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Ahh... Spring!

The poets have it right, spring really is the best time of the year. Months of cool wet weather give way to spurts of new growth as grass and flowers stretch toward the sky and life once again begins anew. Places seem brighter, life seems fuller, and people's dispositions most definitely take a turn for the better. Even the air has the scent of opportunity as high spirits and optimism abound. It is a time of magic and promise, where almost anything can happen and often does.

Life in Southwest Florida is especially pleasant in the single digit months of March and April. The days stretch out long and warm, melting into balmy evenings ideal for long walks along the edge of the Gulf, watching as angry winter waters are transformed into a more pale and placid place.

The islands of Southwest Florida especially offer much to do for both residents and visitors. Like the newly risen flowers, a fresh crop of wondrous activities calls out, just waiting to be discovered and enjoyed.

The theme of this issue of *Times of the Islands* is "In Bloom," as for many people spring is a time to plant. An opportunity to use bare hands to dig deep into fresh earth, to break up stubborn clumps of dirt, and sow the land with living things from vegetables to flowers to tall palm trees, undeterred by crescents of soil embedded beneath previously well-manicured fingernails. The ritual is a symbolic return to our roots and a reaffirmation of life.

Within these pages we'll take you to a few places where growing is a way of life, from a stroll through the Florida

Botanical Gardens and ECHO's Incredible Edible Nursery to practical tips on how to landscape in Southwest Florida. You'll also meet a man whose job it is to control that pest of all pests, the mosquito.

For those whose tastes run to more intellectual pursuits, we offer some insight into the creative mind with interviews with notable celebrities who either reside locally or have used Florida as inspiration for their work, including Jeff Lindsay, author of the series of books that led to the Showtime hit series *Dexter*; an interview with Susan Orlean, author of *The Orchid Thief*, based on mischief that actually took place in Florida's Fakahatchee Strand State Preserve; and a conversation with locally based writer Stuart Pepper regarding his movie, *Royal Face Off*.

Finally, if spring brings anything to the human race it is the spirit of hope. In "Mile Marker 50" a group of long-time friends renew their bonds on the occasion of a 50th birthday, with some adventurous antics on the Outer Banks. And you'll be touched by football great Jim Kelly's very personal battle against a killer disease through his Foundation of Hope.

We hope that this issue of *Times of the Islands* brings a ray of sunshine into your life—if only briefly—during this very special season of renewal.

Glenn V. Ostle

Department Editor, Times of the Islands