

LOCAL & STATE

Is 'clean slate' best for Yacht Club?

Cape Coral residents, officials spar over ballroom building's future

Luis Zambrano
Fort Myers News-Press
USA TODAY NETWORK - FLORIDA

Preserving history or moving forward are the conflicting opinions tossed by residents and officials as Cape Coral grapples with the future of its beloved Yacht Club building.

At a weekly council meeting, the council chambers were packed with most speakers asking the city to stop or delay the city's plan to demolish the Yacht Club's main ballroom building.

"I am dismayed at the council's indifference toward

saving one of the few original buildings that this city has left," said Janel Trull, executive director of Cape Coral Museum of History. "The Yacht Club ballroom is not beyond repair."

The city first discussed the potential future of the Yacht Club in January when the council decided to take a "clean slate" approach to renovate the area and its facilities after Hurricane Ian paused the initial renovation plans.

Hurricane Ian struck as a Category 5 storm on Sept. 28. The region continues its recovery more than eight months later.

Now the council is contending with differing opinions on how to proceed with the Yacht Club, with a majority still in favor of rebuilding anew.

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This aerial view of the Cape Coral Yacht Club photographed on Tuesday shows the current state of the facility after suffering the impact of Hurricane Ian. RICARDO ROLON/USA TODAY NETWORK-FLORIDA



Ginny Dickinson stands next to the heart she made out of seashells, mostly from Sanibel Island. It is on display in the Sanibel & Captiva Islands Visitors Center. BRIAN TIETZ/SPECIAL TO THE NEWS-PRESS

Still standing

Heart made of shells on display at Sanibel & Captiva Islands Visitors Center survived Hurricane Ian

Mark H. Bickel
Fort Myers News-Press
USA TODAY NETWORK - FLORIDA

Ginny Dickinson doesn't sell seashells by the seashore.

She turns seashells into works of art.

It's not a business. It's not a hobby. Dickinson will tell you it's her passion.

There is one piece from her portfolio that has and always will have a special place in her heart. As it turns out, this particular piece of her artwork is heart-shaped, and it was made with a "gazillion" shells, Dickinson said.

This creation became especially meaningful to Dickinson when she learned in October it had survived the wrath of Hurricane Ian, still standing and prominently displayed in the Sanibel & Captiva Islands Visitor Center.

The massive heart has been an inspiration for the greater Sanibel and Captiva community, which is still recovering from the catastrophic damage caused by Ian and will be for many months.

"Ginny could never have known what that heart of shells would represent to our community when it was delivered to our community last year," said John Lai, president and CEP of the Sanibel & Captiva Islands Chamber of Commerce. "It has been seen by over 21,000 visitors who stopped by our welcome center last year, and we've fielded hundreds of calls and emails inquiring about it. Ian may have hurt the heart of our community, but that piece of art reminds us that it will be fully healed."

We caught up with Dickinson, who is 61 and lives in south Fort Myers, by phone and email last week. Here is what she had to say about her heartwarming story:

How long did it take you to make the heart made from seashells?

DICKINSON: I made it in January and February of 2022. It was a signature piece for the 85th Annual Sanibel Shell Show, and then it was moved to the chamber to be put on display.

Can you talk about COVID's connection to this piece?

DICKINSON: When COVID hit, it was hard, especially the first 100 days. I immersed myself in all of my shells. During that time I pre-made many of the (little) hearts from pen shells. Just hearts and hearts and hearts. And then I stored them for two years until I had the chance to use them for this. Pen shells are a big, flat shell. When you open it, it makes the shape of the heart. My husband and I had picked up tons of pen shells years ago, and we stuck them in boxes. Not sure what or why I started making the hearts. It was just to deal with COVID. I was able to use those on the big heart for the chamber.

How long did it take you to make the heart from seashells?

DICKINSON: 59.99999 years. I completed it three months before my 60th birthday. It represents my lifetime of collecting. The reality of it is I physically put it all together in a six-week time frame, but I

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Juneteenth celebrations mark freedom announcement

Free, family-friendly festivities to be held in Fort Myers, Naples

Erica Van Buren
Fort Myers News-Press
USA TODAY NETWORK - FLORIDA

Southwest Florida residents looking for a free, family friendly festivities are invited to Juneteenth events in Naples and Fort Myers on June 17 to celebrate the end of slavery.

Juneteenth in Fort Myers

The Lee County Black History Society, Dunbar Festival Committee and the African Coalition of Southwest Florida are partnering to host the 11th Annual Juneteenth Community Celebration.

The festivities will be held at Roberto Clemente Park, 1936 Henderson Ave. in Fort Myers, from 11 a.m. to 3 p.m. on Saturday, June 17.

"We're coming up on Independence Day. But we know that day doesn't represent Independence Day for everyone in this country," said Martin Byrd, president of the Dunbar Festival Committee. "We'll have

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Lake O discharges likely for Fort Myers, Cape Coral areas through summer

Army Corps predicts heavier flows later in wet season

Polluted Lake Okeechobee water will likely be flowing toward the Fort Myers-Cape Coral area all summer as the lake is already too high, and it's just the beginning of the 2023 rainy season.

The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers held its first summer press conference by phone Friday, and Col. James Booth said the goal is to release water at a rate of 2,000 cubic feet per second as measured at the W.P. Franklin Lock and Dam in Alva.

"We have shifted from the dry season to a wet season weather pattern," Booth said. "Lake Okeechobee water levels have been increasing over the last couple weeks and are currently hovering around 14 feet.

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A blue-green algae bloom has overtaken Lake Okeechobee, as shown in this aerial photo from Friday. Federal and state water agencies were expecting a bloom after Hurricane Ian (2022) stirred up pollution from the bottom of the lake.

RALPH ARWOOD/CALUSA WATERKEEPER

Heart

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spent a lifetime picking up what I needed to do this.

Can you talk in more detail about the process and what was required from start to finish? Cost?

DICKINSON: I had it fabricated in Tampa, by Holland Restoration, out of welded steel, Styrofoam, and then coated in fiberglass. I rented a truck to go get it. Lots and lots of glue sticks were used. I rented a dehumidifier to seal it. Gallons of resin were used as well as years of soft costs to get here – bleach, sun-screen, boat gas, plastic containers, ocean of rinse water – and a most pricey worth it Naples fancy pants white glove moving service, Huff Moving, to transport it safely from studio to the shell show and then to the chamber. Suffice it to say I have a couple grand in it. And it is simply priceless to me now, so, yep, it was way worth it.

What about its height and weight?

DICKINSON: It's a dog hair shorter than the chamber's front-door opening, probably 2-3 feet wide, and really heavy. I had no way to weigh it, but I knew it would be holding tremendous weight when completed – thus, the need for a welded steel and fiberglass base. It is designed in such a way that it could be hung/suspended/rotating – so maybe



This is an example of a small heart made of shells inside a pen shell designed by Ginny Dickinson.

SPECIAL TO THE NEWS-PRESS

one day if it is picked up by the hook in the 'cleavage' it could be weighed. It's hundreds of pounds. I know from always moving it around to work on it.

What types of shells did you use?

DICKINSON: Mostly SWFL shells, but it also contains many large shells from Guam.

Guam?

DICKINSON: A gift from a collector. We owned a Hungarian pointer and had him in dog shows. The man that showed dogs for us knew I loved shells and just before making the heart, November (2021), out of the blue, he wanted to stop

by and give me some shells. His dad served in Guam in the mid-1960s and he and two siblings and they were in middle school living in Guam, and they went out every day and shelled and put what they found in cigar boxes. He showed up 60 years later with them still in the cigar boxes! It was an outstanding collection.

How are the seashells secured?

DICKINSON: Hot glue, and then I put two coats of ArtResin.

Do you have other shell art creations? What?

DICKINSON: Seahorse. Manatee. Turtle. And some other odd stuff I've gifted to friends or kept like sugar skulls.

Is your artwork for sale?

DICKINSON: I have never sold a piece in my life. It is charity-based. This piece was the first time I ever made something on of my own. The rest has been for different causes. Others have been able to make money from my art.

Where were you when Hurricane Ian hit Southwest Florida?

DICKINSON: We were away in Maine. I was terrified watching on TV. My mom, sister, brother, nephew and families were all here. My nephew and his young family, dogs, cat, lost their home and cars to the surge waters. They moved into our condo the very next day and stayed for six months. We were incredibly blessed to be able to offer our

home, so we are just now returning to SWFL after a lot of wandering around.

Why do you think shelling is so popular? What drives people to do this?

DICKINSON: Why so popular? The beauty and the thrill of the find. It is something you can do at any and all ages. It's an ancient practice. It's tangible. It's always a beautiful setting. They fit in a pocket. They survive washing machines. Just the beauty – and the nature part – little gifts lying around, and it once held an animal. Shells rock!

Do you have any favorite shells to collect?

DICKINSON: All the pretty ones.

Are you working on any new projects?

DICKINSON: Always – even in my sleep. And mostly sleep lately, since being on the road for so long did not favor working on a project. I just finished a large, all botanical frame piece (made from yard waste), and I will start next on a public art fundraiser for Sanibel Community Houses & Resources.

Is there anything else you'd like to say?

DICKINSON: My best day ever for shelling is when I got the picture and learned my huge shell heart had survived Hurricane Ian. That heart is special to me.

Juneteenth

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plenty of food vendors, a kids area with bounce houses, face painting and live performances. There will also be informational vendors there as well."

This year's Juneteenth Celebration will be filled with a variety of fun and entertainment for the entire family, including stage performances, music, arts and crafts, food and refreshments. Event attendees will also have a chance to receive free information from community businesses in wealth, health,

education, job training, employment, housing, corporate and governmental services and more.

For more information, visit <https://www.leecountyblackhistorysociety.org/events/>. Interested vendors or exhibitors should contact the Dunbar Festival Committee at martinbyrd@dunbarfestival.org.

Naples Juneteenth event

Juneteenth Freedom Day at the Park: It begins at 11 a.m. Saturday, June 17 and wrapping up at 4 p.m., at River Park Community Center, 301 11th St. N., Naples. A festive day commemorating

the official end of slavery in the U.S., sponsored by the NAACP of Collier County.

It includes food, vendors and live music. For vendor and entertainment information/opportunities, call Shazi Parker at 239-269-2418 or see naacpcolliercounty.org/.

The history of Juneteenth

Juneteenth, which has been celebrated since the late 1800s, was finally recognized as a federal holiday in 2021.

On June 19, 1865, Major General Gordon Granger landed in Galveston and read General Order Number 3 to the

people. Celebrations started in the following years as a way for former slaves to reconnect and recount the day their freedom was announced.

Many of the first Juneteenth celebrations were held on the grounds of African American churches and eventually became more elaborate with rodeos, picnics, barbecues, fishing trips and family reunions.

Erica Van Buren is the underserved communities reporter for The News-Press and Naples Daily News, part of the USA TODAY Network. Connect with her at EVanBuren@gannett.com or on Twitter: @EricaVanBuren32

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