



## NEWS RELEASE

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

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

*Hobie 16 World Championship, Island Hopper Songwriter Fest,  
new attractions, renovations and more*

**LEE COUNTY, FL (U.S.A.)**— In addition to great, year-round weather, shell-drenched beaches and the sparkling Gulf of Mexico, The Beaches of Fort Myers & Sanibel in southwest Florida continues to provide new experiences for visitors to Florida's unspoiled island destination. For the latest vacation information, visit [FortMyers-Sanibel.com](http://FortMyers-Sanibel.com)

#### **Save the dates and plan ahead:**

##### **Sixth annual Island Hopper Songwriter Fest**

Returning Sept. 20-29, 2019, the popular event brings music back to the beach with new artists and events. The festival takes place over 10 days and offers a range of star-studded performances. It kicks off on Captiva Island Sept. 20-22; moves to downtown Fort Myers Sept. 23-26; and ends at Fort Myers Beach Sept. 27-29. [islandhopperfest.com](http://islandhopperfest.com)

##### **Hobie 16 World Championship**

Hobie 16 World Championships returns to the USA, after 35 years of events being held in other locations worldwide. And it's coming to the Beaches of Fort Myers & Sanibel Nov. 1-16, 2019.

Sailors from around the world will compete in three world championship disciplines: Women's, Youth and Open, and three additional disciplines; Masters Cup, Grand Masters Cup and Great Grand Masters Cup.

South Seas Island Resort will host more than 1,000 athletes and 336 teams on 60 new Hobie Cat racing catamaran sailboats for 16 sailing days. Sailors from 30 countries are expected to attend. In past world events, as many as 7,000 people have attended the championships.

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The Hobie 16 World Championships is the only sailboat class in the world to supply 60 brand-new identical Hobie Cats, 16-foot catamaran sailboats, for all competitors to race. Hobie Cat Company will provide the boats that will be used exclusively on the racecourse located just off Sunset Beach at the north end of Captiva Island. [hobieworlds.com](http://hobieworlds.com).

### **In the news**

#### **Relighting of Gasparilla Island Lighthouse**

After a two-year renovation, the historic Gasparilla Island Lighthouse on Boca Grande has been returned to active status. It is formally designated as a “private aid to navigation,” or a PATON, as it is known. It will also appear on maritime charts as an official beacon for mariners.

The new light, in addition to having a replica of the original fourth-order Fresnel lens that was installed in 1927, includes a “turtle-friendly” Max Halo II LED amber bulb, provides a flashing light every six seconds as a nighttime aid to navigation for local boaters and fishermen. And it won't be so bright that it confuses hatchlings, who eventually make their way to the water.

The Gasparilla Island Lighthouse is one of only a few lighthouses accessible to the public on the west coast of Florida. Check schedule for details about tours and climbs.

[barrierislandparkssociety.org](http://barrierislandparkssociety.org)

#### **Citrus trees at Edison and Ford Winter Estates, Fort Myers**

Young citrus trees on the Ford estate, are part of a new living exhibit that is a collaboration of several citrus industry groups and local businesses. The exhibit will showcase about 50 citrus trees and educate visitors on the history and importance of Florida citrus as well as Edison's and Ford's interests in agriculture. When Henry Ford purchased his Fort Myers estate in 1916, dozens of fruit trees, including orange and mango, were already growing in grove-like lines in this area of the property. The new citrus grove will include new signs and interactive displays.

[edisonfordwinterestates.org/what-is-on-the-trees-at-the-ford-estate](http://edisonfordwinterestates.org/what-is-on-the-trees-at-the-ford-estate)

#### **Learn about your shells**

A new app launched by the Bailey-Matthews National Shell Museum on Sanibel Island helps shellers instantly identify more than 65 shells found on The Beaches of Fort Myers & Sanibel. Created by the nation's leading shell experts at the museum, the app allows shellers to snap a photo with a cell phone and the app provides a shell guide with images and descriptions of each shell. [shellmuseum.org/shell-app](http://shellmuseum.org/shell-app)

#### **Yoga classes with goats, flamingos, on the beach, at the gazebo**

There is a yoga class for everyone at locations throughout the area. A few choices:

Yoga with flamingos at Everglades Wonder Gardens in Bonita Springs.

[evergladeswondergardens.com](http://evergladeswondergardens.com)

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Yoga under the gazebo at Lovers Key

<https://www.floridastateparks.org/index.php/events/yoga-beach-lovers-key-2>

Beach yoga on Fort Myers Beach

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

Goat yoga in Lehigh Acres

[barnyardyogainc.com](http://barnyardyogainc.com)

#### **Turtle nesting season**

Each summer, loggerhead sea turtles travel hundreds of miles, to return to our Florida coastline beaches. Most adult loggerheads nest every year, laying several clutches of eggs. Turtle nesting and hatching season begins May 1 and lasts through Oct. 31. Unfortunately due to human actions, coastal development, loss of habitat, pollution, artificial lights, shrimp nets or boating related accidents, sea turtles are facing extinction. Lee County Visitor & Convention Bureau and Turtle Time, Inc. are committed to protecting our endangered marine turtles. Help protect our sea turtles by following a few basic turtle-friendly rules. For a complete list of rules and more sea turtle information, visit [turtletime.org](http://turtletime.org)

#### **Sanibel Island celebrates status as *Bicycle Friendly Community***

Sanibel Island is celebrating its recently elevated Gold Status as a *Bicycle Friendly Community*. The League of American Bicyclists raised the previous Silver Status to Gold Status in recognition of recent extensions and improvements to its 26-mile Shared Use Path. It is one of only two communities in Florida to have achieved top status. The wide, paved trail covers the island from one end to the other along Periwinkle Way and Sanibel-Captiva Road, and also takes interesting turns along Gulf Drive and Rabbit Road. The newest extension connects Sanibel-Captiva Road's path to Bowman's Beach. [mysanibel.com](http://mysanibel.com)

#### **Locally-owned breweries welcome visitors.**

From Fort Myers to Cape Coral to Bonita Springs, area award-winning brewers and distillers blend local oranges, berries, honey and even chocolate with traditional ingredients into smooth tasting original creations. Want to tour a brew house or distillery? A guide directs visitors to the locations. To print a brew trail map and to read details of each of the local breweries, visit [fortmyers-sanibel.com/local-breweries](http://fortmyers-sanibel.com/local-breweries)

#### **Renovations, additions and coming attractions**

There's always something new at The Beaches of Fort Myers & Sanibel as accommodations and attractions plan renovations and additions that are vital to keeping our product fresh and up to the expectations of our visitors.

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### **J.N. “Ding” Darling National Wildlife Refuge, Sanibel Island**

The Bailey Tract has been restored to its historic marsh status and visitors are now seeing more birds than ever, including some not seen in 40 years. In addition, the wildlife refuge has gone solar. A new solar kiosk informs visitors about its solar conversion and the energy and dollar savings that have resulted. Coming soon: In late 2019, the refuge celebrates its 75<sup>th</sup> anniversary. Beginning in November, a three-month Clyde Butcher exhibit, programs and commemorative events run through 2020. Award: America’s Best Bathroom, October. 2018.

[fws.gov/refuge/jn\\_ding\\_darling](https://fws.gov/refuge/jn_ding_darling)

### **Alliance for the Arts, Fort Myers**

An enhanced parking lot, new sidewalks, crosswalks and lighting promote pedestrian access and safety to the facility. Coming soon: A two-acre renovation linking the natural environment with the creative spirit of art. The project includes a towering centerpiece, *Caloosahatchee Water Wall* by acclaimed artist Michael Singer. [artinlee.org/WaterWall](http://artinlee.org/WaterWall)

### **DiamondHead Beach Resort, Fort Myers Beach**

Room renovations are expected to be completed this year. A new restaurant, Coste Island, serves breakfast, cocktails and dinner. [diamondheadfl.com](http://diamondheadfl.com)

### **Outrigger Beach Resort, Fort Myers Beach**

The resort has completed the renovation of its 144 guest rooms. Recipient of the 2018 Thomas Cook “Sunny Heart” award for North America. [outriggerfmb.com](http://outriggerfmb.com)

### **Point Estero Beach Resort, Fort Myers Beach**

Renovations in 2019 include painting and new furnishings. [pointeestero.com](http://pointeestero.com)

### **Candlewood Suites, Fort Myers-Sanibel Gateway**

Property is in the process of completing a renovation of suites and public areas.

[fmyerscandlewood.com](http://fmyerscandlewood.com)

### **The Luminary Hotel & Co. to open in 2020, downtown Fort Myers**

The 237-room, 12-story hotel along the waterfront of downtown Fort Myers plans to open in fall 2020 with 8,000 square feet of function space. It will be connected to the neighboring Harborside Event Center. A signature restaurant, rooftop lounge, culinary theater, indoor and outdoor fitness facility, and spacious pool area on the fourth floor overlooking the Caloosahatchee River, as well as a local diner and retail space at street level will be included. Outlets: Silver King, Ella Mae’s Diner, The Workshop, Beacon Social Drinkery. Visit [camera.deckchair.com/luminary-hotel-florida-usa](http://camera.deckchair.com/luminary-hotel-florida-usa) to watch the construction.

The hotel will be a part of the Autograph Collection® of Marriott International, Inc.

[mainsailhotels.com](http://mainsailhotels.com)

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### **Margaritaville Resort, Fort Myers Beach**

Playing off the brand and laid-back beach lifestyle made famous by singer and songwriter Jimmy Buffet, the resort will be built near the Times Square area of Fort Myers Beach with opening planned for 2021. [www.tpi-fmb.com](http://www.tpi-fmb.com)

### **Fish-Tale Marina, Fort Myers Beach**

Estero Bay Express has partnered with Mound House to offer excursions to Mound Key seasonally from October through April. [esterobayexpress.com](http://esterobayexpress.com)

The marina has added new rental boats and renewed its “clean & resilient marina” certificate. It was voted “best waterfront marina” and “best waterfront dining” by readers of the Fort Myers News-Press. [Fishtalemarina.com](http://Fishtalemarina.com)

### **Florida Repertory Theatre, downtown Fort Myers**

The award-winning theatre that the Wall Street Journal called “One of America’s Top Repertory Companies,” has done upgrades to the interior of the theatre located in the historic Arcade Theatre. Tickets for the 2019/2020 season are available at [floridarep.org](http://floridarep.org)

### **Offshore Sailing School, Cape Coral, Captiva, Fort Myers Beach**

A catamaran motor yacht has been added to the fleet at Westin Cape Coral Resort. For the first time, the school is offering a “fast track to power cruising” certificate course in the U.S. Offshore Sailing celebrates its 55<sup>th</sup> anniversary in 2019 and has taught more than 150,000 adults and families. [offshoresailing.com](http://offshoresailing.com)

## **Annual festivals and events**

### **Happening now**

#### **9th annual Fort Myers Film Festival**

**April 10-14, 2019**

Sidney & Berne Davis Art Center

[fortmyersfilmfestival.com](http://fortmyersfilmfestival.com)

The Fort Myers Film Festival is an intelligent independent filmmaker's preferred event to create, unite and showcase the finest artistic cinematic works. Known for its support of local filmmakers, the event is a must-attend for cineastes who love indie film and film festivals. Check out all the details on the website.

#### **14th annual Fort Myers Beach Film Festival, Fort Myers Beach**

**April 24-28, 2019**

[fmbfilmfest.com](http://fmbfilmfest.com)

The Fort Myers Beach Film Festival invites independent film fans, filmmakers and distributors to spend four days to exchange ideas, make new contacts and enjoy some great films for all ages.

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Area accommodations offer special rates and packages to support this international celebration of independent filmmaking.

### **Smoke on the Water Barbecue Competition & Music Festival, downtown Fort Myers April 26-27, 2019**

239-333-1933

[sbdac.com/smoke-on-the-water-fort-myers](http://sbdac.com/smoke-on-the-water-fort-myers)

The Sidney & Berne Davis Art Center will host barbecue cook teams from across the South to compete in the Smoke on the Water Barbecue Competition & Music Festival 2018. This free community event brings an authentic experience of craft barbecue, beer and bands.

### **Upcoming events**

#### **“Ding” Darling & Doc Ford’s Tarpon Tourney, Sanibel Island**

**May 3, 2019**

239-472-1000

[dingdarlingtarpontourney.org](http://dingdarlingtarpontourney.org)

To celebrate the history of the first documented tarpon caught on a rod-and-reel in “Ding” Darling’s Tarpon Bay in 1885, Doc Ford’s and the “Ding” Darling Wildlife Society-Friends of the Refuge have partnered to host this 8th annual “catch, care, and release” tournament. Proceeds support the wildlife and conservation efforts at the J.N. “Ding” Darling National Wildlife Refuge. Check out all of the details on the website.

#### **23rd annual MangoMania Tropical Fruit Festival, Pine Island**

**July 13-14, 2019**

239-283-0888

[mangomaniafl.net/](http://mangomaniafl.net/)

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 annual affair, an unusual celebration of all the tropical fruit grown on the island, which includes lychee, carambola, longan, papaya, and “chocolate pudding fruit.” Fruit, exotic fruit trees, and fruit-related products are available for purchase. This fun, family event celebrates Pine Island’s mangoes and other tropical fruits. In addition to mango food and beverages, the event features live music, art and craft vendors, food and recipe contests, and activities area for kids and a chance to meet the Mango Queen.

#### **33rd annual Oktoberfest, Cape Coral**

**Oct. 18-20 and 25-27, 2019**

German-American Club

239-283-1400

[capecoraloktoberfest.com](http://capecoraloktoberfest.com)

Hosted by the German-American Club, this huge celebration brings organizes Munich to Cape Coral. The Cape Coral Oktoberfest is the largest party of the year in the community and is THE event for fun, good food, freshly poured domestic and German beer, live music on several stages, laughter, dancing. Call or check website for schedule and ticket information.

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**31st annual J.N. "Ding" Darling Days, Sanibel Island**

**Oct. 19-20, 2019**

239-472-1100

[dingdarlingdays.com](http://dingdarlingdays.com)

**Conservation Art Day** on Saturday, Oct. 19, kicks off the "Ding" Darling Days weekend with Federal Duck Stamp Winners, other artists, cartooning, and nature art -- a day devoted to Jay Norwood Darling's legacy as the first duck stamp artist and Pulitzer Prize-winning political cartoonist.

**Family Fun Day** on Oct. 20, culminates the weekend of eco-activities with all-free Refuge tram tours, live wildlife presentations, hot dogs, crafts, and other family activities. Birding, boating, tram, and kayaking activities fill the weekend.

**37th annual Taste of the Town, Fort Myers**

**Nov. 3, 2019**

[jlfmtaste.com](http://jlfmtaste.com)

Alliance for the Arts

Join the Junior League of Fort Myers for a great day of food, music and kids entertainment for the 37th annual Taste of the Town. All proceeds from this event go to support the projects of the Junior League.

**Cape Coral CoCoNut Festival, Cape Coral**

**November 2019**

239-573-3121

[cocofest.com](http://cocofest.com)

Sun Splash Family Water Park

Cape Coral CoCoNut Festival celebrates Cape Coral's reputation for coconuts, multi-cultural food, boating, fishing and wildlife. The festival will feature a national musical act, gymnastic entertainment, carnival rides, water-ski shows, tropical food, contests, coconut crafts and fireworks.

**14th annual Sanibel Island Writers Conference**

**Nov. 7-10, 2019**

239-590-7421

[fgcu.edu/siwc](http://fgcu.edu/siwc)

BIG Arts and the Sanibel Island Public Library

This intimate writers' conference draws acclaimed authors and songwriters, award-winning poets and screenplay writers. The talented group holds small workshops for all levels of aspiring writers who want to follow in their creative footsteps. Participants also enjoy nightly readings and concerts, which are open to the public. The conference welcomes any writer who wants to create new work or refine a project in progress. For details and reservations, visit website or contact Tom DeMarchi at [tdemarch@fgcu.edu](mailto:tdemarch@fgcu.edu).

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**33rd annual Sand Sculpting Championship, Fort Myers Beach**

**November 22-Dec. 1, 2019**

**In front of Wyndham Garden Hotel**

239-454-7500

[fmsandsculpting.com](http://fmsandsculpting.com)

Come and join the fun on Fort Myers Beach for the 33rd annual American Sand Sculpting Championship and Beach Festival. Sponsored by the Fort Myers Beach Chamber of Commerce, this fun-filled event will include world-class master sand sculptors, a state championship contest, an amateur contest, sand sculpting demonstrations and lessons, and much more. With more than 1,000 tons of sand, master sand sculptors are returning to Fort Myers Beach forming the largest sand sculpting event in the state, plying their craft and showcasing their artistry in what *USA Today* and *CNN Travel* have named a “must-see” and one of the 10 best sand sculpting competitions in the world.

**43rd annual Holiday Nights at the Edison & Ford Winter Estates, Fort Myers**

**November/December 2019**

239-334-7419

[edisonfordwinterestates.org](http://edisonfordwinterestates.org)

Edison Ford Holiday Nights reflect the many contributions of Thomas Edison, Henry Ford and their families to the local community. It was chosen by the editors of *USA Today* as one of the *10 Best Historic Homes for the Holidays*. A not-to-be-missed holiday tradition, the historic buildings and more than 20 acres of gardens are decorated with lights and traditional decorations. The event offers a special holiday tour, Children's Tree Trail, Santa visits on select nights, refreshments and shopping in the Ford Cottage Shoppe, Museum Store and Garden Shoppe. For admission and details: [www.edisonfordwinterestates.org/events/annual-events/holiday-nights/](http://www.edisonfordwinterestates.org/events/annual-events/holiday-nights/)

**35th annual Christmas Luminary Trail and Open House, Sanibel and Captiva islands**

**Dec. 8 on Sanibel Island and Dec. 9 Captiva Island 2019**

[sanibel-captiva.org](http://sanibel-captiva.org)

This event draws visitors from all over the world as they join local residents to celebrate the season with three miles of luminary candles and events.

**River District Holidays, downtown Fort Myers**

**Dec 1, 2019-Jan. 2, 2020**

[fortmyersriverdistrictalliance.com/holidays](http://fortmyersriverdistrictalliance.com/holidays)

The calendar is packed with holiday events to get you in the spirit of the season. Festival of Trees, Holiday Stroll and Tree Lighting, Burroughs's Home & Gardens Holiday House, Music Walk, holiday concert and a New Year's Eve celebration to welcome 2020. Check the website for a complete calendar.

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**Annual Port Boca Grande Lighthouse and Museum Lighting, Boca Grande  
December 2019**

[barrierislandparkssociety.org/events](http://barrierislandparkssociety.org/events)

Celebrate the annual lighting of the Gasparilla Lighthouse at 6 p.m. with music and refreshments. Gates open at 5:30 p.m.

**Annual festivals and events**

**Cape Coral Festival of the Arts, Cape Coral**

**Jan. 11-12, 2020**

[capecoralfestival.com](http://capecoralfestival.com)

239-699-7942

This annual event in its 33<sup>rd</sup> year draws hundreds of artists and more than 100,000 visitors.

**Twisted Strings, Fort Myers**

**Top Rocker Field at Six Bends Harley Davidson**

**January 2020**

[twistedstrings.org](http://twistedstrings.org)

The annual, outdoor festival brings together classically trained musicians who fuse their years of musical training on stringed (and other) instruments with the sounds of jazz, blues, soul, rock, hip hop and world music. Visit site for lineup and ticket information.

**ArtFest Fort Myers, downtown historic district**

**Feb. 1-2, 2020**

239-768-3602

[artfestfortmyers.com](http://artfestfortmyers.com)

On the waterfront in downtown Fort Myers, visitors enjoy made-in-USA original art by more than 200 artists. Enjoy food, music and fun for the whole family. Opening night activities: Jan. 31, 2020.

**Friends of Lovers Key Annual Vow Renewal, Lovers Key State Park**

**Feb. 14, 2020**

[friendsofloverskey.org](http://friendsofloverskey.org)

Love is always in the air at Lovers Key State Park, but even more so on Valentine's Day. Couples renew their vows near the gazebo on the beach, while the ocean and gulls provide background music. The ceremonies at 10 a.m. and 3 p.m. include a champagne toast, brunch or lunch, coffee and cake, socializing, photo, as well as door prizes and parting gifts. Reservations required. The non-refundable donation of \$100 per couple adds to the Environmental Education Center Fund. This event has been a sell-out in the past, so reserve a spot early by contacting event chair Judy Greenwood at 708-359-0466 or [fjgreenwood@gmail.com](mailto:fjgreenwood@gmail.com).

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**82nd annual Edison Festival of Light Grand Parade, Fort Myers**

**Feb. 15, 2020**

239-334-2999

[edisonfestival.org](http://edisonfestival.org)

During February, Fort Myers celebrates the birthday of its most illustrious historical resident, 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 and held more than 1,200 patents. 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 festival.

**Spring Training 2020**

The Beaches of Fort Myers & Sanibel is the spring training home of the Boston Red Sox and the Minnesota Twins. Get up close and see your favorite baseball players. What could be better than beautiful spring days and great baseball? For a complete listing of packages, special rates and information on a spring training vacation, visit [www.FortMyersSanibel.com](http://www.FortMyersSanibel.com).

Boston Red Sox spring training

February/March 2020

JetBlue Park, Fort Myers

[redsox.com](http://redsox.com)

Minnesota Twins spring training

February/March 2020

CenturyLink Sports Complex, Fort Myers

[twinsbaseball.com](http://twinsbaseball.com)

**83rd annual Sanibel Shell Fair & Show, Sanibel Island**

**March 7-9, 2020**

Sanibel Community House

239-472-2155

[sanibelcommunityhouse.net](http://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 fair that includes demonstrations, shell displays, crafts, prizes, food and entertainment.

**21st annual Southwest Florida Reading Festival**

**Fort Myers Regional Library Campus**

**March 2020**

Celebrate the power of reading at the 21st annual **Southwest Florida Reading Festival** at the Fort Myers Regional Library campus at 2450 First St., Fort Myers. The free, family-oriented

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festival is a chance to meet well-known authors and to focus on the importance of reading. There will also be books and authors for kids and teens. Check the schedule and list of authors at [readfest.org](http://readfest.org)

**62nd annual Fort Myers Beach Shrimp Festival and Parade, Fort Myers Beach  
March 7-8, 2020**

[fortmyersbeachshrimpfestival.com](http://fortmyersbeachshrimpfestival.com)

The **62nd annual Fort Myers Beach Shrimp Festival and Parade** takes place at Lynn Hall Memorial Park on Fort Myers Beach. Both days are filled with fun, food and crafts as well as the world-famous Lions Club shrimp dinners. Shrimp are from our local fleets and are as fresh as you can get. Enjoy a 5K run, the Shrimp Festival Parade, crowning of the Shrimp Queen and a shrimp eating competition.

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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 and Lehigh Acres. For media assistance, visit [www.fortmyers-sanibel.com/media-central/](http://www.fortmyers-sanibel.com/media-central/)*