

THE YEAR OF 2025

July: Useppa sold to homeowner group, Charlotte and parking debate

Kicking off the month, Boca Grande celebrated the 4th of July in the traditional island style with the annual Golf Cart Parade. More than 150 golf carts decorated in red, white and blue lined the streets, honked their horns and played songs in celebration of the USA.

As the streets quieted, construction began. The Gasparilla Island Bridge Authority started its causeway armoring project. Further down the road, the canoe/kayak launch and parking area at the Boca Grande Fishing Pier officially reopened. Pipes, heavy equipment and two boats from Gator Dredging arrived at Gasparilla Island State Park for a long-delayed renourishment project at the south end of the island.

During July, all three shifts of the Boca Grande Fire Department went out on the water for training. There were also crews from Charlotte County Fire that joined in. A coordinated Marine Emergency Response Team (MERT) activation was launched for a vessel fire in Turtle Bay, an estuary at the south end of Cape Haze near the Island Bay National Wildlife Refuge. One person was injured. After years of waiting, the department took delivery of a replacement for the old Silver King engine.

Lee County Sheriff's Office was also busy, as marine thefts continued. A theft was reported from a boat on Damficare Street with six rod combos taken from the gunwale. The next week, another boat owner noticed eight fishing poles were taken from the rod holders of his vessel at Miller's



■ From top left, clockwise: Patriotic theme for well-attended July 4th Golf Cart Parade; Kelly Borza at new studio; Road to Boca Grande Fishing Pier, which was not yet open, but parking grading finished. Boca Beacon archives

Marina. Finally, at the end of the month, two suspects were arrested for grand theft of \$5,000 of fishing equipment.

Charlotte County entered the parking debate after receiving complaints from concerned citizens. Staff promised to reach out to Lee County ahead of the August vote. A petition survey by a longtime island resident to keep beach parking access open grew to over 3,000 signatures in just its first week.

In other news:

- Friends of Boca Grande announced the appointment of Martina Long as their new program

director.

- A group of homeowners on Useppa Island, including Boca Grande residents, agreed to the purchase The Useppa Island Club from its owner, the Beckstead family.
- The "Baby" Publix in Placida got new paint. The old beige disappeared in favor of a bluish gray.
- The Gasparilla Inn earned a World's Best Award from Travel + Leisure. It had a score of 95.1, as the year's favorite Florida resort.
- *Vibrio Vulnificus* (or flesh-eating bacteria) made headlines following a rise in infections across Florida, including a reported death in Lee County.

