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NAPLES EDITION

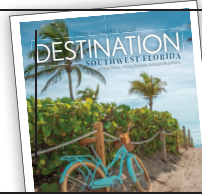
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SHE SHED, SHE SAID:

Make-A-Wish Southern Florida grants teen's dream of an oasis to create and relax | **A15**

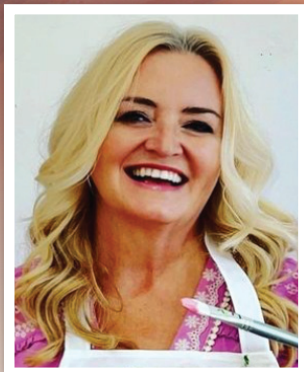


DOGGY DASH: Four-legged friends take over the treadmill in Southwest Florida's one-of-a-kind mobile gym | **A23**



DESTINATION: Discover Southwest Florida's hidden treasures and hot spots to make your visit one to remember | **INSIDE**

INTERNATIONAL WOMEN'S DAY



Camilla Webster



Linda Oberhaus



Tricia LaPointe



Stefanie Ink Edwards

A tribute to the remarkable and diverse ladies who enrich our communities

BY CARLIE ADMIRE

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WHO RUNS THE world? Girls! Beyoncé told us that in 2011 with her hit song that peaked the billboards. She was right. Florida has a higher percentage of women than men, with 51% of the population being female, which aligns closely

with the national average.

Florida has been home to many notable women, including Betty Mae Tiger Jumper (who was also known as Potackee), the first female chairperson of the Seminole Tribe; environmentalist Marjorie Harris Carr; Gwendolyn Cherry, the state's first African American female legislator; and best-selling author Judy Blume, a current and longtime Key West resident best known for her young adult novels.

As International Women's Day approaches, Florida Weekly celebrates the remarkable women in our communities and across the globe. Often facing adversity, these women demonstrate strength, resilience and integrity. But what defines "greatness" in a woman? It is a combination of inner power and the ability to inspire and have a positive impact on those around them.

SEE WOMEN, A12 ►

Florida wildlife at risk

As avian flu outbreak continues its spread, experts urge caution and vigilance

BY MARY WOZNAK

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Concern about the avian flu is spreading among wildlife agencies and wildlife rehabilitation experts, much like the virus itself.

According to the U.S. Department of Agriculture, the virus has been detected in over 12,000 wild birds since the outbreak began in January 2022. Florida is the state with the highest number of detections at 735, followed by California, with 726.

Lauren Barkley, manager of the von Arx Wildlife Hospital at the Conservancy of Southwest Florida, said that in 2022, all the wildlife rehab centers started discussing the onset of bird flu cases.



BARKLEY

"It was almost like a panic moment," she said. "You've heard about it. But what do we do? How do we protect the animals that we have in our care? How do we protect the animals that are our permanent residents? Because it does almost spread like wildfire. And everyone's still trying to understand the virus."

In Florida, the avian, or bird flu, has appeared in 35 Florida counties, including Charlotte, Collier and Palm Beach, according to the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission. Lee County was not

SEE BIRD FLU, A16 ►

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“I was a peer counselor in high school, and that is really where it began. I always felt like I knew I wanted to work in the social service arena,” said Oberhaus. “Working at The Shelter for Abused Women & Children means I get to make a difference in our community, and I feel very fortunate to do this work.”

Oberhaus shared her journey into volunteer work, which began at The Crisis Center of Tampa Bay and later included answering calls at a local emergency room for assault victims.

“I was doing that at 18 years old, which led me to working at a juvenile detention center,” she said. “Those girls came from tragic backgrounds with hardships and trauma. This experience led me to a community mental health center, where I spent over six years before moving to assist as a frontline worker in domestic violence cases. You see a lot and hear a lot. It is about being supportive through different situations.”

Oberhaus is actively involved in the President’s Family Justice Center Initiative, the Harrell Center for the Study of Family Violence and the Florida Bar’s 20th Judicial Circuit Grievance Committee. Additionally, she participates in Leadership Florida and Leadership Collier, focusing on local development and promoting connections to strengthen communities and guidance.

“The Leadership programs connect you with other professionals in many different industries. It is a great opportunity to learn the community better and enhance your connections,” said Oberhaus. “I recently joined the board of directors for Florida Partnership to End Domestic Violence, serving as the president. It is a statewide coalition that provides support to all the certified domestic violence centers in Florida and is an entire network. I was honored to be a part of this and assist in that capacity.”

Oberhaus has received several award titles, including Person of the Year, Leading Lady and the Murray Hendel Civic Achievement Award in 2024. During the reception, Florida Senate President Kathleen Passidomo presented a proclamation from the state celebrating Oberhaus’ impactful work. In addition, for over 10 years, Oberhaus has served as a state-certified auxiliary deputy for the Collier County Sheriff’s Office, earning the “Outstanding Leadership Award” for her contributions.

“I completed the Southwest Florida Law Enforcement Academy, which I cannot even believe myself,” she said. “It is nice to be on the front lines with the deputies. They are our first line of support when on a scene with victims who call the emergency lines for help. I go on street patrol and provide support in domestic violence and human trafficking cases, ensuring safe communities.”

Oberhaus actively seeks new programs and solutions with The Shelter for Abused Women & Children, including the current construction of an apartment-style campus in Immokalee to assist shelter residents in their healing processes.

Oberhaus and her team operate around the clock, offering a safe environment and essential services like plans to leave situations, therapy, job placement assistance, legal support and general inquiries. The Shelter provides 60 beds and typically houses an average of 40 individuals each night.

As a powerful advocate for women in the community, Oberhaus empha-

“This experience led me to a community mental health center, where I spent over six years before moving to assist as a frontline worker in domestic violence cases. You see a lot and hear a lot. It is about being supportive through different situations.”

— Linda Oberhaus

sized, “It isn’t about me; it is about putting women on the map.” She lives by her motto of “happy, healthy, whole,” passionately supporting those in need.

Camilla Webster, Palm Beach County

Fun fact: Attended the University of St. Andrews in Scotland

Camilla Webster masterfully encapsulates the essence of Palm Beach through her artistry. A distinguished bestselling author, she channels her passion into vibrant expressions of art and design. Her work has been showcased in renowned galleries, and she has delivered art talks in prestigious cultural hubs, including Miami, New York, London and Paris.

“I have been a full-time artist since 2013, but I have been painting since I was a kid,” Webster said. “I wanted to tell stories in a new format and was passionate about light and color. I did a very peaceful painting for my mother called ‘Seeking Haven,’ which turned into a TED Talk. I got a studio in New York and then moved to Palm Beach and opened my studio here in 2018. I feel like that is where my story really began.”

Before pursuing her artistic career, Webster was an international journalist for Forbes. During her time in journal-

ism, she reported on market news events like the Wall Street crash and the Davos summit. Webster also worked closely with prominent figures like Richard Branson, producing profiles of billionaires and their companies. As a war correspondent, she reported on the U.S. invasion of Iraq and other crises, striving to understand the human spirit in challenging conditions. She says all these experiences have deeply influenced her artistic perspective.

Inspired by Ernest Hemingway and the Florida Keys, Webster began to create art that captures the world’s natural beauty. She produces abstract seascapes, as well as handbags, home decor and sculptures. From this creative journey, Webster launched the brand “Love from Palm Beach,” motivated by a painting. She described it as “my love note to the world,” aiming to share the joy and beauty of Palm Beach with others around the globe just as she experiences it.

“This year, I started collaborating with other female artists and companies,” she said. “I had the opportunity to work with Chelsea Lane & Co. and created wallpaper that is inspired by our lifestyle and different aspects of nature found in Palm Beach. It is Paradise Palms and launched with Chelsea Viau’s design house. I have also been showcased in top luxury hotels like The Ritz-Carlton and The Sagamore Hotel.”

Her art also includes series, like one featuring patriotic elements and photo-

graphs of Andy Warhol taken by Karen Bystedt.

“It was very well received. I hosted her photographs at my studio. I paint the American flag each year based on what has happened,” Webster said. “My artwork is in many historical presidential family homes. I am a descendant of the American Revolutionary War, and the flag is a symbol of the entire country.”

Additionally, Webster takes part in the annual “Pink Retreat,” which brings together hundreds of women to explore different art forms and the emotions they evoke. She remarked, “It is a way to bring light and inspiration to people.”

Webster says she embraces creative projects that challenge her by exploring unique opportunities and stepping beyond her comfort zone. She remembered painting a traditional English countryside scene for a client, “Each project teaches me something new, whether working with various materials, brush strokes, lighting or techniques.”

With the belief that art can be found in any setting, Webster hand-painted a Moke vehicle (think modern golf cart) that was auctioned for \$55,000 at the

Boca Raton Artisan of Food and Wine Event, benefiting the Palm Beach Boys and Girls Club.

“It was a good challenge. You learn a lot by painting on different surfaces. I get a lot of joy out of thinking about how the individual or public will engage with

SEE WOMEN, A14 ►

“My artwork is in many historical presidential family homes. I am a descendant of the American Revolutionary War, and the flag is a symbol of the entire country.”

— Camilla Webster



Camilla Webster

COURTESY PHOTO

WOMEN

From page 13

the artwork, and depending on the shape and size, you want to get the most out of the piece,” said Webster. “My handbags are popular. Having an exclusive accessory in Palm Beach is a big deal since fashion is fierce in this area, especially with so many events. It is traveling artwork compared to just paintings on a home wall. My handbags are all hand-painted. Depending on the piece, it can take anywhere from a few days to a few weeks to create.”

Webster has also designed custom art-pop champagne bottles in partnership with Moët and created artwork for Thomas Ashbourne and Sarah Jessica Parker’s crafted spirit brand, The Perfect Cosmo.

Throughout the years, her paintings have been part of prestigious displays and collections at notable venues like as Hudson Yards in New York City, the Coral Springs Museum of Art in Florida and the Kips Bay Decorator Show House in Palm Beach.

At Art Basel Miami 2022, she received praise from the mayor of Miami and the Miami Art Commission. Webster has also shared her insights as a speaker at the Power Talks sessions at Art Palm Beach and was an honored artist to represent The Palm Beach Historical Society at various public and private events. Additionally, her piece, The Clock Tower On Worth, was installed into the permanent collection of the Richard and Pat Johnson History Museum of Palm Beach County in 2023.

Webster has expanded her business ventures into sustainability as a co-owner of Seagrass Greens, transforming Atlantic seaweed into nutrient-rich soil amendments and tackling environmental challenges with innovative solutions.

“My grandfather had a farm, and I was always interested in the ecosystem. Everything I paint is about nature, so there is a connection between my artwork and giving back to the oceans and soil. I put peace and love into my artwork, which should also be put into our soil. It is feeding the land with what it needs to flourish and educating the community on sustainable cycles,” said Webster.

Inspired by her latest project, Webster’s recent collections highlight the intricate textures, vivid colors and dynamic spirit of ocean life, forming a lively interplay between nature and artistic creativity.

“My mission has been to inspire and give people joy while creating lasting impact,” she said.

Tricia LaPointe, Charlotte County

Fun fact: Married at Disney World and has visited the theme park over 20 times

Tricia LaPointe has extensive experience in building nonprofit foundations through corporate grants, securing individual donations and managing special events to support families in reaching their full potential. However, for the past two years, she has dedicated her skills to helping Florida’s native residents — its wildlife.

“I am the executive director or CEO of the nonprofit Peace River Wildlife Center. It is very rewarding,” said LaPointe. “My background is in development, and I have done fundraising for different nonprofits for about 28 years.”

Before joining the Peace River Wildlife Center, LaPointe served as a board member for the Animal Welfare League of Charlotte County, held the position of director of resources at United Way, and



COURTESY PHOTO

Tricia LaPointe

worked with survivors of domestic violence, as well as with developmental disabilities and cancer centers. Additionally, she is spotted at Chamber of Commerce meetings and various charitable events and as a guest speaker to the local Kiwanis Club.

In her role at United Way of Charlotte County, LaPointe highlighted the gratifying experience of helping individuals break the cycle of poverty through education, financial stability and healthy lifestyle practices. However, she also acknowledged that her keenness for animals has always been a significant driving force.

“I’ve always had a passion for animals, whether big or small. I began volunteering at the local animal shelter when I was just 10 years old. I remember walking dogs — though it often felt like they were walking us — and also cleaning kennels and giving baths. I can’t remember a time in my life when I didn’t have a pet,” said LaPointe.

Through her guidance and with the support of her team of volunteers and skilled veterinarians, the center cares for 85 permanent residents and rehabilitates nearly 2,500 injured animals annually, achieving an impressive 80% return rate to the wild. She emphasizes that the yearly food costs alone amount to \$90,000, underscoring her dedication to the care and funding of native wildlife.

“We have a lot of birds, from hawks, eagles, shorebirds and songbirds. We also get mammals, from cottontail rabbits and grey squirrels. We accept injured, distressed or abandoned wild animals every day of the week, including holidays. We recently took in a hurt bald eagle that was in a fight with another bald eagle,” she said.

LaPointe joined the nonprofit to secure funding for a new education center at the rehabilitation complex, which

suffered significant damage from recent storms. Additionally, she focuses on promoting the center’s continued growth, cultivating community engagement and supporting the animals in its care.

“The education center is still in the process. We have started building, and we have raised the ground, as well as the infrastructure and other steps after that. But we still have fundraising that needs to happen,” said LaPointe.

Known for her campaigning and nonprofit development expertise, she was brought on board to support this initiative, successfully raising almost \$3 million.

LaPointe explained, “It is a lot of writing grants and talking to people. We have many faithful and long-term donors. But we also get many tourists and residents in our area that didn’t know we were here. Once connecting with them, they also become donors and supporters.”

She noted that the new education center will span three acres, an impressive enlargement from its previous 0.4 acres. It will be relocated to safer grounds outside flood zones, enabling herself and her team to care for more injured and orphaned wildlife.

“Through the fundraising and our new educational center, we will be able to hold more animals. This includes bigger animals, such as foxes,” said LaPointe.

LaPointe and her team dedicated weeks to cleaning the waterfilled and damaged area while caring for the onsite animals, many of which were birds with wing injuries. Given the double hit of hurricanes this past season, they decided to relocate the animals for their safety. LaPointe reached out to other animal rescues across the state, as well as Zoological Disaster Response, Rescue, and Recovery (the largest zoological response organization in the United States) to fa-

cilitate this process.

“We aren’t completely back; our pelicans are still not home. It has been a challenge, but we have a great team,” she said.

LaPointe remains committed to raising funds for the new center while also promoting the importance of respecting and protecting wildlife.

“The center is designed to teach individuals about different species and how to handle encounters correctly,” she said. “We have two opossums and a few owls that cannot be released due to human interaction. They do not know how to hunt since they were raised early on by people.”

LaPointe emphasized the center’s role by stating, “We are not a zoo. Our primary mission is rehabilitation: to treat injured animals and successfully release them back into the wild. Following that, our focus is on our wildlife educational center.”

Thanks to LaPointe’s efforts, the Peace River Wildlife Center has established various community engagement opportunities to address the center’s needs, organizing events such as a one-woman jazz show and comedy nights.

“We have a lot of naming opportunities, from engraved bricks on the new center to selling habitats, benches and street signs. There are many different avenues,” explained LaPointe. “It is different than supporting organizations that help people in the community. With wildlife, you have to find a group that has a passion for animals, it is about finding that niche of donors. But once you do, you have a donor for life.”

LaPointe shared that her passion for animals has deepened through her work with the nonprofit, especially her admiration for owls, which she described as “majestic creatures.” Her mission is to leverage her skills in fundraising and donor relations to further develop the Peace River Wildlife Center.

“My favorite part of my job is being able to give back to the community and be part of conserving our beautiful wildlife,” she said.

The future is female

Pace Center for Girls is one of many organizations dedicated to empowering future generations of women. Serving at-risk girls aged 12 to 18 across Florida, Pace operates in 21 locations, including Lee, Collier, Charlotte, Broward and Palm Beach counties. Since its founding in 1985, the nonprofit has supported over 40,000 young women.

Pace provides opportunities for a brighter future through education, counseling, training and advocacy. Its programs are rooted in the belief that all girls, regardless of race, ethnicity or socioeconomic background, deserve individualized care, support and encouragement to heal and reach their full potential.

Currently, Pace Lee is leading the “Every Girl Deserves” campaign, which is making a significant impact: 93% of students show academic improvement, all participants avoid juvenile justice involvement for a year post-program, and 95% continue their education or find employment.

“Every girl deserves a classroom atmosphere that inspires and supports her growth,” said Jennifer Cellitti, Pace Center for Girls, Lee executive director. “At Pace, we are committed to fostering a nurturing environment that prioritizes health and wellness. With the community’s support, we can transform our center into a haven for growth, healing and opportunity for every girl who walks through our doors.”

For additional information or to support the mission of Pace Center for Girls, visit pacecenter.org. ■