

A HOMETOWN WIN



Braves take the World Series in six games

BY NANJI THEORET

Wellen Park Journal Correspondent

The Atlanta Braves' world championship season started right here in Wellen Park.

And local fans root, root, rooted for the hometown team along the road to victory — from spring training camp at CoolToday Park to the Game 6 clincher and the World Series win, a title that has eluded the Braves for more than two decades.

"This was huge for the organization," says Mike Dunn, the Braves' vice president of Florida operations. "It's a testament to Brian Snitker (manager), Alex (Anthopoulos) our GM and the players. The momentum is building."

SEE BRAVES, A2 ►



▲ Atlanta Braves players savoring the moment they clinched it.

◀ World Series champs celebrate as they triumphantly raise their trophy.

ATLANTA BRAVES/COURTESY PHOTOS

"Everyone shared personal stories from spring training — a player who threw them a ball, players who stopped by the tiki bar for lunch. There was a personal connection, and it was really evident as the playoffs continued."

— Mike Dunn, Braves vice president of Florida operations

New K-8 and high school coming to Wellen Park

BY NANJI THEORET

Wellen Park Journal Correspondent

A new high school and kindergarten-to-eighth-grade school are coming to Wellen Park sooner than planned. Sarasota County Schools is fast-tracking construction to alleviate student counts at Venice High and Taylor Ranch Elementary and a projected

increase of nearly 3,400 future students from Wellen Park, one of the top-selling communities in the U.S.

"We're moving everything up a year," says School Superintendent Brennan Asplen. "There's been a large influx of new students and a lot of people moving to our area."



ASPLEN

The schools will be built on two adjoining sites at River Road and the future Manasota Beach Road extension, allowing them to share parking lots and bus loops for increased efficiency and cost savings.

Design and construction of the \$155-million 425,000-square-foot

high school will begin in summer 2022, with completion expected for the 2025-26 academic year. Work on Wellen Park's K-8 school, which carries an \$82-million price tag, will start in 2023. Unexpected growth in south Sarasota County has pushed enrollment at Venice High and Taylor Ranch Elementary over capacity

SEE SCHOOL, A4 ►

The doors are open

Sarasota Memorial Hospital-Venice Campus stands ready to serve the Wellen Park community **A6** ►



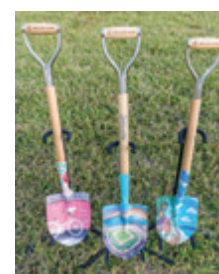
Countdown to Downtown

Three more restaurants are joining the eclectic mix of dining options, boutiques, bars and businesses coming to Downtown Wellen **A18** ►



And the winner is

Your votes were counted, and the winners of the shovel painting contest are in **A32** ►



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ATLANTA BRAVES/COURTESY PHOTO

BRAVES

From page 1

As the mothership of all things Braves Country in Florida, the Braves held local watch parties and rally parties at CoolToday Park. Scoreboards and TVs throughout the park and the Tomahawk Tiki Bar & The Grill were tuned into playoff and championship games. The Braves' growing momentum through the

postseason was reflected in the wider grins of the Braves staff and the number of fans turning out to cheer on their team at the tiki bar. Mr. Dunn was right there with them.

"Employees were watching the team they just saw work out in March," he says. "Everyone shared personal stories from spring training — a player who threw them a ball, players who stopped by the tiki bar for lunch. There was a personal connection, and it was really evident as the playoffs continued. Smiles were bigger, people made a lot of friends — the momentum just kept building."

Major League Baseball's world championship has evaded Atlanta for 22 years, despite winning National League East titles during the past four years. This year, the momentum stuck, although injuries in the homestretch of the regular season threatened another World Series run.

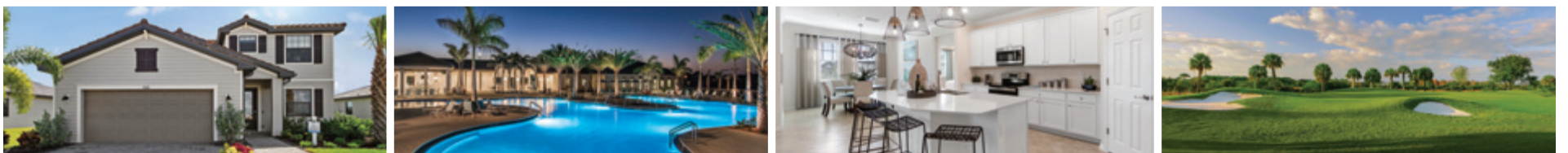
"During spring training, you always hope for the World Series. That's what you're playing for," says Mr. Dunn. "We've been a playoff contender for the last four years. We're a young team. Alex made trades to fill the gaps and we just went on a roll."

SEE BRAVES , A4 ►



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BRAVES

From page 2

Fans took to CoolToday Park's Facebook page immediately after the Game 6 decider, celebrating, sharing spring training memories and expressing their excitement to welcome back the world champions in spring 2022.

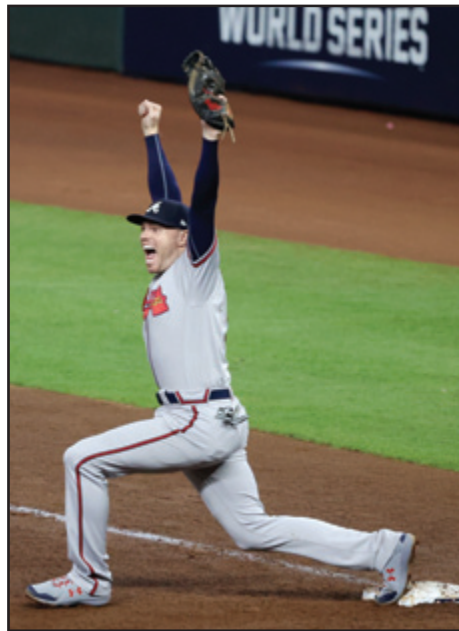
"Unbelievable," Mr. Dunn says, describing the series-ending game, the elation of fans watching the win at the stadium and the sheer number of people he saw gathered en masse at Truist Park and the neighboring Battery during World Series home games in Atlanta. "Just seeing the city and the Battery, it was lively and unbelievable. There were 100,000 people — 40,000 inside the park and 60,000 outside."

The momentum continues long after the final out. Under the larger-than-life mural and number 44 of Braves' legend Hank Aaron (who died in January 2021), a steady stream of fans and curiosity seekers stop by CoolToday Park to see where it all started, take social media selfies, buy World Series merchandise and just soak up the atmosphere of a community rallying behind its hometown team. The park celebrated along with the rest of Braves Country, hosting a viewing party for the world champions parade Nov. 5.

"The playoff momentum has been impactful and fun," says Mr. Dunn. "There's a lot of excitement for baseball and the world champions. There's increased traffic and awareness. People are coming; I've had to call in more staff."

The stadium is planning a big celebration when the Braves return in February. Details will be announced on the park's Facebook page, says Mr. Dunn.

Ironically, the celebration and 2022 spring



ATLANTA BRAVES/COURTESY PHOTO

Local baseball fans got to watch the action and the elation of the players celebrating on the field after winning the series-ending game.

training games will mark the first time the Braves will play to a full-capacity CoolToday crowd of 7,973 since relocating its Florida operations to Wellen Park. The team played the final home game of the 2019 Grapefruit League on the CoolToday field. The 2020 season was cut short — to 10 games — due to a pandemic that was just beginning to set in. The Braves played a full schedule of 16 home games in 2021 but attendance was limited to under 1,900 spectators because of the lingering global pandemic.

Atlanta hosts the Boston Red Sox at CoolToday Park for the spring season opener Saturday, Feb. 26 at 1:05 p.m. Tickets for the spring season are on sale now. 🎟️

SCHOOL

From page 1

and will continue to increase with the addition of 14,800 housing units planned in Wellen Park, according to Jody Dumas, the district's assistant superintendent chief operations officer.

"This was the first year we had to put up portables at Taylor Ranch," he says. "We have the infrastructure for 10 more and think of the new school in Wellen Park as relieving that need."

Sarasota County Schools is reviewing high school prototypes from other districts that it could potentially repurpose for Wellen Park. The district will model Wellen Park's K-8 school after a design borrowed from Lee County to the south.

"Instead of reinventing the wheel, we talk to other districts about what works for students, what works for the system and

makes sense," says Dr. Asplen. "It saves costs and time."

Dr. Asplen says the K-8 concept, combining traditional elementary and middle schools under one roof, provides two different administrations, lunchrooms and other separate facilities while improving the transition from elementary school to middle school. "Our research shows it helps academically," he says.

Wellen Park, ranked No. 5 on real estate consulting firm RCLCO's 2021 list of fastest-selling communities, is expected to add 3,372 K-12 students as construction of new homes continues. Those projections include 2,334 more K-8 students and another 1,038 high school students.

"We haven't addressed growth in a number of years," Mr. Dumas recently told school board members in presenting proposed revisions to the district's five-year capital budget. The budget includes an extra \$30 million to cover escalating construction costs to build the Wellen Park schools and a third school down the road. 💡

"This was the first year we had to put up portables at Taylor Ranch. We have the infrastructure for 10 more and think of the new school in Wellen Park as relieving that need."

— Jody Dumas, district assistant superintendent chief operations officer

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ALL WELLEN GOOD

New hospital opens in Venice

BY ROBIN F. DEMATTIA

Wellen Park Journal Correspondent

Taking the pulse of healthcare needs in the Wellen Park area, Sarasota Memorial Hospital just opened Sarasota Memorial Hospital-Venice Campus to serve the growing population.

Located at the intersection of Laurel Road East and Pinebrook Road, the new hospital is a 5-story, 365,000-square-foot facility with 110 private patient suites.

It includes a 28-bed Emergency Care Center with a stroke hub and two resuscitation rooms, 8 surgical suites, a 22-bed Intensive Care Unit and 10 birthing suites.

There is also an interventional radiology suite, cardiac catheterization labs, endoscopy/bronchoscopy procedural suites, advanced diagnostics and imaging services, a breast health center and more.

It is only the second full-service hospital owned by Sarasota Memorial Hospital, which just marked its 96th anniversary.

The Venice facility is located about 20 miles south of the Sarasota campus and about 20 miles north of SMH's freestanding ER in North Port.

All SMH Urgent Care Centers will remain open.

"We are so looking forward to showing the community what our team has been hard at work building, and bring the high-quality care the community has come to expect from Sarasota Memorial to south county residents," says Sharon Roush, president of SMH-Venice.

Due to pandemic protocols, no grand opening celebration or public tours were planned.

"While this isn't the grand opening we were planning on," Ms. Roush says, "we know it's far more important we get the doors open



The Sarasota Memorial Hospital lobby.

COURTESY PHOTO

and begin providing the care the community needs. We are looking forward to showing off the new facility to patients and their families while meeting their immediate healthcare needs."

Sarasota Memorial Hospital-Venice is equipped with state-of-the-art technology wherever possible.

Surgical suites use smart technology and minimally invasive tools, including the latest in robotic surgery and da Vinci robotic surgical system. The hospital app called EASE allows the operating room team to send secure, HIPAA-compliant text messages (and photos and video if appropriate) to designated family members to update them during a loved one's procedure.

Throughout the hospital, staff use the Voalte devices to instantly connect care providers

and help coordinate patient care and communication. SMH also has a state-of-the-art video telecommunications system to allow patient care providers to easily connect face-to-face with patients, even when isolation/contact precautions are in place.

"We learned a lot during the pandemic, and put those lessons to work as we completed construction of the new hospital," Roush says. "We made modifications that expand our ability to isolate and safely care for patients with highly infectious diseases, including a change in the ventilation system that will allow us to convert all or a portion of our critical care Intensive Care Unit to a pandemic unit. In addition, there are isolation rooms throughout the hospital in key areas to help accommodate any patient needs."

Sarasota Memorial staffed the hospital with

experienced team members from its Sarasota campus as well as recruited clinicians from 36 different states.

"The fact that health care providers are applying to SMH from all over the country really demonstrates the reputation SMH has built nationwide as an exceptional place for both patient care and employee wellness," Roush says.

More than 800 employees have been hired for the new hospital. SMH-Venice also includes a medical staff of more than 600 physicians and 200 advanced practice providers.

There are also more than 100 volunteers supporting staff and patients, with additional volunteer opportunities listed on the hospital's website.

Though the hospital just opened, expansion is already under way with a third patient care tower in the works that will add 68 private patient suites. The SMH-Venice campus is designed in a way that will enable the hospital to double the size of its Emergency Care Center and surgical suites and expand up to 400 patient rooms without disrupting hospital operations.

"The campus is designed to be flexible and expandable so that we can grow and meet the needs of our fast-growing community," Roush says.

Sarasota Memorial Hospital-Venice Campus

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AROUND TOWN

Downtown Wellen's outfitter building makes artful impression

BY NANCITHEORET

Wellen Park Journal Correspondent

At first glance, the outfitter building in Downtown Wellen could easily pass as a large-scale mixed media art installation. It's a contemporary sculpture with a striking single-pitched slanted standing-seam metal roof, exaggerated overhangs cantilevered over the sidewalk, wood cladding and tongue-and-groove soffits emphasizing a linear aesthetic, walls of storefront glass and murals painted across portions of the façade.

Plus, shipping containers.

The freestanding building along the edge of Downtown Wellen's 80-acre Grand Lake is accented by a series of shipping containers, painted in one of Wellen Park's brand colors, "Strawberry Joy Red," one standing on end as a bold exclamation point.

"It's a smaller scaled building and we wanted to give it some presence," says Carrie Goforth, senior project architect at 505Design in Charlotte, North Carolina. "The building is in an active waterfront area and will have bike and kayak rentals and the goal was to make it more like a destination. By turning one of the shipping containers vertically, it becomes a beacon, a signature branding element for the site."

The shipping containers provide storage for the future outfitter's fleet of rentals. "One has a pop-up window, another has a big sliding barn door," says Ms. Goforth. "The doors are meant to be left open to showcase and advertise so people know what's there and what they're able to rent."

The outfitter will occupy about a third of the building's 900 square footage under-air. The remainder is for public restrooms



"It's a smaller scaled building and we wanted to give it some presence."

— Carrie Goforth, senior project architect at 505Design

Renderings of the planned outfitter building in Downtown Wellen.

COURTESY PHOTOS



serving Downtown Wellen's many outdoor amenities, including a children's playground, food truck park, event lawn and community gathering spaces.

505Design was one of four architectural firms selected to design buildings in Downtown Wellen, the social hub of Wellen Park. The company also created a multi-tenant retail building, Ms. Goforth says. The first phase of the new downtown is under construction and expected to open in late 2022.

The building will sport a visually attractive mural. The outfitter is expected to offer water bike, kayak and paddleboard rentals launched from an adjacent floating dock.

Downtown Wellen also offers a 2.8-mile biking, hiking and walking trail around the lake.

Inside, the outfitter will have a drip and painted concrete floor and a sunlit interior courtesy of floor-to-ceiling storefront windows in a grid of aluminum framing. As for the shipping containers — now making international news as they pile up at ports around the world and create a shortage — Ms. Goforth says retrofitting proved too costly. Instead, they'll be fabricated with corrugated metal panels and contrasted with wood cladding, open slatted wood screens at the entrance to each restroom, and tongue-

and-groove on the roof overhangs.

"We like to use wood to add horizontal elements under the overhang. It warms it up and makes the building more pedestrian-friendly," Ms. Goforth says.

The restroom doors will also be red to match the shipping containers. "We picked out that color as a pop, to contrast everything else," Ms. Goforth says.



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Downtown Wellen illustration



Downtown Wellen illustration

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COUNTDOWN TO DOWNTOWN

“For the Love of Arts” celebrates Wellen Park’s dedication to the arts

Wellen Park recently held the “For the Love of Arts” event in partnership with the Arts and Cultural Alliance of Sarasota County. This event symbolized the allegiance between this community and the thriving local art scene that is right in Wellen Park’s own backyard.

“We are blessed to be in a vibrant and robust arts and cultural region, which is why it’s so important for us to build upon that access within Wellen Park,” said Wellen Park president, Rick Severance, who kicked off the event.

Current and future residents gathered in the Wellen Park Welcome Center for the reception. The Welcome Center serves as an outward representation of Wellen Park’s commitment to integrating art into everyday life through beautiful custom murals and installations.

The Venice Symphony, Sarasota Opera, The Ringling, Hermitage Artist Retreat, Venice Theatre, Sarasota Art Museum, Asolo Repertory Theatre, and Venice Art Center all sent representatives to speak about their organizations and other upcoming opportunities to experience the arts in Sarasota County.

Check out some of the featured artists and their work that was showcased throughout the event:

- Michele Moore of the Bone Boutique creates unique jewelry and is the featured artist from the North Port Arts Center — her work is currently on display at the mobile pop-up cart.
- “Blooms” is a vibrant mural of colorful flowers painted on the building’s exterior walls by local artist Laura Pommier.
- “Heartfelt Connections” by Sarasota-based artist Alexis Fraser, also known as Lipstick Lex, is a piece made of lipstick kisses



COURTESY PHOTOS

Representatives of the arts, partners of Wellen Park, current and future residents gathered at the recent For the Love of Arts reception.

as an homage to Wellen Park’s heritage tree program.

The For the Love of Arts event was part of Wellen Park’s Countdown to Downtown event series, which is an 18-month-long celebration leading up to the opening of Downtown Wellen, set to be completed in the later months of 2022. Keep an eye out for upcoming events, such as culinary experiences, craft cocktail-making classes and fitness meetups at wellenpark.com/events or on social at [@WellenParkFL](https://www.instagram.com/WellenParkFL).



Wellen Park President Rick Severance, left, and Arts and Cultural Alliance of Sarasota County Executive Director Jim Shirley



A talented string quartet from The Venice Symphony performed during the reception.

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FUN-LOVING LIFESTYLES

Downtown Wellen: Something for everyone

Part of the Wellen way of life is living healthy, getting to know your neighbors and residing in a welcoming, walkable community.

And soon, Downtown Wellen will have something special for everyone — from great eateries to stylish shops and exquisite sunsets.

Downtown Wellen is being designed as a vibrant mixed-use development that will serve as the premier shopping, dining and entertainment destination for this growing community.

In the meantime, follow Wellen Park on Facebook and Instagram and keep an eye on wellenpark.com to learn about exciting events that residents and visitors can participate in now, giving them a taste of what they can expect once Downtown Wellen is open.

Resident meet-ups

Calling all walkers

Walking is good for your health and it is fun, especially when you are ambulating with your Wellen Park neighbors. Walk with old friends. Meet new friends.

Walkers of all paces are welcome.

The walkers group meets on the first Saturday of each month at 9 a.m. at the Welcome Center.

Walkers enjoy their beautiful community while staying in shape. This is also a great way to meet like-minded friends.

A community ambassador will greet the group and share a map of various walking trails and pathways.

All participants will receive two drink tickets redeemable at Barrel & Bean so you can enjoy a beverage with your new friend.

Cycle with us

H.G. Wells mused, “Every time I see an adult on a bicycle, I no longer despair for the future of the human race.”

Are you a big fan of cycling? Wellen Park makes it easy to feel good — cultivating physical and emotional well-being for all.

On the second Saturday of each month residents are invited to meet at 9 a.m. at the Welcome Center to participate in a cycling group meet-up.

A community ambassador will greet the group and share a map of various cycling trails and pathways. It’s up to you how far you want to cycle.

Each participant will also be given two free drink tickets to redeem at Barrel & Bean, so you can enjoy a beverage with your fellow cyclists after you wrap up your ride. Your choice includes beer, wine, iced tea, coffee or water.

Book club buzz

What a great way to spend a morning — turning the pages of a book, chatting with other readers, participating in book discussions and enjoying a cup of joe.

The Wellen Park book club buzz meets at 8:30 a.m. in the Welcome Center on the last Tuesday of the month.

Books are provided by the Sarasota Library Foundation and coffee is supplied by Barrel & Bean.

Spots are limited.

Register for all groups at wellenpark.com/events



GARTH FRANCIS / WELLEN PARK JOURNAL



COURTESY PHOTO



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AROUND TOWN

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1



2



3

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ALL WELLEN GOOD

Plan Your Visit to the Wellen Park Welcome Center

Step inside the Wellen Park Welcome Center, and it's quickly obvious that it's much more than just your basic information spot. Yes, prospective homebuyers can learn all about living at the wellness-focused community here. But it's also a warm and welcoming gathering place where current residents can relax and meet up with friends.



COURTESY PHOTO

Prospective homebuyers can learn all about living at the wellness-focused community at the Wellen Park Welcome Center.

Created as an immersive, interactive community hub, the Wellen Park Welcome Center features a sleek design where artwork and other visual displays help tell the community's story. A breathtaking preserved moss wall that spans almost 40 feet illustrates Wellen Park's neighborhoods and topography, while a vertical electric bicycle display highlights the extensive trail and pathway network. "Heartfelt Connections," a custom art piece made up of lipstick kisses created by Sarasota-based artist Alexis Fraser (known as "Lipstick Lex"), shares the story of Wellen Park's heritage tree program in a unique way.

The displays give prospective homebuyers a feel for the community. But they also help create a comfortable space where current residents and other visitors can spend time and visit with friends while enjoying a cup of coffee, glass of wine or craft beer from the adjoining Barrel & Bean café.

Barrel & Bean offers locally sourced Venetian Coffee Roasters coffee and pastries in the morning, sandwiches and paninis for lunch, and small plates, wine and Venice-based 3 Bridges Brewing craft beer for happy hour and dinner. It's open to the public and oper-

ated by OTW Restaurant Group, which also owns Irma's Tacos in the adjacent Marketplace shopping center.

Food and beverages can be enjoyed alfresco at the spacious outdoor patio lounge area that runs the entire length of the building. It's a great spot for gorgeous sunset views, and a portion of the patio is shaded by a weather responsive electric pergola.

Whether you already live in Wellen Park or are interested in learning more about the community, stop by the Wellen Park Welcome Center. If you already know why Wellen Park is a great place to live, come on in and have a seat.

The Welcome Center is open 10 a.m.-5:30 p.m., Monday-Saturday, and noon-5 p.m., Sunday.

Visit www.wellenpark.com or call 941-960-7805 for more information.

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SIP 'N' SERVE

Get ready to eat, Wellen Park!

BY NANCITHEORET

Wellen Park Journal Correspondent

Three more restaurants are joining the eclectic mix of dining options, boutiques, bars and businesses coming to Downtown Wellen: gourmet ice cream at Bright Ice, rustic Italian fare from Mirabella's Italian Coastal Cuisine and stone-oven pizzas and a signature 50-tap beer wall at Oak & Stone. All three newcomers are home-spun favorites who identified Wellen Park's pioneering spirit and sense of community as capturing the essence of their vision.

"We are so excited about Wellen Park. It very much feels like our concept for Bright Ice" says Kurt Drake, co-owner of the ice cream parlor he started in St. Pete a little more than two years ago. "It's bright, modern, all natural and focused on people feeling good. It has the same energy we're trying to emulate in our brand. It felt symbiotic."

Since the August groundbreaking of Downtown Wellen, residents of Wellen Park and surrounding communities have been abuzz about the new go-to destination for waterfront dining, shopping and socializing centered around an 80-acre lake. The first phase — and first businesses — are expected to open the fourth quarter of 2022. The vibrant mixed-use downtown will feature residences, retail shops, restaurants, pedestrian-friendly streets and public gathering areas nestled into a natural environment, including a hammock grove and lounge areas under a nearly 100-year-old heritage oak tree and a playground blending into the alfresco setting.

Mirabella's: More to Amore

For Wellen Park residents and long-time restaurateurs Jeffrey and Kathleen Ziccardi, Mirabella's Italian Coastal Cuisine honors Kathleen's grandmother, Mirabella. The restaurant will feature nearly century-old Sicilian recipes like sun-dried tomato pesto red snapper, vegetable-stuffed flounder and other rustic dishes detailed in a recently unearthed journal written by Mirabella.

"The restaurant will offer a culinary journey through Italy focusing on the freshest foods and wines only we can get," says Jeffrey. "It will feature coastal Italian dishes, pasta and seafood, fresh organic vegetables and lighter, healthier recipes that fit with Wellen Park's concept."

Mirabella's seafood-centric menu, which will change seasonally, will also feature octopus salad, a chilled seafood tower and a daily selection of fresh fish and seafood. It will also offer a 14-ounce long-bone veal chop, a center-cut filet with mushroom demi-glace and daily specials. Mirabella's will complement the Ziccardi's Ristorante San Marco, a foodie favorite in downtown Venice where the couple have been privately experimenting with Mirabella's future menu items.

With seating for 166 inside and out and a sun-filled corner location, the family friendly Downtown Wellen restaurant will transport lunch and dinner guests to the island of



COURTESY PHOTOS

Sarasota-based Oak & Stone is opening a two-story venue in Downtown Wellen

Sicily in a rustic ambience of sun-bleached, white-washed finishes and white tablecloths for dinner service. A large L-shaped bar will serve cocktails and the specialty of the house — wine.

"We want Mirabella's to be lively, uplifting and light, exactly like the cuisine," says Jeffrey. "It's not pretentious. It's Florida-comfortable. Guests can come in shorts."

Mirabella's will also feature an extensive easy-to-navigate wine list, highlighting different growing regions in Italy. The restaurant's staff will offer recommendations and guide diners to vintages comparable to other wines they may be more familiar with.

"Some people are used to a certain type of wine and may not know anything about Italian wines," says Kathleen. "We want to open up their eyes to different tastes."

"We have a great relationship with growers in Italy," adds Jeffrey. "We have very regional wines you can't get anywhere else. Wine will be a big part of the whole dining experience. Our team understands the different regions the wine comes from. Some have met the growers. We convert California wine drinkers every day."

The Ziccardis also plan to offer wine flight tastings, host wine dinners and eventually feature live entertainment. They see Mirabella's as an extension of the social community lifestyle they enjoy as Wellen Park residents.

"We've seen the creation of other areas like Celebration and Lakewood Ranch," says Kathleen. "Ten months ago, Wellen Park seemed out there. Now, with the Braves stadium and the development, it's drawing people from Punta Gorda and Sarasota. Wellen Park is a very social community. We all hang out and do stuff together."

"We're very community oriented and involved in community events," notes Jeffrey. "We're good hosts and enjoy entertaining people with good food and wine."

Bright Ice: We all scream for ice cream

The concept for Bright Ice kind of reads like the intro of a two-men-walk-into-a-bar joke. Mr. Drake, an architect/commercial construction engineer by training, partnered with Steve Garrahan, an aeronautical engineer, to launch the first Bright Ice location two years ago. Both men were eager for something more entrepreneurial in their lives.

"Neither of us has previous restaurant or hospitality experience," says Mr. Drake who was dismayed by the cloying sweet, artificially flavored ice novelties generally available to his children. "I thought, 'We can do better than that. We can do all-natural,'" he says. "We make 100 percent of everything in house."

Bright Ice's small-batch ice creams are all natural with a few exceptions. They're also super-premium with a deliciously noticeable higher percentage of butter fat and are available in 16 base flavors appealing to both children and those with more sophisticated palates, like deepest darkest chocolate secret,

"Wellen Park has the population growth businesses want. We're incredibly excited about this opportunity. Oak & Stone complements Wellen Park well."

— Brett Decklever, Oak & Stone cofounder

chocolate cookie cake and cream, lemon with crystallized ginger, caramelized bananas with peanut butter and honey, and roasted strawberries with brown sugar and balsamic. The shop also creates seasonal flavors and offers two specialty flavors every few weeks based on "what's happening around us and inspiring us," says Mr. Drake.

The 1,107-square-foot Downtown Wellen location near the playground and the event lawn will offer indoor and outdoor seating and a sunny interior cloaked in natural materials, bright colors and a custom art wall designed exclusively for the local shop.

"Our aesthetic is bright. It's very much a Florida concept," says Mr. Drake. "We turned away other locations because they just didn't align with us. Wellen Park was the perfect fit. It's everything we want to be."

Bright Ice also offers locally roasted coffee, espresso-and-ice cream affogatos, homemade blondies, gooey brownies, lemon bars and magic bars. The Eye Opener, an appropriately named specialty drink, features four shots of espresso, maple syrup and cinnamon. Bright Ice will also offer grab-and-go pints.

Oak & Stone: Fun, Social Environment

Sarasota-based Oak & Stone is opening its first-ever two-story venue in Downtown Wellen with seating for up to 185 inside and out, including an open-air rooftop, large ground-level covered patio and indoor-outdoor bar.

"It has phenomenal views that will really be a focal point," says Oak & Stone cofounder Brett Decklever. "The covered patio faces directly out to the open community fountain and overlooks the lake."

The restaurant will offer 4,500 square feet of indoor dining on both floors and the 1,000-square-foot rooftop destination. Oak & Stone specializes in tavern food such as wings slow-roasted in a stone oven, artisan pizzas including build-your-own options,



Mirabella's interior will transport guests to the island of Sicily.



Bright Ice's small-batch ice creams are all natural with a few exceptions.

BRIGHT ICE
SCOOP SHOPS

SIP 'N' SERVE



COURTESY PHOTOS

Bright colors and a custom art wall welcome customers to Bright Ice.

burgers, and healthier menu selections like quinoa and veggie bowls. It also serves cocktails and craft beer, the latter available on its famous beer wall which tends to become a social destination.

“People like to hang out at the bar and the beer wall,” Mr. Decklever says. “It creates a social environment because they’re not just sitting at a table for two hours. They’re talking to friends and interacting with other guests.”

The look and feel will be comparable to Oak & Stone’s five other locations, with TVs, roll-up garage doors and an environment that caters to fun, family and community. “It’s a space where you’re always in movement, getting up to go the beer wall or outside,” says Mr. Decklever. “It’s a great space to come in and enjoy. We capture all age groups. We call Oak & Stone a place for the young at heart. It has a unique dining experience

people gravitate to.”

The Downtown Wellen restaurant will offer lunch, dinner and Sunday brunch.

“Wellen Park has the population growth businesses want,” says Mr. Decklever. “We’re incredibly excited about this opportunity. Oak & Stone complements Wellen Park well.”

Like the three new restaurants, Downtown Wellen is designed for the community to gather and enjoy the outdoors. In addition to retail shops, restaurants and businesses in a variety of buildings, Downtown Wellen will offer a food truck park, the centerpiece lake with a floating dock for paddleboarding and kayaking, entertainment and events at event lawn and town hall, a 2.8-mile trail for biking, walking and running around the lake. All in all, it’ll be a destination sought for both a high-energy ambience and low-key relaxation. 🍷

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AROUND WELLEN

Construction Update



Downtown Wellen will encircle the 80-acre lake.



Construction workers are helping to make the dream become a reality.



◀ A giant heritage oak tree, nearly 100 years old, stands ready to shade young and old alike at beautiful Downtown Wellen.

This mixed-use building ▶ will be home to retail shops and restaurants.

Tropia Wellen Park, offering one, two and three bedroom rental apartments, will be just a few steps away from the vibrancy and convenience of Downtown Wellen, which is slated to open in the fourth quarter of 2022. ▶



ADAM HUTCHINSON/WELLEN PARK JOURNAL

Sales have begun in Wellen Park's Playmore District

SPECIAL TO THE WELLEN PARK JOURNAL

Homebuyers interested in living at Wellen Park will soon have even more options from which to choose. Sales are beginning at the neighborhoods in Wellen Park's Playmore District, with options for a range of price points and lifestyles.

For buyers ready to make a move now, Florida-based Neal Communities currently offers paired villa and single-family homes at Boca Royale, ranging from 1,632 to 2,907 square feet and priced from the \$300s. The 1,000-acre gated neighborhood is set amid lakes and nature preserves and offers amenities that include a fitness center, resort-style pool, pickleball courts and "Hydro-Grid" clay tennis courts and an 18-hole par-72 golf course.

Neal Communities is also building two smaller Playmore District neighborhoods. Avelina will feature 96 British West Indies- and coastal-style single-family homes with five floorplan options, ranging in size from 2,327 to 2,762 square feet. The gated, maintenance-assisted neighborhood will include a small passive park for connecting with nature. Sales are expected to begin in February 2022 with pricing in the \$500s.

Wysteria from Neal Communities will offer paired villas and single-family homes ranging from 1,434 to 1,859 square feet. Neighborhood amenities will include a pool and spa, two pickleball courts and a small passive park. Sales are expected to begin in March 2022.

National luxury homebuilder Toll Brothers will offer 270 attached villas and one- and two-story, single-family homes at Solstice, its introductory neighborhood for Wellen Park. The future amenity center will include



COURTESY IMAGE

The Playmore District Neighborhood offers a range of home options, including condos, paired and attached villas and single-family homes.

a resort-style swimming pool with lap lanes, tennis and pickleball courts, fitness center, tot lot, social hall, and yoga and event lawns. Sales have begun, with pricing starting in the mid-\$300s.

The intimate Gran Place neighborhood from Southwest Florida homebuilder Sam Rodgers Homes will feature just 42 homesites. With pricing starting in the \$600s, the single-family, semi-custom homes will include three to four bedrooms and three-car garages. Only 21 of the neighborhood's 63 acres will be developed, and many lots will overlook lakes or preserve areas. Sales are expected to begin in January, and models will

open summer 2022.

Mattamy Homes will offer paired Villas from the upper \$300s and single-family homes from the low \$400s that range from 1,501 to 2,969 square feet at their Sunstone neighborhood. Residents will enjoy exclusive access to a resort-style amenity campus, including a beach-entry pool, clubhouse with lap lanes and spa, clubhouse with fitness center, dog park, tot lot, pickleball and bocce ball courts, and more. Villa homes sales have begun; single-family homes will be released for sale in January 2022.

Wellen Park Golf & Country Club will include approximately 1,300 homes by

national homebuilder Lennar. Sales are expected to begin late spring or early summer 2022, and buyers will be able to choose from a variety of condo and single-family floorplans priced from the \$200s. Residents will enjoy resort-style amenities, including an 18-hole championship golf course, pool with lap lanes and spa, fitness center, tennis and pickleball courts, dining and more.

The Playmore District puts residents in the middle of the action at Wellen Park. Neighborhoods enjoy easy access to the master-planned community's network of trails and amenities like CoolToday Park, the Atlanta Braves' spring-training home. The Playmore District also offers close proximity to Downtown Wellen, the community's central hub currently under construction that will offer a range of shopping, dining and recreational options.

Downtown Wellen will feature a vibrant hub filled with shopping, dining and entertainment options and other amenities. The mixed-use development will be open to residents and visitors alike and feature waterfront experiences, pedestrian-friendly streets and public community spaces.

Expected to open in the fourth quarter of 2022, Phase One of Downtown Wellen will include retail shops; waterfront dining and other restaurants; a stylish food truck park, a town hall; a unique natural playground and splash pad; an outfitter equipped with e-bikes, paddle boards and kayaks for enjoying the 80-acre Grand Lake; and a 2.8-mile health and wellness trail.

Wellen Park has been named the No. 5 top-selling master-planned community in the U.S. for the first half of 2021 by prominent real estate consulting firm RCLCO.

SEE PLAYMORE, A28 ▶

HOMES AT WELLEN PARK

WINTER 2021

| A21

ISLAND WALK – DIVOSTA



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Downsize and upgrade all at once with the Crestview home design at IslandWalk. With 1,574 square feet, and the ability to flex up to 3 bedrooms or 2.5 bathrooms, the Crestview design offers a layout that is just the right size, giving you room to breathe without wasting space. Enter the home to a formal entry way, offering seamless sightline views of the connected living spaces to the outdoors. Continue to 'wow' your company with a chef's kitchen suitably placed at the rear of the home, allowing for effortless indoor or outdoor meals with convenient access to the covered lanai. And, enjoy personalization options such as a multi-generational suite featuring an oversized bedroom with private ensuite bathroom, or the flex room offering a great opportunity for a home office or craft room for freeing up more space in the everyday living area.

Sales center:
13591 Salinas Street, Venice, FL
941-218-2208

Specifications

🏠 Base price: From \$390,990

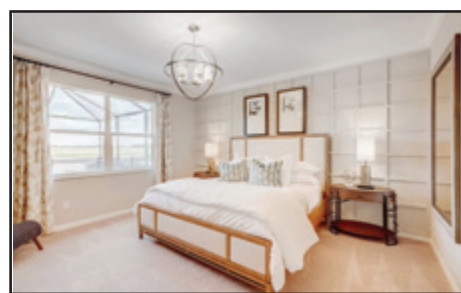
🏠 SF: 1,574

🛏️ 2-3 Bedrooms

🚿 2-2.5 Bathrooms

🏠 Home Type: Single Family

TORTUGA – LENNAR



Marsala

The 2,201-square-foot Marsala home is designed to entertain, featuring an open-concept kitchen and great room. A sumptuous owner's suite creates a personal retreat set apart at the back of the home with two walk-in closets and fabulous master bath. Two additional bedrooms each have their own private bathroom. The den is a great home office or hobby room. The Marsala is complete with a spacious covered lanai and two-car garage.

Sales center:
19611 Tortuga Cay Drive, Venice, FL
941-621-9324

Specifications

🏠 Base price: \$371,999

🏠 SF: 2,201

🛏️ 3 Bedrooms + Den

🚿 3 Bathrooms

🏠 Home Type: Single Family

* Prices are subject to change without notice.

GRAN PLACE – SAM RODGERS HOMES



Edgewater

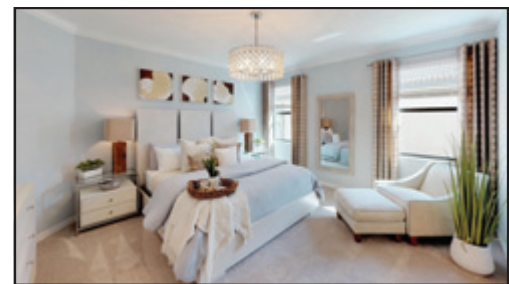
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Sales center: Coming Soon
18075 Home Run Drive, Venice, FL
941-621-9307

Specifications

- Base price: COMING SOON!
- SF: 3,127
- 3 Bedrooms
- 3 Bathrooms
- Home Type: Single family

SARASOTA M WCI, A LENN



Roma

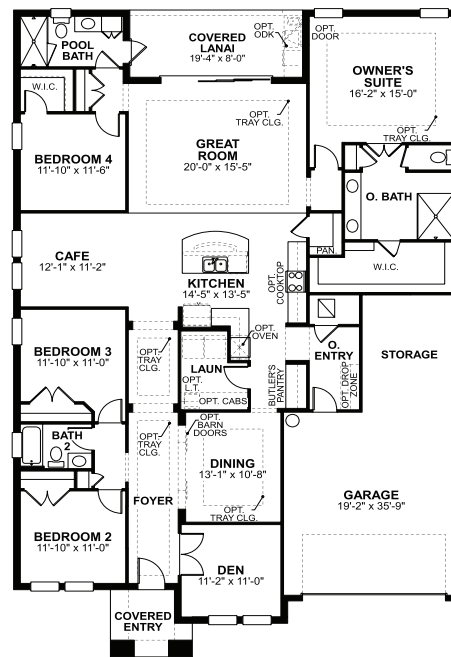
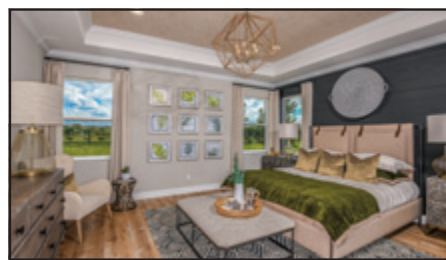
The living is easy with a perfect 1,917 square feet of living space. This home features three bedrooms plus den, two full baths, a large 2-car garage leading to screened-in lanai.

Sales center:
23114 Copperleaf Drive, Venice, FL
941-246-0076

Specifications

- Base price: \$380,999
- SF: 1,917
- 2 Bedrooms & Den
- 2 Bathrooms
- Home Type: Single Family

OASIS – M/I HOMES



The Jackson

A spacious and elegant design, the Jackson's standard layout includes 4 bedrooms, 3 bathrooms, a 3-car garage with additional storage space, and a den with a fully separate mudroom and utility room. As you walk in the Jackson, you step through a covered entry into a long foyer. A den sits at the beginning of the house, creating a light-filled space for work or play. Two large bedrooms sit on the other side with a full bathroom. At the end of a long hallway with an optional tray ceiling, you are greeted by a large open concept space. The kitchen offers an informal dining nook, ample countertop and cabinet storage, and a full walk-in utility room. With clear sightlines, the kitchen opens out into the great room. Designed with maximum space for entertaining and family gatherings, the great room is backed by huge sliding glass doors that lead to a covered lanai. The owner's suite is fit for any king and queen with an optional tray ceiling. The owner's bathroom offers double sinks, an enclosed shower space, a separate toilet area, and a massive walk-in closet with the option to extend it even further. The mudroom provides a seamless transition from outdoors to indoors, featuring a 2-car garage with additional space that can be used as a home gym, room for extra storage.

Sales center:
19806 Bridgetown Loop, Venice, FL
941-208-6897

Specifications

- Base price: \$471,990
- SF: 2,744 (Interior)
- 4 Bedrooms
- 3 Bathrooms
- Home Type: Single Family

* Prices are subject to change without notice.

NATIONAL –
STAR COMPANY

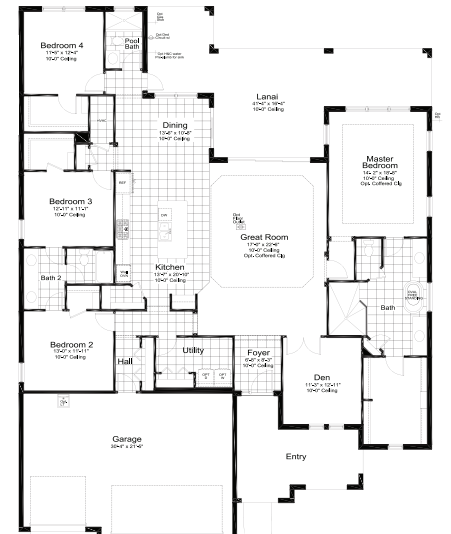


Under-air living space, featuring two spacious
large and airy and open living room with sliders

enice



GRAND PALM – NEAL COMMUNITIES



Kiawah

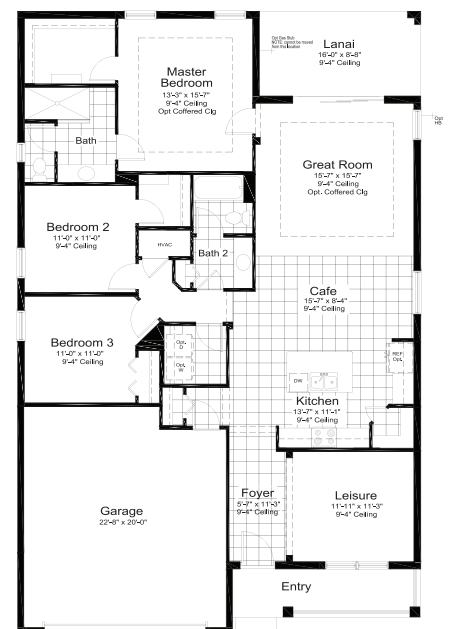
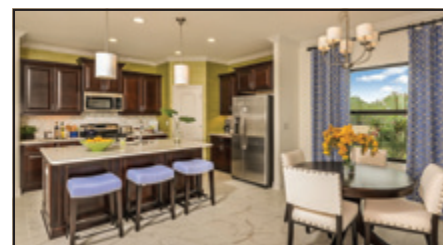
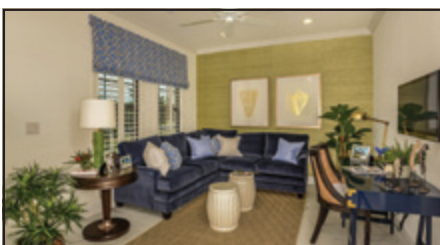
The handsome Kiawah four-bedroom home design offers an optional second floor with bonus room or loft, bath and either one or two extra bedrooms. Even without an upper level, this Grand Palm home is spacious. The open main living area includes a great room open to the island kitchen, which features a walk-in pantry, and dining area. In back, an expansive covered lanai can be built with an outdoor kitchen wall. The master suite with optional coffered ceiling in the large master bedroom includes an over-sized walk-in closet and roomy master bath with dual sink vanities, garden tub, large walk-in shower and private water closet. The three remaining bedrooms all feature walk-in closets. Two of these bedrooms share a Jack and Jill bath while the fourth bedroom is convenient to a pool bath. This home also includes a den and options for this home include additional bedrooms, baths, bonus room and loft. This floor plan is available in 1 or 2 stories.

Sales center:
1 Golf View Dr, Englewood, FL
941-214-9760

Specifications

- Base price: High \$600s
- SF: 2,907
- 4 Bedrooms
- 3 Bathrooms
- Home Type: Single Family

BOCA ROYALE – NEAL COMMUNITIES



Fresh Spring

The three-bedroom Fresh Spring floor plan by Neal Communities features an open main living area. The kitchen includes an island a walk-in pantry and opens to the café dining area and great room, with views through glass sliding doors to the covered lanai. This plan gives you to the options of having an outdoor kitchen wall on the lanai as well as a door with direct access to the master bedroom. The master suite also includes a walk-in closet and a master bath with walk-in shower and private water closet. The home features a den in lieu of a bonus leisure room. Other options include coffered ceilings in the great room and master bedroom, laundry tub in an expanded laundry room, and dual sinks in the bathrooms.

Sales center:
21209 Wacissa Drive, Venice, FL
941-214-9190

Specifications

- Base price: Mid \$400s
- SF: 1,812
- 3 Bedrooms
- 2 Bathrooms
- Home Type: Single Family

* Prices are subject to change without notice.

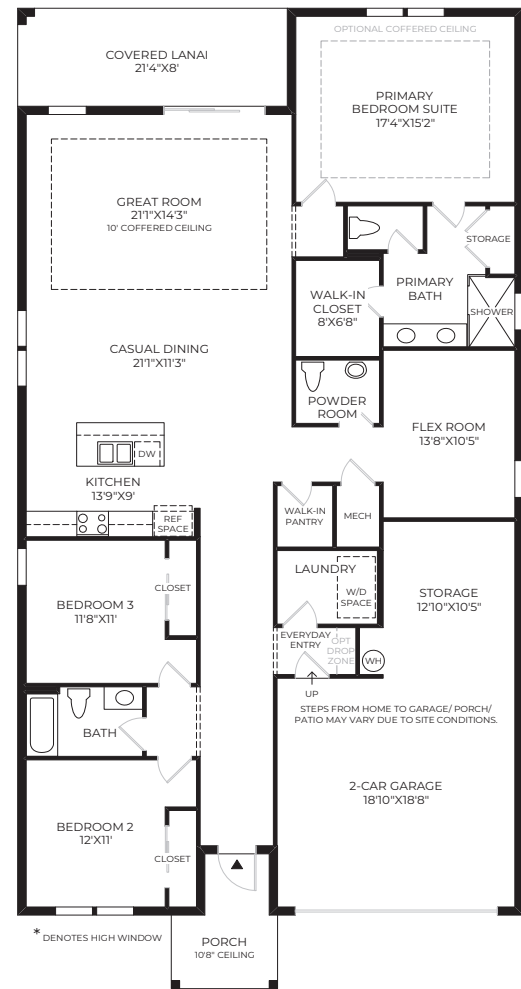
SOLSTICE – TOLL BROTHERS



Sollas

The Sollas features an open floor plan with abundant natural light throughout the home. Overlooking the bright casual dining area, the well-appointed kitchen includes a large center island with a breakfast bar and a sizable walk-in pantry. The spacious great room provides access to the covered lanai for year-round outdoor living. The serene primary bedroom suite is complemented by a large walk-in closet and a spa-like primary bath with a dual-sink vanity, a large luxe shower, and a private water closet. Secondary bedrooms offer convenient access to a shared bath. Additional highlights include a versatile flex room, a convenient powder room, centrally located laundry, and additional storage.

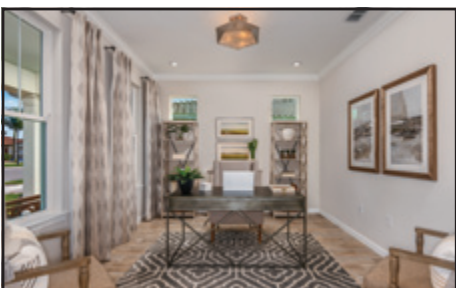
Sales Center: Offsite
152 Daylily Boulevard, Venice, FL
941-628-7086



Specifications

- Base price: \$471,995
- SF: 2,236+
- 3-4 Bedrooms
- 2½-3½ Bathrooms
- Home Type: Single family

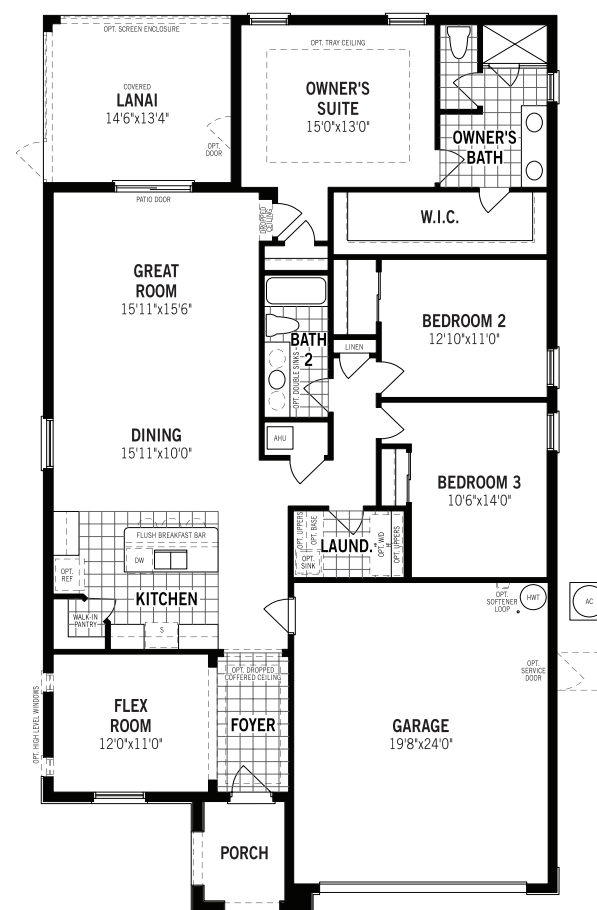
RENAISSANCE – MATTAMY HOMES



Riviera II

The Riviera II is an open and airy home with 1,937 square feet, 3 bedrooms, 2 bathrooms, and a 2-car garage. This 1-story single-family home welcomes you with a cozy front porch in the coastal exterior style, or a covered entry. This open home design is highlighted by a designer kitchen with island that overlooks the dining area and spacious Great Room. A sliding glass door provides easy access to the outdoor covered lanai and brings in abundant sunshine. In the front of the home, a well-lit flex room provides a versatile space for you to use as a home office, hobby room or retreat. Two bedrooms are conveniently located adjacent to a full bath. A spacious, owner's suite is located towards the back of the home for privacy and includes an owner's bath with 2 vanities and an oversized walk-in closet.

Sales center:
11720 Renaissance Blvd., Venice
941-208-6375



Specifications

- Base price: \$454,990
- SF: 1,937
- 3 Bedrooms
- 2 Bathrooms
- Home Type: Single family

* Prices are subject to change without notice.

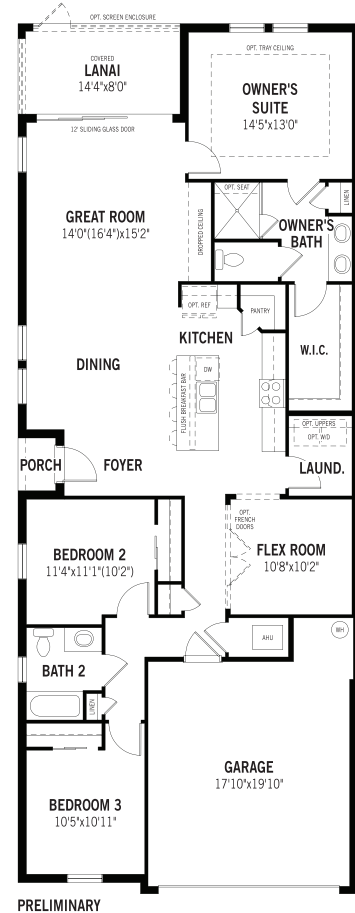
SUNSTONE – MATTAMY HOMES



Topsail

The 1,765 sq. ft. Topsail is an attached villa floorplan with generous space and style. The flow of space and natural light in this end home elevates your every activity, whether daily routine or special occasion — with shared living areas complementing private, comfortable bedrooms. The large, combined space of the dining room, kitchen with breakfast bar and Great Room is perfect for entertaining, with a covered lanai extending the stylish living space outdoors. Bedrooms 2 and 3 share a full bath, while the private owner's suite has its own lavish bathroom and a large walk-in closet. A flex room opens off the kitchen and bedroom hallway, offering a versatile space for anything you choose. Floorplan and illustrations are preliminary.

Now pre-selling:
11721 Renaissance Blvd., Venice
941-621-9759



Specifications

- Base price: Starting from the upper \$300s
- SF: 1,765
- 3 Bedrooms
- 2 Bathrooms
- Home Type: Attached Villa

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Dental care to smile about

BY CHARMAINE ENGELSMAN-ROGERS

Wellen Park Journal Correspondent

Imagine walking into a dental care office and feeling lifted by its atmosphere — a pleasant change for most.

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In some ways, the two doctors at the helm seem as different as night and day. Dr. Seref Gadalla originally hails from Egypt, and more recently Philadelphia, Penn., and received his Doctor of Dental Medicine degree, with honors in community oral health, from the University of Pennsylvania School of Dental Medicine.

Dr. Wylan Bernitt is a rare Florida native and earned his Doctor of Dental Medicine from LECOM School of Dental Medicine right here in Bradenton and a Bachelor of Science in evolutionary anthropology from Duke University.

(Ever wonder what the difference is between DMD and DDS? While the degree names differ depending on where the degree was obtained, they both represent the same education.)

Dr. Gadalla describes his professional mission is "... to provide detailed, high-quality dentistry that exceeds my patients' expectations. I am passionate about serving my community by serving their oral healthcare needs with honesty, integrity, and transparency."

He then shares, "My patients can always expect a warm reception in a calm and comforting atmosphere whenever they visit. They

SEE SMILE, A41 ►



COURTESY PHOTOS

Top: Dr. Gadalla and family.

Above: Dr. Bernitt and his rescue dog, Mica.

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AROUND WELLEN

Countdown to Downtown: Wine Pairing Dinners

While residents anxiously await all the dining experiences planned for Downtown Wellen, some recently participated in a wine-pairing dinner, the first in a series of monthly wine pairing dinners that will take place in the Welcome Center.

Wine expert Chrissie Powell of Republic National was on hand to describe the selected wines of the evening and why they were chosen for each dish.

Diners feasted on a chef-prepared meal from Barrel & Bean.

Starters included a roasted beet salad with goat cheese, candied walnuts, arugula and balsamic, paired with Tribute Pinot Noir and pumpkin bisque, pepitas with pumpkin spice crème fraiche and hazelnut oil, paired with Imagery Chardonnay.

The main course of grilled New York strip loin, rock shrimp scampi, smashed purple potatoes and roasted asparagus followed and was paired with Benziger Merlot.

Dessert was a rich caramel apple bread pudding with brown sugar whipped cream, paired with Prosecco Rose.

Music was provided by a string trio from the Venice Symphony.

Register for upcoming wine and dinner pairing events at wellenpark.com/events.



1. Lori Howe, Tracy Peterson and Noreen Haus
2. Musicians from Venice Symphony
3. Chef at work.
4. Wine expert Chrissie Powell, of Republic National Wine expert Chrissie Powell, of Republic National



PATRICIA HORWELL / WELLEN PARK JOURNAL



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AROUND WELLEN



5. Jim Fogarty, Jim Dawson and Suzanne Roffbert
6. Rick Aronofsky and Heidi Aronofsky
7. Cindy and David DeGeorge
8. Lee Walkup, Betsy Alderman and Patrice Bogden



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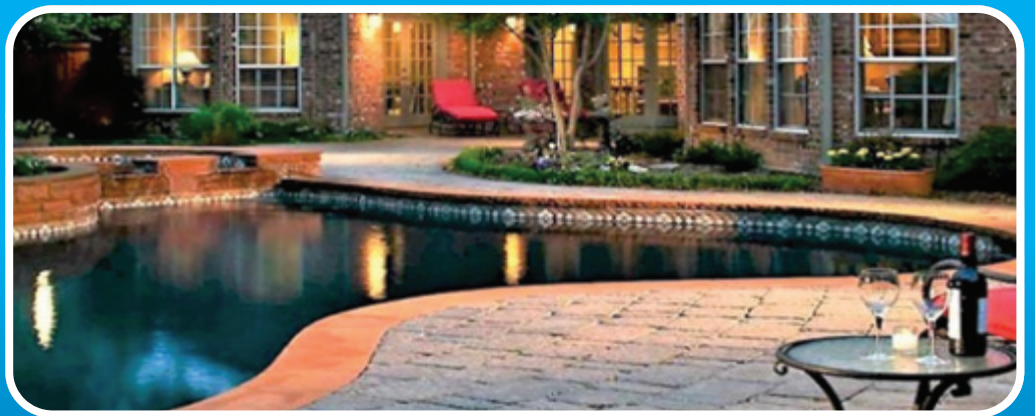
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AROUND WELLEN

Construction of new public safety building on schedule

BY ROBIN F. DEMATTIA

Wellen Park Journal Correspondent

The new City of North Port Public Safety Building being constructed by Wellen Park along Tamiami Trail near the intersection of Preto Boulevard is on schedule, according to John Luczynski, senior vice president of land development for Wellen Park.



GARRISON

Mr. Luczynski says the building is up, the windows are in and interior work is the focus right now. He praised the contractor for ordering supplies like steel earlier than needed to ensure it was on site when needed, to avoid delays due to current supply chain issues.

Wellen Park Development expects the parking lots to be paved by Christmas, the police garage finished by mid-January and the whole complex opened in time for spring training.

The timing is helpful as Wellen Park continues to grow and more people move to Florida.

“This building helps us put a footprint in the Wellen Park area that we’re very excited about,” says North Port Police Chief Todd Garrison. “It will enhance services on the western side of the city where we have more cars going in out of this area.”

Chief Garrison says the substation that will house fire, police and EMS will have space for in-house training using state-of-the-art technology.

There will also be a garage for storage of equipment such as speed trailers.

He says this model of shared space by all three services is not unique and has benefits.

“We’re bursting at the seams at police headquarters,” he says, “so this is an opportunity to spread our resources out a bit to give us more room.”

The department has hired eight additional police officers to cover this section of Wellen Park.

The new Station 86 will feature a four-



COURTESY PHOTOS

Above: The North Port Public Safety Building, which will house fire, police and EMS is on target for an opening this spring.

Right: An artist rendering of the future public safety building.

bay, double-deep, 7,000-square foot apparatus room with rescue vehicles and fire trucks behind bright red metal and glass doors. There will be sleeping quarters and a masonry stair tower that will serve as a spot where personnel can practice rappelling, ladder and hose training and other simulated conditions.

The campus will also include a rescue helipad and a commemorative Hero Plaza to memorialize and honor men and women who have served for their dedication and achievements.

Mr. Luczynski says Wellen Park’s approach was to build something similar to other public safety complexes.

“Our goal was to design an attractive facility that would compliment the architecture of Downtown Wellen.”



A vintage 1946 Seagrave fire truck will be displayed prominently in a glass room that will be lit at night, giving the complex an outstanding feature for the community to enjoy.

Mr. Luczynski says the building’s central location will offer better response times and provide a nice facility for future additions. He says he expects another fire station to be built in Wellen Park within three to four years.

The 25,000-square-foot building cost about \$10.6 million, he notes, plus professional fees and the purchase of a fire truck, making the total investment about \$13 million. Wellen Park is paying for everything upfront and will be repaid from impact fees collected through home sales.

A public grand opening is planned for Spring 2022. 🏠

PLAYMORE

From page 20

Wellen Park offers a vibrant mix of residential, commercial and recreational options among three districts: West Villages, Downtown Wellen and Playmore. The community

currently has approximately 9,000 residents, and at full build-out will have more than 60,000 residents and 22,000 homes.

The community’s brand and vision are rooted in wellness. Wellen Park’s wellness focus is holistic and practical, designed to give residents greater opportunities to connect with one another, take care of themselves and encourage a healthy and active

lifestyle, all within an inclusive, genuine community vibe.

For more information about living at Wellen Park, call 941-499-8210, go to wellenpark.com or visit the Welcome Center at 12275 Mercado Drive in Venice, Fla. The Welcome Center is open Monday-Saturday, 10 a.m.-5:30 p.m. and Sunday, 12 p.m.-5 p.m. 🏠



COURTESY PHOTO

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AROUND WELLEN

Countdown to Downtown: Family Paint Party



Wellen Park families gathered at the Welcome Center recently to paint the pavers and have their artwork immortalized into a walkway in one of Downtown Wellen's future playgrounds. 🎨



▲ Concentration.
▼ The family that paints together...

▲ Artists at work.
So many colors. ▶




PATRICIA HORWELL / WELLEN PARK TELEGRAPH

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AROUND TOWN

Halloween parade at Renaissance



▲ Olivia Miller

Lexi Rider, Tyler Sabadin, and Tori Sabadin ►



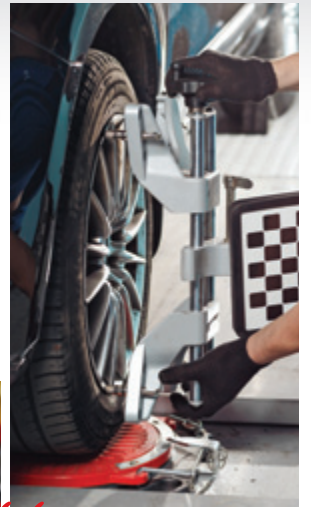
CHRIS TILLEY / WELLEN PARK JOURNAL

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WELL VERSED

Shovels as art

Breaking ground on Downtown Wellen provided the opportunity to connect with Wellen Park partners and neighbors and to be a part of something bigger. Nearly 40 development and builder partners joined in the celebration by contributing unique painted shovels that were used for the ceremonial turning of the dirt, which will later be used as an art installation in the mixed-use building within Downtown Wellen Park. These shovels represent Wellen Park's dedication to the arts, cultural experiences, wellness, and most of all, community.

As a way to continue sharing that sense of community, Wellen Park neighbors and visitors cast their ballots at the Welcome Center for their favorite painted shovel from Oct. 1 to Nov.24. For every vote cast, Wellen Park donated \$1 for the love of arts to the Arts and Cultural Alliance of Sarasota County.

Those painted shovels awarded first, second, and third place were each awarded a \$1,000 donation to a charity of their choice.

First Place: Visit Sarasota County

Second Place: Wellen Park Welcome Center

Third Place: M/I Homes

Additionally, a panel of judges selected a handful of superlatives who were each awarded a \$500 donation to a charity of their choice. Superlatives included:

- Most Representative of Wellen Park: Willis Smith Construction
- Most Creative: West Villages Improvement District
- Most Original: Gravina, Smith, Matte & Arnold Marketing and Public Relations
- Most Whimsical: DiVosta
- Most Representative of the Region: Visit Sarasota County 🏆



All three winners.

ADAM HUTCHINSON / WELLEN PARK JOURNAL



From top to bottom: Visit Sarasota County, Wellen Park Welcome Center and M/I Homes.



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WANDER WITH WELLEN

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BY PATRICIA HORWELL

Wellen Park Journal Editor

The islands of Sanibel and Captiva lie just about 80 miles to the south of Wellen Park, making it a great day trip — but you might fall victim to its charm and decide to stay longer. The Sanibel Captiva Chamber of Commerce can provide a listing of hotels on the islands.

An island paradise, it is believed by historians that Sanibel and Captiva islands were formed as one island about 6,000 years ago, as sediment that rose from the sea after being shaped by centuries of storm activity, according to the chamber.

The Calusa Indians were the first-known inhabitants.

Juan Ponce de Leon is said to have discovered Sanibel while searching for the Fountain of Youth and named the island after Queen Isabella.

The Calusa population became extinct by the late 1700s.

Pirates and Indian raids were the order of the day and it wasn't until 1870 that the U.S. government declared Sanibel safe for settlers. The Sanibel lighthouse was lit in 1884 and continues to be a working lighthouse.

The islands were visited by many famous Americans, including President Theodore Roosevelt, Charles and Anne Morrow Lindbergh, poet Edna St. Vincent Millay, and industrialists Thomas Edison and Henry Ford. Ms. Lindbergh wrote "Gifts from the Sea" while visiting Captiva.

Jay Norwood "Ding" Darling, a Pulitzer Prize-winning cartoonist and conservationist spent many winters on Captiva. He campaigned for federal protection of the island's



Shaded beach entrance.

fragile ecosystem and in 1945 the J.N. "Ding" Darling National Wildlife Refuge was opened on Sanibel.

Driving or biking the islands makes a person stop and take a deep breath — island life is casual and laid back.

Beautiful sandy beaches dot the islands. They are renowned for their wealth of shells and have won awards for being the best shelling beach and some of the best beaches in Florida.

Visitors must pay for parking — \$5 an hour on both islands. Public restrooms are stationed at every public beach access and handicap parking is always free.

At the causeway beaches, visitors can pull their vehicles right up to the water and parking here is free.



Crunchy grouper taco at the popular Island Cow.

The lighthouse beach and fishing pier is at the southern tip of Sanibel. Fish or walk the nature trail boardwalk through native wetlands. Again, there is a fee for parking and there are four free handicap spots.

J.N. Ding Darling National Wildlife Refuge

is open every day from 7 a.m. until about 5:30 p.m. during the winter months. Admission is \$10 per vehicle, \$1 per pedestrian and \$1 per bicycle. Walking trails are open every day and Wildlife Drive is open every day, except for Fridays.

Tarpon Bay Explorers operate a tram tour of the preserve every day but Friday. The tour lasts about 1 ½ hours. Tickets are \$13 for adults and \$8 for children. They also run a nature and sea life cruise. Tickets are \$30 for adults and \$20 for children. Call 239-472-8900 for information or reservations. The preserve is closed on national holidays.

Fishing is big on these islands.

State waters, always within sight of land, are where most of the fishing activity occurs and are abundant with tarpon, snook, redfish, snapper, shark, tripletail, Florida pompano, grunts and smaller grouper.

Farther out, when deep sea fishing one might bag a gag grouper, red grouper, black grouper, scamp grouper, yellowtail snapper, red snapper, lane snapper, mangrove snapper, hogfish, permit, African pompano, porgy or cobia.

Sanibel Island fishing charters are available with local professional guides.

These islands are the winter home to many species of migrating birds as well as the locals — herons, roseate spoonbills, wood storks and more. The interior wetlands are ideal for bird watching either early in the day or toward sunset. Center Tract at the Sanibel-Captiva Conservation Foundation, the Bailey Tract, Sanibel Gardens Preserve and the beaches are all great places to observe those feathered friends. When seeking out birds on the beach, it's best to visit at low tide when wading birds feed.

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There's plenty of shopping. An old, established community usually has its fair share of antique shops and Sanibel is no different. For fashion-conscious women, Sanibel Island also boasts the very first Chico's. Souvenirs, sports outfitters, clothing for the family, accessories and jewelry — all small shops — are plentiful.

And don't forget to stop for lunch or dinner. You'll find family-style, old-Florida, seafood and elegant dining throughout the islands. For instance, The Island Cow is a laid-back, comfortable spot with outdoor and indoor seating. Adults and kids alike will enjoy the atmosphere. Food here is served in large portions. Try the crunchy grouper taco, guava cheesecake and a frozen concoction while you listen to live music. The menu is huge with more than 300 items.

Just relax and remember to breathe.



The beaches of Sanibel and Captiva are known for the abundance of shells.

For more information, visit www.sanibel-captiva.org, www.thepointsguy.com/guide/sanibel-captiva-things-to-do/, www.fws.gov/dingdarling/visitorinformation.html or do an internet search. 📍



PATRICIA HORWELL / WELLEN PARK JOURNAL

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WHY I LIVE HERE

From Vets to Vettes

BY ROBIN F. DEMATTIA

Wellen Park Journal Correspondent

Gary Spinazze volunteered for the Navy right after high school, serving from 1968-1972 primarily onboard aircraft carriers as a “red shirt,” or ordnancemen flight deck crewman.

“When you watch films and see planes fly over (crew) with planes taking off on either side, that was my job,” Mr. Spinazze says. “I armed the bombs and missiles and then de-armed the planes coming back. I didn’t realize until later how dangerous that was.”

As part of the A-7A Corsair squadron out of Lemoore, California, he worked on the Franklin D. Roosevelt in the Mediterranean and the USS Oriskany in the Western Pacific, where he got hazardous duty pay and combat pay. The Oriskany was sunk as an artificial reef off the coast of Pensacola, not too far from where Mr. Spinazze now lives in Wellen Park.

“I saw a documentary where I watched it sink,” he says. “It was surreal. I thought, man, I was in those same areas a thousand times.”

He also has fond memories of being a defenseman with the Fresno Falcons, which was a minor league ice hockey team, when he served in California.

Overall, he says his military experience helped him grow up.

“I told my dad I knew nothing when I went in but sure learned a lot in four years,” Mr. Spinazze recalls. “It was a lot of responsibility and a lot of danger. I can’t believe I did what I did when I was younger.”

Mr. Spinazze stays active with veterans organizations. An avid classic car owner, he helped coordinate a Vettes for Vets car show that raised funds for the Douglas T. Jacobson State Veterans’ Nursing Home in Port



COURTESY PHOTOS

Above: Gary Spinazze with a missile.

Left: Gary Spinazze at a veterans luncheon with Medal of Honor recipient

Charlotte. He has also supported Southwest Florida Honor Flight, helped raise funds for Tee It Up For The Troops with Plantation Golf and Country Club and helps veterans in IslandWalk connect with benefits available through the VA system.

“Veterans don’t get recognized enough,” Mr. Spinazze says. “They wrote a blank check up to and including their life, and I don’t want to see any of them forgotten. We’re able to do the things we do today because of veterans.”

Leading the way is part of who Mr. Spinaz-

ze is. He spent his career in the food industry, working as director of national brands for Roundy’s, vice president of marketing for Richfood/SuperValu, vice president of national accounts and then director of corporate programs and trade relations at Bozzuto’s and later vice president of vendor relations at Nash Finch.

He served two terms as chairman of the board of the National Frozen and Refrigerated Foods Association and served on the Western Michigan University Food Distribution executive advisory board. He also served on the Food Marketing Institutes’ Wholesale Advisory Committee and with many other industry associations and committees throughout this career.

After retiring in 2014, he was inducted into the Frozen Food Industry’s Hall of Fame 2018.

Throughout his career, Mr. Spinazze

“It was a lot of responsibility and a lot of danger. I can’t believe I did what I did when I was younger.”

— Gary Spinazze

helped veterans and other non-profit organizations. He served as executive vice president and treasurer of the Food Industry Serving Heroes Foundation (now known as Friends In Service of Heroes). He was on the board of Special Olympics Minnesota for three years and was chairman of the NFC Foundation, the Nash Finch Company charitable giving arm. He was also active at the Minneapolis Fisher House.

He continues to stay busy in retirement and advises people to do the same.

“You’ve got to get off the couch,” he emphasizes. “Doctors say ‘motion is lotion.’ If you’re not active, you won’t age well.”

He says IslandWalk, where he lives, has a lot of activities, and there is always something happening in Wellen Park, especially with the World Series-winning Atlanta Braves.

Mr. Spinazze spends time with his wife, Sara, and enjoys his son, daughter and grandchildren.

He also recently helped start the Shark Tooth Sports Car Club in Venice to make friends and showcase his new Mercedes 2018 SL550.

“There’s so much to do,” he says. “Don’t limit your options.”

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EVENTS CALENDAR

Note: Please observe each venue's safety protocols and procedures. If not included in the listing, contact the venue directly. All listings subject to rescheduling or cancellation; check before you go.

Through Dec. 26: The Great American Trailer Park Christmas Musical, Off Broadway Palm, 1380 Colonial Blvd., Fort Myers. Performances Tuesday-Sunday. 1- 239-278-4422

Through Dec. 31: Festival of Lights Holiday Showcase, Fishermen's Village, 1200 W. Esplanade, Punta Gorda 1-800-639-0020

Through July 27: Venice Area African American History: Over 100 Years in the making. Runs from now until July 27, . Hours: Mondays, Tuesdays and Wednesdays, 10 a.m.-4 p.m. First and third Saturdays, Oct-April, 11 a.m.-3 p.m. Free to the public. Venice Museum & Archives, 351 Nassau St S, Venice, FL 34285 (Historic Triangle Inn) 941-486-2487 www.venicemuseum.org

Dec. 12: The Deck the Halls holiday concert with the Gulf Coast Symphony, 7 p.m. at Barbara B. Mann Performing Arts Hall. Festive sounds of the season as the Gulf Coast Symphony and Fort Myers Symphonic Masteringers present your favorite holiday medleys. From Leroy Anderson's endearing Sleigh Ride, a medley of music from Christmas movie classics, to Silent Night as arranged by Mannheim Steamroller, and much, much more. For tickets to shows at Mann Hall, call 239-481-4849 or visit www.gulfcoastsymphony.org

Dec. 15-16: The Naples Players Drive-In Movie Night: A Christmas Story - Hosted in the 50-car lot located at 300 8th Street S., just north of the 5th Avenue South home of The Naples Players community theatre. Soundtracks

will be broadcast over short-range FM radio. 8 p.m. Tickets in advance. www.naplesplayers.org

Dec. 16: Holiday Jazz at the MACC at 7 p.m. The Gulf Coast Jazz Collective brings the Collective's special swinging style to holiday classics special guest artists saxophonist Valerie Gillespie and trombonist Herb Bruce. Under the artistic direction of drummer, educator, composer & arranger Paul Gavin, the Jazz Collective invites the best artists from the country to collaborate in concerts that span the entire genre of jazz. 13411 Shire Lane, Fort Myers (just off Daniels Parkway). For tickets, call 239-277-1700 Ext 108 or visit www.gcsymphony.org.

Dec. 16: Fun Time Cloggers at Fishermen's Village, 1200 W. Retta Esplanade, Punta Gorda Noon-3 p.m., 800-639-0020

Dec. 17: GO Divas: Renaissance Christmas Carols. The Gulf Theater, 900 W. Marion Ave., Punta Gorda 7 p.m. \$35, 239-529-3925

Dec. 19: 2 p.m. and 7 p.m. shows - Holiday Pops - Seasonal Favorites. Charlotte Performing Arts Center, 701 Carmalita Street, Punta Gorda 33590. Delight in the wonder of the holiday season with the Punta Gorda Symphony. Tickets: \$65 Adult - \$15 Student (Valid Student ID Required, tickets held at will-call) 941-205-5996 or info@PGSymphony.org

Dec. 19: Hand and Harvest Christmas Artisans Market. 10 a.m.-1 p.m. Mercato, 9132 Strada Place, Naples. www.mercatoshops.com

Dec. 19: The Naples Players presents "It's a Wonderful Life: A Live Radio Play." 7: 30 p.m. Cambier Park, 755 8th St., Naples. 239-263-7990 www.naplesplayers.org

Dec.19: Festive Holiday Favorites with the Suncoast Brass, 7-9 p.m., Gulf Theater at the

Military Heritage Museum (900 West Marion Ave Punta Gorda, Florida 33950). The Suncoast Brass will perform holiday favorites such as Joy to the World, Hanukkah Suite, We Wish You A Merry Christmas, selections from the Nutcracker Suite and more. https://ci.ovationtix.com/35397.

Dec. 26: The Temptations and The Four Tops tribute. 7: 30 p.m. The Stage, 9144 Bonita Beach Road, Bonita Springs. 239-405-8566

Dec. 27: Billy Joel, Lady Gaga, Bob Seger and Cher tribute. 7: 30 p.m. The Stage, 9144 Bonita Beach Road, Bonita Springs. 239-405-8566

Jan. 7: Jan 4: Wellen Park Wine and Dinner Pairing. 6:30 p.m. in the Wellen Park Welcome Center. Featuring four different wines accompanied by a chef's selection of paired courses. Guests will also enjoy musical entertainment by members of the Venice Symphony. Tickets are \$80 per person. For tickets, visit wellenPark.com/events

Jan. 7-8: 2 Florida Winter National Wood Art Expo & Competition, 9 a.m.-4 p.m. One of the premier wood art shows in the country since 1986. Hundreds of entries for competition, vendors of all kinds (wood, tools, blanks, dust equipment, art supplies and more), demonstrations, raffle, artists' displays and sales. Charlotte Harbor Event and Conference Center, 75 Taylor St., Punta Gorda. \$7 for one day or \$10 for two days. www.woodturnersofswfl.org/event-4534201

Jan. 12: Cycling Group Meet-Up at Wellen Park Welcome Center - 9 a.m. A community ambassador will greet the group and share a map of our various trails and pathways. It's up to you how far you want to cycle. Each participate will also be given two free drink tickets

to redeem at our adjacent café, Barrel & Bean, so you can enjoy a beverage with your fellow cyclists after you wrap up your ride. Your choice of beer/wine/iced tea/coffee/water. Reserve your spot at wellenpark.com/events.

Jan. 15: Kaleidoscope of the Arts benefit for North Port Area Art Guild (501c3 nonprofit). Join us for a fast-paced evening showcasing performances by artists and art organizations of North Port. Plantations Golf and Country Club. 500 Rockley Blvd, South Venice. Come as yourself or dress as a favorite character from the art world. Doors open at 4: 30 p.m. Dinner starts at 5:30 p.m. 50/50 raffle, silent auction, gift basket raffle and live auction. Tickets available by calling the North Port Art Center 941-423-6460 or online www.flipcause.com/secure/cause_pdetails/MTMwMTky

Jan. 15: Running Group Meet-Up at Wellen Park Welcome Center - 9 a.m. A community ambassador will greet the group and share a map of our various trails and pathways. It's up to you how far you want to run. Each participate will also be given two free drink tickets to redeem at our adjacent café, Barrel & Bean, so you can enjoy a beverage with your fellow runners after you wrap up your ride. Your choice of beer/wine/iced tea/coffee/water. Reserve your spot at wellenpark.com/events

Jan. 18: Wellen Park Book Club Buzz. Join your neighbors to read great books and talk about them over a cup of coffee (or two). Last Tuesday of each month in the Wellen Park Welcome Center at 8:30 a.m. Books will be on loan from the Sarasota County Library System. Wellen Park will provide two free coffees from Barrel & Bean Café to book club members. Reserve your spot at wellenpark.com/events

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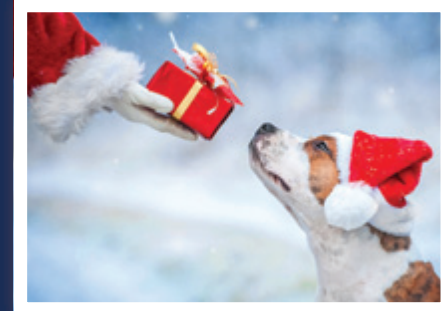
Colleen and Nick Luckner with Hennessy and Cooper





PET TIPS

From veterinarian
Andrea Daniels of West Villages Animal Clinic
www.westvillagesvet.com



A practical shopping list for your pets to have happy holiday.

These gifts can help ensure your pets live long, healthy lives and will be around to celebrate the holidays for many years to come.

Nutritious food: Special treats and table scraps shared from holiday meals may make pets sick or lead to weight gain. If you want to give food treats to your pet, make or buy treats formulated just for them; your veterinarian can advise you regarding what's best for your pet.

A life free of parasites: Are your pets up to date on their heartworm medication and flea and tick preventives? Parasite prevention is a great gift for pets. Talk to your veterinarian about the right course of treatment for your pet.



Regular veterinary care: While a trip to the vet might not seem like anyone's idea of a gift, that routine checkup could spot potential health problems before they become serious.

Pet insurance: Pet insurance helps defray the potential costs of serious medical procedures. Alternatively, pet owners can prepare for these scenarios by setting a little money aside each month. Preparation for a health

emergency is a great gift for you and your pet.

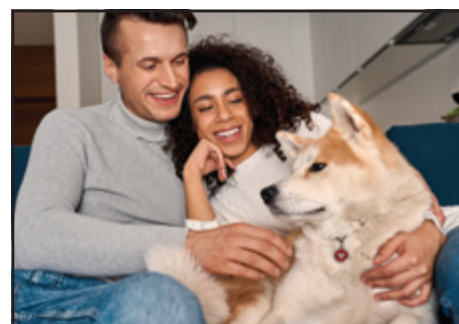
Exercise: Extended play sessions, longer walks, keeping your pet at a healthy weight and engaging in exercise together are all gift ideas of better health to your pet.

A microchip: Having your pets microchipped is a quick, inexpensive way to help ensure that you are reunited if they ever get lost.

A disaster preparedness plan: We might not like to think about it (especially during the holidays), but disasters can happen at any time of the year. And while we may be unable to prevent them, we can

prepare for them. Make sure you have a disaster preparedness plan that includes your pets. See www.avma.org/resources/pet-owners/emergencycare/pets-and-disasters for tips.

Lots of love: The best gift we can give our pets is unconditional love. Showering your pet with affection and attention will make them much happier than any gift you can wrap up with a bow. 🐾



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WELL VERSED

Happily Dancing Again

BY CHARMAINE ENGELSMAN-ROBINS

Wellen Park Journal Correspondent

Like so many of the Southwest Florida arts companies, members of the Sarasota Ballet company are happy to be performing before a live audience again. The pandemic put an end to in-person audiences for nearly two years, but now everyone can be in one place to share the joy of the performances that have put the Sarasota Ballet on the map. (Current Covid protocols can be found on the ballet's website.)

The company was founded by former ballet dancer Jean Weidner Goldstein in 1987. It has built a national and international reputation for excellence in the performances, programs and education it offers. Iain Webb and wife Margaret Barberi are the ballet's director and assistant director.

Marketing Director Jason Ettore describes these upcoming shows that should keep the box office phone ringing.

- Dec. 17-18 at the Van Wezel Performing Arts Hall: "Giselle"

Production by Sir Peter Wright, original choreography by Jules Perrot and Jean Coralli, and music by Adolphe Adam.

- Jan. 28-31 at the FSU Center for the Performing Arts: "Love & Betrayal"

- "Valse nobles et sentimentales" with choreography by Sir Frederick Ashton and music by Maurice Ravel.

- "The Rake's Progress" with choreography by Dame Ninette de Valois and music by Gavin Gordon.

- "Napoli Act III" with production by Johan Kobborg, choreography by August Bournonville, and music by Edvard Helsted and Holger Simon Paulli.



MATTHEW HOLLER / COURTESY PHOTOS

Lauren Ostrander

Teaching the youngsters

Proving that ballet is not only for adults, the Sarasota Ballet School has an education department that embraces young people. The classes provide a quality dance education for children as young as three years old. The school also works in partnership with Sarasota and Manatee county schools in an effort to involve at-risk students in the free program, "Dance — the Next Generation," by conducting enrichment and dance classes for an hour each, two or three times per week; the company provides leotards, shoes and whatever costumes may be needed. This



Ricardo Graziano & Ryoko Sadoshima

program embraces students from grade three up to grade 12. 💡



Ricardo Rhodes

The Hermitage Artist Retreat reaches out to community

BY CHARMAINE ENGELSMAN-ROBINS

Wellen Park Journal Correspondent

The term "artist retreat" might conjure up a visual of elusive, talented people sequestered away together in cottages in a secluded, natural setting, perhaps accessible via a long dusty road. If you have not experienced the artistic offerings and outreach of the Hermitage Artist Retreat on Manasota Key, you might be surprised to learn that what sounds like an artist's enclave is more of a people's access to works that represent what is new in the world of art.

This nonprofit is a creative haven. Artists from all over the world — up to 20 at a time — can focus on their artistic interests among like-minded creators and performers for two-week stints.

The Hermitage is a part of the community at large, a pulsing heart of southwest Florida's art scene. Artists in attendance are more accessible to the community than they might be in other settings and they share a free show, performance, or exhibit with the public while in residence there. This retreat is more of a get-to than a get-away, bringing some of the newest talents in a variety of disciplines to an area that would otherwise not have access to them for several more years. Even traveling to bigger, better-known, pricey venues wouldn't allow access to these new artists and works as quickly as they are presented here through the Hermitage. As proudly noted on its Facebook page, "Hermitage Fellows have included twelve Pulitzer Prize winners, multiple Tony, Oscar, Emmy, Grammy nominees and winners, Poets Laureate, MacArthur 'Genius' and Guggenheim Fellows, and hundreds of extraordinary artists from around the world."

The retreat's artistic director and CEO — writer, actor and producer Andy Sandberg — was himself recipient of a Tony award. Mr. Sandberg now devotes his energy and enthusiasm to making and keeping neighboring communities aware of the creative



COURTESY PHOTOS

Audience enjoying presentation on the beach at the Hermitage.



SANDBERG

offerings that the Hermitage offers. Rather than presenting long-known artists' offerings that have found their way south after many reviews and runs in larger markets, "... we're more interested in the creative development of new work."

Mr. Sandberg says. "In fact, at a show we will sometimes announce, 'If there are any New York Times critics in the audience, please leave.'"

Last year, the Hermitage offered 50 outside events. In addition to the offerings held on the Hermitage Retreat's nine-acre beachfront and lawn, they bring talent to the community as well.

Mr. Sandberg describes some of the retreat's future events:

- Dec. 17 at Booker High School the retreat will present "Hermitage at Booker: The Edge of Music," as part of the Hermitage's recent partnership and artist series with

Booker High School VPA.

- Jan. 7, "Journeys of Identity in Poetry & Music" with Hermitage Fellows Chet'la Sebree and Wang Lu at the Hermitage Beach (entrance at 6660 Manasota Key Road, Englewood.)

- Jan. 14, "Walk on Through" with Hermitage Fellow and Tony Award winner Gavin Creel, in partnership with a commission from the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, N.Y. at the Hermitage Beach (entrance at 6660 Manasota Key Road, Englewood.)

- Jan. 21, Hermitage Sunsets @ Selby Gardens: "The Work" with Hermitage Fellow and Pulitzer Prize Winner Michael R. Jackson, at and in partnership with Marie Selby Botanical Gardens.

- Register for all programs on the website.

At the Hermitage, guests have opportunities to enjoy art in its many forms in a casual. Audience members bring their own chairs and refreshments to enjoy during some performances. Keep up with programming details at the Hermitage Facebook page or www.hermitageartistretreat.org where one can also pre-register for events.



The Artful Lobster at fundraising event.

"This is a big time of growth and change for the Hermitage," Mr. Sandberg says. "We're sort of the hidden gem that doesn't want to stay hidden." 💡

"My patients can count on me to spend as much time as needed with them to ensure that they leave our office healthy, informed, and most of all — happy!"

— Dr. Wylan Bernitt,
West Villages Dental Care



SMILE

From page 25

can also count on my experience and expertise to ensure that they leave our office smiling with pride." He also has a bit of fun with this: "doctor + engineer + artist = dentist."

Dr. Bernitt says, "My mission in dentistry is to always treat my patients fairly and show them the respect that they deserve. It is an honor and a pleasure to be able to practice dentistry in my hometown and serve the people of my community. I am dedicated to treating every person who walks in our door with the same empathy, care, and attention as I would give a member of my own family."

"My patients can count on me to spend as much time as needed with them to ensure that they leave our office healthy, informed, and most of all — happy!" He also notes that "The best and most affordable dentistry is when the right thing is done extremely well the first time and it lasts for a long time."

Harley Cardinal, office manager for West Villages Dental Care, can't say enough good things about how blessed she and everyone else at West Villages Dental Care consider themselves. She says working with two outstanding doctors they all respect, alongside fellow dedicated staff members, and serving satisfied clientele makes their careers a positive part of their lives.

The many effusive client comments and reviews posted online (a near five out of five-star rating) indicate that these professionals are living up to their own great expectations and those of their patients.

The practice provides a myriad of services, including comfortable and cosmetic dentistry, crowns, dental imaging, dentures, implants, oral health, orthodontics, teeth whitening, endodontics, Invisalign, oral surgery and periodontics.

As part of its compassionate care policy, West Villages Dental Care offers high quality emergency dental care during normal business hours, even if the person is not already an established patient. Just call them and set up a prompt appointment as soon as possible.

A glimpse of the doctors' personal lives gives a more complete picture of the people patients are relying on for their care.

Dr. Gadalla is a husband and father who is dedicated to his family and his faith. In addition to enjoying photography, woodworking and creating palm art with his daughter (for their church), he enjoys singing in the choir and helping with Sunday school.

Dr. Bernitt is a newlywed who relishes serving the very community where he grew up and sharing the great outdoors with his wife (fellow DMD Nicole Dunlap). He and their beloved family rescue dog, Mica, share a love of the water and can often be found skiff poling in Charlotte Harbor and fly fishing.

To find out more about West Villages Dental Care, visit its Facebook page (where Ms. Cardinal says you'll find "lots of fun pictures") and the practice website, www.westvillagesdentalcare.com. Schedule an appointment online or call 941-786-0897 during business hours (Monday and Friday from 8 a.m. to 5 p.m.; Tuesday through Thursday, 8 a.m. to 6 p.m.)

As their website asks: Are you ready to smile? 😊

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WELL VERSED

Sarasota Opera ready to bring back what so many have been missing

BY CHARMAINE ENGELSMAN-ROBINS

Wellen Park Journal Correspondent

Everyone seems a bit giddy at the prospect of having even some semblance of our previous normalcy restored to South West Florida arts scene performances.

The folks at Sarasota Opera are especially elated in their anticipation of performing for a regular, in-house audience this season. Communications Coordinator Lana Mullen provided some current information on the opera house, its history and a glimpse into some scheduled offerings at this exceptional venue.

The Sarasota Opera House underwent a \$20 million renovation and rehabilitation in 2007 and has been called (by Musical America) “one of America’s finest venues for opera.” Since 1983, the company has been under the artistic leadership of Victor DeRenzi, marking this his 40th season as artistic director and principal conductor. General Director Richard Russell has provided administrative leadership since 2012.

The pandemic interrupted much of the arts scenes’ regular presentations, and the opera was no exception. “The community has been so generous with support over the past year, and we wanted to show our appreciation by making a return to ‘normal’ as soon as possible,” Mr. Russell has said.

Mr. DeRenzi added, “We are very much looking forward to having the community gathered in the theater again and enjoying live opera together.”

Their statements go beyond addressing



2015 “Tosca”

ROD MILLINGTON / COURTESY PHOTO

only the business side of the art scene. Musicians and other artists have referenced that the vibe they get from interacting with each other and their audiences, or the groove, is simply not the same with streaming or recording performances.

The fall season launched in late October with Gioachino Rossini’s “The Silken Ladder (La scala di seta)” and received a strong response from opera-goers, reiterating the mutual feeling that there is just nothing like sharing a live performance in the company of its presenters and fellow enthusiasts.

Youth Opera

Also returning after a hiatus from the pandemic is the company’s impressive youth program, the Sarasota Youth Opera. In existence since 1984, it is said to be the most comprehensive youth opera program in the U.S. It is also the only program in the United States committed to presenting annual full-scale opera productions for young voices ages eight to 18, accepting all who wish to take part (regardless of skill level or ability to pay). Its after-school courses, summer camps and fully-staged youth



SARASOTA OPERA / COURTESY PHOTO

1987 “Daughter of the Regiment”

opera productions make Sarasota Youth Opera a national model for opera education. In-person rehearsals restarted this fall and a joint concert with the Sarasota Opera Apprentice Artists and the Sarasota Open Orchestra will take place during the Winter Festival on March 22.

2022 Winter Opera Festival

A jewel in the crown of this exceptional arts community, Sarasota Opera has the following performances scheduled for the 2022 Winter Opera Festival.:

- Puccini’s “Tosca,” Feb. 12-March 19
- Donizetti’s “The Daughter of the Regiment,” Feb. 19-March 8
- Bizet’s “The Pearl Fishers,” March 5-19
- Verdi’s “Attila,” March 12-22

Tickets

Single tickets and subscriptions for the 2022 Winter Opera Festival are on sale at www.sarasotaopera.org, by phone at 941-328-1300, via email at boxoffice@sarasotaopera.org and at the Sarasota Opera Box Office, 61 N. Pineapple Ave., Sarasota. 🍷

Cause for celebration The return of the live orchestra — and audience

BY CHARMAINE ENGELSMAN-ROBINS

Wellen Park Journal Correspondent

Betsy Hudson-Traba has been a fan of and participant in the Sarasota Orchestra for, as she laughingly says, “longer than some of my colleagues have been alive.”

That might not be as long as one would think — Hudson-Traba says that younger musicians just coming out of conservatories are beyond anxious to become part of the Sarasota Orchestra.

“I am surrounded by young, cool, hip people who bring great energy and enthusiasm to the group,” she says. “They’re fresh and new and not in the least jaded ...and they know that this is definitely not your grandfather’s orchestra.”

For musicians, finding a good orchestra job is “an extremely competitive business,” according to Hudson-Traba. “We have a tremendous influx of talented young musicians coming to us for many reasons — our community orchestra is one of the finest in the nation and our location is one of the best climates you can find. Our auditions draw a mix of new players (and there are more of them than there are positions available everywhere), and seasoned performers who, for one reason or another, are seeking a change. Conductors and soloists who can perform anywhere in the world choose the Sarasota Orchestra, realizing there is no need to go to Miami or Tampa. They are all aware of how lucky they are to be doing this, and especially to be doing it here.”

How much room is there within the orchestra?

“We have 48 full-time musicians,” says Hudson-Traba, “and (more or less) 30 part-time.”

This diversity of artists translates into an excellent array of sounds and styles for the audience as well as the performers, she says, as is reflected in the five scheduled series scheduled through the Sarasota Orchestra concert season:

Chamber Soirees

• Dec. 19 - Sarasota String Quartet - Four instruments, unlimited potential: The glorious power of the string quartet cannot be contained. Friedrich Schiller’s poem “The Gods of Greece” inspires this program.

• Jan. 23 - Mendelssohn Octet - “The Beautiful Night” by Johann Wolfgang von Goethe.

• Jan. 27 - Inheritance - “The Harp” by Bruce Weigl

• Jan. 27 - Beethoven, Mozart, and Michael Tilson Thomas: each of these extraordinary composers learned the “family business” from his father.

• Feb. 17 - Voices of Color - “BLK History Month” - Nikki Giovanni’s poem “BLK History Month” provides a powerful well of inspiration for February’s concert of works by Black artists from the last century.

• April 10 - Quintessential Clarinet - Sarasota Orchestra principal clarinetist Bharat Chandra champions his versatile instrument in a program of paired quintets, buoyed by Henry Wadsworth Longfellow’s “A Psalm of Life.”

Great Escapes

This is one of Sarasota Orchestra’s most popular presentations, offering a mix of light classics and popular favorites in themed programs:

- Jan. 12-16: Comedy Tonight
- Feb. 9-13: Be mine
- March 16-20: Journey on the Orient Express
- April 20-23: Saddles of the Silver Screen

Masterworks Series

The series features “symphonic blockbusters alongside vibrant works by contemporary composers.”

- Jan. 7, 8 and 9 - Ohlsson Plays Rachmaninoff.
- Feb. 3 - Beethoven and Tchaikovsky.
- Feb. 25 | Neel PAC, Feb. 26, 27 - Fairy



Daniel Jordan

Tales and Fireworks.

• March 10 | Neel PAC, March 11, 12, 13 New World – Dvořák began his New World Symphony out of love and appreciation for the African-American spirituals.

• April 1, 2, 3 - Breaking Boundaries - a sensational adventure with four composers who fearlessly charted their own paths.

Pops

These concerts strive to deliver popular favorites and everlasting classics.

- Jan. 21 and 22 - Revolution: The Music of The Beatles
- March 4 and 5 -The Envelope Please - Three of Broadway’s best join Sarasota Orchestra in a concert of songs that garnered Grammys, Tonys and Oscars
- April 8 and 9 - Unforgettable: The American Songbook - Romantic anthems and cherished jazz standards from the early 20th century, including Frank Sinatra’s “Come Fly with Me” and Etta James’ “At Last.”

Outdoor Pops

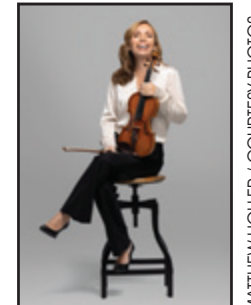
• May 6 and 7: Grab your bell bottoms and come out to the Orioles’ Ed Smith Stadium for a night of music from a time when “catch you on the flip side” referred to vinyl records. Sarasota Orchestra backs the powerful vocals of Nashville-based duo Swearingen and Kelli, who faithfully recreate the magic of ’70s singer-songwriters such as James Taylor,



Jennifer Best Takeda



Joshua Horne



Léna Cambis

Carole King, Neil Diamond, Joni Mitchell and more. A spectacular fireworks display closes out an evening of hits and home runs.

(Tickets for this concert are available through the Ed Smith Stadium Box Office. Call 941-893-6300 or visit Orioles.com/Sarasota.)

Discoveries

• May 14 - Discover Mozart: Genius of Youth - A remarkable season closes with Mozart’s Symphony No. 25, Britten’s first opus, and Tchaikovsky’s Rococo Variations.

And there you have it — definitely something for everybody.

For complete concert information, visit www.sarasotaorchestra.org.

About Sarasota Orchestra

Since 1949, Sarasota Orchestra has inspired and entertained music-lovers across the region and visitors from around the world. As the oldest continuing orchestra in the state of Florida, each year the 76-member Orchestra performs more than 100 classical, pops, chamber music, and community outreach concerts. Sarasota Orchestra’s acclaimed music education program includes the Sarasota Youth Orchestras, established in 1959. Sarasota Orchestra is also the parent program of the world-renowned Sarasota Music Festival, founded in 1965. 🍷



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In the spirit of the holiday season, I would like to acknowledge my customers for an exceptional year in real estate. I cannot express in words how grateful I am for your business, and I truly cherish the relationships we have created. From my family to yours, I wish you much health and happiness in 2022!



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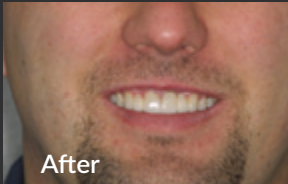
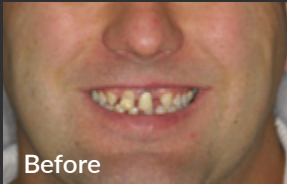
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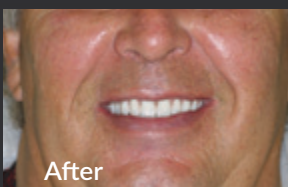
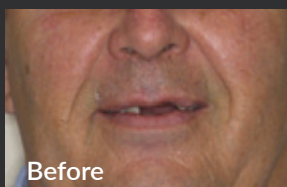
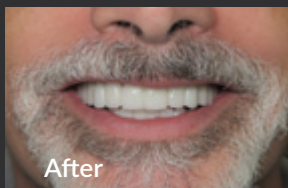
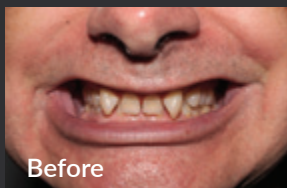
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Katie Marie
Smile Makeover Patient
★★★★★

Actual Patient, Katie Marie

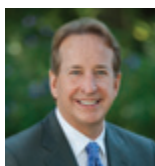


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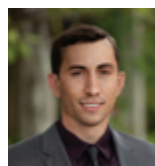
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