, capturing the lifestyle of Ave Maria, the sense of community, the connection, the activities, the families and the diversity we have here in A Big Kind of Small Town,” Mambuca noted.

A meandering putting green invites visitors to hone their short game with the assistance of premium clubs and balls from Ave Maria’s two golf courses—The National and the Panther Run Golf Club. Also on the green is a sky-blue golf cart that looks exactly like a retro convertible Bronco. “As we’ve gotten to know residents, we’ve come to understand that this is a golf cart-friendly town,” Mambuca said. “People love their golf carts, even if they don’t golf, because you can get anywhere in town on a golf cart, whether it’s Publix, the Town Center or the

new Midtown Plaza.”

Caleb Polhill, co-owner of AAction Power Equipment, donated the custom-fabricated golf cart. “There’s nothing like scooting around town in a convertible golf cart and enjoying life in this beautiful weather. We wanted a happy color, so we chose the sky blue, and it pops well with the green turf,” he said, adding that customized golf carts are not uncommon. People like to spruce up their rides with fancy stereo systems, underbody lights or colors representing their favorite sports teams.

In the back corner of the Welcome Center are two selfie stations shaped like pickleball paddles with bench seating and neon lighting. “This is a fun place for residents to take a selfie for social media and tag us at @AveMariaFL or #AveMariaFL,” Mambuca suggested. “I can imagine residents bringing their family when they’re visiting and making a memory there.”

Several maps adorn the new space, including an immense table with a detailed site plan of Ave Maria, as well as a vicinity map on a nearby wall that identifies points of interest beyond town, such as the beaches, airports, nature preserves and entertainment spots in neighboring Naples and Bonita Springs.

“We wanted to create a one-stop spot where people could learn everything about the town and plan their day—whether it’s the businesses, upcoming events, the history of the town or the four home builders,” Mambuca said. “We don’t sell homes there. We sell the community and celebrate all of the exciting goings-on. Some people come in because they’ve never been here before, so we can help them decide what they can do while they’re visiting. Others fall in love with Ave Maria, and we are happy to send them to the sales centers to pick out their dream home.”

Every Tuesday in season, the Welcome Center sponsors free, one-hour narrated trolley tours, as well as live music in the Town Center. Located at 5076 Annunciation Circle, Unit 104, the Welcome Center is open from 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. Monday through Friday and from 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. Saturday and Sunday. For more information, call 239-352-3903. 🌞





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AVE MARIA DEVELOPMENT / COURTESY PHOTOS

Fire Station 32 and EMS Headquarters in Ave Maria provide essential emergency services, ensuring the community is prepared and responds effectively during times of crisis.

PEACE

From page 1

island of Sanibel, it is the same. There were houses [on the coast] with sand up to the doorknobs, so the wires are underground, the transformers above ground and what was above ground were washed away. Ave Maria is ideal because they don't have that storm surge. When it comes to electricity, you might think one solution fits everything, but that is not the case. In Ave Maria, underground makes sense, but in coastal areas, it doesn't."

Ryan said maintenance is also a reason for their success in Ave Maria. They routinely cut back vegetation near the big green boxes that the underground wires lead to. Doing this maintenance means less debris flying around during a storm.

"Even though we are underground, [the wires] are overhead somewhere," Ryan said. "So, vegetation management helps prevent flying debris." Residents appreciate not having to lug sandbags to their doors or having to evacuate.

"What a benefit to be 24 miles inland and to be out of the way of that storm surge. There's also no anxiety knowing all the houses are block," said Jim Anderson,



Ave Maria businesses like Meltz ice cream shop were open day of and post-Hurricane Helene.

a Del Webb Naples resident. "I moved here in 2017 and that is when Hurricane Irma hit, so it went right over my house and there were

130-mile-an-hour winds and no damage."

Anderson said he lost power for only a day during Hurricane Irma and never lost power during Hurricanes Milton or Helene. Anderson said he is also glad he didn't feel the need to buy expensive hurricane windows.

"I could not afford the hurricane windows," he admitted. "A lot of people on my street don't have hurricane windows, and that is okay."

Scott Taggart owns Ledo Pizza in Ave Maria and lives in Lennar's The National community. He said he did not put up hurricane shutters on his home or business because he felt safe without them.

"Nope, no preps for storm," he said. "I feel that confident. I have been here two

years and lost electricity for two hours total. All our power is underground, and we have our own water plant, too, and that also helps."

Serf Sanchez, a Maple Ridge resident, does some storm preparation, but doesn't feel threatened by hurricanes.

"I usually hire a college student to put up some shutters and make sure we have gas for the generator and go to Publix and buy nonperishable stuff. I feel very confident living here because we live further from the coast. We have our own water plant here, so we tend to not have any issues with water, and having the on-site EMS and fire station, we feel safe."

Sanchez appreciates that comfort after living for many years in an area threatened by humongous storms.

"Being from Miami originally, we have gone through many storms, so we are happy to be on this side of the coast and inland," Sanchez said. "We really don't have any issue with our street flooding which is another plus. We did have some



Serafin "Serf" Sanchez, a Maple Ridge resident, waving to his kids in their golf cart.



TAGGART



flickers but did not lose power during the storms.”

Sanchez said another huge benefit is the lower cost of insurance. Since homes are much less likely to be damaged by storms, flood insurance is not required, and regular insurance is cheaper.

“Many of us in this town are saving money with the cost of insurance,” he emphasized.

Josh Graeve, Pulte division president, said out-of-state buyers watch storms on the news and could be fearful of living too close to the coast. They also have clients that live on the east or west coasts of Florida that are now seeking to avoid the yearly storm fears.

“Ian and Milton predominately had an impact on coastal or low-lying areas, or areas that were built some time ago, or were built with a lower level of material,” Graeve said. “In Ave Maria, all the Pulte



PULTE / COURTESY PHOTO

As seen in Del Webb Naples, the majority of Ave Maria homeowners report little to no damage.

homes are built to a 160-mile-per-hour wind rating, and every home is built a foot or more above the base flood eleva-

tion as determined by FEMA and Collier County.” “We are finding that people want to still enjoy the resort and tropical lifestyle of sunny Southwest Florida, but they are simply more mindful of how new construction and certain locations within the region can have more resilience to wind and rain events,” said Ben Crisafulli, Pulte’s vice president of sales.

Kathleen Coppola is one of the people who moved from the coast inland to Ave Maria. She lived on North Naples’ Vanderbilt Beach for 25 years before moving to her Ave Maria community in 2015.

of them had their homes washed away and arrived with just the clothes on their back. It is very sad. It is horrible. We are seeing more people move to this area because it is safer.”

“It is a very safe community because of how inland it is and how high it is. During storms, it is a very safe place to be.”

— Allyson Holland, District Manager of the Ave Maria Stewardship Community District

Allyson Holland, District Manager of the Ave Maria Stewardship Community District, lives in Naples but said she would evacuate to Ave Maria if a huge hurricane was coming.

“It is a very safe community because of how inland it is and how high it is,” Holland

stressed. “During storms, it is a very safe place to be.” ☀️



AVE MARIA DEVELOPMENT / COURTESY PHOTO

The Town Center in Ave Maria serves as a gathering spot for residents, enhancing their sense of safety and community during hurricane season.

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# Bigger and better: Oil Well Craft Beer expansion begins

**BY SANDRA YEYATI**  
Ave Maria Sun Correspondent

Since it first opened in 2017, Oil Well Craft Beer (OWCB) has been a beloved watering hole, growing organically to meet the needs of a loyal clientele. Their first iteration was a small tap-room in unit 500 of the Ave Maria Park of Commerce. In 2019, they added the unit 600 to accommodate extra seating and a three-barrel brewery that fulfilled co-owner Matt Williams’ dream to create custom craft beers.

Today, he and his wife Daneé embark upon an ambitious new expansion that OWCB fans have been clamoring for. When all is said and done—by early to mid-2025—the popular gathering place will have taken over units 700 and 800, adding almost 3,000 square feet to include an event room, expanded kitchen and substantial upgrades to their craft beer operation.

“Everybody seems thrilled, and I’m excited to be able to bring it to Ave Maria and to see what the future holds for us and the community,” Daneé said. “This expansion is needed, and we know it’s time. You can just feel it. I’m really proud of my husband, myself and our staff because we’re growing the right way. We didn’t come into Ave Maria and take on four commercial units from the start. We grew steadily, and the community is the reason. They support us, they love us, they tell people about us, and we just feel very blessed.”

### Brewing and canning

The plan is to move all brewing to unit 800. Additions include four eight-barrel fermenters, as well as a half-barrel brewing system that will enable Brewmaster Ross Wright to experiment, making small batches without risking a lot of material. A new canning line will allow them to distribute their most popular beers in stores and other key distribution points around Southwest Florida.

“Our brewing capacity will increase about five-fold,” Matt explained. “Once we go live with this bigger operation, we should be able to maintain 10 to 12 of our own beers and probably always have five to eight of our 20 taps for house favorites like our Scotch ale, our Irish red and our wheat beer. We’re also hoping that a little bit of local distribution will help us from both a sales and marketing standpoint.”

According to Matt, “We’re making these changes because we need to. We’ve never been able to keep up with the production of our own beer. We can’t make



Daneé Williams, Contractor Victor Treissa and Matt Williams

it as fast as we go through it. The community has spoken and grown and supported us. That’s why we need to expand the brewery.”

### Lunch and dinner

Up until this point, OWCB has been serving submarine sandwiches from 11 a.m. to 3 p.m. and hosting food trucks for dinnertime. That’s all about to change as they make major investments in their kitchen, which will inhabit unit 600, where the smaller brewery implements once were. An Italian wood-fired pizza oven is expected where handcrafted pies will be pulled from the fire and served piping hot. The expanded lunch and dinner menus will also feature a larger selection of sandwiches, salads, charcuterie boards and soups on colder days.

The Williams’ youngest son, Reece, will head the new kitchen operation. In November, he took culinary lessons at The Pizza Tomorrow Summit in Orlando, and in early 2025, he will travel to Florence, Italy to learn traditional dough-making from the people who invented modern pizzas. The team also plans to add six to 10 staff members to serve patrons and work in the kitchen.

### Event room

Unit 700 will be an event room accessible via a 10-foot, barn-style sliding door. “This space will give us a little bit of extra seating for diners, as well as a social room where we can have all of our regular programming like bingo, paint parties, karaoke, Rotary Club meetings,

trivia nights and holiday-themed parties,” Matt shared. “And then, if people want to have a private event, which we get contacted about quite a bit, we will have the ability to shut that rolling door and let folks have their own private gathering while still maintaining our normal business hours in the current space.”

The room will be equipped with many entertainment bells and whistles, including a small stage for live music, a film projector for movie nights, two to three televisions to watch sports games, a shuffleboard table, regulation-size cornhole platforms and dartboards over astroturf for tournaments, cozy booths and high-top seating and a small bar with five taps. “One other cool thing is that we’re putting a glass garage door in the storefront of unit 700, so when the weather is nice, we can have that door up with an air curtain and have an indoor/outdoor beer garden feel,” Matt said.

### Buildout schedule

Workers broke ground on the expansion in October, directed by Ave Maria architect and loyal OWCB customer Oscar Amaro. Units 500 and 600 will remain open throughout the buildout phase, although the brewery has already been disconnected. In the meantime, trusted local brewers have been com-



Matt Williams and Oscar Amaro

missioned to make OWCB’s favorite brews offsite. The event room, kitchen and pizza oven should be open by January or February, and the brewery is expected to be operational by mid-2025.

### Anniversary party

OWCB will celebrate its eighth anniversary from 3 p.m. to 9 p.m. Saturday, Jan. 18, with live music, food trucks and, hopefully, fresh pizzas from their brand-new wood-fire oven. 🍕

*Located at 5334 Ave Maria Boulevard, OWCB is open from 11 a.m. to 10 p.m. Monday through Thursday and from 11 a.m. to 11 p.m. Friday and Saturday. When the new kitchen is complete, Sunday hours will be added. For more information, call 239-354-4454 or visit OilWellCraftBeer.com.*



Reece and Matt Williams



The wood-fired pizza oven at Oil Well Craft Beer will serve up delicious handcrafted pies.



Daneé and Matt Williams.



# BIG KINDS OF SMALL TOWN FUN

## Del Webb Craft Show

The holiday festivities kicked off early this year at The Club at Del Webb Naples Grand Hall in November. The event showcased a variety of arts, crafts and holiday decor created by community ar-

tisans. Attendees enjoyed delicious offerings from food trucks, participated in raffles and were entertained by live performances. 🌟



Amanda Jones displays her embellished sea treasures.



Eddy and Adrianna Pantoja of A Blessed Little Bake Shoppe.



Photographer Laura Bruney.



Carter Clark, 3, with her new best friend.



SANDRA YEYATI/Ave Maria Sun  
Marion Mullee makes flower art with bottle caps.



Cece Quigley and her embroidered products.



Doris Schramer's top-selling crocheted stuffed animals.



Mimi Martin selling her painted glassware and ornaments.

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# ALL AROUND AVE MARIA

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

## ■ OPEN TO THE PUBLIC

### Farmers Market

Browse locally sourced goods and hand-made creations from a diverse mix of 60+ vendors, including organic produce, flowers, honey, specialty food and baked goods, home décor and accessories, ceramics and more. Market hours are 9:00 a.m. to 2:00 p.m. every Saturday, now through April 26, with live music starting at 11 a.m.

### MERCHANT EVENTS

#### Backwoods Feed & Grooming facebook.com/doggonecleaners

Founded in 2016, Backwoods Feed & Grooming specializes in grooming services, pet wash stations, and holistic food and treats for all domestic pets, from household pets to farm animals.

#### The Bean at Ave Maria thebeanofave.com

- Check out The Bean's drive-thru coffee cart in front of The Pub at Ave Maria every day from 6:30 a.m. to 8:00 a.m. to quickly purchase muffins, bagels, hot and iced coffee and more!
- Discover the latest weekly special drink announcements, expertly crafted by their talented baristas, at facebook.com/thebeanatave.
- **Join the Coffee Club.** After buying 10 hot or iced drip coffees, get the eleventh one free.
- **Taco Tuesday** happens weekly from 4:00 to 7:00 p.m. in the Bean Courtyard and features \$3 beef tacos, beer, \$4 chicken fajitas, chips and salsa, margaritas and \$5 pork tacos. Indoor seating is available in case of bad weather.

#### Cadenza Medical Clinic cadenzamedclinic.com

Cadenza Medical Clinic offers a comprehensive approach to health and beauty. They provide personalized healthcare services, blending functional medicine, internal medicine and medical aesthetics. Their concierge practice focuses on helping adults navigate the challenges of maintaining optimal health. Their mission is to treat the root causes of health concerns, optimize wellness from the inside out, guiding you and empowering you to look and feel your best.

#### MELTZ meltzicecream.com

- A family-owned ice cream shop founded by residents who have lived in Ave Maria since 2021. Enjoy a variety of delicious ice cream, toppings, specialty and traditional sundaes, and themed creations inspired by the youngest family members. MELTZ has customizable 100% organic Açaí bowls, boba teas, rolled ice cream and smoothies.
- Bring your furry friend for a complimentary pup cup.
  - On Wednesdays, there is a 10% discount for AMU faculty and students.

#### Mercato at Ave mercatoatave.net

A lively marketplace featuring vendor casitas with handcrafted candles, soaps, clothing, accessories and sweets. Enjoy free Wi-Fi, artisan coffee, live music and a striking mural. Key vendors include Felicia's Hair Studio, Kivora Boutique, Eva's Jewels and Sonia Tello Alterations. Pure Beauty offers beauty products and services, Pop

Love Gelato serves artisanal treats and Berry Juicy provides healthy smoothies. There's also a Stay & Play area for kids.

#### OASIS The Kitchen Lounge oasiskitchenlounge.com

At OASIS, guests can discover a new culinary offering featuring a menu with smaller portion sizes and fun small bites. They can enjoy the chef's monthly specials and indulge in American and Latin brunch options during the weekends. Exciting events await, including comedy nights, wine and jazz evenings, live music performances and Latin socials. Their happy hour is from 4 to 6 p.m. For those planning a party, seasonal party bookings are available now through January.

#### Oil Well Craft Beer oilwellcraftbeer.com

- Indulge in sub sandwiches available daily from 11:00 a.m. to 3:00 p.m.
- **Every Monday to Saturday** from 5:00 to 8:00 p.m., at least one food truck at the Park of Commerce.
- **To-go Tuesdays:** \$1 off crowlers and \$2 off growlers.
- **Wine Wednesdays:** \$1 off wine.
- **Ladies Drink Specials on Thursdays:** \$1 off drafts and wine for ladies.
- **Pick up a Christmas Angel** to support a local child in need, with gifts due back by **Saturday, Dec. 7** for the Guadalupe Center in Immokalee.
- Join Sara Callahan, a Southwest Florida realtor, for **Family Friendly Bingo from 6:00 to 8:00 p.m. on Saturday, Dec. 7.**
- **Glorified Vision Art's Brew and Paint Party** is on **Tuesday, Dec. 10.** Tickets are \$35 a seat, and you can reserve quickly by RSVPing to glorifiedvisionart@gmail.com.
- Join Carol and Tom DiFlorio for an incredibly fun and free **Music Bingo on Monday, Dec. 16,** at 7:00 p.m.

- Cruise Planners Jackie and Dan Rategan are hosting an **Adult Bingo** with free prizes on **Wednesday, Dec. 18,** from 7:00 to 9:00 p.m.
- **Tuesday, Dec. 10 is National Lager Day,** with \$4 lagers available all day.
- At the **Cookie Exchange Meet and Mingle on Friday, Dec. 13, at 7:00 p.m.,** anyone who brings a dozen cookies will get a free drink.
- Bring unwrapped toys to the **Ave Maria Veterans Annual Tailgate Party and Toy Drive on Saturday, Dec. 14 from 11:30 a.m. to 5:00 p.m.,** where you can enjoy food, watch the Army-Navy game and get discounts for wearing team attire.
- Celebrate **National Sangria Day on Friday, Dec. 20,** with \$5 Christmas Sangria.
- On **Saturday, Dec. 21,** Oil Well Craft Beer's **7th Annual Ugly Christmas Sweater and Karaoke Party** features DJ DiFlo. Sing your favorite tunes and wear your ugliest Christmas sweater, T-shirt or tank top. The winner will be announced at 9:00 p.m.
- Join the **New Year's Masquerade Party** with DJ DiFlo. Wear your best masks and celebrate before the ball drops from **9:00 p.m. to 12:30 a.m.**
- Oil Well Craft Beer is hosting its **8-Year Anniversary Celebration on Sat-**



**urday, Jan. 18 from 3:00 to 9:00 p.m.,** featuring live music, delicious food trucks and giveaways every 30 minutes.

#### The Pub & Grill at Ave Maria thepubofave.com

The Pub's new happy hour, running Monday through Friday from 2:00 to 5:00 p.m., features \$5 well drinks, \$4 house wines, \$3 domestic drafts, \$2 pretzel bites and \$1 chips and salsa. Make sure to keep an eye out for live music events.

#### The Secret Ingredient shopthesecretingredient.com

- Celebrate your birthday and enjoy a 20% discount on your favorite regularly priced item with a valid ID.
- Active duty and retired members receive 20% off one regular-priced item with military ID.
- **Every Sunday** this month, fill out your Holiday Wish List for a chance to receive a free gift while supplies last.
- **Every Monday is 55+ and Fabulous Day!** Shoppers aged 55 and up save 10% off one regularly priced item.
- **Every Tuesday, "Twosday" shopping** allows you and a friend to each receive 20% off one regularly priced item when shopping together.
- Discover the excitement of their **Weekly Wednesday Sale,** where a special item is offered at a discounted price. Stop in or stay tuned on their social media channels to see the featured item each week.
- **Retail Therapy Day** happens **every Thursday,** where spending \$50 gets you a free pair of sunglasses.
- **Every Friday, first-time shoppers receive a 20% discount** on one regularly priced item. This discount is available to each new customer once.
- **Pick up a Christmas Angel** to support a local child in need, with gifts due back by **Saturday, Dec. 7** for the Guadalupe Center in Immokalee.
- Celebrate 12 days of Christmas now through Dec. 12 and receive a free fun holiday gift, including items like Christmas earrings, bracelets, pinwheels and ornaments, with no purchase necessary.
- Anything you purchase from TSI on **Saturday, Dec. 14, National Shipping Day,** will receive free shipping. Items will be dispatched via USPS on Monday, Dec. 16.
- Wear a set of pearls and get 30% off your favorite regularly priced item on **Sunday, Dec. 15** for **National Wear Your Pearls Day.**
- Restyle your old fur on **Wednesday, Dec. 18 from 10:00 a.m. to 7:00 p.m. and Dec. 19 from 10:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m.** into a beautiful vest, jacket or keepsake teddy bear.
- **On Wednesday, Dec. 18, an exclusive after-hours shopping event from 5:00 to 8:00 p.m.** will include personalized shopping, free gift wrapping, along with complimentary beer from Oil Well Craft Beer, wine and cookies for late-night shoppers looking for the perfect gift.
- The Secret Ingredient is celebrating its **4-year anniversary on Saturday, Jan. 11 from 10:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m.,** with giveaways every 30 minutes.

#### Stella Rose Way stellaroseway.com

A locally owned boutique featuring a curated mix of gifts, artisanal items, children's products and home decor. They host monthly events to explore Ave Maria souvenirs and aim to be a delightful source for unique finds and home beautification.

#### Tropical Smoothie Café tropicalsmoothiecafe.com

With fresh, made-to-order smoothies, wraps, sandwiches and flatbreads that instantly boost your mood, treat yourself to

an experience that makes eating better and easy breezy. Be sure to try the fan-favorite Tropic Bowls.

#### Vicky Bakery vickybakery.com

Promising a delectable assortment of light, flavorful pastries, from crispy croissants to decadent cakes, each meticulously crafted for an exhilarating culinary experience, now including an expanded selection of party, wedding, and special occasion custom cakes, along with a comprehensive catering service for schools, businesses and community events.

#### Way Out Toys & Games wayouttoys.com

On Tuesday nights, a Pokémon Pack Wars event costs \$20. The event runs from 6:30 to 7:00 p.m. and provides each player with 3 packs of cards to use for the event. During the 3 rounds played, one pack is opened at a time as a group. The winner of each round will receive a prize, and there will be a final grand prize round where all 3 packs provided will be used.

On Thursday nights, there is an open play event for Lorcana at Disney Loracana from 6:00 to 8:00 p.m. It's an opportunity to learn and play the game, and it's open to all ages. Even if you don't have cards, starter decks are available for purchase in-store.

### AVE MARIA UNIVERSITY ATHLETICS

For the latest updates and more information on away games, visit avemaria-gyrenes.com/calendar.

**Friday, Dec. 6**  
W. Basketball vs. Florida National, 5:00 p.m.

**Sunday, Dec. 15**  
W. Basketball vs. St. Francis (Ind.), 12:00 p.m.

**Monday, Dec. 16**  
M. Basketball vs. #19 Huntington (Ind.), 7:30 p.m.

**Tuesday, Dec. 17**  
W. Basketball vs. Goshen (Ind.), 3:00 p.m.  
M. Basketball vs. Bethel (Ind.), 7:30 p.m.

**Wednesday, Dec. 18**  
W. Basketball vs. Northwestern (Iowa), 2:00 p.m.

**Thursday, Dec. 19**  
W. Basketball vs. Dakota Wesleyan (S.D.), 2:00 p.m.

**Saturday, Dec. 21**  
W. Basketball vs. Huntington (Ind.), 12:00 p.m.

**Monday, Dec. 30**  
W. Basketball vs. Michigan Dearborn, 1:00 p.m.

**Tuesday, Dec. 31**  
W. Basketball vs. Mobile (Ala.), 1:00 p.m.

**Friday, Jan. 10**  
Swimming vs. Life, Life vs. STU vs. AMU Tri-Meet in Fort Myers, TBA  
Swimming vs. St. Thomas, Life vs. STU vs. AMU Tri-Meet in Fort Myers, TBA

**Wednesday, Jan. 15**  
W. Basketball vs. Keiser, 5:30 p.m.  
M. Basketball vs. RV Keiser, 7:30 p.m.

**Saturday, Jan. 18**  
W. Basketball vs. St. Thomas, 2:00 p.m.  
M. Basketball vs. RV St. Thomas, 4:00 p.m.



# ALL AROUND AVE MARIA

## ■ AVE MARIA RESIDENT-ONLY

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

### Coffee with a Twiss

This casual gathering with AMMA Executive Director Kim Twiss, usually 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 Thursday, Dec. 12 and Jan. 9 at 10:00 a.m.

### First Fridays: Hometown Christmas

On Friday, Dec. 6, residents can enjoy the magical Hometown Christmas at the Ave Maria Town Center from 3:00 to 9:00 p.m., featuring rides, food trucks and a grand parade at 6:00 p.m. January's First Friday event is on Jan. 3 from 4:00 to 7:00 p.m., with activities for kids, live DJ music and fun for the whole family.

### Onspot Dermatology

Located in the parking lot off Roma Street and Avila Avenue (behind Tropical Cafe Smoothie and Oasis: The Kitchen Lounge), OnSpot provides various dermatological services in their state-of-the-art mobile office. Services will be available from 7:30 a.m. until 3:30 p.m. Fifteen minutes could save your life. Walk-ins are currently available; however, it is recommended that you book your appointment before. Please visit their website [onspotdermatology.com](http://onspotdermatology.com) to book an appointment. Upcoming dates are Saturday, Dec. 21 and Monday, Dec. 30.

### Breakfast with Santa

On Saturday, Dec. 14 from 9:00 to 11:00 a.m., bring the family down to the Ave Maria Water Park for breakfast with Santa and Mrs. Claus. Fill up those tummies with a nice warm breakfast, turn in your wish list and have your picture taken with the jolly old elf himself. Edible and take-home crafts, games, holiday music and fun. Bring your cameras. \$5 per person with a \$25 family cap. Pre-registration is required to get a proper head count for food and crafts.

### Escape Rooms in Ave

On Saturday, Dec. 28 at the Ave Maria Master Association, enjoy an evening of puzzles and games with Puzzle Room Escape for just \$15 per player. Everyone from ages 6 to 99 is welcome to participate in this fun experience.

### Adult Games Group

Adults looking for a friendly group to socialize with and playing a variety of card-type games and Rummikub, etc. are welcome to join the group from 1:00 to 3:00 p.m. Mondays and Thursdays in the AMMA card room. Bring your favorite beverage and snack and join in for some socializing.

### Ave Maria Water Park

The Water Park offers Aqua Aerobics classes Tuesdays to Saturdays at 9:00 a.m. in the Fitness Pool.

They also offer American Red Cross Swim Lesson Programs for residents of all ages. Follow the Ave Maria Water Park Facebook Group or check your resident eblasts for information on classes during this season.

## OTHER RESIDENTS-ONLY EVENTS

### Ave Maria Veterans Association High School Senior Scholarship

The Ave Maria Veterans Association is accepting scholarship applications beginning Wednesday, Jan. 1, 2025, for seniors enrolled in JROTC at Immokalee and Palmetto Ridge High School. Any senior who is a child or grandchild of an honorable discharged veteran, who both reside in Ave Maria, can apply. Scholarships will be awarded in May. Seniors should contact their school counselors and/or the JROTC Leadership. Scholarship applications are due no later than Tuesday, April 1. For detailed instructions and to apply, go to [avemariavets.org/scholarshipapplication](http://avemariavets.org/scholarshipapplication).

## SPORTS AND FITNESS (RESIDENTS ONLY)

### INDOOR AT THE AMMA COMMUNITY ROOM

#### Quest Martial Arts Academy Classes

Instructor Kenny Quintero is 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 239-371-6037 or visit [questmartialartssacademy.com](http://questmartialartssacademy.com).

#### Krav Maga Self Defense Class

Krav Maga Self-Defense Lessons with Instructor Tomasz are held on Wednesday evenings at 7:30 p.m. in the Master Association Community Room. Please call 415-910-2548 for more information and to register for this class.

#### Zumba Classes

Tuesday evenings at 5:00 p.m., join instructor Vanesa for this upbeat and fun type of cardio exercise. For more information, cost and schedule updates, please contact [vanezumba@gmail.com](mailto:vanezumba@gmail.com).

#### Tai Chi Fitness

Experience a meditative workout that increases strength, mobility and much more in these classes. Classes are now on Tuesday evenings at 6:00 p.m. in the community room. For more information, and to register for classes, contact instructor Mylyn Vedel at [myvedel@gmail.com](mailto:myvedel@gmail.com) or 239-220-4181.

#### Sound Bathing

Join resident Andrea for a soothing Sound Bath class with crystal bowls at the Ave Maria Master Association. Relax your body and calm your mind. To sign up and learn more about this unique and beneficial experience, please contact Andrea at 845-742-1525. Classes resume in January.

#### Yoga Fitness Specialized Classes

These specialized and smaller sized classes with Yoga instructor Alexandra Salazar are geared towards senior adults and adults will resume in January. To find out more about how these classes may benefit you, or to register, please email [salex2009@gmail.com](mailto:salex2009@gmail.com). Due to the type of class, walk-ins are not allowed.

### OUTDOOR AT THE AVE MARIA MASTER ASSOCIATION PARKS

The following are the current fitness classes and sports activities approved by the Master Association in our amenities as of the date this is written.

#### Zumba Classes

Join instructor Genesis North for an energetic and enjoyable cardio exercise on Saturday mornings at 9:30 a.m. at the South Park Amphitheater. For more information,



including cost and updates, please contact Genesis North via her website at [genesizumba.as.me](http://genesizumba.as.me).

#### Group Fitness Classes

Bodyweight training sessions are perfect for all fitness levels. Expect a full-body workout that will challenge your muscles, burn calories and improve your overall fitness. These classes are on Monday, Wednesday and Friday from 8:00 a.m. to 9:00 a.m. in the South Park at the Amphitheater.

For more information, cost and updates, please contact certified trainer Victor at 305-606-6045 and [victortorres@gmail.com](mailto:victortorres@gmail.com).

## SPORTS LEAGUES & ORGANIZATIONS

### Ave Maria Little League

Homebased and very first official league in Ave Maria, winners will be gearing up for the Fall season. League play includes baseball, tee ball and softball for kids 4 to 14. For the current season program and more information, visit [avemarialittleleague.com](http://avemarialittleleague.com) or contact [avemariabaseball@gmail.com](mailto:avemariabaseball@gmail.com).

### Soccer Academy

Olfos Sports Academy is offering a Soccer Training Program for the 2024-2025 season, held on Tuesdays and Thursdays from 2:00 to 8:00 p.m. at North Park Fields for boys and girls ages 3-17. This excellent program features certified coaches dedicated to helping young soccer players enhance their skills; for more information, call 305-244-2426, email [olfosportsacademy@gmail.com](mailto:olfosportsacademy@gmail.com) or visit [olfosportsacademy.com](http://olfosportsacademy.com).

### Youth Basketball Training

One Basketball is offering Youth Basketball Training for Ave Maria Residents in grades 3-12, led by former college players Coaches Ryan Atkins and Justin Wingard. Training for grades 3-7 occurs Fridays 5:00 to 6:00 p.m. and Saturdays from 9:00 to 10:00 a.m., while grades 8-12 meet Fridays from 6:00 to 7:00 p.m. and Saturdays from 10:00 to 11:00 a.m. For more details, visit [avemariamasterassociation.com](http://avemariamasterassociation.com).

### Under Armor Rise Flag Football



Come enjoy playing flag football under the lights with this new sports league addition for grades K through eighth. Games will start on Friday, Jan. 10 through the end of February. For questions, email [naplesnortheast@uariseflag.com](mailto:naplesnortheast@uariseflag.com) and register at [leagues.teamlinkt.com](http://leagues.teamlinkt.com).

### Ave Maria Mud Run Team

Join the Ave Maria Mud Run Team and help support the community—\$5 will be donated to a local charity for every resident who registers. Let's send a large team to Naples on Saturday, Jan. 18. Register at [yourfirstmudrun.com](http://yourfirstmudrun.com) and select the Ave Maria Mud Run Team. 🌟


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# BIG KINDS OF SMALL TOWN FUN

## Christmas Boutique Crawl

The magical Christmas Boutique Crawl was a resounding success. The Ave Maria Town Center was filled with holiday cheer and excitement for the entire family. Attendees explored a variety of local businesses that offered exclusive shopping and dining deals, perfect for holiday gift-giving. Everyone enjoyed fun activities suitable for all ages and experienced live entertainment that kept the holiday spirit alive throughout the event. Many families also took the opportunity to capture memories with photos alongside Santa and Mrs. Claus. 🌟



SANDRA YEYATI / AVE MARIA SUN

Santa and Mrs. Claus bring their holiday cheer to The Secret Ingredient, joined here by owner Daneé Williams and a shopper.



The little one is in good hands.



The Ave Maria University Campus Store is decked out for Christmas.



Alexander Pappas, volunteer coordinator for The Salvation Army.



Finding the perfect comic book is serious business at Way Out Toys & Games.



Nick and Patricia Stocton at the MELTZ ice cream shop.

JOHN R. WOOD

PROPERTIES

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# Thomas Peek, the person behind Ave Maria’s growth

BY ANDREA STETSON  
Ave Maria Sun Correspondent

Thomas Peek thought he might get a certificate or some applause as he retired as chairman of the Board of Supervisors for the Ave Maria Stewardship Community District. Instead, he was surprised by having a street named after him.

“Certainly, I was surprised,” Peek said. “I didn’t know what to expect. I thought they might give me a certificate and that would have been fine. To have a street renamed for me, that was a big surprise. And I still don’t know quite how to react to that. It was very nice.”

Peek has been chairman of the board since it was formed 20 years ago. He was selected for that position because of his expertise in creating a community. He is a retired partner of Wilson Miller Barton and Peek, a Naples-based professional engineering, surveying and planning firm. His proficiency is in civil engineering and land surveying. The Air Force veteran and Tennessee native, has lived in Collier County for more than 40 years, and once served as Assistant Collier County Engineer. It was this expertise that helped guide the new town from a farm field into a booming community.

“In my primary business, I was a stockholder and principal in a firm that did a lot of land developing,” Peek explained. “I was familiar with the project that Ave Maria was becoming. I retired from that primary business when they were forming Ave Maria. The person that was trying to recruit people to be on the board knew me, so that is how my name came up, and they asked me if I was willing to be part of the board of supervisors. I knew something about the big picture of Ave Maria even though it had not started construction. I just thought it would be an interesting and enjoyable opportunity to see a new community grow up from just a farm field. It has turned out to be much more than anticipated.”

For the two decades of guiding the community, officials wanted something special for Peek.

“Tom has had a long and storied career here in Southwest Florida,” said Blake Gable, CEO of Barron Collier Companies. “He is a man of tremendous integrity. He is just a wonderful person. He has dedicated a lot of time as the town has grown from very few people to 15,000 people, and he has been there every step of the way and he has always conducted himself with integrity, and I can’t think of anyone else who deserves it more than Tom.”

Blake said this is the first time in 25 years that he has seen a street named after someone who served the community.

“We used to name towns after people,” Blake said. “We thought this was a wonderful way to honor a man who has given so much to that community.”

David Genson, the developer’s representative to the board in Ave Maria, announced the road naming during Peek’s last meeting in November.

“We want to acknowledge all you have done for the district,” Genson began. “You have been very solid for this community. In recognition for your retirement we got together and thought, ‘What is a good way to recognize the things Mr. Peek has done over the course of the years,’ so we are asking the board to rename Massa Way

“We used to name towns after people. We thought this was a wonderful way to honor a man who has given so much to that community.”

— Blake Gable, CEO of Barron Collier Companies



Thomas Peek, longtime chairman of the Ave Maria Board of Supervisors, is honored with a road sign renaming Massa Way to Peek Way as he retires after 20 years of service.



Massa Way will be renamed Peek Way, one of the main roads off the roundabout in Ave Maria.

to Peek Way. Thank you very much for your service. It is very much appreciated.”

Genson said there will be a celebration in January to unveil the new road sign.

Todd Wodraska, president of special district services, came to the meeting just to see Peek being honored.

“When I have meetings, I made sure I would conduct them the Peek way,” Wodraska said. “He is professional, always making sure everyone got a chance to speak their mind and the fortitude to move things along.”

“You are always understanding and you weigh in when you need to, and I always appreciate it,” said board member Robb Kluck. “And you are always smiling.”

The board presented Peek with a replica of the sign that will soon hang on the street. Peek held the new sign as he addressed the

board and others at the meeting.

“I appreciate this very much,” Peek said. “It has been a lot of interesting fun over the past 20 years since the first board meeting in October 2004.”

He recalled those first meetings held at the University of Florida extension agent building, since there was no meeting places in Ave Maria back then.

“It was a while before we could move onto the property,” he continued. “It has been a lot of fun. It really has. I was familiar with the property before Ave Maria was approved. There was some agriculture. It was just a big old farm field. It has really been fun to be a part of watching this whole community grow from a plan to a reality and to just be amazed at what is happening, and I look forward to standing on the sidelines and watching it for the next 20 years.”

Five years ago, Peek, now 85, got two

holes in one during the same golf game at Royal Palm Golf Club off the east trail. That was a big surprise and something very special for him. Now he is excited about this latest surprise and special honor of having a street bear his name. He looks forward to bringing his family and friends to see Peek Way and view the entire community that he has guided for so long.

“We like bringing visitors here to show people what a community should look like when it is done the right way, and Ave Maria is done the right way,” Peek concluded. “I look forward to watching the growth over the next 20 years. It is the best place in Collier County.” 🌻







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

*Merry Christmas and  
Happy New Year*

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