

AUGUST 2023

FISH LINES NEWSLETTER

onward and upward

FISH Begins New Chapter with Bookstore Purchase; Future Plan Will Centralize Local Programs



FISH OF SANCAP plans to create a one-stop shop serving local families with the purchase of a former bookstore next to its current location. Eventually, FISH will create a welcoming setting to house programs that address immediate and long-term needs.

Maggi Feiner, President & CEO states, " FISH now owns the former Gene's Books, 2422 Periwinkle. It is located next to FISH's existing building which was severely damaged by Hurricane Ian and requires a long-term rebuild."

Photo caption, L to R:

Greg Blurton, Treasurer; Kathy Samson, Director; Ellen Sloan, Board Vice Chair; John Morse, Board Chair Emeritus; Maggi Feiner, President & CEO; Maria Espinoza, Executive Director

The purchase of Gene's Book will soon house the food pantry as well as many of our other programs. Eventually both buildings will host programs under FISH's four major pillars – Food, Island-Based Education, Social and Senior Services, and Helping Hands – in addition to long-term recovery services.

"Right now we're working to get the Gene's location ready to house our pantry, one of the larger programs at FISH," said Maria Espinoza, Executive Director. "We will remain fully operational through this transition, serving our island community as we've done for over 40 years."

By expanding its footprint, FISH is helping preserve the legacy of Gene's Books as a community servant, Espinoza said. The business recently announced on social media that it would not reopen in the wake of Hurricane Ian.

"Gene's Books has been a great neighbor and supporter of FISH, sustaining many of our programs through in-kind and financial support," said Jim Metzler, Board Chair. "We're sad to see the store leave the island, yet we're thrilled that they wanted to work with us to write this new chapter for Sanibel and Captiva."

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





FISH Building, continued

Gene's Books opened its 2422 Periwinkle location in late 2019 but has been on Sanibel for almost 10 years. In deciding last January to close, the owners' announcement said in part:

"No natural disaster can diminish our memories or rob us of our passion for the written word. This is the update none of us wished for, but we downright refuse to let go of this amazing community of people. It may seem like Hurricane Ian wrote the last chapter for Gene's Books, but really it's just the beginning of something else. Instead of wallowing in our loss, we are choosing to remain hopeful about the future."



As FISH continues to assist island residents and workers still struggling since Ian, the agency sees the need to grow to meet the needs of long-term recovery.

"We are committed to providing services for as long as it takes," said Espinoza. "Our 2430 building was already tight on space before the hurricane. Now that we are expanding and adding new programs, the extra space will help us serve more people."

A timetable for the expansion is still in the works, according to Espinoza.

Through collaboration and hard work, FISH is helping the community rebuild and recover. FISH continues to provide long-term services for survivors who live or work on Sanibel and Captiva Islands. For requests beyond what FISH can provide, the agency connects with others to provide disaster case management and alternate funding options. Since Ian, Espinoza has joined the Health and Social Service Branch of the Resilience Lee Task Force, the Lee County Unmet Needs Governing Board, and she received the Rotary District Disaster Response award.

The FISH team can be found at their food pantry location, 2430 Periwinkle Way, Monday-Friday from 10 a.m. to 2 p.m., and at The Gathering Place (formerly Noah's Ark), 2304 Periwinkle Way, on Monday, Wednesday and Friday from 10 a.m. to 4 p.m.

More information about FISH is available online at fishofsancap.org, as well as Facebook, Instagram and X (formerly Twitter). For details about hurricane recovery and other services, contact Maria Espinoza, FISH Executive Director, at (239) 472-4775.



HELPING FAMILIES AND CHILDREN AFTER IAN

FISH assists the residents and workforce of Sanibel and Captiva islands by providing long-term disaster recovery services.

“We’re working hard to provide financial, emotional and other types of assistance to residents and our workforce,” said Maria Espinoza, Executive Director. “Many have been struggling since Ian, and we want everyone to know that FISH is here to help. We are working with community members to determine obstacles. From there, we help solve unmet needs through collaboration with agencies and present cases to our partners for additional assistance outside of our scope.”

Ava Gold was preparing for knee replacement surgery before Hurricane Ian hit. Because of the storm and the damage it caused to her home and work place, she decided to postpone surgery and focus on disaster recovery. “I was in a lot of pain and knew I needed the surgery, but in the panic of the storm and the chaos that followed, I went into survival mode and thought finding an alternate living space and a job should take priority.” Ava worked as a server on Captiva and lived on Sanibel in a rental unit. The name of the individual in this release has been changed to protect privacy.



Ava, who had been using the food pantry prior to Ian, reached out to us for assistance with her FEMA application. “FISH was so helpful and walked me through the application and appeal process. I consider myself one of the luckier ones; it only took a few months to receive FEMA funding,” continues Ava. “I used everything in my savings account to make up the difference where FEMA fell short, and was able to find an apartment just off island.”

Once she felt she was in a good place with her housing, Ava rescheduled her knee surgery. “I knew my health insurance wasn’t going to cover the surgery at 100%, so I used a few months of rent money to pay my deductible and other medical expenses,” continues Ava. Although her recovery is going well, it’s taking a bit longer than expected since Ava put off surgery to focus on hurricane recovery. “My plan kind of backfired on me because I thought I would heal faster than I did. The doctor said it would take a longer for me because I waited so long and my knee deteriorated considerably. I reached out to FISH requesting financial assistance for rent and utilities, since I couldn’t go back to work. FISH came through for me, and I am eternally grateful,” notes Ava.

Ava’s struggles don’t end here, however. She is concerned for her adult daughter and her disaster recovery since she ‘lost everything and has nothing to her name’, according to Ava. “I’ve been so depressed since the hurricane and my surgery, and about my daughter’s wellbeing. I’m considering leaving and going up north to my sister’s house for a while,” continues Ava. “It is still so sad on the island, it’s fueling my depression. I think I need to take care of me right now.” *(cont’d on next page)*



Ava, continued

FISH is providing resources and support as Ava contemplates leaving Florida, and are encouraging her to attend our mental health initiative, hosted by us at The Gathering Place and in partnership with SalusCare and Project H.O.P.E. "At this point I'll try anything to get out of my depression and move forward in a place I've called home for many, many years."

Like Ava, many are still struggling since Hurricane Ian. FISH continues to provide long-term recovery services for anyone who lives or works on Sanibel and Captiva Islands. The organization is answering all requests for assistance including emergency financial assistance, providing rebuilding supplies and assisting with medical and mental health referrals and resources.

For those interested in learning more about FISH, please visit our website and social media pages to see firsthand how we work to better the community and our response to the Ian disaster.

FISH HURRICANE PREPAREDNESS PACKET

Annually, FISH, the City of Sanibel, Lee County Emergency Management, and others work together to review plans and any changes for hurricane season. FISH then provides a Hurricane Preparedness Resource Packet with detailed information on where to go, what to do, and how to prepare in the event of an approaching storm. FISH and volunteers verify evacuation routes, flood zones, hotels with generators, shelters, pet accommodations, and more to update the packet annually.

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.

HAVE YOU MOVED?



If your address has changed, even temporarily, please send us an update! Please provide your address, phone number and email as well so we can stay in touch and let you know what we're up to! Changes can be submitted to events@fishofsancap.org



REASSURANCE CALL PROGRAM RETURNS



We are resuming its Reassurance Call Program which has been on hold since Hurricane Ian. Residents and visitors can sign up to receive a friendly phone call from a FISH team member or volunteer. Calls are provided on a frequency determined by the participant – daily, weekly or whatever frequency is preferred.

FISH is keenly focused on the unique circumstances and potential challenges to everyday life of seniors, including loneliness and health and well-being.

In a recent ABC News article by Emma Egan, US Surgeon General calls for action regarding the ongoing 'epidemic of loneliness and isolation' -- Recent research shows half of U.S. adults experienced loneliness daily, attention is

called to the public health crisis of loneliness, isolation, and lack of connection in the United States. The Surgeon General report cites recent research showing that approximately half of U.S. adults experienced loneliness daily, and highlights that a lack of social connection can present significant health risks, as loneliness can increase risk of premature death by 26% and social isolation by 29%. According to the report, insufficient social connection has also been linked to an increased risk of heart disease, stroke, anxiety, depression and dementia. **

The FISH Reassurance Call program provides a telephone call to an older adult who is living alone and/or homebound. The goal is to reduce isolation and loneliness and provide a friendly check-in.

"Many of the seniors in our community are without family or friends nearby, especially since the hurricane forced so many to move to alternate locations while their homes are being repaired or rebuilt," says Erika Broyles, FISH Senior Services Director.

"We want to provide a meaningful opportunity for our seniors to feel connected to the community through an informal and fun conversation. We hope to empower our seniors through this program to stay connected and to develop community relationships that can help combat loneliness."

In 2022, we provided 1,632 reassurance calls to island seniors.

If you or someone you know would benefit from the Reassurance Call program, please contact Erika Broyles, Senior Services Director, 239.472.4775 or erika@fishofsancap.org.

**ABC News



ST. MICHAEL'S & FISH OF SANCAP RESILIENCY HUB AT THE GATHERING PLACE

neighbors helping neighbors

As part of our Long Term Recovery Program FISH OF SANCAP, in partnership with St. Michael & All Angels Episcopal Church and others, is offering services at The Gathering Place, formerly Noah's Ark.



Day	Time	Organization	Topic
Monday	10:00a-4:00p	FISH, Nitza Lopez	disaster relief, financial assistance, disaster resources, etc.
Monday	10:00a-4:00p	SBA	Q&A and assistance
Wednesday	10:00a-4:00p	FISH, Erika Boyles	senior and mental health needs
Wednesday	10:00a-4:00p	SBA	Q&A and assistance
Wednesday	11:00a-12:30p	SalusCare	group therapy focusing on hurricane related topics including PTSD, trauma and loss
Wednesday	12:30p-2:00p	SalusCare, Laura Guarino	mini 1:1 sessions
Wednesday	1:00p-3:00p	Project H.O.P.E.	open discussions on post storm trauma, including mental exhaustion, decision making, financial fears, etc.
Friday	10:00a-4:00p	FISH	overview and assistance
Friday	10:00a-4:00p	SBA	Q&A and assistance

LOCATION:
St. Michael's
(formerly Noah's Ark)
2304 Periwinkle Way
*Enter off Dunlop Road

**If you or someone you know is in need, contact FISH
239-472-4775 info@fishofsancap.org**



FISH continues to help our neighbors in meeting their physical, mental and emotional needs. As always, we are committed to being a safety net for all. **At the end of the day, our message is simple— FISH is for everyone.**

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

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RIBBON CUTTING AT THE GATHERING PLACE





RIBBON CUTTING AT THE GATHERING PLACE





RECORD TURNOUT FOR SCHOOL SUPPLIES DISTRIBUTION



Our school supplies drive assisted an overwhelming number of students with essential items for the 2023/2024 school year. Most of those receiving assistance stated Hurricane Ian unexpected expenses coupled with inflation and reduced work hours were the main reasons for seeking assistance.

“We are tremendously appreciative to our community for their contributions to our Back-to-School drive,” said Maria Espinoza, Executive Director. “The support of businesses, service clubs and individuals helped our students feel confident and organized for the school year.”





JOIN FRIENDS & NEIGHBORS FISH OF SANCAP FRIENDLY FACES LUNCHEON!

neighbors helping neighbors
FRIENDLY FACES LUNCHEON
TUESDAY, SEPTEMBER 12, 11:00A

You're invited to our community-wide Friendly Faces Luncheon, offered at the Rec Center and virtually by Zoom. The cost of the luncheon, provided by community partner Sanibel Deli, is complimentary to guests. Guest speaker Camilita Aldridge, SHINE Program Manager will discuss the following:

- **Medicare Talk:** How Comparing Plans Can Save You Money
- **Medicare's Open Enrollment:** Medicare's Open Enrollment Period -- which begins October 15 -- is a good time to review what you have, compare it with other options, and make sure that your current coverage still meets your needs for the coming year.
- **Questions and help with Medicare costs:** Following the luncheon, SHINE staff will stay onsite from 12pm-1pm. They can talk with you one-on-one to answer questions or discuss financial assistance programs you might be eligible for.



DATE:
Tuesday, Sept. 12

TIME:
Beginning at 11:00 am

LOCATION:
Sanibel Rec Center
3880 SanCap Road
also
Virtual Zoom Call

RSVP:
To Erika Broyles, FISH
By Sept. 8
239-472-4775



Note: Meal selections will be provided upon RSVP. Zoom instructions for those joining virtually will be provided with RSVP. Unfortunately, there will be no meal delivery for virtual participants. Future Friendly Faces luncheons will be held on the second Tuesday of each month throughout 2023.



AUGUST FRIENDLY FACES HIGHLIGHTS

We had a nice turnout for our August Friendly Faces luncheon! Our speaker was Wendy Warner who discussed "You and Your Medications" and guided guests on how to check for medication interactions, how to purchase over the counter medications safely and more!





AUGUST FRIENDLY FACES HIGHLIGHTS





2023 F.I.S.H. 10K/5K SCHEDULED FOR DEC. 2, 2023



This year we are restructuring our race fundraiser to celebrate the resilience of the islands by adding additional activities on race day. We've added a 5K, followed by a family day hosted by the Sanibel Recreation Center. "We feel the 5K will draw additional runners looking to do a shorter race and see it as the perfect opportunity to add other festivities to celebrate our islands," said Cortese who has been a volunteer committee member for 9 years. Joining Cortese as co-chair is Leah Winkler, new to the committee this year, who notes her eagerness to make this year's event 'nothing short of spectacular'.

While other activities are still in planning stages, we have partnered with the 'Rec' Center to offer a kids' race and family fun day following the 10K/5K. "The Sanibel Recreation Department is excited to partner with FISH to offer a fun-filled holiday themed event, with something for everyone, at the Recreation Center immediately

following the Dec. 2nd FISH 10K/5K. We look forward to bringing the community together again for some holiday joy! Stay tuned for more event details," said Andrea Miller, Recreation Director, City of Sanibel. We hope to announce other race day activities soon. "Our islands have been through a lot since Ian, and FISH has been here every step of the way. We want our race event to be joyous and one that not only raises funds but also celebrates our community and how far we've come since Ian," says Maria Espinoza, FISH Executive Director.

Runner registration is currently open on [RunSignUp](#). Fees for registration are tiered, as follows:

- In-person 10K/5K - \$45.00 through Sept. 25th
- In-person 10K/5K - \$50.00 Sept. 26th- Dec. 1st
- In-person 10K/5K - \$55.00 Dec. 2nd, registration available from 6:30am-7:15am
- Virtual for FISH 10K/5K - \$50.00
- Special rate for 18 and under for in-person 10K/5K - \$35.00 until Dec. 1st

This year's race marks the first in-person event in recent years. In 2020-2021 we offered a virtual only race due to COVID and canceled the 2022 event due to Hurricane Ian. The 2023 10K/5K will also offer a virtual option, but we encourage runners to join in-person and stay on the islands for the day or weekend.

Support for the race is critical as FISH continues to serve the residents and workforce of the islands. Sponsorship opportunities are available at various levels and can be found on the organization's website, [fishofsancap.org](#). For additional information on the 10K/5K Race including sponsorship, please contact [Diane Cortese](#) at or [Leah Winkler](#).



FISH LINES

REGISTER TODAY!



2023

FISH

10K/5K

Saturday, December 2

RACING BEGINS 7:30a *race day registration from 6:30-7:15a*

Come celebrate the islands at our 15th annual road race! Join us for a great day including a 10K & 5K run followed by a kids' fun run & family day hosted by—and in partnership with—the Sanibel Recreation Center.

Visit RunSignUp.com for details and to register, or simply scan this code!

The earlier you register, the less you pay! Registration pricing is as follows:

- In-person 10K/5K—through Sept 25th—\$45
- In-person 10K/5K—Sept 26th through Dec 1st—\$50
- In-person 10K/5K—on race day, Dec 2nd—\$55
- Virtual 10K/5K—\$50
- 18 and under in-person 10K/5K—through Dec 1st—\$35

Sponsorship opportunities are available. For additional information, contact:
Diane Cortese, dianerc10@gmail.com OR *Leah Winkler, leahwinkler12@gmail.com*



SCAN HERE!



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

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



TEAM MEETINGS & TRAININGS!

Maria (L) and Manuela (R) at the Better Together Facilitator Workshop hosted by World Renew in Orlando with Kathy Strader (Red Cross Orlando), middle



Manuela (2nd from L) and Andrea (R) at the Harry Chapin Summit





COMMUNITY SUPPORT - THANK YOU BETSY & BILL

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 Betsy and Bill Baumgartner about what it means to be *neighbors helping neighbors*.

"Like so many of us who live on Sanibel, we were shocked and saddened to see our island devastated and so many residents whose homes were damaged or destroyed by Ian. After arriving on Sanibel in late October, once the causeway was open, we surveyed the damage to our home. We felt fortunate that our upper level was spared--the windows and roof held. We lost everything in our lower level which had a 3-1/2 foot storm surge. Our next-door neighbors were amazing. They stopped over and proceeded to help us remove the drywall and suction out the elevator pit. With the upper level ok and water, power and sewer restored, we moved in and started the repair process.

This storm brought neighbors together in wonderful ways, helping and assisting each other. We saw a notice that, due to the storm, several volunteers at FISH were not returning to the island. We were familiar with FISH but had not volunteered. We contacted the office who explained the needs of the organization. We chose to volunteer on Monday mornings and were touched by the people who came to the food pantry. They were island residents as well as workers who had come for help. Everyone had a story, mostly sad, but always optimistic. The pantry was initially in a tent in the parking lot until the building was able to be inhabited. The raccoons thought the pantry was for them and would help themselves each night to anything that wasn't boxed up. Once the building was secure, we moved inside to the dismay of our neighboring raccoons.

*For us, it was a small effort to help out. We enjoyed sharing stories with other volunteers, of whom there are many, working with the dedicated FISH staff and assisting people who came to the food pantry. We learned a lot about what FISH provides to assist Island residents, including a bike giveaway courtesy of Billy's Bikes, supplying drywall and other house needs and a program for fresh vegetables courtesy of the Farmer's Market. We look forward to continued volunteering when we return this fall." *Betsy & Bill**



We are so proud of all of our volunteers and enjoy hearing your stories that highlight your efforts! Many of our volunteers continue to help us even though they are personally affected by Ian, and that has not gone unnoticed. It's heartwarming to learn what it means to you to be a neighbor helping neighbors, particularly during the impact and aftermath of Hurricane Ian.



WE NEED GREAT PEOPLE LIKE YOU!

We're always in need of additional volunteers to assist with our programs and events. 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.

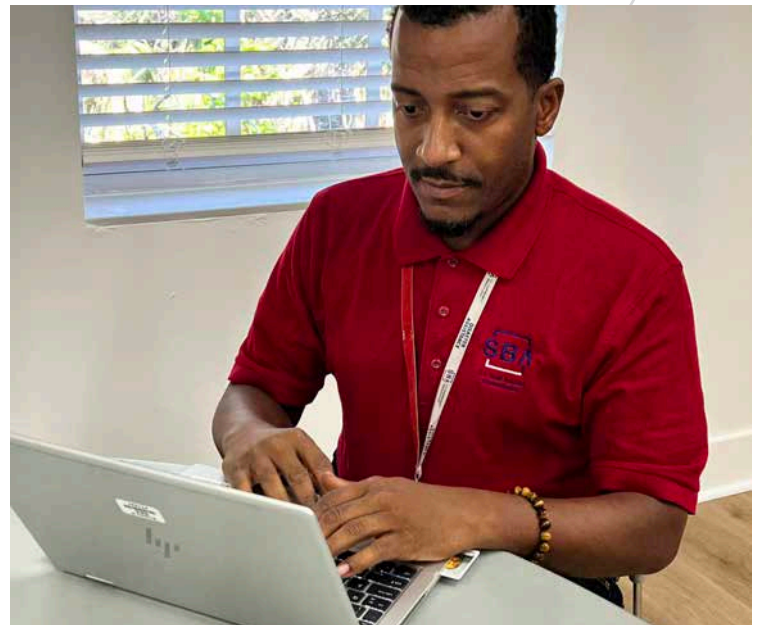
FISH is Sanibel and Captiva's only *neighbors helping neighbors* organization offering a range of human services including:

- Temporary Emergency Financial Assistance
- Disaster Assistance
- Limited Food Pantry
- Mental Health Services
- Medical Equipment Loan
- Hot Meals Program
- Friendly Faces Luncheon
- Kid's Food Backpack
- Youth Scholarships
- Referrals & Resources
- Furniture Distribution
- Tools For Loan Program
- VITA (Income Tax Preparation)





OUR VOLUNTEERS & PARTNERS IN ACTION!



THANKYOU!