PLUGGED-IN RESIDENTS SHARE SOME OF THEIR FAVORITE SPOTS FOR THE

OFF-SEASON.

BY JAYNIE BARTLEY AND TESS LOPEZ | JUNE 1, 2021

(Photography by Brian Tietz)

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Master creative Mila Bridger has an eye for cultural and scenic sights. Here, she is seen photographed at The Oyster Society in Marco Island. Mila Bridger

Catch Live Music:

"The Old Marco Pub always has awesome events—not just once a week like others might. This is where locals come to truly listen. I love to go see the band Tripleshot and musician

Photographer and artist living in Marco Island

Sarah Hadeka, who sometimes sings there. The pub starts music at 8 p.m., after dinner.

Brush Up on Local Lore:

Shop Local:

And they have a great bartender, Darko, who makes an awesome espresso martini." Stage a Photo Op: "In Everglades City, my husband, Ryan Darling, and I like to find a little place to park our Jeep off U.S. 41 and wait for the sunset to take images. After 5 o'clock, I love to just sit there, open the trunk and eat some snacks, while taking in the landscape—it's so flat that you can see the entire sun going down and the water reflects everything."

Cool Off: "The Marco Island Historical Museum has been steadily adding new exhibits over the past years. They have digital displays with movies playing and rooms dedicated to periods of the island's history, like one on the Mackle brothers who developed Marco in the '60s. I don't think many people know about Marco's history—it's really interesting. Some of the artifacts, like the Key Marco Cat statuette on loan from The Smithsonian, date back to pre-

Columbian indigenous civilizations. You can stay there for hours soaking it all in."

City's Development, which is all about women who helped shape the city, like Barbara B. Mann. Tom Hall, who is a huge art advocate and runs the website ArtSWFL.com, is the author. I love him; he also penned a two-volume series on fires that influenced the town." **Sneak a Staycation:** "We just discovered Pine Island. The whole island is basically nurseries and farms. It seems like there are millions and millions of pineapples, all sorts of veggies and fruits, and palm trees everywhere. We stayed at the 1920s-style Tarpon Lodge, which is right across

"I just finished Female Pioneers of Fort Myers: Women Who Made a Difference in the

you're somewhere else. And, it's not crowded like a resort." Find a Hidden Gem: "Signs tacked to trees out in Naples' Rural Estates lead to Rinny Ryan's The Pot Shop. Rinny is super cool. She has a shed with a bunch of pottery and she calls herself a 'pot dealer.' Next to the shop, she has her studio, where you can see her working while you look around. And if you buy a pot or two, she'll usually throw in some star fruits from her garden."

the street from the historic shell mounds at the Calusa Heritage Trail and within walking

distance of a marina, where you can rent a boat to go fishing for the day. You feel like

"We just discovered South Naples Citrus Grove off Collier Boulevard, just past Verona

We go there once a week and get a giant bag of oranges to squeeze for fresh juice."

Walk. You turn onto Sabal Palm Road and it becomes a dirt road; and if you take it, you'll

find the oranges. They also have really good tomatoes, preserves, honey, eggs and herbs.



top."

Soak Up Nature:

Cool Off:

their pool bar."

Sneak a Staycation:

hour."

and we can go by boat, in a bathing suit with a cover-up. The menu has pretty much

everything—if I'm trying to be good, I can pick from any of the salads and add fresh fish on

"Naturally, I love to shop, and Lulu's Gift Emporium is one of my favorite places to get lost. I've known the family for years. I think I actually sold the owner, Laura Jane McGee, her cotillion dress. They have all sorts of candles and baby goods. It's a great place to find a gift when you're not sure what to get someone." **Cruise Around:** "Sanibel has great bike paths that are wide and set back from traffic, so you feel safe. I

usually bike down Periwinkle or on Sanibel Captiva Road, outside of J.N. "Ding" Darling

National Wildlife Refuge, and then stop by Sundial Beach Resort & Spa and have a drink by

since I spend so much time inside at the boutique when I'm working. They're very casual

"Nothing beats boating in the Gulf, cruising with all the dolphin and fish. We go up to

busy. There are turtles roaming around and a little lookout area to take in the views."

Cabbage Key quite a bit. The dock is huge, so it can accommodate a lot of boats when it's

Touristy, but Worth It: "Upper Captiva used to be very low-key; and now there are all of these huge, beautiful homes lining the roads. We still love to road trip there—we go for lunch at Mainstay and Barnacles Bar, then walk around the island and check out the Salty Approach airstrip."

"We typically make the trip to downtown Sarasota on our boat and stay at the Hyatt Regency Sarasota. They have a small marina with plenty of slips. Once we're there, everything is within walking distance. Downtown is very pedestrian-friendly, and there's so much to do. You can grab breakfast at the train-themed Station 400 or stop for a healthy lunch at Green Zebra Cafe before seeing a show at the Van Wezel Performing Arts Hall." **Catch Live Music:**

"Gather, in Cape Coral, is a great venue to sit outside and listen to music. We recently saw

Kyle Anne, a singer-songwriter with a melodic voice that's soothing and perfect for happy

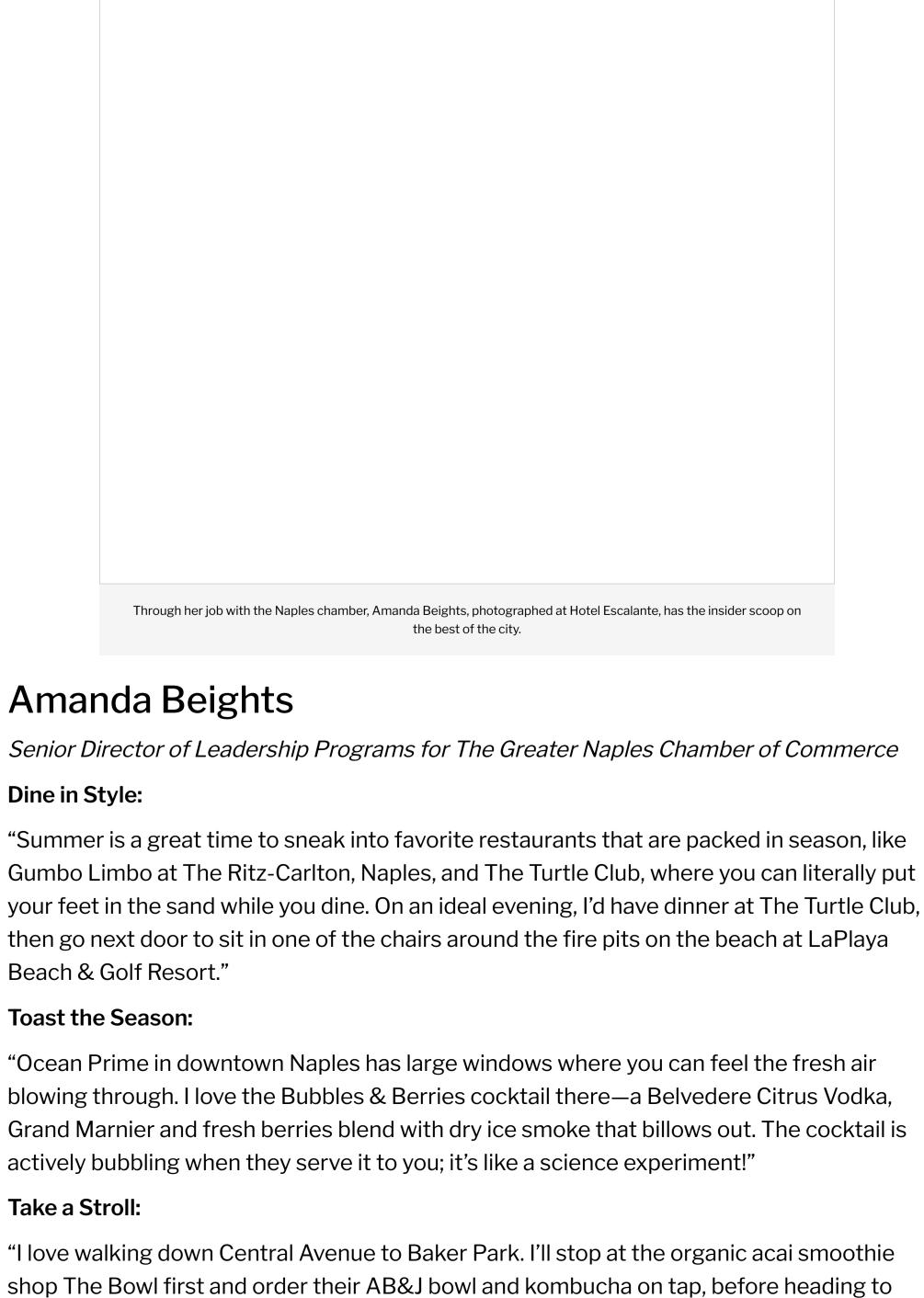
love to cook; I love to eat; I love to shop—and they have all of that. I absolutely love their housemade pasta; they have so many great, different varieties. The guacamole is great, too." **Shop Local:**

"Quintessence Marine Jewelry is run by Aarav Chavda, Kahan Chavda and Roland Salatino,

"For me, the farmers' market-inspired grocery store, Seed to Table, is like Disney World. I

who are harvesting lion fish from the Gulf to make jewelry. The fish's spotted fins are used as statement pendants on chain or pearl necklaces. Clients love that the pieces are made from ocean materials, but don't look totally beachy. Plus, it's helping the environment."

Impress Out-of-Town Guests:



"The Naples Botanical Garden is truly world-class. There are beautiful tropical plants, flowers and art installations year-round. My favorite spot is the tile mosaic wall right next to the lily pads, because it overlooks a beautiful view of the garden. When I have visitors, I'll usually take them to the garden in the morning, then grab lunch from one of the food trucks at Celebration Park, a mile down the road. It's definitely a crowd-pleaser. The entire Bayshore Arts District is such a vibrant, up-and-coming area that I feel most out-oftowners are unfamiliar with. You can enjoy the murals along the street and taste a flight sampler from Ankrolab Brewing Co.—a new brewery with beer and ciders. I always run into locals and other young professionals there."

"Hotel Escalante is almost hidden, as it sits on a brick road surrounded by lush plants and

beautiful architecture off Fifth Avenue South. The property feels like a secret garden right

Baker Park. The park just opened a couple years ago, and it's so open and spacious. The

Gordon River runs along it, and you can follow the paths and boardwalks connecting the

park to the Gordon River Greenway nature preserve. I love to go during the morning or

sunset, since it's a bit cooler out and you can watch the colors in the sky change. That's

usually when I walk my dogs. The fact that it's so close to the city happenings makes it

in the middle of downtown. It's very small, with just a few rooms, so it's quiet and private. My husband and I enjoy eating at the on-site restaurant, Veranda E. The seating is all poolside and they have cafe lights strung overhead. We like using the hotel's golf cart service when we stay there, because you can take it right down the road to the beach. It's also nice to be able to walk from the hotel to the restaurants and boutiques on Fifth

Sneak a Staycation:

Avenue."

such a nice and convenient retreat."

Impress Out-of-Town Guests:

knows his way around the local food scene.

service. I always wear a jacket and dress nicely; and this is coming from a man who lives in

needs. It's a slower pace, and the menu is straightforward and well-prepared. They have a

shorts and polo shirts. The staff knows who we are and takes extra care to meet our

superb wine list and the sommeliers and service staff make all the difference. You feel

transported there. I always feel as if I have left Naples for an elegant and unmatched

Longtime Naples resident and culinary patriarch Tony Ridgway, photographed at his restaurant, Ridgway Bar & Grill, **Tony Ridgway** Chef-owner of Ridgway Bar & Grill, Bayside Seafood Grill & Bar and co-owner of Tony's Off Third **Have a Date Night:** "Dinner at The Grill at The Ritz-Carlton, Naples, delivers fine dining with exceptional

dining experience, and somehow still wind up back in my own bed." **Shop Local:** "David and Jenny Burd, of Friendly Burds, were among the original vendors at the Third Street South Farmers' Market more than 25 years ago. They make the best honey, and always have a selection of fruits, like citrus and mangoes." Dine in Style: "There are a handful of local restaurants we like to support. Among them KC American Bistro, FUSE Global Cuisine and FUSE BBQ, along with Alexander's and Ziggy D'Amico's. I

go because I like the owners, the chefs and their food. I'm a big believer in supporting friends and peers; plus, the food at each of these restaurants meets my criteria for excellence. My wife, Wynne, and I also regularly indulge in breakfast at Skillets. Their pancakes are the best in Naples, and the Nueske's bacon is terrific. The owner used to be a baker at our commissary decades ago." **Impress Out-of-Town Guests:** "I recommend anyone visiting Naples to travel to Third Street South. It's historic and welcoming with a weekly Saturday farmers' market and incredible local shops and dining. I

started frequenting around 1960 when my Aunt Rosemary opened the interior design firm R&R Robinson there, and then opened my first restaurant on Third Street in 1971." **Toast the Season:** "I'm only an occasional drinker. My preferred cocktail is a special mojito we serve at Ridgway Bar & Grill with Appleton Estate Reserve and brown sugar cubes. The bar staff created it for me years ago. I love the rich taste of the Appleton Reserve. The aroma of the mint is more prevalent than the taste and I like that, too."

Photography by Brian Tietz

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