



Charlotte seeks input on libraries and history plans

■ STAFF REPORT

Charlotte County Libraries & History will host public Libraries & History Master Plan meetings on Tuesday, July 15 to discuss the current master planning project.

The first meeting will be held at 2 p.m. at the Port Charlotte Public Library located at 2280 Aaron St., in Port Charlotte. The second meeting will be held at 7 p.m. at Centennial Park Recreation Center in the small multipurpose room. The evening meeting will be livestreamed on the Charlotte County Libraries & History Facebook for those who cannot attend in person.

The public will have the opportunity to ask questions and offer feedback on an initial set of concepts and ideas about how the library may grow and adapt over the next generation.

For information, contact Lanette Hart at (941) 613-3203 or Lanette.Hart@CharlotteCountyFL.gov.

OBITUARIES

Submitting to the Boca Beacon

The Boca Beacon accepts obituaries from funeral homes. We will accept obituaries from immediate family members if no funeral home is utilized. All individuals whose obituaries run in the Beacon should be former or current residents, or established here in some way.

They appear on the Beacon website and on legacy.com, the national website.

They should be submitted by a family member or funeral home. Call the Beacon office at (941) 964-2995 if you need assistance.

IN THE SPOTLIGHT

A foundation for Michigan college education

Ellen Thompson

■ BY SHEILA EVANS

Being labeled a visionary is pretty high praise. That's the word the Detroit News has chosen to describe Ellen Thompson, long-time winter resident of Boca Grande, as well as summer resident of the Mitten State. Her recognition as a visionary came with the naming of Ellen as one of 10 "Michiganians of the Year for 2025."

The Detroit News annually honors 10 of the state's "most impactful residents." This year the announcement of the honorees came on June 12.

Both Ellen and her husband Robert started out their adult lives as teachers, and have maintained a deep love of education as a way to improve lives. The two met as undergraduates at Bowling Green State University in Ohio. Ellen taught for five years, and then switched to being a full-time mother and helpmate to Bob, who left teaching to serve as a pilot in the U.S. Air Force.

On his return, Bob decided to go into business, eventually owning a number of companies. Together, Ellen and Bob founded the Thompson Foundation in 1999 with proceeds from the sale of the Thompson-McCully Co. asphalt road paving company, one of the largest asphalt companies in the state. Money was also added later from the sale of the McCoig ready-mix concrete company and Spring Mill Reclamation sand company.

The Thompson Foundation's mission focuses on education. They believe programs to support and encourage education are the keystone to improving the quality of people's lives. They have spent more than 30 years helping teacher education programs, growing educational infrastructure and providing scholarships for promising young people to attend college.

The Michiganians of the Year honor reflects Ellen's decades of philanthropy with Bob and their foundation. In particular, the newspaper cited Ellen's pivotal role in creating and developing the Thompson Working Families Scholarship Program, which provides financial support to college students from working families. Ellen put the program into action in 2011.

The scholarship program helps students at four partner universities: Bowling Green State University (their alma mater), Grand Valley State University, Michigan Technological University and Saginaw Valley State



■ Ellen Thompson, photographed after the paper's honors. Dan Mears, Detroit News

University. All but Bowling Green are in Michigan, which is where the Thompsons live most of the year.

"Bob and I believe in education," Ellen said. "We believe it really changes lives. We have been fortunate, and wanted to help people. Education is how we can do that."

She proudly said the scholarship program will ultimately impact an anticipated 15,000 students with an estimated \$290 million in funding before the foundation closes in 2033. They have chosen to end the foundation then.

"Too many foundations lose the concept of what the original people want to do, once they have died," she noted. She and Bob do not want that happening with their foundation. They are pleased with the amount of good they will have done throughout the span of the foundation's life.

"We have a wonderful board and the members understand our desires and would follow them," she said, "but eventually new people would be taking over, so we will just end it in 2033." She added that they will both turn 93 this year (and have been married 70 years), so they are likely not going to be around when the doors close on the foundation.

When asked how she reacted when she was labeled a "visionary," Ellen said, "My vision has always been in women and children. We have done other funding to help families, but nothing on this scale. It makes me very proud, but also humbled by this recognition." She laughed at that seeming contradiction of being both proud and humbled, but nevertheless acknowledged both feelings side by side.

Focusing, again, on the scholarships rather than on herself, Ellen explained that scholarship recipients must

'Too many foundations lose the concept of what the original people want to do...'

See SPOTLIGHT on PAGE 4

Is there someone you would like to see profiled for our weekly In the Spotlight feature? Chances are you're not alone. Everyone has a story to tell. Call the Beacon at (941) 964-2995 or email us at editor@bocabeacon.com

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Pardon Our Dust as we begin the restoration of the Historic part of The Seale Family offices. We will be occupying other parts of our building, and look forward to the continued recovery in Downtown Boca Grande.



Uncle Henry's Marina, Slip #30
17' W x 42' L
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Spotlight

from PAGE 3

have at least one parent working. There are achievement requirements regarding grades and class loads, as well. In the end, however, the students will be able to graduate with little to no educational debt.

At Grand Valley State University, the Ellen and Bob Thompson program has meant that nearly one in 15 undergraduate students is a recipient of a Thompson scholarship.

Ellen explained that the seed of the idea of the Working Families Scholarship Program began growing when she was teaching first grade. A young girl named Linda was in her class. She was bright and talented, and eager to learn. The girl was from a large family — 11 children — and Ellen was aware that there would be challenges for her to get a good education, especially getting a four-year college degree. She said that it was children like Linda that she hoped to reach through the program, and give that goal of a higher education, leading to a good job and a happy life.

While the focus of Ellen's recognition by the Detroit News is the work she has done in Michigan, people in Boca Grande have some accolades of their own to offer. The Thompsons have been coming to the Boca Grande Club since 1999, where Ellen said has always been a wonderful place to live.

"It has always been well run," she noted. "In fact, I don't know how anyone could not like living there!" She said they originally spent



■ Ellen and Bob Thompson with some of the grateful scholarship students they have helped through the Thompson Working Families Scholarship Program. Photo submitted

winters in Sanibel, but they had a Michigan neighbor with a home in Boca Grande. That neighbor frequently invited them to visit here. They began feeling uneasy with the development on Sanibel, so they decided to take a look at Boca Grande, and the decision to switch islands was a done deal.

Once in Boca Grande, they became members of the Lighthouse United Methodist Church. Their generosity and care for others became evident immediately. They have now been members of the church for 25 years.

When the Rev. Daphne Johnson heard about the newspaper's

recognition of Ellen, she wrote to the Beacon: "Ellen and Bob are the most kind, humble and caring people you could ever meet. They are only here for a few months out of the year, but when they are here they do not miss being in church. They work the pancake breakfast every year."

She went on: "Ellen is a strong woman who lives out her faith. She is logical, thoughtful and empathetic. She has done so much to make sure others have an education and an opportunity. She truly lives out loving God and loving neighbor."

That may be another definition of "visionary."

BRIEFLY

Public input on rules for Gulf lane snapper

■ STAFF REPORT

The Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission (FWC) will host a series of public workshops to seek input on proposed rule changes for lane snapper in Gulf state waters. Staff will provide a brief presentation on potential proposed rules before gathering public comment at the workshop.

June 25: Fort Myers 6 to 7:30 p.m. at the Fort Myers Regional Library South Building, 1651 Lee St., Fort Myers, FL 33901

June 26: St. Petersburg 6 to 7:30 p.m. at the West St. Petersburg Community Library, 6700 8th Ave N, St. Petersburg, FL 33710

The virtual workshop is June 30 from 6 to 7:30 p.m. A link to access the virtual workshop will be posted on FWC Marine Fisheries Workshops page the day of the workshop.

Gulf lane snapper has exceeded overfishing limits, leading to early closures. Proposed rule amendments would increase the commercial and recreational minimum size limit from eight inches to 10 inches and establish a 20 fish per person recreational bag limit in Gulf state waters. The rules could create consistency between Gulf state and federal waters.

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