

MAKING



PHOTOS COURTESY OF THE HOFFMANS

The Hoffman family: Dawn, Sophie, and Al

FROM RUSSIA...WITH LOVE

It was a segment on *60 Minutes* about orphanages that incited Al and Dawn Hoffman to adopt Sophie, their Russian-born daughter. Now three and a half years old, Sophie, who first met the Hoffmans in Russia when she was eighteen months old, is the reason Dawn is spearheading Camp KidsHope.

"What we're doing with Camp KidsHope is bringing Russian children available for adoption to Southwest Florida for an extended stay," she explains.

"Al and I decided to adopt a child over giving birth to our own child mainly to save a life," says Dawn, indicating that poor economic conditions have resulted in an overwhelming number of orphans in Russia, Romania, and other countries in the region.

Within days of contacting Adoptions Abroad, a licensed adoptions agency, she and Al, chief executive officer of WCI

Communities, Inc., received a call that the agency had found a child for them. The Hoffmans hopped on a plane to St. Petersburg, Russia, to meet Sophie.

"We were told, 'She'll be afraid of Al because he's a man and he has gray hair,' but, to our surprise, she immediately bonded with him," Dawn says. They had about twenty minutes with her during their initial visit and after Sophie was taken from the room they were asked to make an important decision: Would this little girl become their daughter?

"It is extremely difficult to decide if you will make a lifelong commitment after meeting someone for the first time, but we did," says Dawn.

She hopes Camp KidsHope will help other children find the same kind of commitment from loving families. Camp KidsHope will allow children aged five to thirteen from a Russian orphanage to spend two weeks, from Dec. 28 to Jan.

13, visiting with prospective families. Education and discovery is an important aspect of the program, so the visiting children will be able to join field trips to the Imaginarium, the beach, and more.

A special day camp will be held Jan. 6 through 10 at Covenant Presbyterian Church in Ft. Myers for host families. "We want all families, with and without daily work obligations, to have the opportunity to host a child. The older these children get, the more difficult it is to find a family willing to adopt," explains Dawn. "But these children are wonderful and eager to become part of a loving family that will provide them with the nurturing and guidance that all children need and desire."

Those who are interested in adopting, hosting a child, or volunteering as a Russian translator can call Dawn Hoffman for more information at 239/437-7112.

— Valerie Cope

WAVES



PHOTO COURTESY OF VINCENT WOLANIN

Vincent Wolanin

ROCKIN' FOR CHILDREN

On December 7, the place to be is Private Sky Aviation's new maintenance service center at Southwest Florida

International Airport in Ft. Myers. Why, you ask? How about live music by famous rock stars, fabulous food, the chance to tour a private jet, a silent auction, and some surprises—all at this year's Rockin' Christmas Party to benefit The Children's Hospital of Southwest Florida, the brainchild of Sanibel resident Vincent Wolanin.

Wolanin is completing a major upgrade of his Private Sky fixed-base operation at RSW. Private Sky specializes in repairs and maintenance of Gulfstream jets.

The new hangar, with more than an acre under one roof, is large enough to work on twelve of the aircraft a time.

As if hanging out among private jets

weren't glamorous enough, Wolanin is putting together an all-star band for the evening. Which rock stars will be playing that night is strictly hush-hush, but you'll certainly recognize them. "We've flown lots of big names around," says Wolanin. From stars on his contact list, and perhaps those celeb rockers who reside in Southwest Florida, Wolanin promises an eye-popping band for partygoers.

"We're also having food done by area chefs from different hotels and country clubs," says Wolanin, "as well as a decorated tree sale, with trees decorated by area celebrities and personalities." A silent auction and fun surprises will make this jam-packed, rockin' party even more exciting.

Tickets are limited. One hundred and fifty dollars per person will get you into the party. Call 239/437-1840 for tickets. Then find your dancin' shoes.

— Libby Boren McMillan



PHOTO BY KATHLEEN BLASE

Dick Willis

VIRTUAL SHELLING?

Virtual visitors from around the world who click on the Web site of The Bailey-Matthews Shell Museum can now search the collection department's electronic records, thanks in large part to Cape Coral resident Dick Willis. For the past two years, the retired electrical engineer has donated nearly a thousand hours of his time to the Sanibel museum, designing and updating the department's catalog database and its online version.

Willis, 62, who became interested in mollusks while living in Jamaica and Australia, built the tables of authority that monitor the data for correct scientific names. "In the future," he explains,

"very few mistakes will happen. There will be a lot more checking and the data will have more integrity."

Remote users of www.shellmuseum.org, whether they are professional malacologists in New Zealand or amateur shell collectors in New Hampshire, perform searches using a number of possible combinations of taxonomic categories, geographic location, and/or donor.

"I really enjoyed doing it," Willis adds. "I wanted to contribute something to the museum and this was the best way." (He's still hooked on volunteering and now spends one day a week in the museum cataloging volutes, his favorite shell.)

— Libby Grimm

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PHOTO BY KATHLEEN BLASE

Steve Bortone is heading up Sanibel-Captiva Conservation Foundation's Marine Lab.

TAKING THE HELM IN MARINE RESEARCH

As the new director of the Sanibel-Captiva Conservation Foundation's Marine Lab, Steve Bortone is thrilled to be launching groundbreaking research.

"The general theme will be to assess marine habitats around Sanibel and Captiva while looking for long-term trends," says Bortone. "One study right away will be to sample seagrass beds for fish communities—noting kinds of fish, how many, and their sizes."

Bortone taught marine biology for twenty-five years at the University of West Florida at Pensacola and has published books on spotted sea trout and on seagrass beds. Now, he is ecstatic to have those resources right outside his window at the lab at Tarpon Bay on Sanibel.

"It's really exciting to me," he says. "We're going to try to establish some assessments in various habitats like mangroves, seagrasses, and deeper pool areas, and probably up on the shore side of the gulf as well. We'll monitor these habitats for their biological features with the idea that this will be a long-term process of evaluating the area."

With a scant number of previous studies to go by, the lab will seek to establish baseline data that can be integrated for comparison with that being collected by

other area agencies, including Mote Marine in Sarasota and South Florida Water Management District. "It's very important that we use methods and gather data that would be relevant to other studies already going on," Bortone says. "For example, Mote Marine is doing some work up in Charlotte Harbor and the water management district is doing some sampling of the Caloosahatchee. We'll reference our data to those studies."

Bortone first came to Southwest Florida five years ago to work with South Florida Water Management District on some seagrass projects in the Caloosahatchee River. For the past three years, he has served as director of environmental science for the Conservancy of Southwest Florida in Naples, where he conducted various studies of the Everglades.

"This is a great opportunity to come back to this area and do what I've always wanted to do," he says. "I've been in the business for the past thirty years, so I have a lot of colleagues and former students in the area. So, it's also a great chance for me to work with them and to pair the conservation foundation up cooperatively with the other agencies in the region to solve some of these environmental problems."

— Barbara Linstrom-Arnold

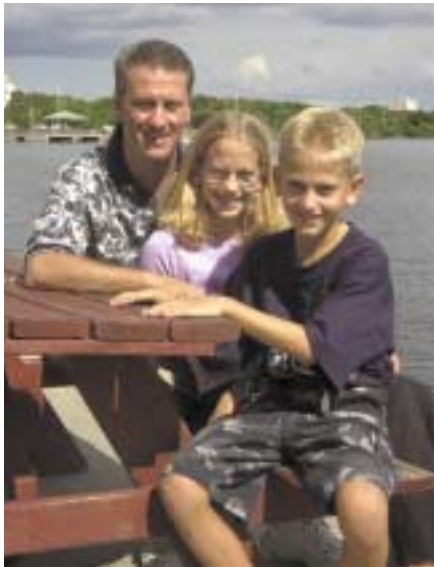


PHOTO BY KELLY MADDEN

Eric, Kristin, and Zac Buckingham

ART OF SUCCESS

You've probably seen Eric Buckingham's work around Lee and Collier counties. His artwork on interpretive signs might have taught you how estuaries work. You might have selected the model for your new home based on his rendering. Or perhaps his distinctive, finely detailed wildlife art has caught your eye in a local gallery or home. It's on display at

Sanybel's Finest on Sanibel Island, has twice been honored in *Florida Wildlife* magazine's annual art contest, and he occasionally contributes a piece as a fundraiser for a community organization, and once for a terminally ill friend.

When you work for yourself as an artist in this market, it's tough to specialize, says Buckingham, who has lived in Ft. Myers since he graduated in 1978 from Ringling School of Art in Sarasota. He'd love to make a living on his wildlife art (most of them are gouache), but the advantage of staying alert for opportunities means he sometimes stumbles across fun and fascinating projects—like one his children drew him into.

When eight-year-old Zac had to write a story last year for his second-grade class at Edison Park Elementary, he wheedled help from his eleven-year-old sister, Kristin. They outlined a story about a pencil that didn't want to be sharpened, a piece of paper that didn't want to be written on, an eraser that didn't want to be rubbed, and a boy. Then they got Dad in on the action. Together, they developed the characters and the story line.

When Zac came home with a glowing

grade and a comment from his teacher that "you should get this published," his father took it to heart. "I guess we're all still looking for teacher approval," Buckingham says with a smile. Eric developed the story and put his illustrating talents to work to create a children's book.

A few months later, he was shopping it to potential publishers, working on a second children's book, and planning a book series based on Zac and Kristin. He also has an animated movie waiting for a producer.

Buckingham tackles all kinds of projects. "It's like the lottery," he says, "if you don't play, you don't win."

He hopes the children's book will be a winning ticket—but in terms of the lesson it teaches, it's already a winner. The pencil, eraser, and paper eventually realize they can accomplish something important. They might not create the Declaration of Independence or record a medical breakthrough—but they can help an eight-year-old boy writing a story. "They realized your importance is not always measured by what you do," the story ends, "so much as how you help those around you."

— Jill Tyrer



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PHOTO BY KATHLEEN BLASE

Pam Kirby Rambo

CREATIVITY WORKS

Pam Kirby Rambo shared her creative talents only with friends before turning her avocation into a business. At Kirby Rambo Collections on Sanibel, she now carries her own line of home accents as well as pieces by other artists.

"Friends had encouraged me to start selling the work I'd been giving as gifts," she explains. "I started doing weekend arts and crafts festivals." Weekdays were spent making each piece by hand; weekends meant constant travel.

Native Virginians, Pam and her husband, Clark, moved from Miami in June 2001 to Sanibel, where they focused on mass-producing Pam's work. They gave up the weekend shows and opened a place at the Village Shops, where her studio also is located.

Rambo is simultaneously launching a wholesale line. Clark uses his background in specialty advertising products to boost the wholesale operation, while Pam oversees the creative end.

This past summer, Rambo had notable success as a first-time exhibitor at The Gift Fair in Atlanta, a national event where thousands of retailers purchase their goods for the coming year. Kirby Rambo items—including hand-painted wine toppers and door stoppers, embroidered tropical tote bags, decorative bowls, and more—sold at the same pace as goods from wholesalers who have been exhibiting for years.

Her hope is that this great start is a sign of things to come, including Kirby Rambo goods in catalogs and retail stores across the country.

— Libby Boren McMillan

Making Waves is *Times of the Islands'* honor roll for Southwest Floridians who, in their everyday lives, make the community and the Lee Island Coast special. If you know of someone who deserves recognition, call us at 239/472-0205 or 239/472-0629.