

AUGUST 2025

FISH LINES



NEWSLETTER

SUPPORTING LOCAL CHILDREN ALL YEAR LONG



With the new school year underway, we are reminding the community about its year-round youth programs designed to support children who live on Sanibel and Captiva—or whose parents work on the islands. From school supplies and food assistance to after-school scholarships and specialty program support, FISH helps families manage rising costs while making sure kids have what they need to grow, learn, and thrive.

“Back-to-school can be financially overwhelming,” says Merari Salinas, FISH Community Outreach Manager. “But when families know they have support, it eases the overwhelm. This August, many children received brand-new backpacks filled with grade-level school supplies during the FISH Back-to-School event. Families also picked up

essentials like clothing items and —items that aren’t always affordable after paying rent, utilities, and groceries.

For one local mom, Rhonda, the school supplies came just in time. “I was worried about how I was going to afford everything for my two kids. Things like folders and markers seem small until you’re buying them for two kids on top of rent and car insurance,” she shares. “Getting the backpacks from FISH meant they didn’t feel different from the other kids. They were excited to start school, not embarrassed. That means everything to a parent.”

This year, FISH collected school supplies for students in grades K–12 through the support of several generous community drop-off locations. Donation sites included the Sanibel Public Library, Chocolattes in Fort Myers, Jerry’s Foods, Sanibel Captiva Community Bank (Sanibel branches), Adventures in Paradise Outfitters to the Outsiders, Macintosh Books + Paper, Sanibel Captiva Trust Company, Sanibel Community Church, and the Sanibel & Captiva Islands Association of Realtors.

“We’re so grateful for the incredible community support that makes this program possible,” says Maria Espinoza, Executive Director of FISH. The organization offered a very special thanks to Saint Michael and All Angels Episcopal Church who provided venue space, Quantum Fiber who provided free snow cones and additional supplies and the many FISH volunteers who organized and helped distribute items. “So many supporters step up each year,” said Espinoza. “This is truly a community effort.”



2422 Periwinkle Way, Sanibel FL 33957
Mailing Address: PO Box 58, Sanibel FL 33957

239.472.4775 | fishofsancap.org | email: info@fishofsancap.org

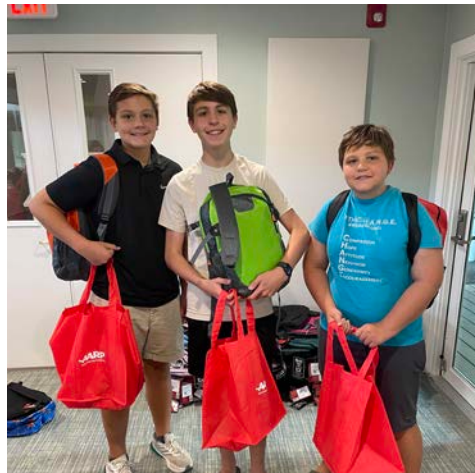




Beyond school supplies, many families also depend on FISH's **Youth Scholarship Program**, which helps cover the cost of after-school care while she works full time. "There's just no way I could afford after-school care without help," Rhonda continues. "My youngest is in second grade, and I need to know he's safe until I get off work. FISH helped with that, and it's been life-changing." For additional information on the youth scholarship program, please contact Nitza Lopez, Social Services Director at FISH.

The FISH **Backpack Program** is another critical support, providing children with weekend meals and snacks when school cafeterias are closed. With easy-to-prepare foods that children can manage themselves, the program helps reduce hunger and promote better focus and health. "Good nutrition plays a big role in academic performance," says Salinas. "We're not just handing out food—we're supporting their learning, their confidence, and their future."

FISH youth programs are open to families who live on Sanibel or Captiva or who have a parent employed on the islands. Each program is tailored to meet a child's unique needs, from school-year help to summer enrichment. "We see families from all walks of life—single parents, working families, grandparents raising grandkids," adds Espinoza. "No matter what your situation looks like, FISH is here to listen and provide support." Families who could benefit from youth scholarships, after-school support, weekend food bags, or other assistance are encouraged to reach out to the FISH team.





HONORING OLDER ADULTS | NATIONAL SENIOR DAY



In honor of National Senior Citizens Day on August 21, we are celebrating the contributions of older adults in the Sanibel and Captiva communities. "Seniors bring so much heart, history, and strength to our islands," says Erika Arnowitz, FISH Senior Services Director. "They've given so much to this community, and it's our privilege to make sure they feel valued and supported—not just on National Senior Citizens Day, but all year long."

To mark the occasion, FISH will be acknowledging local seniors with a small token of appreciation to say "thank you" for all they've done and continue to do. FISH's year-round Senior Services programs are designed to help older adults remain safe, independent, and connected. These services include, but are not limited to:

- Well-Check Calls & Home Visits – Friendly outreach to ensure seniors are safe, supported, and not feeling alone.
- Smile Boxes – Delivered monthly, filled with useful and cheerful items to brighten someone's day.
- Financial Assistance – Help with rent, utilities, medical bills, and other essential expenses.
- Meals by FISH – A Meals-on-Wheels-style program offering fresh, home-delivered meals.
- Friendly Faces Luncheon – Monthly gatherings that offer food, socialization, and fun—at no cost.
- Medical Equipment Loan Program – Access to items like walkers, wheelchairs, and more, all at no cost.
- Hurricane Preparedness Support – Assistance with storm planning, emergency kits, and post-storm check-ins.
- Transportation Services – Volunteer-driven rides to essential appointments such as non-emergency medical visits, pharmacy trips, and errands for daily essentials.
- Food Pantry Access – Nutritious groceries available to all, with delivery for those unable to leave home.

Though most of these programs are available to all ages, many seniors rely on them due to fixed incomes or limited mobility. These senior programs are made possible thanks to the support of many, including senior-specific funding from CAMEO of Lee County, the Shady Rest Foundation, Comcast Business, and generous private donors who share FISH's commitment to helping older adults thrive. FISH also partners with the Santiva Islanders to offer enriching activities like group outings, educational sessions, arts and crafts, and health and wellness classes.

Local resident Ruth M., age 84, shared, "FISH has been with me through it all—after my surgery, during hurricane season, and even just when I needed someone to talk to. The Friendly Faces luncheon is my favorite day of the month!" As we honor National Senior Citizens Day, FISH encourages everyone to check in with the older adults in their lives—and in their neighborhoods. To request help for yourself or a loved one, contact FISH at 239-472-4775.



NEW SPONSORS | MUDBUGS, SANIBEL CAPTIVA COMMUNITY BANK

We are thrilled to welcome MudBugs Cajun Kitchen and Sanibel Captiva Community Bank as the newest sponsors for its upcoming JOG N JAM event. The two-part celebration includes a 10K/5K and kids' fun run this November 1st at the Sanibel Community House, followed by a community concert featuring The Ben Allen Band on December 6th at Tween Waters.

These valued sponsors reflect a local spirit of connection and giving. Kyle DeCicco, President & CEO of Sanibel Captiva Community Bank, shared, "Supporting FISH through events like Jog-N-Jam is one of the many ways we show up for our island community. Sanibel is where we started, and it will always be at the heart of who we are. We're proud to partner with an organization so deeply committed to helping our neighbors thrive."

MudBugs, known for its vibrant Cajun fare, fresh local seafood and festive atmosphere, echoed the sentiment, "We believe in good food, good fun, and giving back. JOG N JAM checks all those boxes. We're honored to support FISH and be part of an event that brings people together for a great cause," says Ron Rice, Owner.

Sponsorship opportunities are still available, and support is essential as FISH continues serving the community through food programs, financial assistance, disaster recovery, and more. Benefits vary, depending on sponsorship level.

Those wishing to be featured on the official race shirt must commit by mid-September, with a firm deadline of September 26 to meet printing timelines. The sponsorship packet can be viewed at fishofsancap.org under the JOG N JAM sponsorships tab. To learn more or confirm a sponsorship, contact FISH at 239-472-4775 or email events@fishofsancap.org.

Highlights from last year's JOG N JAM





FISH LINES



FISH 2025
jog N JAM
CELEBRATION
5&10Ks • beach concert • fireworks • fun



SANIBEL'S ONLY 5/10K RACE

570 RUNNERS IN 2024

COME
walk, run OR jog
our 18th annual road race
SATURDAY
NOVEMBER 1, 2025
BEGINS & ENDS AT THE SANIBEL COMMUNITY HOUSE

JAM
DECEMBER 6
5:30p

RACING BEGINS 7:30a—registration from 6:30-7:15a
Visit **RunSignUp.com** for details & to register. *The earlier you register, the less you pay—scan here!*
Sign up for the **Kids Fun Run** following the awards ceremony—**FREE** under age 10.
Sponsorship opportunities are available. For additional information, email: events@fishofsancap.org



2422 Periwinkle Way, Sanibel FL 33957 • 239.472.4775 • fishofsancap.org



FISH LINES

• FISH 2025

jog^NJAM

CELEBRATION

CONCERT ON THE beach



LIVE MUSIC featuring the

BEN ALLEN BAND

a dynamic modern country rock act in Southwest Florida celebrated for its energetic performances, perfect mix of talent and personalism, and amazing blend of country dance songs and heartfelt country truth

FIREWORKS after concert

FOOD & DRINKS for purchase

GENERAL SEATING bring a beach chair or blanket



ADULTS (ages 19+)—\$75 ea
STUDENTS (ages 7-18)—\$50 ea
CHILDREN (ages 0-6)—FREE!

OR take advantage of **LIMITED GROUP PRICING**
ADULT "4-PACK"—JUST \$200 (only 50 available)

AT
'Tween Waters

SATURDAY
DEC 6
AT
5:30P



FISH HELPS NEIGHBORS WEATHER LIFE'S STORMS



When hurricanes come and go, the damage they leave behind can stay long after the skies clear. For residents like “Linda,” the road to recovery has been long and uncertain. Thanks to the Helping Hands Emergency Financial Assistance Rent Program at FISH OF SANCAP — funded by a generous grant from The Sanctuary Golf Club Foundation — hope found its way back into Linda’s life at a time she needed it most.

After suffering near-total damage to her Sanibel home from Hurricane Ian and then facing new setbacks after Hurricane Milton, Linda and her partner, who is battling advanced cancer, found themselves displaced

once again. Living in hotels with their pets, juggling mounting expenses on credit cards, and jumping through insurance hurdles left them emotionally and financially drained.

That’s when Linda turned to FISH, an organization she knew had always been there for the community. Sitting down with the FISH team, she received not only two months of mortgage help to ease the financial strain, but also the comfort of knowing someone truly cared and was there to listen.

“The weight that was lifted from me was far beyond the financial,” Linda shared. “The FISH team listened to my story. They provided emotional support at a time I needed it most. I left their relief center with a sense of strength I hadn’t felt in a long time.”

Linda’s story is just one example of the many lives touched by FISH’s quiet but powerful presence on Sanibel and Captiva. Through programs like Helping Hands, FISH assists neighbors through some of life’s hardest moments — whether facing job loss, serious illness, or the aftermath of a storm.

“We’re grateful to The Sanctuary Golf Club Foundation for helping make this program possible,” said Maria Espinoza, Executive Director of FISH. “It’s because of their generosity that we can continue to be a lifeline to our neighbors when they’re at their most vulnerable.”

No matter what challenges come — from storms to rising costs — FISH is here. Programs like Helping Hands allow FISH to offer help and a reminder that no one has to face hard times alone.

FISH’s Helping Hands Program provides emergency financial assistance for a variety of needs — from rent or mortgage payments to utilities, medical or dental expenses, and other urgent situations. Each request is carefully reviewed, ensuring individuals and families receive the right support at the right time. For more information about FISH OF SANCAP’s Helping Hands Program and the many ways they serve the community, visit www.fishofsancap.org or call 239-472-4775.



HOMESAFE PROGRAM PORTAL IS OPEN



My Safe FL Home (MSFH) applications have opened! The Florida Legislature has allocated \$280 million for the 2025–2026 fiscal year to fund new Wind-mitigation Inspections and Grants under the MSFH Program.

Grants are for WIND Mitigation upgrades only-Funding is limited and grants are awarded on a first come, first served basis. We strongly encourage eligible homeowners to complete their applications as early as possible to maximize their chances.

Click the [link](#) to see if you are eligible to apply.

What is the My Safe Florida Home Program? | The My Safe Florida Home Program (My Safe FL Home), re-established during the 2022 Special Session of the Florida Legislature, offers financial assistance to eligible Florida homeowners to help retrofit and strengthen homes against storm damage. The program has two (2) main components, both administered by the Florida Department of Financial Services (DFS):

- To provide eligible Florida homeowners with a free, no-obligation Hurricane Mitigation Inspection, which will assess the current hurricane-resistant features of their home and recommend improvements to further strengthen their home against hurricanes.
- To offer eligible Florida homeowners a Hurricane Mitigation Grant to help cover the cost of recommended home improvements identified during the program's initial inspection, enhancing the home's hurricane resistance and potentially qualifying the homeowner for discounts on home insurance premiums.

Matching Grants | The MSFH Program Matching Grant works on a reimbursement basis. Your Grant Application must be approved prior to proceeding with construction work. Payment requests are made at the end of the application process through a Draw Request. You must provide a paid-in-full invoice with your Draw Request. If your Draw Request is approved, you will be reimbursed for 2/3 of the total costs of the construction project up to a maximum state contribution of up to \$10,000, subject to legislative appropriation.

Low-Income Grants | Low-Income Homeowners who meet all other Hurricane Mitigation Grant Requirements are eligible for a Low-Income Grant of up to \$10,000, subject to legislative appropriation, and are not required to provide a matching amount to receive grant funds. Low-Income Homeowners do not need to provide a paid-in-full invoice and are exempt from the insured value requirement.



WELCOME MARY JEAN “MJ” HAYS



We are pleased to welcome Mary Jean “MJ” Hays to the team as Volunteer & Office Coordinator.

In this role, MJ will coordinate and schedule the many dedicated volunteers who support FISH programs while also assisting with administrative responsibilities including building management, events, and day-to-day office operations.

MJ brings a diverse background to the position, with a history that includes over a decade owning a catering business in Georgia and several administrative and bookkeeping roles with local Sanibel businesses.

“MJ’s warmth, attention to detail, and deep connection to the Sanibel community make her a wonderful fit for FISH,” says Maria Espinoza, Executive Director. “She understands our mission and shares our passion for helping others. We’re so happy to welcome her to the team.”

MJ and her husband moved to Sanibel five years ago with their two dogs. She’s an active member of the Sanibel-Captiva Orchid Society and volunteers at BIG ARTS. Outside of work, she enjoys gardening—especially orchids—shelling, creating shell art, and baking for friends.

When asked what drew her to FISH, MJ says, “It’s a blessing to work at such a great nonprofit that helps our community in so many ways and to make a difference. The opportunity to be a part of something that gives back and supports others is appealing to me. You never know how much a small gesture can change someone’s day—or their life.”

FISH looks forward to all MJ will bring to her new role as she continues the tradition of “neighbors helping neighbors”.



**WELCOME
TO THE TEAM!**



IN MEMORY OF CHRIS COILE, FORMER FISH BOARD MEMBER

We are deeply saddened by the passing of Chris Coile, a dedicated community member, philanthropist, and former board member of FISH, who passed away on Thursday, July 31, in Sanibel, Florida, from complications of Parkinson's Disease. He was 80.



Chris and his wife, Susan, made Sanibel their home after years of entrepreneurial ventures, and both became deeply involved in the life of the islands. Chris brought his boundless energy and spirit of service to FISH, joining the Board of Directors and lending his time, wisdom, and generosity to support neighbors in need. His commitment to helping others was evident in all he did—from participating in fundraising events to providing thoughtful leadership and encouragement to the FISH team.

Together with Susan, Chris launched a family foundation that supported numerous causes close to their hearts, including the mission of FISH. He was also known for his musical talents and performed often on the island, donating proceeds from his music to charity.

Chris will be remembered by the FISH family as a kind, generous soul whose warmth, humor, and passion for community left a lasting imprint. We extend our heartfelt condolences to his family and loved ones.

A private service will be held in Sanibel.





neighbors helping neighbors

FISH is committed to the safety and well-being of our island community, and hurricane season is no exception. Hurricane hazards come in many forms, including storm surge, heavy rainfall, inland flooding, high winds, etc.

It is essential to be ready before a storm approaches and crucial to know what to do if a storm makes landfall.

FISH can help—

before & after

THE STORM

NEW!

UPDATED HURRICANE PREPAREDNESS PACKETS

Our annual **FISH Hurricane Preparedness Packet** is full of essential information people truly need, and available **FREE** to anyone who requests one. This year's resource is more valuable than ever, with *updated content based on recent Ian/Helene/Milton experiences and recovery work* including:

- **How to prepare your home ahead of a storm**
- **Evacuation planning & routes**
- **Emergency supply checklists**
- **Local shelter info & pet-friendly options**
- **Hotel contacts with generator access**
- **Guidance for vulnerable populations & seniors**
- **Special Medical Needs Application**

If you or someone you know could benefit from this vital program, packets may be obtained in the following ways:

- **PICKED UP** at FISH—2422 Periwinkle Way
- **DOWNLOADED** at fishofsancap.org
- **MAILED TO YOU** upon request by calling 239.472.4775 or email erika@fishofsancap.org

HURRICANE RECOVERY

In the event a storm makes landfall, please contact FISH after the storm for information and assistance at **239.472.0404 (24-hour hotline)** or email info@fishofsancap.org

In 2024, FISH helped neighbors through the storms with:



586

HURRICANE PACKETS DISTRIBUTED
&

5,680

EMERGENCY MEALS DISTRIBUTED

2422 Periwinkle Way
Sanibel FL 33957
239.472.4775
fishofsancap.org





ADULT SCHOLARSHIP PROGRAM HELPS NEIGHBORS

For many, the road to stability and self-sufficiency isn't a straight line. Whether it's recovering from a storm, trying to advance in a career, or simply seeking a fresh start, education can make all the difference. FISH OF SANCAP's Adult Scholarship Program is here to help make that possible.

Through the program, FISH assists with tuition, books, and necessary supplies—removing some of the financial barriers that often make returning to school feel out of reach. The program is funded in part by the Zonta Foundation of Southwest Florida and is available to residents and workers on Sanibel and Captiva who are looking to improve their job prospects and long-term stability.

"We've seen how continuing education truly opens new doors," says Nitza Lopez, Social Services Director, who supports individuals looking to further their education. "This program is especially important for under-employed adults who are juggling work, family, and financial challenges. A little support can go a long way in helping someone move forward."

That's certainly true for one Sanibel resident, a married mom with a young child who lost her job after Hurricane Ian. "We were trying to survive on one income and pay \$2,500 in rent," she shared. After finally finding a more affordable apartment, she landed a full-time job and was eager to learn new skills. "I applied to a certificate program that could help me move up at work," she said. FISH stepped in to help, covering a portion of the cost. "That support meant everything. I feel hopeful that we'll be able to save for the future and be in a better position long-term."

FISH also supported a young woman while she pursues a degree in Nursing at Florida State University. "I am truly honored, this support means so much to me and will significantly help ease the financial burden of my education. Now I can focus more on my studies and continue working toward my goals without as much financial stress."

In addition to financial support, FISH helps each participant access the services they need—like food from the pantry—so they can focus on work, class, and studying.

For more information about the adult scholarship program or to find out how you can help support educational opportunities for others, contact FISH at (239) 472-4775 or visit www.fishofsancap.org.





Dear FISH of Sanibel-Captiva,

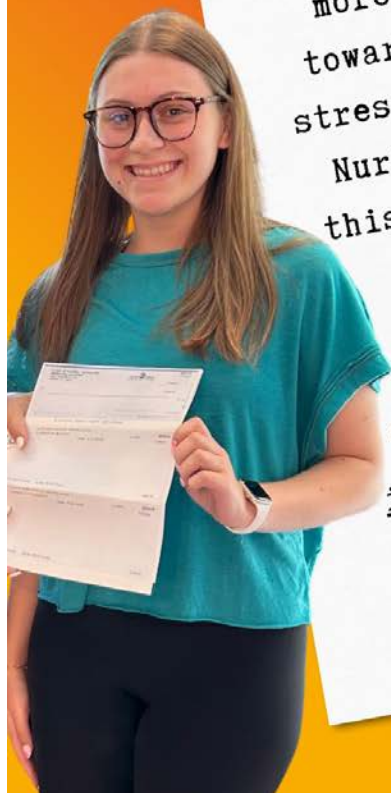
I am writing to sincerely thank you for awarding me the FISH Adult Scholarship Program in the amount of \$2,500.

I am truly honored to have been selected as a recipient of this generous scholarship. This support means so much to me and will significantly help ease the financial burden of my education.

Because of your generosity, I can focus more on my studies and continue working toward my goals without as much financial stress. I am currently pursuing a degree in Nursing at Florida State University, and this scholarship brings me one step closer to achieving my dream of becoming a Registered Nurse and hopefully a Nurse Practitioner.

Thank you again for believing in me and investing in my future. I appreciate your help and the opportunity to apply!

With sincere gratitude,
Emma Zarate





READ HOW WE HELP OUR NEIGHBORS



Summer Financial Struggles for Local Families | For many working families in our community, summer is one of the most financially challenging times of the year. We continue to see an increase in families seeking help, as reduced work hours, rising costs, and school breaks create added strain on already-tight budgets. “For many of the families we serve, summer means fewer hours at work, particularly in industries like hospitality, retail, and seasonal services,” says Nitza Lopez, Social Services Director at FISH. [Continue Reading...](#)

Medical Equipment Loan Program Helps Community Members

Getting around after surgery, managing chronic health conditions, or caring for an aging loved one can be tough—especially without the right equipment. Through our Medical Equipment Loan Program, we help bridge a gap for those in need of temporary medical equipment. “While seniors are the most frequent users of our medical equipment loan program, it’s available to anyone in need,” says Erika Arnowitz, Senior Services Director at FISH. [Continue Reading...](#)



Checking In, Cooling Down: We Keep the Community Safe in Summer Heat



With temperatures soaring into the 90s and heat indexes climbing even higher, we are reminding the community to take extra care during the summer heat. Older adults are particularly vulnerable to heat-related illness, but they’re not the only ones at risk. Children, individuals with medical conditions, and those without access to air conditioning can also be affected. “Seniors are more vulnerable to extreme heat, and many live alone,” says Erika Arnowitz, Senior Services Director at FISH. “It doesn’t take long for things to get dangerous, especially if there’s no air conditioning or if someone is hesitant to use it because of rising electricity costs.” [Continue Reading...](#)

Congratulations Maria Espinoza

The United Way of Lee, Hendry, and Glades Counties recently announced the election of new officers and board members at its annual meeting held on May 30. FISH OF SANCAP is proud to share that Maria Espinoza, Executive Director of FISH, has been named to the United Way Board of Directors. As a United Way Partner Agency, FISH delivers year-round assistance including food pantry programs, financial support, senior services, mental health resources, and hurricane recovery efforts. In 2024, FISH was also named a United Way Resiliency Hub, strengthening its role in disaster preparedness and response for island residents and the workforce. “Our collaboration with United Way has always reflected our mutual dedication to community,” said Espinoza. “I am honored to join the Board of Directors and look forward to contributing in a new way to an organization that has been such a vital partner in helping FISH serve our neighbors, especially through times of crisis and recovery.”





FISH LINES

the tourists are gone hunger is still here

Point to **seven homes** in our county.
Chances are that **one of them**
houses a family that doesn't know
where they'll get their next meal.*



"Everything FISH does is done right!"

—a Sanibel mom on FISH's Fresh Meal Kits

As the tourist season slows, and seasonal residents have left, FISH of SANCAP is experiencing **higher demand than ever at our Food Pantry—with already more visits this year than in all of 2024.** Many are service workers our community relies on and families who may be facing a decrease in hours and wages, while struggling with increased summer costs such as child care. We're doing our best to meet the need, including offering **Fresh Meal Kits**—ingredients for a complete and healthy meal for a family to enjoy together.

Still, we need your help. Please consider donating food or funds to support our much-needed Food Pantry and meal programs. You can turn summer hunger into summer happiness! That's what *neighbors helping neighbors* is all about.



Donate today!

*Source: Feeding America, Map The Meal Gap, 2023 data

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FISH LINES

JOIN FRIENDS & NEIGHBORS FISH OF SANCAP FRIENDLY FACES LUNCHEON

neighbors helping neighbors

FRIENDLY FACES LUNCHEON

Tuesday, Aug. 12th @11:00 a.m.

FISH OF SANCAP is keeping community connections strong with its next Friendly Faces Luncheon on **Tues, August 12, 2025, at 11:00am at the Sanibel Community House, 2173 Periwinkle Way**. The luncheon is open to all ages and all members of the community—residents, visitors, and workers alike.



This month's guest, David Muench, will talk about Periwinkle Park and share their story of community, resilience and renewal.

Periwinkle Park, the beloved trailer park and campground, is a family-owned and operated establishment for over 6 decades. Since its beginning, Periwinkle Park has been a favorite destination for campers and residents, offering a unique and welcoming community on beautiful Sanibel Island.

David will share the Park's history, growth and renewal post Hurricane Ian.

Lunch, prepared by The Great White Grill, is provided by FISH at no cost to guests. **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, August 12

TIME:

Beginning at 11:00 am

LOCATION:

Community House
2173 Periwinkle Way

RSVP:

To Erika Arnowitz, FISH

By August 8

239-472-4775

erika@fishofsancap.org



FISH LINES



neighbors helping neighbors

MENTAL HEALTH WEDNESDAYS

**Talk to a Mental
Healthcare Clinician**

30 minute sessions

free of charge



with **Tiffannie Nalley**, Clinician III
in partnership with SalusCare

At St. Michael's in the Library Room
2304 Periwinkle Way

Book an appointment:

erika@fishofsancap.org | 239-472-4775



FISH LINES

VOLUNTEERS, PARTNERS, COMMUNITY | THANK YOU!



THANK YOU!

neighbors helping neighbors



FISH LINES

VOLUNTEERS, PARTNERS, COMMUNITY | THANK YOU!



THANK YOU!

neighbors helping neighbors



FISH LINES

VOLUNTEERS, PARTNERS, COMMUNITY | THANK YOU!



THANK YOU!

neighbors helping neighbors