

No Magazine Is an Island

Ten years of Times of the Islands

by William Ernest Waites

Just over ten years ago, the very first pages of this magazine, fresh off the press, were being anxiously thumbed through by the hands of their publisher. It was the birth of *Times of the Islands*, and much has transpired during its decade of growth and development.

Standing on the elevated rear deck of his Sanibel home, publisher Friedrich Jaeger reminisces on the intervening years. But he is distracted by the view. He comments on how much it reminds him of the African savannah that he grew to love during his younger years living in Zambia.

"I love this view. I love the probability that it will never change, never be developed. It's one of the things I love about Sanibel," Jaeger muses.

Jaeger started coming to Sanibel as a visitor in 1989. Not many years after, his love for the islands manifested into a form he could share far and wide. Jaeger decided that those who lived along the Southwest Florida coast deserved a magazine that would inform and entertain them—a magazine of exceptional excellence with first-rate writing, top quality production, graphics



Surrounded by his island inspiration, publisher Friedrich Jaeger reminisces on a decade of *Times of the Islands*.

that people would want to collect, and glossy reproduction previously unseen in any local publication.

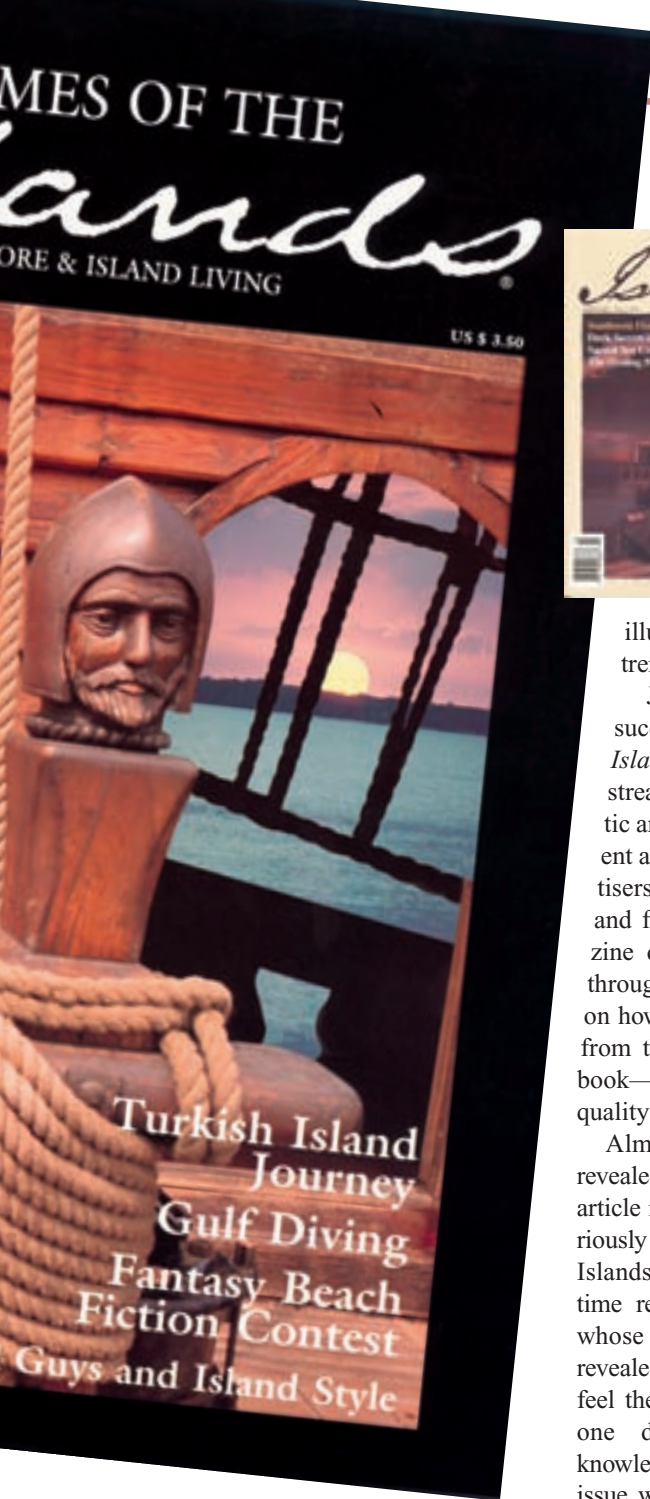
The first issue was assembled in Jaeger's living room, with page layouts also serving as a comfy place for his pet dachshund, Bruno, to sit. During that busy and exciting time, meals consisted primarily of mesquite grouper take-out from the Lazy Flamingo. Walks on the beach served to refresh the spirit, clear the mind, and stimulate the imagination.

As the new publication took form, a key



Some of the faces that made *Times of the Islands* what it is today. From left: Suzanne Tissier LaBounty, former managing editor/editorial director; Maria Fernandes, former circulation manager and proofreader; Jill Tyrer, former editor; Dana Nicloy, former art director.

PHOTO ABOVE BY NICK ADAMS; PHOTO FAR RIGHT BY DOUG HESLIP



“...[Times of the Islands] brought a variety of experiences and perspectives together, and I really enjoyed the people I worked with...[Readers] had good things to say about how effective and interesting they found the magazine.”

— Jill Tyrer, Former Editor

illustrious and upward-trending history.

Jaeger attributes the success of *Times of the Islands* to a continued stream of energetic artistic and administrative talent as well as to its adver-

tisers, whose patronage paid the bills and financed the growth of the magazine during the last decade. Leafing through the latest issue, Jaeger remarks on how many of the original advertisers from that first issue still appear in the book—a testimony to the publication’s quality and ability to reach its audience.

Almost immediately, the magazine revealed the twinkle in its eye, with an article in the second issue mysteriously titled “Dark Secrets of the Islands.” Across Sanibel, old-time residents speculated about whose dalliances would be revealed. Says Jaeger, “You could feel the tenseness in the air. No one dared volunteer carnal knowledge, but the arrival of that issue was much anticipated.” To everyone’s relief, the subject of the article was Sanibel’s unusually dark nighttime skies, which promote spectacular stargazing.

As the magazine grew, so did its talent pool. In the fall of 1997, Susan Holly joined the publication as editor and Sharon Reuter came aboard as head of production and art. That same year, *Times of the Islands* published a story about Sanibel’s hometown political pride, Representative Porter Goss. Unanticipated at the time, this

story would later become an important benchmark in the national renown of the magazine.

Another benchmark in the magazine’s evolution was a two-part article that appeared at the end of 1998 and the beginning of 1999. Thomas Whittingslow wrote the series based on his

visit to Cuba as a tourist. It was rich with insights from inside Havana and incurred some controversy. The decision to run the story was based on the feeling that Sanibel-Captiva had much in common with the island ninety miles to the south of Florida, both as islands and due to historical visits by Cuban fishing vessels to our local waters. This article also reflected a new, more worldly viewpoint, cater-



This issue, which became “required reading” for those in our nation’s capital, profiled Representative Porter Goss long before he became the director of the CIA.

decision was made to staff the magazine exclusively with independent contractors rather than employees to ensure a variety of perspectives and participation by the best local freelance talent available.

The original group included Suzanne Tissier, managing editor; Aldo Ullio, production director; Maria Fernandes, circulation manager and proofreader; Kathleen Blase, photographer; and Dana Nicloy, art director. Together, during the first week of November 1996, they launched the Premier Issue, with distribution of 10,000 copies. It was an exhilarating time, yet just the beginning of an

ing to the broadening interests of *Times of the Islands*' readers.

As the new millennium approached, with nagging fears of Y2K's digital disaster, *Times of the Islands* took on a tongue-in-cheek quality with an "An Islander's Guide to Y2K" that lampooned all that could befall anyone who entered 2000 while anywhere but on the islands. This laid-back approach to an ostensibly serious problem positioned the magazine as a bit of an iconoclast and reminded everyone not to leave his or her sense of humor in the last century.

Times of the Islands was securing its niche as a vehicle for both information and entertainment for tourists, residents, and a far-flung audience of wannabe islanders. A high spot in the magazine's

outreach occurred when Meristar Hotels decided to no longer produce its own in-room magazine and signed an exclusive agreement to provide *Times of the Islands* to its guests. Visitors from across the globe would be treated to an inside look at island life.

As organizational and administrative demands grew, more key players joined the team. Kip Buntrock came on as sales manager and "ambassador at large." Lauren Davies joined the team to keep the books straight and the bills paid on time. The year 2000 also welcomed Kelly Madden as manag-



Writer Libby Boren McMillan welcomed the new millennium "island style," with her tongue-in-cheek guide to Y2K. Artist Dave Drotleff provided memorable illustrations.

"People who read *Times of the Islands* come to really enjoy it for its content, which, of course, conjures up and depicts all things 'islandy.' 'Devoted' is a good description of the typical TOTI reader."

— Kelly Madden, Former Managing Editor

ing editor and Jill Tyrer, replacing editor Susan Holly.

In 2001, Christine Celestino was appointed creative director and Lauren Davies was asked to take the reigns as president, with full operational responsibilities. Also at that time, the magazine broadened its

scope to include events, people, and interests on the Southwest Florida mainland.

In the May/June 2002 issue, a second article about Porter Goss appeared. Again, even though he was an important government figure, the magazine had no inkling of what was in store for its coverage. Both this article and the one from 1997 would become part of *Times of the Islands*' national profile.

The edgy side of the magazine re-emerged in 2003 in an article that investigated the local health care situation. It occurred around the same time that Lee County was talking about raising the sales tax to pay for trauma care at a local hospital, and the hospital was threatening to shut down the trauma center if it didn't get an increase in funding. The article played no favorites and reasserted *Times of the Islands*' leadership in discussing life and living in Southwest Florida.

The following year brought the big story that changed everyone's life in Southwest Florida. Hurricane Charley blew in, shutting down much of the main-



More of the talent that enabled *Times of the Islands* to evolve and grow. From left: Lauren Davies, president; Kelly Madden, former managing editor; Christine Celestino, former creative director; Kip Buntrock, sales manager; Kathleen Blase, staff photographer.

The Chronicles of Charley

A PHOTO RETROSPECTIVE
BY JIM ANDERSON



The Photographer

Friday the 13th proved to be one of the unluckiest of days for Southwest Florida. Not since 1960 had a major hurricane made landfall on Southwest Florida's coast. Charley, a category-four storm packing winds of nearly 145 mph, changed history.

As if Charley weren't enough, the month of September would yield three more major storms that wreaked havoc all over Florida.

Photographer Jim Anderson has called Sanibel home for the past fourteen years and has served as a volunteer firefighter for most of that time. He and his son Jimmy, also a Sanibel Fire and Rescue volunteer, were among the first to report for recovery duty the day after Hurricane Charley.

66 NOVEMBER/DECEMBER 2004

8.13.04 - Bracing for the Worst

Predicted to hit farther north, Hurricane Charley suddenly makes a turn to the right, making landfall Friday at around 3:45 p.m. EDT at Cayo Costa, which is just north of Captiva Island.



The biggest selling issue in the history of the magazine, articles focused on the aftermath of Hurricane Charley.

land, Sanibel, Captiva, and the offices of *Times of the Islands*. Even though much of the resources for the upcoming issue had been safely evacuated the day before, an off-island editorial conference dictated that the content for the issue be completely scrapped and new content be created that addressed the feelings and emotions that were churning in the wake of this devastating event.

On the tail of Hurricane Charley came new editorial director Beth Luberecki, and inventiveness was the order of the day. Being a non-islander at the time, Beth did not possess a "hurricane pass" and had to cajole her way onto the island, past the causeway's roadblock, to attend a job interview for her new position. With

her help, the completely revamped November/December 2004 issue was completed and released for distribution.

When there was time to take a breath, the staff suddenly wondered, "Would there be anyone on the islands to read the issue?" The answer was a resounding "Yes." The post-Hurricane Charley issue flew out of Bailey's General Store and other locations like it was riding on a Category Three wind. It was the largest selling issue in the history of the magazine and continued to sell alongside both the January/February and March/April 2005 issues.

Also in 2005, with the proposed appointment of Representative Porter Goss to head the CIA, a request came from those vetting him in Washington, D.C., for copies of

"We went from film and match prints [when I started] to creating an entirely electronic magazine. Since moving back to New York I now can't wait to get my issue of TOTI in the mail to see what is going on in a slice of paradise I once called home."

— Christine Celestino, Former Creative Director

the magazine that had revealed his earlier years. Suddenly, *Times of the Islands* was on the must-read list in our nation's capital.

The cathartic effect of all this has been the renewed realization that *Times of the Islands* is about more than Sanibel and Captiva. Its influence and interest stretch in many directions. As a result, more coverage has been extended regionally, with, for example, a Pine Island section.

Through it all, *Times of the Islands* has been an anchor for its loyal readers. Like the lighthouse that stands at the tip of Sanibel Island, it has been a constant. Many of the original contributors are still

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“on staff.” Some have left and returned, as has Suzanne Tissier, now LaBounty, who rejoins the magazine this month as editorial director. Beth Luberecki continues as a writer and copy editor. Barbara Linstrom-Arnold and Libby Boren McMillan, both contributing writers since the Premier Issue, still write for the magazine, and Kathleen Blase continues to serve

as staff photographer. Yours truly, who wrote his first piece for the magazine in 2001, returns to write this retrospective.

Circulation has grown each year, with occasional spurts like that attending the post-hurricane issue. But the most rewarding circulation event is when a subscriber walks in off the street and says, “I have subscribed to *Times of the Islands* since your Premier Issue. I have every issue except one. Do you have an extra copy of that issue? I want to complete my collection.”

Times of the Islands has grown and

“The magazine has met a need in this area. Through the years I have seen it grow and shine. TOTI has taken an active part in giving back and supporting the community.”

— Dana Nicloy, Former Art Director

evolved, but one thing that hasn’t changed is that moment, every two months, when the first copies come off the press and are delivered to the office. Eager hands tear open the boxes, and the aroma of printer’s ink fills the air. Jaeger speaks for all: “You smell the ink. You hold it in your hands. You flip through pages. The anticipation is breathtaking—an immediate high. We love it.”

William Ernest Waites is a freelance writer who lives in Ft. Myers and has long ties to Sanibel and Captiva, including previous contributions to Times of the Islands.

Look for Times of the Islands’ Ten-Year Retrospective in each issue throughout 2006. We’ll be looking at a decade of evolution in Southwest Florida on subjects that include the arts, our natural environment, cuisine, and growth and development.



All work and no play? Not at *Times of the Islands* headquarters. Here, publisher Friedrich Jaeger (center) hams it up with (from left) Kip Buntrock, sales manager; Lauren Davies, president; Maria Dispenza, office administrator; and Liz Newkirk, creative director.

PHOTO BY ROSEANNE GIORDANI



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