



SWFLA Today

Fort Myers, Cape Coral at center of two water tragedies

Chad Gillis
Fort Myers News-Press
USA TODAY NETWORK - FLORIDA

Sign, sign, everywhere a sign. The chorus to the Five Man Electrical Band's 1971 hit song rings true today in Southwest Florida.

"No swimming" signs line many beaches and coastal areas here. Some signs say don't eat the fish. Others say avoid the water. Some warn of a beach hazard issued by the National Weather Service.

And in some places where there are

no signs, nature tells the story. Untold numbers of dead fish washed up in the past two months, and more than 400 sea turtles have been recovered from local waters and beaches since Nov. 1.

Two major water quality tragedies are hitting the region at the same time — a red tide that's lingered here since October and a blue-green algal bloom that started in June.

"This is really an extreme event," said Calusa Waterkeeper John Cassani.

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What's the difference between red tide and blue-green algae?

Karl Schneider
Naples Daily News
USA TODAY NETWORK - FLORIDA

Southwest Florida recently has experienced two types of algal blooms, both in the Gulf of Mexico and in freshwater systems like the Caloosahatchee River.

The red tide, formally known as *Ka-*

renia brevis, was already in Gulf waters at the beginning of this year. It is an often recurring bloom that typically starts 10 to 40 miles offshore. Red tide isn't always red, either. It can range in color.

Blue-green algae, or cyanobacteria, is a more recent bloom affecting fresh

See **ALGAE CRISIS**, Page 4A

IMMOKALEE KIDS GET FREE BACKPACKS, BIKES AND MORE



Freddy Diego receives a free backpack during Lipman Family Farms' Back to School Event at Immokalee High School on Saturday. More than 1,500 backpacks filled with school supplies, 200 bikes, \$3,000 in gift cards and 150 free haircuts were given to elementary and middle school kids. More than 2,000 people attended Lipman Family Farms' seventh annual event. MORIAH RATNER/NAPLES DAILY NEWS

Katherine Hamilton
Naples Daily News
USA TODAY NETWORK - FLORIDA

Diana Garcia has lived in Immokalee since she was little. Now, with three little ones of her own — two of them enrolled in the Collier County school system — she appreciates any help she receives to give her children the send-off they deserve.

She and her children were among the more than 2,000 attendees of the seventh annual Lipman Family Farms Giveaway Back to School event at the Immokalee High School football field Saturday. More than 1,500 backpacks, as well as 200 bikes, \$3,000 in gift cards and 150 haircuts were given to students and their families to prepare them for the upcoming school year.

"I think it's really helpful," Garcia said, her children by her side admiring their new backpacks. "It helps a lot with school supplies."

Families flooded into the stadium at 9 a.m., enjoyed free food, drinks and games, including corn hole, and bubble-blowing, and got in line to receive the free backpacks, food and other supplies. Children who won "golden tickets" had the chance to hand-pick one

See **BACKPACKS**, Page 5A

Naples Council member reels back Pier fishing ban, but PETA won't



Brent Batten
Columnist
Naples Daily News
USA TODAY NETWORK - FLA.

It seemed like a good idea. For about 48 hours. Then Naples City Council member

Linda Penniman began hearing from fishermen outraged at her suggestion last month to a local TV station that fishing should be banned at the Naples Pier.

She quickly realized the idea wouldn't fly and began trying to make amends.

"I admitted my mistake to all of those who wrote and called within about 48

hours," Penniman wrote in an email.

That amounted to about 50 mea culpas, she said.

"While it was a mistake on my part, I learned a great deal about what the Pier means to so many in Naples, and it is not all about the fishing," she wrote.

The whole thing appeared about to blow over as quickly as a summer thunderstorm.

Then PETA got involved.

People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals heard about Penniman's suggestion, but not necessarily her quick recant, and took up the cause.

On Friday PETA announced its plan to fly a banner over the Pier for two hours on Saturday reading, "Keep Hook-

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Naples man, 27, dies in 5-vehicle crash on Immokalee Road

Oscar Santiago Torres
Naples Daily News
USA TODAY NETWORK - FLORIDA

A 27-year-old Naples man died Friday afternoon in a five-vehicle crash on Immokalee Road and Quarry Drive in North Naples, according to the Florida

Highway Patrol.

Yordan T. Cueto Viera was driving a GMC Sierra east in the center lane of Immokalee Road east of Interstate 75 and just west of Quarry Drive when his pickup veered off the roadway to the left, FHP reported. Cueto Viera's vehicle crossed over the median, entered the

Immokalee Road lanes for westbound traffic and struck two vehicles, the Highway Patrol reported.

A vehicle traveling west in the outside lane of Immokalee Road then hit two vehicles. The fifth vehicle was hit by debris from the crash.

Cueto Viera, who died in the crash,

was not wearing a seat belt, according to the report.

Another 27-year-old Naples man was in critical condition. A 41-year-old Immokalee woman suffered minor injuries.

The crash remained under investigation Saturday.

Backpacks

Continued from Page 3A

of 200 bikes from Bikes for Tykes to take home.

Leticia Carmona, 12, walked through the rows of bikes with her family, looking for the perfect one. She finally landed on a pink one with silver, shimmery streamers.

"I feel grateful," she said with a shy smile.

The Friends of Foster Children Forever also hosted its fifth annual Back to School Bonanza for foster children with open dependency cases in Collier County on Saturday at the Golden Gate Community Center. The event was sponsored again this year by Arthrex and served more than 300 foster children plus their siblings.

Lipman Family Farms is the largest producer of field grown tomatoes in the country; it has been growing and processing tomatoes out of Immokalee since the 1960s and has been headquartered there since the '80s, said Jaime Weisinger, director of community relations for Lipman Family Farms and a fourth generation Lipman family member.

Immokalee is responsible for 75 percent of the nation's tomato production between the months of November and December, Weisinger said.

About 45 percent of the area's residents live in poverty, according to the United States Census Bureau.

"These are hard-working, dedicated people. A lot of them are farm workers, and the food that's on your table is coming from these farms. They work very



Namiah Prudent, 7, plays with a bubble wand with Gulissa Montalvo, right, during Lipman Family Farms' seventh annual Back to School Event at Immokalee High School on Saturday. MORIAH RATNER/ NAPLES DAILY NEWS

very hard to provide food for their families and for our families," said Andrea Roth, one of the volunteers distributing backpacks.

Roth has volunteered for the event for six years and has brought her own two daughters with her to help since they were ages four and six.

"It's the experience of giving back to the community and making sure [my daughters] understand that there are people that are in need that really, truly deserve to be able to go back to school with full back packs," she said.

Only half of people in Immokalee have health insurance; the average per-

son makes \$10,000 a year; and 40 percent of people graduate from high school and four percent from college, the U.S. Census Bureau reported.

Collier County has around 1,400 homeless this year with another 1,200 children at risk of becoming homeless according to The Hunger and Homeless Coalition of Collier County.

It's numbers like those that make the Lipman Family Farms Giveaway Back to School event an important one.

"The entire community has come together around this event," Weisinger said.

"They know how important it is to

this town. What you see now is the result of seven years of effort."

Besides preparing students for school, the event had more than 40 exhibitors, non-profits and government agencies.

"[The vendors] will help people understand what services are available here," Weisinger said.

One of the tents at the event was for The Shelter for Abused Women and Children. The Shelter was recognized as a national model for its work serving immigrant and migrant battered women through its Immokalee Outreach Office [IOO].

The need for a shelter in Immokalee has grown exponentially over the years, especially considering that Florida is the third highest trafficking destination in the country, according to the Florida Department of Health. In 2015, 15 human traffickers were arrested in a CCSO operation called 'Operation Human Freedom.' Six women were rescued between the ages of 25 to 35.

The non-profit hopes to break ground for the new Shelly Stayer Shelter for Victims of Human Trafficking & Domestic Violence in January and will have 32 beds available.

"[The shelter] did an assessment to measure the need — and in addition to measuring the need for the domestic violence shelter, they also measured need [based on] human trafficking," said Kay-dee Tuff, Communications Manager for The Shelter for Abused Women and Children.

"So that was the impetus for combining the two into one facility with separate wings and separate therapy for each."

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