

They're back; Snowbirds a boon to local economy

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Traffic jams up, lines at registers lengthen and businesses begin hiring seasonal help.

The traditional kickoff for the economic snowbird season remains last week's "Black Friday" with retailers anticipating a healthy four-month season ahead.

Restaurants double staffs to handle the seasonal business increase. The temporary residents provide an economic boost to the area until about the end of March, when the snowbirds take flight north again.

From Fort Myers to Naples restaurants go into overdrive to meet demand.

"Our business doubles in season; tourism is very important to us," said Taste of New York Pizzeria & Café owner Deanne Serwin. "Snowbirds start trickling in about the end of October and we stay busy until almost April."

The controlled mayhem of a commercial kitchen in full operation started before 9 a.m. when calls for delivery meals began. Later, the restaurant's 100 seats fill up for lunch.

Business is so good the full Italian restaurant plans to expand with a location in Cape Coral in December.

The same routine played itself out through other restaurants south to Naples.

"We start adding staff at the end of October," said Maxwell's on the Bay owner Peter Sereno. "We double our staff to 60 when we are at peak season."

Many of Sereno's employees return year after year to work at the Naples restaurant, a continental-dining fixture for 20 years. The restaurant has a few condominium buildings for use by staffers who work up north, usually at an affiliated restaurant in Rhode Island for the summer.

"I'd say many of our employees enjoy working at both locations," Sereno said. "Many like our manager and chef have also been with us for almost 20 years."

The economy may not be the best, but people still like to eat out. In fact the downswing in employment throughout the area may

SEE SNOWBIRDS, A7 ►

pirates

... extremists all

Forget Jack Sparrow. Southwest Florida pirates ruled the seas

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If you once lived in Indiana or Illinois or Ohio or a similar place, the nearest serious pirates were roughly 1,000 miles and several centuries away (not counting a few Ohio River cutthroats from the 19th century).

So you lived in Standardville. You were lost to Extremesville — to the exuberant romance, the gem-studded history, the boundless appetites and freedoms, not to mention the bloody, rum-soaked hedonism of the jolly men and women who chose their destinies at sea, bent under a black flag on capturing ungoverned wealth by force.

(Instead of all that, you were surrounded by tired farmers on John Deere or Ford tractors trying to plant corn, and bent on no more than getting home to

SEE PIRATES, A8 ►

- 1. Henri Caesar**
Henri Caesar, A.K.A. Black Caesar, an African Chief, roamed the coastlines between Sanibel-Captiva and Elliot Key in the early 1700s.
- 2. Blackbeard**
Blackbeard, joined forces with Henri Caesar in 1718, and operated in the region. The two were captured aboard Blackbeard's ship, and hung.
- 3. John "Calico Jack" Rackham**
John "Calico Jack" Rackham and his wife Anne Bonny holed up on Lover's Key on Estero Island after a gun battle.
- 4. Caesar le Grande**
Caesar le Grande, the second Black Caesar, established camps in the early 1800s on Marco, Black, Sanibel, Captiva and Pine Islands — where presumably he hid treasure.
- 5. José Gaspar**
José Gaspar, known by his nickname Gasparilla supposedly pirated Florida's west coast in the early 1800s. Though he is a popular figure in Florida folklore, no evidence of his existence appears in writing before the early 20th century.

The rich historic tradition of stealing boats and treasures from their rightful owners in Florida waters, and then using them for nefarious purposes — the singular act and questionable art of piracy—isn't that charming.



Country Bash

Country music star Blake Shelton headlines Saturday's Lakeside Country Bash at Lakes Park. **C1 ►**



Edison Estate gala

And other events this week in Fort Myers society. **C20-21 ►**



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New residential tower

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