

## The 2021-2022 Snowbird Season is Officially Here



Last Monday, a flock of snowbirds gathered at the Destin Community Center to officially open their “Roost.” The group was smaller than it had been in previous years, but the joy of being able to gather, shake hands, and in many cases, embrace old friends, was huge. Dignitaries from the Destin Chamber of Commerce who were there to greet and meet the snowbirds included Chamber President & CEO Shane Moody and Chamber Vice President Elizabeth Spies.

The past 20 months have been surreal, and everyone has a pandemic story to share. Here are the stories some Michigan snowbirds shared with me.

Brenda and Dick Murphy have enjoyed coming to Destin to escape the northern ice and cold for many years. Last year, knowing that all snowbird activities had been cancelled, they decided to pack a good supply of face masks and head south as usual. They found ways to keep busy. Brenda said she put a 1,000-piece jigsaw puzzle together, then added, “Never again!” They weren’t sure if they would be able to engage in their favorite activities, (Brenda likes to golf and swim, and Dick is an avid fisherman), but, as Brenda put it, “If nothing else, we knew we could at least go out for a walk and enjoy the sunshine.” Still, it was a challenging time for them. Both Brenda’s sons contracted COVID (one even being a health-care provider) and it was stressful for her not to be able to be there for them. Also, they learned that two of their friends had succumbed to the virus. “It makes you realize what’s really important,” Brenda said. “We don’t take our relationships for granted, but we are now more aware of how important it is to stay connected whether through visits, phone calls or social media.”

Diane DeVincent and Jim Demers also decided to head south last season. Why not? Diane was never able to “hunker down” anyhow. At the end of the 2019/2020 snowbird season, She and Jim headed back to Michigan just as the country was beginning to shut down, and many people were taking shelter in the safety of their homes. “I had no choice,” Diane said. “My daughter was about to give birth in Rhode Island, and she needed me.” Diane said the airport was deserted. “You could have rolled a bowling ball without hitting anyone,” she said. However, once allowed in the hospital, she wasn’t allowed to leave for five days. Coming home, she said she nearly had the airplane all to herself. She never really felt deprived. As someone who enjoys yard work, quilting and other crafts, she was always able to keep busy. “I did learn to become more aware of my surroundings,” she said. “I’m more cautious and, of course, more appreciative, especially of our family gatherings.”



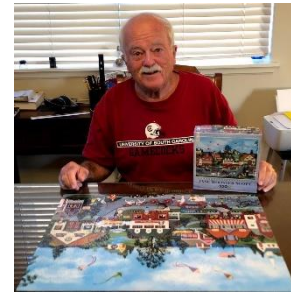
*Dick and Brenda Murphy with Jim Demers and Diane DeVincent enjoying the “snowbirdless season” last year with their vaccinations and face masks.*



Michael and Pat Niemela, decided not to come to Destin last season. Partly because they figured that, without an active snowbird club, there wouldn't be much for them to do. But primarily because they were needed at home to help take care of certain family members who were susceptible to the virus. They ate a lot of home-cooked meals. "We took a lot of naps too," she laughed. Michael filled his time by catching up on some of his favorite TV shows, and Pat enjoyed her weekly "People" magazine from cover-to-cover, including working every crossword puzzle. The hardest part of being shut down, she said, was not being able to enjoy the company of family and friends. Before the virus, they had gone out at least once a week with fellow Michigan snowbirds Jack

and Madonna Burgess. That had to be put on hold. Also, Pat's sister had recently moved within three miles, but they couldn't get together. Fortunately, those bleak days appear to be coming to an end. Pat and Michael are fully vaccinated, and always keep their face masks handy so they can get back to doing the things they enjoy. "We've resumed our weekly luncheons with the Burgesses, and I'm going Christmas shopping with my sister soon," Pat said. Best of all, they have booked a great place to stay in Destin for the months of January and February. They are looking forward to a fun-filled snowbird season.

My husband Joe and I used the "lock-down" to try some new things. He decided to grow his first ever mustache. He thought he would be channeling Clark Gable, but when he was told that he looked more like Wilford Brimley, he decided to shave. Also, like Brenda Murphy, he discovered that jigsaw puzzles were not his thing.



I did some channeling too. I channeled someone's crafty spirit. When a windstorm covered our driveway with little acorns, I gathered some up and made a Christmas wreath with them. I have never done anything like that before, and probably won't do it again, but it did turn out pretty, and I found it curiously therapeutic. Move over Joanne Andrychuk! (Joanne is our craft club chair.)

One thing Joe and I initiated that we will certainly continue, is our daily Cribbage tournament. (Who's interested in starting a snowbird Cribbage club?)

Because of the holiday, there will be no registration on Monday, 11/22, nor meeting on Tuesday, 11/23. Both will resume the following week. However, storage pick-up will still be available each Saturday from 8:30 to 9:30 a.m.

Former Secretary of Education, William J Bennett, once said, "Sometimes we need to remind ourselves that thankfulness is indeed a virtue." I don't think that reminder will be necessary this year. Do you?

Happy Thanksgiving everyone!