

BOCA BEACON

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Inside:

- Who's new at the Post Office?
- Two Swinneys and a Wise man
- New South Beach breaks ground

Two arrested for damages done at Inn Golf Course



STAFF REPORT

Two teenagers from out of state were arrested this week after being caught by Lee County deputies for some disturbing crimes. According to reports, on Tuesday, June 27 Lee County Sheriff's detectives were informed of grand theft and criminal mischief that occurred at the Gasparilla Inn Golf Course. Detectives learned that the golf course was under repair and multiple pieces of heavy equipment had been moved overnight. Two suspects had entered the property and driven multiple pieces of equipment around the course. The heavy machinery, golf course and storage sheds were all damaged. According to LCSO earlier in the week, the damage to the course and equipment was estimated at around \$33,000. However, it is likely that the final cost will be much more. When detectives arrived on the scene, they located multiple sets of bicycle tire tracks through bunkers

See **VANDALS** on **PAGE 12**



Let FREEDOM ring!



■ The amount of patriotic pride was overwhelming at the 2023 Annual Fourth of July Golf Cart Parade, held the morning of the Fourth. It is estimated that 150 carts participated.

Shown above are just a few of the faces that we saw on the street, but if you want more, go to pages 14 and 15.

Photos by Dusty



Gas is back at Boca Grande Marina!

STAFF REPORT

The folks at Boca Grande Marina wanted us to let you know that the gas pump by the side of Harbor Drive is back in business. You

can now gas up your vehicle and not have to worry about running out on the way off island.

All hail the gas pump by the road!



Blazing hot weather doesn't deter tourists who long for a quieter 'season'

BY GARLAND POLLARD

Julie Blakeslee and her sister-in-law Karen Blakeslee were visiting Boca Grande this week after the Fourth of July for one reason: to enjoy Gasparilla Island during the quiet season.

"We don't like it to be so crowded," said Karen Blakeslee.

The extended Blakeslee family of six from Springfield, Mo. included three children. While here, they swam, fished for snapper and shot videos of the Fourth of July parade. The day after the Fourth, they were out on Park Avenue in front of Hudson's, bringing home takeout for the family from Tortuga Mexican Street Cuisine, one of a steady stream of lunchgoers unfazed by the temperature.

The family aspects of Boca Grande and the season also had an appeal for the Sugar family of Syracuse, New York, who come each year.

The father, Remus Sugar, had worked at the Pink Elephant before the family moved up to New York. While here, they visited family and brought niece Agnes along with their



■ Julie and Karen Blakeslee of Springfield, Mo., picking up Tortuga's lunch.

son, Remus Jr. On their return meal at the Pink Elephant, they were happy to find the place open – and packed.

"I was surprised to see so many people," said Remus.

Bridge Traffic Count

The increase in visitors is not just anecdotal. The most precise method of counting visitors to Boca Grande is the Causeway count, which was up 10 percent on the Fourth of July. This Fourth of July, 276 more vehicles

crossed, taking the count from 2,647 vehicles in 2022 to 2,923 in 2023, according to figures supplied by Kathy Banson-Verrico, executive director of the Gasparilla Island Bridge Authority.

Approximately 3,000 vehicles pass over the bridge daily. In June 2022, 92,997 vehicles crossed the bridge, up from 86,000 in June 2021, an increase of eight percent. Presumably, some of the extra traffic can be attributed to service vehicles and building repair recovery, but the holiday report proves a substantial increase.

This increase in travelers is confirmed by local tourism data.

In Charlotte County, Lois Croft, public relations manager of tourism for the Punta Gorda and Englewood Beach Visitor and Convention Bureau, said that in the first quarter of 2023, Charlotte County showed a 12.1 percent increase in visitors, from 197,300 to 221,100. Statistics gathered from the agency Downs & St. Germain showed that expenditures were up 1.5 percent. The occupancy rate was down a bit, from 69 percent to 67 percent,

See **TOURISTS** on **PAGE 18**

