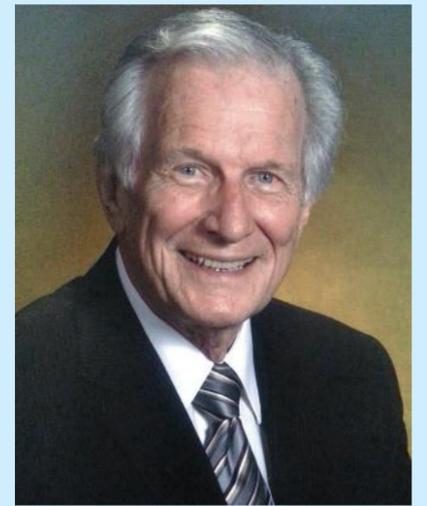


The Ever Fabulous Everglades Seafood Festival



Everglades teachers Becky Welch and Paul Tribble are surrounded by Everglades City cheerleaders, school staff, and community members.

Photos by Scott H. Shook



Remembering Pastor Bob Wallace

Dr. Bob Wallace, our beloved pastor of the Everglades Community Church for nearly 20 years, passed away on January 28 at the age of 93. Pastor Bob was such an integral part of Everglades City. He loved this community and devotedly spent many extra days and hours participating in our area events. For four years (2021-2025), he was a regular contributor to the Mullet Rapper, our local newspaper, writing articles about our historical sites, fishing, and his faith. During his weekly Sunday services, he would inspire our congregation with his powerful voice, speaking from his heart during sermons and leading the church's choir for many years. He brought wisdom, joy, experience, and warmth into the church as he led the Sunday services. And we will always remember his faith and compassion as he ended every service with *Let There Be Peace on Earth* while walking down the aisle hand-in-hand with his wife, Millie.

Pastor Bob was acknowledged in 2016 in the booklet for the 90th celebration of our Church with the words: "God blessed our church on March 19, 2006,

Pastor Bob continued on pg. 9

By Scott H. Shook

The Everglades Seafood Festival has been going on for 56 years now. But only in recent years has it been staged by the terrific trio of Carrie Doxsee, Holly Dudley, and Kelly Kirk, who are taking the event to all new levels. This year's festival was undoubtedly aided by the return of terrific weather with daytime highs hovering around 70 and evenings in the 60s. But it's the wholesome community feel, plenty of excellent food choices—seafood and otherwise—and a nice selection of carnival rides for all ages, that are sure to keep people coming back.

Doxsee was still looking fresh at 8:30 PM Friday, February 13, the first day of the three-day event. She was making the rounds on her KingQuad all-terrain vehicle.

"We are hosting for the fifth year in a row for the Florida Stone Crab



Becky Welch is emotional as she and fellow Everglades City School teacher Paul Tribble are honored for their distinguished service.

Association," Doxsee said. "It's organized chaos," she laughs. The three ladies are also directors for the Florida Stone Crab Association. And as most locals know, Everglades City is considered the Stone Crab Capitol of the World.

With Southwest Florida

experiencing one of its coldest winters in decades, Doxsee and her fellow directors were surely hoping for the kind of weather they ended up with.

"The weather was definitely an issue and a major concern for sure,"

Festival continued on pg. 3

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Everglades Isle



March 2026

Sunday, March 1	Monday, March 2	Tuesday, March 3	Wednesday, March 4	Thursday, March 5	Friday, March 6	Saturday, March 7
AA meeting 4:00 PM Everglades Community Church	EC Girls Softball 6:00 PM at Gateway Charter	Congressman Mario Diaz-Balart's Team 2:30 PM Everglades City Hall EC Boys Baseball 5:00 PM vs TVSN		Ladies Coffee 8:30 AM City Seafood EC Girls Softball 6:00 PM at Dunbar	Garage Sale 8:00 AM-5:00 PM Fisherman's Cove ESPH First Friday Social 5:00-7:00 PM Rod and Gun Club	Garage Sale 8:00 AM-12:00 Noon Fisherman's Cove Everglades Challenge Boat Race 8:30 AM
Sunday, March 8	Monday, March 9	Tuesday, March 10	Wednesday, March 11	Thursday, March 12	Friday, March 13	Saturday, March 14
AA meeting 4:00 PM Everglades Community Church		Everglades Book Club		Ladies Coffee 8:30 AM Dulce's Café Everglades Lions Club Dinner Meeting 6:00 PM Jinkins Fellowship Hall	ESHP Annual Meeting 11:30 AM Everglades Isle	
Sunday, March 15	Monday, March 16	Tuesday, March 17	Wednesday, March 18	Thursday, March 19	Friday, March 20	Saturday, March 21
AA meeting 4:00 PM Everglades Community Church	EC Girls Softball 7:00 PM at Lely	EC Boys Baseball 5:00 PM vs. Donahue Catho St. Patrick's Day Celebration and Corned Beef Dinner 4:00-7:00 PM Museum of the Everglades		Ladies Coffee 8:30 AM HavAnnA Cafe Third Thursday 2:00 PM Museum of the Everglades Flowers and Felonies in the Fakahatchee	EC Boys Baseball 5:00 PM vs. Mason Classical Academy EC Girls Softball 6:00 PM vs. Seacrest Country Day	The Grapefruit Gathering & Art Fair 9:00 AM-3:00 PM Museum of the Everglades Art in the Glades McLeod Park 10:00 AM-2:00 PM Everglades Lions Club Turkey Shoot 10:00 AM-5:00 PM Mayberry Cypress Tower Camp
Sunday, March 22	Monday, March 23	Tuesday, March 24	Wednesday, March 25	Thursday, March 26	Friday, March 27	Saturday, March 28
Everglades Community Church 12:00 Noon - 1:00th Celebration 1:30 PM - Memorial Service for Pastor Bob Wallace Everglades Lions Club Turkey Shoot 12:00 PM-5:00 PM Mayberry Cypress Tower Camp	EC Girls Softball 6:00 PM vs. CSN	EC Boys Baseball 5:00 PM vs. TVSN		Ladies Coffee 8:30 AM Island Café EC Girls Softball 6:30 PM at South Fort Myers	EC Girls Softball 6:00 PM at Coral Shores	Pancake Fly In 9:30-11:30 AM McLeod Park
Sunday, March 29	Monday, March 30	Tuesday, March 31	<p>To list your upcoming event, meeting, or activity free of charge in the calendar, send details to lynn@coastalbreezenews.com. Deadline for the April edition of the Mullet Rapper is March 16.</p>			
AA meeting 4:00 PM Everglades Community Church	EC Boys Baseball 5:00 PM vs. Mason Classical Academy EC Girls Softball 7:00 PM at Golden Gate					

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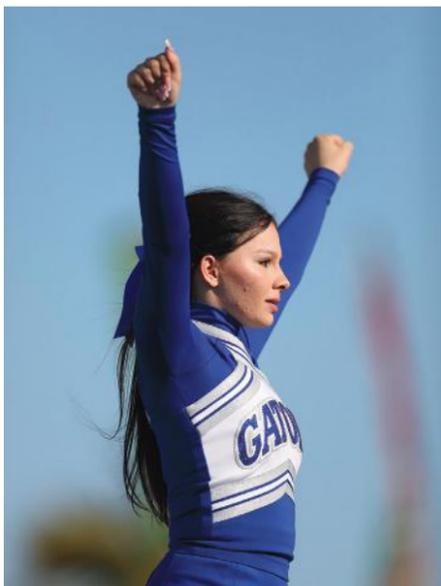
Sun. Worship	10:00 AM
Sun. Kids Church	10:00 AM
Sun. Renewal	6:00 PM
Wed. Youth Renewal	7:00 PM
Thurs. Bible Study	7:00 PM

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EC cheerleader Olivia Demere entertains the crowd.

Festival continued from pg. 1

she said. "This crowd is amazing. Our vendors have been amazing. We really have no complaints. We haven't had many hiccups."

The festival started Friday afternoon with great local flavor. Naples-based singer Maddy Benner delivered a strong rendition of the National Anthem. Everglades City cheerleaders, elementary school-aged to high schoolers, entertained the appreciative crowd. Then two local teachers with a combined 98 years of teaching in Everglades City were honored with awards of distinction.

Paul Tribble has taught at Everglades City School since graduating from the University of Florida in 1972.

"I asked the Lord to open only one door and leave all the others closed," Tribble said, "because if there were two doors open, I might get confused and make the wrong choice. When I graduated there was only one job opening in the state. Just one. And it was here."

Tribble, who has loved his career in Everglades City, almost retired in 2014.

"I'd had a stroke," he said. "I retired. I said, 'Lord, I'm done.' I said, 'I'm not going back to Everglades unless they call me.'"



Maddy Benner did a great job with the National Anthem on Friday afternoon.



Justin and Maci Grimm of Grimm's Stone Crab. Their business has operated in Everglades City since 1979. Justin can crack 100 pounds of stone crab claws in 40 minutes.



Photos by Scott H. Shook

School board member Tim Moshier and his dog Nacho, teacher and coach Becky Welch, Everglades City principal Cheryl Allison, and teacher Paul Tribble gather after Welch and Tribble were honored.

The phone rang and they said, 'Mr. Tribble, we need an art teacher and we want you to return if you're interested.' So, I'm back now, till the end of this year. No regrets. There's a whole lot of love, man."

After the presentation, Tribble was mobbed by former students, from five to 50-something. "Everywhere I look I see my students," he said.

Becky Welch, better known as Coach, has been on the job for 46 years. It sometimes seems like she coaches all of the sports at the school. She was visibly moved during the ceremony. One student in the crowd said. "Aw, Coach is crying." Her friend nodded her head and said, "Yeah." She was still emotional after leaving the stage where she and Tribble had been joined by the school's cheerleaders and various members of the school staff and community.

Everglades City School principal Cheryl Allison was happy to pinch-hit for the coach.

"I just wanted to say that we're blessed," Allison said. "I don't think there's any other school that has not just one, but two people who have not just given their careers but

committed their lives to a school and to its students. These people have taught generations: grandparents, parents, and grandchildren. And it's the one school that parents look up at the teachers and say, 'I had him and I had her also.' So, we're very blessed. And Coach Welch is not allowed to leave. I can only do one at a time. She won't say the R (retire) word yet. She's not going. Not yet."

The close-knit community of Everglades City is on full display during the seafood festival. It's easy to tell the locals from the tourists. The locals, for the most part, are the ones with babes in arms, teenagers walking hand in hand wearing blue jeans and ball caps, grandchildren pushing grandparents in wheelchairs. All are greeting each other with familiarity and friendliness. That sense of community is what makes Everglades City unique.

"We're a very small school," Allison said, "but with a very huge heart. There's culture and community and a bond here that you can't get anywhere else."

For more photos, see pg. 11



Jack Shealy entertained the crowd on Saturday.



MULLET RAPPER

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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



What a great celebration service in the new church!



STORIES FROM THE HEART

Pastor Jesse Wilson

It's Finally a Reality!

After five years, beginning with a dream for a larger church building that would be elevated enough above flood level, our new church finally opened to our congregation and the public on February 8.

Over 140 people, mostly members, joined us in celebration of this special moment. For the locals on Chokoloskee Island, it would mark the fourth church building on that piece of land over the last 116 years.

The third church, built in 1961, will continue as a multi-purpose building. As I think of all the previous pastors and members who have

attended the church during that time, I'm humbled that my wife and I got to play a small role in making this happen. The greatest blessing of all, though, is that the building, which cost over a million dollars to build, was paid for by a very generous couple who don't attend the church.

Had it not been for their generosity, the project would not have gotten off the ground. For those who have faith and believe in miracles, this was definitely a miracle, or at least ranked up near the top for one. But when you believe that the world was created and framed by the hand of God, then I guess believing for a church to be built debt-free isn't so difficult an undertaking for God. When you step through the doors and enter the short hallway to the sanctuary, you'll find some black and white photos of our rich history on the walls. We believe honoring our past prepares us to walk into our future with humility and gratefulness.

One of my greatest joys now is funding the building of a new church in Pakistan for a growing congregation that, like us five years ago, didn't have the necessary funds to build. Our congregation pledged to do for them what someone has done for us, in a way, paying it forward. But we're not stopping there. When that project is completed, we plan on building more in poor areas, sharing



Photos Courtesy of Pastor Jesse Wilson

Aerial view of the new church on the right next to the previous one.



Our band singing of God's faithfulness.

God's heart of love along the way. I think life is more enjoyable when you spend it helping others. Like the Bible says, it's more blessed to give than to receive. I'd say amen to that!

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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Property on the north side of the current Barron River where the first settler of the future Collier County, John J. Weeks, and his family lived. Later the property became the home of the Brown family, later known as *The Bruner Place*, *The Sunset Lodge*, and is currently the headquarters of *Outward Bound*.

Photo by Craig Woodward, August 2011

Who was the First Settler of Present-Day Collier County?

By Craig Woodward

Obviously, there were numerous Calusa, Seminole, and other Native Americans who have lived here for centuries, so we need to narrow the question: who was the first permanent white settler of present times, “permanent” meaning someone whose family members still reside in Collier County. The answer is clearly John J. Weeks, who moved to what would later become Collier County in 1862.

What brought him here? How did he make a living? Where did he live? If you read the last article published in this column regarding the incident at Lostman’s Key, you saw a direct quote from John Weeks about having his crops stolen by an unscrupulous Captain Jocelyn; in relaying that story in 1869, he also mentioned he had already lived in what would become the future Collier County for seven years, meaning he moved here in the middle of the Civil War. Not an easy thing to do as Florida, the third State to secede from the Union, was throughout the war heavily blockaded by the Union navy, a strategy to stop the flow of goods, arms, and ammunition coming into

the south from the Caribbean.

John Weeks, who had previously fought in the second and third Seminole Indian Wars as well as enlisted in the Mexican War, by the time of the Civil War, said he would “fight any man but not a neighbor.” He was a Union sympathizer living in Confederate Florida, who relocated from north Florida to Key West to avoid the Southern draft. Weeks was employed in the vegetable farms located on the mainland at Cape Sable, just north of Key West, a strong Union defensive point. These farms were established to provide sufficient food for a city full of Union military and navy personnel. Two years before the Civil War concluded in 1865, Weeks, then age 41, moved his family and farming operations up the coast. It is not clear why; we can only assume he was looking for more fertile land, and perhaps Cape Sable was getting too congested. For the rest of his life, Weeks would choose to live in remote areas.

In 1862, the future Collier County was virtually empty, with only a few Seminole Indians residing in

the interior areas, leaving Weeks a choice of anywhere to locate. Did he choose to live on the beach in Naples? No. Did he choose the Caxambas or the estates area of Marco? No. He chose a rather obscure place: the entrance to what was known as “Haiti Potato Creek,” a name usually shortened to just “Potato Creek.” It was named for the Cassava plant (also called Yuca), the remnants which were found growing there. Cassava is a starchy plant cultivated throughout the Caribbean and known as the “bread of the tropics.” The presence of the remains of this crop is evidence that this area had been inhabited for years. Potato Creek’s name was later changed to the Allen River and is currently known as the Barron River in Everglades City. When Weeks chose the spot where the river enters Chokoloskee Bay, it was occupied by two plume hunters, Bill Clay and his partner Powell, who were described as “improvement jockeys” as they moved around a lot and each time sold off their squatter’s rights.

John J. Weeks was born in Beaufort, South Carolina, about 1821. When John moved to what is now Everglades City, he was married to his second wife, Sarah Mercer (who was part Native American). Sarah brought into their marriage two daughters by her previous marriage, Mary Elizabeth (Lizzie) Raulerson and Martha Jane Raulerson. John and Sarah had two more daughters: Mary Apolonia Weeks (born 1862 in Cape Sable) and Sarah Jane “Sallie” Weeks, who was born in 1865 at the Weeks’ home adjacent to Chokoloskee Bay. In a tragic situation that would change the history of the Weeks family, John’s wife, Sarah Mercer Weeks, died in 1865 during the birth of her daughter Sallie, leaving John to raise the young girls. John buried his wife on the property near their home which was described as a simple palmetto shack.

Like other pioneer homesteads that would follow, the property chosen by John J. Weeks met the requirements of having high, dry land, having accessibility by boat (as water travel was the only means available), and having rich soil for farming. Ample fresh water was key and available by traveling up the river beyond the point where it was brackish. This small, isolated family lived a difficult life raising vegetables and fruits (bananas, sugar cane, pumpkins, and cowpeas) and by burning buttonwood (a relative of the mangrove family) to make charcoal to sell in the Key West market. According to their family history, John Weeks was against the killing of mother birds for their plumes and, thus, did not participate in one of the few lucrative jobs available at the time. Captains Nicholas or his brother Adolphus Santini, then living in Cayo Costa, picked up Weeks’ produce and sailed it south to Key West to sell.

Life started changing for the Weeks family when the former Mayor of Key West and one of its most prominent citizens, William S. Allen, attempted to grow castor beans commercially in Sanibel Island, his plan being to press them to make castor oil (Allen and his brother owned a pharmacy in Key West). When that venture proved to be a failure, on a return trip to Key West in 1869, Allen sailed into Chokoloskee Bay looking for fresh water and met John Weeks and three of his daughters: Lizzie, who would have been around age 10, Apolonia age seven and Sallie around age five (John’s second step daughter Martha’s whereabouts are not known but she may have gone back to the Raulerson family near Tampa). John Weeks relayed to Allen the story of the death of his wife in childbirth, how long he had lived in this location, and told Allen about his encounter



Sallie Weeks Daniels, the first woman born in Collier County, is seated with her husband Jim Daniels standing to her right holding a fiddle, with their family and friends.

File Photo

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Planes, Pilots, and Hospitality

By Harry Henkel

Everglades City's annual Seafood Festival took place February 13-15, and as usual, the town became overwhelmed with traffic except for its Airpark, due in part to a coordinated effort between Collier County Airport Authority personnel and The Friends of the Everglades Airpark.

Spencer Brillon, who manages both the Immokalee and Everglades Airport, was assisted by Lewis and bought a four-seater gator on Saturday morning. Spencer and Lewis did a great job managing the "flight line." They carefully parked the planes (38) along the taxiway. As the planes stretched the length of the runway, they gave pilots/guests rides to and from their planes.

Once the pilots were brought to the Terminal Building, the Friends

welcomed them and offered free popcorn and ice water. Pilots were asked to sign in and were given rides to the Seafood Festival and back to the Airpark. Several pilots and passengers camped under their planes. Some mentioned they have been doing that for years. All agreed they enjoy flying to the Everglades Airpark. At least 50 planes came to the Everglades Airpark from Friday to Sunday. Most planes came on Saturday. Many came from the East Coast airports, such as Miami Executive, Pompano, and Fort Lauderdale. A few Canadian planes came from the Sarasota Airport. Some came from Punta Gorda, Arcadia, and as far away as Tampa. Several people remarked about the importance of saving our airport here in this beautiful community.



Everglades Airpark had plenty of planes come for the Seafood Festival.



Photos by Judy and Paul Sims

Spencer Brillon, Operations Manager, Collier County Airport Authority.



Transportation was arranged to take pilots to and from their Airpark to the Seafood Festival.

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In Loving Memory of Tom Leonard

The family of Lieutenant Colonel Leonard is deeply saddened to announce his passing on February 5, 2026. Born on October 11, 1932, Tom lived a full and remarkable life. He



touched the hearts of those he met through: UVM College, his apple business, his military career, playing golf, fishing at Everglades City, and his stay at Our House in Rutland, Vermont (<https://www.vermontvisitingnurses.org/impact-thomas-leonard-aka-snake/>).

Heartfelt thanks to his brother, David Leonard, and his cousin, Wanda Styka, for reaching out to him throughout the years. He leaves behind his daughters, Wanda Leonard and Karen Leonard, a son Thomas C. Leonard, Jr., two grandsons, one great-grandson, nieces, nephews, and cousins. He joins his parents, James and Audrey Leonard, his brothers, James Leonard and Robert Leonard, the mother of his three children, Mary Bowman Leonard, and his beloved friend for many years, Anne Wood.



Tom Leonard with friend Anne Wood.

Memorial contributions in memory of Tom may be made to the Everglades Society for Historic Preservation, Inc. (for the Bank of Everglades Building project), and sent to ESHP, P.O. Box 46, Everglades City, FL 34139.

Become a Member of ESHP

Submitted

Everglades Society for Historic Preservation invites all members and those interested in becoming members to our annual meeting on Friday, March 13, at 11:30 AM at Everglades Isle. Our speaker will be Greg Reed, Supervisory Park Ranger at the Everglades

National Park. He will provide up-to-date information on the newly opened Marjory Stoneman Douglas Visitor Center and future plans.

Please make reservations by Friday, March 6, by calling 239-719-0020. Cost is \$20 for members and \$25 for nonmembers.



Pastor Bob continued from pg. 1

when the Reverend Dr. Bob Wallace accepted the position as minister of our church. We were also blessed with his wife Jane Wallace, herself an ordained minister. Pastor Bob, as he is affectionately known in our church, has been a blessing to us for almost 10 years... In February 2011, the Lord called Jane Wallace home. In God's wisdom and grace, God again blessed Pastor Bob and our church with a partner... Mildred Crawford. Pastor Bob and Millie are the spiritual core of our church."

Pastor Bob served 20 years as a Chaplain in the Navy and was a strong advocate for our veterans and those currently serving in the armed services. He would proudly remember

them on Veterans Day, asking each member of the congregation who had served to stand together and give their name, rank, and serial number. Pastor Bob was a respected, loyal, and appreciated member of our community. He will be missed by all.

Pastor Bob is survived by his loving wife Millie, his devoted children, grandchildren and great-grandchildren.

Everyone is invited to join our congregation for a memorial service to be held at 1:30 PM on Sunday, March 22, at the Everglades Community Church, following the Church's 100th year celebration, which Pastor Bob was so looking forward to as he would have celebrated his 20 years as Pastor of our "Friendly Church on the Circle."



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Everglades City Students Quench Thirsty Seafood Festival Patrons

By Lillian Kee

The annual Everglades City Seafood Festival is an event founded in 1970 to support the stone crab culture in Everglades City, which is known as the stone crab capital of the world. The Florida Stone Crabbers Association (FLSCA) runs this event. This event attracts many people from all around and gives them a chance to see what Everglades City truly is about. The festival brings support to local businesses, churches, families, the stone crab industry, as well as Everglades City School.

The festival itself has many vendors, and one that is the most well-known is the Everglades City Schools' Coca-Cola booth. Each year, without a doubt, you will see the Coke booths. This is where you go during the hot day at the festival. In these booths, you will find staff and

students from Everglades working hard to support our school. This is the school's biggest fundraising event; students and staff work hard because, without it, we would not have many of our favorite activities. High school students work to raise money for their prom tickets and other school events, while our middle schoolers are working to support the school's clubs and sports.

As every year, the school had three booths - one trailer on each side of the stage, and the last in the midst of the food court. As you walked around with your friends and family, you could stop by yourself for a cold Coke or an ice-cold water. Between the Florida heat and the warmth you'll feel from being served by Everglades City School, you'll definitely want an ice-cold drink.



Photo by Frank Steiger

Museum of the Everglades March Events

Submitted

It will be a busy mid-March at the Museum of the Everglades. On March 19, Flowers and Felonies in the Fakahatchee, the Third Thursday Lecture Series, starts at 2:00 PM. In this companion lecture to the current temporary exhibit at Museum of the Everglades, Growing Obsession, Museum Manager Thomas Lockyear will focus on the now infamous case of attempted theft – immortalized in Susan Orlean's iconic book "The Orchid Thief" - in the nearby Fakahatchee Strand State Preserve Park. The sordid story of Homestead horticulturist John Edward Larouche and his perfidious plan to purloin and propagate rare Ghost Orchids, along with other crimes of floral passion, will be discussed.



Then on March 21 from 9:00 AM to 3:00 PM, come to the Museum for the annual Grapefruit Gathering. In recent years, the birthday of county

founder Barron Gift Collier was celebrated with the Grapefruit Gala. Collier purchased a grapefruit grove at Deep Lake that shifted the local



economy towards tourism and led to the creation of Collier County in 1923. Hence the saying "it all started with grapefruit." This year, the occasion is

being celebrated with The Grapefruit Gathering and Art Fair featuring an art fair, fruit tree sale, fresh Florida citrus, food, art and live music and more.

Fresh Herbs for Cooking

By Patty Huff

South Florida in the wintertime is a perfect place to enjoy growing fresh herbs. Many years ago, I had two large self-watering containers full of fresh herbs, located on my deck just off the back porch. After the first hurricane washed them away, my husband built me an elevated structure to plant my herbs and decided to move it to the south side of the house. However, it still floated away during a hurricane, so we now strap it to the house whenever we are threatened with high water.

It is so nice to just go out and clip whatever herbs I need for cooking. Currently, I am growing rosemary, which is wonderful on steaks and roasted potatoes; mint for tabouli salads, tea, and special cocktails; thyme for chicken dishes; basil for pesto and pasta; parsley for chimichurri sauce; oregano for vegetables and pizzas; sage for brown butter and turkey dressing; and dill for fish, shrimp, and egg and potato salads. Fresh herbs are so easy to grow and taste so good! Enjoy!



The Ever Fabulous Everglades Seafood Festival

Festival continued from pg. 3



Photos by Frank Steiger Photography



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Everglades Lions Club News

By Elaine Middelstaedt
 Secretary of Everglades Lions Club

We have been busy this season with our Chuck Wagon at the Everglades Seafood Festival, serving burgers, dogs, mullet dip, and fillets. We also had a successful BBQ Chicken Dinner fundraiser in McLeod Park, which was well appreciated by our friends and neighbors.

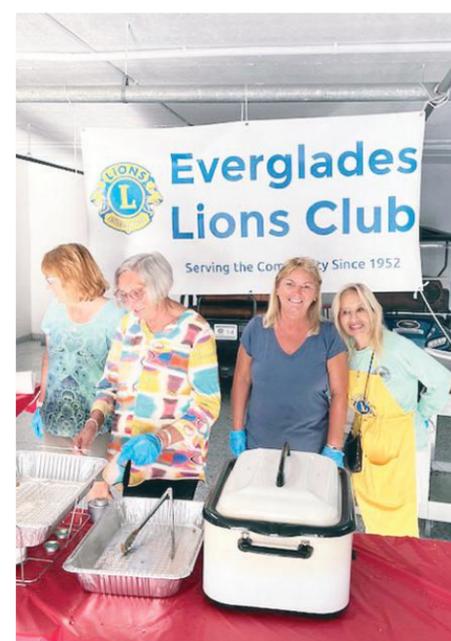
On March 12 at our monthly club meeting, which takes place starting at 6:00 PM in the Fellowship Hall

behind the Everglades Community Church, our planned speaker is from Lighthouse of Collier, who will tell us what services they offer to visually impaired people here in Collier County. We may also host members of other area clubs for a "Zone" meeting and could even have a visit from higher-ups. We welcome all visitors.

Our biggest event of the year will be our Turkey Shoot (paper targets,

no birds are hurt) which will take place on the weekend of March 21-22. Like last year, this event will take place at Mayberry's Cypress Tower Camp, located at 18101 Cypress Tower Road, Ochopee, FL 34141. Raffle tickets are for sale around town with gift certificate prizes. Door prizes will also be awarded. Each shoot is essentially a 50-50 drawing, with the winner getting half the shoot money and the Lions Foundation of Everglades getting the other half.

Since the rifles are using birdshot at the targets, the winners are purely random luck. The winner could be a first-time shooter or an experienced pro. You never know. But the judges use calipers to see which shooter got closest to the center of the target. Safety, of course, is paramount. There will be strictly enforced guidelines.



Last year's shoot was the first after an absence of about eight years. We are happy to be able to offer it again. This is a great way to keep the Gladesmen culture alive for families in our area.

The Everglades Lions Club has been serving the greater Everglades community since 1952. We thank you for your continued support.

Triad Seafood Market & Cafe

Family Dining on the Riverfront



- Stone Crabs
- Shrimp
- Gator
- Oysters
- Mahi-Mahi
- Burgers
- Salads
- Homemade Key Lime Pie

401 W School Dr • Everglades City • 239-695-2662





TriadSeafoodMarketCafe.com

EVERGLADES LIONS CLUB ANNUAL TURKEY SHOOT!

MARCH 21
10 AM - 5 PM

MARCH 22
12 PM - 5 PM

\$5 ROUNDS • \$10 ROUNDS • \$20 ROUNDS
50-50 TO THE WINNER!

RAFFLE PRIZES & DOOR PRIZES!



\$150 BASS PRO GIFT CARD!



\$250 BASS PRO GIFT CARD!



\$500 BASS PRO GIFT CARD!



\$150 BASS PRO GIFT CARD!

MAYBERRY CYPRESS TOWER CAMP
18101 CYPRESS TOWER RD.,
OCHOPEE, FL 34141

First Settler continued from pg. 6

with the evil Captain Jocelyn.

Allen immediately saw an opportunity to farm the opposite bank of Potato Creek and left the tools and supplies with Weeks which he had brought back from Sanibel. By 1873, Allen had a home on Potato Creek, which was renamed the Allen River; the Allen home later evolved into the current Everglades City Rod and Gun Club. William S. Allen is credited with being the town's founder. Allen's connections in Key West brought more settlers to the Chokoloskee Bay area, as well as laborers to work his farm.

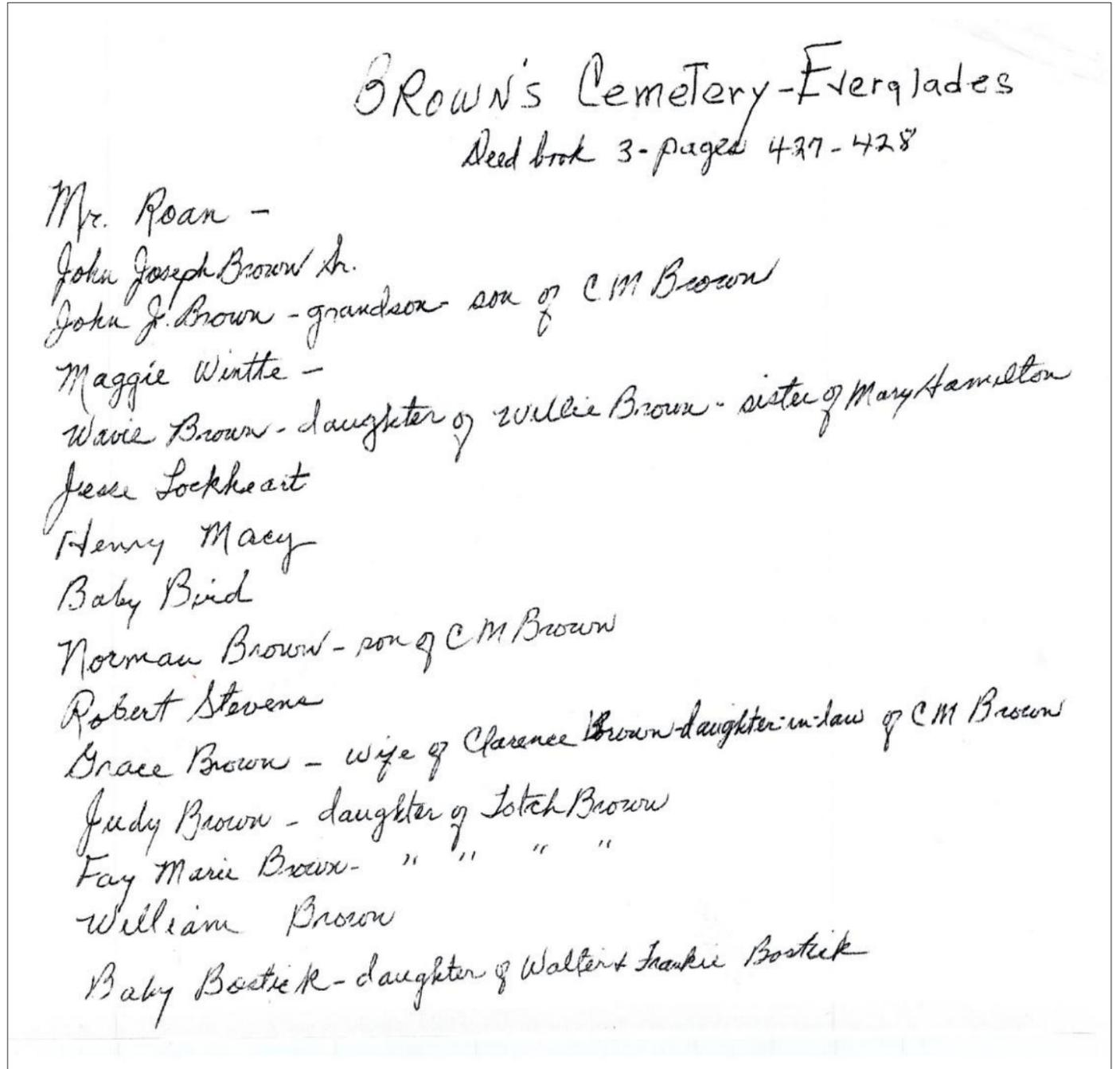
In what today would be considered unusual, on March 18, 1878, in Key West, John Weeks, around age 57, married for the third time; his bride was his stepdaughter, Lizzie Raulerson, who would have been around 20 at the time. The family had been baptized in 1876 as Catholics in Key West; John and Lizzie would have seven children who would survive them.

John and Lizzie would move around quite a lot during their marriage, back to Cape Sable where some of their children were born, to Chokoloskee Island (where John, as the first settler on the Island sold his squatters rights to the Santini brothers), to an island that would later be part of Isles of Capri, and to northern Rookery Bay where a cut thru the present day Keewaydin Island was named "John's Pass" after John J. Weeks (the Pass has since filled in).

But by 1900, the Weeks family was living and farming on Horr's Island at the Blue Hill Plantation on the eastern end of the Island (named after "Blue Hill," an old Indian mound) when John, age 79, died in June of that year. The 1900 census done by John F. Horr (who grew pineapples on the same island) shows John and Lizzie had seven children living at home: three girls and four boys ranging in ages from five to 19 years old, the boys all listed as "farm laborers." In 2000, one of John's great-great-grandsons looked for his grave on Horr's Island but was never able to find it.

The Rest of the Story...

After John's death, Lizzie married twice more; first to Andrew Barnes from Grocery Place, and they had one daughter. Later, Lizzie married for the last time to Richard (Dick) Sawyer. They had no children, but Dick's son, Preston Sawyer, knew Lizzie Sawyer as his stepmother. Preston Sawyer's life is extensively outlined in his book "The Caxambas Kid." For many years, Elizabeth (Lizzie) Raulerson Weeks Barnes Sawyer lived in Old Marco and was simply known as "Grandma Sawyer." She died in 1939 and was buried in an unmarked grave* at the Marco Cemetery. Also buried at



Submitted Photo

Undated list of those buried at the Brown's Cemetery. Note that Sarah Mercer Weeks is not named, perhaps because her burial site was unknown or was relocated.

the Marco cemetery is a husband, children, and many of her relatives.

*(On March 5, 2012, I helped Lizzie's great-great-grandson, Melvin Brown, unload and place a headstone on top of the original weather-worn tabby mortar slab that had been poured over her grave site.)

John's daughter, Mary Apolonia, married twice, once to George Christian, a farm hand of William Allen's, and then to Richard Hamilton, with whom she raised six children in various places in the Ten Thousand Islands. John's daughter Sallie, who was born at the death of her mother in 1865, married James (Jim) Daniels and had seven children. At one time, Jim Daniels was the crew boss for the clamming industry that was working out of Pavilion Key.

The original Weeks settlement, where the Barron River enters Chokoloskee Bay, was sold in 1883 by the Weeks family to the Browns and is the historical homestead of this family. C.M. Brown subdivided and platted the property, later selling it in 1918 to George Bruner. Near the property is the Brown cemetery, where presumably Sarah Mercer Weeks is also buried. For many years, this property was operated as the "Sunset Lodge" and since 1986 has been owned by Outward Bound. This location is not only a

well-known feature of the entrance to the City of Everglades but has the unique distinction of being the only property in Collier County which currently celebrates 164 years of continuous occupation.

The children of John Weeks went on to marry and have many children of their own. It is impossible in this article to outline the family's extensive genealogy, but almost all the pioneer families of Collier County, including the Browns, Whiddens, Hamiltons, Daniels, Dickersons, Nashs, Kirklands, Lowes, Howards, and many others can claim the Weeks as relatives.

Many of the Weeks' extended family are mentioned in the historical book of the Chokoloskee Bay Country - "Killing Mr. Watson," which is heavily based on facts with some fiction added. Until recently, there was very little else written about the impact of this first pioneer family on our local history. Fortunately, a great-granddaughter of John and Lizzie Weeks, Faye Dickerson Brown, wrote a book, "Weeks Family Connections," about their unique history. I want to thank Faye for her assistance as I was completely lost in researching these "connections" for this article.

St. Patrick's Day Celebration

Submitted

The Friends of the Museum of the Everglades are hosting an event in the Museum parking lot on Tuesday, March 17, from 4:00 to 7:00 PM to celebrate St. Patrick's Day and all things Irish. A traditional corned beef dinner with Irish soda bread will be served. Beer, wine, and water will also be provided, and games and entertainment. Prizes will be awarded for the

best Irish dress, best Irish jokes, best (clean) Limericks, and there will be a 50/50 raffle. All this fun, food, and drink come at a cost of \$35 per person. To make your reservations, please call or text Elaine Middelstaedt at 305-962-8136 no later than March 10. Reservations for up to 40 people will be accepted on a first-come, first-served basis.



FISHING THE EVERGLADES

Capt. Mike Merritt

March Fishing

Here it is in the second half of February and I am thinking about March. The fishing is picking up and should continue to get even better in March. We just saw a few days of really warm weather and some calm winds. This allowed the water to clear up and made for some fun sight casting. We had schools of Black Drum become visible and also some really nice Permit moved in close. This is what we can look forward to in March. Of course, I know March can be a very windy month. But on those

days when the winds are low, you can expect similar results.

The Tarpon will also continue to increase in numbers for those who are looking for them. We will see some really big fish this month and in pretty good numbers. March is a great month to target these big ones. If the winds kick up, you can look in the rivers and back bays as they will move in back there.

Snook fishing in March is always known as the transition month. The Snook start moving into the Islands in March. We get fish from offshore moving in, and we get fish moving out of the back country into the Islands. It is usually the first month you will catch Snook back in the Islands with any consistency. Of course, the back country will still hold plenty of Snook. But it's a great month to

sneak out front on the incoming tide and cast to some good fish. If you're using artificials then try using jigs, as they will work great this month. Working that jig slow and steady along the bottom will get plenty of looks.

As you see, things will be heating up this March. Not only Snook and Tarpon, but those big Black Drum schools and Permit, too. Then on top of this, the biggest Mangrove Snapper of the year will be inshore. My daughter caught a 21.5" inshore Mangrove Snapper in March. We also caught lots of 16-18" fish. So, the variety will continue. It will be a little different but I think it will be better. The Sheepshead bite will slow down, but the others will more than make up for it.

With warmer temps and better tides, March will be a nice change. I know we occasionally get a

late-season cold front in March, but I am looking forward to the warming trend. The biggest factor will be winds. But hopefully, we get enough calm days in between to see some really good fishing on the outside. Good Luck Fishing and enjoy the change of season!

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.

Congressman Mario Diaz-Balart Around EC

Submitted

Congressman Mario Diaz-Balart was bestowing more than just handshakes in Everglades City. Lynn McMillin, owner of the Smallwood Store, received a Congressional

Record of Recognition for all her work through the years.

Diaz-Balart also presented a check for \$7 million to Everglades City Mayor Howie Grimm and

members of the City Council for a new Everglades City Community Center to be built at McLeod Park.

A reminder that on the first Tuesday of the month, a member of

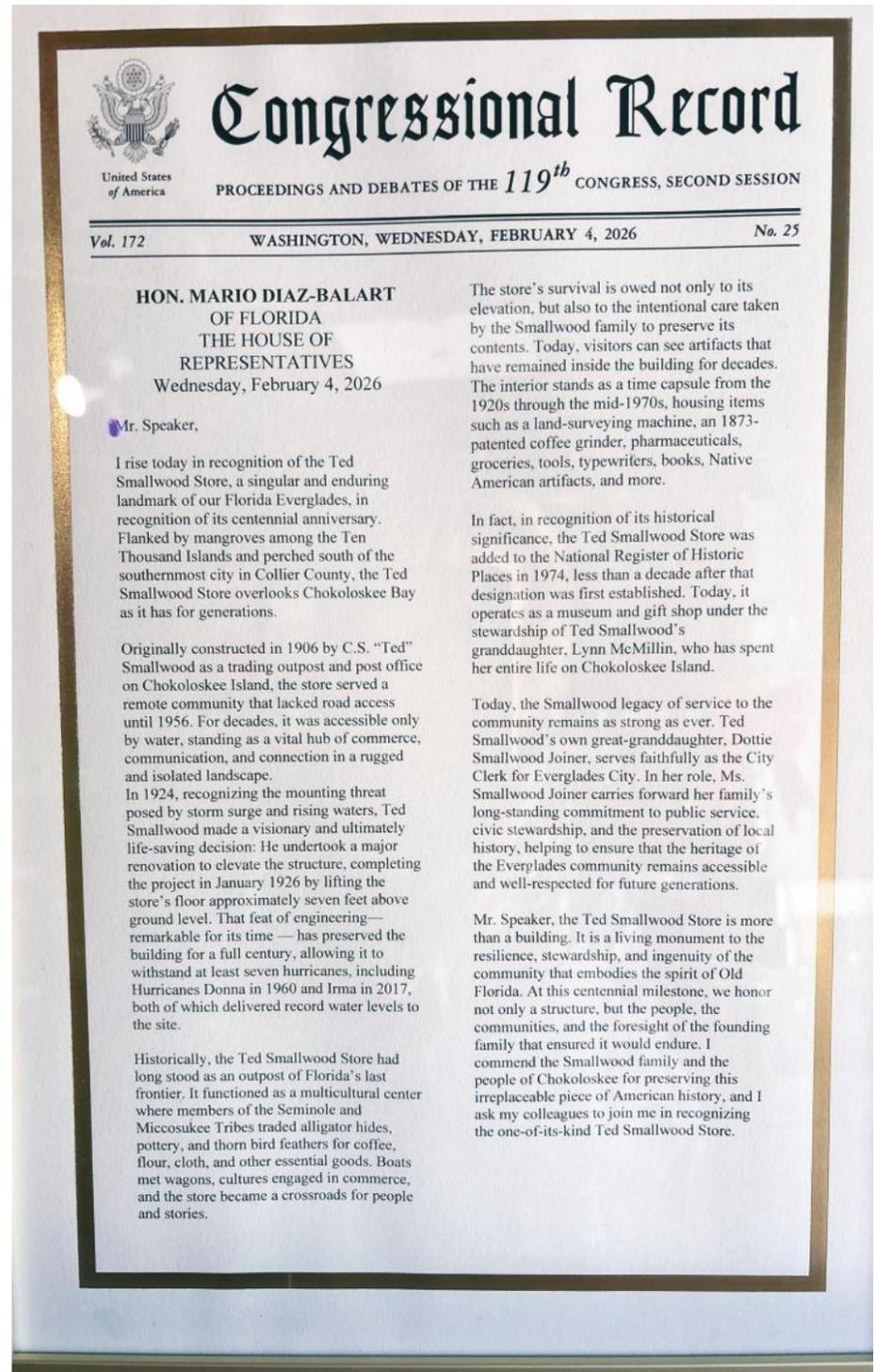
Congressman Diaz-Balart's team is at Everglades City Hall to assist with federal casework, including USPS, social security, veterans' benefits, immigration, and other federal issues.



Congressman Mario Diaz-Balart presents a check to Everglades City Council members and Mayor Howie Grimm for a new Everglades Community Center.



Lynn McMillin received the Congressional Record Recognition from Congressman Mario Diaz-Balart for all her work through the years at the Smallwood Store.



Congressional Record
PROCEEDINGS AND DEBATES OF THE 119th CONGRESS, SECOND SESSION
Vol. 172 WASHINGTON, WEDNESDAY, FEBRUARY 4, 2026 No. 25

HON. MARIO DIAZ-BALART
OF FLORIDA
THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES
Wednesday, February 4, 2026

Mr. Speaker,
I rise today in recognition of the Ted Smallwood Store, a singular and enduring landmark of our Florida Everglades, in recognition of its centennial anniversary. Flanked by mangroves among the Ten Thousand Islands and perched south of the southernmost city in Collier County, the Ted Smallwood Store overlooks Chokoloskee Bay as it has for generations.
Originally constructed in 1906 by C.S. "Ted" Smallwood as a trading outpost and post office on Chokoloskee Island, the store served a remote community that lacked road access until 1956. For decades, it was accessible only by water, standing as a vital hub of commerce, communication, and connection in a rugged and isolated landscape.
In 1924, recognizing the mounting threat posed by storm surge and rising waters, Ted Smallwood made a visionary and ultimately life-saving decision: He undertook a major renovation to elevate the structure, completing the project in January 1926 by lifting the store's floor approximately seven feet above ground level. That feat of engineering—remarkable for its time—has preserved the building for a full century, allowing it to withstand at least seven hurricanes, including Hurricanes Donna in 1960 and Irma in 2017, both of which delivered record water levels to the site.
Historically, the Ted Smallwood Store had long stood as an outpost of Florida's last frontier. It functioned as a multicultural center where members of the Seminole and Miccosukee Tribes traded alligator hides, pottery, and thorn bird feathers for coffee, flour, cloth, and other essential goods. Boats met wagons, cultures engaged in commerce, and the store became a crossroads for people and stories.

The store's survival is owed not only to its elevation, but also to the intentional care taken by the Smallwood family to preserve its contents. Today, visitors can see artifacts that have remained inside the building for decades. The interior stands as a time capsule from the 1920s through the mid-1970s, housing items such as a land-surveying machine, an 1873-patented coffee grinder, pharmaceuticals, groceries, tools, typewriters, books, Native American artifacts, and more.

In fact, in recognition of its historical significance, the Ted Smallwood Store was added to the National Register of Historic Places in 1974, less than a decade after that designation was first established. Today, it operates as a museum and gift shop under the stewardship of Ted Smallwood's granddaughter, Lynn McMillin, who has spent her entire life on Chokoloskee Island.
Today, the Smallwood legacy of service to the community remains as strong as ever. Ted Smallwood's own great-granddaughter, Dottie Smallwood Joiner, serves faithfully as the City Clerk for Everglades City. In her role, Ms. Smallwood Joiner carries forward her family's long-standing commitment to public service, civic stewardship, and the preservation of local history, helping to ensure that the heritage of the Everglades community remains accessible and well-respected for future generations.

Mr. Speaker, the Ted Smallwood Store is more than a building. It is a living monument to the resilience, stewardship, and ingenuity of the community that embodies the spirit of Old Florida. At this centennial milestone, we honor not only a structure, but the people, the communities, and the foresight of the founding family that ensured it would endure. I commend the Smallwood family and the people of Chokoloskee for preserving this irreplaceable piece of American history, and I ask my colleagues to join me in recognizing the one-of-its-kind Ted Smallwood Store.

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.

We are down to the wire! Logo #2 and #4 have received the most votes. What do you think? Send your vote in today!

MULLET RAPPER LOGO CONTEST

Name: _____

Telephone: _____

I like logo #: _____

Clip this entry form and mail to
Coastal Breeze News
Suite 216, 1857 San Marco Rd.
Marco Island, FL 34145.

Contest closes March 31, 2026. Contest winner will be announced April 15, 2026. One entry per person.



Logo #1



Logo #2



Logo #3



Logo #4



Logo #5

Adventurers Set to Launch in 2026 Everglades Challenge

Submitted

At 8:30 AM on Saturday, March 7, 2026, more than 60 small boats will push off the sand at Fort De Soto State Park, beginning a grueling 300-nautical-mile

journey down Florida's Gulf Coast to Key Largo. Participants are allowed eight days to complete the challenge, but the ultra-ambitious (and slightly insane) boaters will

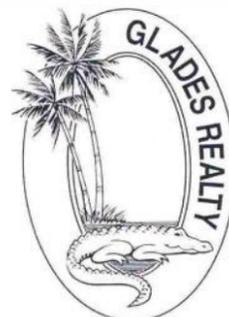
finish in just a couple of days.

The Everglades Challenge, organized by WaterTribe, is often described as equal parts race, expedition, and act of perseverance. The rules are simple but unforgiving: no motors and no support crews. Competitors must manage navigation, unpredictable weather, and mechanical challenges alone, relying entirely on their own skills.

Among the fleet will be first-time entrants Rebecca Sensor of Everglades City (racing as Pink Panther) and Elizabeth Goldsmith of Old Fort, North Carolina (aka Toonces). The pair will sail a 21-foot Sea Pearl, a shallow-draft

sailboat known for its versatility in coastal and backwater conditions. With a flat bottom and twin lee boards instead of a keel, it can glide through less than a foot of water. If the wind fades, their only option is to switch to the oars and row.

There are no monetary prizes - simply finishing is the reward. Sensor and Goldsmith are allowing themselves the full eight days to finish, but if winds are favorable, they hope to arrive in Key Largo in five days. Once the race starts, supporters can track Sensor, Goldsmith, and the rest of the fleet live at <https://www.watertribe.com/Events/ChallengeGMapper.aspx>.



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Your Local Broker With Local Knowledge

It's Tax Time

By Mike Klein

Whether you will have to pay federal income tax on your Social Security benefits depends on your combined income:

- v If you file as an individual:
 - Up to \$25,000: No tax
 - \$25,000–\$34,000: Up to 50% of your benefits may be taxed.
 - More than \$34,000: Up to 85% of your benefits may be taxed.
- v If you file a joint return:
 - Up to \$32,000: No tax
 - \$32,000–\$44,000: Up to 50% of your benefits may be taxed.
 - More than \$44,000: Up to 85% of your benefits may be taxed.

Social Security benefits are still taxed under current tax law and considered a part of a recipient's taxable income. However, the 2025 Tax Act (One Big Beautiful Bill Act) introduced a temporary deduction that allows eligible beneficiaries to lower their overall taxable income and reduce their tax.

The new senior deduction allows eligible seniors and their spouses who are 65 or older to deduct up to \$6,000 each from their taxable income for tax years 2025 through 2028. There are adjusted gross income limits to this deduction. It is only available to single filers making less than \$75,000 or couples making less than \$150,000.



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7 Days a Week

Island Cafe

7 days per week 6 am - 9 pm
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Chokoloskee

HavAnna Cafe

Open for Season!
239-695-2214

Markets

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(239) 695-4535

Glades Haven General Store

Daily 9 am – 7 pm
(239) 232-0486

Grimm's Stone Crab

(239) 695-3222

Goodland.

Kirk Fish House

Monday-Saturday 10 am - 5 pm
239-394-8616.

Volunteer Opportunity

If you enjoy meeting people from around the world and telling them about our wonderful community and the things to do here, then you would enjoy volunteering at the Everglades

Area Welcome Center next to Dulce's Café.

High School Students who are interested in fulfilling their volunteer service hours should also contact Patty Huff at 239-719-0020

Worship

Chokoloskee Family Church

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

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

Lot for Sale

305 Storter Ave. S, Vacant lot. Save impact fees and utilities because property was previously improved. \$120,000 possible owner financing.

Help Wanted

The Mullet Rapper is looking for a part-time freelance writer. Send your resume to val@coastalbreezenews.com.

Clubs

Everglades Lions Club

2nd Thursday of the month | 6 pm
September - May
Jinkins Fellowship Hall behind Everglades Community Church
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

Helpful Numbers

EC Airpark: (239) 252-6298
EC City Hall: (239) 695-3781
EC Public Library: (239) 695-2511
EC Trash Pickup: (239) 252-2380
EC Visitor Center: (239) 232-0473
Goodland Recycle: (239)252-2380
Mullet Rapper/Coastal Breeze News Office (239) 393-4991.

Post Office

Everglades City & Chokoloskee: (239) 695-2174
Ochopee: (239) 695-2099
Goodland: (239) 394-7387

Local Parks

Big Cypress: (239) 695-2000
EVG National Park: (305) 242-7700
Fakahatchee Preserve: (239) 961-1925
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\$.25 cents per word after

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Send to Val@MulletRapper.com

Feel free to call with any questions!
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