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August • 2023

**Issue 6
47th Year**

Beautiful Clouds Over Amber Glades!
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Vice PresidentTammy Tynan.....519-751-8408

Treasurer.....Aimee Stuyvesant.....727-200-8917

Ass't Treasurer.....TBD

Secretary..... Tricia Lasisomphone.....315-542-8928

Activities Director.....TBD

Park Office.....727-582-2850

After Hours Emergency.....727-641-9556

Shangri La Star Newsletter.....Norma Rowe.....shangrilalargo@gmail.com

MESSAGE FROM OUR HOA PRESIDENT

Hello everyone! On August 2 there will be a BBQ at the clubhouse from 3 p.m. to 5 p.m. provided by MyCare Medical. Let Jim know you will be attending so they can get a head count. I will not be using the Facebook page to communicate. Everything will be in this book or posted on the board. Bingo is back, Patrick Chieves will be calling as long as there are 5 people. Thank you Patrick. We are still looking for an Activities Director. If interested please contact me. Tricia Lasisomphone has been appointed by the board to be interim Secretary until the December vote. We need help getting our park back to a happy place to live. I thank all who have faith in me and will continue to do my best. We will be better!



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Since 1977, the Clearwater Free Clinic has provide problem oriented healthcare to low income, uninsured residents of upper Pinellas County by means of office visits, medications, lab work, x-rays and specialty referrals. The Clinic, a volunteer driven non-profit, non government medical facility, provides primary healthcare at no cost to those who do not qualify for government assistance, and who cannot afford private medical care. 1218 Court St., Clearwater – 727-447-3041



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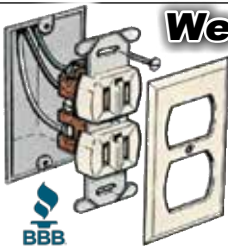
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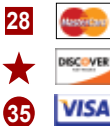
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continued on page 8

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Gulfport Fresh Market

The Gulfport Fresh Market is every Tuesday 9AM - 3PM (October - April) - Summer hours (May through Sept.) are 9AM - 2PM - on Beach Blvd. below 29th Ave. S. in Gulfport's Waterfront District. Fresh produce, bread, cheese, nuts, honey, seafood, crafts, music and more!

Universal CityWalk

Whether you're looking to check out the shops, get in some extra steps, or experience the nightlife or Mardi Gras festivities, Universal CityWalk can be a fun spot to visit – and doesn't have to cost any extra money aside from the gas to get there. Universal CityWalk is home to a variety of shops, restaurants, bars, and clubs, but it's also a great spot to take in the sights and atmosphere, walk around the lake, or people watch. You can also visit CityWalk's Rising Star karaoke bar or Coconut Club. One note, you have to be at least 18 to get into Rising Star and, of course, 21 to purchase alcohol. During the day, Universal charges a fee to park, which varies from \$30 to \$60 per vehicle. However, after 6 p.m. on most nights and outside of Halloween Horror Nights, you can park for free. Throughout the year, you may even be able to listen to music or catch some performances on the Universal CityWalk Lagoon Stage.

For the Pups

Dog Parks for small and large dogs at Eagle Lake Park, 1800 Keene Rd., Largo

Please remember to pick up after your dogs here in the park.

BIRDS AND BLOOMS – OSPREY

It sure is a hot 2nd summer here in Florida. I hope all of you are keeping cool and hydrated! This month I would like to focus on the Muscovy duck. Many of you have seen these at ponds and lakes here, and sometimes even parking lots! These are large ducks with long necks. They have a long bill and a long tail. Wild Muscovy Ducks are cautious birds that feed by dabbling in shallow wetlands. Domesticated ducks can be seen at urban parks, where they mix with other ducks and volunteer themselves for handouts from park visitors. They eat a variety of plant and animal foods and should you choose to feed them, provide cracked corn or lettuce. If you have a bird or bloom you would like me to discuss, please reach out to me at 727-200-8917 or wvbkwrwmn@gmail.com



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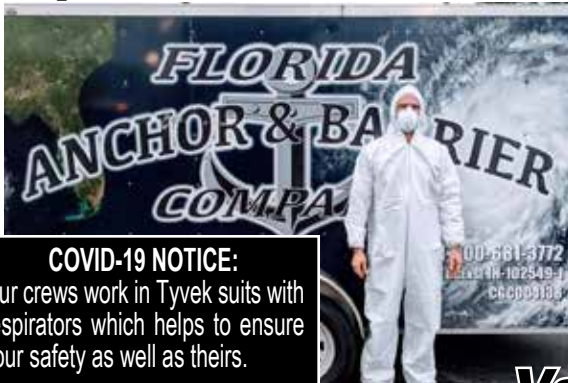


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JOKE

An airplane is about to crash. A female passenger jumps up and frantically announces, "If I'm going to die, I want to die feeling like a woman." She removes all her clothes and asks, "Is there someone on this plane that can make me feel like a woman?" A man stands up, takes off his shirt and says, "Here iron this!"



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RECIPE: QUICK AND EASY FRIED RICE

Ingredients

- 1 cup Long Grain White Rice
- 2 tsp vegetable oil
- 2 eggs, lightly whisked
- 2 bacon slices, chopped
- 1 carrot, peeled and grated
- 2 shallots, trimmed, finely sliced
- 1/2 cup frozen peas, thawed
- 1 tbsp soy sauce
- Sesame seeds, to serve
- Shallots, sliced, extra, to serve



Directions

Cook the rice in a large saucepan of boiling water for 12 minutes or until tender. Drain and leave to cool. --- Heat oil in non-stick wok or large frying pan over medium heat. Add eggs. Swirl over base to form an omelette. Cook for 2 minutes or until set. Transfer to a chopping board. Set aside to cool slightly. Roll up and thickly slice. ---Add bacon to wok. Cook 4 minutes until light golden. Add carrot. Stir fry 1 minute. Add shallots, peas and rice. Cook, stirring, 3-4 minutes. Add egg and soy sauce. Stir until heated through. Sprinkle with sesame seeds and top with extra shallots. Serve immediately.

If you've got a recipe you think we'll all like, I would LOVE to include it in the newsletter. Email: shangrilalargo@gmail.com or my cell: 352-807-3232

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Carol Zapiecki, Clearwater, FL



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AGING AT HOME



Aging in Place: Safety Tips to Help Make It Possible

One third of American homes today house residents over the age of 60, and 90 percent of those residents would prefer to stay in their homes as they age for as long as humanly possible, a study by the National Institute on Aging shows. With more Americans living well into old age, that may seem like a tall order. But planning ahead can make aging in place more achievable for you or your loved ones. The National Institute on Aging and Senior Living Magazine offer practical tips for making any home safer as we age: **Fix walkways.** This is the time to repair cracked or uneven areas of the walkway that could prove hazardous. **Improve lighting.** Install point lighting at the front door and motion-sensor lights to make entering and navigating the home safer. **Safety-proof the kitchen.** Switch to appliances with easy-to-read controls and simple-to-push button interfaces. Installing Lazy Susans or roll-out shelving in pantries and cabinets will make it easier to access foodstuffs, dishes, pot, pans and more. **Guard against slips and falls in the bath.** Add non-slip flooring and a securely attached grab bar to the shower. Consider building in a permanent bench or purchase a sturdy shower chair. Install a hand-held, adjustable height shower head with a hose to help direct the water. **Security and home automation.** In addition to a home security system, look into systems that automate light control, entertainment and more. **Know how to get help.** Do an online search now to become acquainted with available senior resources—such as transportation, meal delivery or personal care service—provided by local agencies, senior centers and state offices.

DAY TRIPPIN' ~ FALLING CREEK FALLS



See one of Florida's fabulous but little known waterfalls on a short walk just north of Lake City. Take a quick detour from I-10 to see a spectacular root-beer-colored cascade, which plummets more than 10 feet over a deep lip of limestone and flows away over limestone boulders at the bottom of a ravine. Falling Creek Falls was the site of the first settlement in this area, and this short accessible boardwalk trail offers easy access to the scenic view. It's a short stroll from the trailhead through an open meadow into the lush woods surrounding Falling Creek, a tributary of the Suwannee River. A well-built boardwalk winds through a floodplain forest of bald cypress, sweetgum, and magnolia. You hear the falls well before you see them. At not quite 1/4 mile, you reach an observation platform overlooking the burbling tannic water. Stand and enjoy the cool rush of air and the ambiance of one of Florida's rare natural waterfalls before you continue to the end of the boardwalk for a pretty picture – the waterfall framed by the forest. Return along the boardwalk, and turn left at the junction with the boardwalk you saw coming in. The boardwalk ends and

continued on page 16



drops you down on a trail in an upland forest, upstream from the falls, where you'll hear the burble of water through rocky rapids. The footpath affords a few views of the waterway before it turns away and heads deeper into the woods. Emerging in an open grassy area, it swings right and drops you off at the children's playground and restrooms at one end of the parking area. From I-10 exit 301 drive north on US 41; immediately turn right on Falling Creek Rd (CR 131) and drive 0.8 mile to the trailhead parking area on the right. Dogs are not permitted.

THE WORLD WIDE WEB



Thirty years ago, listeners tuning into *Morning Edition* heard about a futuristic idea that could profoundly change their lives. "Imagine being able to communicate at-will with 10 million people all over the world," NPR's Neal Conan said. "Imagine having direct access to catalogs of hundreds of libraries as well as the most up-to-date news, business and weather reports. Imagine being able to get medical advice or gardening advice immediately from any number of experts. "This is not a dream," he continued. "It's internet." But even in the early 1990s, that space-age sales pitch was a long way from the lackluster experience of actually using the internet. It was almost entirely text-based, for one.

It was also difficult to use. To read a story from NPR, for example, you would need to know which network-equipped computer had the file you wanted, then coax your machine into communicating directly with the host. And good luck if the computers were made by different manufacturers.

But 30 years ago this all changed. On April 30, 1993, something called the World Wide Web launched into the public domain. The web made it simple for anyone to navigate the internet. All users had to do was launch a new program called a "browser," type in a URL and hit return. This began the internet's transformation into the vibrant online canvas we use today. Anyone could build their own "web site" with pictures, video and sound. They could even send visitors to other sites using hyperlinked words or phrases underlined in blue. This became one of the web's most game-changing features, putting different corners of our digital knowledge-base just a mouse click away. **No patents, no fees.** The World Wide Web was the brainchild of Tim Berners-Lee, a 37-year-old researcher at a physics lab in Switzerland called CERN. The institution is known today for its massive particle accelerators. "Almost everything which you needed to know in your daily life was written down somewhere," Berners-Lee told NPR's *Fresh Air* in 1996. "And at the time, in the 1980s, it was almost certainly written down on a computer somewhere. It was very frustrating that people's effort in typing it in was not being used when, in fact, if it could only be tied together and made accessible, everything would be so much easier for everybody." CERN owned Berners-Lee's invention, and the lab had the option to license out the World Wide Web for profit. But Berners-Lee believed that keeping the web as open as possible would help it

continued on page 24



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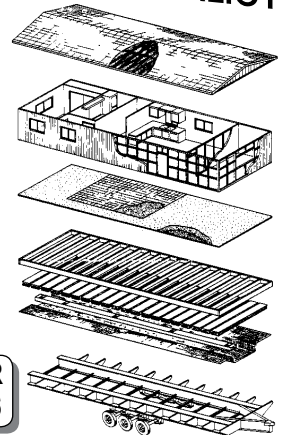
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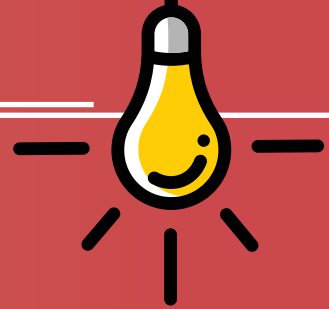


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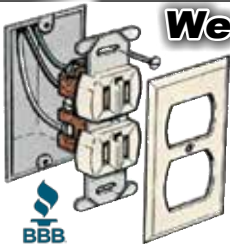
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	6 Cornhole 5:00pm	7 Bingo 7 Shuffle 10:00am - Alice 69 - Bi
13 Cornhole 5:00pm Everett Northcut - Lot 148 - Birthday	14	Bingo 7 Shuffle 10:00am
20 Cornhole 5:00pm Sylvia Rodriguez - Lot 52 - Birthday	21	Bingo 7 Shuffle 10:00am
27 Cornhole 5:00pm	28	Bingo 7 Shuffle 10:00am

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7:00pm board m King - Lot irthday	Marbles at the Clubhouse 1:30pm			
7:00pm board m	Marbles at the Clubhouse 1:30pm		Cheryl Clueck - Lot 135 - Birthday	
7:00pm board m	Marbles at the Clubhouse 1:30pm Jack Winthrop - Lot 132 - Kim Glaze - Lot 84 Norma Rowe - Lot 136 - Birthdays			
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grow. "The web setting out as something which was universal, something which anybody could use, I felt was very important," he said. "It's no good having something which will run on any platform if, in fact, there is a proprietary hold on it." Berners-Lee eventually convinced CERN to release the World Wide Web into the public domain without any patents or fees. He has since attributed the runaway success of the web to that single decision. **The web takes off.** NPR's coverage of the post-web era describes a "great online awakening" driven by an explosion in the number of internet-connected people. "The result is more chaos than you can imagine and literally thousands and thousands of websites," Rich Dean reported for NPR in 1996. By the end of 1995, more than 24 million people in the U.S. and Canada alone spent an average of 5 hours per week on the internet. Today, nearly two-thirds of the world's population uses the web to visit hundreds of millions of active websites. Some of those pages belong to companies that are among the most valuable in history like Facebook, Amazon and Google. It's hard not to wonder what life would look like today if CERN and Berners-Lee hadn't decided to give away his invention. In a 1999 interview on *The Diane Rehm Show*, Berners-Lee was asked why he never cashed in.



"The question, when it's posed like that, it implies that you really only measure people's value by their net worth," he said. "People are what they've done, what they say, what they stand for, rather than what they happen to have in the bank."

The good, the bad and the unpredictable. In the three decades since the web went public, it's revolutionized how we communicate, gather, work and learn. It's also expanded the reach of propaganda and disinformation and upended our standards of privacy. Berners-Lee predicted some of these ramifications decades ago. "I don't mind there being biased information out there," he told NPR in 1999. "The important thing is that you should know, when you're on the web, whether you're looking at biased information or not." A few months later, he wondered on-air: "Do users now know when they're getting something which is fair and unbiased? Do they know how to tell the difference between news, op-ed, editorial and advertising on the web?" As director of the World Wide Web Consortium, Berners-Lee has overseen development of the web with the goal of maintaining its neutrality as a platform. "What it becomes is really a question of what people put into it," he told *Fresh Air*. "And what I'm trying to do from the technology point of view is to keep it universal — to stop it, as a technology, from trying to influence what you can do with it and what you can't." In a way, he says, the web is really just a reflection of us — and that's by design. "When you go out there, the webpages you see are written by people," he reflected on NPR's *Talk of the Nation* in 2002. "You're looking at a certain subset of the churning mass of humanity out there. So it's not that the web itself is an animal, but it's that society is this really exciting, decentralized thing, and the web, fortunately, is more or less able to echo it."





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QUEEN LATIFA

Dana Elaine Owens (born March 18, 1970), known professionally as Queen Latifah, is an American rapper, singer, songwriter, actress, and producer. Owens was born in Newark, New Jersey. She attended Essex Catholic Girls' High School in Irvington, but graduated from Irvington High School. Always tall, the 5-foot-10-inch (1.78 m) Latifah was a power forward on her high school basketball team.

She signed with Tommy Boy Records in 1989 and released her debut album All Hail the Queen on November 28, 1989, featuring the hit single "Ladies First". Nature of a Sista' (1991) was her second and final album with Tommy Boy Records. In her music career, Queen Latifah has sold nearly 2 million records worldwide. Her third album, Black Reign (1993), spawned the single "U.N.I.T.Y.", which, being a large influence on women, won a Grammy Award and peaked at #23 on the Billboard Hot 100. She has been dubbed as the "Queen of Jazz-Rap". She became the first female hip-hop recording artist to get nominated for an Oscar. The Root ranked her at number 35 on The Root 100 list. Latifah was inducted into the Hollywood



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Walk of Fame in 2006 and the New Jersey Hall of Fame in 2011. She is a recipient of a Grammy Award, with six nominations, a Golden Globe Award, two Screen Actors Guild Awards, with two nominations, two NAACP Image Awards, including thirteen nominations, one Emmy Award, with three nominations and an Academy Award nomination. Queen Latifah became an influence to R&B, soul, and hip-hop artists, such as Eve, Da Brat, Lil' Kim, Fugees, Jill Scott, Lauryn Hill, Missy Elliott, Remy Ma, Ivy Queen, Foxy Brown, Ms. Dynamite, and Naughty by Nature. Latifah starred as Khadijah James on the FOX sitcom *Living Single* from 1993 to 1998. She also starred in the lead role of *Set It Off* (1996). She created the daytime talk show *The Queen Latifah Show*, which ran from late 2013 to early 2015 on CBS. She has appeared in a number of films, such as *Bringing Down the House* (2003), *Taxi* (2004), *Barbershop 2: Back in Business* (2005), *Beauty Shop* (2005), *Last Holiday* (2006), *Hairspray* (2007), *Joyful Noise* (2012), *22 Jump Street* (2014) and *Girls Trip* (2017). Latifah received critical acclaim for her portrayal of blues singer Bessie Smith in the HBO film *Bessie* (2015), which she co-produced, winning the Primetime Emmy Award for Outstanding Television Movie. Since 2016, she has starred as Carlotta Brown in the musical drama series *Star*.

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This home in Oakland, Florida is commonly referred to as the Bin Laden Mansion due to its connection to Osama bin Laden, the mastermind behind the September 11th attacks on the World Trade Center and the founder of the Pan-Islamic militant organization Al-Qaeda. Situated along the shores of Johns Lake, the large gated estate features 1,200 ft of private shoreline, 5 bedrooms, 5 bathrooms, a 4-car detached garage, a 3,000 ft carriage house, and horse stables. Despite the negative attention it garnered, this home was actually built decades before it was occupied by the Bin Laden family. Although the previous owners claim the home was built as a vacation home for William Pratt, a New York native and chemist who helped invent Jell-O, it was more likely to have been built by Frank M. Pratt. In the May 18, 1928 issue of the *Orlando Evening Star*, one column reads, “Frank Pratt of Rochester, N. Y., has commenced the erection of \$45,000.00 home at Edgewater Beach on Johns Lake. The house will be a large two-story of hollow tile construction and the ground will be landscaped including a sea-wall fronting Johns Lake. This will be one of the finest homes in Central Florida.” According to the last owners, the property was owned by Earl Silas Tupper, the inventor of Tupperware and founder of the Tupperware Plastics Company, sometime in the early-1950s, although this cannot be confirmed. The corporate headquarters of the Tupperware Company was moved from Massachusetts to Orlando, Florida in 1952. After a falling out with his vice-president Brownie Wise, which resulted in her dismissal in 1958, Tupper sold The Tupperware Company to Rexall Drug Company for \$16 million. Shortly afterward, he divorced his wife, gave up his U.S. citizenship to avoid taxes, and moved to an island off the coast of Costa Rica, or according

continued on page 32



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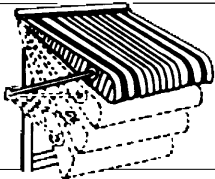
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to other sources Isla San José. “Desert Bear” Khalil bin Laden, one of Osama bin Laden’s 54 siblings, bought the property for his wife as a wedding gift in December 1980 through his Florida company, Desert Bear, for \$1.6 million. The mansion would be known as “Desert Bear” during the time. Soon after the 9/11 terrorist attacks, Khalil bin Laden, along with many other of his relatives, left the United States on a chartered flight accompanied by bodyguards and associates. Khalil bin Laden had suspicious connections to the Tri-Border frontier region of Brazil, which is known for evidence of terrorism. Adding to the suspicions were his inquiries to informant Bonnie Sharrit about bringing in Arabs from Saudi Arabia and Brazil to attend a Florida flight school. According to federal officials though, Khalil bin Laden was not involved in the terrorist attacks in any form and left the country for the safety of he and his family. The house laid vacant thereafter, attracting many vandals who caused damage to the home, including a safe thrown down a stairway and bullet holes in the walls. In February 2006, the property was sold to Aleem Hussain, the majority holder of PYC Development IV, for \$4,043,800. Less than a year later, he was charged with running a \$9 million real-estate scam and in 2007, was sentenced to seven years in prison. The house was foreclosed upon and was then bought by Johns Lake Investment Group for \$1,725,800. Around November 2012, a man by the name of John LeClair made a lease-purchase agreement on the property with Johns Lake Investment Group. LeClair lived in the back house with nothing but a leather couch, a glass coffee table, a flatscreen television, and a computer, while the main house was planned to be rented out for weddings. Instead, LeClair abandoned the property after taking deposits for nuptials. Circuit Judge Donald Myers ordered LeClair to make restitution of \$37,000 for “deceptive and unfair” business practices. According to those involved, LeClair had either hidden or sold off all of his assets, and those he had stolen from never received their deposits back. The house was purchased by Gary and Dana English in 2014 for \$2 million. In order to pay off debt as well and to obtain funding to renovate the home, the Englishs planned on selling 11.3 acres of their 17-acre property to a development firm. The buyer, Alabama-based LIV Development Inc., proposed building a 242-unit luxury apartment complex. The residents of Deer Island, an affluent neighborhood between the highway and the lake, opposed the proposal as it was incompatible with the character of the town. They also cited traffic concerns for S.R. 50, an often-congested, six-lane commuter route into Orlando, and possibly harming their property values. City commissioners rejected the proposal in a 4-1 vote. Owing more than \$2.1 million for the property, Gary and Dana English filed for bankruptcy, and the property was foreclosed upon in July 2019. The property was sold to Virginia-based real estate and development firm Cornerstone Group Development LLC for \$7.7 million. The house was once again abandoned and its future is uncertain.

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GIBSONTON FLORIDA – SIDESHOW CAPITAL

With the demise of the carnival, an important slice of American history risks being lost – but the residents of Gibsonton, Florida, are trying to keep the legacy of the town’s famous ‘freaks’ alive for those who didn’t quite fit elsewhere, Gibtown was a utopia. Its first settlers, the Giant, and his wife, the Half-Woman, ran a campsite, a bakeshop and the fire department. The post office catered to little people with extra-low counters, and the beer hall had custom-built chairs for the Fat Ladies and the Tallest Man. Special zoning regulations allowed residents to keep and train exotic animals in their gardens. Siamese-twin sisters ran a fruit stand. Three factories manufactured Ferris wheels and carousels. Or at least that’s how Ward Hall, aka the King of Sideshow, remembers it. In the golden days of American carnival, all roads led to Gibsonton, Florida. The self-defined, 14,900-inhabitant town 12 miles south of Tampa became the industry capital. “Carny Town” was a fabled place where everyone had run away with the circus. When Ward arrived in 1967, it was home to up to 100 self-defined “human oddities”, in addition to several thousand “carnies”. Balmy winter weather offered a foothold in a nomadic lifestyle, where rides could be repaired, big cats trained (“every day, or they forget”) and stunts practiced during the off-season. It was a safe haven, away from prying eyes. The “freaks” came in three categories: self-made (the tattooed lady), working acts (sword swallowers, fire breathers, knife throwers) and the natural-born. There was Betty Lou Williams, who had her baby sister growing out of her abdomen. You could admire Priscilla the Monkey Girl, who had a double set of teeth and silky black hair covering her body (she eloped with the Alligator Boy, with a skin condition making his skin reptile-scaly). You could also meet Lobster Boy, who only had two fingers on each hand. As a manager, showman and stand-in father figure, Ward Hall worked with them all. These days, one of America’s most controversial entertainment legacies is all but extinct: Ward’s World of Wonders is the last legitimate 10-in-1 – 10 acts for the price of one – sideshow in America. “The public loves the show,” Ward, now 84, insists. “Otherwise I wouldn’t still be in the business after 70 years.” Where society saw disability, Ward saw business opportunity and star potential. In showbiz since age 14, Ward made a living selling the extraordinary, macabre and bizarre across America: two-headed animals, three Native American boys wrestling alligators (one lost a finger – “There was danger to it!”), monkeys in race cars, a wax replica of The Last Supper, a man bare-handedly milking rattlesnakes, foetuses in glass bottles, and human “freaks”. Today the exhibition of “extraordinary bodies” remains illegal in several states, with laws reflecting a discourse of victimization. Michigan and Pennsylvania penal codes, for instance, prohibit the exhibition of any “deformed human being or human monstrosity” except for scientific purposes. That the performers are consensual adults, highly paid and not necessarily suffering, is often overlooked. Several of Ward’s performers featured in Todd Browning’s 1932 film *Freaks* (widely banned as too graphic a display of physical disabilities). Their collectible portraits now fetch



...continued on page 36



hundreds of dollars on eBay. “Of course I exploited them – and the more I exploited them, the more money they made,” Ward says. Had he not been exploited, Elvis Presley too, Ward insists, would still be singing in a some beer joint in Tupelo, Mississippi. Ward turned pity into fascination, and unfortunate circumstances into superpowers. Dick Brisbane, with feet growing directly from his hips, causing a waddling walk, became Penguin Boy. Stanley Barent, born with stumps for arms, became Seal the Seal Boy. With the right sales pitch, anything – and anyone – could be exhibited. “These people were not handicapped; at least in their minds they were not,” Ward insists, recalling Louise Capps Hill, the armless girl who drove a tractor, milked cows, played guitar and raised her children on her farm. “You and I will see them and say, ‘Oh my God, what handicap to have no arms at all’ – but there was nothing that girl couldn’t do.” Todd Robbins, a sideshow historian and performer, explains that such carnivals were a fin de siècle zeitgeist where anything was possible. Exemplifying remarkable resilience and the ability to overcome obstacles – Frog Boy, for instance, telling the audience about his condition while doing cigarette tricks using only his mouth – the freakshow was a direct extension of the American dream itself. “For the first hundred years of us as a nation, the majority of people came from elsewhere,” he explains. “Everyone here was the other; an outsider. They came here because they had a dream and an idea that tomorrow was gonna be a better day if they only worked hard enough and were smart. Sideshow was only an extreme version of that. Anything is possible and here’s a good example: if it’s possible to eat fire, then I can be president of the USA.” On behalf of an already waning trade, Ward spearheaded a campaign against a 1921 Florida statute banning the exhibition of malformed, deformed or disfigured humans. He was successful: three years later, judges held the sideshow prohibition “unconstitutional” – because people with deviating bodies have the right to work.

This right to work was crucial to Ward, who approached his performers matter-of-factly with well-meant pragmatism – people are going to gawk anyway, why not make them pay for the privilege? He taught them how to make money, and brought them into a makeshift family (“I was the Papa,” he says proudly). Many stayed with him all their lives. On the lush banks of the Alafia River, the unlikely community carved out a tropical paradise for themselves. The Tomaini couple arrived first, spreading the word over the carnival grapevine of a place of strawberry fields, orange groves and rivers full of fish, where locals didn’t shun show people. Conveniently close to Sarasota and with the railway passing through, the location was ideal. A chain migration sparked off as those operating rides, games and cotton candy stands followed suit. As the society grew, its residents named streets after themselves. In return for their contribution to the local economy, residents of Hillsborough County were granted permission to keep carnival trailers, rides and animals in their gardens. Gibtown became a sanctuary, and the stigma associated with the trade was convenient as well: outsiders stayed away thanks to rumors about “carnies” stealing children. The world’s showtown capital remained a well-kept secret, purposely never a tourist destination. Nowadays, Gibtown looks like any other American small town (the only town in Florida shrinking for the past 25 years, claims Ward). If you didn’t know it was there, you might

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drive straight through. The “freaks” are gone, too. Ward’s last “human oddity”, Norbert Pete Terhune, or Poobah the fire-eating dwarf and King of Pygmys (once chief and sole inhabitant of Ward’s traveling Pygmy Village), passed away in 2012. “We have people who just ruined the freakshow business,” Ward complains with a smirk. “We call them doctors. Simultaneously, discrimination laws opened doors for people with disabilities to pursue more conventional careers. With civil rights movements, gawking at those born different became taboo, and “freakshows” perceived as exploitative. “More than anything, the rise and fall of the freakshow is a story about society’s changing views on physical difference”, Brigham A Fordham, author of what might be the most substantial analysis on the legal discourse of sideshows, explains. “By necessity, sideshows can survive only so long as they offer something that their viewers find slightly more entertaining than offensive.” Meanwhile, the world is encroaching on Gibtown. A gigantic Walmart marks the arrival of chain corporations in a society priding itself on its individualism. Industry is expanding, low-income housing under construction. “In 20 years, all of this will be gone,” Ward says, gesticulating towards his house, which he shares with his life-partner Chris Christ and Red the sword swallower. As showmen become a minority, Ward believes it’s only a matter of time before even the zoning regulations disappear. The demise of the carnival, and of Gibtown, an important slice of American history risks being lost – though residents try hard to keep the legacy alive. A metal replica of an enormous boot, crowdfunded by Concerned Citizens of Gibtown, marks the town’s entrance and the spot where the Giant’s Camp once stood. Downtown, the recently opened Showmen’s museum features antique rides and non-PC minstrel show posters.

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