

newsletter

The Commute vs. The Community

Why Workforce Housing is Sanibel and Captiva's Essential Infrastructure

For decades, the commute across the Sanibel Causeway was a small price to pay for the privilege of working in paradise. But today, that commute has transformed from a minor inconvenience into an “untenable” barrier that is threatening the very fabric of our island economy. As luxury mega-developments surge on the mainland, Community Housing and Resources (CHR) is sounding the alarm: without a dedicated commitment to on-island workforce housing, Sanibel and Captiva risk losing the people who keep the islands running.

A Business Community at the Breaking Point

Recent surveys of over 27 local Sanibel businesses reveal a stark reality: **86% of island organizations have been forced to limit their hours of operation, capacity, or services due to staffing shortages.** From “The Shack” to the “Bailey-Matthews National Shell Museum,” the refrain is the same: the commute is too long, the traffic too heavy, and the cost of gas and tolls too high.

“Just an eight-hour workday can add two hours to the time that employees are away from home,” notes Rick Winningham of Jerry’s Foods. This “commute tax” on time and money has led to a rise in tardiness, absenteeism, and burnout. **93% of local business leaders now state that workforce housing is “critical” or “very important” to their future.** Businesses like Heidrick & Co. have even had to open mainland offices because the daily trek to Sanibel became impossible for their staff.

The Pull of the Mainland: A Growing Threat

The challenge isn’t just the difficulty of getting to the island; it’s the increasing ease of finding work away from it. Southwest Florida is currently seeing a “construction boom” of massive master-planned communities. Projects

like **Kingston** and **Verdana Village** are set to add over 12,000 homes in rural Lee County, while **Corkscrew Grove** and **Big Cypress** plan for thousands more in Collier.

Crucially, these mega-developments aren’t just building houses; they are building **commercial and retail hubs**—over 1.4 million square feet of it. For a service worker living in Lehigh or Cape Coral, the choice is becoming simple: take a job at a new mainland “village” minutes from home, or fight two hours of traffic for an island wage. As one local bank branch manager warns, “We’re always wondering if an employee is going to get another offer that will steer them off island”.

The Luxury Paradox

While thousands of units are “coming out of the ground” across the region, they are almost exclusively labeled as **luxury**. In Lee and Collier counties, roughly **13% of the population is “house burdened,”** spending more than 30% of their income on shelter. For-profit developers find affordable housing “unprofitable and unattractive” due to surging land costs and a three-to-five-year permitting timeline.

This leaves a massive gap that only organizations like CHR can fill. Unlike density-bonus projects where affordability “expires” after 30 years, CHR is in perpetuity, ensuring that these homes remain dedicated to the workforce.

Building a Resilient Future

The future of Sanibel and Captiva depends on recognizing workforce housing as “**essential infrastructure**”; just as vital to a thriving community as our roads, schools, and public services. A strong workforce housing system supports the people who keep the islands functioning every day, from teachers and first responders to hospitality workers, nonprofit staff, and small business employees.

“Affordable housing offers work-life balance, better morale, and a stronger sense of community pride,” says Winningham. By investing in CHR, we are doing far more than building apartments — we are investing in the long-term resilience, stability, and heart of this community. We are helping ensure that the people who love, protect, and serve Sanibel and Captiva can continue to afford to call this island home.

Excitement is already building for CHR's February Event, **Seats with a Story**

Participating artists officially reserved their benches and chairs, each eager to begin transforming them into one-of-a-kind works of art. The energy and creativity on display were contagious, offering an exciting preview of what's to come. *Stay tuned as these functional pieces become vibrant expressions of community, creativity, and island spirit ahead of the February event.*



Island Life in Bloom: May Community Highlights

Earlier in the month, on May 8th, the CHR family was out in full force for Islands Night. We had a wonderful time at our informational table and loved seeing everyone during the traditional island truck walk. *It's moments like these that make our island community feel like one big family!*

Developing Tomorrow's Vision: **Leadership Sanibel-Captiva Class of 2026**

Our hearts were truly full on the evening of May 6th as we gathered for the Leadership Sanibel-Captiva Closing Session. It was a beautiful evening of reflection and recognition, bringing together current participants, proud alumni, and island leaders to celebrate the professional and personal growth of our Class of 2026. This program is a cornerstone of our community, and seeing the passion of these emerging leaders reminds us why we love our islands so much.

The celebration kicked off with plenty of warm conversation and delicious bites, allowing participants to connect with local mentors and share stories from their leadership journey. During the ceremony, we were especially honored to recognize the steadfast support of the Charitable Foundation of the Islands (CFI) team—including Leigh, Sharon, and Laura—as well as our dedicated Ambassadors, whose guidance made this year possible.

As these leaders complete their formal program, we look forward to the vital roles they will play in the continued stewardship of Sanibel and Captiva. The insights they have gained will undoubtedly help shape the future of our island home for years to come.



Cooking Up Wellness: The AngeliFISH Kitchen Initiative

We are so inspired by the recent AngeliFISH Luncheon hosted by the FISH of Sanibel-Captiva Foundation! Nearly 70 neighbors gathered to support the 2025-2026 AngeliFISH Kitchen initiative, which is doing wonderful work for our community.

- **A Healthy Focus:** Guest speaker Carrie Bloemers from Lee Health shared valuable insights on the power of nutrition and wellness.
- **The Mission:** The initiative is working to provide FISH clients with air fryer ovens and host healthy cooking classes to make nutritious meals accessible to everyone.
- **Making an Impact:** Several CHR residents have already received air fryers through the program, helping support healthier meals.
- **Gratitude:** A huge thank you to the Foundation and everyone who attended this event to help our neighbors live healthier, happier lives.



Our CHR Family: Celebrating Milestones



We celebrated a very special anniversary on May 22nd. Nicole officially marked three years of service with CHR! We are so grateful for her talent and the heart she brings to her work every day. If you'd like to see more of the fun we had celebrating her (including some great shots from Bonnie!), be sure to head over to our Facebook page, where we've posted plenty of photos from the festivities.



We gathered at Sanibel Community House to share in the joy of Anna, David, and their family as they await the arrival of their precious little boy. It was a wonderful time filled with love, laughter, and community support as friends came together to honor this special season of life. Wishing Anna and David much happiness as we are all excited for the June arrival.



Remembering Lynne Campean



For more than a decade, Lynne Campean was a devoted friend and supporter of Community Housing & Resources. She generously shared her time, talents, and resources, serving on committees, attending events, and championing CHR's mission at every opportunity.

A gifted singer and artist, Lynne brought creativity and warmth to our community, including her beautiful contributions to the Festival of Trees. Alongside her husband, George—a longtime CHR board member and founder of the volunteer Crew—she helped strengthen CHR through years of dedicated service.

Lynne's unexpected passing leaves a void in our community, but her kindness, generosity, and commitment to helping others will continue to inspire us. We are deeply grateful for the lasting impact she made on CHR and the lives of so many in our community.

A memorial celebration honoring Lynne's life will be held in November.



Love Sanibel back

Love Sanibel Back kickoff at the Sanibel Island Farmers Market was a wonderful chance to connect with the community.

Community Housing & Resources (CHR) had a great time talking with neighbors and sharing our message about workforce housing and why it matters right here on Sanibel.

Thank you to Love Sanibel Back for bringing everyone together and helping strengthen the bonds that make this community special.

Learn more: saintmichaels-sanibel.org/love-sanibel-back



SAVE THE DATES

Sip, Surprise & Create

June 25, 9-11am

Heart of the Island Shops–Macintosh Books + Paper giving away 100 wrapped books, plus coffee, pastries, and Rachel Pierce bookmarks.

Christmas in July at Noah’s Ark Thrift Shop

Tuesday, July 7 10am-1pm

Enjoy all the Christmas items for sale while you listen to Christmas music; then continue on throughout the island to do some early Christmas shopping!

Special Announcements

Upcoming Board Meeting

Our next Board Meeting is scheduled for June 18th. We value the input and engagement of our community as we work together to support island housing.

Anna is now a certified notary public!

Community members can bring documents to CHR for notarization, and Anna will be available to provide this service free of charge. Whether you need forms, affidavits, or other important documents notarized, we’re happy to help.

Job Openings

RETAIL / SALES

Periwinkle Place

Facilities and Ground Associate
Various Store and Sales Associates

J.McLaughlin (Sanibel & Captiva Locations)

Part Time Sales Associate
Contact Allison Davies: 616-589-6457

PROFESSIONAL / ADMINISTRATIVE

City of Sanibel

Wastewater Plant Operator Trainee

FACILITIES / MAINTENANCE

Sanctuary Golf Club

Assistant Equipment Mechanic -
Equipment Operator

ANIMAL CARE / WILDLIFE

CROW (Clinic for the Rehabilitation of Wildlife)

Wildlife Rehabilitator
Certified Veterinary Technician
Student Program Coordinator

EDUCATION / CHILDCARE

CECI

Preschool Assistant Teacher

FOOD SERVICE

Sundial Beach Resort & Spa

Sous Chef

RECREATION / AQUATICS

City of Sanibel

Part Time Lifeguard

HEALTHCARE

Lee Health - Sanibel

Medical Assistant

we've moved offices!

2340 Periwinkle Way *Suite L-1*



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