

MAKING



PHOTO BY KATHLEEN BLASE

Virginia Fleming

WAITING TO INHALE?

“Come the month of May, I can finally take a few breaths,” says Virginia “Ginny” Fleming with a big smile. “I’ve got to have

that summer season to recoup for October.”

It’s actually hard to believe that summertime is enough time for the Sanibel resident and well-known community leader to take a breather. The 1999 Angel Volunteer of the Year and Sanibel-Captiva Chamber of Commerce Citizen of the Year for 2000 serves as a board member or committee member of more than a dozen nonprofit organizations. They include The Bailey-Matthews Shell Museum, Community Foundation of Sanibel-Captiva, Old Schoolhouse Theater Foundation, and Sanibel Cares.

And that’s just on the islands. Other affiliations include the Children’s Hospital, The Edison-Ford Winter Estates Foundation, Gulf Shore Ballet, Southwest Florida Community Foundation, and Southwest Florida Symphony Society. In addition, Fleming completed Stephen Ministry training through Sanibel Community Church.

Fleming is passionate about her causes,

noting, “The more you give, the more you get. Just think of the things I’ve learned!”

She went to college in Missouri, raised her two children in St. Louis, and became a year-round Sanibel resident in 1987. Of all her responsibilities, Fleming says her priority is her ten grandchildren. “The best thing I do is spend time with them.”

Does any one organization have a special place in her heart? “My main drive outside my family and church is the Old Schoolhouse Theater,” says Fleming. “I love what (artistic director) J.T. Smith does. There aren’t many theaters like J.T.’s. And I love music.”

If she did have more free time, Fleming adds, “I should devote more time to my golf game. I can’t get out as much as I like. I belong to two book clubs and I also like taking gourmet cooking classes. The irony is that I subscribe to seven cooking magazines but it takes so long to read them that I have to order pizza!”

— Libby Grimm

SEAFARERS

Longtime Sanibel residents Dick Derowitsch and Shelly Storves are taking a break from living on the island but it’s hard to say exactly where they are right now. That’s because the husband and wife embarked in February on an adventurous sailing trip. They hope to eventually reach New Zealand, probably stay there awhile, and they expect to be away from Sanibel for as long as two to three years.

Their dream-come-true trip is the culmination of three years’ preparation. Storves, who holds a captain’s license and was once in the charter boat business, grew up sailing and used to race on the Chesapeake. She taught Derowitsch how to sail—a skill that complements his main hobby, fishing.

On their next-to-the-last day on Sanibel, Storves explained how the origi-

nal idea for the trip came about: “I’ve never cruised before and I’ve always wanted to go to the South Pacific. I don’t want to sail in cold water. And Dick was starting to think about retiring. So I said, ‘You like to fish and I like to sail. Let’s do it!’”

They bought their impressive boat, *Sandpiper*, brand new three years ago from world-renowned transatlantic sailboat racer and boatbuilder Walter Green of Yarmouth, Maine. *Sandpiper* is a fast-sailing catamaran, thirty-seven feet long and nineteen feet wide, weighing five thousand pounds unloaded and eight thousand pounds loaded. The boat has twin diesel engines for auxiliary power and can go a thousand miles under fuel. “But we sail faster than we motor,” Storves noted.

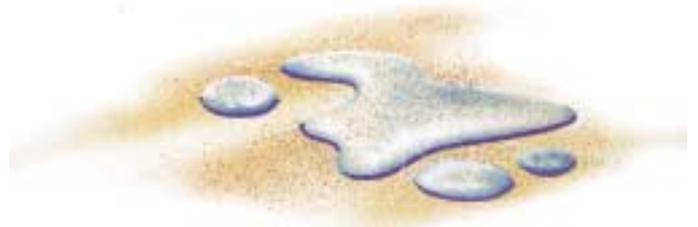
As planned, a short while before their trip began, Derowitsch left his job at the



PHOTO BY KATHLEEN BLASE

Dick Derowitsch and Shelly Storves

WAVES



Island Water Association, where he was engineering manager and had worked for twenty-five years. Storves also left her engineering supervisor position at the IWA, where she'd worked for twelve years. "That stage of our lives is over," they both explained.

Being engineers, however, sure comes in handy when you plan to sail around the world. Derowitsch and Storves modified *Sandpiper* with such state-of-the-art equipment as radar, satellite communication, and global positioning navigation. They also installed desalination equipment so they can convert seawater to drinking water, and have solar and wind power for energy.

The two sailors will check e-mail on their laptop computer and log onto the Internet to check weather reports. They sighed with relief when they said, "All this technology has taken so much stress out of sailing."

If an e-mail came today from Derowitsch and Storves, it would probably say they are in the Bahamas exploring Exuma, which Storves said she was particularly looking forward to visiting. Next on their itinerary are the Turks and Caicos Islands and probably the Florida Keys in autumn. Then they want to sail to San Blas in Panama and go through the Panama Canal in February or March of 2004, before hurricane season.

Once in the Pacific Ocean, Derowitsch and Storves plan to visit the Galápagos Islands. After that, they will head toward the Society Islands in the South Pacific and finally end up on New Zealand's North Island.

Keeping them company on the boat are their two Abyssinian cats—who get seasick, Storves noted, laughing. Onboard is sixty pounds of cat food and, Storves added, "They'll also, of course, be able to eat some of Dick's fish!"

—Libby Grimm

CREATING A SPACE FOR CONTEMPORARY ART

Kate Kramer wants to open people's eyes.

As interim director of the new Art Gallery at Florida Gulf Coast University, she's mapping out seasons designed to raise awareness of cutting-edge art and to expose Southwest Florida residents and visitors to sights they might never have seen before.

"I'm trying to make (this) gallery a contemporary art hub for the region," Kramer explains. "We have awesome art centers here, but most of them have very specific communities they are serving. Yes, we need promotion of the artists who are living here. But the university can provide a vision of what contemporary art can be. I think we can show what's going on nationally and internationally."

With a doctorate in modern studies (an interdisciplinary field that includes such diverse elements as art, literature, and urban planning) and a decade of fine-arts management, Kramer is well suited to this task. She helped get the Naples-based Eckert Fine Art gallery off the ground, and then spent two and a half years coordinating exhibitions at the Naples Museum of Art. In addition, she's been managing the career of her husband, Chris Poehlmann, a nationally known contemporary artist.

Last year, Kramer took an appointment as a visiting professor of art history at FGCU. Teaching an art history survey course that many students took to fulfill their arts requirement, she discovered that seventy-five percent of the students who were not majoring in art had never set foot in a gallery or museum. When she was named FGCU's interim gallery director, she decided to try to rectify that situation.



PHOTO COURTESY OF FLORIDA GULF COAST UNIVERSITY

Kate Kramer

"Folks who were raised here have not had that many opportunities to experience contemporary art," she notes. "I think it's critical that there is someplace they can come."

To that end, Kramer has planned a number of noteworthy exhibitions, including a 2004 show of works by Kara Walker, a noted and sometimes controversial African-American artist, and, this past season, a national, juried exhibition of contemporary art. Shows featuring student and faculty works are also planned, as are collaborations with such art centers as the von Liebig in Naples.

"I'm trying to open up that door a little bit," Kramer says. "A lot of people are unsure what contemporary art is. I think we can really fill a need."

The FGCU Art Gallery is open from 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. Tuesdays through Fridays. For more information, call 239/590-7222.

—Janina Birtolo

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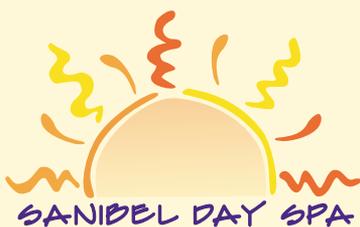
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Jim Jennings

SANIBEL'S NEWEST COUNCILMAN

Although it might sound like an oxymoron, Jim Jennings is actually an unassuming politician. Voted into office in March as Sanibel's newest City Council member, Jennings came out of relative obscurity to unseat a former mayor.

President and founder of the island's Republican Club, Jennings, 55, has been active in Lee County politics for some time, but his role has always been behind the scenes. "I've always helped others get elected," he says. A middle school art and math teacher for more than thirty years, Jennings moved to Cape Coral in 1973, a couple years after graduating from Bowling Green State University in his home state of Ohio.

In the early '90s, he and wife, Christine, started looking for a place where they would be happy to retire eventually. After looking from Bradenton to Naples, Sanibel won, hands down. "We kept coming back to Sanibel," says Jennings. "I love the beach. I love to collect the seashells and talk to people on the beach."

Although he had never had political

aspirations for himself, Jennings made the decision to run for council on his way to Jeb Bush's inauguration in January. "My wife and I decided that I had to run," he recalls. Upset by hearing of arrogant treatment of church representatives and what he perceived as a lack of fiscal responsibility, Jennings realized that the only way to effect change would be to get himself into City Hall.

So, when he retires from teaching in May, he'll enter the realm of public office full-time. In doing so, he hopes to bring a fresh attitude to council chambers.

"I want people to feel welcome to be heard," he says. He anticipates thoroughly enjoying his new role on the island, he adds; "I love to talk to people—to anybody."

He also wants to institute a "red carpet" mentality. "I want to have the doors open and to have a road map for people to know how to go about having their concerns addressed, and for them to walk away feeling like their concerns were heard. And, if they are put on hold, I want them to understand why there are other considerations."

— Barbara Linstrom-Arnold