

Check out charities before giving



Are your mailboxes filling up with year-end solicitations for charitable donations?

Deciding to whom to give is not always easy. There are no laws that require charities to use a specific percentage of your donations on charitable purposes. It is up to each of us to make sure our charity giving is used wisely for those in need, instead of lining the pockets of for-profit fundraisers and questionable organizations.

The Lee County Sheriff's Office Communities Against Senior Exploitation recommends:

- Make an annual charitable giving budget and list and stick to it. Keep your list to a manageable number of charities.
- Don't judge a charity by an impressive sounding name. Many organizations have names similar to other well-known charities.

- Ask for a written description of programs, staff, finances, and tax deductibility of the charity, such as an annual report.

- Most telephone appeals are made by salespeople employed by professional fundraisers. Most of your donation goes to the fundraiser, not to the charity.

For detailed reports that rate charities and tell you how your donations will be used, go to these national charity watchdog resources on the Internet: www.give.org or www.charitynavigator.org

For information on local charities, contact the Better Business Bureau at www.bbb.org or call them.

For assistance call the Sheriff's Office Fraud Line: 239-477-1242. ■

— CASE, *Communities Against Senior Exploitation, is a Partnership of the Lee County Sheriff's Office and the community to prevent elder financial exploitation*

Seasonal boating speed zones now in effect

Lee County Division of Natural Resources reminds area boaters to heed the seasonal changes in several speed zones in Lee County that went into effect last week. Areas throughout the county including Estero Bay and St. James City, will experience changes in the posted speed zones. These changes can be a reduction in speed or an increase in speed. Boaters are encouraged to take note of speed zone signage to assist them in adhering to the changes in the zones. All changes in the zones are reflected in the Lee County Boater's Guide.

Additionally, Lee County Division of Natural Resources would like to alert area boaters to the high numbers of Manatees currently in Lee County. Recent surveys have found close to 400 Manatees in Lee County waters, with as many as 100 located in San Carlos Bay alone. Boaters are encouraged to follow all speed zone regulations, wear polarized sunglasses, avoid sea grass beds, and remain alert when boating. If the public spots a struggling, beached, or injured manatee they are urged not to try and assist the animal, but to call the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission hotline at 1-888-404-3922. ■



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Insurance Tips

FLORIDA LAW STATES THAT INSURANCE COMPANIES MUST GIVE DISCOUNTS TO HOMEOWNERS WHO PROTECT THEIR HOMES AGAINST HURRICANES.

Southwest Floridians have seen in the past few years the great damage that hurricanes and storms can cause if windows and doors are not covered. You will pay for hurricane protection, whether you own it or not. Living in sunny Florida carries with it a responsibility to protect homes and property against hurricanes. One of the most significant changes that a homeowner can make in the cost of wind-related insurance premiums is to protect the openings of a home with approved hurricane shutters or impact-resistant glass. If these are rated to withstand at least 110-mph winds and also impact from windborne debris, a homeowner will receive the full scheduled premium credit.

Review insurance policies now to make sure coverage is adequate.

Contact the Florida Department of Financial Services in your city for detailed information on insurance. In addition, this office will review policies for homeowners.

Remember: Insurance companies stop writing policies when a named hurricane moves into the Gulf of Mexico or the Atlantic Ocean off Florida. Obtaining insurance from the state-backed Citizens Property Insurance Corp. may take weeks.

Inc. Magazine Recognizes Storm Smart in Annual 'Inc. 500' List

Fort Myers, Fla. — Storm Smart Industries, the largest hurricane protection company in Southwest Florida, has been included by Inc. Magazine in its annual "Inc. 500" list of the fastest-growing privately held companies in America. Coming in at Number 387, Storm Smart is the highest listed hurricane protection company, as well as the only honoree, based in Fort Myers.

While Storm Smart has been experiencing triple-digit growth for the past several years, the past two years of increased storm activity have brought hurricane preparedness to the forefront of people's minds.

Brian Rist, Owner and CEO of Storm Smart Industries, states "We take great pride in how our team of more than 150 committed professionals have risen to the challenges of such tremendous growth and continue to provide our customers with first-rate products and service. I want to take this time to personally thank every member of the Storm Smart family, especially our wonderful customers who have entrusted us with the protection of their homes, and ultimately, the safety of their family's lives. We do not take that responsibility lightly and will continue to earn that trust, one customer at a time."

While Storm Smart has an extensive advertising program, the majority of sales originate from customer referrals, a fact that employees take with great pride.

Along with this year's "Inc. 500" listing, Storm Smart has also been recognized by the Lee County Economic Development Office as the Ninth Largest Manufacturing Company in Lee County, as well as receiving a "2006 Best" award from The News-Press.

Brian Rist, President of Storm Smart Industries, has been helping residents prepare their homes against wind, rain and heat for nearly a decade. If you have any questions or need information about today's articles, please call Storm Smart Industries at 239-278-9092.