

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Visitors celebrate annual festivals and events on The Beaches of Fort Myers & Sanibel

LEE COUNTY, FL – In addition to great weather, shell-drenched beaches and the sparkling Gulf of Mexico, The Beaches of Fort Myers & Sanibel in southwest Florida is the setting for many nationally recognized festivals and special events each year.

During February, Fort Myers celebrates the birthday of its most famous historical resident: Thomas Edison. His winter home on the Caloostachee River is one of the ten most visited homes in the U.S. and it is fitting that as the inventor of the light bulb, he is honored with a month-long celebration, the **Chico Charities Edison Festival of Lights**, in its 71st year.

There is even a festival that celebrates the mango! For two days in mid-July, it's all about the Pine Island mango as fans go crazy for anything made from the delectable fruit at the quirky **MangoMania Tropical Fruit Fair**.

It should come as no surprise that Sanibel Island, known worldwide for its great shelling, has been welcoming visitors for 72 years to the **Sanibel Shell Fair and Show**. Each March, locals and visitors and locals celebrate with displays, crafts and entertainment.

Also in March, the **Fort Myers Beach Shrimp Festival & Parade** pays homage to the area's harvest of sweet, pink shrimp. This event has been around for nearly 50 years and boils up more than 1,000 pounds of shrimp for 40,000 visitors!

In April, islanders and visitors gather on Sanibel Island for the popular **Taste of the Islands**, now in its 29th year. The afternoon includes sampling island cuisine and dancing in the sand to live music with the locals. It's for a good cause: The Clinic for the Rehabilitation of Wildlife (C.R.O.W.).

-MORE-

Annual events at The Beaches of Fort Myers & Sanibel/Page 2

In October, the J.N. “Ding” Darling National Wildlife Refuge on Sanibel Island hosts a weeklong birding and eco-festival, **“Ding” Darling Days**. In conjunction with National Wildlife Refuge week, the festival includes tours, food, wildlife presentations and many family activities.

Also in October, paddlers love the **Calusa Blueway Paddling Festival**, now in its fourth year. Along the Great Calusa Blueway paddling trail, events include activities that help participants achieve a “carbon neutral” vacation experience with tips to bring home. The festival includes free clinics and demonstrations, speakers’ series, waterfront hospitality events and chances to win a kayak and other prizes.

Many visitors plan their vacation in November so they will not miss the world-famous **American Sandsculpting Championship Festival** that has taken place on Fort Myers Beach for 23 years. This popular competition includes sculptors from all over the world and draws thousands of visitors during the five-day event.

In addition to the festivals and events listed below, visitors planning a vacation to Florida’s unspoiled island sanctuary should visit www.FortMyersSanibel.com for a list of events that take place all year. Some of the many not-to-be-missed celebrations include:

71st Chico Charities Edison Festival of Light Stadium Show, Grand Parade & Fireworks, Fort Myers

Feb. 21, 2009

239-334-2999

www.edisonfestival.org

During February, Fort Myers celebrates the birthday of its most illustrious historical figure, Thomas A. Edison, in befitting fashion. Edison, who built a home on the banks of the Caloosahatchee River and spent winters there, invented the light bulb. So it’s appropriate that the month of activities culminates with a lighted night parade. Invention competitions, parties, craft shows and a 5K run are all part of the celebration. The gates at the Edison Stadium, Fort Myers High School, open at 4 p.m. on Feb. 21 for those who wish to watch the parade and fireworks with reserved seating. Entertainment begins at 5 p.m. climaxing with fireworks at 7 p.m. to kick off the grand lighted parade. The spectacular two-hour parade winds its way through thick crowds down Cleveland Avenue toward the stadium.

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72nd Annual Sanibel Shell Fair & Show, Sanibel Island

March 5-7, 2009

Sanibel Community House, 2173 Periwinkle Way

239-472-2155

www.sanibelcommunityhouse.com

Sanibel Island, named the best shelling beach in the U.S. and one of the best in the world, hosts shelling enthusiasts who gather each year for the shell fair that draws visitors from all over the world. One of the most unique events in the country, it began on a porch with just a few islanders and has evolved into today's event that includes demonstrations, shell displays, crafts, prizes, food and entertainment. Serious shellers compete for prizes while visitors shop and enjoy these treasures that include award-winning Sailor's Valentines...popular in the 1800s when sailors brought them home to their sweethearts. In celebration of this world-renowned shelling island, the Shell Fair features shell displays and crafts, food and entertainment. Hours are 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. Thursday and Friday, 9 a.m. to 4 p.m. Saturday. Admission to the fair is free. Admission to the shell show inside is a \$3 per person donation.

Fort Myers Beach Shrimp Festival and Parade, Fort Myers Beach

March 14-15, 2009

239-463-6986

www.fortmyersbeach.org

Two days of festivities celebrate Fort Myers Beach's shrimp harvest. Activities for the 51st annual event will include a 5K Treasure Run, kids run the weekend prior, 10 a.m. parade, and crowning of the Shrimp Queen on Saturday. Craft vendors, the boiled shrimp concession, and other seafood booths set up at Lynn Hall Memorial Park both days.

29th Annual Taste of the Islands, Sanibel Island

April 26, 2009

Sanibel Community Park

2221 Periwinkle Way

239-472-3644

www.crowclinic.org

Spend an afternoon on the island from noon to 6 p.m. sampling island cuisine and dancing in the sand to live music with the locals. Taste of the Islands, celebrating its 29th anniversary this year, benefits Clinic for the Rehabilitation of Wildlife (C.R.O.W.).

MangoMania Tropical Fruit Fair, Cape Coral/Pine Island

July 11-12, 2009

German-American Social Club

2101 Pine Island Road

239-283-4842

www.mangomaniafl.com

The mango is the star attraction for two days each summer on Pine Island. Go wild for fruit as you sample locally-grown delicacies at this ninth annual affair, an unusual celebration of all the

-MORE-

Annual events at The Beaches of Fort Myers & Sanibel/Page 4

tropical fruit grown on the island, which also includes lychee, carambola, longan, papaya, and “chocolate pudding fruit.” Fruit, exotic fruit trees, and fruit-related products are available for purchase. The festival also offers live music, kid’s activities and rides.

4th Annual Calusa Blueway Paddling Festival, county-wide

Oct. 24-Nov. 1, 2009

www.CalusaBluewayPaddlingFestival.com

Along the Great Calusa Blueway paddling trail on waterfront communities in southwest Florida, events include activities that will help attendants achieve a “carbon neutral” vacation experience with tips to bring home. The festival includes free clinics and demonstrations, a speaker series, waterfront hospitality events and chances to win a kayak and other prizes. Also: moderately priced nature and cultural tours, waterway cleanups, canoe and kayak races, and a catch-and-release kayak fishing tournament. A nature photography contest and family-oriented outdoors eco-fests round out the offerings. Complete details with contact information and regular updates may be found at www.calusabluewaypaddlingfestival.com.

"Ding" Darling Days, Sanibel Island

Oct. 21-Nov. 1, 2009

J. N. "Ding" Darling National Wildlife Refuge

239-472-1100

www.dingdarlingdays.com

"Ding" Darling Days include a week of eco-activities with free refuge tram tours, live wildlife presentations, hot dogs, kids activities, Federal Duck Stamp artist presentation, and more. Birding and kayaking tours, environmental speakers, a nature photography contest, and Junior Duck Stamp Awards will fill the week with environmental activities for all ages. The festival celebrates the birthday of the refuge's namesake, conservationist and Pulitzer Prize-winning political cartoonist Jay N. "Ding" Darling.

23rd Annual American Sandsculpting Championship Festival, Fort Myers Beach

Nov. 4-8, 2009

239-454-7500

www.sandfestival.com

Dolphins, great blue herons, giant computers, entwined lovers and Neptune, god of the seas: The intricate sculptures at the 23rd Annual American Sandsculpting Championship Festival takes “playing in the sand” to a whole new level November on Fort Myers Beach. From nothing more than a beach of sand and 300 gallons of water, about 20 master sculptors will create complex works of art. Amateur sculptors are invited to create and learn from the masters during a Sandsculpting 101 workshop on Friday. The workshop is free, but there is a fee for amateur team entries into the contest’s three categories: children, friends and family, and businesses. The fee includes T-shirts and gift prizes for winning teams.

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**The 25th Annual Christmas Luminary Trail and Open House, Sanibel and Captiva islands
Dec. 4 and 5, 2009**

239-472-1080

www.sanibel-captiva.org

This popular event draws visitors from all over the world as they join local residents to celebrate the season. Three miles of luminary candles line Periwinkle Way from 5:30-9 p.m. on Sanibel Island on Dec. 4 and Dec. 5 on Captiva Island. Businesses are decorated for the holidays with 2000 candles illuminating the island pathways, storefronts and homes.

**Holiday Nights at the Edison & Ford Winter Estates, Fort Myers
December 2009**

2350 McGregor Blvd.

239-334-7419

www.efwefla.org

Millions of lights celebrate Thomas Edison's contribution to modern life and the festivity of the season at this 34-year Lee County tradition enjoyed by more than 30,000 visitors each year. Lights and decorations fill 20 acres of gardens, along with the recently restored Edison buildings and the Estates' historic homes. Holidays at the Estates places historical decorations amidst the orchids, exotic trees and plantings that fill the gardens. Events include artists and craftsmen exhibits and appearances, as well as book signings and demonstrations in the Creative Cottage located in the Ford Caretaker's House.

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EDITOR'S NOTE: The Beaches of Fort Myers & Sanibel in southwest Florida includes: Sanibel Island, Captiva Island, Fort Myers Beach, Fort Myers, Bonita Springs, Estero, Cape Coral, Pine Island, Boca Grande & Outer islands, North Fort Myers, Lehigh Acres. A comprehensive press kit and images are available upon request.