

Isles Life

An exclusive magazine serving the residents of Punta Gorda Isles and Burnt Store Isles

Meet
Phillis Dewitt &
Craig Nelson
of PGI

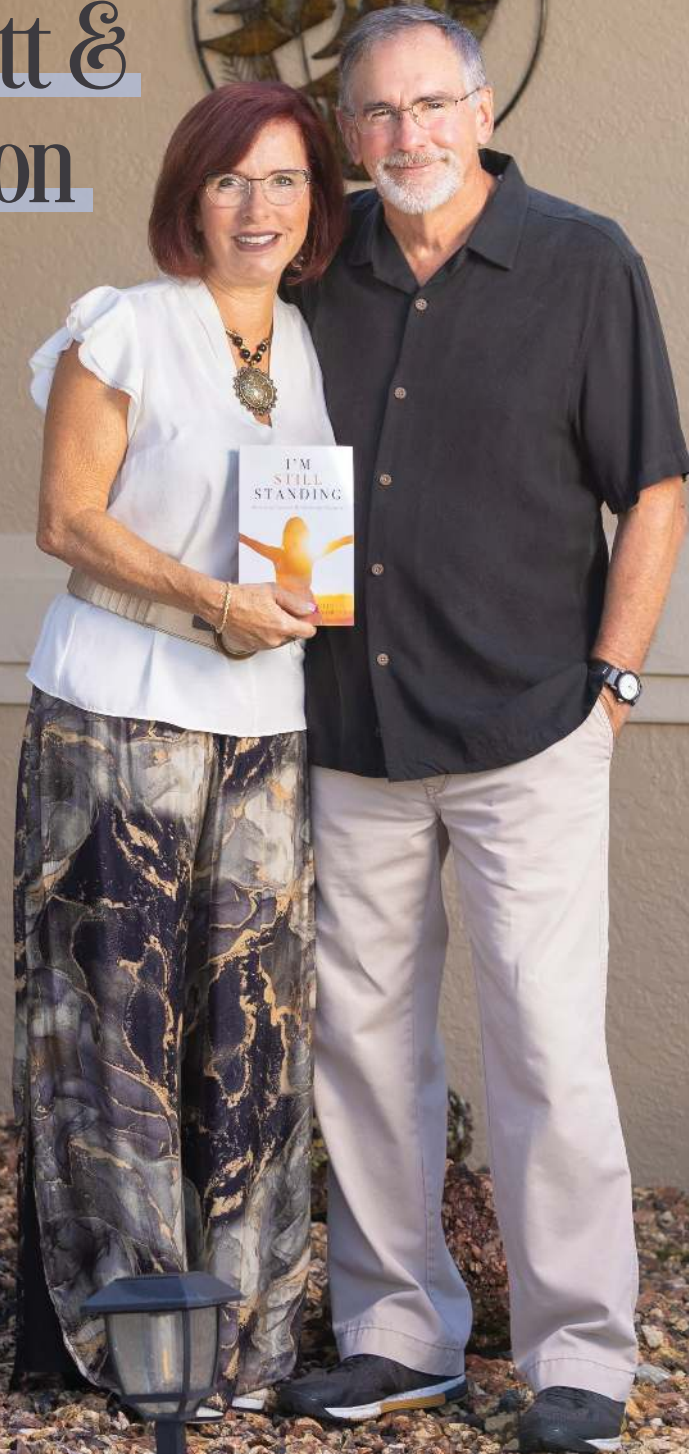
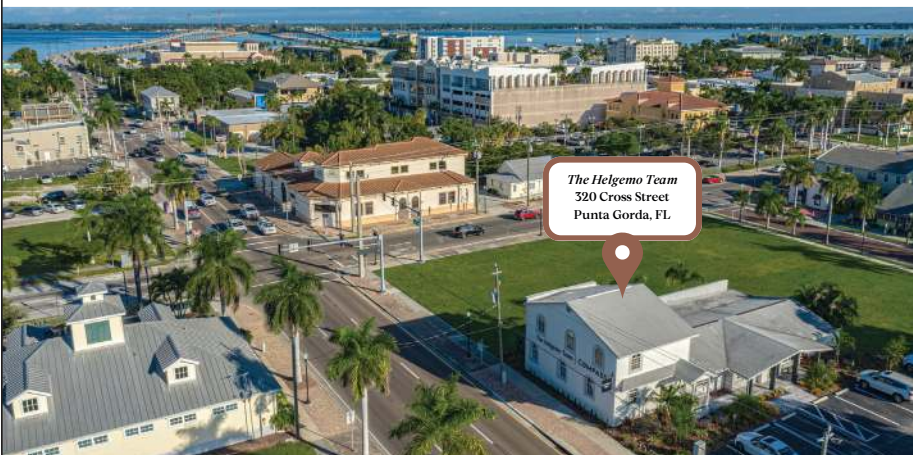


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Punta Gorda Isles Sold in December

Address	Beds	Baths	Sq. Ft.	Adom	List Price	Close Price
824 Via Tripoli	2	3	1,877	48	\$245,000	\$225,000
2000 Bal Harbor Blvd #1-111	3	2	1,517	0	\$249,900	\$249,900
530 Matares Dr	3	2	1,603	6	\$525,000	\$408,000
1 Colony Point Dr #14c	2	2	1,581	209	\$450,000	\$420,000
3308 Purple Martin Dr #132	3	2	1,882	231	\$529,000	\$455,000
4000 Turtle Dove Cir	3	2	1,741	4	\$498,000	\$497,500
1802 Los Alamos Dr	3	2	2,301	40	\$599,000	\$508,960
3606 Towhee Ct	3	2	1,537	169	\$525,000	\$510,000
841 Pamela Dr	3	3	2,444	16	\$699,990	\$625,000
101 Tropicana Dr	3	2	1,454	65	\$550,000	\$651,000
951 Lassino Ct	3	2	2,165	48	\$695,000	\$700,000
2620 Tarpon Cove Dr #312	2	2	2,330	5	\$749,900	\$720,000
1442 Kiwi Ct	3	2	1,868	7	\$875,000	\$850,000
320 Palm Isles Ct	3	2	2,224	47	\$1,085,000	\$1,050,000
1256 Eider Ct	4	3	2,448	140	\$1,343,000	\$1,300,000
1205 Royal Tern Dr	3	3	2,731	74	\$1,500,000	\$1,500,000
119 Tropicana Dr	3	4	2,750	35	\$1,890,000	\$1,650,000
3846 Saint Kitts Ct	4	4	3,888	91	\$1,890,000	\$1,800,000



Burnt Store Isles Sold In December

Address	Beds	Baths	Sq. Ft.	Adom	List Price	Close Price
460 Monaco Dr	3	3	2,510	7	\$1,299,900	\$1,160,000
3959 San Rocco Dr #122	3	2	2,383	257	\$438,000	\$410,000
5042 San Rocco Ct	3	2	1,631	124	\$397,500	\$370,000
3818 Tripoli Blvd #41	2	2	1,451	87	\$229,900	\$200,000



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Feedback/Ideas/Submissions

Do you have feedback, ideas, or submissions? We are always happy to hear from you! Deadlines for submissions are the 7th of each month. Email your thoughts, ideas, and photos to SNicklas@bestversionmedia.com

For Advertising Information

Contact Abbey Nasino ☎ 262-287-0553

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Community Resources.....	211
SW Florida Crime Stoppers.....	1-800-780-TIPS
Text Your Gov, text hi for city info.....	347-0747

Isles Life
An exclusive magazine serving the residents of Punta Gorda Isles and Burnt Store Isles

Isles Life Magazine
An exclusive magazine delivered monthly to homeowners in the Punta Gorda Isles and Burnt Store Isles waterfront communities

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Happy January! I hope this message finds you well and that you enjoyed a joyful holiday season. January is a time for new beginnings, reflection, and setting intentions for the year ahead.

As the new year unfolds, I encourage everyone to take a moment to appreciate the beauty of our town during this winter season. Whether it's the peaceful stillness of the water or the cozy gatherings with neighbors, every moment is a reminder of the wonderful community we share.

This month also brings an opportunity for us to come together. I invite you to shop local, and visit our farmer's markets or the Military Heritage Museum, both are open for business. Your patronage is vital in making Punta Gorda a better place for everyone.

As we look forward to 2025, what a beautiful blessing it would be to commit to supporting one another and nurturing the friendships that make our community strong. Together, we can create lasting memories and build a brighter future.

Wishing you all a healthy and fulfilling January. Here's to new opportunities and continued connection as we embark on this year together!

Warm regards,



Summer Nicklas

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CALENDAR OF EVENTS



January 2025

Punta Gorda Downtown Farmer's Market

Taylor Street (between Olympia Avenue and Herald Court), recurring weekly on Saturday, 8am-12pm. Voted the best small market in Florida and 15th in the USA, you can find a large number of vendors offering fruits and vegetables, pickles, jams and jellies, orange juice, German bakery, fresh homemade pasta, kitchenware, cupcakes, beef and fresh seafood, fresh citrus, jewelry, candles and soaps, dip mixes, Florida arts and crafts, cheese, baguettes and olives, homemade pies, orchids, organic produce, personalized pens, kettle corn, coffee beans and drinks, native and exotic plants, natural facial products and all natural smoothies. Also features live entertainment! Located at the corner of Taylor and Olympia in downtown Punta Gorda.

Pickleball 101-FREE Beginner Pickleball Lesson, South County Regional Park (outdoor permanent pickleball courts) 5 & 6, 670 Cooper Street, Punta Gorda 33950, Every Saturday @8:30 a.m.-10:00. If you're brand new to PB or just getting started and developed some nasty habits, this class is for you. What you'll learn: Safety Guidelines, Proper warm up, Stance, Grip, Serve and Return of Serve, Dinking. New players should wear a hat, bring hydration and a paddle. Contact: Regina Dugas to reserve your spot: 1reginadugas@gmail.com. Lessons provided by the Volunteers of Peace River Picklers.

Punta Gorda History Park Sunday Market and Artisan Village, Sundays 9:00am-1:00pm. Visit Punta Gorda's only weekly Artisans Market, held every Sunday in the History Park, 501 Shreve Street. You will discover local artists selling their creations, as well as our resident artists in the History Park Artisan Village, where the Peace River Woodturners, the Punta Gorda Fiber Arts Group, and Southwest Florida Potters Guild each work out of one of our historic buildings. Their buildings are open to the public during market hours on Sunday, as well as during Music in the Park and other events. In addition to our artisans, the Sunday market vendors include local providers of farm fresh produce and eggs, locally hived honey, home baked artisan breads, goat cheese, and other goodies. Come check out our wonderful vendors!

Punta Gorda Seafood & Music Festival, January 17th-19th, Laishley Park. Outdoor food and fun await at the 4th Annual Punta Gorda Seafood & Music Festival at Laishley Park. Join us for a weekend of delicious food, live music, and festive activities beginning Friday evening from 4pm-10pm, continuing Saturday 11am-10pm, and concluding Sunday 11am-6pm. The event is produced by Paragon Festivals. General admission is FREE! This seafood and music festival is designed like a gourmet meal, blending the finest ingredients to create an unforgettable experience. Choose from a variety of entrees including seafood, meat, and vegetarian options, all cooked fresh onsite. Enhance your meal with an assortment of side dishes and decadent desserts. A selection of alcoholic and non-alcoholic beverages will also be available. Relax and enjoy live musical performances by some of Florida's and the region's top artists. The entertainment schedule will be posted as the festival date approaches. Last year's lineup featured Annika Chambers Deslauriers and Paul Deslauriers, Ronnie Dee and the Superstars, Memphis Lightning, Jack'D Up, Sean Chambers, Thunder Beach, Reggie King Sears, 22N, Kettle of Fish, K-Luv and United Funk Foundation, and One Night Radio. In addition to the music and food, explore a marketplace offering a variety of arts and crafts, including paintings, mixed-media, glasswork, gourmet food items, and specialty products. Enjoy shopping between band performances to find unique and handcrafted items. "Normal" feels so good! Come join us and enjoy the familiar joys of life once again. NOTE: Bands and performance times are subject to change, so please check back for updates! NOTE: Pets ARE allowed at the event! No outside food or drinks permitted.

Sullivan Street Craft Fair, January 18th, 10:00am-5:00pm, Sullivan Street in Punta Gorda. Punta Gorda Chamber of Commerce Annual Sullivan Street Arts & Craft Festivals is a family-friendly event. Come join the fun!

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A New Year's Message FROM YOUR MAYOR



● BY DR. DEBORAH LUX, MAYOR OF PUNTA GORDA

Happy New Year! As we begin a new year, I am delighted to extend warm greetings to our seasonal residents returning to Punta Gorda and to all those who call this beautiful city home year-round. January is a time of renewal, fresh opportunities, and exciting activities.

Recently, Punta Gorda welcomed new council members—Jeannine Polk, Greg Julian (Vice-Mayor), and Janis Denton—who have committed to listening to residents and making thoughtful decisions for our community's future.

National Holidays in January

January offers special occasions to reflect, celebrate, and look forward:

- **New Year's Day (January 1):** Happy New Year, everyone! As we embrace 2025, our city is committed to learning from challenges, including hurricanes and flooding, and preparing proactively to prevent future damage.
- **Martin Luther King Jr. Day (January 20):** This day honors the legacy of Dr. King and his profound contributions to the civil rights movement. It serves as a powerful reminder that service to others can help create a more just, compassionate, and unified society.
- Dr. King's unwavering commitment to improving society inspires us to work toward improving our communities and fostering unity.

January Happenings in Punta Gorda

Punta Gorda offers a vibrant calendar of events to start the year. Whether you enjoy the arts, music, history, or delicious seafood, there is something for everyone. For additional details, visit the **Punta Gorda Chamber of Commerce's events page** at www.puntagordachamber.com.

Here are some January highlights:

- **Home and Garden Show (January 18):** Explore the latest trends in home improvement and landscaping.
- **Seafood and Music Festival (January 17–19):** Savor fresh seafood and live music in a fun, festive setting.
- **Saturday Ghost Stories Tour:** Uncover Punta Gorda's intriguing and spooky history.
- **Artisans Market:** Support local artisans showcasing their creative works.
- **Farmers Market:** Held weekly, offering fresh produce and a great sense of community.

City Workshops and Resident Input

Transparency and residential input are one of our top priorities in 2025 for Punta Gorda. Under the leadership of our new council members and Interim City Manager, Dr. Melissa



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Reichert, we are committed to hosting workshops that foster open dialogue and collaborative decision-making. The **first workshop** will take place on **January 21 at 5:30 PM** at the **Military Heritage Museum**, with a focus on the future of City Hall. We encourage all residents to participate and especially welcome those with expertise in engineering, architecture, infrastructure, and construction to join a committee/task force. Your educated and practical insights will be invaluable. If you're interested in serving, please email us at citycouncil@cityofpuntagordafl.com.

Opportunities to Get Involved

Punta Gorda thrives on the active participation of its residents. If you are passionate about shaping our city's future, consider serving on one of our **city boards or committees**. This is a wonderful way to bring your unique perspective and expertise to the table. To learn more about board service in the City of Punta Gorda, visit <https://www.ci.punta-gorda.fl.us/government/boards-committees>. Another way to contribute is by joining **TEAM Punta Gorda**, a volunteer organization dedicated to making Punta Gorda a great place to live, work, and play. TEAM always welcomes new volunteers and projects. To learn more, contact TEAM at **941-637-8326** or team@teampuntagorda.org.

Looking Ahead

As your Mayor, I am deeply honored to serve this incredible city. Together, we can make 2025 a year of positive progress and unity. Your involvement—whether by attending events, participating in workshops, or volunteering—makes Punta Gorda truly special.

Let's embrace the opportunities ahead and work together to make this year one of positive progress and community spirit.

Wishing everyone a Happy New Year filled with joy, friendship, and exciting possibilities!

Debi
Mayor Dr. Deborah Lux

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S.W. FLORIDA Fishing Report January 2025



● BY CAPT. BART MARX

Hello fellow anglers,

It's January and 2025 is a new year and a great time to go fishing! This month, near shore, you should be able to find plenty of sheepshead around the edges of the near shore reefs. Fishing for these guys, you should use a 1/0 hook or something close to that with a piece of shrimp. And you could use a 20lb. leader, if the water is really clear. This is the time of year that they move offshore to spawn. They also can be found near the pilings of any structure bridges or docks close to the Gulf. They will get thick on some of the natural ledges, around the 50 ft. range. I have a State of Florida for-hire fishing license that allows me to go as far as 9 miles offshore, so these are the areas that I am talking about.

Also, there is another species that like to travel in a similar way. The species is the flounder. They tend to migrate to the sandy areas close to the Gulf up and down the coast of Southwest Florida. They are less picky about what they eat and they will eat frozen sardines and shrimp, too. You can use a similar rig to harvest these guys on a 1/0 hook and 20 lb. leader. You may use a fish finder rig or a knocker rig, either works well. If you are fishing in shallow waters, you could use a jig and a shrimp slow retrieve sliding along the bottom. The flounder are aggressive feeders and they do have a mouth full of teeth and if you have some smaller pinfish they will eat them, too.

Another fish that would be found this time of year would be the hogfish. The hogfish are a bit more of a chore to find. They like the natural ledges in the 40 to 50 ft. range. And they only like to eat crustaceans, shrimp small crabs like fiddlers, etc. They will eat small blue crabs, too. I have witnessed them eating broken off legs from a spiny lobster while diving in the Keys. There is some good white meat on these guys that makes a great meal. And if you are looking for some fish for the table while you are looking in these areas there should be plenty of white grunts and lane snapper.

Check the regulations! Remember, I fish state waters for hire, only 9 miles offshore. So, if you fish inshore, there should be plenty of action, too. Red fish along the mangroves and around the edges of the oyster bars scattered all along the Southwest Florida coast. They are not too picky and they will eat dead stuff, as well as live bait. And remember, this time of year shrimp is naturally in the harbor and close to the beaches. The shrimp this time of year are larger than in the summer. Fishing on the flats, where there are grass beds, you can find some nice sea trout. They don't mind the cooler waters and like to hang out on the

edges of the grass where they blend in. I have found that is a great ambush spot for the bigger trout.

So, if you are one of the newcomers to our area, I will come on your boat and help with your learning curve. I call these training sessions where I will help with where and how to rig your rods. And show you where you can drive your boat safely. This is where you and your best fishing buddy or your wife that you fish with can learn. By doing it this way, I can teach while we are fishing. If you are interested in a training session, give me a call. Capt. Bart Marx 941-979-6517 or e-mail me at captbart@alphaomegacharters.com

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10 New Year's Resolutions

FOR FAMILY CAREGIVERS

• BY KRIS CHANA



Caring for someone you love is one of the most meaningful — and challenging — roles you can take on. It's a journey filled with love, devotion, and sacrifice, but it can also come with moments of stress, exhaustion, and self-doubt.

If you've ever felt like you're barely keeping your head above water, know that you are not alone. Millions of caregivers feel the same way, especially around the holidays, when the pressure to create joy for everyone else is at its highest.

As we step into the new year, it's important to pause and remember that your well-being matters, too. Just as you care for your loved one, you deserve care and compassion for yourself.

Taking even small steps toward self-care can make a world of difference — not just for you, but for the person you're supporting.

This list of New Year's resolutions is designed to help you prioritize you.

Whether it's setting boundaries, reaching out for support, or giving yourself grace, these resolutions are gentle reminders that you're doing your best — and that it's okay to take care of yourself along the way.

10 New Year's Resolutions for Caregivers

1. When I feel like I'm not doing anything right, I will remember that guilt is not an option because I know that I did the best I could.
2. Even if it seems impossible, I will make time for myself, which means I may have to ask for help that I never considered before.
3. I will say no to requests when I know that I cannot add any more to my plate.
4. I will follow through with my own medical appointments, even if I must reach out for help. Maintaining my health is essential so I can be there for my loved one.
5. I will plan time each week to rest and recharge to prevent caregiver burnout, even if that means asking for help.
6. I will seek advice and support from other caregivers who understand and can relate to my journey, even if that means attending a caregiver support group.
7. I will remember that taking care of my own needs is not selfish and ultimately benefits everyone around me.
8. I will be open to alternative ways of caring for myself and my loved one and will not be afraid to try new things.
9. I will remember that my loved one did not choose this disease or illness they are living with.
10. I understand that reaching out for help is a sign of strength. I will seek appropriate help if I feel depressed, anxious, or overwhelmed over an extended period of time.

This list is meant to be a starting point. You might choose one resolution or several — whatever feels right for your journey. The most important thing is to give yourself permission to pause, reflect, and care for you.

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Remember, you don't have to do this alone. A little time to recharge can help you be the best version of yourself — for your loved one and for you.

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● SUBMITTED BY SUMMER NICKLAS

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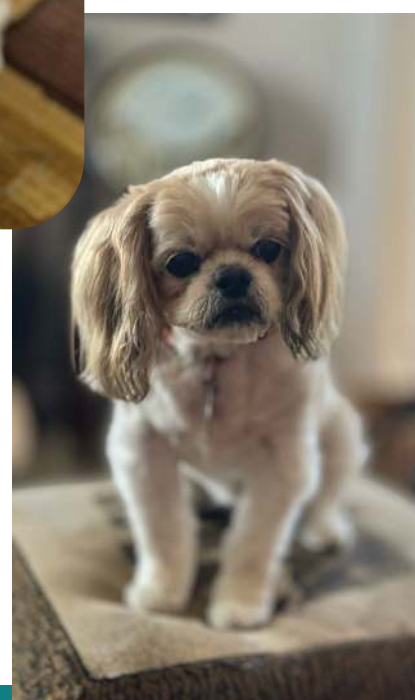
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Meet GG of BSI:

Taking Furniture Exploration to New Heights

● BY SUMMER NICKLAS

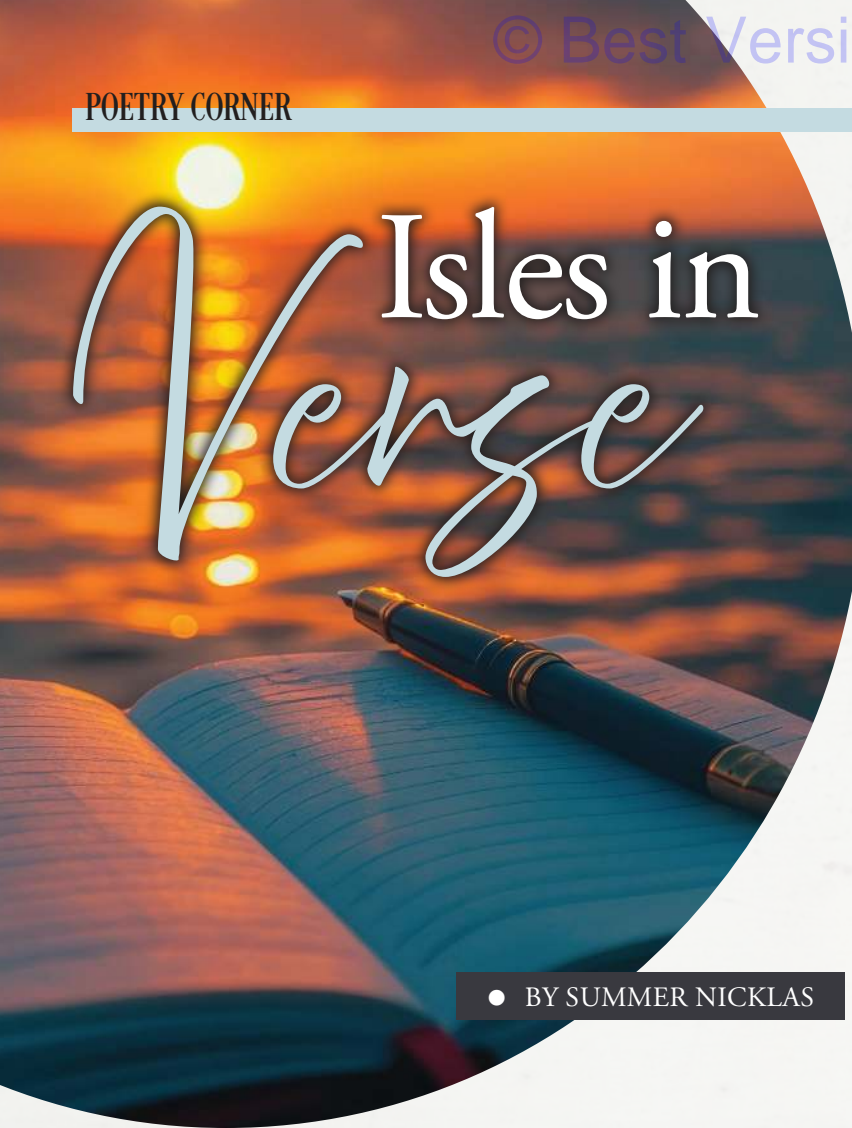
PHOTOS SUBMITTED
BY GLENN AND SHARON GROFF OF BSI



This is GG; she is a 13 year old Shitzu who lives in BSI and loves getting treats from her neighbors. She's always on the lookout for her friends with treats! She is spry and still can jump on the furniture, even at her age.

Her parents are Glenn and Sharon Groff.

Is your pet a ham? Do they love attention? Or do you simply want to introduce your pet to the neighborhood? Send us your pet photos and we will feature them in Isles Life! Email Summer Nicklas at SNicklas@bestversionmedia.com.



Isles in Verse

● BY SUMMER NICKLAS

Whispers of the Waterside

In a small town where the whispers play,
By the water's edge, at the break of day,
Golden beams kiss the shimmering waves,
While seagulls dance in the breeze that braves.

Shutters flung wide, with colors so bright,
Flowers in bloom, a delightful sight,
Children's laughter rings down the lane,
As fishermen cast their lines once again.

The boats gently sway in a cozy embrace,
While hearts find solace in this tranquil place,
Misty mornings and sunsets so grand,
Life moves slowly in this peaceful land.

Market stalls open with treasures to share,
Fresh-baked bread and stories laid bare,
Neighbors gather, with waves and smiles,
Sharing sweet moments that stretch for miles.

Under the stars by the soft, lapping tide,
Dreams take flight on the ebbing side,
In a small town where the waters gleam,
Life flows gently, like a cherished dream.

Ties That Bind

In the heart of our home where laughter rings clear,
Family gathers, drawing us near.
Around the old table, stories unfold,
Moments of joy and memories of gold.

With hands that are weathered, yet strong and so kind,
We share in the burdens, the love intertwined.
Silly games, late-night talks, dreams whispered low,
In the warmth of each other, our true colors show.

Through seasons of change, we weather the storm,
In each hug a refuge, a place that feels warm.
From the smallest of triumphs to the biggest of falls,
We lift each other up, answering the calls.

The laughter of children, the wisdom of age,
In this circle of family, we turn every page.
In moments of stillness, or bustling delight,
Love is the thread that binds day and night.

So here's to the family, our circle so wide,
In joy and in sorrow, forever our guide.
No matter the distance, wherever we roam,
In each other's hearts, we always have home.

The Language of Love

In the quiet corners where soft whispers dwell,
Love weaves its magic, a sweet, timeless spell.
It dances in glances, ignites with a spark,
A melody sung in the depth of the dark.

It's the warmth in the silence, the glow in the eyes,
The laughter that echoes, the joy that replies.
In the simple moments, in shared cups of tea,
Love blooms in the chaos, the calm, and the free.

It's a touch that can heal, a hand that can guide,
A shelter of comfort when storms collide.
It's the stories we tell, both the old and the new,
In the fabric of life, it's the thread that is true.

Through trials and triumphs, it strengthens our bond,
In the heartbeats we share, in the quiet Beyond.
It's the promise of forever, the leap and the fall,
The reason we rise, the answer to all.

So here's to love's journey, with all of its grace,
In the dance of connected souls, we find our place.
No matter the path that our lives may take,
In love's gentle embrace, our hearts will awake.

The Tides of Time

Time is a river, flowing endlessly wide,
Carrying moments like leaves on the tide.
It dances through seasons, both gentle and strong,
In whispers of ages, it sings us along.

With each tick of the clock, a story unfolds,
Of laughter and heartache, of dreams yet untold.
It shapes us and molds us, a sculptor so wise,
In the canvas of life, where our memories rise.

The sun paints the dawn, as the moon bids goodnight,
In the passage of hours, we find our own light.
From the innocence of youth to the wisdom of years,
Time holds our laughter, our sorrows, our tears.

Yet in its swift current, we often forget,
To cherish the moments, to hold and beget.
For the present is fleeting, a gift wrapped in gold,
A treasure that sparkles, a story retold.

So let us embrace it, this journey we share,
With hearts wide open, and memories to spare.
For in the dance of time, we find what we seek
The beauty of living, the love that we speak.

Pawprints on the Heart

In the morning light, with the softest of sighs,
A tail thumps with joy, as the sun starts to rise.
Whiskers a-tingle, and eyes shining bright,
My furry friend dances, a pure delight.

With each little bark or a gentle, sweet purr,
They weave through our lives, a soft, loving blur.
Through puddles and grass, on adventures we roam,
In the warmth of their presence, we find our true home.

Their laughter is simple, their love knows no bounds,
In the comfort of fur, my heart leaps and bounds.
From playful mischief to cuddles at night,
They fill up our days with joy and pure light.

When the world feels heavy, and skies turn to gray,
With a nuzzle or wag, they can chase gloom away.
They listen with patience, no judgment or fear,
In their eyes, we find solace, a love that is clear.

So here's to our pets, our companions so dear,
With their pawprints imprinted, we hold them near.
They teach us of joy, of loyalty true,
In this beautiful bond, I'm forever with you.

Home is a Feeling

Home is the place where the heart finds its rest,
In the warm embrace of those we love best.
It's laughter that echoes through hallways and rooms,
A shelter from darkness, where light brightly blooms.

The scent of fresh meals, a familiar embrace,
Walls filled with memories, time's gentle trace.
In the shadows of corners, where secrets are shared,
Home is the warmth knowing someone has cared.

Through seasons that change and the years that go by,
Home welcomes us back, like a soft lullaby.
With every small moment, each joy met with tears,
It holds all our dreams, our triumphs, our fears.

It's more than a building; it lives in our soul,
A tapestry woven with love as the goal.
In the quiet of mornings or bustling of night,
Home is where laughter and comfort feel right.

So wherever we wander, wherever we roam,
In our hearts, we carry the essence of home.
For in every heartbeat and each gentle sigh,
Home is a feeling that never says goodbye.

The Thread of Friendship

Friendship blooms like a gentle flower,
A bond that deepens with each hour.
Through life's bright sun and shadowed rain,
Its roots hold fast, defying pain.
A whispered laugh, a knowing glance,
A shared adventure, a second chance.
In joy, it dances, light and free,
In sorrow, it's a sturdy tree.

It needs no wealth, no grand display,
Just simple acts, day by day.
A listening ear, a helping hand,
A promise made to understand.
Though time may stretch and miles divide,
True friendship walks by your side.
An endless thread, unseen, yet strong,
A melody, a timeless song.
So cherish the friends who light your way,
Through every night and dawning day.
For in their hearts, you'll always find,
A home, a peace, a love unlined.



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● BY SUMMER NICKLAS

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Coach Wade Taylor graduated from Charlotte High in 1985, continued his undergrad at Nova Southeastern and completed his Master's degree at Warner Southern. He has served as the Head Coach of Charlotte High's Track & Field Team, Girls Weightlifting, and Varsity Football. Additionally, he has been teaching history at Charlotte High for over 20 years.

Coach Scott Harvey graduated from Port Charlotte High in 1991 and then graduated from the University of Florida. He loves to golf and is our current Head Boys Golf Coach, and has spent over 20 years coaching golf at Charlotte High. Coach Harvey teaches General Geometry and Honors Geometry, and has been an educator for over 25 years.

HW Educated BBQ is dedicated to making a positive impact in our community through volunteer work and generous contributions. They've proudly partnered with Charlotte BMX, a 501(c)(3) nonprofit facility, to support their scholarship program. Each year, a minimum of five BMX racers receive a \$500 scholarship for their future education, and are committed and excited to support an additional two recipients annually. By investing in the education of young athletes, HW Educated BBQ aims to empower them to pursue their dreams while fostering a spirit of community and teamwork. Together, they're not just serving great BBQ; they're serving a brighter future for our youth.

If you haven't had the chance to try HW Educated BBQ at one of their events yet, be on the lookout! Their delicious BBQ is not just a meal; it's a community experience. From the savory flavors to the warm hospitality, you won't want to miss out on sampling their mouthwatering offerings at upcoming gatherings. Keep an eye on their event schedule, and prepare your taste buds for a treat!

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A Story of EXTRAORDINARY COURAGE, STRENGTH, AND FAITH,

● BY GEN. DICK CARR, USAF PILOT, RETIRED

CHAPTER 1

"I am witness to a thousand acts of compassion, sacrifice, and endurance. But of all the men whose dignity humbles me, one name is revered among all others. They took his life, but they could not take his dignity." "Lance Sijan prevails." - Senator John McCain, Faith of Our Fathers, Vietnam War, Fall of 1967.

The Ho Chi Minh Trail (main supply route from the North to fighters in the South and Cambodia) ran from a hub at Vinh southward to near the Mekong River and then the Vietnam-Cambodia border. A major mountain range (Annam Mountains) blocks ground travel from east-west directions. To get their supplies to the south, truck supply convoys had to cross one of two passes, Mu Gia, or Ban Karai, then a river ford at Ban Loboy in Laos. (Remember the recent article about heavily bombed Laos).

Now, in November of 1967, the amount of supplies going south rose by a large amount. In response, the U.S. doubled the bombing of the passes and the ford. These three places were very heavily defended by North Vietnamese forces. Lance Peter Sijan from Milwaukee, WI., after being an athlete in high school, went to a US Naval Academy Prep School. Graduating from the school he won an appointment to the U.S. Air Force Academy, where he played football, graduating in 1965. He went to pilot training, then to his first assignment at Da Nang Air Base, South Vietnam as an F-4 Phantom pilot. On the Ho Chi Minh Trail, the truck convoys moved mostly at night to avoid detection, so most of the attack sorties were at night. Lance was a rear seat pilot looking to soon upgrade to front seat as they took off as leader of a two-ship formation from Da Nang Air Base, South Vietnam at 8pm on November 9, his 67th combat mission. His squadron commander was in the front seat.

Within a half hour they linked up with a Forward Air Controller, who dropped flares to illuminate the target, the Ban Loboy Ford. As they rolled in and dropped their bombs, Sijan's F-4 exploded (Analysis blamed a bad bomb fuse)! No parachutes were seen and no survival radios were heard. However, Captain Sijan did get out of the aircraft and landed

on a mountain slope, falling through jungle trees, and passing out. He was unconscious with a compound fracture of his left leg, skull fracture, concussion, and a mangled right hand with his fingers bent backwards. His squadron commander, LtCol Armstrong has never been found and is presumed dead.

A search and rescue team of 108 total aircraft spent all the next day with Anti-Aircraft guns firing from all directions, searching without any contact, having nine of the rescue aircraft hit by ground fire and one A-1 lost. Finally, on November 11th, fighters from two bases heard Sijan on the radio. He was out of flares and hard to detect in the triple canopy jungle. One "Jolly Green" rescue helicopter got a close radio triangulation on him. Sijan told the crew to send a jungle penetrator but not a pararescue jumper due to heavy North Vietnamese Army patrols. Jolly hovered for 33 minutes until the enemy fire got too bad and had to leave. Nothing further was heard from him. Unbelievably, with his terrible injuries, and no food or water, Sijan crawled for 46 days, living off the jungle.

Thanks to the US bombing halt for Christmas, 1967, the north redoubled its supply effort again and were driving in daytime with no fear of being bombed. Because of that, they found Sijan in the middle of a road on Christmas Day. He was taken to a road camp near Ban Karai pass and put in a bamboo hut like you can see in our Military Heritage Museum. He was dressed in a black cotton shirt and pants with the left leg cut away due to the swelling. Several days later he noticed a mountain tribesman. Thinking he could escape and contact the tribesman, Lance overcame a guard, took him unconscious with a left-hand chop and crawled away. He was recaptured in half a day. Then his captors placed a full-length heavy cast on his left leg, not for medical purposes, but to keep him from escaping.

NOTE: The area of these passes and their heavy air defenses are very familiar to your author. My first combat mission in an RF-4 was in Mu Gia Pass, at night! Many more missions took me to those same places.

(Continued next month)

Navigating Punta Gorda's Fitness Scene • BY SUMMER NICKLAS

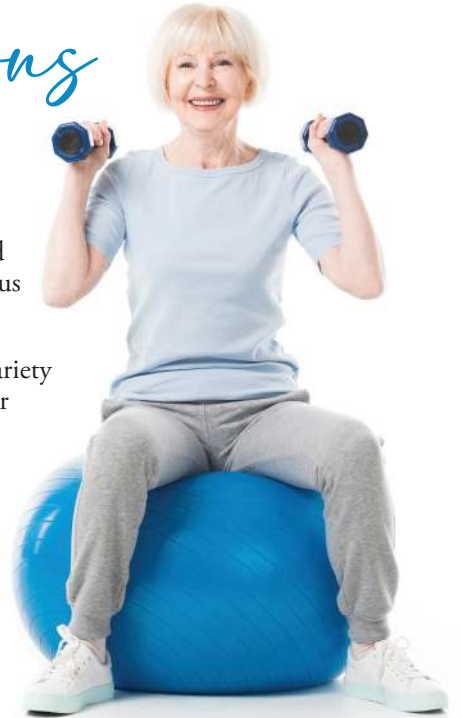
for New Year's Resolutions

As we usher in the new year, many of us embark on a journey of self-improvement through New Year's resolutions. Among the most common resolutions is the commitment to fitness and a healthier lifestyle. Luckily, Punta Gorda offers a myriad of opportunities for individuals to embrace their fitness goals. Here we explore various local fitness options for those looking to prioritize their well-being.

Isles Fitness, CrossFit Punta Gorda, Punta Gorda YMCA, and local Pilates Studios offer a variety of options for any lifestyle. Hiking trails along the waterside offers a beautiful view. Consider starting a walking club with neighbors or find local fitness events like walkathons and 5K's.

As you embark on your fitness journey, remember that success often comes from a balanced approach. Start by setting realistic, small goals that you can build upon over time.

Most Importantly, keep in mind: It's all about having fun! The key to staying active is finding activities you genuinely enjoy. Don't pressure yourself into strenuous workouts if you'd rather take a leisurely stroll. Listen to your body, embrace different forms of movement and celebrate your progress. Remember, even small steps count towards a healthier, happier you.



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Global Giving, Local Living:

The Inspiring Journey of Phillis Dewitt and Craig Nelson

WE WOULD LIKE TO THANK KAREN BROWN OF MICHAEL SAUNDERS & COMPANY - PUNTA GORDA DOWNTOWN FOR BRINGING YOU THIS MONTH'S COVER STORY.



● BY SUMMER NICKLAS | PHOTO BY MONICA AMAYA, MONICA AMAYA PHOTOGRAPHY

On any given sunny afternoon in Punta Gorda, you might find Phillis Dewitt and Craig Nelson enjoying the very things they love most: boating on calm waters, taking a leisurely bike ride, or catching up with friends and neighbors. For the couple who relocated to this Florida gem in 2018, life here represents far more than retirement, it's the culmination of decades spent building careers, raising a family, and giving back to communities around the world.

With their busy schedules, infectious energy, and shared sense of purpose, Phillis and Craig are living proof that retirement is what you make it. From humble beginnings to fulfilling careers and now a vibrant life in Punta Gorda, their story is one of love, service, and adventure.

Phillis was born in Pekin, Illinois, where her independent spirit and strong work ethic began to take shape. After high school, she pursued her passion for nursing, earning multiple degrees, including a doctorate and post-doctorate, from the OSF College of Nursing. Phillis dedicated her life to healthcare and education, not just at home but on a global scale. Over the years, her career spanned teaching, nursing, and international medical missions, each role reflecting her deep commitment to helping others.

Craig's journey began in Amery, Wisconsin. He spent much of his childhood moving from farm to farm before his family eventually settled in Iowa. After high school, Craig attended Southern Illinois University in Edwardsville, laying the groundwork for a successful career. Following his time in the U.S. Army, he began working with Central Illinois Public Service Co (later Ameren Corporation), where he remained for 40 years. His career, marked by dedication and steady growth, provided stability while also allowing him to embrace life's adventures.

Though their paths were distinct, Phillis and Craig shared a similar set of values: hard work, faith, and family. It was these common threads that ultimately brought them together.

Some love stories are born from chance, and Phillis and Craig's are no exception. After losing her husband of 27 years of marriage, Phillis gave love another chance. Phillis and Craig met in a delightfully unique way, on a live recreation of "The Dating Game," an event hosted by Cache' Connections, a Christian matchmaking group.

What began as a lighthearted game soon turned into a meaningful relationship built on trust, mutual respect, and shared dreams. The couple married in 2010, blending their families and embarking on a life together that would take them around the world.

While Phillis and Craig both enjoyed successful careers, their lives have been defined as much by service as by work. Phillis has participated in over 40 international medical mission trips, using her nursing expertise to help underserved communities across the globe. Her passion for helping others extends beyond borders, and she remains committed to making a difference wherever she can. Phillis has always used what she has been

● CONTINUED ON PAGE 22

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COVER STORY



● CONTINUED FROM PAGE 21

given to help others, whether it's through nursing, teaching, or missions, she is blessed to do what she loves.

Craig, too, has embraced this call to service. After retiring from Ameren in 2019, he began accompanying Phillis on her mission trips, contributing his time and energy to humanitarian efforts. Together, they have traveled to countries near and far, from Central America to Southeast Asia, working side by side to improve the lives of others. It's rewarding to see the impact they can make together. These trips aren't just about giving; they're about connecting with people, learning from them, and sharing hope.

Closer to home, Phillis and Craig's dedication continues. Phillis serves on the board of directors for CASA in Illinois, an organization that advocates for children in foster care. Over the

years, she has fostered more than 100 children and provided a permanent home to many. Phillis and Craig's home has always been full of love and laughter.

Between them, Phillis and Craig have raised a big, beautiful, blended family. Phillis has three children, Melanie and Christopher, and the memory of her late son, Brandon, remains a cherished part of her life. Craig has three daughters, Jennifer, Kristin, and Julie, who live in Illinois and are building lives of their own. Combined, they are proud grandparents to 14 grandchildren, all of whom bring joy and laughter to their lives. While the couple now calls Punta Gorda home, they remain close to their children and grandchildren, finding time for visits and celebrations whenever they can.

After decades spent working and raising a family in Illinois, Phillis and Craig began looking for the perfect place to retire. Their research led them to Punta Gorda, our community filled with friendly charm, beautiful weather, and abundance of activities.

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Retirement for Phillis and Craig is anything but quiet. When they're not traveling for mission work, they spend their days enjoying everything Punta Gorda has to offer. Boating on the water, golfing with friends, or simply soaking up the Florida sunshine, it's the perfect balance of adventure and relaxation.

For Craig, Punta Gorda's charm lies in its natural beauty and laid-back lifestyle. After reading an article about great places to retire, Punta Gorda's tropical weather, water front views, and friendly people helped Phillis and Craig make the decision to move here; it was everything they wanted in a retirement destination.

Even in retirement, Phillis and Craig's sense of purpose continues to guide them. Phillis and Craig are preparing for another medical mission trip to Guatemala, remaining steadfast supporters of each other and partners in service. Together, they are proof that life's greatest rewards come from giving back, staying active, and cherishing time with loved ones.

The couple made the move in 2018 and quickly fell in love with their new home. From boating and golfing to kayaking and biking, Punta Gorda offers the active lifestyle they enjoy so much. They've also found a welcoming community at Deep Creek Community Church, where they stay connected and involved.

For this remarkable couple, Punta Gorda isn't just where they retired, it's where they've found joy, peace, and a renewed sense of purpose. Whether volunteering abroad or enjoying a quiet evening on the water, Phillis and Craig Nelson are living their best chapter yet.

● CONTINUED ON PAGE 24

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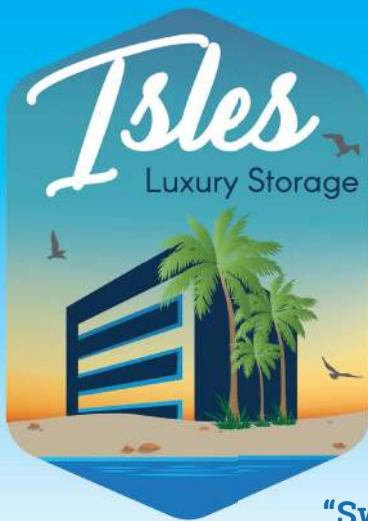


COVER STORY

● CONTINUED FROM PAGE 23

To learn more about Dr. Phillis Dewitt's extraordinary life, pick up her book, "I'm Still Standing: How God Turned My Pain into Purpose" or visit her website: <https://phillisdewitt.com/>.

After Brandon's untimely passing in November, the Brandon Dewitt Foundation, led by Brandon's fiancé, Kara Parkey, is a nonprofit organization that invests in companies and initiatives that turn promising innovations into breakthrough treatments and care that impact cancer patients and their families' lives. Proceeds from the BDF will help fund hospitals', doctors' and scientists' cancer research and clinical trials, and fund early-stage cancer-related companies. Their goal as a foundation is to further initiatives dedicated to preventing and curing cancer, and to make treatment accessible and affordable to everyone. To learn more, visit www.changegiving.com.



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Creamy Spinach and Artichoke Dip

with Gorgonzola

• BY SUMMER NICKLAS

Ingredients:

- 2 (10-ounce) boxes, chopped frozen spinach
- 1 box frozen artichoke hearts
- 3 tablespoons salted butter
- 4 cloves chopped garlic
- 3 tablespoons flour
- 1 cup chicken stock
- 1 cup fresh milk
- Salt and black pepper
- Ground nutmeg
- 1 cup Gorgonzola crumbles (1 1/2 cups, if shredded)

Directions:

1. Preheat oven to 400 degrees.
2. Defrost spinach 10 minutes on defrost setting in microwave then drain well by wringing out in dish towel. Defrost artichokes for 5-6 minutes on defrost in microwave then wring out and chop finely.
3. Heat a saucepan with butter over medium heat.
4. Add garlic to melted butter and stir 1 to 2 minutes, then sprinkle in flour and mix 1 minute more.
5. Whisk in stock and milk and season with salt, pepper and nutmeg.
6. Thicken for 1-2 minutes then remove from heat and melt in Gorgonzola.
7. Stir in spinach and artichokes and half of the shredded cheese.
8. Transfer to a small casserole and add remaining cheese to top.
9. Brown and bubble in the oven for 10-12 minutes.
10. Serve dip with warm bread, celery, or your favorite pita chips.

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Step Inside:

The 14th Annual Home Tour Hosted by The Beyond Ourselves Club of the PGI Civic Association

● BY SUSAN HILLS | PHOTOS BY LUCILLE PONTE

The Beyond Ourselves Club is the community service organization of the Punta Gorda Isles Civic Association. Through their fundraising efforts they have raised over \$628,000 for local children's charities. The 14th annual Share the Love for the Kids home tour will take place on March 1, 2025 from 10:00 am to 4:00 pm.

Five local homeowners will be opening their beautiful homes for the tour. Among them, "A unique tropical paradise inside and out", with large floral displays, wall reliefs, and murals. The safari themed primary bedroom is a must see. The pool and lanai overlook a lush garden.

"Seize the grays under Florida rays" has an extensive shell, sea glass, and coral collection, as well as motor-themed antiques, mixing coastal design and vintage stylings in a coastal remodel. There is a beautiful garden overlooking an expansive canal view.

"Family fun, rain or shine" is ideal for entertaining family and friends. It has an enormous chef's kitchen with 2 islands, and a second-floor media room with refreshment bar and a balcony



extending the entertainment space. “Coloring outside the lines” uniquely fuses a distinctive art collection with vintage and mid-century modern furnishings and glittering light fixtures.

“Thrifty finds, Palm Beach designs” displays his love of fishing and her netting of consignment treasures with a Palm Beach flair. A primary bedroom suite offers a quiet Asian inspired sanctuary after a day’s fishing or catching thrift shop deals. Take advantage of our \$35 special price ticket day on February 3 online or in the lobby of the Punta Gorda Isles Civic Association from 9:00-2:00. Tickets will be available for \$40 from February 4 to February 28 online with a credit card. You can also purchase your tickets with cash or credit card in the lobby of the Punta Gorda Civic Association February 24-27 from 9:00-2:00 or on February 28 starting at noon. Tickets will be available in the lobby the day of the tour for \$50 from 9:00-2:00.

For more information go to the Beyond Ourselves website at: www.pgica.org/Beyond_Ourselves. Your contribution can make a positive difference in the lives of local families.





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FUN ZONE

FOR KIDS

Digging Into Some Garden Humor

Why did the gardener plant a light bulb?
Because he wanted to grow a power plant!

What did the dirt say to the rain?
If you keep this up, my name will be mud!

What do you call a grumpy vegetable?
A sour pickle

How does a farmer count his cows?
With a cowculator!

What did one plant say to another?
"I'm rooting for you!"

Why do potatoes make great detectives?
Because they keep their eyes peeled!

Why was the mushroom invited to all the parties?
Because he was a fungi!

What kind of flower gives you kisses?
Tulips! (Two lips!)

What's a tree's favorite drink?
Root beer



HOW TO MAKE A

Miniature Garden

IN A JAR

What You'll Need:

- A clear glass jar or container (like an old pickle jar or a fish bowl)
- Small plants (like succulents, moss, or tiny ferns)
- Potting soil
- Small pebbles or stones (for drainage)
- Activated charcoal (optional, helps keep the air fresh)
- Decorative items (like tiny figurines, shells, or colored stones)
- A spoon or small shovel (to help with planting)
- Water (for your plants)

No-Bake Oreo Cheesecake Bites

Ingredients:

Oreo cookies (*or any chocolate cookies*)
Cream cheese (softened)
Powdered sugar
Chocolate chips (optional)

Instructions:

Crush Oreos into fine crumbs and set aside.

In a mixing bowl, combine cream cheese and powdered sugar until smooth.

Mix in half of the crushed Oreos.

Roll the mixture into small balls and coat with remaining Oreo crumbs.

Place on a tray and refrigerate until firm, about 1 hour. Serve chilled.

Step-by-Step Instructions:**Gather Your Materials:**

Collect all your supplies. Choose a clear jar so you can see your beautiful miniature garden!

Prepare the Bottom Layer:

Start by placing a layer of small pebbles or stones at the bottom of the jar. This helps with drainage so your plants don't get "waterlogged." Aim for about 1 inch of pebbles.

Add Activated Charcoal (Optional):

If you have activated charcoal, sprinkle a thin layer on top of the pebbles. This helps keep the air fresh inside your jar by preventing odors.

Layer the Potting Soil:

Carefully add a layer of potting soil on top of the charcoal or pebbles, about 2-3 inches thick. Use your spoon or small shovel to spread it evenly.

Plant Your Mini Garden:

Take your small plants and gently remove them from their pots. Make small holes in the soil and place each plant inside, patting the soil around the base to secure them. If you're using moss, just lay it on top of the soil.

Add Decorations:

Now, let your creativity shine! Place tiny figurines, shells, or colored stones around your plants to make your miniature garden unique.

Water Your Garden:

After planting, give your miniature garden a light watering. Be careful not to overwater; a few spritzes or a tablespoon or two of water will do!

Find a Happy Spot:

Place your jar in a spot where it can get some sunlight but not too much direct heat. A bright windowsill works great!

Take Care of Your Garden:

Make sure to check on your garden regularly. Water it when the soil feels dry but be careful not to overwater. You can also trim any dead leaves as needed.

Extra Tips:*Choose the Right Plants:*

Look for low-light plants if your jar will be in a shady spot. Succulents are great options for sunny areas!

Experiment: Make different themed jars, like an underwater garden with blue stones or a fairy garden with little creatures!

● CONTINUED ON PAGE 30

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KIDS CORNER

● CONTINUED FROM PAGE 29

Fun Things To Do Around the Isles

Visit the Charlotte Harbor Environmental Center (CHEC)- Explore nature trails, educational exhibits, and learn about local wildlife. Kids can participate in eco-education programs and even take part in guided nature walks.

Explore Fishermen's Village- Spend a day at this waterfront shopping and dining complex. Kids can enjoy the small beach, watch the boats, and participate in special events or craft fairs.

Dolphin Tours- Go on a family-friendly dolphin cruise. There are several companies that offer boat tours where kids can see dolphins in their natural habitat.

Punta Gorda History Park- Visit this park that features historical buildings. It's a great spot for adventure!

Kayaking and Paddleboarding- Rent kayaks or paddleboards to explore the beautiful waters around Punta Gorda. Kids will love spotting fish, birds, and maybe even a manatee!

Punta Gorda Skate Park- If your kids enjoy skateboarding, scooters, or rollerblading, take them to the Punta Gorda Skate Park. It's a fun place for them to practice their skills.

Visit the Peace River Wildlife Center- This wildlife rehabilitation center is home to various native animals. Kids can learn about local wildlife and the importance of conservation.

Attend a Local Event or Festival- Check out Punta Gorda's calendar for family-friendly events like the Annual Seafood Festival or Holiday celebrations.

Take a Bike Ride on the Punta Gorda Pathways- Rent bikes and ride along the paved pathways that connect various parks and scenic spots throughout Punta Gorda.

Visit the Local Farmers Market- Check out the Punta Gorda Farmers Market on Saturday mornings. Kids will enjoy exploring fresh produce, local goods, and possibly even live entertainment.

Explore the Visual Arts Center- Participate in family-friendly art classes or workshops. Sometimes they offer special programs for kids to get creative.

Take a Tour of the Charlotte Harbor- Join a local boat tour that sails through the tranquil waters of Charlotte Harbor, where kids can learn about marine life and the local ecosystem.

Fishing Excursions- Book a family fishing charter for a day of fishing adventure. Kids can learn how to fish and enjoy the thrill of catching their dinner!

Exploring history at the Military Heritage Museum- Kids will have a blast discovering the stories of bravery and courage while learning about our heroes. From tanks to aircraft, every exhibit will spark their imagination!



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The Places of Punta Gorda

● BY REBECCA A. KEEN

Punta Gorda Charlotte Library



When I was a young girl, my family's move to a small town marked a new chapter. Relocating from a subdivision closer to the city, our country home felt more like my grandparents' farm than a place where I belonged. But soon, I would come to love the abundance of trees and thickets of blackberry vines.

The day we arrived, with boxes still unopened, I asked my mom if we could go to the library. I will never forget her response. She smiled and replied, "You think going to the library is a religious experience." It was true then and remains true today.

A late 19th-century philosopher, William James, once said that a religious experience is defined by a sense of wonder and involves the whole person . . . mind, emotions, values, and relationships – all things critical to my successful transition to a new high school! I'm thankful that my mom took me that afternoon. No matter what the coming days would bring, the library would provide a place of refuge where I could lose myself in a good book.

One of the very first places we explored when moving to Punta Gorda was our local library. Adorned with a painting depicting its 100+ year history, the mural called Pages from our Library's Past was dedicated the year after the building opened in 2019. The library had moved and expanded several times since 1908, when it was initially housed in the rectory of the Episcopal church. The location on Shreve Street has over 50,000 items available for checkout, with Youth, Teen, and Study spaces to relax and read to your heart's content. Self-service checkout and a drive-up drop box are options that simplify utilizing their services.

One of the most intriguing libraries I've ever heard of is The Haskell Free Library and Opera House, built in 1904 on the international border of the US and Canada. This architectural marvel boasts two different addresses, one in Vermont and the other in Quebec. It's been dubbed "the only library in the US without books." Recognized in the National Register of Historic Places for both countries, Haskell houses over 20,000 books published in French and English, all located on the Canadian side of the building. Stepping inside the US front door, visitors are greeted by a diagonal black line running through the building's reading room and opera house, marking the border. If you're fortunate enough to attend an opera, the performance takes place in Canada, but you might find yourself seated in the US!

While our community library may not be on an international border, the people of Punta Gorda have their own unique place to peruse. In a room dedicated to preserving our past, you will find books specifically focused on Florida's history. There is also a section for large-print books and new releases, as well as a section

for local authors. My new book, *In the I of the Hurricane, Hope after Historic Storms Ian and Idalia*, can be found in new releases by local authors. If you don't find the novel you are searching for, the library can request a transfer to obtain it. For the most popular selections, add yourself to the waiting list, and the library will notify you when it's available.

Having a community library is such a gift! If you have not already done so, stop by soon to unwrap this neighborhood treasure.



Rebecca's book, *In the I of the Hurricane, Hope after Historic Storms Ian and Idalia* is now available. Stop by and pick up a copy at our local bookstore, Copperfish!

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PUNTA GORDA GARDENING

Garden Happenings

● ARTICLE AND PHOTO BY JOYCE LAUBACH

We hope this information encourages you to enjoy nature through the many organizations and many opportunities offered in our community.



January
PLANT OF
THE MONTH

Pencil Cactus (Euphorbia Tirucalli)

The pencil cactus is a common plant found for sale at garden centers or from donated cuttings. They are succulents and exotic in form with pencil-width stems and tiny leaves. While succulents, they are not a true cactus. There is also a variety that produces a flush of red color on new stem growth and is referred to as Firesticks.

Like many succulents, pencil cactus will do best in very well-drained soil. Poorly drained areas will potentially promote root rot to develop. Full, all-day sun is also recommended for vigorous growth and best color. While pencil cactus can take the seasonal rains of summer, keep this succulent on the drier side during the winter when it is in a somewhat dormant state.

Be careful of the sap. Wear gloves when handling and especially when pruning and propagating. Propagate using six-inch tip cuttings which have been dried to seal off the cut end and prevent rot. The pencil cactus makes a beautiful specimen plant. While normal precautions must be exercised concerning its toxic sap, please consider it as a highly ornamental plant for your collection.



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Punta Gorda Nature Park – This park at the corner of Aqui Esta and Bal Harbor is a beautiful place to exercise, meet friends, and enjoy the volunteer-maintained, donation supported gardens and pathways. Dogs and new volunteers are always welcome. Green Thumbs continue to focus on ways to enhance the health and beauty of the gardens. Stop by any Friday morning if you want to touch base with volunteers if you have questions or comments.

Free Seminars in the park – “Talking Plants”, 9:30 AM on second Fridays:

January 10 – Adaptive Gardening; February 14 – Herb Growing; March 14 – Orchid Repotting

Park at the shopping center and bring your own chair. Registration not required.

Visit Facebook.com/PGIGreenThumbs or www.PGIGreenThumbs.org for park information.



Punta Gorda in Bloom – This project is devoted to downtown beautification and is responsible for the colorful planters along Taylor and Marion. The project is only possible to achieve and maintain with the help of volunteers, so please consider giving a little of your time. There is flexibility for you to choose a role and the amount of time you invest. To find out more about getting involved, visit www.PuntaGordaInBloom.org, www.facebook.com/puntagordainbloom, or contact TEAM@Teampuntagorda.com.

Charlotte Harbor Environmental Center: The Alligator Creek CHEC location is virtually in our backyard and is a wonderful place for nature lovers. General admission is free. Some events charge a small fee.

- Free guided hiking tours take place on Tuesday mornings at 9 am.
- Full moon guided hikes.
- Wild Wednesdays film series.
- Environmentally themed lectures...Lectures for January and February:
- Algae, Detritus, and Salt Spray, Oh My! - an overview of Charlotte County Marine Smellscape by Kate Rose - Florida Sea Grant Agent; Introduction to Sustainable and Fun Recreational Fishing by Mark Williams - Florida Master Naturalist.

The Caniff Welcome Center features live animal ambassadors, a gift shop, and educational exhibits, and is open from November to May from 10 am to 3 pm. The Preserve also features an alligator dock, bird blind, and butterfly sanctuary for immersive nature experiences. The butterfly sanctuary is open limited hours. Check the webpage to browse the online calendar for details of upcoming programs and events: <https://www.checflorida.org/calendar>.

● CONTINUED ON PAGE 34



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PUNTA GORDA GARDENING

● CONTINUED FROM PAGE 33

Charlotte County Extension Services – Master Gardener Programs

Tour the Master Gardener Demonstration Gardens – The gardens, located at 25550 Harborview Road, are open daily for anyone to visit, with free tours available the 2nd Tuesday of each month at 9 AM through May. This garden was designed to highlight a wide range of plants that represent ideal “Florida Friendly” selections that can inspire choices for your own garden. Each section of the demonstration garden reflects a different theme, from edibles, to natives, to succulents, to pollinator plants and ornamentals. Master Gardeners work on garden maintenance every Tuesday morning. Visit www.EventBrite.com and search under UF/IFAS Charlotte County Extension Service for details.

Plant Helpline: Have your garden questions answered by a Charlotte County Master Gardener every Monday, Wednesday 1120 Centennial Blvd., Port Charlotte and Friday from 1-4 PM: in person at the Master Gardener office, via phone at 941-764-4444 on the same schedule, OR post questions any time at mastergardener@charlottecountyfl.gov.

Seed & Information Station - Interested in starting new plants from seed? At the same location as the Helpline...check out the Seed & Information Station in the front lobby. The type and number of seeds available at any given time depends on donations so feel bring to bring seeds to swap. In addition, there's always info on FFL, seasonal gardening, soil test kits, gardening calendars, etc. – all free to take home.

Parks That Teach – Tours take place on the first Saturday and third Wednesday of the month through May. Guided tours are led by the University of Florida's Master Gardeners and are free to the public. View the unique ecosystems of mangroves, identify trees and shrubs, and learn how these plants can fit into your home landscape. Pre-registration not required.

Location: Meet at the circular benches at the Punta Gorda Library, 401 Shreve Street, Punta Gorda.

Plant Topics – These free public educational sessions run through March on the third Tuesdays of the month at 2 PM at the Punta Gorda Library. Free and open to the public. The topic on January 21 will be “Herbal Tea Gardening”. Many plants can serve as both garden ornamentals AND as the source for making herbal teas. Learn how to prepare the garden, select the plants, harvest and preserve the leaves, make custom blends and then enjoy the flavor and health benefits of your own tea.

The February 18 topic will be “Flowering Trees” and the March 18 topic is “Bonsai for Everyone”.

Walk-up Plant Clinics -

Stop by one of these locations to have your landscape questions addressed by volunteer Master Gardeners:

D&B Nursery - Tue, Thur, Sat, 9-4 -142 Panther Ct, Port Charlotte

Home Depot – Port Charlotte - 2nd Saturday, 9:30-12:30, 19690 Cochran Blvd;
Punta Gorda - 2nd Saturday 9:30-12:30 3941 Tamiami Trail

Lowes - 2nd Saturday 9:30-12:30, 2000 Tamiami Trail, Port Charlotte

Englewood Library – Tues. & Thur., 10:00-12:00 3450 N Access Rd, Englewood

Port Charlotte Library - 2nd & 4th Thur., 1:00-3:00 2280 Aaron St., Port Charlotte

Punta Gorda Library - 2nd Wed., 11:00-1:00 and 3rd Tues 2:00-4:00, 401 Shreve St Punta Gorda

Master Gardener Radio – 4th Tuesday of each month 10am-11am on 1580 WCCF-AM – New topics discussed every month.



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For more information about Master Gardener programs and events, visit <https://sfyl.ifas.ufl.edu/charlotte>. For Florida specific, scientifically based garden advice on plants in general, visit <https://gardeningsolutions.ifas.ufl.edu> and insert your search term.

Peace River Botanical & Sculpture Gardens:

Every Tuesday is Tail Waggin' Tuesday. Bring your furry friends. For each animal, there is a \$5 donation to the Animal Welfare League.

Every Sat. is "Stay and Play"; yard games, music and fun the whole family can enjoy.

Beguiled By The Wild, featuring the art of Charley Harper, continues until January 19.

Zimsulpt Returns in February! Display and sale of high-quality Zimbabwean sculpture, increasing awareness and appreciation of the Shona artists, their sculpture movement, and the culture of the Zimbabwean people. Live sculpting demonstrations.

PRBG continues introducing new programs, classes and features, and is widely recognized as an asset and destination for our region. The work there continues to prioritize and demonstrate the delicate balance of our ecosystem through rich cultural and arts programming. Visit www.PeaceRiverGardens.org for an up-to-date status of the gardens and details about upcoming classes and events.

Port Charlotte Happy Gardens and Exchange:

Come celebrate the new year with other plant lovers at the Port Charlotte Happy Gardener's Plant Exchange, held on the first Saturday of each month from 10am-10:30am at the William R Gaines Veterans Memorial Park 20449 Edgewater Drive in Port Charlotte. Free and open to the public. You never know what treasures you might find!

Punta Gorda Garden Club: The group counts on fund raising to support many very worthwhile local causes. Visit www.PGGC.org to sign up for either of these classes:

A six-part series of classes on floral design will be held on Tuesdays at the Congregational United Church of Christ on Aqui Esta in Punta Gorda starting January 14 from 9:30 to 3:30. \$90 for all six classes, including instructor- led training, materials and handouts.

A one-day class called "Digging It: Horticulture Basics" will be held on January 22 from 9:30 am to 2:00 pm at the Buttonwood Community Center, 701 Aqui Esta Drive, Punta Gorda. The \$25 fee includes instructor-led training, materials and handouts. The instructor will be the president of the Florida Federation of Garden Clubs.

General Event Information – Not for Garden Happenings

The Punta Gorda Historical Society resumes its "Kickback Music" program in January. Held on the 2nd and 4th Wednesdays of the month from 5 to 7 PM, starting Jan 8 and 22, 2025 thru May 2025. These events are held outdoors in the Punta Gorda History Park on Shreve St. next to the library. Bring your own chairs and refreshments and enjoy live music in this garden setting. Free, but Historical Society contributions welcome.

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SPORTSMAN'S PARADISE

● BY SUMMER NICKLAS



In the early days, Punta Gorda became known as a “Sportsman’s Paradise”.

Tarpon was one of the most sought after game fish by those who navigated the expansive flats in our local waters. “Silver King” Tarpon, as they were called, with some weighing over 80 pounds were caught locally and at an impressive rate. Punta Gorda Isles, with its easy access to Charlotte Harbor, was the perfect pathway for avid anglers. Species like snook, sea trout, and redfish dotted the harbor and were relatively abundant and prime table fare for their captors. Boats and docks in the man-made canals of Punta Gorda Isles created the perfect habitat for snook and redfish, some of Florida’s premiere game fish. Around the numerous channel markers, Cobia was a favorite catch.

Punta Gorda Isles, Inc. offered friends and prospective clients a unique opportunity to experience local waters first hand. The *Islander*, a 32-foot Chris Craft, was a busy vessel as sales in the Isles soared. Guests toured canals and Charlotte Harbor on *The Islander*, as Punta Gorda Isles sales representatives anticipated a sale. In 1962, 80 x 120 waterfront home sites in the Isles were selling for \$4,950. The Punta Gorda Isles “Boys” were forward-looking and original to include this type of selling point to attract buyers and it worked well. By 1970, there



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were over 750 waterfront homes in the Isles. Later, the Islander II, a 48-foot Hatteras became part of the collection and it too hosted tours, parties and other celebrations. People from all over the country were interested in Punta Gorda for its small town atmosphere that offered luxury living at a more affordable price than in other parts of the state.

For my grandfather, a 22-pound snook became a favorite memory of fishing in the harbor just outside the canals of the Isles. Punta Gorda Isles made way for its residents to enjoy having boats in their backyards, access to both the harbor and the gulf, and a life on the water to enjoy year round. I remember diving through The Islander II as a teenager, after it was sunk somewhere in the waters near Ponce de Leon Park. As I navigated my way through the vessel, I could almost imagine the many memories that went down with the boat. It was an uncanny but astonishing connection to the past; one that so many people were able to enjoy in its prime in such a special way.



Summer Nicklas, is the granddaughter of Robert J. Barbee, Jr. Senior Vice President of Punta Gorda Isles, Inc. (b.1927-d.2003) and Brenda L. Barbee. She is married to Dr. Scott F. Nicklas and has six children: Kendall, Kaylie, Kaitlyn, Brendan, Luke, and Easton. She is the Career Specialist at Charlotte High School.



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EXPERT CONTRIBUTOR

The Book

● BY CAPT. MARK MILLER



I have often thought, I wish I would have started keeping a record of all I have seen in the past 60 years growing up in Punta Gorda. To tell the truth, it would be a very thick book with many chapters. For instance, one chapter would be about the two-lane drawbridge that crossed Charlotte Harbor in the 1960's. Of course, there was not as much traffic then, since there was no Port Charlotte or Murdock to speak of. Just Charlotte Harbor to about W. Tarpon Boulevard. Oh yes, and there was this new community called "Punta Gorda Isles" just starting up.

Moving many chapters forward to the 1980's, the town was still small enough that everyone still knew each other and there were many new businesses starting to show up. One of these was

Ingman Marine, and that got my attention from day one.

Another notable chapter would be in 2004, when a little storm called Hurricane Charley hit Punta Gorda. The impact was strong, not only from the storm, but it also put Punta Gorda on the mainstream map, and we have not stopped growing since.

In the book, there may be many good chapters, but some may not be so good. For instance, 2024 could have been better. With a tough economy, poor leadership on all fronts and yes, Helene and Milton; the Hurricanes that just keep on giving.

Let's turn the page to the next chapter. 2025. It is really looking up. Many of us have new floors, walls, etc. in our homes; the economy should start to rebound and fishing is going to be better than ever (spoken like a true fisherman)! And I know Ingman Marine will be a helpful as ever. As I should have mentioned in every chapter of my book, I would have talked about the days, months, years, even decades spent on Charlotte Harbor. It has always been a major part of my life.

If you're ready to start your new book, chapter one would hopefully be titled "Boating on Charlotte Harbor". To make this happen, visit us at Ingman Marine. Maybe I'll be lucky enough to be your delivery captain and can fill you in on many other stories from "old" Punta Gorda.

Don't let any slack in your lines. Captain Mark at Ingman Marine, 941-255-1555.

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