

Gulfport Messenger

Newsletter of the Gulfport FL Merchants Association

September 2008

A Very Productive Year

The Gulfport Merchants Association has achieved record results in the past year that are unmatched in its history. Ambition and belief in the potential of Gulfport combined with especially active members have made these accomplishments possible. GMA Board President Mike McCue highlighted the results of GMA's work during the past year at the monthly membership meeting on September 9th held at Sea Breeze Manor Bed & Breakfast. Activities, events and accomplishments of GMA's past year include the following:

Art Walk on the first Friday and third Saturday of each month has become a well-known Gulfport institution and drawing card, bringing crowds to town that also patronize local shops and restaurants. Art Walk also helps to resonate with Gulfport's identity as an Art Village.

The Tuesday morning **Fresh Market** each week draws locals and visitors alike to one of the few outdoor markets in Pinellas County open throughout the year. Growing in popularity and size, the Fresh Market offers fresh produce, seafood, baked goods and other items not otherwise available in town.

Annual events and festivals are becoming a hallmark of Gulfport and the GMA. **Get Rescued in Gulfport**, sponsored by GMA, has grown immensely in size and popularity since its inception. The March event attracted 165 vendors and netted over \$20K for canine rescue organizations. In addition to packing Gulfport streets with enthusiastic pet lovers, the event showcases Gulfport's and GMA's commitment to caring and community service.

Another popular event sponsored by GMA is the annual **GeckoFest**. This year's event in September attracted festive crowds in spite of rainy weather. A total of 195 vendors, 3 stages of entertainment and 70 roaming street performers testify to the increasing popularity and visibility of this special event. GMA was able to double its contribution over last year to its beneficiary, AIDS Walk St. Petersburg, out of a portion of GeckoFest

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proceeds, again demonstrating a commitment to community service.

With the City of Gulfport, GMA co-sponsored the venerable **4th of July Festival**, always one of the most popular and well-attended Independence Day events in Tampa Bay, and famous for fabulous fireworks. And **SpringFest** in April, co-sponsored by GMA and the Gulfport Chamber of Commerce, continues to attract numerous vendors and thousands of visitors each year.

Major physical and aesthetic improvements to Gulfport's Art Village were accomplished by GMA in the past year. Over 30 new **paver segments** were installed up and down Beach Blvd. to accommodate the increasing number of vendors participating in Art Walks and special events. An **electrification project** on Beach Blvd. now supplies electric power outlets to street vendors and also powers new **tree lighting** that now drapes street trees throughout Beach Blvd. And a **streetscaping project** has beautified planters in the Art Village with sod and new drought-tolerant ornamental plants. Each of these GMA-sponsored projects were paid for with funds from the Tax Increment Financing (TIF) Fund. GMA pays for electric power out of its own funds.

Media exposure and advertising for Gulfport, Art Walks, Fresh Markets, events and festivals has grown significantly over the year. Local resident Suzanne King, GMA's paid Events Coordinator, is responsible for managing and marketing these activities, regularly transmitting press releases to hundreds of media outlets throughout the year. GMA funds advertising for events and members in the *St. Petersburg Times* "Weekend" section each week, reaching 310,000 readers. As a benefit of membership in GMA, businesses are allotted free advertising space in the *Times* on a rotating basis. GMA is also now considering the placement of ads in the *Tampa Tribune*, as well as a commercial to be broadcast on Bright House cable TV channels.

The fifth version of GMA's "**GULFPORT: The Secret Is Out**" brochure will go to press within the next few weeks. The brochure features a

Productive Year (continued)

map and listings for GMA member businesses and is widely distributed throughout Gulfport, the beaches, local colleges and neighboring communities.

GMA has put its own organization on sounder footing during the year. **Accountant** Vanessa Long of Accounting Results has been hired to manage member dues, financial and tax matters. And GMA has now secured liability **insurance coverage** for added security.

With such a long list of accomplishments to its credit in just the past year, the Gulfport Merchants Association has reason to be proud. These achievements highlight how the GMA:

- Heightens the visibility and popularity of Gulfport to visitors
- Elevates the quality of life for local residents
- Improves the business climate and drives customers to local businesses
- Contributes to local community service organizations
- Supports the work of local artists and artisans
- Beautifies the streets of Gulfport

Vision, hard work, commitment and funding are all required to produce such results. What would Gulfport be like without Art Walk, without its annual festivals, without merchants who support the improvement of our town?

If your business is a member of the Gulfport Merchants Association, thank you for supporting its work with your voice, your help and funding with member dues. If your business is not a member, GMA challenges you to support it as it supports Gulfport and you. If you take part in GMA, you help make more great things possible.

To join GMA, please complete the enclosed form and return it with a check for membership dues for your first quarter (\$75) payable to Gulfport Merchants Association.

(Continuing member invoices are also enclosed with this mailing.)

Member Highlight: Yummy's

One of Gulfport's newest businesses is an already popular one. Yummy's, which opened in the Art Village Courtyard (2914 Beach Blvd. South) in April, offers a menu of Chicago-style food items, including its specialty, an Italian beef sandwich, as well as a variety of hot dogs, hot and cold sandwiches, pitas, salads, ice cream and more. Truly a mom and pop business, Yummy's is owned and operated by Richard and Bonnie Reale and employs only two other family members. Bonnie was born and raised in the St. Petersburg area and Richard has lived in the area for 25 years now, except for a four-year stint with Bonnie in Alabama.

Their first experience in the "Yummy" business took place from about 1999-2003 when they operated Yummy's Fillin' Station in Hartselle, Alabama, near Bonnie's family. A converted gas station served as their headquarters and proved popular to locals there. But the allure of Florida convinced the two to return home to Tampa Bay, where they worked for a time in the mortgage banking business. When their company experienced a downturn last year, they decided to return to their "passion": Yummy's. They considered several locations in the area, but decided on Gulfport after having visited for Art Walks and other occasions, saying they have always loved its "Old Florida" charm and friendly people.

The Reales are friendly people themselves and have created a welcoming atmosphere at Yummy's, informal and homey. The walls are decorated with snapshots of customers, especially the many kids and families that have become regulars. So far, according to Richard, business is "better than we hoped." Yummy's has already scored good publicity, twice being noted in the *St. Petersburg Times*, including a listing of readers' favorite hot dog spots.

A side business that the Reales have undertaken for several years is called Tinslee's Inc., a line of hand-made tin objects including bird feeders, photo holders, trays and other creations made of "tin with a grin." The tin sculptures are available at Yummy's or through their website at www.tinslees.com.

Yummy's is open Monday through Thursday, 11AM to 7PM, Friday and Saturday 11AM to 8:30PM, closed Sundays.

Coming Up Soon

Sat., Sep. 20: Art Walk 6-10PM
Tue., Sep. 23: Fresh Market 9AM-3PM
Tue., Sep. 30: Fresh Market 9AM-3PM
Thu., Oct. 2: Fox on Your Block 5:30-8:30AM
(See related article)
Fri., Oct. 3: Art Walk 6-10PM
Tue., Oct. 7: Fresh Market 9AM-3PM
Tue., Oct. 14: Fresh Market 9AM-3PM
Tue., Oct. 14: GMA Monthly Meeting
(at Peninsula Inn & Spa)
5:30-6:30PM
Sat., Oct. 18: Art Walk 6-10PM

On the Horizon

The Merchants Association is planning two more special events before the end of the year.

On Saturday, November 29th, a special **“Buy American in Gulfport” event** will assemble specially selected vendors of American art, crafts and other wares along Beach Blvd. This holiday shopping event will take place during Thanksgiving weekend, the busiest shopping weekend of the year. This is a new event on the GMA calendar. Proceeds from vendor fees will benefit American servicemen and women overseas.

Businesses within the Art Village are encouraged to decorate and light up for the holidays no later than the November 29th event. Our annual **Lighted Holiday Village** sets a festive tone for visitors to Gulfport. There will be a contest and prizes for best decorations. Watch for more details on these events in the coming weeks.

Fox on Your Block

Art Village merchants are encouraged to rise and shine very early on the morning of Thursday, October 2nd. From approximately 5:30 to 8:30AM, local Fox network affiliate channel 13 will air segments of live coverage of Gulfport's Art District during its morning programming. The Gulfport coverage, spearheaded by the GMA, is part of a series of “Fox on Your Block” segments featuring Bay Area shopping and entertainment districts. Gulfport will be the second area featured, following a previous segment on Tampa's Ybor City neighborhood.

Fox on Your Block (continued)

Art Walk vendors will be set up for the segment and merchants willing to open their doors in the early hours may be among those receiving this free media exposure.

For questions about this event, contact GMA Events Coordinator Suzanne King at (727) 322-5217.

GMA Meetings: All Invited

The Gulfport Merchants Association holds its monthly membership meeting on the second Tuesday of each month at one of its member business locations. Meetings begin at 5:30PM and are generally no longer than one hour. The next meeting's location is usually announced at the previous monthly meeting and is published in this newsletter in the calendar of events.

All are welcome at these meetings, GMA members and non-members alike. If you have not joined the GMA but are interested in attending, you may be able to get a feel for the ongoing activities of the Association. Your attendance and participation are welcome. The next monthly meeting will be held at the Peninsula Inn & Spa (2937 Beach Blvd. South) at 5:30PM on October 14th.

For more information, please feel free to contact a GMA Board Member.

Mike McCue (Domain Home Accessories):
President (302-9299)
Mike McKee (Art Village Courtyard): Vice
President (459-1963)
Leslie Gilchrist (The Outpost): Treasurer
(439-1485)
Lori Rosso (Sea Breeze Manor): Board Member
(343-4445)
Mary O'Malley (Reef Dog Gifts & Grooming):
Board Member (323-7007)
Suzanne King: Events Coordinator (322-5217)

Something to Think About

“Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed citizens can change the world. Indeed, it is the only thing that ever has.”

Margaret Mead