

Record Fleet for Annual Blessing

By Scott H. Shook

While the Blessing of the Fleet may never become the signature event in Everglades City—that distinction belongs to the Everglades Seafood Festival—it probably best epitomizes the fishing village that calls itself the stone crab capital of the world. Sure, the Everglades Seafood Festival is bigger—one of the largest festivals in the state—but the smaller Blessing of the Fleet perhaps best reflects the small town charm of Everglades City.

A half hour prior to starting time on Saturday, September 27, locals, many of them in fishing boats, start to converge on Camelia Street Grill, the site of the Blessing of the Fleet. An Everglades City resident is talking on her cellphone in her front yard, sharing some good news with a friend. “Our chicken just started sitting on her eggs,” she reported proudly.

The scene at Camelia Street Grill is Americana, Everglades City style, at its best. Where else in Southwest Florida do you see young mothers milling around with babes in arms? Curious visitors from around Southwest Florida mingle with locals to watch the stone crab fleet navigate their way down the Barron River and tie up along the seawall in front of the restaurant.

Everglades City’s two big events, the seafood festival and the Blessing of the Fleet, are both organized by the energetic trio of Carrie Doxsee, Holly Dudley, and Kelly Kirk. They are also founding members of the Florida Stone Crabbers Association (FLSCA), the organization that runs both events. Kirk was unable to attend Saturday.

“Even though Kelly’s not here today,”



Strictly Business arrives at the Blessing of the Fleet.

Photos by Scott H. Shook

Carrie Doxsee said, “she is missed tremendously. She is a very important part of all of this and everything that we do. So, she may not be here physically, but she’s definitely here in spirit.”

This is the third year the event has been staged at Camelia Street Grill. From all appearances, it was the best turnout so far.

“It’s a pretty good turnout today,” Dudley said. “I think we had about 15 or 16 boats in the fleet. That’s a record. Our first year was close to that, probably off by one or two. We have the whole fleet from Everglades City and Chokoloskee here, and two from Goodland. And we’re probably going to feed about 300 or 400 people today. We’ve got 500 pounds of fried mullet

See BLESSING on pg.4

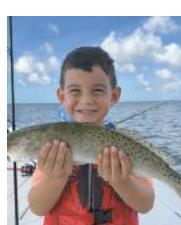
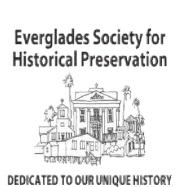
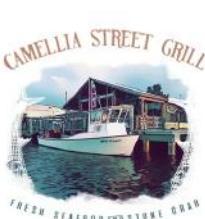


Holly Dudley and Carrie Doxsee were running the show at the Blessing of the Fleet in Everglades City.



There’s something for everyone at the Blessing of the Fleet. Rixey Johanna has blue lips from eating her slushie.

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Calendar

			Wednesday, October 1st	Thursday, October 2nd	Friday, October 3rd	Saturday, October 4th
Sunday, October 5th	Monday, October 6th	Tuesday, October 7th	Wednesday, October 1st Opening of Snook Season Food Pantry 9:30-12 Noon	Thursday, October 2nd Ladies Coffee – 8:00 AM City Seafood EC Girls Volleyball at Mason Classical Academy 4:00 PM		
Sunday, October 12th	Monday, October 13th	Tuesday, October 14th	Wednesday, October 8th Pepper Ranch Preserve Sunflower Viewing Dates through October 12 Food Pantry 9:30-12 Noon	Thursday, October 9th Ladies Coffee – 8:00 AM Island Cafe	Friday, October 10th	Saturday, October 11th Bike Ride through Historic Everglades City and Chokoloskee 9:00 AM McLeod Park Annual Chili Cookoff 11:00 AM McLeod Park
Sunday, October 19th	Monday, October 20th	Tuesday, October 21st	Wednesday, October 15th Stone Crab Season opens Food Pantry 9:30-12 Noon	Thursday, October 16th Ladies Coffee – 8:00 AM City Seafood Third Thursday Lecture Series: "Pathways to Partnership: Listening, Learning, and Working Together." Museum of the Everglades 2:00-3:00 PM	Friday, October 17th	Saturday, October 18th
Sunday, October 26th	Monday, October 27th	Tuesday, October 28th	Wednesday, October 22nd Food Pantry 9:30-12 Noon	Thursday, October 23rd Ladies Coffee – 8:00 AM Island Cafe	Friday, October 24th	Saturday, October 25th Nate Edwards Fishing Tournament Everglades City Fall Festival McLeod Park, 5-8 pm (Trunk or Treat, hay rides, games, inflatables, snow cones, free food)
			Wednesday, October 29th Food Pantry 9:30-12 Noon	Thursday, October 30th Ladies Coffee – 8:00 AM City Seafood	Friday, October 31st 	

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National Park Service Homes on South Copeland Demolished

Submitted

Three stilt homes owned by the Everglades National Park were demolished this summer. According to the park service, options are being explored about the property, but they "will continue to mow and maintain the vegetation."



Submitted Photo

History of the Bank of Everglades Building

by Patty Huff

This month, we are celebrating the life of Arita Parker, who passed away on September 5. Everyone knew Arita and her sister Babs. In 2006, the Everglades Society for Historic Preservation invited both of them to speak at our first "Nostalgia Night," reminiscing about growing up in Everglades City.

More recently, after the Bank Building was donated to ESHP, Arita shared her memories with ESHP of working at the Bank of Everglades when she graduated from Everglades City High School in 1952. Arita moved away after she married her husband, Kenneth Parker, and returned in 1992, a year and a half after his death.

Arita began her bookkeeping career at the Bank of the Everglades when the Vice-President, Mildred Cooke, hired her at the recommendation of one of the Collier brothers and bought her proper "business" clothes. She learned a lot from Mildred ("an excellent bookkeeper") and worked there as a teller bookkeeper, counting the cash and putting it in the safe, which was located inside the vault.

Some of Arita's comments were:

"The bank was a wonderful place to work."

"I didn't know Barron Collier, Sr., but Dad did. Dad said he was just an everyday fellow." (Mr. Collier hired Arita's father, Ivan Hoffman, as the city electrician; he turned the streetlights on every evening and off every morning in addition to working at the power plant that was owned and operated by the Collier Corporation.)

"I'll tell you one thing: Collier Corporation was one fine bunch of people to work for. They were so good to everybody, all their workers. They were good people...good people."



Helen Bryan, Arita Parker, Vicky Wells, and Sherry Geiger.

Submitted Photo

Arita also mentioned that the Bank manager would invite the employees once a month to dinner at the Rod & Gun Club.

The original stairs were located on the outside of the building for access to the second floor, which housed the corporate offices of Humble Oil, the District School Board, and the Collier Corporation. Arita recalled the time she asked the manager why the employees were not allowed to go upstairs. He told Arita that the bank employees only went upstairs to be fired!

Arita also assisted us with information about the layout of the first floor of the building, where the bank manager's office was located, as well as his assistant, and the interior colors of the building. ESHP plans to

bring back the original trim, floors, and windows, and include a place to honor those who owned and worked in the building over the years.

With a recent donation of \$5,000.00, ESHP has established an Arita Parker Fund to honor her with sponsorship of one of the 20 historic windows. If you would like to make a tax-deductible contribution to remember Arita, visit www.eshp.org and click the "donate" button, or mail to ESHP, P O Box 46, Everglades City, FL 34139.

Arita, we will miss you. You taught me a lot about this community, which inspired me to get involved with its history. Your smile, determination, and love of Everglades City will always be a part of us.

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"There are no other Everglades in the world. They are, they have always been, one of the unique regions of the earth; remote, never wholly known. Nothing anywhere else is like them."
~ Marjory Stoneman Douglas

Arita Hoffman Parker

August 13, 1934 – September 5, 2025

Arita Parker, 91, of Copeland, Florida, passed peacefully in the presence of family members on September 5, 2025, at Avow Hospice in Naples, Florida.

Born August 13, 1934, in her family home in Everglades City, Arita was a lifelong Floridian devoted to her family, church, and community. She was a proud graduate of Everglades City High School, Class of 1952 Valedictorian, and varsity member of the Everglades City High School Basketball Team. She began her professional career at the Everglades City Bank shortly after graduation. Over the decades, she advanced in banking, serving as Bookkeeping Department Manager at Lehigh Acres Community Bank, and later as a Southwest Florida Regional Manager in charge of bookkeeping operations for SunTrust Banks.

Arita was devoted to her beloved husband, Kenneth Parker of Jerome, Florida, who passed away in 1991,

and she did not remarry. She is survived by two sons - Ronald Parker of Copeland, Florida, and Bruce Parker of Richmond, Virginia - and six cherished grandchildren: Hiedi, Melissa, Dana, Paige, Jessica, and Miranda. She was preceded in death by her parents, Jesse Ivan Hoffman and Alberta Bryant Hoffman of Everglades City, Florida.

Deeply committed to service, Arita faithfully served as treasurer of Copeland Baptist Church, the Copeland Water Cooperative, and the Everglades Lions Club. She was invited to render historic presentations at the Everglades Museum on occasion throughout the years and captivated the audience with her accounts of Everglades City history. Her dedication to stewardship and her steadfast faith inspired all who knew her.

A memorial service to celebrate Arita's remarkable life will be announced at a later date. The family requests that memorial donations be directed in her honor to the Everglades Lions Club (P.O. Box 189, Everglades City, FL 34139), Copeland Baptist Church (P.O. Box 457, Copeland, FL 34137), or the Everglades Society for Historic Preservation (P.O. Box 46, Everglades City, FL 34139).



Arita's legacy of love, integrity, and community service will live on in the many lives she touched.

October 2, 2025 Mullet Rapper

See BLESSING from pg.1

and grits. We've got pulled pork, rice and beans, and adult beverages."

"We do want to say a big thank you to Naiara Rementeria of Camilla Street," Doxsee said. "Without the support of Naiara and her entire crew, we couldn't do this. It is amazing that she's been willing to participate."

Doxsee's husband, Daniel, is a third-generation stone crab fisherman. His boat is named Endangered Species. The name is symbolic of the plight of the stone crab industry.

"The future of our commercial fishing industry is unknown," Doxsee said. "It's not like you can go to school and study how to be a crabber. This is a generational thing that's passed down, and it's very expensive to get into. So, we may actually be an endangered species. The Florida Stone Crabbers Association is doing everything they can to try to protect and advocate for a commercial industry and bring public awareness and support. We have a working commercial waterfront, and even that is going away with the real estate expanding the way that it is. If these guys don't have a place to dock, where are they going to bring their products? Commercial working waterfront is a big concern for

us. I don't think the public is aware of the impact that real estate expansion has on these small industries. This is a big source of tourism. People come to Florida for stone crabs because this is really the only place you can get them in the entire United States."

Tyler Few is a fourth-generation crabber, working out of Goodland. He and girlfriend Claire Orgass and her son Elliot brought Few's boat, Crab Daddy, to the blessing.

"I come from crabbing, from a family tradition," Few said. "They're all out of it now, but I'm trying to bring it back. I'm 36. I'm just trying to keep it alive. Last of the dying breed. I've been doing it since I was probably about eight. My family originated from Capri Fisheries on Isles of Capri. It's a hard job. It takes a lot of dedication. You've got blood, sweat, and tears. If you ain't bleeding for it, it ain't worth it. You've gotta want to do it. If you don't want to do it, it ain't for you."

Orgass works side by side with Few.

"It takes a certain finesse to watch him on the back of the boat," she said. "And the way that he's worked on getting this boat ready for himself and for the family this year is remarkable. It's not for the faint of heart."



Stone crab fishing is a family affair.

Photos by Scott H. Shook



Alessandra Alber, Chloe Doxsee, Sara Geddis, and Christina Le aboard Endangered Species.

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STORIES FROM THE HEART

Pastor Jesse Wilson

All is Well

When my wife and I got married, we were cautioned about having children. Due to my wife's failing kidneys, the doctors were cautious about her getting pregnant and advised against it. So, we did what any normal couple would do - we decided to have a baby! Apparently, the doctor was unaware that my wife and I were born into families that thrived on going against the grain. Her being a Skiles and coming from a large family where family reunions typically had over a hundred people show up, she wasn't too concerned about it. I, too, came from a large family with eight aunts and uncles and so many cousins I couldn't remember all of them.

So, when my wife decided she wanted a baby, well, no doctor was going to convince her otherwise! I went along with it because that's what husbands do, and I was a little scared of her. Well not her, mostly her dad. He was from Missouri and when we would wrestle, he would win at any cost. Whether that was pulling my hair or pulling my toes apart till I begged for mercy. He said he didn't know martial arts; he knew Missouri. I wasn't sure I understood what that was, but after a few go-rounds, I gave up any aspiration of beating him.

My wife not only wanted a baby; she told God what she wanted the baby to look like. Blond and blue eyes. I was quick to point out to my lovely bride that in my family, all the kids were born with black hair and brown eyes. It was backed with science - my brother, my sister on my dad's side, my dad, my grandpa, and his dad. I think if I had been able to trace my family lineage any further, she would have seen that all the way back to Adam and Eve, black hair and brown eyes were in our DNA.



Zaylie, cute as a button!

My wife didn't care about science; she had faith and told me and everyone else that we were having a baby girl, and she would be blond and blue-eyed. Nine months later, Jessica Morgan came into the world, all of six pounds, with blond hair and blue eyes. When I get to heaven, I'm going to have one word for God: "Really?"

I think I got the last laugh, though. Everyone said she looked just like her daddy, even if she had blond hair and blue eyes. Fast forward 23 years, and I found myself walking my perfect baby girl down a grassy aisle and reluctantly giving her to her husband to be. What was a happy and sad day all rolled into one was soon turned into beautiful memories as time went on. Then over a year and a half later, my daughter gave birth to our first grandson, Kai. He couldn't have been more perfect; after all, he had black hair and brown eyes! I was a proud pop pop (my special name for being a grandpa), and my wife was affectionately called mimi.

Do you know what the best thing about being a grandparent is? When you're tired, you just send the grandkids home to mom and dad! Despite having some health challenges due to a very rare genetic disorder, Kai is the sweetest boy

you'll ever meet.

He loves swimming, loves golf cart rides, especially when pop pop goes fast, and like any boy, he loves to be tickled and to wrestle with pop pop. Sometimes, unlike my father-in-law, I let him win. Sometimes.

Our joy was increased even more when on Christmas morning, 2022, Zaylie came into the world. She wasn't supposed to be born on Christmas, but figuring God still owed me one from the whole blond, blue-eyed thing, I prayed Zaylie would be born early and on Christmas. Oh, and she has black hair and brown eyes! In your face, mimi! She loves playing with her kitchen set and making pizza for us, though it's not healthy to eat wooden blocks, and she loves golf cart rides, and throwing stones in the water down at Smallwood's Store on Chokoloskee. Yes, grandbabies are the best.

I have to admit it, life is good, and when the world gets crazy, I just look at those grandbabies and smile



Kai is always smiling.

Photos by Jesse Wilson



Mimi and our miracle daughter Jessica, blonde and blue-eyed.

because for a few moments, all is well.

Jesse currently pastors Chokoloskee Family Church on Chokoloskee Island along with his wife, Charity. Their growing congregation keeps them busy with local outreaches and community events. They have two grandkids who live in the area who also attend their church, along with their daughter and son-in-law.

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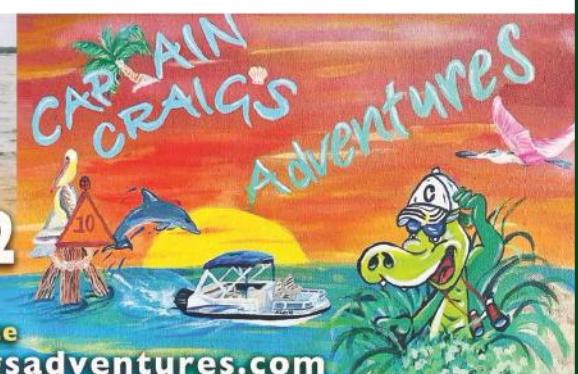
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Angels of the Swamp

by Patty Huff

Many hurricanes have left our streets in disrepair with potholes throughout the city, some deep enough to cause damage to our cars or to a walker or cyclist. FEMA will be providing funds to eventually bring permanent relief BUT in the meantime, our city staff has come to the rescue.

On Saturday, August 30, Everglades City was alive with activity as our city staff, yes, our city staff, was out with their shovels and rakes, walking



Submitted Photos

behind the trucks and equipment laying the asphalt. They went well beyond their job descriptions to get the work done! How many other cities or towns

in this state would have this dedication and commitment?

All of us have been frustrated with how much time it takes to make repairs

after our hurricanes, but we are grateful to our city "Angels:" Dottie Joiner, Karen Cochran, and Terry Smallwood. Thank you!



FISHING THE EVERGLADES

Capt. Mike Merritt

October Reds! And Snook, of Course!

October is always a great month to catch lots of Redfish here in the 10,000 Islands. We should be able to catch them all throughout the Islands this month. Also, some of these fish will move up into the rivers and hopefully stay up there till winter! But right now, the Islands are going to be the best fishing. A low incoming tide will get you the most consistent action. You should be able to catch these fish all the way up until the tide floods and they get up into the roots to feed. Once that happens, they will be a little harder to find until the tide drops again and they come back out. They can be found in a variety of places and you can catch them on a variety of baits. Scented soft plastics on a jig are probably the most effective method when it comes to artificials. Live shrimp is, of course, always effective on the Reds. They love eating crustaceans. How you present



Submitted Photo

your bait or jigs depends on the depth and the bottom. Reds are typically a bottom foraging fish, so keep this in mind. Their sense of smell and sound make up for their eyes when in murky water. They will utilize these senses to find your baits even when visibility is zero. If you work that jig slow along the bottom, they can hear it, and when they go looking, they can pick up the scent quickly. Reds are fun and this time of year, you might find some pretty large schools.

Of course, we catch a lot of nice Snook every October, and many times

they are feeding along with the Redfish. Incoming tide early in the morning is a good bet. Some of the biggest Snook I have caught in the last 10 years have been in October. Working a top water over an oyster bar as the tide is flowing over it is probably one of the best Snook bites you will ever get. I love the top water feed, and this month it will still be good. Of course, live bait should be very abundant in the Islands this month also. That is one reason the bite is so good. Snook, Reds, and Tarpon will all feast on Mullet, Pilchards, and Greenies as they move in with the tide.

This is definitely one of my favorite months. Over the years, the fishing has definitely declined, but we still have some great years, and I am hoping this will be one of them! I always look forward to October as I know many of my clients do also. I have a lot of great memories of a 20-lb. plus fish being caught during October here in the Islands. Especially at night, which is something that I rarely do anymore. We spent many fun nights catching big Snook in these Islands. I am so busy fishing during the day there is no way I can do an all-nighter and fish the next day! Those days are gone but not forgotten. We truly have a wonderful paradise here and we are blessed to be able to enjoy it. So, I hope your October bite is as good as mine! Good luck fishing!

Captain Mike Merritt was born in Coral Gables, Florida, lived in Australia as a child, and then moved back to Everglades City, Florida, where he graduated from Everglades City High School. He caught his first snook at the age of eight and has been catching them ever since. He is a third-generation fisherman and has been guiding in the Everglades National Park for over 30 years. While the glades are his primary fishing grounds, he also owns The Amazon Prime Ecolodge and has been fishing in Brazil's Amazon for the last 12 years.



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October is Greenways and Trails Month

Submitted

In recognition of the Greenways and Trails month, Everglades City, designated the 9th Florida State Trail Town in 2019, will host a guided bike ride through historic Everglades City and Chokoloskee on Saturday, October 11, at 9:00 AM. The tour will begin



Submitted Photo

and end at McLeod Park where the Women's Ministries will be hosting a Chili Cook-off at 11:00 AM. For more information and to sign up for the bike tour, contact Patty Huff at snookcity@gmail.com.

Pathways to Partnership Listening, Learning, and Working Together

Submitted

On October 16th, this companion lecture to Sharing the Path, Museum Manager Thomas Lockyear will explore the ways in which partnerships with our region's indigenous people have shaped our understanding of and relationship with what has been described as "one of the harshest

environments on earth" — both historically and in present day.

Mr. Lockyear will also discuss the evolution of the exhibit as well as the Museum's 2023 collaboration with the Miccosukee Tribe on the We Are Still Here exhibit that shared their history from their own perspective. The talk will also include stories of successful historic partnerships and other lessons from the past as well as our blueprint to build better strategies for the future based on traditional indigenous knowledge.

Pathways to Partnership: Listening, Learning, and Working Together. October 16th at the Museum of the Everglades, 2:00 PM – 3:00 PM.



Photo Courtesy of American Museum of Natural History

Image of Frank Brown and Charlie Tommie crossing the Everglades.

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Hook'em in the Glades 2025

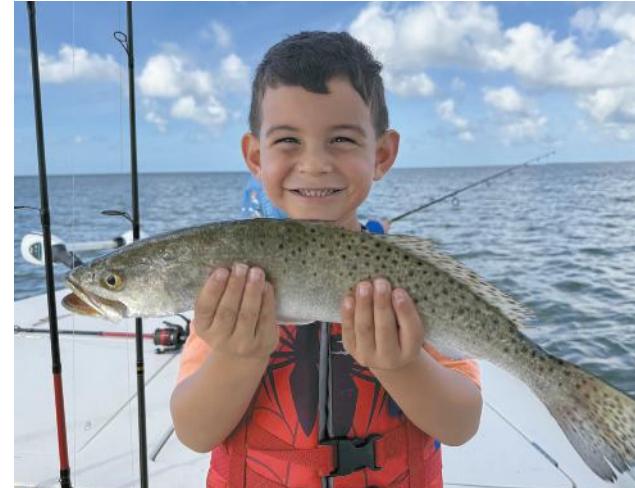
By Rylee Mayberry



The eighth annual Hook'em in the Glades fishing tournament is back this year, promising two days of community fun, friendly competition, and plenty of catches! The event kicks off Friday, November 7th, with the mandatory captain's meeting at Camellia Street Grill. Check-in begins at 5:30 PM, followed by dinner at 6:00 PM. Afterward, tournament officials will go over rules, distribute equipment, and answer questions to prepare anglers for the big day on the water.

The fishing action begins on Saturday, November 8th, as participants hit the water bright and early to compete for the top spot. Winners will receive the tournament's signature prize, a nano-crafted metal-edge cedar-based trophy.

For many, though, it's about more than just winning. Jill Whitcomb, founder of Hook'em in the Glades, puts it best: "My favorite part of the tournament is seeing the kids' fish



and the smiles on their faces."

This tournament truly does hold a special place in my heart. Last year, I was honored to become the first angler ever to earn the Grand Slam trophy by winning all three categories, snook, trout, and redfish. It was a moment I will never forget.

With good food, friendly competition, and plenty of memories to be made, this year's tournament will be another highlight of life here in Everglades City.

If you would like to sign up for this year's Hook'em in the Glades fishing tournament, you can contact Jill Whitcomb at hookemintheglades@gmail.com.

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E-City Set On Improving

By Scott H. Shook

Building a competitive volleyball program is not an easy undertaking, especially in an area like Everglades City, where neighboring schools and facilities are a hefty car ride away. But venerable Everglades City volleyball coach Becky Welch, who has coached at the school for 46 years, likes what she saw when the Gators hosted Marco Island Academy, one of the top teams in Southwest Florida.

While her improving Gators didn't take a set from the Rays, losing 25-8, 25-13, 25-19, Welch sees her team on an upward trajectory. And while she realizes her team hasn't caught up with MIA and some of the other top programs in the area, she feels her Gators are heading in the right direction.

"Our goal was to keep improving each game," Welch said of Thursday's game. "The first game we ended here," she said, holding her hand low. "Second game, we scored more points. And then third game, we finally went ahead. So that's climbing the ladder. It was exciting."

One area where Everglades City always holds its own - and often dominates - is in school spirit. The tight-knit community supports their kids. And they're vocal. When the Gators held a lead in the third set, the gym was rocking.

"Tonight it didn't matter if we were behind," Welch said. "They kept the spirit going. And that was huge because usually when a team starts losing, you start to lose the crowd. But the crowd stayed in it the entire time."

The Gators held leads of 8-6, 11-7, 13-8, and 16-13 in the third set before the Rays closed the door. The home crowd was roaring like it was a conference championship game, which the two schools have participated in over the years, notably in boys and girls basketball.

Welch said the community is behind the volleyball program.

"They are committed to playing volleyball," Welch said, "like the rest of the world. It's always a hard thing because of distance. Financial means.

Commitment from parents. We're in a remote area, or rural area. I know Marco Island's out on an island, and Immokalee's out there, but they all have programs available around them. We have nothing around us. So the parents finally got on board, realized there's some talent here, and they started investing. All my kids, all nine of them, are now committed to a travel team. They're all on different teams. They're going to strength training. They're living like the rest of the kids. And that really makes them feel good that they can compete now, because they're getting the same training and same coaching and playing with other kids. We call it getting over the bridge, and they're being exposed to things they've never



Everglades City fans are always supportive of their teams.

Photos by Scott H. Shook



Sophomore Rylee Mayberry is focused.



Freshman Xzaviera Davis sets the ball for a teammate.



Freshman Madeline Collins faces off against Marco Island Academy freshman Kolbie Bernhardt.



Freshman Amaia Mayberry Rementeria attacks the ball.



Junior Jalen Mayberry-Escubi serves.



Becky Welch has been coaching at Everglades City for 46 years. She likes what she sees in her young volleyball team.



Freshman Amaia Mayberry Rementeria makes a nice dig.



The Everglades City community supports their team.



Freshman Aria Mitchell is part of an improved Everglades City lineup.



Jalen Mayberry-Escubi confers with teammates.



Madeline Collins goes for a kill shot.

seen, coaching, different players. And I think that's helped them tremendously. And they're handling it wonderfully."

Welch credits her assistants for much of the team's improvement.

"I've got this great assistant right here," Welch said, motioning to Amie Richards, who played for local power Seacrest, which has won multiple state championships. Richards also played college volleyball at Lynn University

in Boca Raton. Welch also praises athletic director Jason Mayberry.

"Jason is one of my former students and players from when I was coaching the boys," Welch said. "He's our athletic director now, and we've been coaching together quite a few years."

Welch sees a bright future for her young team who are off to a 6-2 start.

"We have five ninth graders, two sophomores, and two juniors - and one

junior will graduate as a senior," Welch said. "We have no seniors, so they're going to be together for a while. And now they're finally understanding what it takes to get to a higher level of playing. And they're doing it. They're executing it. And I think it's wonderful for them because they're going seven days a week. Even in the summer they were finding the right camps, the right everything. The parents are so invested, and that's awesome."

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Saving Our Airpark

By Harry Henkel

To all those directly or indirectly involved with the preservation of the Everglades Airpark, we, as members of the newly formed Friends of the Everglades Airpark, Inc. (a not-for-profit 501 (c) (3) organization), organization, wish to thank everyone for their support in this effort. In late February, Kevin Dohm wrote an article in the Coastal Breeze bringing attention to Collier County's consideration of closing the Everglades Airpark. On March 4, a resident of Everglades City presented a letter for the City Council Members to sign that basically asked the County to preserve the Airpark. The Mayor of the town added his letter stating, "He wished they had consulted the Town before making such a decision." These letters were hand-delivered to the Collier County Commissioners on March 11, 2025. The Airport Authority presented its views on the reasons for closing the Airport, mostly based upon its inability to turn a profit. In rebuttal, several pilots, concerned citizens, and Stacey Heaton, the Southwest Florida rep. for AOPA (Aircraft Owners and Pilots Association), spoke giving reasons for why the Airport wasn't profitable and the safety aspects of keeping the Airpark operational. After debate among the Commissioners, Burt Saunders, Chairman, suggested a study should be conducted as to how to make the Airport profitable. Commissioner McDaniel asked that his staff be given permission to study how the Airpark could be closed. Out of respect to Stacey Heaton, the Commissioners asked that an Ad-Hoc Committee be

formed to explore all aspects of how to keep the Airpark open and operational.

It was apparent that two immediate problems had to be addressed: the fueling depot and the neglect of hangar repairs since Hurricane Ian. Mr. Saunders asked that the fuel depot be corrected as soon as possible. Almost three months went by before the fuel depot was operational. The hangars are still in need of repair. The Vir-Tower was repaired the second week of May. For the three remaining weeks of May, the Tower reported 500 airplane activities. The same report came in for the month of June, and over 500 airplane activities were reported for July. Over 1,500 gallons of fuel have been sold not only to airplanes but to airboats as well. As a result of some hefty donations, a group of concerned citizens created a not-for-profit Organization entitled "Friends of the Everglades Airpark." Our mission is to advocate and encourage like-minded citizens, pilots, etc., for the continued success of our local airport. We would be remiss not to thank Commissioner Saunders for his comment to "Explore avenues to keep the Airport open." Equally important has been and will remain all the hard work that Stacey Heaton of AOPA has given us towards keeping the Airpark on a steady path towards success. This is a case of many being heard by those we elected to serve us. Just today, I heard a slogan, "Remarkable things can happen when people care."

Many thanks to all who encouraged our elected officials to do the right thing in preserving this important piece of Everglades City History.

Sincerely,

The Board Members of "Friends of the Everglades Airpark, Inc."

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Your ultimate source for community events, local insights, area news and so much more.

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The 2025 American Indigenous Arts Celebration

Hosted by Seminole Tribe of Florida Ah-Tah-Thi-Ki Museum

The Seminole Tribe of Florida's Ah-Tah-Thi-Ki Museum proudly announces the return of the American Indigenous Arts Celebration (AIAC) on **Friday, November 7, and Saturday, November 8, 2025**, on the museum's festival grounds in Big Cypress from 10:00 AM to 5:00 PM on both days. This vibrant two-day festival is free to attend with free parking and promises a dynamic showcase of Native arts, culture, and heritage.

The celebration begins with a Grand Entry Powwow led by Seminole Medicine Man Bobby Henry, Tribal dignitaries, Native drummers, dancers, and hoop dance performers. Visitors will be immersed in cultural traditions while enjoying a schedule packed with entertainment for the whole family including Pharaoh's Wildlife Kingdom critter show, alligator wrestling with Billy Walker, Powwow dancers & Native drummers, and hoop dance competition.

Fashion lovers will experience two



Submitted Photo

unforgettable runway moments. On Friday, guests will enjoy a showcase by students of the Ahfachkee School and on Saturday a featured fashion show by Seminole designer Lenora Roberts.

Additional highlights include a live painting demonstration by Seminole artist Elgin Jumper, hoop dance workshop with world-renowned Tony Duncan, Mexican Cultural Academy Dance exhibits presented by Ameyal Productions, photo opportunity with Native American actor Dallas Goldtooth, plus meet and greet the new Miss Florida Seminole and Junior Miss Seminole 2025.

Throughout the event, visitors can shop from authentic Native craft vendors and artists, enjoy traditional food vendors, and take advantage of free admission to the Ah-Tah-Thi-Ki Museum, home to an extraordinary collection of Seminole history and culture.

"The American Indigenous Arts Celebration is one of the best opportunities to experience Native culture, living traditions, and artistry in one place," said Museum Director, Gordon Wareham. "It is both a celebration and an invitation to learn, connect, and honor Indigenous heritage."

For more information, please visit <https://www.ahtahtiki.com/AIAC/> or call 863-902-1113.

An Insider's Look at Ted Smallwood

By Scott H. Shook

When you visit the Museum of the Everglades, you are invariably greeted by an amiable bearded gentleman named Matthew Anderson. Anderson isn't quiet, but he's not extroverted. He's helpful and he's interested in introducing you to the history of Everglades City and its surroundings. And as attendees found out during his Third Thursday lecture on September 18, "Ted Smallwood: The Man Behind the Store," Anderson's also a member of the well-known Smallwood family.

Even the most casual visitor to the Everglades City area knows about the fabled Smallwood Store in neighboring Chokoloskee, an Everglades institution opened by Ted Smallwood in 1906 as a trading post, post office, and general store. Today, the Smallwood Store operates as a museum, filled with genuine artifacts that have been part of the store's history for decades.

Several members of the Smallwood family were in attendance on Thursday to listen to one of their own deliver his very first speech. And you could tell the entire audience was rooting for Anderson to do Ted Smallwood's memory proud.

"It was my first lecture ever," Anderson said ingeniously, "so I was nervous. I didn't really know exactly how it was going to go. But I think it went okay."

It helped that when he glanced into the crowd, he saw Ted Smallwood's ancestors seated near the back of the room.

"It was nice to have family here," Anderson said, "because I can speak to them on a personal note and be comfortable. That helped. At the end, they let me know I did really well. I thought it went a little quick because when I looked at the clock, it was only 2:30."

While Anderson's prepared material didn't fill the one-hour time slot, his question-and-answer session did. It



Photos by Scott H. Shook

Presenter Matthew Anderson with Smallwood family members Deanna Anderson, Dottie Smallwood, Terry Smallwood, and Barbara Smallwood.



Matthew Anderson gives a presentation on Ted Smallwood.

was obvious that he researched his subject thoroughly as he was able to answer every question.

At one point during his presentation, Anderson appeared to get choked up. It was while he was discussing Ted Smallwood's legacy. As he looked into the audience his eyes locked on his father-in-law, Ted's great-grandson, Terry Smallwood.

"It got emotional right there," Anderson said. "At the time, I was talking about the family. I was thinking

about family and who might take after Ted the most. And that is Terry Smallwood, my father-in-law. He really takes care of his family. He's there for his grandkids, his kids. At the drop of a hat, he's there to help you build something or do something. He's a good, calm, steady force in the family."

For Anderson, Ted Smallwood's legacy is more than the famous store that bears his name; it's the family that is carrying on his legacy.

"You really want to learn who Ted was," Anderson said. "Not just what he did, where he went. We talk about his relationship with other store owners and how, 53 years later, he made a point to go to the other coast to see a friend of his. And how he took care of Mr. Watson's family. That doesn't give you an insight to his personality. When I met my wife and came into the Smallwood family, they had been here for six generations. It's remarkable to see how close my wife and her sisters are, and how they fought through a lot of trials in their lives, and how they support each other. They didn't have to stand on their own two feet all the time. They had each other. And generationally, that's how their family's been. They've grown up being influenced by all their family members. The kids are so close. That's where it's at, right? That's how the Smallwood family is to me. They are a tight-knit, *we can do anything together* family. That's Ted Smallwood's legacy."

Anderson said there is still one family member who remembers Ted Smallwood.

"Uncle Curt was ten years old when Ted passed away," Anderson said. "He remembers having dinners with them at the Smallwood Store when he was a child. He would have been born in 1941. A lot of the photos I used in the presentation are from his collection."

The Smallwood Store has an anniversary coming up in 2026.

"Next year will be 100 years of the Smallwood Store on stilts," Anderson said. "Ted worked out of his store from 1906 until 1917, when he built the store that currently is there now on the waterfront. That store stayed on the ground until the hurricane of 1924 scared Ted. There was four feet of water in the store. He finished raising it by the hurricane of 1926. He also dredged so boats could get right up to the store."



Photo Courtesy of Curt Smallwood Collection

Ted Smallwood.



Photo Courtesy of Collier County Museum

Ted Smallwood in front of his famous store.

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Sat & Sun 8 am - 4 pm
(239) 695-4700

Diving Pelican

Sun-Thur 11 am - 8 pm
Fri-Sat 11 am - 8:30 pm
(239) 232-0475

Gator Hole Bar

Wed-Thur 11 am - 7pm
Fri-Sat 11 am - 12 am
Sun 11 am - 7 pm
(239) 232-0475

Island Cafe

Daily 6 am - 9 pm
(239) 695-0003

Nely's Corner (Inside EFC)

Fri-Sun 6:15 am - 3 pm
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Rod & Gun

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Paradise Found

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Stans Idle Hour

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Worship

Chokoloskee Family Church

Sun: 10 am School & Worship, 6 pm Service
Wed: Youth 7 pm
1236 Demere Ln, Chokoloskee

Everglades

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Sun: 11 am Worship
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First Baptist Church

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Wed: 6 pm Bible Study
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Holy Family Catholic Church

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101 S. Copeland Ave, Everglades City
evergladeslionsclub@gmail.com

Ladies Coffee

Thursdays | 8:30 am
Rotates Everglades City Restaurants
snookcity@gmail.com
(239) 719-0020

Goodland Civic Association

3rd Tuesday of the month | 6:30 pm
Goodland Community Center
417 Mango Ave, Goodland
(239) 776-1372

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