

PHOTO BY KATHLEEN BLASE

**Kevin Pierce**

## SPEAKING FOR FLORIDA'S ENVIRONMENT

Kevin Pierce is enjoying ever-growing success with the educational radio program he hosts, *The Florida Environment*, which had aired for three years on local public radio, was recently picked up by its

first commercial station. It is now heard by nearly 400,000 people around the state from Miami, St. Petersburg, and Tampa, to Tallahassee, Gainesville, and Jacksonville.

The goal of Pierce's popular show is to teach radio listeners about Florida's environment. Listeners have learned about everything from wild orchids to manatee whiskers.

The show is supported by the Southwest Florida Council for Environment Education (SWFCEE), a non-profit organization dedicated to promoting and expanding environment studies throughout Southwest Florida. Partnering with Audubon of Southwest Florida, county and state school systems, and area developers, SWFCEE helps students from pre-kindergarten through post-graduate levels learn more about Florida's unique environment.

No stranger to radio, Pierce moved to Southwest Florida in 1963 when his family started a local radio station. "Having a family in the business, you get to start young," recalls Pierce, until recently a longtime Sanibel resident. "So in the '70s

I started working at the radio station from the end of the afternoon shift, at six, until sunset. Of course, part of the year, six is sunset," he laughs, "so during the winter, I was not on the air."

Pierce worked in television as an anchor at the local ABC affiliate in the 1980s and more recently on a weekly public television program about Florida Gulf Coast University. Many recognize his trademark bow tie, which he has worn on-air for twenty-two years.

Now an independent producer of radio programs, Pierce provides programming to stations around the country.

Local audiences can tune in to *The Florida Environment* at 9:07 a.m. Monday through Friday, following the ABC news, on WJPT 106.3-FM; or visit [www.FloridaEnvironment.com](http://www.FloridaEnvironment.com), which gets about 20,000 visitors per week.

— Libby Boren McMillan

## RETIREMENT'S FOR THE DOGS

Thirteen years ago, when Britons Diane and Peter Sheppard sold their nightclub in England and retired to Florida, they planned a life of sunshine and relaxation in their new hometown of LaBelle.

"We're working harder than we ever did," remarks Diane as she explains why she started Animal Rescue, Inc., a non-profit, no-kill animal shelter. On any given day, about forty cats and 100 dogs call it home while awaiting adoption.

"I grew up loving animals. We brought our dog and our horse over here because I don't believe in leaving animals. It's like leaving your grandmother.

"We wanted to adopt another dog when

we came here and no one knew of a place." At the Animal Control Department, she says, "The guy was surprised I wanted to adopt and didn't know where to put the adoption fee. That's what opened my eyes."

Diane was also shocked to find so many abandoned animals in the area and soon began rescuing them. Until the shelter became a 501(C) (3) organization, "My husband financed me for a long time and I nearly pulled him under. We always need donations," she says.

The animals that are adopted are spayed or neutered and have their shots. Her new dream is to get enough subsidies to set up a low-cost spay and neuter program. (Donations may be sent to Animal Rescue,



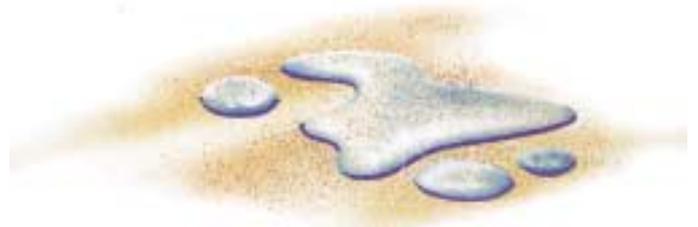
PHOTO COURTESY OF DIANE SHEPPARD

**Diane Sheppard**

Inc., P.O. Box 2441, LaBelle, FL 33975, or call 863/612-0228.)

— Libby Grimm

# WAVES



PHOTOS BY KATHLEEN BLASE

**Sgt. Michael Murray**

## HURRICANE WATCH

As acting commander of the Sanibel Police Department and director of the Emergency Management Plan, Sgt. Michael “Moon” Murray is in charge of getting islanders to respond to evacuation orders. “I don’t want to scare people, but there will come a time when they need to take leaving the island seriously,” he says. “We don’t know when, but a serious storm or hurricane will eventually happen.”

Murray, who has been with the Sanibel Police for eighteen years, assumed charge of emergency management just before this year’s hurricane season.

It’s not newcomers and vacationers that Murray is worried about. “The people who have been here the longest are the least apt to leave because they’ve been through other situations where nothing really happened. They have a false sense of security.”

Sanibel has a new system in place so that as soon as Lee County officials mandate an evacuation, the system will notify people by phone to get off the island.

“It’s basically a reverse-911—a communicator that will ring into people’s homes and tell them to evacuate,” he says. Murray hopes that no one will have to learn the hard way. “I just want people to be safe. It sure beats the alternative.”

—Barbara Linstrom-Arnold

## MARKETING MIRACLES

Bet you’d never guess that a Sanibel resident is one of the most prolific producers of infomercials in America. “We’ve done everything from kitchen gadgets to sporting goods,” including miracle fishing lures and “slash-your-own garlic,” says Don Abbott, owner of Abbott Productions. “One of our big niches that we’ve done over the past five years is in the real estate seminar business, getting people in the seats for real estate seminars in the major markets.”

Abbott’s twenty-one-year broadcasting career in Indianapolis and Ohio included his own drive-time radio show and television variety show. At the time, he had a very strong opinion about infomercials. “I did not *ever* want to get into that,” he says, laughing. But then he saw its potential. “I began to specialize in something that all the advertising industry was casting aside as a dirty sheet.”

One of Abbott’s first infomercial clients was Captran Resort Company, the genesis of timeshare, conceived by Lee County resident Keith Trowbridge. “They were big clients in the late ’70s,” says Abbott. “We got them through an agency in Indianapolis and started coming down here doing TV production for Keith and his companies. We were doing all of his national promotions with Dick Van Patten.

“We figured that we could operate just as well out of Lee County as anywhere else,” so in 1981 Abbott moved his company, wife Betty, and daughter Liz to Florida.

For Abbott Productions, the emphasis is on marketing, not television. “Abbott Productions is a marketing company; we just happen to have the facilities to produce commercials. We’re one of the few companies in the world that does it all, complete turnkey—concept, script, mar-



**Don Abbott**

ket research, and production.”

For each infomercial, he generates reports by the minute that show when the phones rang during each show. “We can compare the orders to the script and see exactly when we got the orders,” he says. “If a show has a weaker segment, the script will be rewritten to pump up sales at that point.” And then, of course, there are the operators.

“There’s a corporation in Omaha that we work with,” says Abbott, “with 4,000 operators on duty, twenty-four hours a day. We also use operators in India for our 800 numbers at 2:30 in the morning; they’re English-speaking with English education. It’s the middle of the afternoon, they’re very up and productive.”

The indefatigable Abbott is also an inventor, having come up with patents on kids’ games, sporting goods, and even pulsing lights on airplane wings.

—Libby Boren McMillan

## LEADING THE RACE

Triathlete Merri Murphy, 47, laughs when she explains she started running at age 35 “because I was running from 40.” It soon became a way of life. “I keep getting better,” she says. “You get addicted.”

She enters about five triathlons yearly for her personal best.

She and her husband, Michael, have lived for 20 years on Sanibel, where they own and operate a landscaping business. Michael trains with her but doesn't compete.

“Training smart is important,” Merri notes. “That means cross training and that's why I like triathlons so much. I love to kayak. I love skeet shooting. I'm a participant, not a competitor!”

It's that enthusiasm that led the Murphys to help organize the first Sanibel Triathlon in 2001. This year, they are race directors for Sanibel Triathlon 2002, Sept. 8 at Sundial Beach Resort.

“The proceeds benefit The Sanibel

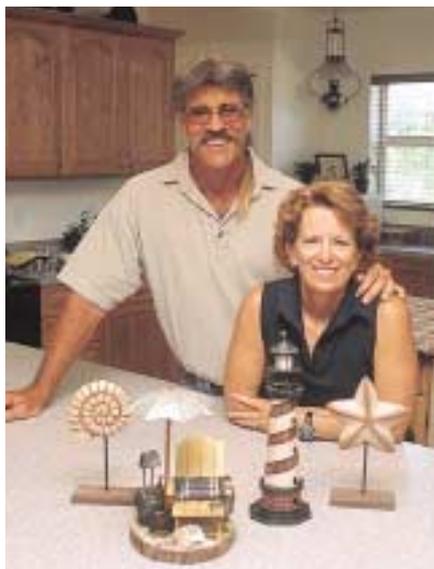


PHOTO BY LIBBY GRIMM

**Michael and Merri Murphy**

School intramural sports program, which is so important,” Michael says. “Teams keep kids from forming gangs, and sports help that transition to high school. Our daughter, Summer, is now 20 and was

always really involved in sports.”

Merri adds, “If I can turn anybody on to sports, it's a thrill. For Triathlon 2002, we also added teams of two or three people to encourage people they *can* do it. Within two or three years, people often become triathletes.

“If people would only try sports! What difference does it make what time you get? A guy said to me he was 27 and no way could he start running. I said, ‘You need a positive mind.’ You feel how great it is. It's a healthier lifestyle.”

The Sanibel Triathlon takes a year of planning. “We knew a triathlon would work as a benefit on Sanibel. There's nowhere more beautiful. Often, smaller races are best, so we keep this one at 250 entrants.”

Ironically, although Merri Murphy tests the course a week before the race, she's been much too busy each year to enter it herself.

— Libby Grimm

## CREATING A COSTA RICAN PARADISE

Former islander Cindy Coop has taken what she loves most about Sanibel and applied it in a very real way to a coastal community in Costa Rica.

“I never thought I'd find a place more beautiful than Sanibel,” says Coop, an Indiana native who vacationed on the island since she was a little girl and lived there in the '80s.

It was while working at the Santiva Lazy Flamingo that a chance encounter led Coop to visit Costa Rica for the first time in 1989. That visit ended up turning into a lifelong love for a village called Dominical on the Pacific Coast.

“I think it's one of the most beautiful places in Costa Rica, because in other places the mountains are set back, but here they come right down to the ocean,” says Coop.

Having purchased farmland there with her partner, a surfer who died of melanoma two years ago, Coop ended up owning the majority of the small town.

“We had the opportunity to buy most of the town but about seven acres,” she says. “It's not like we went in as develop-



PHOTO BY KATHLEEN BLASE

**Cindy Coop**

ers. We moved there because the land was inexpensive and barely inhabited. It was really jungly and really wild.”

Over the years, Coop has made her

mark on Dominical, which was inhabited by about 200 people when she first moved there. Now, the town boasts 5,000 inhabitants in high season and about 2,000 in the rainy season.

Coop contributed to the growth and sophistication of the once-sleepy jungle village. “Since we owned the majority of the town, we went through the government and the tourist agency and local municipality and basically zoned the whole place,” she says.

When she first moved there, the drive to the closest supermarket was about two and a half hours. That changed when Coop developed a small strip mall, which included a grocery store, in tasteful Sanibel fashion. She's also developed a gated community with mountain homesites, a luxury apartment complex, and is currently looking for investors to develop her beachfront property in an environmentally conscious manner.

“I've really enjoyed slowly developing it in a way that looks like Sanibel; you know, very green, nice, and low key,” she says.

— Barbara Linstrom-Arnold

# Diamond in the Rough



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# Visitors' Views

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



PHOTO COURTESY OF DEBORAH WOLFE

Deborah Wolfe

## UNLEASH THE GOOD DOG IN YOUR PET

Got a cranky cat or a cantankerous canine? Keep an eye out for best-selling Canadian author/pet therapist/columnist/radio and TV personality Deborah Wolfe. Wolfe visits Captiva annually from the Vancouver area when she manages to extract herself from an oh-so-busy schedule of solving pet problems.

Her book, *Good Dog! Positive Dog*

*Training Techniques*, is headed for its fifth printing.

"All dogs want to be good dogs," declares Wolfe, who has taken animal behavior courses but relies heavily on instinct and observation.

She also hosts a one-hour radio program, which is simulcast online. "I sit out here on my farm and talk to the world," she says happily. "I hear from people with dogs and cats, and then I have to

give practical, workable advice that they understand within a minute." The day following each radio broadcast brings more e-mail questions from around the world.

"The farm" is Camp Good Dog—five acres of forest, meadow, river, and pond. It's a boarding and training facility for up to fifty doggie guests. Twelve cats, two dogs, 100 chickens, ten ducks, eight goats, and one special human companion also call Camp Good Dog home. "I also have a resident blue heron, a couple of eagles, spawning salmon in our creek, frogs, and trees taller than Rockefeller Center everywhere," says Wolfe.

The trainer's latest undertaking: She's just been cast in a Canadian television series called *Doggin' It* on the Global Network. "My segment is training and behavioral problems," she explains. "In a six-minute segment I show the dog's bad habit at its worst, then I show how to replace it with a good one....The dog goes from being naughty to being sweet. It's like magic!"

Wolfe also tours as a pet therapist, going to live shows and training problem dogs on the spot. Area newspapers hold pre-arrival contests for the "baddest dog" in town, then those troublesome pooches go on stage and Wolfe works her magic.

Captiva has long been a favorite getaway since Wolfe's parents, Barbara and Alfie Magerman, discovered it twenty-five years ago. "It's nice to sit in the heat and watch dolphins coming and going," she says. "The bird life is incredible. A special highlight is getting to experience manatee or having a close call with dolphin."

Check out Wolfe's advice, book, and more at [www.CampGoodDog.com](http://www.CampGoodDog.com).

— Libby Boren McMillan

*Making Waves* is *Times of the Islands'* honor roll for Southwest Floridians who, in their everyday lives, make the community and the Lee Island Coast special. If you know of someone who deserves recognition, call us at 239/472-0205 or 239/472-0629.