

MAKING



PHOTO BY KATHLEEN BLASE

Jane Roberts helps people get comfortable in the water.

SWIMMERS' GUARANTEE

Five hours is all it takes to learn to swim, says Jane Roberts, founder and operator of SWIMMERS, a unique service designed to help adults conquer their swimming fears.

Roberts, a swim instructor for more than twenty years, originally developed the program in her native England in 1996, but brought it to Southwest Florida in June 2003. After many years of vacationing in the area, Roberts says she met a number of people who lived in homes with beautiful pools that they were afraid to use. So when she, her husband Brian, and their son Sam decided to become full-time residents of Southwest Florida, it seemed only natural to bring the SWIMMERS concept along.

The program requires a total of six hours—five hours in the water and one hour of consultation—and consists of six fifty-minute lessons that are divided into two or three sessions of one-on-one instruction in a private pool. All of the lessons are taught in the water and begin as simply as taking a walk from one side of the pool to the other. As the lessons progress, Roberts teaches floating, proper breathing and swimming techniques, and gently guides her pupils to put their faces in the water—the biggest hurdle for most, she says.

However, when they overcome that hurdle, address their fears, and learn to swim, Roberts says her pupils earn a confidence they carry into other aspects of their lives.

“It can change your life,” she says, noting one customer who learned to swim after her husband died. “It gave her something to live for.”

No matter what their reason for contacting SWIMMERS, Roberts will accept only customers who truly *want* to learn. “The only time it doesn’t work is when the person is being pushed into it by someone else,” she says. But if the pupil wants to be there, Roberts guarantees the program. “We’ll teach you until you learn to swim,” she says. “We always give that guarantee, but we’ve never had to use it.”

For more information, call 239/267-9728, e-mail jane@swimmersusa.com, or visit www.swimmersusa.com.

— Jennifer Workman Lessinger

WAVES

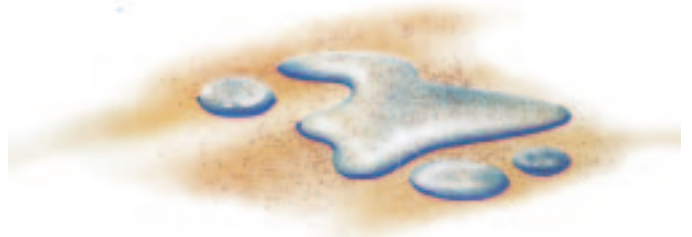


PHOTO BY ANNE POWERS

Kathleen Hecksher keeps harmony at WMYR.

TUNED IN

Kathleen Hecksher was born in Missouri, but arrived in Southwest Florida in time to be in the first graduating class from North Ft. Myers High School in 1966. She stayed in the area and, despite training as a bookkeeper, took a job as a waitress, which is how she found her future path.

When one of her customers said he was

looking for a bookkeeper for the radio station he owned, she laughed. “You can’t own a radio station,” she told him. “They are owned by the government.”

Of course, she learned that Robert Hecksher could and did own radio station WMYR, then known as WHEW. She not only went to work for him, she married him.

Today, she owns the station, having

inherited it when her husband died in 1999.

When Robert Hecksher launched the station in 1952, programming was in blocks—an hour of country, an hour of gospel, an hour of blues, and so on. But in 1954, he went to Atlanta and heard an all-rock station. He brought the format home to Ft. Myers, becoming the first station to play rock and roll in Southwest Florida.

Since then, WMYR logged a number of other firsts, and Kathleen Hecksher has been part of many of them.

WMYR, 1410 AM, currently broadcasts a Disney-format, family radio programming, and owns the format in Lee, Charlotte, Hendry, Collier, and Glades counties. “We’ve tried a couple of other formats but we have been extremely successful with Disney,” she says.

With more than 125,000 children under fourteen years old, it’s a huge market, and advertisers like it because parents listen, too. Her sales force is called the “mom squad,” because almost all are part-time employees and mothers.

When she’s not working, Hecksher’s hobbies include angel collectibles and gardening at her home on Pine Island. She’s planted an English garden in her front yard.

The land has increased dramatically in value over the years but she says she isn’t tempted to sell. “I couldn’t duplicate what I have,” she says.

With more than thirty years in radio, Hecksher can do just about any job at the station, from managing to running the control board. She spends at least five days a week at the station, which is still in its original location at 2835 Hansen St., working nine- and ten-hour days.

“In radio, you can have a lot of fun,” she says. “But it’s a huge responsibility.”

— Anne Powers

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PHOTO BY KATHLEEN BLASE

Connie Ramos is raising her magazine for success.

JUST FOR FAMILIES

Enthusiastic and bright-eyed, Connie Ramos is always brimming with ideas. So when she started mulling the concept about four years ago of a magazine for the families of Southwest Florida, she didn't necessarily take herself seriously at first.

Having moved to the area from Miami when her former husband became managing editor of *The News-Press*, Ramos and her two children, now 11 and 10, were eager to become a part of the community.

"Right away when we came, we joined the YMCA," recalls Ramos. "I was always listening to the parents on the sidelines of basketball games and soccer games talking about their kids and things they needed help with—a speech condition or a chronic sinus condition or what to get their autistic child involved with."

She initially went to work part-time in her former field as a dental hygienist, but her desire for something more fulfilling fueled a whirl of possibilities in her mind.

"On the other coast there was a parenting publication that I used as a resource," she says, and she helped her husband with a golf magazine he had started as a hobby. "He had also worked at the *Miami Herald* for thirteen years and I had been looking over his shoulder. Plus, in high school and college, I was on the yearbook and journalism staffs, so I did have the background."

Some local market research informed Ramos she was on the right track.

"I found in Lee County alone, there were something like 60,000-plus kids in the public school system and close to 30,000 in

Collier. Besides that, I found an abundance of home-schooling families, private schools, day cares, and preschools. Combining that all together, I found there were something like 125,000 school-age children living in Lee and Collier counties."

With that in mind, Ramos decided there was a definite need in the region for a family-oriented publication.

Several months later, in December 1999, she gave birth to the first bimonthly issue of *Southwest Florida Parent & Child* magazine with a 10,000-copy run. "I didn't start small by any means," she says. "But I also just expected to have enough ads to cover the costs of the magazine, so that I didn't have to dive into our personal accounts. The first issue, though, actually did make some money. After that, it's just been snowballing into something bigger and better."

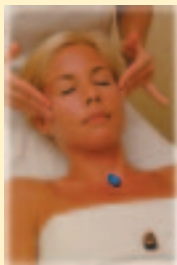
With continued increases in advertising and sponsorship, the publication has doubled its size, gone to a glossy cover, and now comes off the press every other month in 20,000 runs.

"It's extremely rewarding," says Ramos. "Not necessarily financially, but the feedback from the community is. It's always been in my nature to help and I feel like I'm really helping."

With 525 distribution sites in Lee, Collier, and now Charlotte counties, the magazine is available in Blockbuster stores, the front offices of public schools, and at scores of toy stores, children's clothing shops, and pediatricians' offices.

— Barbara Linstrom-Arnold

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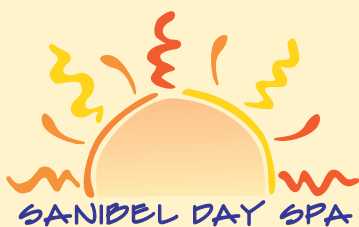
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PHOTO BY KATHLEEN BLASE

Fun in the sun is a money-maker for Dieter Reichardt.

WHERE WORK IS PLAY

"I'm a person who likes the sun," says Dieter Reichardt, as if that is all the explanation needed for moving from Germany to Southwest Florida. While sitting on a picnic bench overlooking the water outside his Sea Wave Power Boat Rentals office at Bayside Marina at Captiva's lush South Seas Resort, it's hard to argue with him.

Originally from Herne-Wanne-Eickel, a small area of Germany near Düsseldorf, Reichardt, 46, first came to Florida in 1989. During that two-week visit, Reichardt and his family toured the state, covering 2,300 miles and visiting a number of island communities. While he was impressed with all that he saw, it was the relaxed atmosphere, friendly people and, of course, abundant sunshine of Florida's Gulf Coast that Reichardt liked most. "Nobody can beat the nice weather," he says.

Each year the family returned and after a while Reichardt decided to sell the large, successful car wash he'd owned for more than sixteen years and look for a business opportunity in Florida—hoping to find

one near the water. When he learned about an opportunity to buy the boat-rental business at South Seas, it sounded like the perfect match. He and wife Elka bought the business in 1998 and moved to Cape Coral. Soon after, their daughter Cordula followed them and took over as manager at Sea Wave.

Under the care of the Reichardt family, Sea Wave grew more than forty percent the first year and has continued to increase ever since. Always trying to improve and expand, Reichardt has incorporated a free training course for those customers who need it and, in August 2003, added a water-taxi service. His business philosophy is to put the customer first and says it is his nature to help people. "When people have a good time, this gives me a good feeling and touches my heart," he says.

Since moving to Florida, Reichardt hasn't had an opportunity to return to his homeland, claiming his business keeps him too busy for a vacation, but he doesn't let it get him down. He's having too much fun in the sun.

—Jennifer Workman Lessinger

Visitors' Views

An introduction to a few of the many remarkable visitors to Southwest Florida

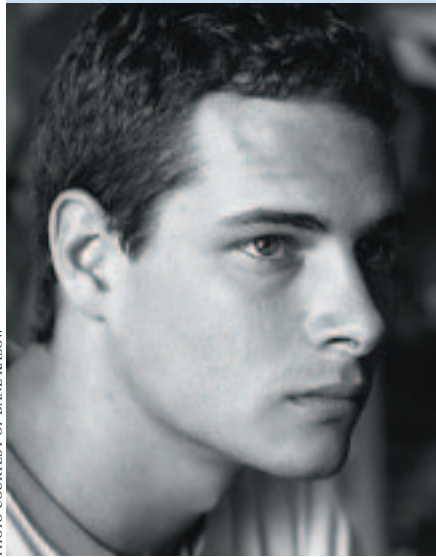


PHOTO COURTESY OF DANL KASOW

Danl Kasow's DAMN Networks doesn't give him much down time.

LOOKING FORWARD TO ISLAND TIME

Danl Kasow conducts a life many people only dream of. In August, Kasow, owner of a computer and Internet consulting firm, wrapped up work on a new Coen brothers film. This year, he's responsible for a giant computer network in Madison Square Garden for the 2004 Republican National Convention. The 25-year-old

"People weren't so
uptight down there.
It was the healthiest
I ever felt."

— Danl Kasow

does business throughout the United States and in Europe, yet his dreams center on Sanibel Island.

"In the summer of 2000, I was living in New York when I came down. It was a breath of fresh air. It was so relaxing with happy people. People weren't so uptight down there," says Kasow, who rented a place for a year. "It was the healthiest I ever felt."

He vowed to return often, and he has,

but he stays so busy with his firm, DAMN Networks, that finding time to escape isn't easy.

"This year was the first I've worked in the major motion-picture industry," he says. He had worked a little in music editing with his father, who has been a music editor for film for many years. "My dad has always tried to get me into working with him."

Kasow finally took him up on it with the Coen brothers' film, *Intolerable Cruelty*.

He explains the sequence of events: "The Coen brothers edit a rough cut," Kasow explains. "We used music of a type we thought would be good in a scene." The film is then shown in its rough version to a test audience, he says, "so we got a real ability to check out what kind of music we wanted there." The directors then make changes to the film accordingly.

And how does one who's not Arnold segue from Hollywood into a political arena as large as the 2004 Republican National Convention?

"I was recommended to the fellow who's running the show," says Kasow. "I have less than a year to design the network and programming, and two weeks to set up, wire the whole Garden with areas like Internet cafes. We have to build an internal messaging system, so that throughout the arena you know you have a message to be picked up."

Kasow is excited about the project. "This is the biggest job we've nabbed so far. I don't know who's going to top this. We're expecting over 50,000 people, including politicians, press, delegates, and CEOs."

While Kasow's own politics are non-partisan, an uncle, John Bonacic, serves in the New York State Senate. Interestingly, Kasow says, "He had a friend who lived down the road from me on Sanibel, who was also a New York senator."

Sanibel is on Kasow's calendar after Madison Square Garden. "Absolutely," he says. "I love it. I miss it. That's a pilgrimage I have to make a couple of times a year now. After the convention, it's going to be especially relaxing."

— Libby Boren McMillan



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