

*November, 2022*



*Photo by Richard Murray*

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

Page

---

WC Personnel

1

---

WC Staff Profile—*Antonia Diavila*

2

---

Board Briefs

3

---

Community Tip of the Month:  
*HOAst voting*

3

---

Upcoming HOA Governance Events

4

---

The Surprises and Lessons Ian Left

5

---

Board Member Profile—*Mike Boriss*

6

---

Cover Photo Entry Details

7

---

Activity Profile—*Texas Hold' em*

8

---

What Happened to Our Trees?

9

---

Committee Corner

10

---

The Dichotomy of Hurricane Ian—  
*Humanity in the Face of Tragedy*

12

---

Back Cover—*Staff*

16



Photo by Richard Murray

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Bill Bell, Vice President

Michael Boriss, Treasurer

James Schopp, Secretary

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The Cy-Press

November 2022

**We have a winner!**

We had over 330 responses to our “Name the Newsletter” survey and we’re pleased to announce that Vince D’Andrea’s entry, The Cy-Press, was the winner! Thanks to Vince, to everyone who submitted a name, and to everyone who voted!

VOTE



## “Ms. Clean”—Antonia Diavila



If she had the time and facilities, she'd love to join a gym and enjoy a swimming pool. She joked that doing so would improve her fitness and help her do her job better.

She loves cleaning, and the friendly residents she encounters in Winding Cypress. The biggest challenge she faces is the language barrier. Antonia knows a bit of English, but not a lot. When you see Antonia, please smile, wave, and say hello. It would make her day, and very likely, yours too!



If you haven't ever paid attention to how sparkling clean and beautifully maintained the WC Amenity Center is, please take a good look around the next time you're there. From the gathering areas to the fitness center to the restrooms/locker rooms to the windows, Antonia Diavila is the housekeeper responsible for keeping it that way. And she loves doing it.

Antonia is originally from the state of Guanajuato in south central Mexico. She came to Florida in 2017. Her first job was cleaning at a hospital, but Antonia's sister Maria, who works as the weekend housekeeper at Winding Cypress, encouraged her to apply here for the weekday job. And she got it!

Antonia is a widow and lives with her father whom she cares for. She has no children but her job and taking care of her father leave her with very little free time. When possible, she and her dad walk for exercise and pleasure.

In the precious few moments of free time she has on the weekends, Antonia does lacemaking and crocheting. Some pictures of her work are featured at right. This writer also does needlework and is very impressed by the quality, intricacy, and beauty of Antonia's work!

## Board Briefs

November 2022

There is no doubt that October 2022 was one for the record books. In the wake of the storm, many of you stepped up to help each other, demonstrating the true spirit of generosity that's present here in WC. The board would also like to commend the community for their generous donations to the victims of the hurricane—including volunteering, cash, and items.

In the aftermath of Ian, it has been wonderful to drive through the neighborhood and see many of you showing pride of ownership by spending time on your landscape. For those of you who are patiently awaiting our landscaper, BrightView, to respond to your needs, thank you for your patience. Many of their staff members were not nearly as lucky as we were.

Southwest Property Management is working with vendors and Florida Power & Light to address our street lights and signs that were damaged by Ian. If you've seen something in any of the common areas that needs addressing, please report it to the property manager, or to BrightView if it's landscaping related.

After much due diligence and expert support from the building and grounds committee, including requesting back up systems to help prevent future catastrophic fountain failure, the board has agreed on the necessary repairs to our entrance fountain and are moving forward. Hopefully the fountain will be fully functional by the holidays. Additionally, a contract has been signed to resurface our pickleball, tennis, and bocce courts. We will be working with the vendor to try to schedule the resurfacing with as little inconvenience as possible to our players.

Our community is happy to have Activities Director Maribeth Jones back. Although we had a few bumps in the road without her, our property management company is working on fail-safes to prevent issues in the future.

A new and expanded plant list was approved in October. We owe a big thanks to our Architectural Review Committee who spent hours ensuring we have not only beautiful, but viable, landscape options.

Last, but certainly not least, the members of our Finance Committee cannot be thanked enough for the hundreds of hours they have spent on our budget.

Having presented the proposed 2023 budget to the owners, updates are being made.

The proposed budget will be mailed or emailed to owners in anticipation of the board's vote to approve it in mid-November.

### **Enrolling In HOAst Electronic Voting**

HOAst electronic voting will be used for elections and other important decisions within Winding Cypress. Using HOAst instead of paper ballots saves time and money.

If you still need to sign up, please send a request for an invitation to the Board of Directors at [WCBoardofDirectors@swpropmgt.com](mailto:WCBoardofDirectors@swpropmgt.com)

When you receive the invitation, it will include a username and password allowing you to register for online voting. Please log in, establish your account, and opt in to receive electronic communications and online voting. Many, if not all, of your questions about HOAst can be answered by clicking on [Learn More About HOAst](#).



*Photo by Marco Arilli*

### **November Safety Tip**

Here in Winding Cypress, we're lucky to share the road with various species of wildlife. If you haven't yet seen them, there are gopher tortoises and other tortoises/turtles, rabbits, and even some birds that tend to sit in the roadway. Please follow the speed limit, and slow down as you approach any wildlife. If you have any questions or find an injured/sick/orphaned animal, contact the Conservancy of SW Florida's Von Arx Hospital. Click [here](#) to visit their website.

# Upcoming HOA Governance Events

Election day in the U.S. is defined as "the Tuesday next after the first Monday in the month of November." In Winding Cypress, we are stretching that out a bit with several different votes over the next few months. Here's a preview of what to expect:

1. **Budget approval** - On Oct 26<sup>th</sup> the Finance Committee presented the proposed 2023 budget to the community at an evening town hall. In mid-November the board will vote to approve the budget.
2. **Amending article 9.3 of the Bylaws** – In mid-December the community will vote on an amendment that would change the number of votes required to make any future changes to the Bylaws or the Declaration of Code, Covenants and Restrictions. The current rule requires two-thirds of the ENTIRE community to vote in agreement of a change to either of those documents. When all homes are sold, this will be 511 "yes" votes (one vote per residence). The amendment would change that to two-thirds OF THOSE WHO VOTE once quorum is obtained (a minimum of 230 total votes – one vote per residence).
3. **Town Hall presentation of proposed revisions to governing documents** – In mid-February our attorney will present the remaining proposed changes to the governing documents. These changes are predominately removing the developer from the documents, as well as blending in the 30+ amendments.
4. **The annual meeting, election, and the vote to adopt the revised governing documents** - In mid-March we will hold our annual meeting to complete the vote on revising the governing documents, as well as hold the election of 2 board members. It's interesting to note that the election of board members does not fall under the vote requirement in item 2 above. However, to conduct the annual meeting, there must be a minimum number of "attendees" (a quorum).

Bear in mind there are multiple state laws as well as other rules in our own governing documents that dictate exactly how these events must be conducted. As the votes and board election draw closer, you will be receiving announcements with the required details.

**THANK YOU** to those who have opted into receiving electronic communications! Note that opting into electronic communications is separate from opting into using our online voting system (HOAst). To date, 55% of Winding Cypress residences have registered for HOAst. Mailing non-HOAst users their election materials will be expensive.

**If you haven't already,  
please consider requesting an invitation to vote electronically  
by clicking [HERE](#)**

**Be sure to include your name and WC address**



## **To our honored Veterans:**

There are so many ways people can serve their community, but military service goes above and beyond what any community could ask for. The risks you took for the sake of our people are what place you among the most respectable. We are fortunate to have you as our protector and neighbor. Thank you and enjoy your Veterans Day!

## The Surprises and Lessons Ian Left Behind

A group of Winding Cypress neighbors, who fortunately did not suffer significant damage to themselves or their homes, were recently asked about their experiences during Hurricane Ian. They were asked specifically whether there were any unexpected effects/surprises and what additional preparations they would take for hurricanes in the future. Here are some of their answers.

Stacy Nelms, Veronica (Ronnie) Asafaylo, Phyllis Kuntz, and Shaun Clancy were hurricane first timers. Ronnie and Shaun were surprised by the lengthy loss of internet and unreliable cell phone service. Phyllis was taken aback by the fact that her children's home near the Botanical Garden was severely damaged, while her home only sustained very minor damage.

Shari Rossi, Diane and Mike Merola, and another neighbor who asked that we not use his name had all been through at least one other hurricane. Shari said Ian was scarier than Hurricane Irma because she was in her own home this time, whereas she was not in her home for Irma. Diane and Mike were surprised by the failure of their generator due to an oil issue, and several residents reported substantially higher gas bills as a result of using their generators during the storm.

Shaun, Ronnie, and Diane and Mike learned some generator lessons. Mike said, "Have your generator checked and serviced BEFORE hurricane season." Shaun has stocked up on oil and oil filters so that he can change the oil if his generator needs it before or during a storm. He also installed an antenna in his attic so he could get some live TV channels without needing the internet.





## Introducing Board Treasurer Mike Boriss

**“A day is a day. It’s just a measurement of time. Whether it’s a good day or a bad day is up to you. It’s all a matter of perception.”  
-Donald L. Hicks**

That pretty much sums up Mike’s perspective on life. This writer met with Mike recently in the Shady Palm over a couple of diet sodas. In a conversation peppered with jokes, smiles, tears, and lots of serious discourse, Mike shared his goals for the board, his hopes for the community, his current personal struggles, and his perspectives.

Born in Dearborn, Michigan, Mike attended Wayne State University and Kansas City College of Osteopathic Medicine. He subsequently completed a one-year internship at Detroit Osteopathic Hospital, a two-year medical residency, and a subsequent two-year fellowship in Cardiology at Kennedy Memorial Hospital in New Jersey. Mike is board certified in Internal Medicine, Cardiology, Critical Care Medicine, and Nuclear Cardiology. Safe to say, Mike has an affinity for getting things done, and done right—even (and maybe especially!) in a crisis.

Mike ended up settling in New Jersey, where he practiced as a general cardiologist for 37 years in Cape May Court House. It was here that Mike raised his three children—eventually remarrying after meeting the love of his life, Cookie. Mike and Cookie purchased a home in Winding Cypress in 2016, spent five years as snowbirds, then settled here full time. Mike retired last year, and they were fully enjoying all that Winding Cypress has to offer

– from serving on the board to playing pickleball, joining in the organized activities, and dining out at the Shady Palm with friends—until Cookie was diagnosed earlier this year with leukemia. Cook (as Mike affectionately calls her) is currently in remission and moving forward with overwhelming support, guidance, and love from Mike, her family, and her dear friends both up north and here in the community. And yet, despite monitoring ongoing treatments, coordinating specialist consultations, managing medication and dietary regimes, and providing many weeks of advocacy and support for his wife, Mike remains committed to the Winding Cypress board.

In fact, Mike noted that the board members spend countless hours every week on official board work. This includes meeting with the many committees, vendors, fellow residents, legal staff, Pulte representatives, and Southwest Property management and staff—and ensuring everything is executed as expeditiously, as efficiently, and as cost-effectively as possible. It’s a tough job, but each of the board members recognizes the benefits of a smooth transition. That includes the need for improvements to some of the past equipment and services, and the necessity for prioritizing and keeping the community’s best interests at the forefront. “I’d like to remind my fellow residents that we, as a board, are also residents here in Winding Cypress. Your board is no longer a faceless corporation. Trust me when I say, we take each and every item here very seriously, and treat it with the utmost attention and respect. We have a fiduciary duty to Winding Cypress, and we are committed to ensuring the community runs well.” And that, after all, is exactly what we’d hoped for.

So, what makes Mike Boriss tick? “Well, I like to help people. And I like to get things done as effectively and efficiently as possible. A key component of that is communication. Lack of communication is the root of most problems. I believe that talking through an issue, face to face, is always better than attacking each other behind the scenes.” If you know Mike, that is exactly how he tackles life—and why he ran for the first resident board in Winding Cypress. “I’ve always held leadership positions throughout my career, and facilitating communication is my thing. Communication should be undertaken with an eye toward perspective.” Mike’s biggest frustration through our transition, from a Pulte-led community to a board-led community, is just that. “Lack of communication from our previous leadership, and a perspective that was not community-focused, has led to a plethora of misinformation that continues to spread. The residents deserve better board-driven decisions, and better

(continued from page 6)

resident-centric communication.” And that’s pretty much Mike’s goal—setting expectations, promoting a healthy perspective, and improving communication.

When asked what he’d like the community to remember moving forward, Mike didn’t hesitate. “I would like my fellow community members to remember that we are very fortunate to live here. And although we don’t always agree as a board, that’s to be expected. We are unique individuals with lots of experience, expertise, and 110% good intentions. It’s a good board with a lot of energy and ideas, but we need to make thoughtful, reasonable changes. And to do it right, we need to *prioritize*. That takes time.”

That being said, Mike is impressed with the board’s progress so far. He’s led teams of professionals throughout his career, and is no stranger to the over-

sight and execution of similar duties. “I think we’ve made great strides. Working with our committees has been great, and there are a lot of intelligent and motivated residents volunteering their time on those committees. Will we make mistakes? Sure. Will we learn from them and become a better community? I hope so. Will we remain committed to providing the best service we can for Winding Cypress? Absolutely.” Mike hopes the community can see that and view the board with a reasonable eye. “There is a significant amount of work going on that isn’t visible yet to the community, and all this takes time. Please be assured that we are focused and dedicated to getting it done. We love this place, too!”

And at the end of the day, isn’t that what perspective is all about?

## Don’t Forget to Submit your Cover Photo Entry!

Do you love to photograph the natural beauty of Winding Cypress life? Please submit your best photo of Winding Cypress for a chance at becoming the WC newsletter cover! And as you can see in this issue, even if your photo is not selected for the cover, it could still appear in the newsletter. All photos used will be credited to the photographer, so be sure to include your name in the email.

Please note: due to an overwhelming number of great photos received in the past, we ask that you limit your submissions to one per month per person. Send your photo (in .jpg format, please) by November 20 to [windingcypresscomm@gmail.com](mailto:windingcypresscomm@gmail.com) for a chance to appear in the December newsletter.



Photo by Larry Goode

## Texas Hold 'em at Winding Cypress



Although this writer loves to play cards, never in her 60+ years has she watched, played, or even read about this variation of poker. This is surprising when you learn that Texas Hold 'em is said to be the most popular of poker games. In fact, the World Series of Poker features a no-limit variation. Now, after doing some research, the game sounds like a fun blend of card smarts, acting, and a little bit of luck.

Of course, this article is not intended to teach you how to play Texas Hold 'em. You can, however, [click here](#) for the basics. You'll learn that Texas Hold 'em is a simple poker game, but the number of possible situations and combinations is so extensive that it can be extremely complex. Thankfully, here at WC there's an unintimidating way to get experience with the game and have fun at the same time.

Ron Chalker has played poker all his life – typically, dealer's choice. At Falling Waters where he and his wife Jo lived before moving to WC, three women ran a Texas Hold 'em group and he learned how to run a community game from them. When he moved to WC he missed it, so he decided to run his own game here. "They had half the number of players we have; now there are a few who come from there to play with us."

Generally, every Tuesday night you'll find Ron setting up tables and chairs, greeting players at the door, and handing out the packets he's put together beforehand. Ron is also dedicated to ensuring those who want to play get to give it a try. "We not only accept, but welcome new players!" In fact, anyone interested in learning how to play can call or text Ron at 330-501-8283 or email him at [chalker01@aol.com](mailto:chalker01@aol.com)

Feeling lucky? Win or lose, you'll have a great time with this group!

## Texas Hold 'em Tuesdays at the Amenity Center

**Play starts promptly at 6:00 pm. No entrance after first deal.  
Games typically end by 9:30 p.m.**

Come on down and join in on the tournament and have a night's worth of fun with your fellow poker players!





## What happened to our trees?

Hurricane Ian brought many issues for many people. As we all know, we were very fortunate here in our community. We often overlook the effects of a hurricane on nature when there is such devastation to homes and people. One topic of conversation that keeps popping up in Winding Cypress, however, is why did the shrubs and trees in the preserve turn brown after Ian? Days have gone by, and it has become increasingly noticeable. Will these plants and trees survive? Even hearty plants such as the sea grape, which survive on the oceanfront, are hurt.

According to the National Weather Service, some forecasters believe this "weird occurrence" could be due to the blowing of rain containing sea salt onto any exposed vegetation by fierce winds. Interestingly, you can look around and see several trees and bushes with withered, brown leaves on one side while the other side of the trees appears a normal green.

With so little rain to wash the salt off trees and bushes in the wake of these high winds, the vegetation that experienced the brunt of the winds (and thus most exposure to the sea salt) seems to have begun to wither and wilt. The leaves turned from dark to dull green, to brown, because of the wind damage. We know this as *wind burn*.

The good news is, as sad as the plants and trees look now, they should rebound by spring. It just looks much more like fall than it usually does in southwest Florida!



## Committee Corner

Committee Corner features news from Winding Cypress’s committees.

### Architectural Review Committee

*Ronnie Asafaylo, Chair*

Topic: Protect Your Home

The 2022 hurricane season continues and we want to remind residents that temporary *painted* aluminum shutters provided by the builder, accordion style shutters, and roll-down shutters may only be closed during a storm event\* or when a storm event is imminent, unless the homeowner lives out of state for the official hurricane season. In this case, the shutters may be installed from June 1 – November 30 and ONLY IF THE OWNER IS NOT IN RESIDENCE.

If *unpainted* temporary shutters are used, install these seventy-two (72) hours in advance of a hurricane and remove them within seventy-two (72) hours after the hurricane has passed.

A note about generators—An ARC application and approval is required for both standby and portable generators. A Collier County permit is required for standby generators only. Remember that portable generators and fuel tanks may not be stored on any portion of the exterior of the property.

\*A “storm event” is defined as a meteorological event in which winds in excess of 40 mph and rainfall has occurred, or is expected to occur, within 5 days.

### Finance Committee

*Jim Sullivan and Steve Shedd, Co-chairs*

The Finance Committee has been consumed with completing the Fiscal Year 2023 budget. The Budget Town Hall Meeting was held on October 26 to review

the proposed budget with the community. In mid-November the board will vote to approve the budget.

### Building and Grounds (B&G)

*Michael Merola and Michael Kaufman, Co-chairs*

During the month of October, the committee:

- Assisted in proposal reviews to upgrade playing surfaces on all pickleball, tennis, and bocce courts.
- Lent expertise and advised the board on the community fountain repair agreement, with design improvements to prevent recurrence of damage due to pit flooding.
- Began evaluating the economics of installing a generator to protect Shady Palm frozen foods from loss during a power outage.
- Continued weekly coordination meetings with BrightView on the following:
  - 80% completion of irrigation system testing and controller mapping
  - 100% completion of mapping home roof runoff collection systems, as part of lake beach erosion control efforts
  - Working with BrightView to re-stake hibiscus trees throughout the community

### Safety and Access Control Committee

*Michelle Apgar, Chair*

- The committee has been in contact with Collier County and Florida Department of Transportation (FDOT) officials regarding procedures and pricing for green “Winding Cypress” signs at the Collier Blvd. and Rt. 41 entrances.
- We’ve requested information on procedures and pricing for proposed new stop signs from the engineering firms that filed our site plans.
- The committee submitted their proposed expenditures for the 2023 budget.

### Activities and Social Events

*Adrienne Bergquist and Patricia Orangio, Co-chairs*

Lots of exciting activity/event options are on the horizon.

## Committee Corner (continued from page 10)

Keep your eyes open for announcements, and be sure to check the website for signup information.

Our Thanksgiving Potluck Dinner, set for November 13th at 4 P.M. is shaping up to be a huge success. Reservations have been robust, and it appears we have lots of residents who will be coming together to share a meal of thanks! If you are interested, be sure to sign up on the website and let Bonnie at the front desk know what dish you'd like to bring for sharing.

Other exciting events we look forward to are: the Renegade tribute band concert, a resident craft fair (a couple of spots are still available for vendors), the holiday golf cart parade, holiday concert, and a fantastic New Year's Eve celebration that's sure to ring in 2023 in grand style!

### Shady Palm Committee

*Susanne Abbiati, Chair*

The Shady Palm is now open on **Saturday evenings!** The first evening, October 22, was a success with many residents showing their support. The newly adjusted hours for Shady Palm are:

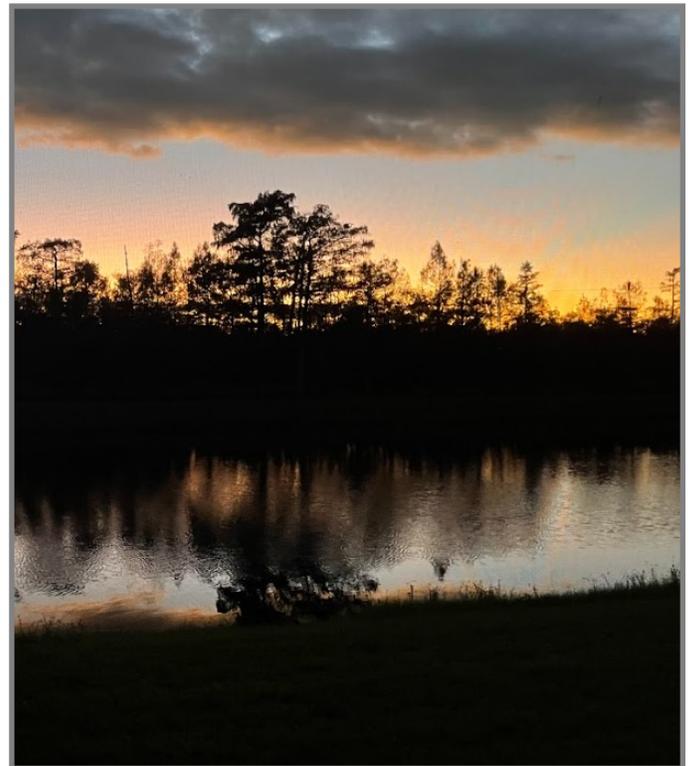
Monday, Tuesday: closed (except for during football season)\*  
Wednesday: 11 A.M. to 4 P.M.  
Thursday, Friday, Saturday: noon to 8 P.M.  
Sunday: noon to 5 P.M.

\*The cafe is open Monday evenings during football season. Light fare is available from 8 to 10 P.M. and drinks are served until the end of the game.

In addition to the new extended hours, Oscar, the café manager, has worked with the bar to add several more upscale alcoholic offerings.



Above: Photo by Jennifer Ballinger



Above: Photo by Tammie White



Above Left and Above: Photos by Richard Murray

## The Dichotomy of Hurricane Ian: *Humanity in the Face of Tragedy*

*“When the maximum sustained winds of a tropical storm reach 74 miles per hour, it’s called a hurricane. A hurricane can be an awesome and destructive force of nature.”*

That’s according to the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA)—and the second sentence describes the best, and the worst, of what a hurricane can be. Sadly, when Hurricane Ian hit Florida as a Category (“Cat”) 4 hurricane at 155 MPH (just 2 MPH shy of a Cat 5) on September 28<sup>th</sup>, 2022, it embodied the worst for many. No amount of preparation or foresight could spare several coastal communities—and tragically, a significant number of homes, businesses, farms, and lives were lost.

And as hurricanes almost always are, Ian wasn’t discriminatory. Driving through Collier County a few days after the storm had passed, electricity had been restored to most of the area. Yet everywhere you looked, Ian had left his signature. Trees were down. A pontoon boat was awkwardly wedged between a light pole and the edge of a sidewalk. Smashed business signs and marquees littered parking lots. The famous Naples Pier, along with the remaining historic Cape Romano Dome Houses, were demolished. Restaurants lining iconic Fifth Avenue stood with doors wide open—not to welcome diners, but to sweep out brackish water, remove ruined furnishings, and vent out moisture and humidity with large industrial fans. According to one employee at Chops, a local steak and sushi favorite on 5th Avenue, “it’s going to take a minute before we can open. A loooooong minute. Lots of work to be done.” By all accounts, many of the establishments could be looking at months, or even years, before contractors can be hired and work completed. And many homeowners are right behind them—anticipating a long waiting game before drywall, flooring, screens, and roofs are repaired.

(continued on page 13)



Above and below: Bonita Springs on September 28, 2022, the day of Hurricane Ian



(continued from page 12)

### **Impacts Close to Home**

Just ask Julio Vazquez, Account Manager for Brightview Landscape Services in Winding Cypress. He is working hard to attend to everyone's needs here, despite many of his landscaping crew being severely impacted. In fact, Brightview has been unable to contact twenty-seven employees since Ian hit. The additional work responsibility this creates is, understandably, further compounded by Brightview's concern for the well-being of their employees. "We lost everything, but we still feel blessed that we were OK. Many others were not," explains Julio. "I didn't have a place to sleep, and much of my crew was affected by the hurricane, but we wanted to keep coming to work for Winding Cypress."



Naples Pier after Hurricane Ian

Understanding the widespread impacts of the hurricane are sometimes difficult for those who were fortunate enough to avoid Ian's wrath. Here in Winding Cypress, our homes were left relatively intact. Other than bushes, trees, torn screens, and other minor damage, our community was lucky this time. So many others were not. In his soft-spoken and polite manner, Julio described what it was like on the night Ian hit. "During the hurricane my wife, our 9-month-old daughter, and I were home. We didn't think we would be in danger, so we stayed. All of a sudden water started coming in and flooding our house. We got out the door and made it to safety just as our home was engulfed in six feet of water." Julio and his young family have recently found a place to live in Ft. Myers, after living out of their car for two weeks. In fact, Julio's car still carries many of the supplies he has collected to help his family until they can get back on their feet. And Julio wasn't the only one of his Brightview crew who lost everything. Despite this, he remains upbeat and grateful. "A PayPal fundraiser has been set up to help us get some of the things we need until we can get re-established. Even so, those who could, came back as soon as we could because we are committed to ensuring the community receives quality landscaping services."<sup>1</sup> That, right there, shows spirit, integrity, and grit.

But when we talk "close to home," it wasn't only our contractors and other service workers in Winding Cypress who experienced hurricane damage. Several residents' family members were also on the receiving end of Ian's unwelcome visit. Many are still dealing with the aftermath of flooding and wind damage, spending the last few weeks tearing out carpets and discarding ruined belongings, dragging items to the curb, and reinstalling drywall and flooring.

### **Disasters Don't Discriminate**

A similar situation played out in Bonita Springs, according to local hairdresser Danielle Sheets. When their home was flooded during Ian, she and her family lost many of their possessions. But she, too, feels lucky that she and her family survived Ian's wrath. "We live on a river in Bonita Springs, and when we realized the river was rising, we left at 3 A.M. and headed for safety. That was fortunate because we ended up with 8' of water in our home. We are still awaiting word from the insurance agency about coverage."

(continued on page 14)

(continued from page 13)

Danielle owns one hair salon in Naples and was set to open a second location in Bonita Springs. Sadly, the building that houses her new salon sustained so much damage, plans to repair and open that business are on hold. “Despite all we lost, we still feel grateful. We are also so thankful for all the help we received, and the fact that we were not injured. Not everyone was so lucky.”

Ft. Myers Beach, as well as the barrier islands of Sanibel and Captiva, were three of Ian’s primary targets. According to Holly Smith, Sanibel Island’s mayor, the island was completely unrecognizable after Ian’s destruction. In speaking with President Joe Biden during his visit to Florida, she noted, “It’s my understanding this is probably in the top three weather events that’s hit our United States in recorded history, so the magnitude of this is different than the other ones. Right now...it’s almost being handled like a war mission.”<sup>2</sup> And Mayor Smith’s sentiments are reflected not only up and down Florida’s Southwest coast, but also inland where rivers and creeks continued to rise days after Ian left the state.

### **With Heartache Comes Comfort**

Yet when a disaster strikes, we also see the good in humanity. People rise to the occasion, extending heartfelt and much-needed support including shelter for people and their pets; jumping in with on-site cleanup; managing fundraisers; coordinating and distributing necessities such as food and clothing; serving up thousands of meals; and managing services behind the scenes such as hosting payroll processes, providing disaster recovery, and overseeing cybersecurity. Winding Cypress residents Mark Brewer and Claudia Pisa embody just that brand of humanitarian outreach, showing others how a selfless, caring act of kindness can make all the difference for someone.

Mark and Claudia have been volunteers with the Red Cross for several years. When a disaster strikes, they deploy anywhere they are needed. They’ve seen heartache, loss, and destruction first-hand—yet it’s that ability to provide comfort as well as tangible necessities that keeps them returning time after time. “The destruction we saw, right in our own backyard, was devastating,” noted Mark quietly. “We worked in an RV park where the homes were upside down, laying on their sides, or completely flattened.” He glanced at Claudia who nodded in agreement, then continued. “We spoke with a woman there who was up to her armpits in water when the hurricane hit. She and her dog put on life jackets and swam a quarter of a mile to a Walmart. They clung to a building column until they were able to move on. The stories are horrific. What we’ve seen and heard—it took my breath away.”

They explained that there were some areas, such as Ft. Myers Beach, where the Red Cross wasn’t allowed to enter due to search and recovery. “It’s heartbreaking,” they agreed. “People in here can’t believe what it’s

(continued on page 15)



Red Cross Disaster Relief Volunteers

(continued from page 14)

like just a couple of miles away. There are people behind the Walmart [on 41 heading toward Marco Island] that are wading in water, protecting themselves with sheets,” shared Claudia. She explained that many had lost their entire homes. A lucky few still had a structure standing—waterlogged, gutted of belongings, and uninhabitable—but still standing like sentinels overseeing the cleanup all around them. Many of these folks had nowhere else to go, and so continued living in barely habitable, unsanitary conditions. “They need shelter, not just food,” said Claudia, her face clearly showing the frustration and exhaustion they both felt. “Not only are they lacking adequate places to live and sleep, they have no bedding, furniture, or appliances... the entire contents of their homes are on the curb. These people are scared, and they have nothing.”

Despite all this, Claudia shared a common sentiment among those most impacted by Ian. “I met a woman from Pine Island who had left to stay with her daughter in Cape Coral. She was pretty emotional, but just so thankful.” That sentiment echoes the gratitude and generally upbeat attitude we heard from Julio, Danielle, and Mayor Smith. Even in the face of loss, they are grateful for the help, the kindness, and the compassion shown to them. And as often as Mark and Claudia have seen this kind of destruction and desperation, the gratitude and strength of the survivors still touches them deeply. With a self-deprecating smile, Mark shrugged his shoulders and sighed. “Despite having no clean clothes, nowhere to cook or eat, nowhere to sleep, people’s faces would just light up when they saw us. They welcomed a familiar face, and the kids especially loved the special treats we had for them, thanking us with wide-eyed gratitude.” When asked if all the hard work, emotional and physical fatigue, and frustration at seeing so many left with so little was worth it, they didn’t hesitate. “It’s amazing,” smiled Claudia, looking over at Mark. He nodded and continued, “Absolutely. People were still so grateful and positive, and just thanked us for being there. Honestly, we feel like we get more out of it than we put into it.”

When it comes to the timing, location, and force of natural disasters, one truth stands clear: no matter where you live or who you are, Mother Nature does not discriminate. Yet despite the general destruction and hardship left in the wake of Ian and other disasters, one has to marvel at the quintessential oxymoron of survival: the indomitable human spirit nevertheless succeeds, against all odds, and in the face of hardship. And when we see that spirit buoyed, supported, and cared for by the compassion of humanity, we see the true meaning of community.

<sup>1</sup>[Fundraiser for Julio Vazquez’s Family](#)

<sup>2</sup>[NBC News Sanibel Mayor Holly Smith](#)





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