

MAY 2023

FISH LINES NEWSLETTER

onward and upward

HELPING HANDS: ASSISTING OUR ISLAND SENIORS



Hurricane Ian is known as one of the most destructive storms in US history. FISH OF SANCAP is continuing to assist the residents and workforce of Sanibel and Captiva islands.

More than eight months after the storm, residents and businesses, including the FISH building, are still without electricity and running water. "Even though we are facing tremendous obstacles ourselves, we are still providing necessary supplies and resources to those we serve," said Maria Espinoza, Executive Director. "It's a little discouraging knowing that we are coming into the heat and humidity of the summer months, and another hurricane season, but we are working hard to resolve our own building issues while continuing to help our neighbors." The FISH food pantry, located at 2430 Periwinkle Way, has been and continues to provide water, shelf stable food, cleaning and hygiene supplies and more.



FISH is providing all types of assistance for long term recovery to community members. "The struggles are real," says Meghan Overtson. "My home was severely damaged and I'm now deciding whether it's worth it to repair, or if I have to tear it down. Meghan reached out to FISH after learning her insurance settlement was far lower than she expected.

"My wind insurance is saying it was the flood that caused the damage, flood is saying it was the wind, and never the two shall meet," continues Meghan. According to a recent story on *Bay News 9*, 'State data shows that of the more than 700,000 insurance claims from Hurricane Ian, roughly a third have been rejected or remain unpaid. That is despite the fact that insurance companies in Florida are supposed to settle claims within a 90-day window. That window closed in December and yet people are still in limbo.'

Meghan spent time in a shelter after Ian, which she believes landed her in the hospital with pneumonia. Meghan is an older adult who has lived alone on Sanibel for the past two decades. "I wasn't eating properly or getting enough rest," she said. "What started as a cold quickly turned into a persistent cough, shortness of breath and a high fever. It's when my lips started turning bluish that I knew I had a serious thing going on."

continued on next page

2430-B Periwinkle Way, Sanibel FL 33957
Temporary Mailing Address: 15550 McGregor Boulevard, Suite 204, Fort Myers, FL 33908
239.472.4775 ~ fishofsancap.org ~ email: info@fishofsancap.org





Meghan's story, continued

After being released from the hospital, Meghan secured a hotel as a temporary living space. "FISH was so helpful to me with the FEMA application and appeal process. It took a while – several appeals -- but FEMA finally came through for me. If I didn't have the FISH team on my side guiding me through the process, I probably would have given up and then I don't know where I'd be," she continues.

Meghan will stay in the hotel and continue to work with her insurance company for the repair or rebuilding of her home. FISH is providing food and supplies for her health and well-being, and is ready to assist with rebuilding supplies, furnishings and other supports she may need. "I think the hardest part of this, besides losing literally everything I had, is not being able to see an end in sight," says Meghan. "I feel like I'm going in circles on a daily basis, and most days don't seem to get very much accomplished. At this point, I'm concerned about my mental wellness." FISH is providing resources for Meghan and others that include group and individual counseling.

FISH has also connected her with peers to create a support system and social outlet. "I met a really nice lady my age who is going through something similar," continues Meghan. "We all have the same story, but our individual responses and outcomes are different. It's nice to have someone to talk to, compare notes with and bounce ideas off of." Meghan and her new friend share transportation and are looking forward to joining the FISH monthly luncheon (Friendly Faces) on the island. "I still get sad when I go to Sanibel and see what's left of my home, but now I have something to look forward to and someone to share a meal with." Friendly Faces, a monthly socialization luncheon, was recently reinstated after Ian and will be held on June 13 at the Sanibel Recreation Center, 3880 Sanibel-Captiva Road.

"I'm sure they hear this all the time, but I can't thank FISH enough for the help they continue to provide me. Small or large, FISH covers the needs of everyone and always, I mean always, makes you feel important and heard."

FISH HURRICANE PREPAREDNESS PACKET



As many continue to restore and rebuild, the Atlantic hurricane season is less than one month away. We are encouraging everyone to plan and prepare for the hurricane season ahead and are providing our resource packet, available now, to anyone who requests.

To receive a free Hurricane Resource Packet, please contact the FISH Walk-In Center at 239-472-4775 or email erika@fishofsancap.org. Packets may be downloaded at fishofsancap.org, on the [Hurricane Ian Resources](#) or [Social & Senior Services](#) page.

Appointments may be arranged for those who would like a more detailed discussion on how to prepare for hurricane season.



FISH LINES

WITH FISH HURRICANE PREPAREDNESS PACKETS

FISH is committed to the safety and well-being of our island neighbors, and hurricane season is no exception. Hurricane hazards come in many forms, including storm surge, heavy rainfall, inland flooding, high winds, etc.

It is essential to be ready before a storm approaches. FISH can help.

WEATHERING THE STORM together



Our annual **FISH Hurricane Preparedness Packet** is a valuable island resource available to anyone who requests it. The packet provides detailed information on where to go, what to do, and how/when to begin preparing for hurricane season, including:

- Suggested Do's and Don'ts
- List of Hotels
- Check Lists
- Pet Information
- Evacuation Routes
- City of Sanibel Hurricane Pass Application
- Special Needs Application
- List of Shelters/Map
- Hotline Numbers

If you or someone you know could benefit from this packet or program, please contact us. Packets can be picked up at the FISH Walk-In Center at **2430-B Periwinkle Way, Sanibel** or at our temporary office at **15550 McGregor Blvd, Suite 204, Fort Myers** and are available for download at fishofsancap.org. For a packet by mail, contact FISH by calling **239.472.4775** or email clientservices@fishofsancap.org.



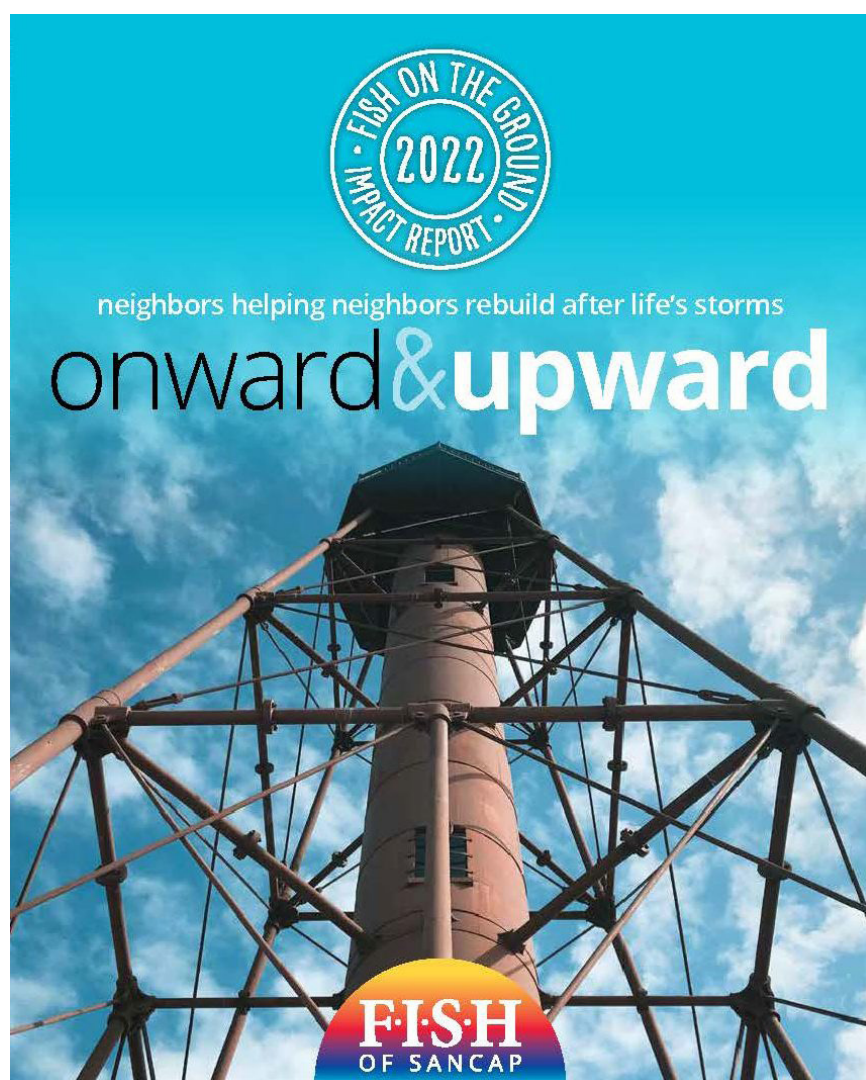
neighbors helping neighbors

2430-B Periwinkle Way, Sanibel FL 33957 • 239.472.4775 • fishofsancap.org



OUR 2022 IMPACT REPORT IS AVAILABLE!

This is the most challenging times yet for FISH and for our beloved community. We have faced several disasters in the last five years but Hurricane Ian and its path of devastation tops the list. We cannot stress enough how proud we are of FISH, our staff, our volunteers, our community members and partners who have raised the bar for what neighbors helping neighbors means. Additionally, we are grateful for our supporters from around the world. They immediately sprang to action to ensure we had the resources necessary to be some of the first responders on the ground helping our islands in the recovery process.



Like so many homes and buildings on the islands, the FISH Walk-In Center, which has been ground zero for delivering aid to the thousands of service requests we receive annually, was destroyed by storm surge. While we can use the parking area and structure for some distribution of items and storage, we have had to relocate temporarily to an office space in Fort Myers. However, we are committed to rebuilding a new Walk-In Center where anyone in need can find help and hope.

Our islands will be, in many ways, forever changed by this past year. Witnessing the kindness, compassion and commitment of our neighbors to each other proves that the spirit of community on which FISH is founded is stronger than ever. **We have stood with Sanibel and Captiva for more than 40 years and we will continue to serve as YOUR island social service organization long into the future.** There is only one way to go from here—**onward and upward.**

[Please visit our website to review our Onward & Upward 2022 Impact Report](#)



IMPACT 2022 FACTS

food programs • island based education • social & senior services • helping hands & financial assistance

 FISH ANSWERED
75,995
SERVICE REQUESTS


3,233
MEALS-BY-FISH
WERE DISTRIBUTED


1,632
REASSURANCE
CALLS
MADE TO ISLAND SENIORS

518 
SMILE BOXES
CHEERED SENIORS


4,041
FOOD BACKPACKS
WERE DISTRIBUTED FOR KIDS


9,500
EMERGENCY SUPPLIES

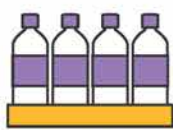

1,085
HOLIDAY MEALS DISTRIBUTED


5,722
FOOD PANTRY
VISITS
UTILIZING
259,270
POUNDS OF FOOD

240 
HURRICANE
PACKETS DISTRIBUTED

1,080 
BUCKETS OF CLEANING
SUPPLIES DISTRIBUTED POST IAN


442
BIKES
DISTRIBUTED


10,341
CASES OF WATER
DISTRIBUTED POST IAN


24,000
10 LB BAGS OF ICE
DISTRIBUTED POST IAN


419
PRE & POST IAN
HURRICANE CALLS

CHANGING LIVES IN OUR COMMUNITIES SINCE 1982

Please consider FISH as your island nonprofit partner.

93% of every dollar spent goes directly to our over 30 programs and services. Together, we will continue to be there to remove obstacles, fill in the cracks, and meet individual needs—*neighbors helping neighbors.*

2430-B Periwinkle Way, Sanibel FL 33957 239.472.4775 • fishofsancap.org





FISH FRIENDLY FACES RETURNS - IN PERSON AT THE REC CENTER!

Islanders, friends and family are invited to the community-wide FISH OF SANCAP Friendly Faces Luncheon, scheduled for Tues., June 13 beginning at 11:00am. Lunch, prepared by The Sanibel Deli, consists of a cold entree, side and dessert. The cost of the luncheon is complimentary to participants.



The Friendly Faces luncheon has been a tradition offered by FISH for many years that has been postponed since Ian's landfall. "We are thrilled to bring back our luncheon and to reconnect with community members we haven't seen for a while," says Erika Broyles, Senior Services Director, FISH. "Friendly Faces is a great way to catch up with friends and make new connections – something we've missed since so many have been displaced by Hurricane Ian. We cannot wait to see all your smiling, friendly faces!

The monthly luncheon will be held at the Sanibel Recreation Center located at 3880 Sanibel-Captiva Road, Sanibel and a virtual option will also be provided. Reservations and meal choices are required by Fri., June 9 to the FISH Walk-In-Center, 239-472-4775. Zoom instructions for those joining virtually will be provided with RSVP. Unfortunately, there will be no meal delivery available for virtual participants.

Guest speaker Chris Lechowicz, a herpetologist, and the Wildlife & Habitat Management Program Director at SCCF, will discuss the post hurricane impact on the islands' wildlife. Chris, who grew up on the southwest side of Chicago, had a strong interest in nature at a very young age, especially with amphibians and reptiles. His passion for all things slimy and scaled led him to the Chicago Herpetological Society where he was mentored by numerous knowledgeable members and visiting scientists.

Chris has two Bachelor of Science (B.S.) degrees in Zoology and Computer Science from Southern Illinois University at Carbondale (SIU) and a Master of Science (M.S.) degree in Environmental Science from Florida Gulf Coast University (FGCU). He began working at SCCF in 2002 and is the Director of the Wildlife Habitat Management Program and staff herpetologist. As land manager, he oversees SCCF's nearly 2000 acres of conservation land with the help of his field technicians. He is a member of the Turtle Survival Alliance, the IUCN/SCC Tortoise and Freshwater Turtle Specialist Group, a board member of the Florida Turtle Conservation Trust, and an active member of the local herp society (Calusa Herpetological Society).

"It's an honor to host Chris, and we're looking forward to learning more about the wildlife and ecosystems on the islands," said Erika Broyles.



COMMUNITY SUPPORT

FISH could not provide the programs and services we do without the unwavering support of our volunteers! Our volunteers graciously provided over **7,400** hours of service and drove over **20,000** miles of behalf of FISH and our neighbors in 2022.

Below is a testimonial from Jim and Joan Bajek about what it means to them to be *neighbors helping neighbors*.

"Volunteering has always been part of our lives. Together, we try to make our community a better place for all. When we moved to Sanibel a little over 6 years ago we had many volunteering choices. FISH caught our attention because of the number of different programs that help those in need. We work in the food pantry, pick up food donated by the Midwest Food Bank, deliver meals, provide medical equipment and transport assistance and help with the many holiday programs. It became easy to get drawn into the action and meet so many people. It's made a positive impact on those that need it the most and on us since we have the time and resources to devote to the effort. We love seeing the smiling faces and kind words from those receiving help. Knowing we have become a vital part of the Sanibel community spirit fuels our desire to continue giving. Hurricane Ian turned our lives upside down putting the brakes on our volunteer work while we regained our composure, purchased replacement vehicles and began restoration of our home and property just like so many others on the island. We couldn't stay away from volunteering very long and so we reconnected as soon as we were able to with FISH. We are volunteering again and enjoy seeing those smiles from everyone again and look forward to seeing the FISH building being restored bigger and better than ever!"

Jim & Joan Bajek





JERRY'S FOOD BAGS

Thank you Jerry's for providing food bags for purchase to support our food pantry! Premade bags may be purchased for \$15.00 and will be donated to help our neighbors in need.



ISLANDS NIGHT!

We were so excited the tradition continued with the annual Islands Night at Hammond Stadium! Our team enjoyed the celebratory evening with islanders, friends and family.





FISH LINES

CALLING ALL FRIENDS OF FISH!

Our annual Race 4 F.I.S.H. is one of our major annual fundraisers and we want to bring it back to our community in 2023 by planning something **grand!** We are looking for additional members to assist us in planning, coordinating and executing a great event for 2023! Currently we meet via Zoom on the last Friday of the month, beginning at 10:00am to discuss ideas, materials, coordination, and more! You don't need to be a runner to become a race committee member! For additional information, please contact [Diane](#) or [Nicole](#).



MAY IS MENTAL HEALTH AWARENESS MONTH

The theme of Mental Health Awareness Month 2023 is "Look Around, Look Within," according to Mental Health America. Mental health professionals' aim is to emphasize the ways that our surroundings — like safe and stable housing, healthy home lives, neighborhoods and cities, and nature — affect our mental health.

Mental Health Awareness Month

YOU MATTER

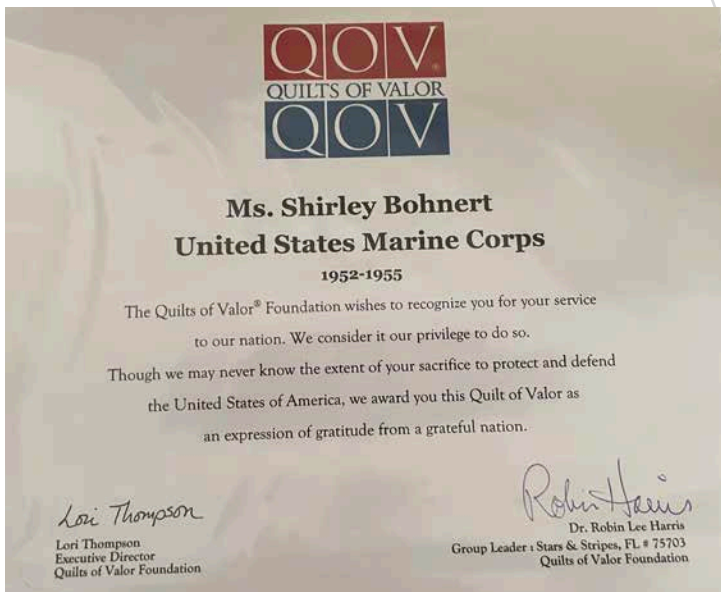
If you need resources for
mental health and well being,
please contact us at
239.472.4775





HONORING SHIRLEY BOHNERT!

Congratulations FISH volunteer and former FISH board member Shirley Bohnert for receiving a Quilt of Valor for your service! Shirley served in the United States Marine Corps 1952-1955 and we thank Shirley for her service!



★ ★ ★ ★ ★
**WE ARE CLOSED FOR
MEMORIAL DAY
MAY 29, 2023**

REMEMBER & HONOR



WE NEED GREAT PEOPLE LIKE YOU!

As we move toward summer months and some of our volunteers return to their 'up north' homes, we are in need of additional volunteers to assist. Please contact us to sign-up as a FISH volunteer or to answer any volunteer questions you may have. It's a great way to connect and serve the community!



ABOUT FISH

FISH of SanCap is a nonprofit, staffed by more than 200 volunteers. Professionals staff our Sanibel site and our temporary Fort Myers location and are available Mon. through Fri. to assist islanders and visitors with an array of services and programs. FISH is Sanibel and Captiva's only *neighbors helping neighbors* organization offering a range of human services including:

- **Temporary Emergency Financial Assistance**
- **Disaster Assistance**
- **Limited Food Pantry**
- **Medical Equipment Loan**
- **Hot Meals Program**
- **Kid's Food Backpack (coming soon)**
- **Youth Scholarships**
- **Referrals & Resources**
- **Furniture Distribution**
- **VITA (Income Tax Preparation)**

