

KEY WEST WEEKLY

January 6, 2022



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PARADISE IS PACKED

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5450 MacDonald Ave. No.5
Key West, FL 33040
Office: 305.453.6928
www.keysweekly.com

Publisher
Britt Myers
britt@keysweekly.com

Publishing Partner
Jason Koler
jason@keysweekly.com

Editor
Mandy Miles
mandy@keysweekly.com

Account Executive
Stephanie Mitchell
stephanie@keysweekly.com

Staff Writers
Charlotte Twine
charlotte@keysweekly.com
Jim McCarthy
jim@keysweekly.com
Alex Rickert
alex@keysweekly.com

Copy Editor
Mike Howie
mike@keysweekly.com

Production Manager
Anneke Patterson
anneke@keysweekly.com

Circulation Manager
Charlotte Hruska
char@keysweekly.com

Design / Web Master
Travis Cready
travis@keysweekly.com

Design / Pre-Press
Irene de Bruijn
irene@keysweekly.com

Javier Reyes
javier@keysweekly.com

Director of Digital Media
Chanice Dos Santos
chanice@keysweekly.com

Classifieds
Anneke Patterson
anneke@keysweekly.com
305.743.0844

Se habla español
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Tuesday Noon
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Tuesday 2 p.m.



NUMBER OF THE WEEK

191 Preliminary data from the Florida Department of Highway Safety and Motor Vehicles shows 191 crashes and more than 14,000 citations issued for motorists who failed to “move over” in Florida in 2021. Per the “Move Over” law, drivers are required to move over a lane for a stopped law enforcement vehicle, utility workers, tow trucks or construction vehicles with displayed warning lights. Failure to do so could result in a fine and points on a person’s driving record.

ON THE COVER

Our cover photo of a New Year sand sculpture was created on New Year’s Day at Bahia Honda Beach. KATHY STONECASH/
Contributed

KEY WEST TALKS TRANSIENT RENTALS & SIDEWALK CAFES

OFFICIALS WANT RENTAL PROPERTIES TO PAY MORE

W **MANDY MILES**
mandy@keysweekly.com

Key West city officials want to make it more expensive for homeowners to rent their properties for a month or a week at a time.

Monthly and weekly vacation rentals are a main cause of Key West’s long-term housing shortage, Commissioner Jimmy Weekley said at the Jan. 4 city commission meeting, where officials raised the city’s transient rental fee from \$150 to \$300 while instructing city staff to investigate the possibility of raising those fees even more.

“Why \$300 and not \$3,000 or \$4,000?” Weekley asked. “If the city wanted to use that money and put it into an affordable housing trust fund because so many of these properties are diminishing our affordable housing supply, is that doable? Since they’re responsible for the loss of housing in this community, I think they oughta be paying more into a housing trust fund.”

City Attorney Shawn Smith said, “We can certainly look into it, but it’s a complex issue that will take time because you can’t put the cost of affordable housing entirely on the back of a private citizen.”

He added that the topic would be a good one for the city’s new community development and housing director to explore. That position was added to the 2022 budget at the request of Mayor Teri Johnston, and five candidates are being interviewed this month, facilitator Elisa Levy said during her report on the Key West Forward strategic plan.

During the discussion, officials made a distinction between the fees



Key West officials are considering higher fees for vacation rentals. CONTRIBUTED

charged by the city for transient, or short-term, rentals, which are fewer than 28 days, and the market-rate cost of an existing transient license. The city no longer issues new transient rental licenses, so an existing one must be bought on the open market, where they often sell for \$350,000 to \$500,000 due to their profitable potential.

With commissioners in agreement with Weekley, officials did vote unanimously to raise the fees for transient rentals from \$150 to \$300 while they explore additional price increases and possibilities.

In other news, the commission voted 6-1 to approve the new sidewalk cafe program and the new fees, which were lowered since the outdoor dining program started last summer.

Initially, participating restaurants had to pay an annual base fee of \$100. “The program also required a \$500-per-seat revocable license fee. In addition, the city charges a one-time per seat impact fee of \$592, billed over seven years,” city documents state.

The new fee schedule eliminates the \$500-per-seat fee, but includes a \$592 fee that’s payable over seven years.

“At this time, staff recommends amending the café dining/seating ordinance to require a one-time \$100 application fee and payment of the aforementioned impact fees; however, at this time the revocable

license fee is recommended to be removed,” city staff recommended.

Commissioner Billy Wardlow was the only dissenting vote, saying, “I really don’t care for it. I approved it for COVID, but a lot of them are making plenty of money down there. Is the city liable for any problems, like if a drunk person walks by and takes food off someone’s plate?”

Commissioner Mary Lou Hoover pointed out that the new ordinance requires restaurants to carry an additional \$1 million in insurance for outdoor dining.

Commissioner Sam Kaufman added that the sidewalk cafes “could be a really good selling point for our Duval Street revitalization, especially if we can get more uniformity and wider sidewalks on both sides of the street.”

As for cruise ships, City Attorney Shawn Smith told the commission that he and City Manager Patti McLaughlin were meeting with special counsel Ed Pozzouli on Jan. 5, the day after the commission meeting. “We’ll get an update on the new cruise ship ordinances from him. And Judge Sandy Taylor is also looking at her schedule for a date that she can accommodate mediation. We’re hoping for a Saturday before February.”

At the start of the meeting, Johnston presented her State of the City address, outlining past and upcoming projects, successes and challenges.

WELCOME, SOLDIER RIDE



Wounded warriors cross the Seven-Mile Bridge during the 2020 Soldier Ride. Keys Weekly file photo



Soldier Riders mount up in 2020 at Coral Shores High School in Tavernier. Keys Weekly file photo



Naval Air Station Key West hosts the Wounded Warriors in 2020. Keys Weekly file photo



Soldier Ride participants in 2020 get huge support along Key West's Duval Street. LARRY BLACKBURN/Keys Weekly

41 WOUNDED WARRIORS BIKE THE KEYS JAN. 7-8

W **MANDY MILES**
mandy@keysweekly.com

They're back and they need support as only the people of the Florida Keys can provide.

After a year's hiatus due to COVID, Wounded Warrior Project's Soldier Ride returns to the island chain this weekend, Friday and Saturday, Jan. 7 and 8.

Forty-one wounded military warriors will ride through the Upper, Middle and Lower Keys for three legs of a ride. Some ride traditional bikes, while others use adaptive bikes, such as hand-powered cycles, recumbent bikes, tricycles and hybrid bikes, to accommodate various injuries endured in combat.

All Wounded Warrior Project events, including the Soldier Rides, are entirely free for the warriors.

"Here in the Florida Keys, we come out to cheer the riders on like nowhere else. It's so inspiring to see these men and women reclaim their confidence and strength, both mental and physical," said Cathy Crane, director of Monroe County Veterans Affairs, who organizes the Soldier Ride in the Florida Keys. "These men and women have all been wounded in conflict. Some of their injuries are visible and others are invisible, when we're talking about traumatic brain injuries or post-traumatic stress disorder and other injuries."

Crane encourages all Keys residents, visitors and schoolchildren to line U.S. 1 when the ride is coming through their section of the Keys.

"We wave flags, wear red, white and blue and just give them moral support that means the world to them as they ride 10 to 17 miles in each leg," Crane said. "And they love seeing their supporters. They'll reach out and high-five people as they're passing by. It's an amazing feeling for everyone involved."



Supporters are encouraged to line U.S. 1 Friday in the Upper and Middle Keys and Saturday in the Lower Keys and Key West to cheer on the Soldier Ride. Keys Weekly file photo

And so many groups and organizations are eager to be involved with the event in the Keys, Crane said.

"This is the 10th year the partnership among Key West's Military Affairs Committee, the City of Key West and Monroe County has worked together on the Soldier Ride," Crane said. "It's the 16th year that Soldier Ride is visiting the Keys."

Government, law enforcement, veterans groups, fire and rescue services, civilians, schools and a host of other groups and individuals all volunteer to make the ride comfortable, memorable and healing for its participants.

"Warriors never ride alone; they move forward together, as a unit, just as they did during their military service," states the Wounded Warrior Project Soldier Ride website. "Soldier Ride empowers warriors to find solace, healing, and strength through movement. The experience opens doors to new opportunities and knowledge and helps to unleash their untapped potential. We only ride as fast as the slowest rider, so everyone can benefit."

So, when and where will the warriors ride in the Florida Keys?

FRIDAY, JAN. 7:

8:30 a.m.: The ride starts at Key Largo VFW Post 10211 with a 9:30 a.m. water stop at Coral Shores High School in Tavernier, ending around 10:30 a.m. at Postcard Inn Beach Resort & Marina in Islamorada.

11:45 a.m.: Meet and greet at Marathon Fire Rescue Station 14.

1 p.m.: The warriors head south from the fire station over the Seven Mile Bridge, ending at Veterans Memorial Park on the south end of the bridge around 2 p.m.

SATURDAY, JAN. 8

9:30 a.m.: The ride departs the DoubleTree Grand Key Resort in Key West and heads to the U.S. Naval Air Station Key West at Boca Chica Key, then loops back to Bayview Park in Key West. (Roadside supporters along U.S. 1 and at the Triangle in Key West have two opportunities to see the riders on their way to and from Boca Chica.)

Noon: Welcome ceremony at Bayview Park in Key West.

12:45 p.m.: Community Ride from Bayview Park until 2 p.m. The public is invited to ride with the warriors to historic Key West military sites. Patriotic bike decorations are encouraged. Suggested donation is \$20.

UP, UP AND AWAY

POLE VAULTERS DEFY GRAVITY AT FREE EXPO



Elite pole vaulter Garrett Starkey defies gravity and uses physics (somehow) to propel himself over a 16-foot pole while practicing in Key West in October. MANDY MILES/Keys Weekly

W MANDY MILES
mandy@keysweekly.com

“Look how high that thing is.”
“How the hell do they do that?”
“I’d end up impaling myself in a flailing heap while still at ground level.”

These and other observations are typically heard at Key West’s annual Pole Vault in Paradise expo. (Yes, that last comment came from me during the 2020 event.)

The free demonstration and competition highlight the speed, strength, agility and coordination of about 80 elite pole vaulters, aged 15 to 67, from 10 states, Mexico and Canada, while raising money for the Key West High School’s track and field programs.

Key West resident pole vaulter Steve Hanes launched Pole Vault in Paradise more than three years ago as the signature event for the Key West Track and Field Club, with crucial help from Dave Perkins at Key West High School.

The event offers spectators a free, up-close look at the athleticism of elite competitors, all vying to beat the Key West island record for cash prizes. Everyone is invited to bring beach chairs and blankets while spending a day at the beach and watching truly impressive athletic feats.

Pole Vault in Paradise has enabled the Key West Track & Field Club to donate \$24,000 and over \$10,000 in equipment to the Key West High School track team in its first two years, Hanes told the Keys Weekly.

The event features two official runways and landing pits for a high-flying demonstration.

“The athletes are always trying to beat their own personal bests or a state or world record, which makes for a great spectator event that draws hundreds each year,” Hanes said. “And this year we’ve drawn even more elite athletes with the possibility of cash prizes.”

The runways are open all day Friday, Jan. 7 for the athletes to practice and spectators to watch. The main event starts with a pancake breakfast on Saturday, Jan. 8 at 8 a.m. at Higgs Beach, between Ed Knight Pier and West Martello Tower. The first flights launch around 9 a.m. and will continue throughout the morning and afternoon as records are broken and personal bests are updated, Hanes said. Ten of the male vaulters have achieved personal bests over 18 feet high.

Food and beverages will be sold all day, while a DJ provides the soundtrack.

“Participant Anicka Newell, who lives in Texas and competes in Canada, competed in both the Rio and Tokyo Olympic Games and has jumped 15 feet 5 inches,” Hanes said. “And Billy Olson is a new resident of the Florida Keys who is expected to attend. He set the world record in 1986 as the first-ever vaulter to clear 19 feet indoors.”

All proceeds from the sale of merchandise and food and beverages, along with athlete registrations, benefit the KWHS track and field programs.

For more information or to make a donation, visit kwtfc.org.

BRINGIN’ THE INGHAM BACK

HISTORIC MUSEUM SHIP RETURNS TO TRUMAN WATERFRONT



The historic U.S. Coast Guard Cutter Ingham is seen Jan. 1 at its berth at Truman Waterfront, following its return from Tampa Ship boatyard, where \$650,000 of maintenance and repairs were done to the underwater portion of the hull. Tugboats escorted the most decorated Coast Guard ship in history to the boatyard and returned her to Key West on Dec. 30. The ship will reopen for its popular tours and weekend happy hours in about two weeks, said its owner and director Bill Verge. MANDY MILES/Keys Weekly



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NEW YEAR, MORE COVID SPREAD

CASES SOAR AS STATE, KEYS COME OUT OF BUSY HOLIDAY

W **JIM MCCARTHY**
jim@keysweekly.com

Lines poured out the door of the Advanced Urgent Care facility in Key Largo on the morning of Jan. 4 as people waited to receive a COVID-19 rapid test. Further south at Founders Park in Islamorada, appointment slots were filling quickly as people were ready for their swab test.

In Key West on Tuesday, 150 of 400 tests were positive, Key West City Manager Patti McLaughlin reported.

With a busy holiday season in the Keys and Florida comes another wave of COVID spread. A COVID-19 report by the Florida Health Department reported 951 new cases of COVID-19 in Monroe County from Dec. 24 to Dec. 30. Throughout Florida, 298,455 new cases were reported in the same time span, and that's up from 128,186 between Dec. 17 and Dec. 24 and 29,514 in the days spanning from Dec. 10 to Dec. 17.

"A real high number of people are coming back as positive cases," said Bob Eadie, top health officer for Monroe County. "It's not totally unsurprising. But the numbers are surprising in the sense we haven't seen them that high before.

"Part of it is that everybody over the holidays wanted to be tested so they could travel. I think we're probably still continuing with that sort of thing," he continued. "People really get concerned when they read all the media accounts, so I think all that's playing into it too."

Those feeling ill should contact their doctor and get tested, Eadie said.

Eadie said the latest variant spreading, Omicron, isn't as virulent as others. That's evidenced by relatively low hospital figures at local hospitals. As of Jan. 4, Lower Keys Medical Center had six COVID patients in house with one patient in the intensive care unit. Baptist Health South Florida was caring for five patients with COVID-19 at Fishermen's Community Hospital and Mariners Hospital. Across the Baptist system, some 619 patients with COVID-19 were receiving care — a 350% increase from that of two weeks ago.

"We have all the resources we need at this time to care for our community," said Gina Halley-Wright, spokeswoman for Baptist Health South Florida.

Students returned to the classroom on Jan. 4 following a holiday break. Data from the Monroe County School District's dashboard shows 64 students were confirmed positive with COVID-19 during winter break, from Dec. 20 to Dec. 31. Twenty-seven teachers and staff tested positive over the break.

School board chairman Andy Griffiths said during a Jan. 3 evening radio show that the district is following CDC quarantine guidelines, which now say to quarantine and isolate five days. New guidance by the CDC, which came just before the New Year, states that the change is motivated by "science demonstrating that the majority of SARS-CoV-2 transmission occurs early in the course of illness, generally in the 1-2 days prior to onset of symptoms and the 2-3 days after."

"But in cases where an order from the governor conflicts with the CDC guidelines, we are obeying the governor," Griffiths said during an interview on U.S. 1 Radio, adding that "The CDC has had some credibility issues recently."

In a Jan. 3 press conference in Broward County, Gov. Ron DeSantis told reporters that schools will remain open in Florida. He said no "crazy" mitigation is needed.

"If you look at the data amassed throughout the pandemic, it's found that you have worse outcomes by closing schools in terms of whatever community prevalence is. The schools aren't driving this," he said. "They need to be in school. Parents need to be assured they can send kids to school."

Eadie said the number of children seriously affected by COVID and Omicron remains low.

"That's not to minimize those who may have health issues and it could be more serious," he said. "But it's more like a cold for the vast majority of children."

Recent COVID spread is hitting workplaces hard, including the Monroe County Sheriff's Office. As of Jan. 3, the office was short about 25 employees due to positive COVID tests. They include patrol deputies, corrections officers and administrative staff.

"That was as of last week, and the number is a constantly moving target," sheriff's spokesman Adam Linhardt told the Keys Weekly on Jan. 3.

Capt. Don Hiller of the Monroe County Sheriff's Office in Marathon said it's hitting them very hard.

"The only saving grace is that all of our symptoms have been on the milder side and recovery has been very quick," he said. "But it is spreading rapidly throughout our agency."

In Monroe County's two jails, 16 of the 525 current inmates have tested positive for COVID-19. Strict protective protocols had kept the jail population largely COVID-free until this past week of widespread community transmission that is affecting all agencies and industries.

With COVID-19 cases on the rise, the Jan. 6 Islamorada Village Council meeting at the Founders Park Community Center has been canceled. The two agenda items scheduled for the meeting have been moved to the Jan. 27 meeting agenda.

Despite rising cases, Monroe County remains in the upper echelon in the number of people vaccinated. With 59,472 residents, or 82% of the population inoculated, the Keys sits No. 2 in the state in percentage of people vaccinated.

A little more than 300 people in Monroe County received a vaccine between Dec. 24 and Dec. 30. Supplies remain available at local pharmacies for those wishing to get inoculated. But vaccines for young kids ages 5-11 remain hard to obtain.

A little over 1.6 million children ages 5 to 11 in the state have been vaccinated, per the Florida Health Department's latest report.

Monroe County Commissioner Holly Raschein said there's been no clear answer as to why the Keys can't get the vaccines. As a mom, Raschein said, she's hopeful that the wrinkles will be ironed out and that kids in the Keys, and their parents, will have the option to be vaccinated should they choose so.

"I understand the natural supply chain issue that comes along with a health emergency; however, our neighbors to the north in Miami-Dade County seemingly have a robust supply, as they should given their size. But our residents shouldn't be required to travel there to have their children vaccinated," she said.

Eadie said vaccines for children are beginning to come online, but still limited. In Key West, Walgreen on North Roosevelt Boulevard is providing COVID vaccines to kids ages 5 to 11. Vaccines are also being provided by CHI in the Upper and Middle Keys. CHI's Marathon Health Center provided a one-time vaccination event for children ages 5 to 11 on Jan 6 from 11 a.m. to 2 p.m.

Mandy Miles, Alex Rickert and Charlotte Twine contributed to this report.



People line up for a COVID test by Curative at Islamorada's Founders Park during the holidays. DAVID GROSS/Keys Weekly

By Mandy Miles, Alex Rickert and Jim McCarthy

CHRISTMAS CROWDS AND NEW YEAR CHAOS

KEYS WERE PACKED FOR THE HOLIDAYS

Traffic is snarled. Restaurants are packed. Hotels are pricey. Airports are overcrowded. Supermarket shelves are bare and everyone is shorthanded.

It must be the holiday season — and winter tourism season — in the Florida Keys.

But despite continuing concerns about COVID and its Omicron variant, things are better this January than they were last January, when vaccines were still largely unavailable and the virus was sending thousands of people to the hospital.

"January is going to be a very interesting month," Stacey Mitchell, director of the Monroe County Tourist Development Council, told the Keys Weekly on Jan. 5. "Demand for the holidays was off the charts, and you couldn't have written a more perfect script in terms of weather and continuing limited options for international travel, Caribbean travel and cruise travel."

Jodi Weinhofer, president of the Lodging Association of the Florida Keys & Key West, agreed.

She also pointed out how many Keys residents she speaks with who comment on the crowds, traffic and delays.

"We have to consider that we've been sharing our Keys communities with second and third homeowners for the past several months. A house that typically sits empty all of a sudden had six to 10 people in it for the holidays," Mitchell said. "Our traditional lodging supply, our traditional hotel rooms, is a finite number. But we also now have a different crux of residents bringing more people here. So a lot of the foot-falls on our islands, a lot of the traffic on the roads, has nothing to do with the TDC or tourism advertising.

"Our workforce will be strained. Our traffic will be congested. This will be the new normal. We have a whole new population here," Mitchell said. "If you want to run an errand on your lunch break, you better have a 2-1/2-hour lunch."

When it comes to the holiday numbers in all regions of the Keys, here's what we found:

The Key West Chamber of Commerce reports 95 to 98% occupancy in Key West hotels for the Thursday, Friday and Saturday nights of the New Year weekend.

In Marathon, "A number of our middle to larger resort hotels averaged at least 93-98% occupancy. The average daily rates were on par if not a little higher than this time last year. All in all, it was a very positive, very strong holiday week for the busiest week of the year," said Daniel Samess of the Marathon Chamber of Commerce.

In the Upper Keys, "Everyone I talked to was full, but they did mention that they were receiving a lot of cancellation calls due to illness, but they were able to fill the rooms quickly," said Judy Hull, executive director of the Islamorada Chamber of Commerce.

Key Largo Chamber of Commerce President Elizabeth Moszynski said based on surveys, Key Largo hotels saw occupancies of 90% and greater during the week between Christmas and New Years. By Jan. 2, rooms started to open up.

"Leading up to Christmas weekend and New Year's, most hotels were sold out," she said.

So as the winter continues to send people south to our island chain, be patient, wash your hands and wait it out. The summer slowdown will be here soon enough.



While traffic was slow and snarled on U.S. 1, Key West's Duval Street was packed on New Year's Eve and for much of the holiday week. LARRY BLACKBURN/Keys Weekly



Traffic Snake Creek Bridge: A line of traffic slowly moves south over Snake Creek Bridge in Islamorada after Christmas. DAVID GROSS/Keys Weekly

"And even as COVID numbers in Florida continue to blow up, I think people still know that we're not the rest of Florida. We don't have the 1,000-room hotels and giant indoor events. And once again, we're the beneficiary of it being the dead of winter up north and in the Midwest."

"As we've already witnessed, I believe Americans will continue to prefer domestic destinations and our destination represents the farthest south someone can go without leaving the confines of the U.S.," Mitchell said. "Think about it: no matter what happens with flights, testing and changing rules, you can still always drive out of the Keys."



Two white men are seen on a webcam setting fire to a Christmas tree at the base of the Southernmost Point landmark shortly after 3 a.m. on New Year's Day. Courtesy of Two Oceans Digital

SCORCHING THE SOUTHERNMOST POINT

LANDMARK REPAIRS NEARLY COMPLETE FOLLOWING PRE-DAWN ARSON

W **MANDY MILES**
mandy@keysweekly.com

Key West's iconic Southernmost Point monument gained global attention on New Year's Day, when two men set fire to a Christmas tree at the base of the landmark. They reportedly took photos while the fire spread to the concrete monument and significantly scorched its paint job. The whole incident was captured by a webcam that constantly records activity at the landmark.

Key West Police detectives quickly identified the suspects, and as of Tuesday, Jan. 4, were just awaiting the required signatures on an arrest warrant, city spokeswoman Alyson Crean told the Keys Weekly.

City employees quickly began repairing and repainting the island's most-photographed location that marks the Southernmost Point in the continental United States and the closest point to Cuba — well, the closest point that civilians can access, as the island's true southernmost point is located on restricted military property.

The 12-foot concrete monument is painted to look like a giant buoy. It has stood at the corner of South and Whitehead streets since 1983 and draws thousands of camera-toting tourists each year.

"Workers are scheduled to put the finishing touches on the landmark and unveil its repairs at 8 p.m. Thursday, Jan. 6," Crean said.



A pre-dawn fire deliberately set by two suspects in the first hours of 2022 quickly spread from a Christmas tree to Key West's iconic Southernmost Point, causing significant damage to one of the most photographed spots in the country. Courtesy of Two Oceans Digital

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"The churches of Christ greet you." Romans 16:16 NKJV

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"Thus says the Lord, the King of Israel, And his Redeemer, the Lord of hosts: 'I am the First and I am the Last; Besides Me there is no God'"
— Isaiah 44:6 NKJV



LETTER TO THE EDITOR

COUNTY LEADER LOOKS BACK ON 2021 AND FORWARD TO 2022

To Florida Keys residents and visitors: 2021 was a challenging year. With all the tribulations Monroe County has endured, our commissioners and staff have continued the forward press to enhance our citizens', business owners' and visitors' quality of life. There is nothing more important to us than the health, safety and well-being of our residents and guests as we spent the last two years learning how to adapt. I am honored to have served as Monroe County administrator for the past 15 years, and I am proud of our residents, commissioners, and 579 county employees.

Emergency Management continues its COVID-19 partnership with the Florida Department of Health in Monroe County, community partners and the Keys municipalities, while activating for two tropical storms in 2021. Our Information Technology department is diligently automating services for residents, including the new permitting system that will go live in 2022. Engineering and Roads was busy with bridge projects on Duck Key, significant road improvements in Key West, and road elevation projects throughout the county. Solid Waste supported on-site collection on Duck Key to accommodate bridge closures, while Monroe County saw an increase in all areas of debris management.

The Office of Sustainability and our County Commission continue to lead the country in climate change and sea-level rise adaptation conversations. The county is committed to continuing the Roads Vulnerability Analysis and Capital Plan for county-maintained roads. Canal restoration efforts are also in full force. Our Strategic Planning staff hosted town halls to gather new community feedback and reaffirmed safety on U.S. 1 as a number-one priority. And, unincorporated Monroe County received one of the best ratings in the country for coastal communities in the Community Rating System, saving Florida Keys flood insurance policyholders millions of dollars annually.

Our Facilities Maintenance team strives to maintain the highest cleaning standards at county-maintained properties and buildings, and with the hiring of a director for the newly created Parks and Beaches division, Monroe County's open spaces will continue to thrive. Project Management employees completed capital projects at the Marathon library and Cudjoe Key fire station, and the new Plantation Key Courthouse will open in early 2022. Key West International Airport hosts six airlines offering 21 nonstop

destinations and hub airport connections. In 2021, the airport served more than 1 million passengers, the most it's ever seen.

Legislatively, the county secured \$26 million from the state, most of that in Florida Keys Stewardship funding – the most we have ever seen – while continuing to push for the funding to be placed in the annually allocated Land Acquisition Trust Fund. Our Budget and Finance department advocated for reimbursements of COVID-19 and storm-related expenses while producing and administering the \$457.3 million budget for fiscal year 2022.

Monroe County Fire Rescue and Trauma Star provided a record number of lifesaving services and flights to the mainland with no out-of-pocket costs for residents. Fire Rescue graduated its fourth "Hot Shots" class, waiving tuition fees for residents at its fire training academy, and secured funding to hire new firefighters. Social Services, Veterans Affairs, and Guardian ad Litem advocated for our most vulnerable residents. And, the Extension Service guided residents in gardening, sustainability and other vital Florida Keys resources.

Planning and Environmental developed new ROGO (development) criteria and re-implemented mobile marine sewage pump-outs to protect our marine environment. Code Compliance focused on illegal vacation rentals, unsafe structure abatement and illegal clearing of our critical habitat. Fleet personnel continued maintenance of county vehicles. Employee Services worked with local hospitals to ensure employees and locally insured residents had access to in-network emergency room care. The County Attorney's office reviewed 1,306 documents, including 44 ordinances and 490 resolutions. The county's five libraries were awarded a \$1 million grant to update technology. The library system also had its biggest year on record, reaching over 64,000 e-circulations by the end of 2021.

Monroe County is committed to creating a better life every day for everyone in the Florida Keys. In 2022, Monroe County will continue to have open and courageous communication with our community. We will be here for you. This is a community we can all be proud of, and we will continue to strive to make our island home a safe and enjoyable place to live, work and play.

Cheers in paradise,
Roman Gastesi
Monroe County Administrator

ARE YOU SICK? STAY HOME

HEALTH DEPARTMENT FIGHTS COVID SPREAD



The county health department recommends masks, vaccines, social distancing and hand-washing, and wants sick people to stay home to fight the spread of COVID-19. CONTRIBUTED

The Florida Department of Health in Monroe County urges all who are sick to stay home to prevent infectious diseases, especially COVID-19, from spreading.

"The infection rate of COVID-19 in Monroe County is high," said Dr. Mark Whiteside, medical director for the health department. "By continuing to be around others while knowingly sick, you can be exposing not only your friends, family and co-workers, but also their families. Stay home to cut off the transmission of COVID-19."

"One in three people getting tested in our county for COVID-19 is coming out positive," said Bob Eadie, health officer and administrator. "The best way to prevent anyone from getting infected in the first place is to follow basic public health principles. Masking when around others, covering your cough or sneeze, washing your hands, and social distancing, even when vaccinated, are key to slowing the spread of this virus."

If you have not yet been vaccinated or received your booster shot, do so as soon

as possible to prevent serious infection, hospitalization and death.

If you test positive for COVID-19, regardless of vaccination status, stay home. Monitor symptoms and stay in touch with your doctor. If you are having trouble breathing or have chest pain, go to your local emergency room as soon as possible.

If you were exposed to someone who tested positive for COVID-19 and have not yet received a booster shot or are unvaccinated, stay home. Testing should be done if symptomatic or as recommended by a healthcare provider.

Employers are encouraged to adopt infection prevention and control strategies and policies to keep employees from getting sick and spreading it to others.

For more information visit <http://Monroe.flhealth.gov/covid19> or email MonroeCOVID@flhealth.gov. Additional guidance from the CDC is available at <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/if-you-are-sick/quarantine-isolation-background.html>

— Contributed



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STARTING FRESH IN 2022



KEY WEST ROCKS AS SUSHI DROPS



A pirate wench and a posh drag queen, a conch shell, a vintage PanAm flight attendant and a giant Key lime wedge all dropped into 2022 on New Year's Eve in Key West.

Duval Street featured parties at all sorts of venues, including Sloppy Joe's Bar and Bourbon Street Pub, where the legendary female impersonator Sushi descended from a second-floor balcony in a red high-heeled shoe.

In the hours leading up to midnight, several other performers entertained the masses on a stage erected on Duval Street.

Upon landing safely, Sushi welcomed the crowd to 2022 while wearing an incredible gown of her creation that took the gifted seamstress and costume designer about 60 hours to create, Sushi told the Keys Weekly.

— Mandy Miles

Photos by LARRY BLACKBURN/Keys Weekly

1. Confetti and party people surround female impersonator Holly Dae as she performs in front of Bourbon Street Pub.

2. Revelers pack the 700 block of Duval Street — and several other blocks — for Key West's famed New Year's Eve celebrations.

3. The guys and gals from Bourbon Street Pub and 801 Bar ring in 2022 on Duval Street.

4. Hats off to 2022.

5. Sushi regales the crowd in a gown she made by hand.



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JANUARY 2021

733 Trinidad Lane \$1.725m
Caroline represented the buyers

FEBRUARY 2021

16805 Tamarind Rd. \$1.650m.
Caroline represented the sellers

MARCH 2021

40 Merganser \$380k
Caroline represented the buyer

5030 5th Ave \$345,950
Caroline represented the buyer

APRIL 2021

1211 Watson \$830k
Caroline represented the sellers

MAY 2021

620 Thomas #288 \$630k
Caroline represented the buyers

JUNE 2021

1124 Eaton St. \$740k
Caroline represented the buyer

1103 Thomas St. \$900K
Caroline represented the buyer

OCTOBER 2021

1707 Bertha St. \$650k
Caroline represented the sellers

1701 Jamaica Ln. \$1.4 mil
Caroline represented the sellers

NOVEMBER 2021

1518 5th St. \$700k
Caroline represented the sellers

29857 Tropical Trader Rd. \$549k
Caroline represented the sellers

DECEMBER 2021

624 Mickens \$1.3 mil
under contract in December
Caroline represented the sellers



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W**MANDY MILES**

mandy@keyweekly.com

HOUSING HINGES ON JAN. 18 VOTE

PLANS INCLUDE RENTALS AND OWNERSHIP AT TRUMAN WATERFRONT

It's finally happening. After 20 years of discussion and debate, Key West is closer than it's ever been to building affordable housing on the final 3.2 acres of Truman Waterfront.

City officials selected a joint-venture group called The Lofts at Bahama Village to build the housing that will combine rental units and ownership units.

The housing group includes developer Vestcor, the Smith Hawks law firm and AH Monroe, which has built several successful affordable housing communities in Key West, including Poinciana Royale on Duck Avenue and Marty's Place on Bertha Street.

The Lofts at Bahama Village has created architectural renderings of the new neighborhood. It's identifying various funding streams for the project and creating an interactive website for

residents to file the needed paperwork and apply for one of the units.

But wait...

Before any dirt gets moved, before any foundation is laid, any structure is built and before anyone moves into a brand new home, the voters of Key West must take one essential step and vote "Yes" in a Jan. 18 referendum.

The only question on the ballot asks Key West voters to authorize a 99-year lease of the 3.2 acres to the housing group. The city charter requires voter approval for any lease of city-owned property longer than 20 years.

"In order to apply for subsidized housing funds from grants and the government, we need to have control of the land for at least 50 years for rental units, and 99 years for home ownership affordable housing," said Scott Pridgen, executive director of AH Monroe, who has steered Marty's Place and Poinciana Royale through the affordable housing funding gauntlet that involves government money, grants and private investment.



The joint-venture group known as The Lofts at Bahama Village is planning to build a combination of these rental and owned homes at Truman Waterfront. CONTRIBUTED

"With a vote of 'Yes' in the referendum, we can apply for the funding and get started," he said. "If the referendum doesn't pass, we can't even apply and the housing doesn't happen. To me, it's a no-brainer, and our group, The Lofts at Bahama Village, is working hard to answer questions, alleviate concerns and head off any naysayers before they vote."

How many units and where?

The proposal from The Lofts group includes 126 total units — 98 one- to three-bedroom rental apartments, and 28 two- and three-bedroom affordable home ownership units, Pridgen said.

"But the number of rental units will likely decrease as the project proceeds through all the needed committee approvals, such as from HARC and the Planning Board," Pridgen said. "The 126 is the maximum. If anything has to be reduced, it will be the number of rental units, not the ownership units, because we've heard how important that opportunity is to residents. We could even convert some rentals to ownership based on the community's needs and the number of people who qualify for the mortgages. But we do have to have a minimum of 75 rental units in order to compete for state funds."

Pridgen emphasized that such details — rental vs. owned units and the total number of units — cannot be determined until the referendum passes.

"Once that passes, we can launch our interactive website to see how many people qualify for rentals and mortgages and how many units to build in each income category."

Pridgen said The Lofts proposal accommodates local households that earn 60%, 80%, 100% and 120% of the Area Median Income (AMI), which is the middle income in a given region. Monroe County's current AMI is \$84,400.

So a two-person household that earns up to \$48,850 per year is at 60% of AMI and considered very-low income. The same household that earns \$65,100 per year is at 80% AMI, or low-income. A two-person family earning \$84,400 is at 100% AMI and classified as median-income. Two-person households earning up to \$97,650 are at 120% of AMI and considered moderate income.

Once the community's income levels are evaluated, The Lofts group will determine the final breakdown of rental and owned units.

Who can apply for the housing?

Federal rules prohibit housing discrimination, but they do allow people who live in a particular census area that's struggling or marginalized to be prioritized on a waiting list, Pridgen said.

Current residents of Bahama Village will be in the first priority on the waitlist.

"Once we determine how many of those applicants are eligible for the housing, if we still have units left, we'll open it to families living in Key West. The third priority group is singles in Key West and the fourth priority group will open applications to anyone living in Monroe County. But they still must qualify under the income guidelines.

All applications will be handled through the coming interactive website, he emphasized.

People who are currently on a waiting list with the housing authority will not get priority and must file a new application with The Lofts at Bahama Village, Pridgen said.

Next week, Scott Pridgen will answer more questions about the housing plans for Truman Waterfront.

WASTED RESOURCES

SALVATION ARMY DEALS WITH DONATION MESS



The Salvation Army in Key West is asking people not to drop off donations when the thrift store is closed. The resulting mess, as people help themselves in the rear parking lot, forces the organization to throw out anything that was on the ground. CONTRIBUTED

W **MANDY MILES**
mandy@keysweekly.com

Add this one to the “no good deed goes unpunished” category. The Salvation Army staff in Key West returned to its Flagler Avenue thrift store after the New Year holiday to find clothes and other household items strewn across its rear parking lot.

Donors left the items in the parking lot and scavenging residents helped themselves while turning the property lot into a dump site.

“When we are closed and people donate, other people

come and go through everything and take what they want and leave us this mess,” said Susan VanDePutte, administrative assistant at the organization. “Would you be able to put something in the Keys Weekly asking people to only donate when we are open? We are the largest recycler of clothing and household goods in the Keys, and when people spread it all over the ground we must throw it away. It’s a heartbreaking waste.”

The Salvation Army, 1924 Flagler Ave., is open 9:30 a.m. to 4:45 p.m. every day but Sunday.

2 DEPUTIES CLEARED IN FIGHT

STATE ATTORNEY’S OFFICE DROPS CHARGES AGAINST PIKE AND CURRY

W **MANDY MILES**
mandy@keysweekly.com

The State Attorney’s Office has dropped all charges against two Monroe County Sheriff’s Office deputies who were arrested by Key West police following a Dec. 18 fight on Duval Street with three visiting Navy sailors.

Assistant State Attorney Val Winter on Jan. 3 filed “Memorandums of No Action” on behalf of Connor Curry, 23, and Trevor Pike, 25.

Pike had been facing a misdemeanor disorderly conduct charge and a felony battery charge for punching a Navy sailor in the face and knocking him out. That sailor was airlifted to a Miami hospital, but has since been released “and is doing fine,” Sheriff Rick Ramsay told the Keys Weekly on Jan. 3.

Curry was facing a misdemeanor disorderly conduct charge.

In dismissing Pike’s case, Winter wrote, “The State of Florida hereby declines to file charges in this case and therefore enters this ‘no action’ for one or more of the following reason(s): Defendant’s actions were justified under the circumstances to defend himself as demonstrated by video evidence from a bystander witness, which was offered to law enforcement, but was not viewed or collected prior to arrest.”

In dismissing Curry’s misdemeanor charge, Winter wrote, “The State of Florida hereby declines to file charges in this case and therefore enters this ‘no action’ for one or more of the following reason(s): Defendant did not engage in any conduct which was criminal or unjustified as demonstrated by video evidence from a bystander witness which was offered to law enforcement, but was not viewed or collected prior to arrest.”

In response to the State Attorney’s action, Ramsay told the Keys Weekly, “My deputies have been vindicated and my assessment of the situation has been validated.”

Curry and Pike are back on patrol with MCSO, but initially had been placed on unpaid leave by the sheriff’s office pending the criminal investigation and an internal affairs investigation.

But after reviewing cell phone video recorded by independent witnesses — six women who were downtown for a birthday party — Ramsay told the Keys Weekly, “I believe the criminal charges against my deputies are unjust. And I’ve asked Key West Police Chief Sean Brandenburg and State Attorney Dennis Ward to review the videos before proceeding with criminal charges. The video

shows my deputies were defending themselves, and the Navy sailors were the aggressors in the fight.”

Ramsay questioned the actions of Key West police supervisor Sgt. Alex Rodriguez, who was called to the scene after the fight “because policy dictates that an incident involving law enforcement officers requires a supervisor to be present.”

Ramsay said the women who were downtown repeatedly offered Key West police their cell phone video that shows the entire incident between the two off-duty deputies and three visiting Navy personnel.

The Key West police officers had body-cam footage, and there were independent witnesses who kept pointing to the Navy sailors as the aggressor,” Ramsay said.

“The video clearly shows a Navy sailor in a white shirt charging one of the deputies. He swings and hits him in the upper cheek. My deputy grabbed him and took him to the ground while the other deputy stood by and did not engage.

“Then the other sailors come into the fight and charge the deputy,” Ramsay told the Keys Weekly. “As soon as my deputy hit one of the Navy guys, who immediately fell to the ground, my deputy stepped back and did nothing more than defend himself.

“Early on, the first Key West police officer on the scene believed the deputies were a victim and a witness, and the Navy personnel were the suspects,” Ramsay said, adding that the women with the video told Key West Police they had seen and recorded the whole scenario.

“The police told the woman to stand across the street and wait. They waited 10 or 15 minutes and then Key West police said, ‘Nah, I don’t need to see the video.’”

“When the women saw on the news the next day that the deputies were facing charges, they emailed the sheriff’s office with their statements, contact info and the video they recorded. They also sent their video to a Fox News TV affiliate,” Ramsay said, adding that he had expressed his concern to Brandenburg.

“I asked Chief Brandenburg to review the videos and draw his own conclusions. I asked the same thing of our state attorney, not to do my guys a favor, but to ensure we know who the aggressors are.”

Brandenburg told the Keys Weekly on Dec. 22 that he was still reviewing the footage. He declined to comment on Jan. 5 with regard to the charges being dropped.

NANCY CALLIHAN

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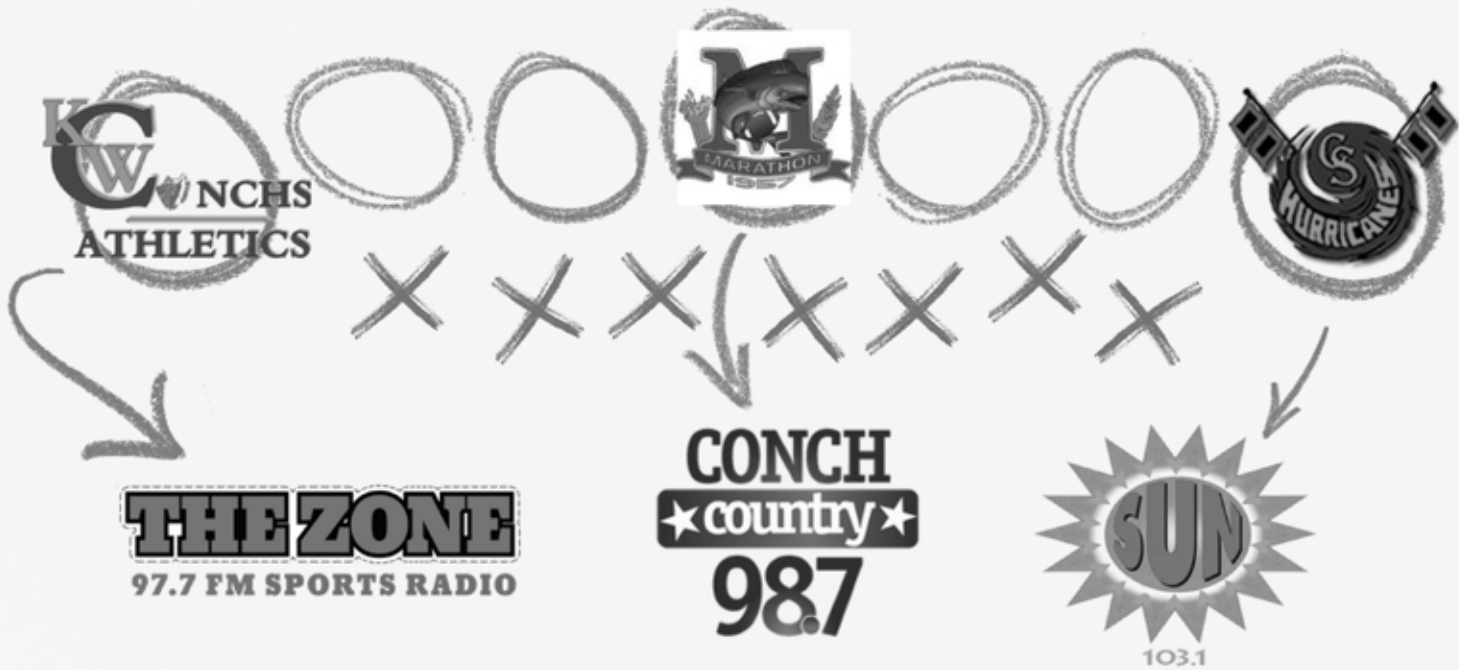
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'FREEDOM FIRST'

GOVERNOR'S BUDGET SEEKS INVESTMENT IN TEACHERS, OFFICERS AND ENVIRONMENT

W **JIM McCARTHY**
jim@keywestweekly.com

Florida Gov. Ron DeSantis' proposed \$99.7 billion budget seeks to invest more in the environment, raise pay for law enforcement and teachers and fully fund programs for affordable housing.

Legislators in the state House and Senate will convene for their first day of session in Tallahassee on Tuesday, Jan. 11. Adoption of a budget for the upcoming fiscal year, which begins July 1, is among the tasks for the legislature before the 60-day session concludes on March 11.

DeSantis presented his "Freedom First" budget to the legislature and Senate President Wilton Simpson and House Speaker Chris Sprowls last month. The governor said his fourth budget highlights Florida's resiliency and strength, while showing commitment to fight for Florida's families, freedoms and future.

"In Florida, we have put freedom first – protecting Floridians' freedom to earn a living, to operate businesses and to choose educational options tailored for their children," DeSantis said. "As a result of our commitment to freedom, Florida's economy continues to thrive and Floridians are better able to provide for their families. I am proud to announce my budget proposals that will build on our foundation of freedom by investing in priorities that matter to our residents."

Throughout his time in office, DeSantis has made Everglades restoration a priority with hundreds of millions invested in projects. That commitment continues in his budget proposal, with \$372 million for the Comprehensive Everglades Restoration Plan. CERP is a framework for restoring, protecting and preserving the Everglades ecosystem. The plan is a 50-50 partnership between Florida and the federal government. The state and the South Florida Water Management District (SFWMD) have invested around \$2.3 billion in CERP-related land acquisition, project design and construction.

To help send more water south, DeSantis' budget includes \$69 million for the Everglades Agricultural Area (EAA) Reservoir. The project includes a treatment wetland that will clean water and a reservoir that will store

excess water from Lake Okeechobee. The project, which DeSantis signed an executive order to expedite during his early days in office, is a joint effort between the SFWMD and U.S. Army Corps of Engineers. The state began construction on its component of the project, the stormwater treatment area, in 2020. In April, the SFWMD governing board approved an agreement with the Army Corps that keeps them on track to construct the reservoir component.

On the education side, DeSantis is proposing \$600 million in funding to continue elevating K-12 teacher salaries across the state to a minimum of \$47,500. In 2020, DeSantis asked lawmakers for \$900 million for teacher pay increases and bonuses. The COVID-19 pandemic affected revenues, however, bringing lawmakers to agree on \$500 million for teacher pay increases.

DeSantis' budget proposes \$23.9 billion in state funding for the K-12 public school system, which covers costs associated with current projected enrollment of 2.98 million students in the state. Around \$1.4 billion is being proposed for early child education, including more than \$406 million for voluntary pre-kindergarten.

Pay increases for law enforcement are also proposed within the governor's budget. In total, DeSantis is recommending \$75.4 million to increase the base rate of pay for over 4,500 state sworn law enforcement officers. Entry-level officers would see a 20% increase in their pay, bringing the average filled position base rate to \$61,200. Non-entry level officers would receive a 25% increase.

In addition, DeSantis is proposing \$1 million to establish the Out-of-State Law Enforcement Equivalency Reimbursement to help cover costs for officers moving to Florida.

As for affordable housing, the governor's budget proposes to provide \$355.5 million to fully fund the Sadowski Affordable Housing Trust Funds. Historically, the pot of money was used to fund other initiatives or projects that weren't related to affordable housing. The legislature came to an agreement last year that funds wouldn't be swept for other causes.

The Sadowski Fund was created in 1992 to provide funding to the State Apartment Incentive Loan (SAIL) program and the State Housing Incentives Partnership (SHIP) program. The governor's budget proposes \$95 million for SAIL and \$220.5 million for SHIP.

BRIEFLY

KEY WEST SEAFOOD FESTIVAL POSTPONED UNTIL APRIL

The 16th Annual Florida Keys Seafood Festival has been postponed until Saturday, April 2 from 11 a.m. to 8 p.m. and Sunday, April 3 from 11 a.m. to 5 p.m. at Bayview Park in Key West. The event was scheduled for Jan. 15 and 16, but COVID concerns prompted the change.

There is a \$10 admission charge per person for adults, good for both days, which enters that person into a raffle for \$250 worth of seafood. Children under 12 are admitted free. Proceeds benefit sustainable fisheries management programs and youth scholarships. The festival is presented by the Florida Keys Commercial Fishermen's Association.

RED BARN THEATRE RESCHEDULES PLAY'S OPENING NIGHT

Key West's Red Barn Theatre has rescheduled opening night for the pandemic-delayed first show of its 42nd season.

"Cats Talk Back," a critically-acclaimed mock-docu-comedy, will open a three-week run on Monday, Jan. 10. Tickets are now available for all performances through Jan. 29. The play will be presented outdoors under the stars in the Red Barn's courtyard. All curtains are at 8 pm.

"You can't imagine how much we want to bring you our production of 'Cats Talk Back,'" said Director Joy Hawkins. "We regret our original opening had to be postponed, but this virus is unpredictable, to say the least. But every precaution is being taken to keep everyone safe and healthy."

LOWER KEYS CHAMBER HOSTS NAUTICAL EXPO

The Lower Keys Chamber of Commerce presents its 18th annual Nautical Expo on Saturday and Sunday, Jan. 15 and 16 on the chamber grounds, 31020 Overseas Hwy., Big Pine.

The event features scores of vendors selling new and used boating, fishing, diving gear, nautical art, home decor, clothing, jewelry and food.

Visit lowerkeyschamber.com for more information or to rent a vendor booth.

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THE GALLERY ON GREENE

Peter Vey
Ballast Key, now re-named Wolkowsky Key after its former owner David Wolkowsky, has had a rich history of creative visitors in film, literature, and fine art, including Tennessee Williams, Truman Capote, Jimmy Buffett, Gloria Estefan and others. The island, located nine miles west of Key West, is now under the stewardship of The Nature Conservancy, and is deeded to the United States Fish and Wildlife Service. The main house and guest house remain much the same as during the heyday of David's celebrity entertainments.

Dog Beach, 48 x 36, Oil on Linen

A recent week-end visit to the now tranquil refuge by Peter inspired a series of pieces. His amazing ability to absorb and translate his visual surroundings are evident in these works.

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But our magnetic appeal goes beyond the

menu. The skilled professionals who define our local hospitality industry do much more than mix creative cocktails and serve delicious meals. These hard-working men and women are ambassadors, social directors, travel advisors and unlicensed — but often effective — therapists.

To celebrate our unique culinary culture, Keys Weekly brings you this bi-weekly feature

to highlight the food, libations and local personalities that define our “must-try” destinations across the Florida Keys.

Whether you're a first-time visitor or a fifth-generation local, your options are endless. Indulge in something new or revisit a familiar favorite. And above all, support the local owners and loyal employees who are vital to our Keys communities.



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PAUL "CUZZY" BARCUS
Poké in the Rear, Key West

Paul "Cuzzy" Barcus is a talented, 18-year veteran of Key West restaurants. He worked as sous chef and in other leadership positions at Blue Heaven, Ocean Key Resort and Santiago's Bodega before becoming a partner in Poké in the Rear with Grant Portier and Jenn Stefanacci-Portier.

Barcus recently introduced Cuzzy's Flatbread, shown on the right, featuring fresh tuna poké on grilled flatbread atop seaweed salad, hoisin and sriracha aioli. On the left is Poké's best-selling poké bowl, Elle's Poké on Fire, a spicy combination of fresh tuna or salmon, rice, vegetables, edamame and seaweed salad, topped with crispy fried onions.

Poké in the Rear is located at 504 Angela St., Key West, and is also accessible from Duval Street via Aqua Nightclub, 711 Duval St.

TOMAHAWK RIBEYE SPECIAL
Florida Keys Steak & Lobster House, Marathon

For a decadent treat on a special occasion, treat yourself to the Tomahawk experience, said Justin Ahearn, general manager of the Florida Keys Steak & Lobster House. "We handcut the tomahawks ourselves, fresh off the rack every day. We pair it with a Florida lobster tail, shrimp and jumbo North Atlantic sea scallops, which we proudly receive daily to ensure quality."



For more, visit our Keys Table Magazines online at keysweekly.com/table. Our Florida Keys Table Magazines are published nine times a year in the Upper Keys, Marathon and Key West. For more information email: Stephanie@keysweekly.com.

We're going to lose weight, quit drinking (at least in the daytime), get back in shape, start a retirement fund, paint the living room, eat less fast food, you know the drill. And it all sounds well and good — for the first week of the year. But that week is now over, and we bring you...



★★★★★
**TOP
10**

NEW YEAR RESOLUTIONS THAT HAVE ALREADY BEEN BROKEN

10. Sober January.
9. No politicians will be forced to step down in 2022.
8. I will not engage in meaningless social media arguments about masks, vaccines or cruise ships.
7. Your 75 HARD Challenge ended before Andy Cohen could get drunk enough to rant about "the crappiest mayor in New York City history."
6. I will not yell at my kids in 2022.
5. "This is the year I stop streaming and start reading more boo- ... Whoa, hello, 'Yellowstone' season 4!"
4. I will not take both claws from a stone crab.
3. I will not light a Christmas tree on fire near a coveted monument.
2. I will no longer pass on the shoulder or in the turning lanes of the 18-Mile Stretch
1. Porn-free January.

Mainstreaming

WHAT TO DO THIS WEEK

NOW TRENDING



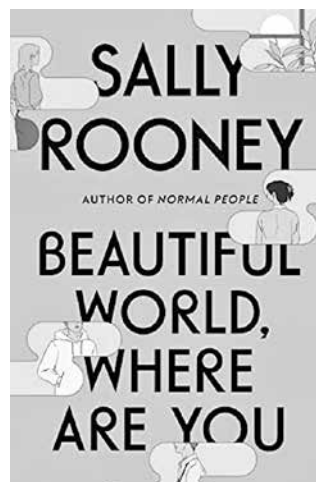
WATCH | COBRA KAI SEASON 4

Set more than 30 years after the events of the original "Karate Kid" film, Netflix's drama-comedy hybrid enters its fourth season. When John Kreese relapses into old ways and forces Johnny Lawrence out of his own re-opened Cobra Kai dojo, Johnny and high school rival Daniel LaRusso must unite their teams of high school fighters to retake the All-Valley karate tournament title. When Kreese convinces LaRusso's old tormenter, the sadistic Terry Silver, to return as a Cobra Kai sensei, Daniel and Johnny's fragile alliance is put to the ultimate test. *The 10-episode season premiered in its entirety on Netflix on Dec. 31.*



LISTEN | RICHER THAN I'VE EVER BEEN

According to Apple Music, there is no shortage of confidence across Rick Ross album titles with "God Forgives," "I Don't" and "Teflon Don." But with his new album, the Miami-hailing MC is not only crowning himself, but reveling in one of wealth's most under-heralded privileges: creative freedom. The album's 12 tracks stand in stark opposition to the contemporary trend of bloated and overlong rap releases, Ross coming across forthright with bars like wanting to be a better father in his song "Little Havana." *Listen on Apple Music and Spotify.*



READ | BEAUTIFUL WORLD, WHERE ARE YOU

In this novel by Sally Rooney, the best-selling author of "Conversations with Friends," Alice, a novelist, meets Felix, who works in a warehouse, and asks him if he'd like to travel to Rome with her. In Dublin, her best friend, Eileen, is getting over a breakup, and slips back into flirting with Simon, a man she has known since childhood. Alice, Felix, Eileen and Simon are still young — but life is catching up with them. They desire each other, they delude each other, they get together, they break apart. They have sex, they worry about sex, they worry about their friendships and the world they live in. Are they standing in the last lighted room before the darkness, bearing witness to something? Will they find a way to believe in a beautiful world?

— Amazon

RAMS HEAD PRESENTS

UPCOMING EVENTS



THE ULTIMATE JOHNNY CASH EXPERIENCE
AT KEY WEST THEATER
JANUARY 11TH



JUDY COLLINS
AT KEY WEST THEATER
JANUARY 12TH



KETCH SECOR (OF OLD CROW MEDICINE SHOW) & MOLLY TUTTLE
AT KEY WEST THEATER
JANUARY 16TH



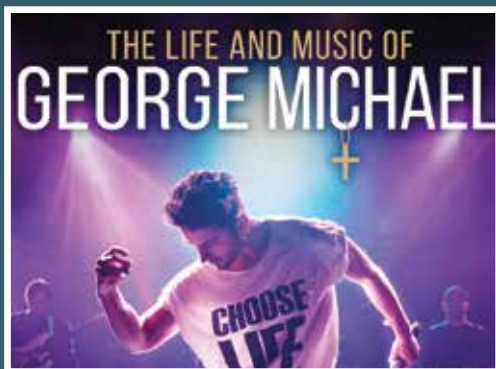
RODNEY CROWELL
AT KEY WEST THEATER
JANUARY 22ND



CARL PALMER
AT KEY WEST THEATER
JANUARY 31ST



KENNY WAYNE SHEPHERD & CHRISTONE "KINGFISH" INGRAM
AT COFFEE BUTLER AMPHITHEATER
FEBRUARY 5TH



THE LIFE AND MUSIC OF GEORGE MICHAEL
AT KEY WEST THEATER
FEBRUARY 12TH



PRICE IS RIGHT LIVE
AT COFFEE BUTLER AMPHITHEATER
MARCH 26TH



REBELUTION
AT COFFEE BUTLER AMPHITHEATER
JUNE 5TH

I may not be a rockstar or a billionaire, but I have the smile of one!

Lucy Buffett, Crazy Sista, Restaurateur, & Author



My gypsy soul landed me in Key West in 1975 for two crazy years, then took me to live and work on three different coasts over the next four decades. By the time I returned and bought my island dream home, I had a hodgepodge of dental work. My big bro told me to go to Dr. Troxel, who came up with a comprehensive reconstruction plan to make another one of my dreams come true: a big beautiful movie star smile! Thank you, Fred. You are the best!

All my Gumbo Love, LuLu

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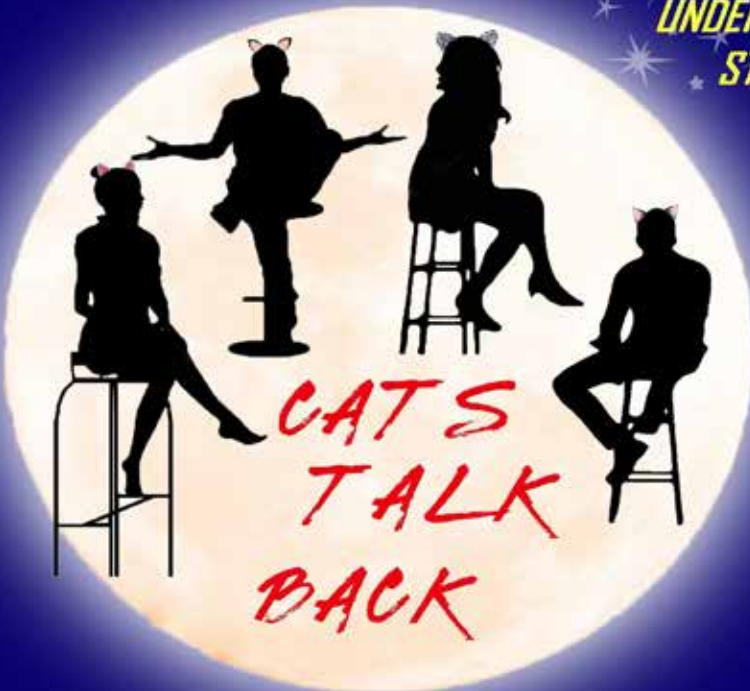
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DESERT ISLAND DAYS

BALLAST KEY IS A SANCTUARY WORTH SAVING

If I want to cut to the chase when telling someone about Ballast Key, I drop the fact that it was once on the market for \$15.8 million. It's true, but not the point.

Ballast Key is 10 miles west of Key West as the crow flies, longer if you don't want to run your boat aground. It was a private island owned by Key West legend David Wolkowsky, who died in 2018 at the age of 99. (To read up on Wolkowsky — and you should — Google Michael Adno's profile on the Bitter Southerner website, or his 2018 obituary in the New York Times.)

The island is somewhere between 14 and 26 acres. Distinctions between land and water are often debatable, as much of it is mangroves, sandbars and salt ponds that dry up in the winter. It is off the grid, relying on water catchments, solar panels, an occasional generator, and surrounded by the Key West National Wildlife Refuge.

If you've been to Woman Key or Boca Grande, or taken the Dry Tortugas ferry, you've passed Ballast Key. It's the only house you'll see out there. (A guest house and workshop on the island are mostly obscured by trees.) It's modeled on the Northwest Channel lighthouse, which burned in 1971. It is also the actual Southernmost Point in the contiguous United States.

The house always reminds me of Springsteen's mansion on the hill, the place where people project their fantasies, where life would be easier and better. (These fantasies often involve lottery tickets.)

When I first was there as the guest of a guest of a guest in the late 1990s, a signed Jimmy Buffett album sat on the coffee table. It said something like, "David, sell me your island, Jimmy." Buffett, along with Fast Buck Freddy's owner Tony Falcone, had bought the Kress building on Duval Street from Wolkowsky, who also had a playful penchant for forged art and artifacts, so who knows if it was real.

My second visit was in summer 2019. Chris Bergh, the South Florida program manager for the Nature Conservancy, had invited me out, partly, I believe, because of my Audubon and bird geek credentials, and partly to show me what an amazing window into the Florida Keys backcountry it was.



Anyone who knew David well will tell you he never actually wanted to sell Ballast Key — but liked to dangle it as bait in front of developers and other wealthy people, to reel them in and play them for a while, before cutting the line. Bergh often spoke with Wolkowsky about the ecological importance of the island and the need to prevent its development.

After Wolkowsky died in 2018, the island was donated to the Nature Conservancy, which promptly handed the deed to the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service with an agreement that the Nature Conservancy would manage it for 10 years to ensure its protection. It was to become a base of operations for researchers and biologists, providing deeper access to the unique Keys ecosystem.

I proposed to Bergh a photo project documenting not just the island — its wildlife, architecture, landscape and the researchers to come — but also how the arc of its story would change now that its ownership had. Then I was awarded a Knight Foundation grant to do just that.

For the last two years I've been making periodic trips — an afternoon, a couple days — wandering and taking pictures.

Access to the island is priceless; time there, priceless. Time to notice the tear in the screen, the great white heron perched on an abandoned lobster trap, the shadows of young lemon sharks circling the flats, the hermit crabs that devour almost anything you offer. Time to stand so still that a clapper rail — an amazingly shy, sneaky bird — can exit the mangroves and walk almost across my foot without noticing me. Time to wait for the right light to hit the Suzy Zuzek dePoo mural in the main house. Time to form opinions on the personality of the Würdeman's heron that hunted fish on the south shoreline.



Photographer Mark Hedden captures the offshore essence and ecological importance of Ballast Key. MARK HEDDEN/Keys Weekly

COVID threw a few wrenches into the works. It wasn't safe to open the place up for researchers, and the Nature Conservancy ended its management agreement within two years. I made myself minorly useful as an occasional fill-in caretaker, and the folks at USFWS have allowed me more time out there to shoot and complete the project.

The culmination of all this — called South of Southernmost — is now hanging on the walls of the Sanger Gallery at The Studios of Key West.

The exhibit will be open to the public Tuesday through Saturday until Jan. 27. There's an opening from 6 to 8 p.m. on Thursday, Jan. 6. It's free, but reservations must be made through the tskw.org website, and masks are required.

Ballast Key will never be open on a broad scale to the public. It can't sustain that and still retain its crucial ecological value — something which, to my mind, is worth way more than \$15.8 million.

My hope is to give people a sense of what's so valuable out there, why it needs protecting and why this is such a great legacy for David Wolkowsky.

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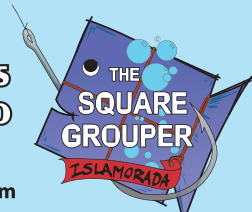


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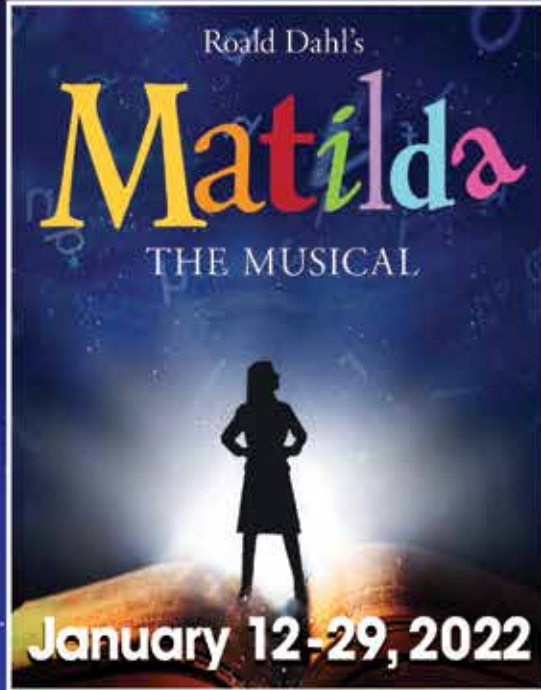


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CHARLOTTE TWINE
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STATE-MANDATED PARENTAL CONTROL OVER SEX EDUCATION BEGINS

GOV. DESANTIS SIGNED BILL IN JUNE 2021

Legislation that Florida Gov. Ron DeSantis signed into law back in June giving parents more control over the sexual education of their children is now being carried out within the Monroe County School District (MCSD). The schools are making available an opt-out form for sex ed in case parents don't like the subject matter that's being taught to their kids.

"This is part of state legislation, recently approved, under statute 1003.42," Christina McPherson, executive director of teaching and learning for the district, told Keys Weekly.

The statute says, "Any student whose parent makes written request to the school principal shall be exempted from the teaching of reproductive health or any disease, including HIV/AIDS, its symptoms, development, and treatment. A student so exempted may not be penalized by reason of that exemption."

The statute also says that instructional materials used to teach reproductive health or any disease, including HIV/AIDS, "must be annually approved by a district school board in an open, noticed public meeting."

In the Dec. 14, 2021 school board meeting, school district staff members presented a new sex education curriculum that includes such topics, called FLASH (Family Life and Sexual Health). Staff also mentioned that a parental opt-out form is available on the MCSD website.

Marissa Malone-Means, coordinator of STEM & comprehensive health, said the FLASH program is for students in grades 6 through 12. "Topics for grades 6 to 8 include decision-making for healthy relationships with family and friends, and self-esteem," she said. "For grades 9 to 12, topics include reproductive system and pregnancy."

In addition, 6th grade FLASH lessons teach about puberty and menstruation, while human reproduction as a unit is covered in 7th grade.

Malone-Means also noted that abortion is not covered but birth control is discussed with the older students in the FLASH curriculum.

"The health education curriculum for students in grades 6 through 12 shall include an awareness of the benefits of sexual abstinence as the expected standard and the consequences of teenage pregnancy," the statute reads.

But statistics from the 2019 Florida Youth Risk Behavior Survey Report indicate that many Florida teens don't consider abstinence or even birth control to be an option. The survey is conducted by the Florida Department of Health in collaboration with the Florida Department of Education and school districts statewide, and it is taken by a random selection of 9th to 12th graders. It said that 36.6% of high school students have had sex, and 14.7% of high school students did not use any sort of birth control during the last time they had intercourse.

"Teens have always had sex, and I don't see that changing," said Cali Roberts. She is the executive director of Key West's WomanKind, a federally funded nonprofit agency that provides family planning and gynecological and primary care. "Everybody knows someone who has a young mother."

Roberts said half of the girls in Key West High School are WomanKind patients, and that at any given time, the clinic has 350 female students between the ages of 13 and 20.

"I highly support parents having complete control of what they feel is appropriate for their child," she noted. "I have a problem with people just being afraid of the word 'sex' itself and immediately reacting with: 'No, my child can't learn that.' Silence is not sex education.



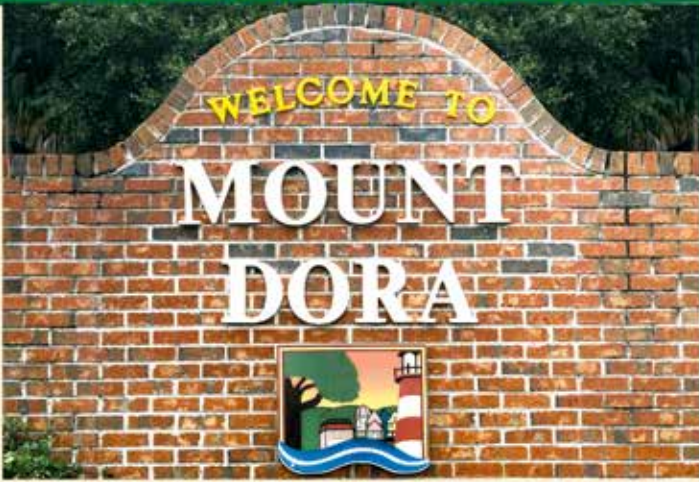
Statistics from 2019 indicate that 36.6% of Florida high school students have had sex, yet the state encourages them in sex education to abstain. CONTRIBUTED

"Changing the statewide guidance concerns me, as there are counties in the state that have high teen birth rates that we never want to emulate," she said. "Liberty County has 19.7 teen pregnancies per thousand girls up to the age of 20. That's four times higher than Monroe County for teen birth rate. Our current rate is 4.75 pregnancies per thousand girls up to age 20. Monroe County does an excellent job, and I hope to continue that."

More information is at www.keysschools.com/Page/892.

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ADOPT A PET AT THE FLORIDA KEYS SPCA

The Keys Weekly family loves animals as much as our friends at the Florida Keys SPCA do, and we're honored each week to showcase some "forever" friends that are ready, waiting and available for adoption by loving families from the organization's Key West campus.

From cats and dogs to Guinea

pigs, hamsters, rabbits, reptiles and birds, the perfect addition to your family is waiting for you. The SPCA's knowledgeable staff will help with advice and care tips while working to ensure a good fit between each pet and its people.

The SPCA's Golden Paw program also provides special assistance with vet bills and medications for special-needs and older animals that may require a little extra TLC.

Check the Key West Weekly every week for just a few of the animals waiting for a home, and see them all at fkspca.org.



Salem is a 3-year-old, female medium mixed breed.



Potato Chip is a 2-year-old, male domestic shorthair.



Millie Moo is a 5-year-old, female medium mixed breed



Bunnie is a 5-year-old, female American rabbit.



Easy E is a 3½-year-old, male domestic shorthair.

ART FOR ALL

STOCK ISLAND ART STROLL HIGHLIGHTS DOZENS OF LOCAL CREATORS



Artist Barb Sage adds a touch of whimsy to everything she touches. Keys Weekly file photo

Stock Island's Art District is ramping up for 2022 with its Second Saturdays Art Stroll from on Saturday, Jan. 8, from 11 a.m. to 5 p.m. There are new venues and a whole new lineup of art, fresh brews, exciting views and gifts as small as postcards to sculptures built for a cathedral ceiling.

The Art Stroll starts at the Green Pineapple located within the Perry Hotel, 7001 Shrimp Road. They will spotlight three local artists:

- Lucy Hawk Art, a Key West-based artist who creates hand-cut paper artworks.

- Suffused with the powers of the earth's elements, Zen by Karen Moore jewelry looks and feels beautiful. Each piece is cleansed with Reiki energy, giving you the opportunity to infuse each stone with your own personal intention.

- And Jasmine Jones of Ocean Blues Studio is a Key West native who uses a combination of alcohol inks, acrylic paint and resin layers to create a body of work with a greater depth than traditional two-dimensional paintings.

Then make your way to Stock Yard Studios, 5700 4th Ave. Here you will find the Sacred Space gallery of 16 local female artists with three work spaces: Whimsy Key West, Lucy Hawk Art and Beth with Washed Ashore Seaglass. Also in



Lucy Hawk's intricate cut-paper creations are among dozens of artwork styles featured at Sacred Space during the Stock Island Art Stroll on Saturday, Jan. 8. CONTRIBUTED

the Stock Yard compound are stone sculptors Craig Berube-Gray, Pamela Kostmayer and AD Tinkham.

From there, wind your way to Washed Up Key West at 6475 2nd St., a custom woodworking shop and artisan gift shop.

Finish your journey at Collections, Key West, 6810 Front St. Park at the Hogfish and stroll 120 paces down the dock until you reach the red doors. From impressionism, kinetic sculptures and Cuban art to pen sets and postcards, all are featured in a yacht club of old.

Visit ilovestockisland.org and the I Love Stock Island Facebook page for updates about more Stock Island happenings.

— Contributed



AND THE NOMINEES ARE...

FINALISTS ANNOUNCED FOR INAUGURAL KEY WEST MUSIC AWARDS



BEN SOLOVE
... is a local radio personality and music promoter who loves to share his passion for music.

The inaugural Key West Music Awards, aka the Iggy Awards, will take place at 7 p.m. Sunday, Jan. 30 at the Key West Theater on Eaton Street.

The nomination committee has completed its job and named the finalists in all

20 categories. The difficult decisions are now in the capable hands of our seven-judge panel whose identities will be revealed at the show. The panel includes six local dignitaries (all of whom have ties to the music scene), and one celebrity judge who also happens to be an award-winning musician. The Iggy Awards will be handed out to the winners during the ceremony, which will also include several live performances and the presentation of a Lifetime Achievement Award and an In Memoriam tribute.

The event is also a fundraiser for Sister Season Fund of Key West. Ray West and I will be your hosts for the evening.

Come on out, walk the red carpet, bid on the silent auction, support your local musicians and Sister Season Fund, and enjoy what is sure to be a fun and memorable evening and an excellent show.

Tickets are available at the theater box office and online at keywestmusicawards.com.

Congratulations to all Iggy Award nominees and finalists. Here are the categories and finalists:

ENTERTAINER OF THE YEAR

Nick Brownell, John Lamere, Oren Polak

COVER BAND OF THE YEAR

The Durtbags, Happy Dog, The Beatle Band, Killer Dudes

SOLO ARTIST OF THE YEAR

Nick Brownell, Ross Brown, Raven Cooper, Zack Seemiller

DUO OF THE YEAR

Shanty Hounds, Raw Dawggs, George Chapman and Caffeine Carl, Coconut Koalas

SONGWRITER OF THE YEAR

Adrienne Z, Lance Taylor, Tony Baltimore, Ericson Holt

RISING STAR

Shastina Chiles, Marshall Morlock, David Warren, Justin Angelo

VOCALIST OF THE YEAR

Michelle Dravis, Kari Wolf, Rob Benton, Marjory Lee

FAN OF THE YEAR

Kim Walsh, Charlie Brumley, Fred Covan, Steve Craig

FACILITATOR OF THE YEAR

Ralph DePalma, Paul Blatt, Tim Lorber

MENTOR OF THE YEAR

Wayne Sorbelli, Larry Baeder, Joe Dallas, Gary Hernandez

BLUES ARTIST OF THE YEAR

Moose Boles, Andy Westcott, Larry Baeder, Ericson Holt

COUNTRY ACT OF THE YEAR

Nick Brownell, Farewell to Cowboys, C.W. Colt, Nick Norman

REGGAE ACT OF THE YEAR

Massai, Turner Harrison, Lower Keys Reggae Band, Toko Irie

ROCK ACT OF THE YEAR

Caffeine Carl & The Buzz, The Durtbags, Tony Baltimore & The Wilde Awake

R&B/RAP/SOUL ACT OF THE YEAR

Cody Daley D3Lay, Robert Albury, Kim Jade Fry

INSTRUMENTALIST OF THE YEAR

Marty Stonely, Tommy Tangie, Kenny Fradley, Ray West, Ross Brown

SONG OF THE YEAR

99 Degrees - Ericson Holt
Let's All Go Insane - Tony Baltimore
The Otherside - Adrienne Z
Coco Plum - The Coconut Koalas

ALBUM OF THE YEAR

"Don't Forget Where You Came From" by Gary Hempsey, "99 Degrees" by Ericson Holt, "Ghost on the Highway" by Lance Taylor, "Hear Me In" by Tony Baltimore



RALPH MORROW

... a veteran sports columnist, says the only sport he doesn't follow is cricket. That leaves plenty of others to fill his time.
ralphmoro1936@gmail.com

SPORTS & MORE

CONCH'S NFL CAREER CONTINUES WITH JAX JAGS

Key West-born Mekhi Sargent is on the move again. The running back, who played college football at Iowa after setting all-time records at Key West High

School, received a lump of coal on Christmas Day, when the Los Angeles Rams dropped him. The Jacksonville Jaguars signed him a few days later. The Rams had signed Sargent on Nov. 6 and assigned him to the practice squad. He played in just one game with the Rams, against Jacksonville, on Dec. 8, when he carried the ball twice, gaining 5 yards.

The Jaguars had Sargent listed as inactive as of Sunday, Jan. 2.

Undrafted after a stellar career at Iowa, he was picked up by the Tennessee Titans during the spring, played a few games and was dropped on Nov. 2. For the Titans, he gained 4 yards in two carries.

AN ESPN HALFTIME ANALYST, Trevor Matich, was praising college football coaches who support their players' decision to skip bowl games in order to go pro. Writer Mike Florio took the same stance on NBC.

I disagree.

If the players are getting a free education, they can fulfill their obligation to attend college and play for the school's football team. Matich said the bowl games are mere exhibitions. But tell that to Gator fans, whose Florida team lost to University of Central Florida in the Gasparilla Bowl. Tell it to any rabid fans of winning or losing bowl teams.

But don't tell it to Mississippi, which lost its star quarterback Matt Corral to a first-quarter leg injury on Saturday and subsequently lost to Baylor, 21-7, in the Sugar Bowl.

Corral is projected to be a first-round selection in the NFL draft.

People like Matich and Florio justify their approval of skipping bowl games by pointing to potential injuries that could put players' NFL draft — and paycheck — possibilities in jeopardy.

Coaches who move on between the end of the regular season and the bowl season are another problem to which I don't have an immedi-



Mekhi Sargent

ate solution. But I will. I'm still pondering the situation.

I HAVE WATCHED PARTS of many post-season games. Un-

less you have a rooting interest, I'd say the best game was the Music City Bowl in which Purdue won in overtime, 48-45, with a field goal over Tennessee.

But, if you have a rooting interest, as I do with Ohio State, then the Buckeyes coming back from a third-quarter, 14-point deficit, to beat Utah, also 48-45, and by a late field goal in the Rose Bowl, stands out.

SOUTHEASTERN CONFERENCE FANS had reason to celebrate as Alabama defeated Cincinnati and Georgia triumphed over Michigan in the national championship semifinals. Neither game was close. The winners play Monday, Jan. 10, for the national collegiate title. I think Alabama will win that game, duplicating the SEC title contest. But I won't be surprised if the Bulldogs pull off an upset.

From what I've seen in the post-season, no team, no league comes close to the SEC finalists. I can't disagree with Michigan and Cincinnati also making the final four. Although they were whipped in those games, no one else had impressed me enough to take their spots.

I have to admit that Oklahoma State rallying from a 21-point deficit to beat Notre Dame, 37-35, in the Fiesta Bowl, and Arkansas handling Penn State, 24-10, in the Outback Bowl, surprised me.

I'm still disappointed that Miami had to pull out of the Sun Bowl because of the virus. Luckily, the bowl found Central Michigan, which not only filled in, but defeated Washington State.

BACK TO THE PROS... As a result of their Sunday loss to Tennessee, the Miami Dolphins have no chance at making the playoffs. Too bad. Until Sunday, the Dolphins had been exceptional during their seven-game win streak. They're now 8-8 and face New England for the last game of their season.

BRAND NEW FANNY



A photo, captured by Bob Williams, of the Fanny Key demolition underway on Sept. 19, 2021. CONTRIBUTED.

W ALEX RICKERT
alex@keysweekly.com

CITY OF MARATHON SETTLES WITH FANNY KEY OWNERS

The California couple responsible for the illicit clearing of West Fanny Key has reached an agreement with the city, according to settlement documents published by the City of Marathon Code Compliance Department.

After meeting with an ecological consultant to determine the number and type of trees that were removed from the island, David and Tammy Marabella, owners of West Fanny Key, are required to replant the entire cleared area using a minimum of 10 species from a list of 16 native plants.

As the City of Marathon requires that restoration plantings be done on a 6:1 ratio, the couple will also be required to provide an additional 120 native plants to the city of Marathon "for planting at an off-site location of the City's choosing to enhance restoration activities on City-owned properties."

The plantings must be completed by June 9, a deadline intended to correlate the restoration activities with Florida's wet season. Failure to complete the required plantings will result in fines of \$100 per day until all the requirements of the settlement agreement are met. The couple is also "liable for a period of one year from the date of the planting for any failure of the Restoration Plan brought about by trespassing, acts of vandalism, or any Act of God."

"We resolved it, and we had cooperation from the owners, which we appreciate," said Marathon City Manager George Garrett. "They never questioned us. We met one time, went on site one time with the biologist they hired, and they agreed to the settlement."

Though the settlement does not include additional fines beyond the costs of the replanting, Garrett said he was pleased with the outcome. "They were forward about it, and they took responsibility. When you have to plant

trees six to one and make sure they survive for a year, you've just spent a fair amount of money."

The settlement comes nearly three months after Marathon resident Bob Williams found his daily swim around East and West Fanny Key, two small islands on the gulf side of the south end of Marathon, blocked by a barge with a backhoe clearing vegetation off the west island on Sept. 19.

"This incident was particularly egregious because of the density of birds (on the island)," said Williams at the time of the clearing. "This is devastating to a healthy and viable rookery."

Photos posted to Facebook quickly sparked outrage among Marathon residents, and the City of Marathon launched cooperative investigation efforts with the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission (FWC) and the Department of Environmental Protection (DEP).

While the settlement with the city should theoretically close the book on the cleared upland hammock, roughly 10 percent to 15 percent of the cleared area falls under the jurisdiction of the DEP, whose case file on the island is still unresolved.

The most recent compliance inspection document signed on Dec. 13 states that the island is still in "significant non-compliance." The report states that, "The property contains approximately 643 square feet of unauthorized impacts to forested buttonwoods wetlands. (These activities) required an Environmental Resource Permit (ERP) from the department. The department has no record of an ERP permit being issued for this property."

The city's settlement agreement includes an admission of responsibility by the Marabellas, but the issue of who operated the equipment used in the clearing remains unsolved. Turtle Hospital founder Richie Moretti posted a \$5,000 reward for information on the operator's identity, but this reward has yet to be claimed. Keys Weekly reached out to attorney Segundo J. Fernandez, retained by the Marabellas in the settlement proceedings, but received no reply.

WATCH THE ROAD, NOT THE HELICOPTER

AERIAL REPAIRS PLANNED FOR MAIN POWERLINE



A helicopter completes inspections and repairs to the electrical tieline that powers the Florida Keys along U.S. 1. CONTRIBUTED

Keys Energy Services (KEYS) will make several helicopter-based repair projects on the main power transmission line, known as the tieline, from Key West to Marathon throughout January.

These projects include repair of concrete transmission poles throughout Keys Energy service and the replacement of the static line that protects the power systems against lightning strikes on the tieline from Big Pine to Marathon.

Residents are advised to drive safely while this work is in progress, and keep their focus on the road and not the helicopter flying overhead.

Some of these repairs cannot be performed on energized lines, so KEYS will need to de-energize a

portion of the tieline. While portions of the tieline are offline, all KEYS customers will be powered via local generation and should not experience any interruptions in service. In the event a power outage occurs during this time, KEYS' crews will work to restore service as quickly as possible.

Anticipated dates for work that will require the tieline to be de-energized are Jan. 11, 12, 13, 15, 19, 20, 22 and 24, weather permitting.

Grays Power Supply was selected as the vendor for the pole repair project, which includes 384 poles, at an estimated total cost of \$6.2 million. Michels Power Inc. was selected as the vendor for the static line replacement project at a total cost to Keys Energy of \$1.6 million.

— Contributed

MOTHER NATURE MOURNS

RENOWNED BIOLOGIST E.O. WILSON'S MOST FAMOUS STUDIES TOOK PLACE IN THE KEYS

W

CHARLOTTE TWINE

charlotte@keysweekly.com

Imagine this scenario: A young scientist asks Monroe County agencies if he can conduct an experiment. He would like to tent off some small mangrove islands — just six teeny, tiny ones — and gas all the insects living there so that they all die. Then, he would document what happens.

Do you think that request would fly today in the county's permit department? How many hours of discussion would that take with the county commissioners?

Yet, this experiment is precisely what biologist and double Pulitzer Prize-winning author Edward O. Wilson masterminded off the coast of Sugarloaf Key in the 1960s. And his resulting studies are some of the most famous and oft-quoted in evolutionary biology, leading to his reputation as "the heir to Charles Darwin." His recent passing

on Dec. 26, 2021, at the age of 92 has been mourned around the world — as well as in the Keys.

"That study is profound. He wrote the book 'Sociobiology,' and it gets drilled into you on a graduate level. It's a foundation in ecology," said field biologist Jerry Lorenz, director of Audubon's Everglades Science Center, based in Tavernier.

"Wilson came up with this idea that island biogeography is the foundation of evolutionary theory," Lorenz explained. "He literally put tents over small islands, killed everything inside them and waited to see what colonized them, and how quickly. For example, spiders would show up, or ants, or a land snail."

Lorenz pointed out that the gas used — called methyl bromide, it's a fumigant for controlling pests — did not cause any permanent damage. But the result of the research has had a long-lasting impact in the annals of science.



Biologist Edward O. Wilson, known as the heir to Charles Darwin, built his reputation on groundbreaking studies he conducted in the Florida Keys in the 1960s.

David Wagner is a professor of ecology and evolutionary biology for the University of Connecticut and has been to the Keys to conduct research many times over the years.

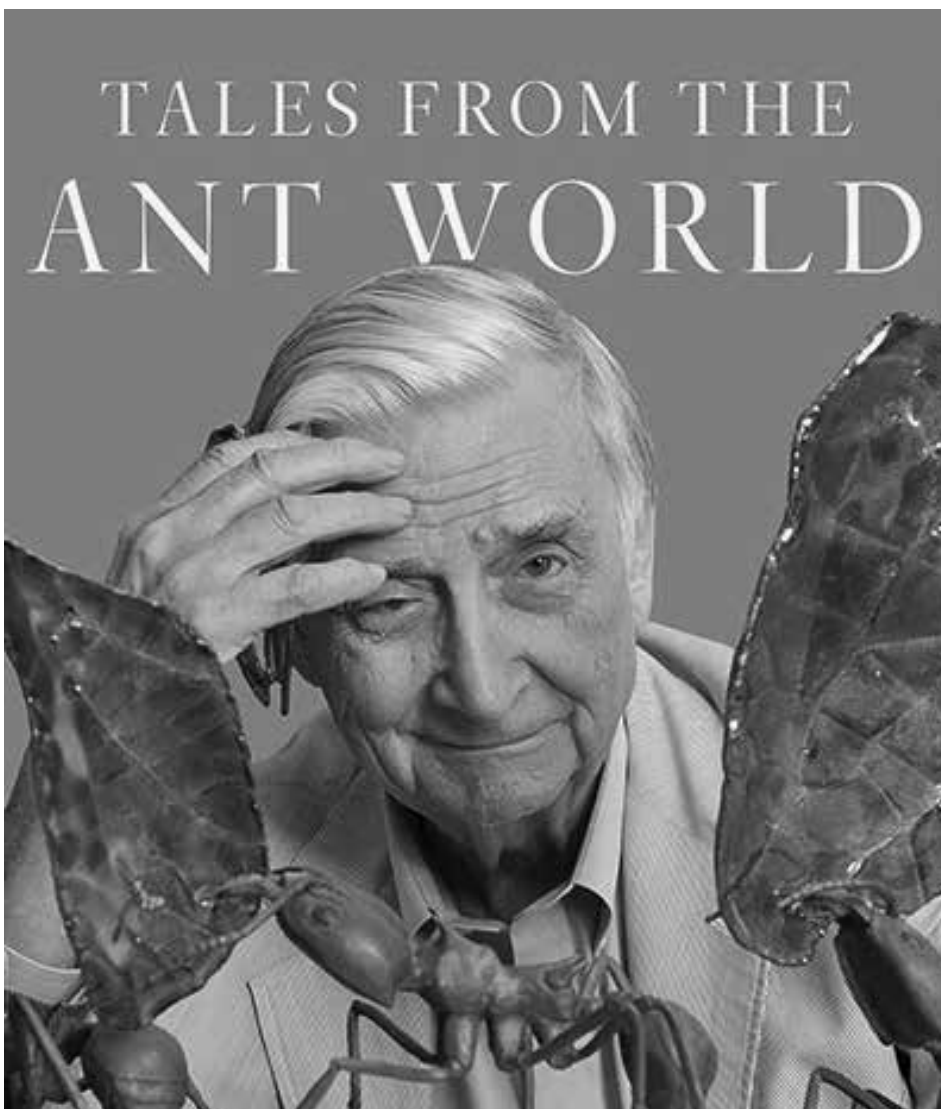
"Wilson and his student, Dan Simberloff, conducted a multi-year study that revealed that the area of a Florida mangrove key (and by extension, an island, coral reef, mountain top, or rainforest) could be used to predict the number of species that could live there in equilibrium," he told Keys Weekly in an email. "His theory of island biogeography ... has been verified by thousands of follow-up studies, and is now being used, in reverse, to predict how fast species are likely to go extinct as we lose reefs, develop islands, and otherwise defaunate the planet."

Pete Frezza, environmental resources manager for the Village of Islamorada, also noted that Wilson's studies led to conservation efforts in the Keys.

"Those studies were beneficial and led to Everglades National Park closing all those islands to the public once it was realized how sensitive the islands can be," Frezza said. "They can harbor unique species. A prairie warbler has become a subspecies on a few islands, and they've taken on unique characteristics. The big picture is when something lives isolated on an island, it evolves and adapts to the local environment. There's a species of snake on those islands that's unique, as well as a mangrove terrapin."

Wagner, a close colleague of Wilson's, will also miss his friendship and his "stalwart defense of nature."

"Ed was a quiet, dignified, private scientist with big ideas and tremendous intellect — and one of the most brilliant scientific writers over the course of six decades at Harvard," he said. "Legions of students and career scientists have held him in high esteem for the whole of their careers. But perhaps no other is as saddened and imperiled at his passing as Mother Nature herself."



Biologist Edward O. Wilson was also known as "the Ant man." He won a Pulitzer Prize for this book about ants. CONTRIBUTED

A KEY WEST BICENTENNIAL STORY

LIEUTENANT RAISES U.S. FLAG OVER THE ISLAND IN 1822

When East Florida and West Florida were still Spanish territories, they were wild, sparsely-populated frontiers.

The Spanish had established two ports. On the Atlantic coast, there was the Spanish port of St. Augustine. Along the long curve of land that spills into the Gulf of Mexico, there was the port at Pensacola. Hoping to begin to tame the land, Spain encouraged settlement of the territory and offered land grants to those willing to brave the frontier and make at least some small portion of it inhabitable.

The acquisition and development of the property were sanctioned through a program of land grants implemented in 1790 and would come to affect Key West's colorful history. These property transactions are referred to as Spanish Land Grants. There was good news for the Spanish landowners when the territory was transferred to the American government under the Adams-Onís Treaty. If adequate documentation could be shown to American authorities, the land grants would be recognized.

In the Florida Keys, only a handful of islands had been legally acquired while they had been under Spanish rule. The Bacacas Keys land grant was originally assigned to Francisco Ferreira. The transaction occurred after Ferreira, who had been in St. Augustine at an opportune time, petitioned the Governor on Jan. 4, 1814, "to grant him in absolute property a Key situated among those called the Florida Keys, and is also known as Key Baca and also four small islands which are situated in the vicinity."

The petition was approved the next day, "as the services rendered by the petitioner are well known, and in consideration of the great losses which he has suffered by the Revolution." The 1814 Ferreira land grant included the islands recognized today as Key Vaca, Long Key, Knights Key, Boot Key and Duck Key.

Key West was the other primary Florida key legally acquired during Spanish ownership. Before it became an American property, the island's second-to-last owner was Don Juan de Estrata. In 1815, Estrata sold the island to Juan Pablo Salas, the island's last legal owner under Spanish rule, and Salas sold the island to its first American owner, John Simonton.

John Watson Simonton was born in New Jersey in 1791. Simonton grew up a merchant and businessman operating between Mobile, Alabama, and Cuba. Because of the route he traveled, he understood Key West's advantageous position. He also understood the importance of the island's naturally deep harbor and easy access to the shipping channels between the Mississippi River, Gulf of Mexico and the Atlantic coast. On Dec. 20, 1821, Simonton paid Juan Pablo Salas \$2,000 for the island, a sum he paid in full.

One month later, on Jan. 19, 1822, Salas sold the island again, this time to an attorney named John Strong. Adding some Key West flavor to the island's already colorful hues, Strong, the attorney, turned around and sold the island twice, too. He sold Key West to both John Geddes of Charleston and George Murray, president of the Legislative Council of the Territory of Florida.

Though the Florida Reef and the Florida Keys had been included in the Adams-Onís Treaty, Lt. Mathew Perry of the U.S. Navy was given orders in February to sail the U.S. schooner



BRAD BERTELLI

is an author, speaker, and Florida Keys historian. His latest book, "The Florida Keys Skunk Ape Files," is a fun blend of two of his favorite subjects — Florida Keys history and the Skunk Ape.

Shark to Key West, survey the island and harbor, and officially declare the island a U.S. possession. By the time Perry arrived at Key West and raised the first U.S. flag over the island on March 25, 1822, several families were already calling the island home, and they gathered to witness the event.

This year, the bicentennial honors Perry's raising of that first flag over the island in 1822. In the meantime, thinking he was the undisputed owner of Key West, Simonton took on three partners, selling parcels of the island to John Whitehead, John Fleming, and Pardon Greene. All of these men gave their names to Key West streets: Simonton, Whitehead, Fleming and Greene. It took years for the courts to wade through the documents and determine the island's rightful owner. Simonton was declared the legal owner on May 23, 1828.

In other bits of period history, Monroe County became the Florida Territory's sixth county when it was established on July 2, 1823. Named after the then sitting and fifth president of the United States, James Monroe, county boundaries originally extended north to the southern shore of Lake Okeechobee and west to the Gulf of Mexico. Key West, the most populated community in the territory, was named the county seat. On Jan. 8, 1828, the city of Key West was officially incorporated.

That same year, Key West was added to the list of St. Augustine and Pensacola as an official U.S. port of entry.



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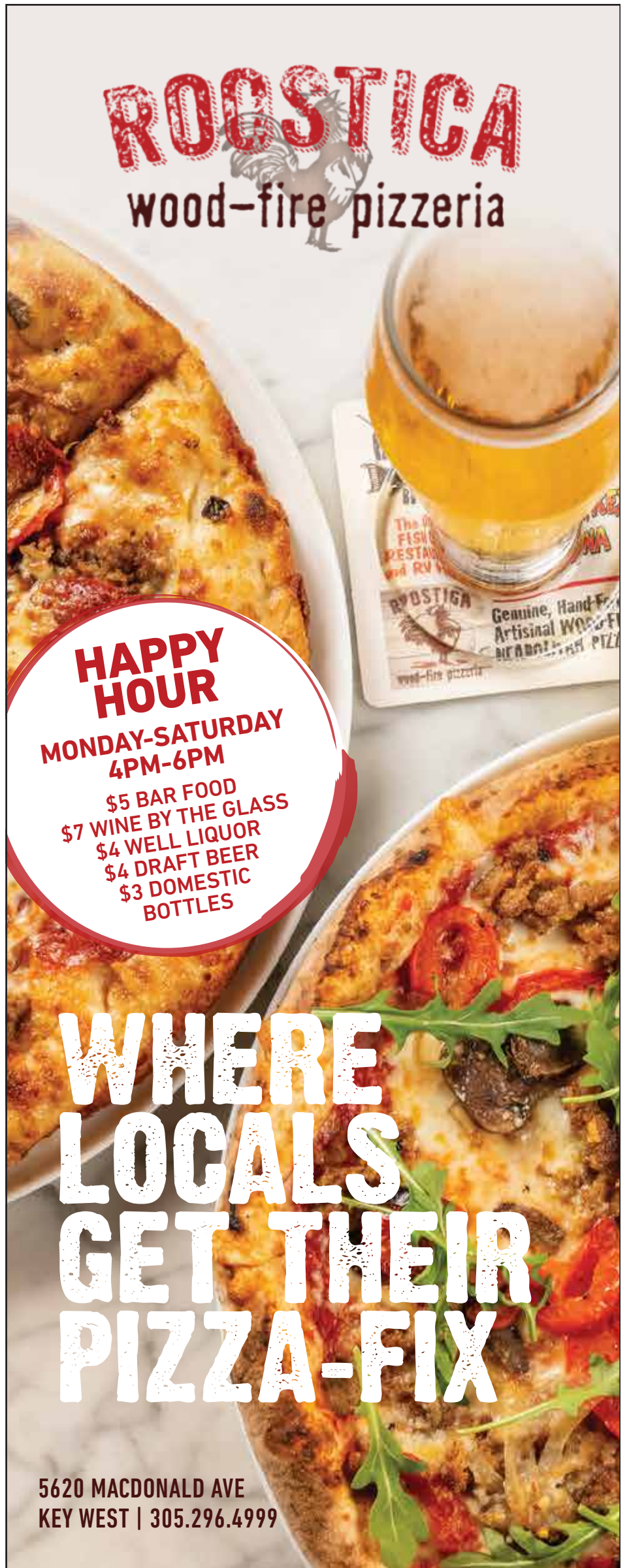
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NEW YEAR BRINGS NEW ART

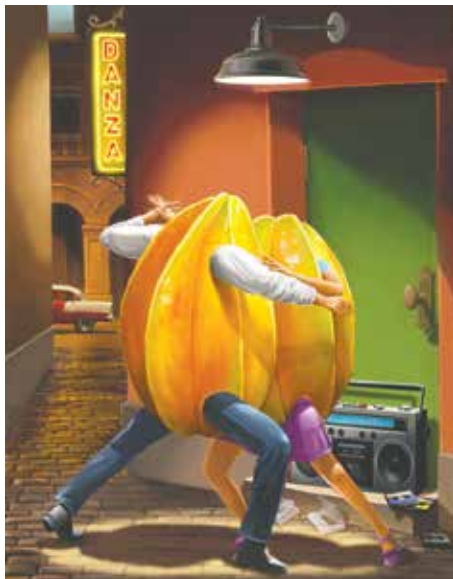
EXPLORE 'SOUTH OF SOUTHERNMOST' AND OTHERS AT THE STUDIOS

On Thursday, Jan. 6, The Studios of Key West kicks off a new arts and culture season with the opening of four exhibits.

The highly anticipated "South of Southernmost" by Mark Hedden opens in the Sanger Gallery; "Pandemic Drawings" by Nicholas Hill opens in the XOJ Gallery; "Dancing In A Tea Cup: A Pixel Paradox In Paradise" by Christopher Santoro opens in the Zabar Project Gallery, and a collection of large-scale ceramic pieces by Ann Labriola opens in the Zabar Lobby Gallery.

Hedden's "South of Southernmost" is an exhibit of photographs of Ballast Key, a backcountry island 10 miles west of Key West, south of the Southernmost Point. It was owned and used as a getaway for the influential and creative by David Wolkowsky, a member of a family with deep and storied Florida roots. Upon his death, under the guidance of The Nature Conservancy, the island was donated to the National Wildlife Refuge system, with the intention of it becoming a backcountry research station. Hedden's images document the shift in Ballast Key's gravity, as the arc of its story switches from the human to the wild.

For well over a year, against a backdrop of headlines consumed by the pandemic, Ohio-based printmaker Nicholas Hill has scanned the paper each day for people glimpsed in the backgrounds of news photos, then foregrounded them as raw, brush-and-ink drawings across the paper's surface.



'Danza' by Christopher Santoro

Numbering over 3,800 so far (with just a selection on view in Key West), "Pandemic Drawings" serve as a reminder of lives lost.

Known as an illustrator of children's books, with over 40 years of titles under his belt, Christopher Santoro's seemingly effortless range extends to elegant abstractions, witty design, and tightly rendered visual puns that just might make you snort with laughter. With titles including "Open the Barn Door," "Open the Garage Door," and "It's Haunted!" Santoro has been honored by the Society of Illustrators, the American Institute of Graphic Arts, the American Library Association, and The New Yorker. "Dancing In A Tea Cup" is a selection of his incredibly diverse work.

Rounding out the January exhibitions is the work of Ann Labriola, the sure-handed and well-loved director of fine arts at the College of the Florida Keys. Labriola is also one of the area's strongest ceramicists, with a collection of recent work combining organic and abstract forms in her distinct style.

All four exhibitions will be on view Jan. 6-27 at The Studios of Key West, 533 Eaton St. The galleries are free and open to the public Tuesday through Saturday from 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. More information is at tskw.org.

— Contributed

SAVORING SAKE AND SOY SAUCE

POKÉ IN THE REAR HOSTS SPECIAL 7-COURSE PAIRING DINNER

W **MANDY MILES**
mandy@keyswestweekly.com

You've heard of the craft beer movement, artisanal balsamic vinegar and elaborate olive oil. Now add soy sauce to the list of products that get better with time and when produced in small batches.

Grant Portier, chef and co-owner of Poké in the Rear on Angela Street, recently found himself experimenting with some of the more distinctive drizzles of soy sauce and decided he had to share his discoveries.

The result? A seven-course craft soy sauce and sake pairing dinner at Poké in the Rear.

"Look at this. It's black garlic soy sauce. These specialty sauces are becoming huge in Japan and once you try them, you'll never go back to the red or green Kikkoman's soy sauce that's been in your fridge for years. I wanted to do something unique for a special foodie dinner, and these sauces were my inspiration," Portier said while also showing off a perfectly marbled Japanese steak that will be one of the dinner courses. "These craft soy sauces are so flavorful, so complex, it's almost as if you're tasting a wine, with all its layers. I've been letting our diners help themselves to this array of craft soy sauces and they're hooked."

Portier is not alone in his analysis. "There are 300 different aromas in soy sauce, apparently, a figure comparable to wine," food

writer Michael Booth explains in his exploration of soy sauce in Japan for saveur.com.

The cutting-edge, seven-course dinner at Poké in the Rear will take place on Sunday, Jan. 9 from 6:30 to 9:30 p.m. at Poké in the Rear.

"This is a dinner not to be missed," Portier said. "We are taking off the gloves and showing what we can really do. Seven courses, each paired with a very special drink, talks by our soy sauce maker, music by Andrew Burelson and all around, a truly memorable night."

Only 36 tickets are being sold, and only 16 were remaining as of Jan. 4, he said.

The cost is \$195 per person, which includes tax but not tip, Portier said.

Each course is perfectly paired with sake, Yamazaki single malt scotch or Grand Marnier Cuvée Centenaire, 100-year anniversary edition.

It all starts with a welcome drink, an elevated Lychee Martini created by Grant's wife and business partner Jenn Stefanacci-Portier, who owns the adjacent 22&Co. Bar.

Then there's an heirloom mushroom, backfin crab and goat cheese roulade, fresh belon oysters topped with trout roe and ponzu, Key West pink shrimp with craft soy sauce and grilled white asparagus, Hawaiian moonfish sashimi, pan-seared Chilean sea bass with grilled, purple Japanese eggplant and steamed bok choy, Japanese Wagyu strip steak, seared and served atop a Himalayan salt block with white truffle parsnip puree and finally a candied pecan and golden raisin croissant bread pudding with the 100-year Grand Marnier.

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Publish:
January 6 & 13, 2022
The Weekly Newspapers

IN THE CIRCUIT COURT OF THE SIXTEENTH JUDICIAL CIRCUIT, IN AND FOR MONROE COUNTY, FLORIDA CASE NO.: 21-DR-000538-K DIVISION: FAMILY IN RE: THE MARRIAGE OF: NANCY INGRAM, Petitioner/Wife, and, ABRAHAM PERETZ, Respondent/Husband. NOTICE OF ACTION FOR DISSOLUTION OF MARRIAGE (NO CHILD OR FINANCIAL SUPPORT)

TO: ABRAHAM PERETZ LAST KNOWN ADDRESS: SUNSET MARINA, 5555 COLLEGE ROAD, LOBSTER 16 DOCK KEY WEST, FLORIDA 33040 YOU ARE NOTIFIED that an action for dissolution of marriage has been filed against you and that you are required to serve a copy of your written defenses, if any, to it on Samuel J. Kaufman, Esq., Law Offices of Samuel J. Kaufman, P.A., whose address is 3130 Northside Drive, Key West, Florida 33040 on or before January 24, 2022, and file the original with the clerk of this Court at: 500 Whitehead Street, Key West, FL 33040, before service on Petitioner or immediately thereafter. If you fail to do so, a default may be entered against you for the relief demanded in the petition.

The action is asking the court to decide how the following real or personal property should be divided: NONE Copies of all court documents in this case, including orders, are available at the Clerk of the Circuit Court's office. You may review these documents upon request. You must keep the Clerk of the Circuit Court's office notified of your current address. (You may file Designation of Current Mailing and E-Mail Address, Florida Supreme Court Approved Family Law Form 12.915.) Future papers in this lawsuit will be mailed or e-mailed to the address(es) on record at the clerk's office. WARNING: Rule 12.285, Florida Family Law Rules of Procedure, requires certain automatic disclosure of documents and information. Failure to comply can result in sanctions, including dismissal or striking of pleadings. Dated: December 23, 2021 Kevin Madok, CPA Clerk of the Circuit Court Monroe County, Florida By: Riza Hall Deputy Clerk Publish: December 23 & 30, 2021 and January 6 & 13, 2022 The Weekly Newspapers

IN THE CIRCUIT COURT OF THE SIXTEENTH JUDICIAL CIRCUIT, IN AND FOR MONROE COUNTY, FLORIDA CASE NO.: 21-DR-000305-K DIVISION: FAMILY IN RE: THE MATTER OF: GUSTAVO PEREZ RAMIREZ Petitioner, And, DELIA MARIBEL URIZAR OXOM, Respondent. NOTICE OF ACTION FOR PUBLICATION TO: DELIA MARIBEL URIZAR OXOM ADDRESS UNKNOWN YOU ARE NOTIFIED that an action for Petition for Dissolution of Marriage has been filed against you and

LEGAL NOTICES

that you are required to serve a copy of your written defenses, if any, to it on, Attorney for Petitioner, Ashley Benitez, Esq., and the Law Office of Alex Hanna, P.A., 8700 West Flagler Street, Suite 380, Miami, Florida 33174, on or before January 17, 2022, and file the original with the clerk of this Court at: 500 Whitehead Street, Key West, FL 33040, before service on Respondent or immediately thereafter. If you fail to do so, a default may be entered against you for the relief demanded in the petition.

Copies of all court documents in this case, including orders, are available at the Clerk of the Circuit Court's office. You may review these documents upon request. You must keep the Clerk of the Circuit Court's office notified of your current address. (You may file Designation of Current Mailing and E-Mail Address, Florida Supreme Court Approved Family Law Form 12.915.) Future papers in this lawsuit will be mailed or e-mailed to the address(es) on record at the clerk's office. WARNING: Rule 12.285, Florida Family Law Rules of Procedure, requires certain automatic disclosure of documents and information. Failure to comply can result in sanctions, including dismissal or striking of pleadings. Dated: December 10, 2021 Kevin Madok, CPA Clerk of the Circuit Court Monroe County, Florida By: Riza Hall Deputy Clerk Publish: December 16, 23, 30, 2021 and January 6, 2022 The Weekly Newspapers

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EMPLOYMENT

Kelly Electric in Marathon looking for experienced Journeyman/Electrician. Please send resume to Kelly6098@aol.com or call Bill at 305-743-7098

City of Marathon Current Job Openings: Public Works Fleet Mechanic, Utilities Field Engineer and Marina Technician/Pump Out Captain. Full Benefits. EOE Please see City website for details www.ci.marathon.fl.us

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The Marathon Yacht Club is looking to hire a part-time Bookkeeper 16-20 hours per week. Bookkeeping experience required. Additional office duties required. Call 305-743-6739 to schedule an interview.

Charter Captain /Mate - Busy fishing charter business in Marathon looking for experienced fishing Captain/Mate. Busy boats and location. Offshore, Inshore, Reef/Wreck. Also part-time Boat Cleaner needed for afternoons. Send text or call 305-481-3259

FI Keys Diesel - Marathon now hiring: Diesel Technician -Competitive compensation package. Exp in the marine field preferred but not necessary. Exp w/ Caterpillar and Cummins Marine Engines a plus. Diesel Mechanic Assistant position available. Motivated candidate willing to learn a new trade or expand current skills. Company willing to train. Qualified applicants please call 305-289-2070 or email resume to neil@allkeysdiesel.com . Drug Free and valid Drivers License a must..

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The Advocate DUI Program is hiring for a part time position. DUI evaluator - 2 days a week, Bachelors or Masters degree with experience in substance abuse field required. Bilingual preferred, not required. Office located in Marathon. Contact Marcia at (305) 704-0117.

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LOCATION: MIDDLE KEYS

The Florida Keys Aqueduct Authority is looking for two (2) D.S.O.s to perform entry-level, semi-skilled work, involving the repair and maintenance of FCAA water distribution and transmission systems. Employee must ensure safe work practices, maintain water flow, and test the water supply. Qualifications: H.S. diploma or GED; supplemented by 1 yr previous experience and/or training as a pipefitter with a public utility, construction comp, or plumbing company. Must have a valid FL CDL "A" license w/in 12 mos of hire date. Must obtain a FDEP Level 3 license w/in 18 mos of hire date. Salary: \$20.52/hr. with excellent benefits.

Apply online at: www.fkaa.com/employment EEO, VPE, ADA



TEMPORARY DISTRIBUTION SYSTEM OPERATOR

LOCATION: MIDDLE KEYS

The Florida Keys Aqueduct Authority is looking for four (4) temporary D.S.O. to perform entry-level, semi-skilled work, involving the repair and maintenance of FCAA water distribution and transmission systems. This position could lead to a regular, benefited position in the future. Employee must ensure safe work practices. Qualifications: H.S. diploma or GED; supplemented by 1 yr previous experience and/or training as a pipefitter with a public utility, construction comp, or plumbing company. Salary: \$25.00/hr.

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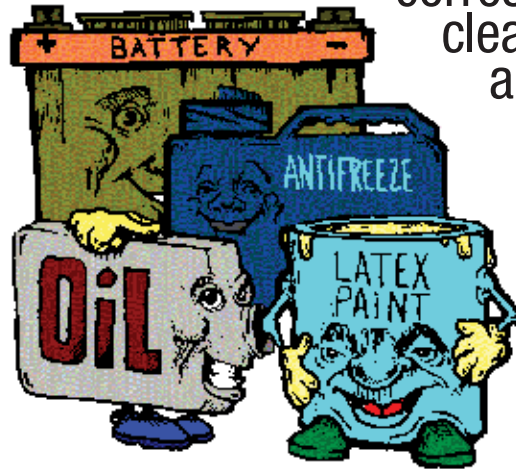


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Qualifications: High School Diploma or GED, working knowledge of computers and other office equipment, and a Florida Driver's License Class B CDL within 6 months of hire. This position is designated as a safety sensitive position. An employee in this position is subject to the mandatory Department of Transportation drug testing program which involves random drug testing. Starting salary: \$37,559.76 plus benefits. For more information, contact Human Resources at: Careers@monroecounty-fl.gov or call 305-394-4966. APPLICATION AVAILABLE AT: www.monroecounty-fl.gov via the position link on our employment page. Veteran's Preference Available; E.O.E.



TRANSFER STATION OPERATOR

Monroe County Solid Waste Management is looking for a responsible applicant for the **Long Key Transfer Station**, MM 21.5. The primary function of this position is to weigh vehicles in and out of transfer station and maintain transfer station property.

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