

CELEBRATING
41
YEARS

THE BLOOMINGDALE GAZETTE

THE OFFICIAL PUBLICATION OF THE BLOOMINGDALE NEIGHBORHOOD ASSOCIATION SINCE 1980

VOLUME XLI 🌿 ISSUE 6 🌿 JUNE 2021 🌿 www.Bloomingtondale.Life

STATE CHAMPS!



Photo courtesy of Mike Camunas, Creative Director, 813Preps.com

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PLEASE ♻️ RECYCLE

WINNER

2013, 2014, 2016,
2018 & 2019

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Neighborhood
Recognition Award

Best Communications
Newsletter Category

“Why fit in when you were born to stand out?” Dr. Seuss

THE AWARD-WINNING
BLOOMINGDALE GAZETTE

YOUR COMMUNITY NEWSPAPER



JOY BOISSELLE

Editor - The Bloomingdale Gazette

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Website: www.Bloomingdale.Life

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The official publication of the BNA since 1980, delivered free to Bloomingdale residents on the first Wednesday of each month.



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Email: Bl.Neighbor1@gmail.com

Website: www.Bloomingdale.Life

BNA Board meetings are held the second Tuesday of each month at the Bloomingdale Community Office.

President:

Suzy Watts

Vice President:

Sean Donahue

Treasurer:

Grace Lewis

Directors at Large:

Bobbi Ferraro

Billy Hightower

BNA COMMUNITY CORNER

LIKE US ON FACEBOOK!



JOIN TODAY!

HELP KEEP THE GAZETTE AND OTHER PROGRAMS COMING!

The Bloomingdale Neighborhood Association membership drive continues. Just \$35 will help keep our programs and services on track. Please send your membership today and be part of making Bloomingdale a great place to live, work and call home!

MONTHLY CALENDAR

BNA Board Meeting / Tuesday, June 8, 6:30 p.m. / Bloomingdale Community Office, 3509 Bell Shoals Road / Call 813-252-0252 for information. Send topics you want addressed to bl.neighbor1@gmail.com.

SAVE THE DATE! Community Garage Sale: Sept. 11, 8am to 1pm

Campo YMCA Trunk or Treat: October, TBA

Fall Community Clean-up: Nov. 6, 9am to 1 pm, Stay tuned for details.

Santa Drive-through: December 5

Please Note: Our event dates may change, be rescheduled or even be cancelled due to COVID-19. We will make decisions based on the safety of our residents.

BNA BRIEFS

WANT TO SEE MORE ANNUAL EVENTS? JOIN "TEAM BLOOMINGDALE!"

We need residents like you to add your energy and a little of your time to the Association Board. Let's put our hearts and efforts into our community. Call 813-681-2051/252-0252 or email Bl.Neighbor1@gmail.com for information.



FLAG DAY IS JUNE 14!

Many Americans celebrate Flag Day by displaying the Red, White and Blue in front of homes and businesses. The day commemorates the adoption of the Stars and Stripes as the official flag of the United States. Need to properly dispose of your flags? There are many places close by and include: A Boy Scout drop box at the Presbyterian Church of Bloomingdale between Dunkin Donuts and Stonewood (see picture), any VFW or American Legion and ACE Hardware.

BNA BRIEFS CONT.

****UPDATE! LAST CALL! ****

Our July issue will be the ONLY issue focusing on our 2021 graduates. Sorry for any confusion! Calling All 2021 Graduates, Parents and Friends! We want your graduation photos for our July issues!



The Gazette wants to help you celebrate your graduation moments, including pre-k through college graduations, Alafia and Cimino clap outs, formal pictures, parties, and more!

Send your graduation photos or selfies to inbloominglenews@gmail.com by **June 25**. At a minimum, identify those in the photo from left to right, the school graduating from, and the plans of the graduate. Photos need to be no less than 600x600 resolution, but preferably 1 mb or better for best results. We will do the rest! Don't forget to provide contact information just in case there are questions.

THANK YOU, BLOOMINGDALE! OUT WITH THE OLD, IN WITH THE NEW!

Effective with the July issue, I am stepping down as the Bloomingdale office manager and Bloomingdale Gazette editor. Between both positions, I worked for the community for nearly 10 years. It was a pleasure getting to know all my neighbors, local businesses and others who help make our community a wonderful place. I enjoyed helping where and when I could and I enjoyed taking part in our many events. I am happy to announce that my Gazette reporter and friend Jane Owen will be taking over as both the office manager and Gazette editor. I see Jane as a younger version of myself, full of passion and ready to step in for a seamless transition. I know she will keep the Gazette a stellar publication. See you around Natures Way!

Joy Boisselle



BLOOMINGDALE SPECIAL DISTRICT

3509 Bell Shoals Road
Valrico, Florida 33596
(813) 684-6667 Office
(813) 684-2358 Fax
BSTD@verizon.net
<https://mydistrictwebsite.com/>
Hours: 8 a.m. to 12 p.m.

Tom Leech, President
Charlie Woodcock, Treasurer
Russell Jones, Trustee
Randy Kehrmeyer, Trustee
Claire Letkiewicz, Trustee
Lee Raschke, Trustee
Kristine Schroeder, Trustee

For information on the BSD visit:
mydistrictwebsite.com/
[bloomingle-dale-special-taxing-district](https://bloomingle-dale-special-taxing-district.com/)

THE COMMUNITY'S COMMON AREA CONNECTION

TOM LEECH, BSD PRESIDENT

Office Reopens, Residents May Attend In-Person Meetings

A drop in the COVID-19 numbers means businesses and public facilities are opening again. The office on Bell Shoals will return to regular hours (Mon-Thurs, 8 a.m.- Noon) effective 1 June. Additionally, beginning with the June 14 regular monthly meeting and budget hearing, residents will be able to attend meetings in-person.

Fig Trimming

Fig trimming has been completed throughout the community and tree trimming will begin in June and be complete by the end of the month.

Injured Cyclist Sends Heartfelt Thanks

Last month, I wrote about the April crash on Natures Way that resulted in a fatality and left one of our neighbors hospitalized in serious condition. Many of you responded by sending cards and well-wishes via the BSD office, which were delivered to John. In response, John penned a thank you note that I am pleased to share with you:

"Hi, my name is John and I am the cyclist injured in the April 3rd accident on Natures Way. I just wanted to express my gratitude to the Bloomingdale community for the outpouring of support, well wishes, and kind thoughts. The numerous cards, along with the gracious posts and comments are helping my family and I through a very difficult time. I thank you all and wish you the very best!"

-- John

This is what community is all about – looking out for our neighbors and rendering aid and assistance without hesitation. And this is one of the defining characteristics of Bloomingdale.

Monthly Meeting

Bloomingdale residents are invited to attend the public hearing on the FY22 budget and the regular monthly meeting of the BSD on June 14. The hearing begins at 6:15 p.m. and the regular meeting will begin at 6:30 p.m. Both will be held at the Bloomingdale Community Offices, 3509 Bell Shoals Road. If you would like to speak at the hearing or the monthly meeting, members of the public are allotted 3 minutes to make comment or ask questions per Hillsborough County policy. *Hope to see you there!*



2021 Marks First-Time BNA Awards Two \$2,000 Scholarships!

By Michelle Colesanti

Courtesy Photo



Photo: Michelle Colesanti

Congratulations, Jake and Rosie!

With COVID-19 restrictions causing the curtailment, postponement or cancellation of many events, the BNA awarded two \$2,000 scholarships this year. Giving back to exceptional students in our community became a top priority! The scholarship honors BJ Stelter, who passed away in 2019. She served the Bloomingdale community for 14 years as the second principal of Bloomingdale High School.

Sean Donahue, BNA VP and scholarship committee chair noted the excellence of all applicants. He said, "We are proud of all the nominees for the Bloomingdale Scholarship and hope all of these individuals go



on to make strong contributions to our community and nation."

2021 BNA Scholarship Male Winner: Jake Kehrmeier

Congratulations to Jacob (Jake) Kehrmeier for earning the 2021 Bloomingdale Neighborhood Scholarship. Kehrmeier's 5.868 GPA, along with his many academic and community service honors and awards helped with the decision to offer him a scholarship.

Sean Donahue, BNA VP and Scholarship Committee Chair said, "Jake is a dedicated community volunteer with outstanding grades. We are proud to present this scholarship to this fine young man."

Kehrmeier's activities include the National Honor Society, Spanish Honor Society, The BETA Club and Mu AlphaTheta (Mathematics) Honor Society. He spent three years in chorus and was a four-year stand-out on the Bull's wrestling team. He

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www.IernaAir.com

was twice Campo Y Lifeguard of the Month and was also a mentor for its Summer Literacy Program.

in numerous organizations and events with impeccable academic aptitude.”

Community service is important to Jake. Since 2017 he has volunteered at the Fall Festival, Spring Clean Up and, Santa and Easter Bunny visits and parades. “I feel blessed and am grateful to have grown up in our Bloomingdale Community, and am proud of the contributions I’ve made along the way to help make it a special place to live. I am very proud and grateful to receive this award.”

In the top 1% of her class, Rosie was in the National Honor Society, Science Honor Society, The BETA Club and Mu AlphaTheta (Mathematics) Honor Society and the Tri-M Music Honor Society.

He resides with his dad and mom, Randy and Cheryl Kehrmeier in Windsor Woods. This fall, Jake will attend USF to study Biochemical Science.

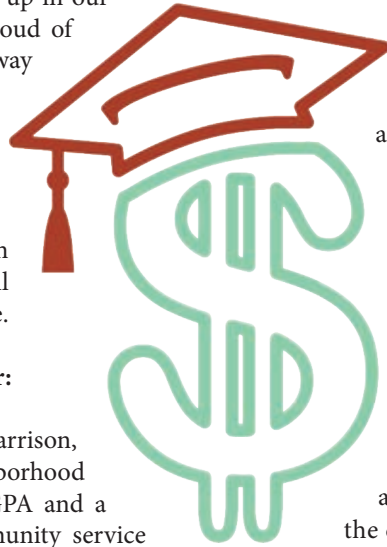
She is active in Teen Impact, an organization promoting healthy lifestyles and relationships to teens. She is also a Worship Leader for New Hope Youth Praise, allowing her to use her musical gifts to serve God and do more in her church community.

2021 BNA Scholarship Female Winner: Rosemarie (Rosie) Harrison

Congratulations to Rosemarie (Rosie) Harrison, who received the Bloomingdale Neighborhood Scholarship. Harrison boasted a 6.9 GPA and a long list of both academic and community service honors and awards.

Harrison said, “The Bloomingdale Community has always been extremely supportive of local schools, ensuring that students have the resources they need to perform their best academically.” As for the award, she said, “I’m really thankful as it will help financially. I am thankful to the community.”

Harrison lives in River Crossing with dad and mom, Richard and Victoria Harrison. She plans to attend Auburn University to study Chemical Engineering in the Fall.



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Welcome to the Neighborhood

Compiled by Jane Owen



Allegria Italian Restaurant

Location: 518 Oakfield Dr. Brandon, FL 33511

For more info: <http://www.allegriaitaliana.com/>

Phone: 813-651-1166

Dinner reservations are not required but recommended

Closed on Mondays

Allegria Italian Restaurant is now open for lunch from Tuesday - Sunday 11:30-2:30! Buon Appetito!

Owned by the Dragonetti family, Allegria Italian Restaurant is all about community. Their specialty is “Delizioso!” food and amazing, personal customer service. Places like Allegria are few and far between. Let’s face it, there aren’t many authentic independently owned Italian restaurants in the area.

Restaurant owner, Vito Dragonetti, believes that the excellent food and service they offer makes Allegria special. Many of the restaurant recipes come from family members like his Grandmother’s Lasagna.

“There’s not too many places like ours. You come to enjoy dinner, and you will. We have a different atmosphere. It’s a different type of service, too – professional and yet we get to know our customers,” he explained.

Vito and his family live in Valrico and settled here after 38 years in New York. They have been in Brandon for 7 years. He loves our Bloomingdale community and having the restaurant in Brandon.

“This area is a great area – a piece of heaven for me. It is in the middle of everything and close to everything. It is beautiful.”

Allegria opened for lunch again in May. Lunch is served Tuesday through Sunday from 11:30-2:30. They have expanded their lunch menu and a must try is their famous “Classis Parmigiana Hero Subs.”

Check out the menu online: <https://allegriaitaliana.com/brandon-allegriaitaliana-food-menu>. Lastly, Allegria hosts live music at dinner every other Wednesday and the last Thursday of the month.



Courtesy Photo



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Gasparilla Pizzeria and Growlers

Location: 1028 Bloomingdale Ave in Plaza Bella (near Shrimp Boat and The Green Boutique)

For more info: <https://gasparillapizzeria.com/>

Phone: 813-661-4191 Call to place your order!

Facebook: www.facebook.com/gasparillapizzeria



Gasparilla Pizzeria and Growlers:

Bringing Great Food, Beer and Families Together

Gasparilla Pizzeria and Growlers is a New York style pizzeria influenced by local flavors and a love for beer. One of the owners Todd Little said that not only are they excited about their restaurant, but they love their location, "Everyone has been fantastic! If you are looking for good quality pizza, this is the place for you!"

Opened in October 2020, the restaurant is co-owned by Tampa locals who have worked in New York style pizzerias together for over 15 years. Just a few months into opening, the owners showed their commitment to community by providing pizza at a celebration for the Bloomingdale Football team's best season in history.

Quality is the priority at Gasparilla's. Nothing was done in haste or left to chance. The owners use local ingredients and serve craft beers and offerings from Keel and Curley Winery! Even better, Growlers can be delivered with your pizza!

Delivery is available within 5 miles through the pizzeria and 10 miles through locally owned Mobile Meals.



The Gasparilla Pizza Krewe! Left to Right: Connor Larsen, Owner/Beer Expert, Jack Sigler, Owner/Pizza Master, Catalina Franco, Owner, Jack and Catalina's Children, Liliana Sigler and Lucas Sigler. Not Pictured: Todd Little, Owner, Jeff and Shannon Ciane, Owners, Al Carapella, Mentor, and Jeremy Dunkley, Manager



Photos: Jane Owen



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BDGZDC20

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Bloomington Bulls Baseball

The Road to the 2021 State Championship



Bright gold medals can't outshine the smiles of the newly crowned Bloomington Bulls 2021 State Baseball Champions. The final held, May 22 in Fort Meyers, pitted two powerhouse teams – Bloomington (24-6) vs Orange Park Fleming Island (25-6). The Bulls secured the win 5-1 after at least four previous state title attempts – one in the 90's, 2002, 2004, and 2014.

Graduating seniors – Joe Skinner, Gabe Garrett, Donovan Dubuisson, Marlon Bowen, Wyatt Strickland and David Eckaus – were integral team members. Coach mused, “We have 6 seniors who were all critical components of this team that we will have to find a way to replace. We had a very special group in 2020 that we had to replace and it led to a state title, so... anything can happen.” From this side of the bull pen, the future looks pretty bright for Bulls baseball.

Coach Kris Wilken heads this exceptional group of athletes and coaches. He has been the head coach for 14 years and spearheaded two previous runs at the title in 2004 and 2014. In spite of the pandemic hardships, Wilken commented, “This was such a special year for us as a school. So many sports had tremendous seasons. For us to put kind of a capstone on this year athletically for our school was pretty cool.” Indeed, Coach!

Describing the champions, Coach Wilken said, “This truly was a team effort all season. Just a **Selfless, Classy, Relentless** group of guys who held themselves and each other **Accountable** and approached every day with a ton of Passion and Pride.” And, yes those words are capitalized for a reason.

As for the win, he put it plainly. “We hadn't played our best in a long time. Us coaches knew it. The players knew it. So that was our challenge for Saturday night. Win or lose, let's go play our best game of the year and the players delivered for sure.”




Jake Magadan



Chase Chappell winds up for the pitch.





2021 Florida High School
6A State Champs
Bdalebullsbaseball
@Bdalebullsbase1

The Bulls would like to thank our administration, our parents our student body and our community for all of the support. Last night was special for our program and we are definitely proud, absolutely excited, but more than anything we are thankful for you all.
Go Bulls!



Selfless. Classy. Relentless. A

The Team

- 1 Dawson Harman INF, RHP • So.
- 2 Drake Harman OF • Jr. **
- 3 Makye Hayes OF • Jr.
- 4 John Rosario C, 3B • Jr.
- 5 Trey Clinton LHP • Jr.
- 6 Jack Owens RHP, OF • Jr **
- 7 Bobby Rossi C, OF • So.
- 9 Dannels Garcia INF, OF • Jr.
- 10 Colby Shelton INF • Jr. **
- 11 Joe Skinner 1B, DH • Sr.
- 14 Chase Chappell RHP • Jr.
- 16 Gabe Garrett INF, RHP • Sr.
- 17 Zack Cable INF • Jr.
- 18 Donovan Dubuison OF • Sr.
- 19 Jake Nolte RHP • Jr.
- 20 Jake Magadan OF, RHP • So.
- 21 Alex Vazquez 1B, RHP, 3B • So.
- 23 Marlon Bowen OF • Sr. **
- 24 Trey Wilson INF, RHP • So.
- 26 Wyatt Strickland C, INF • Sr. **
- 27 Carlos DeJesus C, 1B • Jr.
- 32 David Eckaus LHP • Sr. **

**2021 All-Western Conference Baseball



Wyatt Strickland



Proud Seniors.



Photos: Amy Nolte, Jaime Chappell & Tayrn Magadan

2/16	Sickles	W2-1
2/18	Newsome	W17-4
2/19	Plant	W2-0
2/22	Robinson	W3-1
2/26	Strawberry Crest	W5-2
3/1	East Bay	W7-3
3/4	Newsome	W3-1
3/5	Plant City	L5-1
3/9	Leto	W6-2
3/13	Alonso	L9-7
3/15	Leto	L4-0
3/16	Riverview	W10-0
3/17	Steinbrenner	L11-7
3/23	Strawberry Crest	L5-4
3/26	Freedom	W6-2
3/30	King	W8-1
4/1	East Bay	W8-0
4/6	Durant	W3-2
4/9	Armwood	W11-4
4/14	Blake	W9-2
4/16	Plant	W2-1
4/20	Lenard	W7-0
4/22	Alonso	L4-3
4/27	Largo	W6-2
4/29	St. Petersburg	W3-2
5/7	Gaither	W7-4
5/12	Mitchell	W2-1
5/15	Gulf Coast	W4-3
5/21	Dwyer	W3-2
5/22	Fleming Island	W5-1

The Experienced Coaching Staff

- Head Coach Kris Wilken – 14 years on the job!
- Assistant Coach Josh Wilken – 4 years!
- Assistant Coach Cody Wilson – c/o 2017
- Assistant Coach A. Wilson – c/o 2012
- Assistant Coach James Masson – 23 years!
- Assistant Coach Tim Malloy – More than 3 years!
- Statistician Frank Lombard – More than 14 years!



David Eckaus



Gabe Garrett

Accountable. And Champions!

4th Annual Running of the Bulls 5k Tramples Expectations

By Jane Owen

Citing Incredi-BULL support from racers, supporters and sponsors, race organizers deemed this year's Running of the Bulls 5k the most successful yet!

Held on May 23, the race moved from its original location at Bloomingdale High School to the Hillsborough State Fairgrounds due to School District COVID-19 restrictions. Organizers reported the highest number of registrations and more business sponsors than in any previous year. Nearly 300 participants stampeded through the tree-lined fairgrounds and perhaps more importantly, the race was the most profitable 5k in Bloomingdale's history.

Jon Sever, BSHS Band Director, said the event means more than ever before: "More than other years, the 5k this year was an event that meant we are on our way back to pre-covid normal. To see parents, students, and runners enjoying themselves outside made some of our struggles this year hit the 'pause button' even just for a little while!"

The Bloomingdale Band, which the race benefits, is tremendously grateful for all of the community support. Like most school organizations, fundraising options since the pandemic have been limited.

Bringing bragging rights home, Bloomingdale Junior Jordan Hierholzer won the race with a time of 17:27:29! The Bloomingdale Drumline played before the race started and again as participants began the race. Bloomingdale Senior and Track/XC Captain Sofia Johnson spoke before the race start, sharing encouragement and giving an invocation.

A monster truck rally was also at the fairgrounds that weekend so participants were able to enjoy unique scenery with trucks along the route and grab some photos at the finish with a couple monster trucks.

Maple Street Biscuit Company, the Valrico Fresh Market, and Publix provided race food with icy refreshments supplied by Kona Ice. Acropolis Greek Taverna and Heroes Paradise were Title Sponsors. Many, many other local sponsors gave to the event as well – donations reached a staggering \$10,000! Thank you all!

Pictures will be posted on the Running of the Bulls 5k page: @bloomingdalebulls5k on Facebook and the band website: www.bloomingdaleband.com

Photos by Fred Ocasio and Tim Boone



ROTB - The most fun you can have with your horns on!



Overall Winners Jordan Hierholzer (17:28) and Olivia Orobello (21:07)

And the racers are off!



Ladies Winners in the 50-59 Age Division: Deana Havens, Deanna Hutchins, Ellen Hagenbarth



Sofia Johnson, BSHS Senior and Track/XC Captain, gives a thumbs up to the ROTB 5k.



Monster trucks added a unique photo op for race runners!



Male Winners 15-19 Age Division: Thomas Schilling (1st), Malik Millet (2nd), and Jeremy Hagenbarth (3rd)



Bloomington kicker David Owen stretches those legs as he heads to the finish!



The Rajun Bull Drumline hangs out with the Bull before the start of the 4th Annual Running of the Bulls 5k.



National Honor Society volunteers behind the scenes kept the event running smoothly.

Track Stand-out CJ Thomas Holds School Records, Places Ninth at State

Submitted by Coach LaWanda Byrd

Bulls track star Curtis Thomas (CJ) holds Bloomingdale High School records for the 200m and 400m events at 21.79s and 49.89s respectively. In addition, Turner placed ninth in the 200m at the FHSAA 4a Track and Field State Championships held May 8, in Jacksonville.

Coach LaWanda Byrd said, "Curtis is a talented athlete who showed leadership on and off the field. We are so proud of Curtis, for all the time, effort and hard work that he devoted this season and we wish him all the best as he transitions to Collegiate track and field at Florida A&M University."



2021 Freshmen Bull Camp Welcome Class of 2025!

The BSHS Student Government Association is excited to see you ALL THREE DAYS Tuesday, July 20, Wednesday, July 21, Thursday, July 22 at Freshmen Bull Camp!

- Please arrive by 8 a.m. to sign in. Bull Camp will end tentatively at NOON every day.
- Come play leadership games and learn more about Bloomingdale High School with SGA, and more leaders from our school!
- Get excited for your Pep Rally on Thursday, July 22!

Go to <https://forms.office.com/r/QL4pHVscgi> to register for Bull Camp today! Contact SGA sponsor Rebecca Johnson at Rebecca.Johnson1@hcps.net for information.



Congratulations to Bloomingdale's All County Band & Orchestra Students!

The 2020/2021 Hillsborough All-County Ensembles are an opportunity for the top musicians from throughout the county to experience music making in a large ensemble setting with students from throughout the county. This is also a chance for these top-tier students to work with a professional director other than their own. This annual event showcases the best and brightest Hillsborough County has to offer.



BAND

9/10
Clay Larson
Jocelyn Bueno Hernandez
Creighton Cantrell
Cameron Jennings
Matthew Ryan
Mishka Moronta
Chole Erickson



11/12
Jose Cisneros
Mason Rhody
Summer Hogenmiller
Diana Munoz
Danna Rodriguez
Declan Ware



ORCHESTRA

9/10
Anapaula Blanco
Aryanna Rojas
Courtney Nguyen
Caleb Miller
Katelyn Lugo
Gabriella Holmes
Daniel Jimenez
Conner Moriarty



11/12
Caitlin Beery
Jordan Hierholzer
Trey Hydock



Weight Room Dedication Honors Former Principal

Head Football Coach Jake Coulson and former BSHS principal Sue Burkett get their Bull on at the new weight room dedicated in Burkett's honor. The Burkett Weight Room serves as a reminder of Burkett's accomplishments at the school.

Now serving as the Hillsborough County Regional Superintendent for Middle Schools, Burkett said, "I am beyond humbled that the program thought to honor me in such a special way. Helping Coach Warner and Coach Coulson build that room, which would in turn build the winning football program we now have, was so significant for us as a school and the community as a whole."

"Building successful athletic programs for students to gain post-secondary academic opportunities and giving the coaches the tools they need to do just that is as critical as providing the proper instructional materials to our teachers to make our learners academically successful. The excitement that the football team has brought to the whole Bloomingdale community has been electric – especially this year when there wasn't much to celebrate with the constraints of Covid."

"While my legacy will live in the hearts of the kids I served in this community for over a decade, seeing my name in the locker room is pretty awesome, too! I have been blessed to have served this community for so long and impact as many kids as we have!"

Congratulations, Mrs. Burkett!





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Sanibel is the “Natural” Choice for Your Next Beach Vacation

By Michelle Colesanti

The sun is about to rise; a perfect time for taking a walk on Sanibel’s beach. Well known for being one of the best shelling spots in the world, it is a good time to look for shells that may have washed ashore overnight, especially if the tide is low.

Although we are lucky to have so many beautiful beaches within driving distance for day trips, this low-key destination just off the coast of Fort Myers is a great choice for a long weekend or week-long destination.

If you are like me and prefer more natural beaches, you will love Sanibel, as city codes prohibit high rises above 40 ft. My husband Phil and I chose to rent a condo for three nights at Pelican’s Roost, which overlooked the Gulf. If it is high season, many condos do require a seven-night minimum stay.

There are no traffic lights on the island. During heavily trafficked times of the day, certain intersections do have traffic controllers, which are welcomed, especially by bike riders.

Biking is by far the best mode of transportation on Sanibel. We chose Billy’s Rentals, which had plenty to choose from for reasonable prices.

There are 25 miles of bike trails throughout Sanibel. I loved riding without having to worry about vehicular traffic. You can get just about anywhere on the island via bike.

Take a ride to the east end where you can visit Sanibel’s historic lighthouse and beach while enjoying views of Fort Myers across San Carlos Bay. The trip will make you hungry so stop at the nearby Lighthouse Café, which claims to have the world’s best breakfast or enjoy lunch at Grandma Dots at Sanibel Marina, not too far away.

Into nature or birding? Do not miss JN “Ding” Darling National Wildlife Refuge, which actually takes up most of the northern side of the island. The time of year determines what birds and wildlife you might see. Although it was quiet during our May visit, we found an Osprey nest with babies visible as well as a Yellow Crown Night Heron protecting her young in a nest tucked away in a tree.

You can drive through the reserve, but biking is one of the best ways to see it. It is \$10 per car to travel the four-mile road, but only \$1 per person for bikers and walkers. Visit https://www.fws.gov/refuge/JN_Ding_Darling/visit/plan_your_visit.html.

Other places of interest include Bowman’s Beach and the Bailey-Matthews Shell Museum. A lot of cute shops are sprinkled along the main road, Periwinkle Way. Restaurants are also plentiful. We visited two of the top-rated restaurants: The Mad Hatter at 6467 Sanibel Captiva Rd., located just before the border crossing over to Captiva Island and the Bleu Rendez-Vous Bistro, a wonderful French restaurant located at 2430 Periwinkle Way. Both restaurants were perfect for celebrating any occasion.

It was hard leaving this paradise, but it’s already back on our list for a return visit. For more information, visit <https://sanibel-captiva.org>.



Photos: Michelle Colesanti



Sanibel Island, with its natural beaches and great shelling opportunities, is the perfect beach getaway.



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