

FEBRUARY 2025

FISH LINES NEWSLETTER



We Celebrate Volunteers, the Heart of Our Mission

Volunteers are the heart and soul of FISH OF SANCAP, playing a crucial role in ensuring the organization can continue serving the residents and workforce of Sanibel and Captiva. With over 200 dedicated volunteers, we rely on their passion and generosity to help operate our many programs, from food pantry support and meal delivery to transportation assistance, senior services, and disaster recovery efforts.



On January 16, 2025, we had the opportunity to connect with potential new volunteers at the Volunteer Expo, presented by the Charitable Foundation of the Islands and powered by the Pfeifer Realty Group. The event featured over 40 clubs and organizations in the community, allowing attendees to learn about local opportunities to give back. We were thrilled to share our mission, meet passionate community members, and inspire others to join their team.

“We’re deeply grateful for the volunteers who support us,” said FISH Executive Director Maria Espinoza. “Without them, we simply couldn’t provide the lifeline that so many in our community count on.”

“The Volunteer Expo was an incredible way for us to connect with people who want to make a difference, and we’re excited to welcome new faces to the FISH family,” Espinoza continues

The impact of FISH volunteers is staggering. In 2024 alone, FISH volunteers provided 6973 hours of service and drove 17,609 miles to assist community members. Based on research by the Independent Sector, the value of a volunteer hour in Florida is estimated to be \$31.61 as of January 2024. This means that the time and dedication of FISH volunteers contributed an estimated \$220,417 in service to the community.

Leading by example is FISH President & CEO Maggi Feiner, who has dedicated nearly 20 years to the organization on a completely volunteer basis. Maggi contributes over 50 hours per week, guiding FISH through multiple crises and transforming it into a critical community resource. Her commitment and leadership continue to inspire others to step up and support the mission.



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Mailing Address: PO Box 58, Sanibel FL 33957

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Volunteers, continued

We offer a variety of volunteer opportunities, whether individuals prefer a set schedule or need flexibility to help when they can. To make the process even easier, we use POINT, an online system that allows volunteers to select their duties and schedule based on availability. Opportunities include, but are not limited to:

- Children’s Backpack Program – Help pack, deliver, and restock backpacks filled with food.
- Medical Equipment Assistance – Assist clients in picking up or returning medical equipment.
- Food Pantry Support – Pick up donations, shop for pantry items, sort deliveries, or deliver food.
- Hurricane Information Committee – Distribute hurricane preparedness packets and check in on residents.
- Meal Delivery – Pick up and deliver hot meals to seniors and individuals.
- Transportation Assistance – Provide rides on and off the island for medical and other.
- Events Support – Assist at community and fundraising events with setup, greeting guests, check-in, and more.



“As we look ahead, FISH remains committed to our community and to finding new, innovative ways to make sure every person in Sanibel and Captiva thrives,” said Espinoza. “Thank you to our volunteers for standing strong with us! We couldn’t do it without you.”

We are always looking for compassionate, community-driven individuals to join its volunteer force. Whether you have a few hours a week or just want to help occasionally, there are plenty of ways to get involved.

We also welcome volunteer groups, including businesses hosting ‘days of giving’ and high school students hoping to fulfill their community service hours while making a meaningful impact.

To learn more about volunteering with us, visit our website at www.fishofsancap.org or call Claire Marquardt, Volunteer & Office Coordinator at 239-472-4775.





Enhancing Food Programs to Meet Rising Needs

For many families in Lee County, the rising cost of living has made access to nutritious food a daily struggle. Inflation, skyrocketing rents, and the aftermath of Hurricanes Ian, Helene, and Milton have left countless families making impossible choices: feeding their children or paying rent, buying groceries or affording life-saving medications.



In response, we have enhanced our food programs and extended its food pantry hours to support families and individuals who are struggling to make ends meet.

“Food insecurity is a reality for far too many people in our community,” said Maria Espinoza, Executive Director of FISH. “We see families who are working hard but simply cannot stretch their income far enough to cover basic needs. Our food programs are here to ease that burden and ensure no one goes hungry.”

FISH offers a variety of food assistance programs designed to meet the diverse and urgent needs of the Sanibel, Captiva, and Lee County communities. Each program requires an intake and sign-up process to ensure resources are allocated where they are needed most.

Food Pantry: The most-used resource at FISH, the pantry provides supplemental groceries to individuals and families. FISH sees firsthand how rising food prices coupled with disaster expenses is affecting the community. With unexpected, unbudgeted remediation or repair costs, along with lost work hours and livelihoods, many continue to struggle from the hurricanes over the last 2.5 years.

The senior population is facing overwhelming challenges, with rising healthcare costs and skyrocketing prescription medication expenses straining their already limited resources. “It’s heartbreaking to see,” shares Espinoza. “Far too often, we come across empty refrigerators and bare cabinets in seniors’ homes because they’re forced to choose between buying life-saving medications or putting food on the table.”



The Food Pantry is a vital service for residents and the workforce and offers perishable products, fresh fruits and vegetables, shelf stable food, personal hygiene products and pet products. The updated pantry hours allow for greater accessibility:

- Monday, Wednesday & Friday: 10:00 AM - 3:00 PM
- Tuesday & Thursday: 10:00 AM - 7:00 PM



Food Programs continued

Other food programs we provide include:

- **Meals by FISH:** A hot meal delivery service ensures seniors, homebound individuals and others in need receive nutritious meals five days a week, with extra portions for the weekend. Meals are subsidized by FISH.
- **Fresh Meal Boxes:** These boxes provide families with fresh ingredients and recipes, allowing them to cook healthy, home-prepared meals.
- **Children's Backpack Program:** This program provides children with access to nutritious food after school, on weekends, and during school breaks, ensuring they have the energy and focus needed to thrive. By bridging gaps in consistent nutrition, the program supports overall well-being and helps set children up for success in the classroom and beyond.
- **Holiday Meal Program:** FISH offers families special holiday meal baskets during the Thanksgiving, Christmas and Easter holidays, complete with all the ingredients needed for a festive family gathering, bringing a sense of joy and normalcy to whatever challenges a family may be facing.

For Sarah Singleton, a single mother of three, FISH's food programs have been a lifeline. "It's heartbreaking not to be able to provide enough for my kids," Sarah shared. "I work full-time, but between rent, utilities, and other bills, there's just not enough left for food. The Food Pantry helps us keep going, and the Backpack Program makes sure my kids don't go hungry on weekends or during school breaks." To protect her privacy, Sarah's name has been changed.

Sarah also expressed her gratitude for FISH's Holiday Meal Program. "The holiday meals were such a blessing. They brought us together as a family and gave us something to look forward to. Asking for help isn't easy—it's depressing to know I can't consistently feed my family on my own. But FISH has given us more than food; they've given us hope."

In a September 2024 article published in the News-Press, '... last year alone, more than one in eight Southwest Floridians, including one in six children, experienced hunger that impacted their quality of life. And the heartbreaking reality is these numbers continue to rise...' Additionally, according to the Health Planning Council of Southwest FL, 17% of children in Lee County are food insecure. In Lee County, where many residents are still recovering from the financial impacts of recent hurricanes, FISH has seen an increased demand for their food programs.

"Our neighbors are struggling to make impossible choices every day," Espinoza said. "With the support of our donors, volunteers, and partners, we're working to ensure that no family has to choose between putting food on the table or keeping a roof over their heads."

FISH encourages anyone in need of food assistance to contact their team for an intake assessment to determine the best resources for their situation.



Local Family Rebuilds Through Generosity and Partnerships

In collaboration with Community Housing & Resources (CHR), United Way, and the generosity of the local community, we recently helped a single mother of two move from a difficult living situation into a brighter future.

The client, Kelly S., is a mother to an 8-year-old daughter and a disabled son requiring round-the-clock care. She relocated to Sanibel three years ago, initially living with a friend. The arrangement soon became strained as she depended on him for transportation and, while he allowed her to use his vehicle, she spent most of her time running his errands leaving little time to seek additional work to help secure her independence. The name of the individual has been changed for privacy purposes.

Kelly reached out to us for help. She had used their Food Pantry a few times in the past and hoped they might have resources, guidance, and support to help her improve her situation and build a better life. When we received a donated van, we immediately thought of Kelly. “When I called to see if she’d be interested, she literally jumped for joy,” shared Nitza Lopez, FISH’s Social Services Director. “Having reliable transportation was exactly what she needed to take control of her life.” To ensure everything was in order, we had the van inspected by a mechanic and even helped Kelly with the transfer paperwork, making the entire process smooth and stress-free.

We also referred her to CHR, and within three months, she was approved for housing, providing her family with a safe and stable home. Through the United Way Gifts In-Kind program, we helped furnish her new apartment through their POD furniture distribution event, where she selected new beds for her entire family, a sectional sofa, a coffee table, nightstands, and even a TV.

“I’m still settling in and want to take some time to offer my gratitude,” begins Kelly in a letter to Nitza and FISH. “You and FISH have given me a fresh new start. You’ve helped feed my family, you’ve helped me get the home of my dreams, and you helped me get solid transportation. I can get to work on my own and feel inspired knowing that I am making a life that is mine. No one can take it away. I know I am actually moving forward now, and it’s so empowering and motivating that all my efforts do make a difference. I see a huge light at the end of a long, weary tunnel.”

This story shows how FISH, with the help of its donors, community partners and volunteers, comes together to help people overcome challenges, rebuild their lives, and create a brighter future for their families. Lopez added, “This is what FISH is all about—helping our neighbors move forward one step at a time. By addressing immediate needs and working with partners like CHR and United Way, we’re able to support long-term change.”





JOIN FRIENDS & NEIGHBORS FISH OF SANCAP FRIENDLY FACES LUNCHEON

neighbors helping neighbors
FRIENDLY FACES LUNCHEON
TUESDAY, Feb. 11 @11:00 a.m.

FISH is thrilled to welcome Larry Comstock from ECHO as the guest speaker for the February luncheon. ECHO, a global Christian agriculture organization with over 50 years of impact, is transforming lives by equipping small-scale farmers with the tools, techniques, and resources they need to combat hunger and malnutrition.



Comstock's presentation will take you on a journey through ECHO's incredible history, from its humble beginnings on five acres in North Fort Myers to its current role as a global leader with a 57-acre Global Farm and Regional Impact Centers in East Africa, West Africa, and Asia, plus exciting plans for a new center in Central America.

Larry joined ECHO in February, 2023, after ten years in senior development positions at Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary and World Vision. A graduate of Brown University (BA) and Tuck School of Business at Dartmouth College (MBA), Larry lives in Naples, Florida, with Alison, his wife of 43 years.

- The cost of the luncheon is complimentary to guests -- meal selections will be provided upon RSVP
- **Space is limited, please RSVP early**

FISH continues to help neighbors in meeting their physical, mental and emotional needs. As always, we are committed to being a safety net for all. At the end of the day, our message is simple -- FISH is for everyone.



DATE:

Tuesday, Feb. 11

TIME:

Beginning at 11:00 am

LOCATION:

Sanibel Community House
2173 Periwinkle Way

RSVP:

To Erika Arnowitz, FISH
By Feb.7
239-472-4775
erika@fishofsancap.org



FREE TAX Preparation



neighbors helping neighbors

Sanibel Public Library
770 Dunlop Rd, Sanibel FL 33957

Every other Friday: Feb7, Feb21,
Mar7, Mar21, Apr4 and Apr18
10:00am - 2:00pm



IRS certified United Way volunteers prepare taxes for FREE for households earning \$66,000 or less per year.

VOLUNTEER INCOME TAX ASSISTANCE
VITA |  UNITED WAY
A UNITED WAY COLLABORATIVE

WHAT YOU NEED:

TAXES WILL NOT BE COMPLETED WITHOUT THESE ITEMS

- Valid Picture ID.
- Social Security Card or Individual Taxpayer Identification Number (ITIN) for EVERYONE on the tax return.
- Birth dates for EVERYONE on the tax return
- All earning statements (W-2, W-2G, 1099s)
- Total paid for daycare & the provider's business Employer Identification Number
- Did you buy insurance from the Marketplace? Bring Form 1095-A
- If married and filing jointly, the spouse must be present to sign the return

WHAT YOU MAY NEED:

- A copy of last year's federal and state return
- Routing and account numbers for direct deposit
- Are you a student or are you making payments on a student loan?
Tuition statement from school (1098-T)
Student loan interest statement (1098-E)
- Are you self-employed?
Written totaled mileage records
Totaled business income and expenses (less than \$35K)
- Identity Protection Pin (IPP) if applicable

APPOINTMENT REQUIRED

Visit

UnitedWayLee.org/FreeTaxPrep

Call 2-1-1 or (239)433-3900

Book your appointment today!



Welcome Salli Kirkland to the 2025 Board of Directors



We are proud to announce the addition of Salli Kirkland to its 2025 Board of Directors. Salli's extensive history of community involvement, leadership, and commitment to the island community make her an outstanding addition to the FISH family.

Salli moved to Sanibel in 1990, drawn by the island's unique charm and close-knit community. Initially working in Special Events Management with the Mariner Group, Salli helped open The University Club in Fort Myers while commuting daily from the island.

Over the years, her connection to the Sanibel community deepened as she joined her husband, Billy Kirkland, in expanding his resort beach rental business into the thriving "Billy Empire" it is today.

Always a supporter and volunteer at The Community House, Salli served multiple terms on the Sanibel Community Association's Board of Directors, including as President. Her leadership and vision played an important role in the reimagining and remodeling of The Community House.

In addition to her professional and civic accomplishments, Salli takes immense pride in her family. Her daughter Vanessa, a long-time Customer Service Associate at Bank of the Islands, has carried forward the family's community spirit. Salli's two granddaughters currently attend Sanibel School, where she is an active and involved grandmother.

Reflecting on her new role with FISH, Salli shared, "I believe the services FISH provides, with the commitment of neighbors helping neighbors, is such an important part of our community and has proven how essential this organization is to so many islanders. I am honored to be a part of the energy behind the FISH organization."

Maggi Feiner, President & CEO of FISH, expressed her enthusiasm about Salli's appointment: "We are so pleased to welcome Salli to the Board of Directors. Her deep roots in the Sanibel community, her leadership, and her passion for giving back make her a fantastic addition. Salli has demonstrated a steady dedication to advancing connection and support within our island community, and we are excited to have her insight and energy as we continue our mission to serve those in need."

FISH is confident that Salli's leadership and experience will enhance the organization's ability to address the evolving needs of the Sanibel and Captiva communities.



Captiva Dog Party for FISH Food Pantry's Furry Friends



Our furry friends are benefitting from incredible community generosity! The recent Captiva Dog Party, hosted by Melissa Halliburton, Founder & CEO of BringFido, and held at the Captiva Civic Association, raised an impressive \$5,170 for the FISH Food Pantry, providing nearly 10 months of dog food for pets in need.

The event brought together the community in a fun celebration, all for an important cause—ensuring that island pets don't go hungry. With the rising costs of pet food and essentials, many families are finding it increasingly difficult to care for their four-legged family members. "We've seen firsthand how inflation and rising expenses are impacting not only people but their pets, too," said Maria Espinoza, Executive Director of FISH. "Thanks to this fundraiser, we can help relieve some of that stress for families, making sure their furry companions are cared for."

For pet owners, being able to access pet food through our Pantry can make a huge difference. Halliburton said "the idea for the Captiva Dog Party sparked when I toured the food pantry with The Charitable Foundation of the Island's Leadership class last year. When I saw the pet food section and learned that FISH distributes 10,000 pounds of dog food to our island's residents and employees each year, I knew it was an area where I could help." With Bailey's General Store generously providing dog food to FISH at cost, donations go even further, ensuring pets on the islands receive the nutrition they need.

The Captiva Dog Party wasn't just about raising funds—it was also a fun-filled event for pets and their humans alike. Four-legged guests of the dog friendly luau feasted on an unlimited "Poo-Poo Platter" while their owners sipped tiki cocktails and bid on auction items like a dog-friendly Pack Walk from the Bailey-Matthews National Shell Museum, a Private Doga Session from The Treehouse, and an O.E.C. V.I.P. card that entitles the winning pup to free slices of bacon on each visit to Over Easy Café for the next year. Linda Linsmayer's dog, Frankie, even won a ride in the fire truck with her "Fire Dog for the Day" package from Captiva Island Fire Control.

For those who couldn't make it to the event, there's still time to help! Donations can be made at Pierce's Paw Paradise, where contributors will receive a free lighthouse dog toy or a "pawtographed" copy of BringFido's book, Ruff Guide to the United States, as a thank-you gift. FISH continues to be the island's safety net, providing not just for humans but also for their beloved pets. "Our pets are family and knowing we're able to ease the burden for owners through the Food Pantry is a wonderful feeling," Espinoza added.

"A big thank-you to everyone who attended, donated, or supported the Captiva Dog Party, and to the Captiva Civic Association, BringFido, Bailey's General Store, and Pierce's Paw Paradise for their generosity. Together, we're making tails wag and lives brighter on Sanibel and Captiva."



Our Volunteers, Partners & Team in Action



THANK YOU!



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