



Smallwood Store Celebrates Stilts Centennial

By Scott H. Shook

It was billed as a weekend of celebrating 100 years of the Smallwood Store on stilts. It was that and so much more on Friday and Saturday, January 23-24, in Chokoloskee, just outside of Everglades City. The celebration included a community showing of the new documentary, Outlaws of the Everglades, authentic Native American food, a live en plein air painting of the iconic landmark by renowned local artist Paul Arsenault, top-notch live country music, and more kindness than anyone could ever expect.

A lot of the kindness came compliments of the three Native American tribes who were a central component of the event: members of the Miccosukee, Seminole, and Independent Tribes.

Lynn McMillin, granddaughter of the historic store's namesake, Ted Smallwood, was emphatic in her insistence that her Native American friends were front and center at the event.

"I think the significance of the celebration is that they had a close relationship with my grandfather," McMillin said. "I grew up with them and went to school with them."

One of the highlights of the centennial celebration was the delicious food—especially the Indian hamburger, a ground beef creation wrapped in Indian fry bread, then deep fried. There were also a number of booths being operated by the various Tribes. It was impossible to be less than impressed by the genuine kindness shown by everyone involved in the weekend celebration.

A special bonus was the community showing of the new documentary about the famous marijuana smuggling operation that put Everglades City and Chokoloskee under a national spotlight in the 1980s. The Centennial Celebration marks only the second showing of the documentary, which appears



Melody Osceola prepares an Indian burger. It's a culinary art form.



Young art fans Collette and Vivian Koller of Sarasota with famous local artist Paul Arsenault, who created the painting on the easel during the Centennial Celebration.

destined for bigger and better things.

"We had our world premiere at the Key West Film Festival on November 16," said Rob Hoovis, director of the film. "We had 200 people in the hall. It was packed, and it was a great response. So, this is actually the second showing. We have some other film festivals down the road, some small, hopefully some big."

Surprisingly, it is Hoovis' feature length filmmaking debut.

"The funny thing is, I have never made a film before," Hoovis said. "Not like this. I've made short films and things like that. But I'd never done



Photos by Scott H. Shook

It was a beautiful day on the water for tourists attending the Centennial Celebration.



Cypress Billie, son of the famous James Billie, was part of the weekend entertainment.

anything like this. And I don't like anything that I do. I'm hard on myself as far as being a critic. I do like how it turned out, and so that's rare for me. And we've had a very good response."

Thomas Lockyear, manager of Museum of the Everglades and a former film student, was effusive in his praise of the documentary.

"I thought it was phenomenal," Lockyear gushed. "We get people walking into the museum all the time asking about the story. I've been the manager of the museum for nine years now. So, I speak 100 percent as an outsider. I've learned as much as I can about it because it's a huge



Lois Billie hands a customer a famous Indian burger, which is deep-fried inside Indian Fry Bread.

part of the history. But to get a bunch of these surviving people who were instrumental in the whole operation here, telling their version of the story and telling it completely, and in many ways, humbly. To hear Darrell Daniels talking about how he doesn't feel proud of what he did, but he's proud of the fact that he did a great job at doing it. It's what everybody needs

Smallwood continued on pg. 12

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February 2026

Sunday, February 1 AA meeting-4:00 PM Everglades Community Church	Monday, February 2	Tuesday, February 3	Wednesday, February 4 Food Pantry 9:30-12 Noon	Thursday, February 5 Ladies Coffee-8:30 AM City Seafood	Friday, February 6 First Friday Social Everglades Society for Historic Preservation Rod & Gun Club	Saturday, February 7
Sunday, February 8 Big Cypress Gallery Spring Meet & Greet 10:00 AM-3:00 PM AA meeting-4:00 PM Everglades Community Church	Monday, February 9	Tuesday, February 10	Wednesday, February 11 Food Pantry 9:30-12 Noon	Thursday, February 12 Ladies Coffee-8:30 AM Dulce's Cafe	Friday, February 13 Seafood Festival 4:00-10:00 PM	Saturday, February 14 Seafood Festival 10:00 AM-10:00 PM
Sunday, February 15 Seafood Festival 11:00 AM-6:00 PM AA meeting-4:00 PM Everglades Community Church	Monday, February 16 No School – President's Day	Tuesday, February 17 EC Girls Softball at East Lee County 6:30 PM	Wednesday, February 18 Food Pantry 9:30-12 Noon EC Girls Softball vs. Golden Gate 7:00 PM	Thursday, February 19 Ladies Coffee 8:30 AM HavAnnA Cafe EC Boys Baseball Baseball vs. Naples Classical 4:00 PM Third Thursday 2:00 PM Museum of the Everglades Defending the Sacred	Friday, February 20 EC Boys Baseball at Mason Classical Academy 5:00 PM	Saturday, February 21 Art in the Glades McLeod Park 10:00 AM-2:00 PM
Sunday, February 22 AA meeting-4:00 PM Everglades Community Church	Monday, February 23	Tuesday, February 24 Museum of the Everglades Exhibit Growing Obsession EC Girls Softball vs. South Fort Myers 6:30 PM	Wednesday, February 25 Food Pantry 9:30-12 Noon	Thursday, February 26 Ladies Coffee 8:30 AM Island Cafe	Friday, February 27	Saturday, February 28 Celebrate Big Cypress 8:30 AM-3:30 PM Big Cypress National Preserve EC Girls Softball vs. Coral Shores 11:00 AM

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The Maroons of Lostman’s Key and Capt. Jocelyn

By Craig R. Woodward

If you read my column last month on The Origin of Local Place Names then you know how Lostman’s Key and River were named. That information piqued my interest in researching this story and finding out more of the details.

It turns out that the villain in the story was a notorious character in Southwest Florida around the late 1800s. Captain Jocelyn (also sometimes spelled Joselyn) was described in 1875 as having “fame in Florida rivaling that of the most bloodthirsty pirate of the China Seas.” While he claimed to be an Englishman from Plymouth, the locals believed he was really an American from the northeast. Jocelyn had come to Florida during the Civil War as a union “blockade runner” and learned the coast well. After the war, he stayed in Florida sailing a green-hulled sloop named the “Flirt” (unusual at the time as most of the vessels were rigged as schooners) and soon became “the terror of the whole coast as a pirate and murderer.” His notorious reputation included stories that at least four strangers and more than one Spanish fisherman had disappeared visiting him on an island on which he resided in Pine Island Sound (east of Captiva). All of those who disappeared, in his own account, had accidentally “been knocked overboard by the boom of the Flirt’s mainsail and drowned.” Another description was that “he boarded unprotected and stranded or wrecked vessels on the Florida reef, robbed the passengers of money and jewelry, taken what he wanted of the cargoes and then decamped to some unknown rendezvous...” It was also said that: “Because of his vile reputation, Jocelyn could only get seamen of very low character or strangers to sail with him.”

Fredrick Townshend, while on a trip in Florida, met Captain Jocelyn in Punta Rassa (now the mainland side of the Sanibel causeway) and described him as: “...a more cut-throat-looking desperado I never beheld. Apparently between forty-five and fifty-five years of age, of medium height, very strongly built, with long black hair and beard, and flashing black eyes shaded by heavy eyebrows, he was quite the beau-ideal of a pirate, and his dress and arms fully kept up the character. He wore a blue flannel shirt and a ragged pair of pants tucked into long sea-boots, a red leather belt round his waist containing a revolver and long knife, and carried a rusty old rifle which he never let out of his hands.”

In 1862, John Weeks, who was then living at the entrance to the Barron River with his three daughters, relayed a story to William S. Allen, a former mayor of Key West, who later settled in the area now known as Everglades City and built his home



Photo provided by Google map

Lostman’s Key

where the Rod and Gun Club currently stands. John Weeks’ encounter with Captain Jocelyn was described in his own words as: “Thar’s one man though that’s treated me mean, an’ that I’d shore like t’ meet. He kem yere a year or so ago an’ took all th’ stuff I hed, bananas, sugar cane an’ punkins, saying he’d be right back from Key West with a lot o’ grub for me, an’ I aint laid eyes on th’ damn scoundrel sence; ... His name is Joselyn – Captain Joselyn...”

Allen told Weeks that he had seen Jocelyn in Key West and that he had a bad name. Furthermore, he knew that Jocelyn was under bond to appear in a U.S. court charged with smuggling, was once a pirate, was very rich, and had a hiding place among the Ten Thousand Islands where he hid the loot he stole from wrecked vessels.

So, some time after Weeks relayed this story to William S. Allen, Captain Jocelyn met up with five soldiers in Key West who agreed to pay him \$200 if he would take them in his sloop to Punta Rassa. They were dressed in civilian clothes, but Jocelyn understood them to be Army or Navy deserters. He hid them in his sloop while leaving Key West during the night and the following night anchored off Lostman’s Key, a remote area located approximately halfway between Cape Sable and Everglades City. Here it was reported that he ordered the “helpless credulous dupes to disembark, telling them they were on the mainland and that they would find a settlement with a saw mill where they could get work a short distance back into the woods.” They were happy to leave “such a harsh and vile scoundrel” as Captain Jocelyn was and without a supply of food or water, and carrying only the clothing they wore, they landed on Lostman’s Key.

An unknown number of days later, Scotty, the helmsman of Allen’s schooner “Jennie,” along with George W. Allen (William S. Allen’s son) sailing north from Key West, spotted a man on the beach waving a signal flag. Near shore they found five men, some “almost dead from hunger, thirst and exposure.” They had to be helped on board and, when on the deck, they were described as “wild

of eyes, half crazed by anxiety, and emaciated by hunger and privation, they presented a woeful aspect.”

The youngest of the maroons and the most talkative, “Spud,” relayed the above story of what happened at the hands of Captain Jocelyn. To feed the men, the vessel stopped at Pelican Key, where they collected several hundred clams, while George Allen shot two raccoons and two curlew (young white ibis). On their way to the Allen place in Everglades they stopped at Chokoloskee Island. George and Spud made their way into the center of the island, where they found among the shell mounds an abandoned hut. Nearby, they reported that under a gumbo limbo tree was a “cairn of alligator skulls, and turtle shells, all surmounted by several deer antlers. The place, in weird abandonment, bespoke only want, suffering, disaster or tragedy at some time in the dim past.”

At the Allen Place the maroons, to show their appreciation for being saved, worked hard and helped clear the land around the present day Rod and Gun Club. When they were healthy enough, they were taken north, except for Spud, who stayed and worked for the Allens as well as working for a month with John Weeks before being taken to Punta Rassa. Because of this incident, William S. Allen named the Key “Lostman’s” and the adjacent river also got the same name. Meanwhile, Scotty, the pilot of Allen’s schooner “Jennie,” said that he thought the name should really have been “Found Man’s Key.”

Editor’s Note: The Mullet Rapper is pleased to have Craig Woodward as a new columnist writing on local history. His parents camped on Marco’s beach in 1952 when they were in their 20s. During a December 1967 family vacation, while camping at Collier Seminole State Park, his parents decided to move permanently to Florida when one of them got a job here. Craig’s mother, Glenellen, got a job teaching high school in Everglades City, and the family moved in the summer of 1968. She taught here from 1968-70, when she transferred to Naples High.

Craig has long been interested in local Florida history. For 20 years he led “history day,” a tour of historical sites on the Island sponsored by the Marco Chamber of Commerce Leadership Marco; he was very involved in the design and construction of the Marco Historical Museum; he participated in archaeological digs, and he has researched and written a number of articles about local history.

Craig and his wife Bonnie have had a residence in Everglades City for 21 years.



Everglades City, Chokoloskee Island, Part of the Islands, Ten Thousand Islands
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Publisher: Val Simon
239/777-5942
val@coastalbreezenews.com

Editor: Lynn Alexander
lynn@coastalbreezenews.com

Publisher’s Emeritus:
Patricia A. Huff,
Snook Publications

Advertising Sales
Jeff Dostal
616/284-0638
jeff@coastalbreezenews.com

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Craig Woodward
Patty Huff
Captain Mike Merritt
Pastor Jesse Wilson
Scott Shook
Elaine Middelstaedt
Don Manley

For subscription info please call
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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



Placing a bible in the foundation where the pulpit will be!



Pouring the foundation.

Photos Courtesy of Pastor Jesse Wilson



STORIES FROM THE HEART

Pastor Jesse Wilson

A Dream Realized

It started in the fall of 2019, a short seven months after becoming the pastor of Chokoloskee Church of God. Wanting to send a message to the communities of the Ten Thousand Islands, it was decided that we would modify the name of the church to Chokoloskee Family Church of God. The members at that time loved the

name change as it reflected who we were, a family church where everyone would be welcome and those who came were treated like family. And as I would always say to our church family during Sunday services, family sticks together. We also began to talk about building a larger facility that would accommodate our growth and serve as a shelter for our island during future hurricanes. That meant we would need to build high enough to not be flooded and to have a Generac system that would power the air conditioners during extended outages. The only problem with our dream was that we had no money to build. But I reminded our congregation that God was bigger than our dreams and if it were His will, it was His bill. Shortly after we began praying for God to make a way, I was introduced to a person who took an interest in what we wanted to do.



Members writing scriptures on the walls.

This individual offered to pay for our project and thus began a multiyear journey which included a year lost to covid in 2020. After a three-year rollercoaster ride with Collier County, multiple meetings for permits and zoning, we were able to finally break ground in the fall of 2023. What was supposed to take up to 12 months to build took over two years. But like a woman who forgets the pain of childbirth when the baby is born, we have finally arrived at the big day! On Sunday, February 8, at 10:00 AM, we will have our first service in our new church! The old church will be renamed The Thomas J. Wells Family Life Center in honor of Pastor Wells, who built the building in the late 1950s. It will become a multi-use building, for use as a Children’s Church on Sunday mornings, a

youth center on Wednesday nights, and when we have dinners, it will serve as a fellowship hall. The old building seated 100 until we added 21 more chairs in 2023. The new church building will seat 160 with room to add an additional 20-40 chairs. We are excited to have a church that will continue to serve the communities of the Ten Thousand Islands. Having been an integral part of the Ten Thousand Islands for over 110 years, we look forward to being here for another 100 years, doing what we do best, sharing the love of God, working with those who have addictions, and making disciples. We look forward to what God has in store next for our church, Chokoloskee Family Church, and for the communities that make up the Ten Thousand Islands! See you Sunday, February 8, at 10:00 AM, Chokoloskee Family Church, where faith and family come together.

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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Calling All Artists for the Grapefruit Gathering

Submitted

The Museum of the Everglades is seeking artists for the first annual Grapefruit Gathering Art Fair and Fruit Tree Sale. The event will take place on Saturday, March 21, from 9:00 AM to 3:00 PM at the Museum of the Everglades.

There is no fee for the vendors selected for inclusion in the event. To apply for a space, send three to five photos, a description of your work, and a brief statement explaining why you would like to participate in the event to Museum Manager Thomas.Lockyear@collier.gov. He can also be reached at 239-252-5027 for more information.

Space is limited – there will be 10 to 15 stalls for 10’x10’ tents in the parking lot beside the Museum.

All submissions must meet the following criteria:

- All art must be original and created by the artist. No mass-produced or commercial products.
- All artist mediums are open including, but not limited to drawings, paintings, prints, sculptures, textiles, ceramics, photography, etc.
- The artist who created the work displayed must be present at the art fair.
- The art displayed should be



connected to, or in some way reflect our unique regional culture.

- Any art that celebrates or explores an aspect of Florida agriculture is definitely a plus for potential inclusion in this inaugural event.

About the Event

In recent years, the Museum of the Everglades commemorated the birthday of county founder Barron Gift Collier with the “Grapefruit

Gala.” Collier purchased a grapefruit grove at Deep Lake in 1921 that facilitated a shift in the local economy from agriculture toward tourism. That’s why the saying goes “It all started with a grapefruit!”

This year, the event will include a celebration of Mr. Collier, his accomplishments, and the community’s agricultural roots. There will be live music and fresh Florida citrus.

History of the Bank of Everglades Building

By Patty Huff

Question: What do the International Swimming Hall of Fame (ISHOF) in Ft. Lauderdale and the Bank of Everglades Building have in common?

Answer: William Forrest Dawson, known as “Buck” Dawson, was a historian, fundraiser, author, promoter, and “prankster,” according to the

ISHOF, who chose him to be its first executive director in 1963, the year before he became the owner of the Bank of Everglades building in Everglades City, 100 miles to the west.

The Bank of Everglades continued to conduct business as the first bank of Collier County until 1962, when its operations moved to Immokalee. The building was converted into a boarding house until “Buck” Dawson

purchased it in 1974 with plans to make it a tourist attraction – the “Presidential Fishing Hall of Fame.” He was unable to achieve his goals and ended up selling the building in 1979 to Rusty Rupsis (see September 2025 issue of the Mullet Rapper).

Buck was not a swimmer but became interested in the sport after 1955 when he married Rose Mary Mann (daughter of Matt Mann, head coach of the U.S. Men’s Swimming Team at the 1952 Summer Olympics). Buck co-directed swim camps with his father-in-law in Canada each year and was chair of the Michigan’s women’s swim AAU for eight years. While serving as executive director of the ISHOF, he was responsible for its growth from a “shoebox collection” to a million-dollar operation, introducing swim-a-thons to the U.S. He is quoted as a powerhouse of the American Swimming Coaches Association as well as the National Swim and Recreation Association. Buck received many other accolades, always “spreading the word and willing to talk and teach swimming to anyone.” Who knows what the Bank Building would have been like if Buck was able to fulfill his dream of creating a “fishing” hall of fame here?

Buck Dawson died of heart failure and complications due to Parkinson’s disease on April 4, 2008, in Ft Lauderdale at age 87. To read more about Buck, visit <https://www.swimmingworldmagazine.com/news/passages-buck-dawson-mr-swimming-hall-of-fame-dies-at-87/>

When the Bank Building rehabilitation is completed, ESHP will celebrate each of the previous owners with photos and history of those who had their own dreams of preserving this historic site. Join us by being a part of this important project.

Visit us online at <https://evergladessocietyforhistoricpreservation.org/our-projects/> or call Patty at 239-719-0020.

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FISHING THE EVERGLADES

Capt. Mike Merritt

February in the Everglades National Park

With February fast approaching and the weather changes that are expected, we will see a change in the fishing. Of course, this all depends on the weather cycle and one thing I have learned in the last 40 years is you can't predict what is going to happen so you must generalize. February usually sees larger Tarpon showing up. This makes for some great times. It can be very challenging but has a great reward just to be able to hook up. As the month progresses, it will get even better – it's a great way to spend a day here. Tarpon can be a tough quarry most days, but sometimes you hit it just right and they are eating anything that passes in front of them. This is what keeps Tarpon fishermen going. Just the chance that you will have one of those days, or a fish of a lifetime! If you want to catch Tarpon, you must be committed. But then there are those days when opportunity

arises, and you get them when you least expect it. So be prepared when they are here and if they show up, you just might get that trophy fish.

For those that don't want to tangle with the Tarpon, we have some of the best Trout fishing of all year in February. Bigger fish have generally moved inshore this month and catching 20" Trout is possible most days. These fish will be on the flats and around the outside oyster bars. At least they will be on what is left of these. Grasses are not what they used to be. So, keep on moving and looking as the fish congregate in tighter areas due to this. You used to be able to drift these flats and catch Trout all the way across, but now you will find pockets of fish. If using live shrimp on a cork, you may also catch some nice Pompano! Not to mention all the others like Mackerel, Bluefish, Jacks, and Ladyfish. A great way to spend the day with kids or novice anglers.

In and around the Islands, you can catch Black Drum, Redfish, Seatrout, and even some Snook. Casting jigs around the edges of the Islands and bars is a great way to find these fish. They will all take slow-fished jigs. Just remember to work it as slowly as possible, which allows the Drum and Reds to find it. Scented tails or tipped with shrimp is the way to go. Like I said, there will be some Snook moving back into the Islands and they are suckers for a properly fished jig. A lot of people fish them too fast and

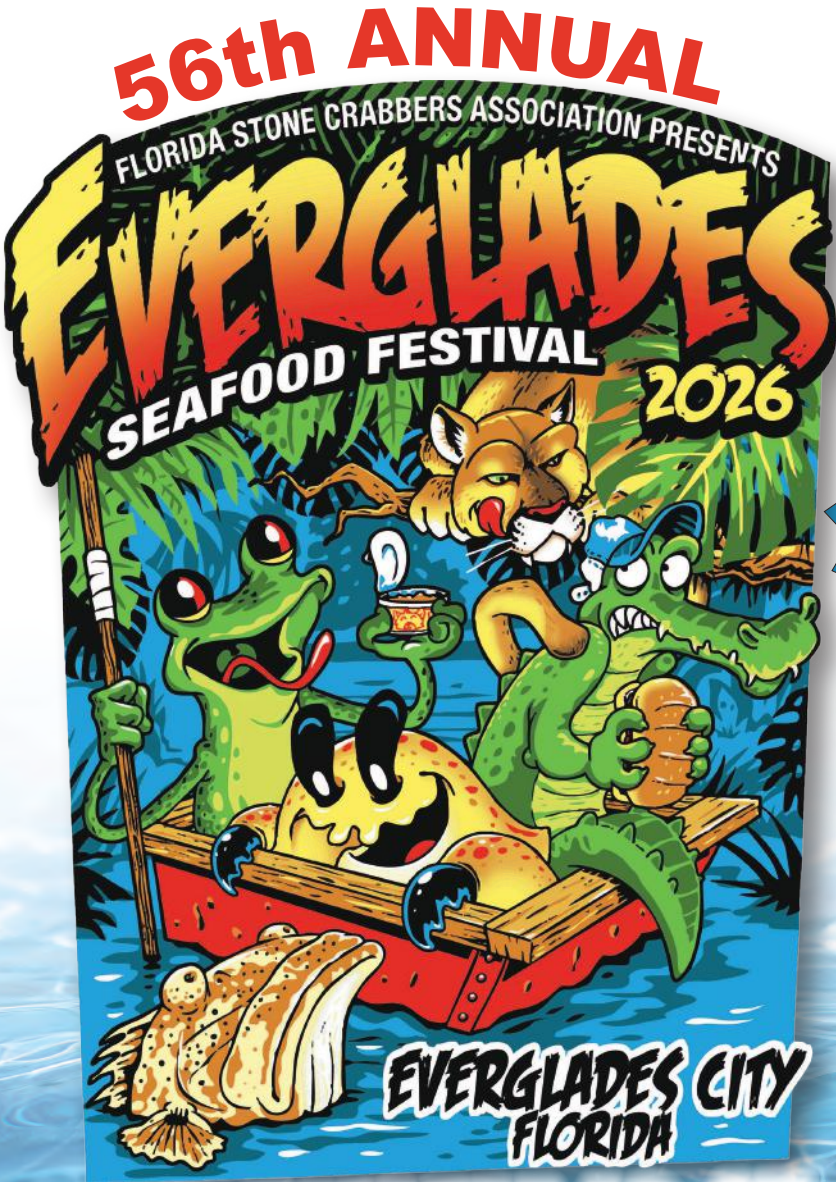


jig them way too hard, especially in shallow waters. Deeper water allows for more of a jiggling action, but in shallow water, it is best with a softer jiggling action. Color can also matter and I switch between glow and root beer with a chartreuse tail most days. I do carry a bigger variety but these color patterns are proven. Quarter-ounce or three-eighth-ounce jig heads will suffice. I use some custom-made red jigs from Roosbaitco. These have a strong, wide gap hook. A small gap hook can prevent you from hooking a big Snook, and a weak hook can cause you to lose it when it straightens out. So don't use just any cheap jigs, or you will only have yourself to blame when you finally hook that good fish and lose him.

We have the Seafood Festival coming up and I will once again be there in my booth promoting my Amazon Fishing Lodge. But I will also be showing the gear that I use

both at my Lodge and here in the Everglades. From Jigs, Tails, to Rods and Reels, you can see what I use to catch big Snook in the Everglades and big Peacock Bass in Brazil's Amazon. So, stop by and say hello. We will most likely be raffling off some great stuff, too! Good luck fishing - take a kid fishing and make some memories!

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.



FEBRUARY 13-15

Enjoy three days of live country music, carnival rides, arts, crafts, and tantalizing seafood, right here in the Stone Crab Capital of the World.

Friday, Feb.13

- Charlie Pace emcee
- 4:00-4:30 Opening Ceremony-National Anthem Maddy Benner
- 4:30-4:45 Everglades City School cheerleaders
- 5:00-6:00 Aydin Holt
- 6:15-7:15 Big Cypress Band
- 7:15 DRONE show
- 7:30-8:30 Fortunate Son (Creedence Clearwater Revival tribute)
- 9:00-10:30 Moonstone Riders

Gator Nate will emcee the drone light show on Friday

Saturday, Feb.14

- 10-10:45 Opening Ceremony
- 10:55 National Anthem Mary Jo O'Regan
- 11:00-12:00 Edison Schetter
- 12:30-1:30 Bandana Brothers
- 2:00-3:00 Jack Shealy Band
- 3:30-4:30 CJ Garton
- 5:00-6:00 Gator Nate
- 7:00-8:30 Tyler Farr (Headliner)
- 9:00-10:00 The American Stones (Rolling Stones tribute)

Sunday, February 15th

- Gator Nate Emcee
- 11:00 -11:45 Chokoloskee Praise Band
- 12:00-1:00 Jordan Guess
- 1:30-2:30 Wes Shipp
- 3:00-4:00 Charlie Pace Band
- 4:30- 6:00 Meatloaf (Meatloaf tribute band)

Admission to the festival on Friday evening is free with a canned food donation. Saturday and Sunday's adult admission will be a \$10 minimum cash donation. Beverage and carnival ride tickets will be available for purchase with cash (only), and ATMs will be available onsite.

Online at www.evergladesseafoodfestival.org



Outlaws of the Everglades

By Don Manley

“Square grouper” is slang for the large, compressed bales of marijuana resembling large fish that smugglers utilized when importing the contraband to the coastlines of South Florida and the state’s Gulf Coast.

The square grouper has become an integral part of the history and lore around Chokoloskee and Everglades City, harkening back to the heyday of the area as a center for pot smuggling during the 1970s and 80s.

Commercial fishing had long been the village’s economic backbone, but that began changing during the 1970s when the Federal government began restricting the trade as a preservation measure. Then, in 1985, a ban on commercial fishing in Everglades National Park crippled the industry for the generations of residents who’d made a living by harvesting those waters.

It was then that the neighboring villages underwent a dramatic shift to highly lucrative illicit trade, adding credence to the old saying “When one door closes, another one opens.”

Kent Daniels knows the story well, having lived it. He and about 29 members of his immediate and extended family were among the local residents who spent smuggling tons of pot to survive economically after the ban made their legal professions unfeasible.

“I’ve heard people say, well, they could have done other things,” said Daniels, 64, who’s now a private fishing guide and amateur historian. “Well, I don’t think so, because I didn’t have the schooling, and we lived on the island and were involved in the commercial fishing industry. Living off the land is what we knew. And when they come in and took that away from us, they didn’t offer us anything else. The marijuana, when it came in, the family got in it. We knew the water. We were born and raised on it. I have either walked it, swum it, held it, played in it, and commercial fished some



Kent Daniels.

way or another, all my life.”

The smuggling ring was one of the largest ever in the United States. Its size and scope eventually led to Federal agents and Collier County sheriff’s deputies sealing off Everglades City and Chokoloskee and making widespread arrests in July of 1983 as part of the two-year undercover “Operation Everglades. The raid resulted in the initial arrest of 23 to 28 people. Eventually, more than 300 people were indicted and more than half of the local fishing boats were seized.

Daniels family members spent about a decade involved in the trade, employing their intimate knowledge of the 10,000 islands to evade capture by the authorities and, as with their fellow smugglers, maintaining strict silence about their activities. Ultimately, the law did catch up with them, resulting in prison sentences in both state and Federal facilities.

According to Kent Daniels, who served about 11 years behind bars, they were never caught red-handed and were only convicted on charges of conspiracy.

“We were the first family since the James brothers (Frank and Jesse) that never went down for the crimes committed against the United States government,” he said. “That actually made us famous. And we’re the family that has the record for hauling the most into the country and for the largest job that ever came in at



At the Key West Film Festival.

Photos Special to Coastal Breeze News

one time. In one night, we hauled somewhere around 162,000 pounds.”

The smuggling exploits of Kent Daniels, his family, and other key players in the community are now the subject of a documentary. Entitled “Outlaws of the Everglades,” the documentary examines the area’s history and culture and the decisions that led to it gaining a national and international reputation as a marijuana smuggling hub.

Aside from interviews with Kent Daniels, the film also features segments by Southwest Florida historian Robert Macomber, well-known Florida author Carl Hiaasen, and legendary Miami Herald photojournalist Tim Chapman.

“Outlaws of the Everglades” represents the first time the Daniels family, Southwest Florida residents for 10 generations, and others involved in the trade have broken their public silence about what occurred during the days when the square grouper ruled.

The film will be shown on January 23 and January 24 in Chokoloskee as part of the 100th anniversary celebration of the historic Smallwood Store’s being placed on stilts after a

hurricane lifted the structure off its foundation. The event will feature live music, Native American food, and arts and crafts. There will also be family-friendly activities, boat tours, raffles, and special programming tied to the store’s century-long role in the Everglades.

The Everglades Society for Historic Preservation will be sharing information and celebrating the area’s rich history. Kent Daniels will be present to speak with attendees about his experiences and “Outlaws of the Everglades,” as will some of his family members and others involved in the trade, along with Carl Hiaasen.

Festivities begin at 11:00 AM and end at 7:00 PM. Admission is \$15 per person.

The Smallwood Store is located at 360 Mamie St. For more information, please visit <https://www.facebook.com/events/historic-smallwood-store/centennial-celebration-at-the-historic-smallwood-store-chokoloskee-fl-jan-23rd-2/2021332062047783/> or call 695-2989.

For more information about the “Outlaws of the Everglades” documentary, please visit <https://outlawsoftheeverglades.com/>.




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For a Fakahatchee adventure

Submitted

High and dry in a tram or in the evening under the stars, now’s the time to experience Fakahatchee Strand Preserve State Park. Over the years, thousands of visitors have explored Florida’s largest state park with the help of Friends of Fakahatchee volunteers.

The best introduction to the 85,000-acre park east of Naples is the Interpretive Tram Tour. A naturalist leads each two and a half hour tour, which includes a 15-minute walk down a path lined with air plants, ferns, and seasonally blooming orchids. The Friday morning tours begin at 10:00 AM. Tickets are \$35 person, plus fees.

The Fakahatchee Biologist Led Swamp Walk is the most in-depth tour of the park. The park biologist leads a small group of participants into the slough’s knee-deep water, where they are surrounded by air plants, ferns, and orchids. Visitors should come prepared to get wet to experience the beauty of the swamp. This unique four-hour adventure on Saturdays begins at 9:00 AM. Tickets are \$150 per person, plus fees.

The Night Sky Experience offers participants the chance to view and photograph the nighttime sky in one of the darkest places in southwest Florida. Your guide, an amateur photographer and astronomer, schedules each program when there is an interesting formation of planets and stars over the preserve. This will be an opportunity for photographers and visitors with binoculars to see the Milky Way. This event begins at 6:00 PM, Saturday, February 7, and concludes at 8:45 PM. Tickets are \$35 per person, plus fees.

For tour dates in the coming months and required reservations, visit www.orchidswamp.org and click on “tours and adventures.”



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Museum of the Everglades Seafood Festival Events

Submitted

There’s a whole lot going on during the Seafood Festival, February 13-15 and that includes events at the Museum of the Everglades! Betty Osceola of the Miccosukee Tribe will again demonstrate traditional indigenous cooking, making delicious Indian frybread in front of the museum. The Indigenous Alligator Wrestling Team, led by Betty’s cousin Joseph Osceola, will do a number of demonstrations on both Saturday and Sunday in the museum parking lot. The “Sharing the Path” exhibit exploring Indigenous Traditional Ecological Knowledge (ITEK) will remain on display through the Seafood Festival until February 21.



Joseph Osceola of the Indigenous Alligator Wrestling Team will be at the Museum of the Everglades during this year’s Seafood Festival.

the Third Thursday talk on February 19, where Betty will be speaking on “Defending the Sacred.” And coming to the Pauline Reeves Gallery, “Growing Passion – The Enchanting Story of Orchids in the Everglades.”



Photos Courtesy of Thomas Lockyear

Betty Osceola demonstrating traditional indigenous cooking and making Indian frybread.

Help Us Choose a New Logo

By Mullet Rapper Staff

You still have time to be part of the Mullet Rapper logo refresh... and maybe win some cash, too!

Cast your vote for the newly designed logo you like best. Clip the entry form from the paper and send it in to be entered into a drawing for \$150. The drawing will be held

mid-March; the cash winner will be announced in the April edition, along with the unveiling of the new logo.

And remember – if you have an article, photo, letter to the editor, or event you would like to see in the paper, send it in to us at lynn@mulletrapper.com.



Logo #1



Logo #2



Logo #3



Logo #4



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MULLET RAPPER LOGO CONTEST

Name: _____
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Clip this entry form and mail to
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Suite 216, 1857 San Marco Rd.
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Contest closes March 31, 2026. Contest winner will be announced April 15, 2026. One entry per person.

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that keeps our local history alive.

A History Walk Through Everglades City

Historian Patty Huff, president of Everglades Society for Historic Preservation, led a lively walking tour of Everglades City on a chamber of commerce morning with temperatures in the mid-70s on Tuesday, January 6. Huff’s tour harkened back to the glory days of the 1920s when the fishing village was the vibrant county seat of Collier County.

Huff’s walk included tours of historic homes and an insider view of the restoration work taking place on Bank of Everglades, the first bank in Collier County.

Huff’s tour also included a delicious seafood luncheon and cocktails at the historic Rod and Gun Club on the shores of the Barron River. The famous restaurant and hotel has hosted four U.S. presidents over the past century.

The goal of the tour was to raise money for the Bank of Everglades restoration that is well underway. When restored, the former bank will serve as the permanent location for the Everglades Area Visitor Center and Trail Town Headquarters.

The Bank of Everglades building was built in 1927 for Barron Gift Collier, who envisioned an iconic landmark building as the home for the Bank of Everglades. The Bank remained in the building until 1962, when the business relocated to Immokalee. The building was then used as a rooming house.

In 1979, the building was purchased by Reba “Rusty” Rupsis, who published the Everglades Echo newspaper in the building until 1990. After that, it was a bed-and-breakfast under several succeeding owners until it closed in 2017. The building has remained vacant since that time.



Photos by Scott H. Shook



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Smallwood continued from pg. 1

as far as the definitive story of what Operation Everglades was, what the drug smuggling business was. But the other thing for me, it shows that it was more complicated than it’s usually put forward. The director shows one after another the changes in the commercial fishing industry in 1951, the national park boundary in 1947, and then going up through the 1970s. It keeps changing. It’s like these guys are literally trying to make a living and put food on the table. The noose is tightening. But to throw it up there and say, okay, this is the actual legislation that occurred, it’s not just opinion. It literally happened. And to watch it in a video, it shows you what they’re talking about. I think that it’s going to resonate with a lot of people. I think that a lot of people are interested in the story. I know they are from working at the museum and hearing people that want to know about it. And it’ll be wonderful when it’s

available commercially so I can say, ‘Oh, you need to go watch this film.’”

Lockyear sees the film being picked up by the big boys.

“It should be something that’s showing on the History Channel or something like that,” he said. “Absolutely. It’s professional quality. You know, the production value is incredible. When I say a film is phenomenal, I’m talking about all aspects of it, from the technical standpoint to the production standpoint. Everything is so beautiful.”

Kent Daniels, the star of the documentary, was on hand to sign autographs and regale attendees with his seemingly bottomless wellspring of stories. He’s proud of the job his rookie director did.

“He was nervous about it,” Daniels said. “But I think he did a great job.”

Tucked away adjacent to the food tent sat perhaps Southwest Florida’s most famous artist, Paul Arsenault,

who was putting the finishing touches on an en plein air painting of the Smallwood Store. He even enlisted a few of the Native American children in attendance, in their colorful dresses, as models. Arsenault autographed copies of his new book, An Artful History of Naples and Collier County, for thrilled fans. Arsenault has spent over 50 years painting Southwest Florida’s disappearing landmarks since he settled here in 1974.

To top things off, the Jake Hair band, from Okeechobee, took the stage performing country music hits. Hair, who resembles George Strait, delivered the goods wearing his cowboy hat and playing his red Fender Telecaster.

All in all, it was a wonderful event at one of the most historic sites in Southwest Florida.

“It’s a local landmark,” Lockyear said, “and I always tell people they should visit here. There’s not a lot of old Florida like this left. I think that it’s incredibly important, not



Museum of the Everglades manager Thomas Lockyear with documentary star Kent Daniels.

just as a landmark, but as a place where local history and heritage are collected and shared. So, I love it. It’s certainly more than equal to Museum of the Everglades in its importance in preserving the local history.”

Looking back on this weekend’s festivities, one is left with one burning question: Perhaps this should become an annual event?

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Wed: Youth 7 pm
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Everglades
Community Church
Sun: 11 am Worship
101 Copeland Ave, Everglades City

First Baptist Church
Sun: 9:45 am School, 11am Worship and 6 pm Service
Wed: 6 pm Bible Study
416 E School Dr, Everglades City

Holy Family Catholic Church
200 Datura St E, Everglades City
Sunday Mass at 10:30

Goodland Baptist Church
Sun: 10 am Worship
Wed: 6 pm Bible Study
410 Mango Ave. Goodland

Copeland Baptist Church
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Clubs

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evergladeslionsclub@gmail.com

Ladies Coffee
Thursdays | 8:30 am
Rotates Everglades City Restaurants
snookcity@gmail.com
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Goodland Civic Association
3rd Tuesday of the month | 6:30 pm
Goodland Community Center
417 Mango Ave, Goodland
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EC Public Library: (239) 695-2511
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Everglades Area Welcome Center

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A photograph of the Everglades Area Welcome Center, a two-story building with a covered porch and a sign that says 'Welcome Center'.

Operated By:

The logo for the Everglades Society for Historic Preservation, featuring a stylized drawing of a building and the text 'EVERGLADES SOCIETY FOR HISTORIC PRESERVATION' and 'Dedicated to our Unique History'.

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