

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

**March 2010**

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## **What's new from The Beaches of Fort Myers & Sanibel:**

*Art of the Olympians, new attractions, baseball and accommodations  
green lodging, special events and more await visitors*

LEE COUNTY, FL (USA) – With recent openings of new attractions, accommodations going “green,” the newly opened Art of the Olympians Al Oerter Center of Excellence, and many exciting special events planned in upcoming months, The Beaches of Fort Myers & Sanibel in southwest Florida continues to provide new experiences for first time and returning guests to Florida’s unspoiled island sanctuary. For the latest information on the area’s many accommodation choices, events and activities, visit

[www.FortMyersSanibel.com](http://www.FortMyersSanibel.com).

### **Art of the Olympians**

Visitors will have an opportunity to view art by worldwide Olympic medalists at the **Art of the Olympians Al Oerter Center of Excellence**, scheduled for a late 2010 grand opening. Located in downtown Fort Myers in the former City Pier building on the Caloosahatchee River, the opening marks the fulfillment of Olympians and Olympic enthusiasts, who along with the late, four-time consecutive gold medalist, Al Oerter, sought to use their passion for art and sports to create an arena to celebrate excellence.

Art of the Olympians features the art of international Olympic medalists, educational programs for children and adults and special events. Featured works include those by Olympians Jean-Blaise Evequoz, fencing, Switzerland; Al Oerter, discus, USA; Florence Griffith-Joyner, sprints, USA; Peggy Fleming, figure skating, USA; Liston Bochette, decathlon and bobsled, Puerto Rico; Kader Klouci, long jumping, France; Roald Bradstock, javelin, U.K.; Shane Gould, swimming, Australia and many others.

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For hours of operation and details, call 239-332-5055 or visit

[www.artoftheolympians.com](http://www.artoftheolympians.com).

### **Calling all young inventors!**

Registration for the fifth annual Edison & Ford Winter Estates Inventor's Summer Camp is now open with weeklong summer classes running June 8 through Aug. 18. The Estates is a living lab where every project engages the campers in the sciences, arts, and history to ask questions and discover the answers while having fun. Camp hours are 9 a.m. to 4 p.m. Monday through Friday and are open for first through sixth graders. Cost for Estates members is \$200; non members \$230. Scholarships will be available. For details and registration forms visit [www.efwefla.org](http://www.efwefla.org). For information, call 239-334-7419.

### **Harbour House at the Inn opens on Fort Myers Beach**

Harbour House at the Inn has opened on Fort Myers Beach with 34 units in the downtown district of Fort Myers Beach. The property is adjacent to the Matanzas Inn Resort and within walking distance to the beach, restaurants and shopping. Seven floor plans include studio, one, and two bedroom condominiums with panoramic views of Matanzas Pass and the beach. Boat access and dockage are also available through the adjacent Matanzas Inn Resort. For more information and special rates, visit [www.harbourhouseattheinn.com](http://www.harbourhouseattheinn.com) or call 239-463-0700.

### **Sailing certification offered in Bokeelia**

**Sebago Sailing Inc.**, a sailboat rental operation, recently opened a new location on Charlotte Harbor in Bokeelia. Rentals start at \$150 a day for a 22-foot Catalina. It also offers American Sailing Association certification. For details visit [www.sailcharlotteharbor.com](http://www.sailcharlotteharbor.com).

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#### **Sanibel Harbour joins Marriott International**

Sanibel Harbour Marriott Resort & Spa has joined the Marriott International family, bringing the first full-service Marriott Hotels & Resorts brand to Lee County. The 347-room resort is owned and managed by Columbia Sussex and will operate under a franchisee agreement with Marriott International Inc. In its transition to a Marriott, the resort will offer a number of upgrades and renovations that are expected to be complete by the end of 2011. Information: [www.sanibel-resort.com](http://www.sanibel-resort.com) or 239-466-4000.

#### **Follow The Beaches of Fort Myers & Sanibel on social media**

The Lee County Visitor & Convention Bureau (VCB) has entered into the world of social media with the launch of Twitter and Facebook pages. Both sites are popular with past, present and future visitors who learn about the upcoming happenings in the destination as well as share their experiences and photos. Visit the VCB's Twitter page at [www.Twitter.com/SocialLeeVCB](http://www.Twitter.com/SocialLeeVCB) (@SocialLeeVCB) or become a fan of The Beaches of Fort Myers & Sanibel at [www.Facebook.com/SocialLeeVCB](http://www.Facebook.com/SocialLeeVCB).

#### **Attractions news**

**Sanibel Island's Clinic for the Rehabilitation of Wildlife (C.R.O.W.)** opened its new **Healing Winds Visitor Education Center**. Offering a rare opportunity for visitors to learn how one of the nation's leading rehabilitation hospitals rescues and cares for injured wildlife, the 4,800-square-foot education center is part of a \$2.8 million renovation project. Designed to inspire and educate with interactive wildlife experiences, this special center teaches how injured animals are admitted, diagnosed (by western or eastern methods), how they are cared for and how they are released. Visitors also get to play the "vet" as they follow the cases of four animals from admission to release. C.R.O.W. veterinarians and staff have treated more than 200 animal species with 4,000 patients each year receiving treatment at the facility. Admission: donation of \$5 is recommended. Hours: 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. Tuesday through Sunday. Information: [www.crowclinic.org](http://www.crowclinic.org) or 239-472-3644.

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At the new **Butterfly Estates** in the river district of downtown Fort Myers, visitors surround themselves with thousands of butterflies at this new eco-attraction. The venue includes a botanical garden and butterfly habitat with cascading waterfalls, lush tropical nectar plants and butterflies that delight guests with their astounding beauty. Admission: \$15 for adults 17 and older; \$9 for children three to 16. Hours: 10 a.m. to 5 p.m. daily. Information: [www.thebutterflyestates.com](http://www.thebutterflyestates.com) or 239-690-2359.

**Imaginarium Hands-On Museum & Aquarium** in Fort Myers recently unveiled its **Dinosaurs & Ice Age Giants exhibit**. Through May 2010, the traveling exhibit visits a world where T-Rex ruled and winged reptiles soared. Information: [www.imaginariumfortmyers.com](http://www.imaginariumfortmyers.com) or 239-321-7430.

**Southwest Florida Yachts (SWFY)** in North Fort Myers has added a **Jeanneau Prestige 36 motor yacht** to its charter fleet for cruising local waterways. The new vessel, Lady Lyn, provides roomy and well-appointed accommodations for four adults with an expansive owner's cabin forward and a starboard side guest cabin. Information: [www.swfyachts.com](http://www.swfyachts.com) or 239-656-1339.

More than 3,000 years of mystery have been unveiled exclusively at **Southwest Florida Museum of History** in Fort Myers, with the exhibit, **Tutankhamun: Wonderful Things from the Pharaoh's Tomb**. More than 100 faithfully reproduced replicas of original artifacts will be on display through June 19, 2010. Information: [www.swflmuseumofhistory.com](http://www.swflmuseumofhistory.com) or 239-321-7430.

#### **Accommodations earn "green" designation**

Known worldwide for its shell-strewn beaches, wildlife refuges, and sparkling waterways, The Beaches of Fort Myers & Sanibel offers an ideal location for reconnecting with southwest Florida's most valuable natural resources. It is for this reason that the destination has always had a strong commitment to the protection and preservation of the environment.

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In an effort to conserve and protect the area's resources and to save energy, the hospitality industry is working to do its part. Thirty-six area accommodations have been named to the *Florida Green Lodging Program*:

### **Fort Myers Beach**

- DiamondHead Beach Resort, Fort Myers Beach, [www.diamondheadfl.com](http://www.diamondheadfl.com), 239-765-7654
- Hampton Inn & Suites, Fort Myers Beach, [www.fortmyersbeachsuites.hamptoninn.com](http://www.fortmyersbeachsuites.hamptoninn.com), 239-437-8888
- Mango Street Inn, Fort Myers Beach, [www.mangostreetinn.com](http://www.mangostreetinn.com), 239-233-8542
- Pink Shell Beach Resort & Spa, Fort Myers Beach, [www.pinkshell.com](http://www.pinkshell.com), 239-463-6181
- The Riviera Villas, Fort Myers Beach, [www.therivieravillas.com](http://www.therivieravillas.com), 920-203-0018

### **Sanibel Island**

- Blue Dolphin Cottages, Sanibel Island, [www.bluedolphincottages.com](http://www.bluedolphincottages.com), 239-472-1600
- Castaways Beach & Bay Cottages, Sanibel Island, [www.castawayssanibel.com](http://www.castawayssanibel.com), 239-472-1252
- Ocean's Reach Condominium Resort, Sanibel Island, [www.oceansreach.com](http://www.oceansreach.com), 239-472-4554
- Sanibel Inn, Sanibel Island, [www.sanibelinn.com](http://www.sanibelinn.com), 239-472-3181
- Seaside Inn, Sanibel Island, [www.sanibelcollection.com/seaside\\_inn](http://www.sanibelcollection.com/seaside_inn), 239-472-1400
- Song of the Sea, Sanibel Island, [www.songofthesea.com](http://www.songofthesea.com), 239-472-2220
- Sundial Beach & Golf Resort, Sanibel Island, [www.sanibelcollection/sundial\\_resort](http://www.sanibelcollection/sundial_resort), 239-472-4151
- Sunset Beach Resort, Sanibel, [www.sanibelcollection/sunset\\_beach](http://www.sanibelcollection/sunset_beach), 239-472-1700

### **Fort Myers**

- Best Western Fort Myers Inn & Suites, [www.bwfortmyers.com](http://www.bwfortmyers.com), 239-276-3949
- Comfort Inn & Suites Airport, Fort Myers, [www.choicehotels.com/fl1795](http://www.choicehotels.com/fl1795), 239-939-5002
- Country Inn & Suites Sanibel Gateway, Fort Myers, [www.countryinns.com](http://www.countryinns.com), 239-454-0040
- Courtyard by Marriott Fort Myers at I-75 and Gulf Coast Town Center, Fort Myers, [www.marriott.com/hotels/travel/rswap](http://www.marriott.com/hotels/travel/rswap), 239-332-4747
- Crowne Plaza Hotel, [www.cpfortmyers.com](http://www.cpfortmyers.com), 239-482-2900

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- Hilton Garden Inn, Fort Myers, [www.fortmyers.stayhgi.com](http://www.fortmyers.stayhgi.com), 239-790-3500
- Holiday Inn Downtown Historic District, Fort Myers, [www.holidayinn.com](http://www.holidayinn.com), 239-332-3232
- Homewood Suites by Hilton Fort Myers, [www.homewoodsuitesfortmyers.com](http://www.homewoodsuitesfortmyers.com), 239-275-6000
- Hotel Indigo, downtown Fort Myers, [www.hotelindigo.com](http://www.hotelindigo.com), 239-337-3446
- La Quinta Inn & Suites Airport, Fort Myers, [www.lq.com](http://www.lq.com), 239-466-0012
- Residence Inn by Marriott, Fort Myers, [www.residenceinn.com/rswri](http://www.residenceinn.com/rswri), 239-936-0110
- Sanibel Harbour Marriott Resort & Spa, Fort Myers, [www.sanibel-resort.com](http://www.sanibel-resort.com), 239-466-4000
- Shell Point Guest House, Fort Myers, [www.shellpoint.org](http://www.shellpoint.org), 239-454-2275
- Spring Hill Suites by Marriott, Fort Myers, [www.marriott.com/rswsh](http://www.marriott.com/rswsh), 239-561-1803
- Suburban Extended Stay Hotel, Fort Myers, [www.suburbanhotels.com](http://www.suburbanhotels.com), 239-938-0370

#### **Bonita Springs**

- Holiday Inn Express, Bonita Springs, [www.hiebonitasprings.com](http://www.hiebonitasprings.com), 239-248-0699
- Hyatt Coconut Plantation, Bonita Springs, [www.hyattcoconutplantation.hyatt.com](http://www.hyattcoconutplantation.hyatt.com), 239-947-7300
- The Hyatt Regency Coconut Point Resort & Spa, Bonita Springs, [www.coconutpoint.hyatt.com](http://www.coconutpoint.hyatt.com), 239-444-1234
- The Inn at the Springs, Bonita Springs, [www.theinnatthesprings.com](http://www.theinnatthesprings.com), 239-949-5913

#### **Estero**

- Hampton Inn & Suites, Estero, [www.hampton.com](http://www.hampton.com), 239-947-5566

#### **Pine Island**

- Bokeelia Tarpon Inn, Bokeelia, [www.tarponinn.com](http://www.tarponinn.com), 239-283-8961
- Bridgewater Inn, Matlacha, [www.bridgewaterinn.com](http://www.bridgewaterinn.com), 239-283-2423

In addition, the Cayo Costa State Park cabins have received the green lodging designation. With nine miles of beautiful beaches and acres of pine forests, oak-palm hammocks, and mangrove swamps, this barrier island park is a Gulf Coast paradise.

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Accessible only by private boat or ferry, overnight stays are available in the 30 primitive cabins. Call 239-283-0015 for ferry information and visit [www.floridastateparks.org/cayocosta](http://www.floridastateparks.org/cayocosta) for park information. For overnight reservations, visit [www.reserveamerica.com](http://www.reserveamerica.com).

Launched in 2004, the *Florida Green Lodging Program* is a voluntary effort by the Florida Department of Environmental Protection (DEP) to encourage the lodging industry to conserve and protect Florida's natural resources. The program designates and recognizes lodging facilities that make a commitment to conserve and protect Florida's natural resources. Its environmental guidelines allow the hospitality industry to evaluate its operations, set goals and take specific actions to continuously improve environmental performance. For more information about the *Florida Green Lodging* visit [www.floridagreenlodging.org](http://www.floridagreenlodging.org).

### **Three area wildlife refuges celebrate 100 years**

Three area wildlife sanctuaries were celebrated recently as they each turned 100 years old. As a result of the environmental vision of President Theodore Roosevelt, the three refuges that were authorized in 1908 provide important opportunities for wildlife viewing and recreation on some of the most pristine waterways in Lee County.

Administered by the J.N. "Ding" Darling National Wildlife Refuge, they include:

**Pine Island National Wildlife Refuge**, with 548 acres, includes 17 islands of densely forested red and black mangroves. Location: north of Sanibel Island. Includes Chino Island, Cove Key, Rat Key and Whoopie Island. Information:

[www.fws.gov/southeast/PineIsland/](http://www.fws.gov/southeast/PineIsland/)

**Matlacha Pass National Wildlife Refuge**, with 512 acres and 23 islands of primarily wetlands with low sand and shell ridges. Location: Within Matlacha Pass estuaries. Includes Merwin Key, Wood Stork Island and Kite Island. Information:

[www.fws.gov/southeast/MatlachaPass/](http://www.fws.gov/southeast/MatlachaPass/)

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**Island Bay National Wildlife Refuge**, with 20 acres, includes six undeveloped tracts of land that occupy the higher portions of several islands and mangrove shoreline.

Location: Southwest of Punta Gorda in the Cape Haze area of Charlotte Harbor.

Information: [www.fws.gov/southeast/IslandBay/](http://www.fws.gov/southeast/IslandBay/)

**Spring training**

**The Beaches of Fort Myers & Sanibel is the spring training home of the Boston Red Sox and Minnesota Twins.** The destination makes it easy for fans to take advantage of all that it has to offer along with great deals for spring training. For details and great deals on packages, visit [www.fortmyerssanibel.com](http://www.fortmyerssanibel.com).

**Boston Red Sox Spring Training**

March 3-April 2, 2010

City of Palms Park, Fort Myers

For tickets and package information go to [www.redsox.com](http://www.redsox.com) or call 239-334-4700

**Minnesota Twins Spring Training**

March 5-April 1, 2010

Hammond Stadium, Fort Myers

Go to [www.twinsbaseball.com](http://www.twinsbaseball.com) for schedule and ticket information.

**Recent hotel openings**

The **Resort at MarinaVillage** at the Tarpon Point Marina in Cape Coral, a SunStream Hotels & Resort property, offers guests 19 stories of views of the Caloosahatchee River, San Carlos Bay and the Gulf of Mexico. The resort includes choices of 1-, 2- and 3-bedroom residences up to 2,225 square feet. Guest rooms combine hotel and residential living with grand rooms, master suites, guest suites, dining terraces and access to amenity decks. Amenities include boat slips, waterfront dining and shopping and a spa. Call 239-765-7654 or visit [www.marinavillageresort.com](http://www.marinavillageresort.com).

**The Residence Inn Fort Myers Sanibel**, located in **Fort Myers**, with 116 spacious suites, including complimentary high-speed Internet access; fully equipped kitchens with a refrigerator, microwave and coffee maker; flat-panel televisions; and sleeper sofas. Some rooms have balcony views of protected marshland and partial water views. The pet-friendly property also includes complimentary coffee and breakfast, on-site laundry, and daily maid service. Call 239-415-4150 or visit [www.marriott.com/hotels/travel/rswrs-residence-inn-fort-myers-sanibel/](http://www.marriott.com/hotels/travel/rswrs-residence-inn-fort-myers-sanibel/)

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**Hyatt Place Fort Myers at the Forum**, with 148 rooms, features: a bakery café serving Starbucks® specialty coffees and premium wine and beers, a 24-hour guest kitchen providing made-to-order snacks and entrees, continental breakfast, Wi-Fi throughout the hotel, heated outdoor pool and a 24-hour fitness center. The hotel is non-smoking. Call 239-418-1844 or visit [www.fortmyers.place.hyatt.com/hyatt/hotels/place/](http://www.fortmyers.place.hyatt.com/hyatt/hotels/place/)

### **Upcoming annual events and festivals**

#### **73rd Annual Sanibel Shell Fair & Show, Sanibel Island**

**March 4-6, 2010**

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

[www.sanibelcommunityhouse.com](http://www.sanibelcommunityhouse.com)

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 all over the globe. 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. In celebration of this world-renowned shelling island, the Shell Fair features shell displays and crafts, food and entertainment. Hours are 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. Thursday and Friday, 9 a.m. to 4 p.m. Saturday. Admission to the fair is free. Admission to the shell show inside is a \$3 per person donation.

#### **52<sup>nd</sup> Annual Fort Myers Beach Shrimp Festival and Parade, Fort Myers Beach**

**March 13-14, 2010**

239-463-6986

[www.fortmyersbeachshrimpfestival.com](http://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. Events include a 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.

#### **13<sup>th</sup> 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](http://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

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fruit-related products are available for purchase. The festival also offers live music, kids' activities and rides. From 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.

### **21<sup>st</sup> Annual "Ding" Darling Days, Sanibel Island**

**Oct. 17-23, 2010**

J. N. "Ding" Darling National Wildlife Refuge

239-472-1100

[www.dingdarlingdays.com](http://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, 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 Web site.

### **5<sup>th</sup> Annual Calusa Blueway Paddling Festival, county-wide**

**Oct. 29-Nov. 7, 2010**

[www.CalusaBluewayPaddlingFestival.com](http://www.CalusaBluewayPaddlingFestival.com)

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

### **24<sup>th</sup> Annual American Sandsculpting Championship Festival, Fort Myers Beach**

**Nov. 1-14, 2010**

239-454-7500

[www.sandfestival.com](http://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.

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For information on planning a vacation to The Beaches of Fort Myers & Sanibel and special value-added packages, visit [www.FortMyersSanibel.com](http://www.FortMyersSanibel.com). Also visit the VCB's Twitter page at [www.Twitter.com/SocialLeeVCB](http://www.Twitter.com/SocialLeeVCB) (@SocialLeeVCB) or become a fan of The Beaches of Fort Myers & Sanibel at [www.Facebook.com/SocialLeeVCB](http://www.Facebook.com/SocialLeeVCB).

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***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. Images available upon request.