

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Visitors celebrate annual festivals and events on The Beaches of Fort Myers & Sanibel

LEE COUNTY, FL – In addition to great weather, shell-drenched beaches and the sparkling Gulf of Mexico, The Beaches of Fort Myers & Sanibel in southwest Florida is the setting for many nationally recognized festivals and special events each year.

Running through April 2010, Pine Island's Creative Coast Weekends bring the fishing village and artist enclave of Matlacha alive with all things art. On the second weekend of each month, special events, gallery openings, classes and entertainment welcome the entire family.

During February, Fort Myers celebrates the birthday of its most famous historical resident: Thomas Edison. His winter home on the Caloosahatchee River is one of the ten most visited homes in the U.S. and it is fitting that as the inventor of the light bulb, he is honored with a month-long celebration, the **Edison Festival of Lights**, in its 72nd year.

It should come as no surprise that Sanibel Island, known worldwide for its great shelling, has been welcoming visitors for 73 years to the **Sanibel Shell Fair and Show**. Each March, locals and visitors celebrate with displays, crafts and entertainment.

Also in March, the **Fort Myers Beach Shrimp Festival & Parade** pays homage to the area's harvest of sweet, pink Gulf shrimp. This event has been around for 52 years and boils up more than 1,000 pounds of shrimp for 40,000 visitors!

There is even a festival that celebrates the mango! For two days in mid-July, it's all about the Pine Island mango as fans go crazy for anything made from the delectable fruit at the quirky **MangoMania Tropical Fruit Fair**.

-MORE-

Annual events at The Beaches of Fort Myers & Sanibel/Page 2

In October, the J.N. “Ding” Darling National Wildlife Refuge on Sanibel Island hosts its 21st weeklong birding and eco-festival, **“Ding” Darling Days**. In conjunction with National Wildlife Refuge week, the popular festival includes tours, food, wildlife presentations and many family activities.

Also in October, paddlers love the **Calusa Blueway Paddling Festival**, now in its fifth year. Along the Great Calusa Blueway paddling trail, events include activities that help participants achieve a “carbon neutral” vacation experience with tips to bring home. The festival includes free clinics and demonstrations, speakers’ series, waterfront hospitality events and chances to win a kayak and other prizes.

Many visitors plan their vacation in November so they will not miss the world-famous **American Sandsculpting Championship Festival** that has taken place on Fort Myers Beach for 24 years. This popular competition includes sculptors from all over the world and draws thousands of visitors during the five-day event.

In addition to the festivals and events listed below, visitors planning a vacation to Florida’s unspoiled island sanctuary should visit www.FortMyersSanibel.com for a list of events that take place all year. Some of the many not-to-be-missed celebrations include:

72nd Edison Festival of Light Stadium Show, Grand Parade & Fireworks

Fort Myers

Feb. 20, 2010

Edison Stadium, Fort Myers High School
Downtown’s Edwards Drive and Cleveland Avenue
239-334-2999

www.edisonfestival.org

During February, Fort Myers celebrates the birthday of its most illustrious historical figure, Thomas A. Edison, in befitting fashion. Edison, who built a home on the banks of the Caloosahatchee River and spent 46 winters there, invented the light bulb. So it’s appropriate that the month of activities culminates with a lighted night parade. Invention competitions, parties, craft shows and a 5K run are all part of the celebration. Celebrating 72 years, the gates at the stadium open at 4 p.m. for those who wish to watch the parade and fireworks with reserved seating. Entertainment begins at 5 p.m., climaxing with fireworks at 7 p.m. to kick off the grand lighted parade. The spectacular two-hour parade winds its way through thick crowds down Cleveland Avenue toward the stadium. Stadium tickets are \$20.

-MORE-

Annual events at The Beaches of Fort Myers & Sanibel/Page 3

73rd Annual Sanibel Shell Fair & Show, Sanibel Island

March 4-6, 2010

Sanibel Community House, 2173 Periwinkle Way
239-472-2155

www.sanibelcommunityhouse.net

Sanibel Island, named the best shelling beach in the U.S. and one of the best in the world, hosts shelling enthusiasts who gather each year for the shell fair that draws visitors from around the globe. One of the most unique events in the country, it began on a porch with just a few islanders and has evolved into today's event that includes demonstrations, shell displays, crafts, prizes, food and entertainment. Serious shellers compete for prizes while visitors shop and enjoy these treasures that include award-winning Sailor's Valentines...popular in the 1800s when sailors brought them home to their sweethearts. Hours are 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. Thursday and Friday, 9 a.m. to 4 p.m. Saturday. Admission: \$3 donation is requested to indoor shell show. Fair is free.

52nd annual Fort Myers Beach Shrimp Festival and Parade, Fort Myers Beach

March 13-14, 2010

239-463-6986

www.fortmyersbeachshrimpfestival.com

Two days of festivities celebrate Fort Myers Beach's shrimp harvest. Activities for the 52nd annual event will include a 5K Treasure Run, kids run the weekend prior, 10 a.m. parade, and crowning of the Shrimp Queen on Saturday. Craft vendors, the boiled shrimp concession, and other seafood booths set up at Lynn Hall Memorial Park both days.

13th annual MangoMania Tropical Fruit Fair, Cape Coral/Pine Island

July 10-11, 2010

German-American Social Club
2101 Pine Island Road
239-283-4842

www.mangomaniafl.com

The mango is the star attraction for two days each summer on Pine Island. Go wild for fruit as you sample locally-grown delicacies at this ninth annual affair, an unusual celebration of all the tropical fruit grown on the island, which also includes lychee, carambola, longan, papaya, and "chocolate pudding fruit." Fruit, exotic fruit trees, and fruit-related products are available for purchase. The festival also offers live music, kids' activities and rides. 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. on Saturday; 9 a.m. to 4 p.m. on Sunday. Admission: \$6 for adults; free for 9 and younger.

5th Annual Calusa Blueway Paddling Festival, county-wide

Oct. 29-Nov. 7, 2010

www.CalusaBluewayPaddlingFestival.com

Along the Great Calusa Blueway paddling trail on waterfront communities in southwest Florida, events include activities that will help attendees achieve a "carbon neutral" vacation experience with tips to bring home. The festival includes free clinics and demonstrations, a

-MORE-

Annual events at The Beaches of Fort Myers & Sanibel/Page 4

speaker series, waterfront hospitality events and chances to win a kayak and other prizes. Also: moderately priced nature and cultural tours, waterway cleanups, canoe and kayak races, and a catch-and-release kayak fishing tournament. A nature photography contest and family-oriented outdoors eco-fests round out the offerings. Complete details with contact information and regular updates may be found at www.calusabluewaypaddlingfestival.com.

**21st annual J. N. "Ding" Darling National Wildlife Refuge, Sanibel Island
October 17-23, 2010**

239-472-1100

www.dingdarlingdays.com

"Ding" Darling Days include a week of eco-activities with free refuge tram tours, live wildlife presentations, kids activities, Federal Duck Stamp artist presentation, art day, family day and more. Birding and kayaking tours, environmental speakers, a nature photography contest, and Junior Duck Stamp Awards will fill the week with environmental activities for all ages. The festival celebrates the birthday of the refuge's namesake, conservationist and Pulitzer Prize-winning political cartoonist Jay N. "Ding" Darling. For detailed schedule, visit website.

**24th Annual American Sandsculpting Championship Festival, Fort Myers Beach
November 2010**

239-454-7500

www.sandfestival.com

Dolphins, great blue herons, giant computers, entwined lovers and Neptune, god of the seas: The intricate sculptures at the 24th Annual American Sandsculpting Championship Festival takes "playing in the sand" to a whole new level in November on Fort Myers Beach. From nothing more than a beach of sand and 300 gallons of water, about 20 master sculptors will create complex works of art. Amateur sculptors are invited to create and learn from the masters during a Sandsculpting 101 workshop on Friday. The workshop is free, but there is a fee for amateur team entries into the contest's three categories: children, friends and family, and businesses. The fee includes T-shirts and gift prizes for winning teams.

**The 26th Annual Christmas Luminary Trail and Open House, Sanibel and Captiva islands
Dec. 3 and 4, 2010**

239-472-1080

www.sanibel-captiva.org

This popular event draws visitors from all over the world as they join local residents to celebrate the season. Three miles of luminary candles line Periwinkle Way from 5:30-9 p.m. on Sanibel Island on Dec. 4 and Dec. 5 on Captiva Island. Businesses are decorated for the holidays with 2000 candles illuminating the island pathways, storefronts and homes.

-MORE-

Annual events at The Beaches of Fort Myers & Sanibel/Page 5

Holiday Nights at the Edison & Ford Winter Estates, Fort Myers

December 2010

2350 McGregor Blvd.

239-334-7419

www.efwefla.org

Millions of lights celebrate Thomas Edison's contribution to modern life and the festivity of the season at this 34-year Lee County tradition enjoyed by more than 30,000 visitors each year. Lights and decorations fill 20 acres of gardens, along with the recently restored Edison buildings and the Estates' historic homes. Holidays at the Estates places historical decorations amidst the orchids, exotic trees and plantings that fill the gardens. Events include artists and craftsmen exhibits and appearances, as well as book signings and demonstrations in the Creative Cottage located in the Ford Caretaker's House.

-30-

EDITOR'S NOTE: The Beaches of Fort Myers & Sanibel in southwest Florida includes: Sanibel Island, Captiva Island, Fort Myers Beach, Fort Myers, Bonita Springs, Estero, Cape Coral, Pine Island, Boca Grande & Outer islands, North Fort Myers, Lehigh Acres. A comprehensive press kit and images are available upon request.