

BUSINESS PROFILE

A homegrown business leader and community patron

BY EVAN WILLIAMS
ewilliams@floridaweekly.com

Blonde and with a shining smile, Sandy Stilwell seems like the personification of the Sunshine State itself. With nine Lee County businesses under the name Stilwell Enterprises, she has captured the local entrepreneurial spirit as well.

"My family was always entrepreneurial," she said. "They taught us how to work — how to work hard."

Ms. Stilwell came to Florida from Chicago when she was 2 years old.

Her parents traveled by boat down the Mississippi River and became one of the pioneering families of Cape Coral, where thousands of plots were being sold by Gulf American Corp.

"They advertised it all along the Midwest as the waterfront wonderland of the world," Ms. Stilwell said.

Soon, the family moved to Fort Myers Beach, where she grew up boating and spending the summer at one of her parents' hospitality businesses, Memory Lane Cottages.

Her parents later opened the Ramada on Fort Myers Beach and Ms. Stilwell was part of the housekeeping staff, her first job. Her uncle also had a restaurant on the beach called Tradewinds — a McDonald's is there now — where she served customers breakfast and lunch.

She now operates five restaurants, an inn and a shopping center on Sanibel and Captiva Island. One restaurant — the Sunshine Seafood Café and Lounge — is in Fort

Myers.

The secret to all the success?

"I'd say just be consistent," she said. "Offer good food and good service at the most reasonable price you can afford. And know that even if you offer all those things you can still fail. (The hospitality business) is the hardest business, period."

"And never think you've arrived. You can never sit back and coast."

Although Ms. Stilwell has never had one fail, she became an expert at operating hospitality businesses at a young age. By 17, she was running the Ramada on her own, while her parents were on vacation.

"They allowed me to experience what it was like in management," she said. "A little at a time."

Her most recent business association is Florida Shores Bank, where she is on the board of directors. The bank opened this summer.

"We're really hoping the community will embrace us," Ms. Stilwell said. "...If businesses are expanding during these times, they need to look at more than one bank — we want to be that bank."

Florida Shores offers customers a program called CEDARS, which allows them to deposit up to \$5 million — and get all of it insured by the Federal Government. Florida Shores keeps the entire amount protected by the FDIC because it invests it in other banks at the current FDIC limit of \$250,000.

It's one of the programs bank CEO Robert Vice instituted, Ms. Stilwell said. He was also her personal banker for 20 years.



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Sandy Stilwell

During that time, she has been an inexhaustible community figure, first helping to build the Ronald McDonald House at Health Park, and then serving on boards as diverse as the Community Health Visioning 2017 Steering Committee, also, on boards of two universities, Lee Mental Health, Uncommon Friends Foundation, The American Heart Association Advisory Board, and others.

One of her favorite organizations is the Salvation Army of Lee County, because she said it has low administrative costs: for every \$1 in donations, it only spends about 6 cents on management. Ms. Stilwell spent three years as chairman of the board.

"I have a great passion for finding a need and meeting it," she said.

Her awards include Gulfshore Life Magazine's Woman of the Year in 2007, and the first annual Apex Award for Women in Business given by the Fort Myers Chamber of Commerce. This year, she was Gulfshore Life's Philanthropist of the Year.

It all started when she did volunteer work for her children's school.

"I was asked to be on another board, and then another," Ms. Stilwell said. "I love it. It makes my life complete knowing I've been able to help the community."

Here two sons live in Lee County and help manage her businesses. She also has two grandchildren, ages 5 and 3, who recently moved back to Fort Myers from Maui.

When she's not working, Ms. Stilwell is an avid fisherman. In fact, she won top prize for Lady Angler, at this year's Summer Slam Tournament on Fort Myers Beach, where she caught a 42 inch Snook in the first 15 minutes.

Fishing, hikes, the peace and quiet of nature — that's more Ms. Stilwell's style.

But she also likes shopping in a big city. And traveling is another favorite pastime. This summer, she visited New York City, Washington D.C., Rome, Sicily, came back to Fort Myers to check on her businesses; then left again for Montana, and finally Glacier National Park in Canada, where she went fly fishing.

A few years ago, she and a friend spent some time exploring Italy's coast.

Still, she said Lee County will always be home.

"I don't see myself ever leaving Lee County permanently," she said. ■

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<div style="background-color: #e91e63; color: white; padding: 5px; text-align: center;">Warehouse</div> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 62,400± SF • 3-Phase Power • 3,311± SF Office Space • 3 Dock High Doors • Just off Daniels Pkwy • Extra Paved Parking • Quick Access to I-75 • Airport Woods Comm.Ctr <p style="font-size: 0.8em; margin: 0;">Price: \$3.90 PSF + \$1.85 PSF CAM Contact: Todd Holman</p> <p style="text-align: right; font-size: 0.7em;">WA1379</p>	<div style="background-color: #e91e63; color: white; padding: 5px; text-align: center;">Office Space For Lease in S. Fort Myers</div> <div style="background-color: #ffc107; font-weight: bold; padding: 2px;">Immediate Occupancy</div> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 1,032± SF (Built-out) • Zoned: C1 - Commercial • Great location on • South Commercial Park • Off South US 41 • Between Daniels Pkwy • Excellent Parking Ratio • & Six Mile Cypress Park <p style="font-size: 0.8em; margin: 0;">Price: \$6.00 PSF NNN + \$1.00 PSF CAM Contact: Honora' Jacobus</p> <p style="text-align: right; font-size: 0.7em;">WA1725</p>	<div style="background-color: #e91e63; color: white; padding: 5px; text-align: center;">Residential Investment Property</div> <div style="background-color: #ffc107; font-weight: bold; padding: 2px;">Motivated Seller</div> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Fully Leased Out Duplex • Well Maintained • Professionally Managed • Positive Cash Flow • Located in Lehigh Acres • Adjoining Duplex Avail. <p style="font-size: 0.8em; margin: 0;">Price: MAKE OFFER Contact: Robyn Wright or Alex Wright, CCIM</p> <p style="text-align: right; font-size: 0.7em;">WA1751</p>	<div style="background-color: #e91e63; color: white; padding: 5px; text-align: center;">3,700± SF Warehouse/Office For Sale</div> <div style="background-color: #ffc107; font-weight: bold; padding: 2px;">PRICE REDUCTION</div> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Off Lucket & I-75 • Ideal for Manufactures • Warehouse w/carport • & Distributors • Zoned IPD • (2) OH Doors • Manufactured Office • Water/Sewer • 1.75± AC <p style="font-size: 0.8em; margin: 0;">Sale: \$637,000 Contact: Tom Woodyard or Carrie Vincent</p> <p style="text-align: right; font-size: 0.7em;">WA2012</p>	<div style="background-color: #e91e63; color: white; padding: 5px; text-align: center;">Office Space in Lehigh Acres</div> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 1,071±SF to • Zoned CS1 • 1,581±SF Units • Prime Location • Vanilla Shell Build Out • On 6-Laned Lee Blvd • Occupancy Soon • 3 Road Frontage Access • County Water & Sewer <p style="font-size: 0.8em; margin: 0;">Price: Unit 2 & 3-\$1,000.00/Mo+Tax Each Unit 4-\$2,000.00/Mo+Tax Contact: Steve Wood</p> <p style="text-align: right; font-size: 0.7em;">WA1889</p>
<div style="background-color: #e91e63; color: white; padding: 5px; text-align: center;">Warehouse for Sale on Edison Avenue</div> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Building I- 50,550± SF • 13 OH Doors • Building II- 7,200± SF • I2-Heavy Industrial Zone • (35,550±SF - Leased & 15,000±SF Vacant) • Large Yard-Fenced & Paved • Air-Conditioned Showroom <p style="font-size: 0.8em; margin: 0;">Price: \$4,900,000 Contact: Todd Holman</p> <p style="text-align: right; font-size: 0.7em;">WA1902</p>	<div style="background-color: #e91e63; color: white; padding: 5px; text-align: center;">2.93± Acres Site Southside Industrial Park</div> <div style="background-color: #ffc107; font-weight: bold; padding: 2px;">NEW LISTING</div> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • S of Hanson St • Zoned Heavy Industrial • E of Metro Pkwy • Allows warehouse & more • Near Downtown FTM • Access to I-75 (ext. 138) • Corner Site/Cargo St • Near Plantation/Vernonica Shoemaker <p style="font-size: 0.8em; margin: 0;">Price: \$887,216 or \$6.95 PSF Contact: Tom Woodyard or Carrie Vincent</p> <p style="text-align: right; font-size: 0.7em;">WA2028</p>	<div style="background-color: #e91e63; color: white; padding: 5px; text-align: center;">1.74+/- Acre Mobile Home Sites N. Fort Myers</div> <div style="background-color: #ffc107; font-weight: bold; padding: 2px;">NEW LISTING - Income Potential</div> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ebson Drive Location • (6) MH Pads • Off Laurel Drive • RVs Welcome • Access to US41/I-75 • Zoned MH-3 • Near The Shell Factory • Partial Fenced <p style="font-size: 0.8em; margin: 0;">Price: \$395,000 Contact: Tom Woodyard or Carrie Vincent</p> <p style="text-align: right; font-size: 0.7em;">WA2031</p>	<div style="background-color: #e91e63; color: white; padding: 5px; text-align: center;">Warehouse For Lease or Sale in Benchmark Corporate Park</div> <div style="background-color: #ffc107; font-weight: bold; padding: 2px;">Just Reduced</div> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 25,000± SF incl. 450± SF • IL - Light Industrial • Office w/2 Restrooms • All Block & Sprinkled • 4 OH Grade Level Drs • Benchmark Corp. Park • Two (2) Truckwell Doors • Off I-75, Exit 138 • City Water and Sewer <p style="font-size: 0.8em; margin: 0;">Lease Rate: \$4.75 PSF + \$2.00 PSF CAM Sale Price: \$2,475,000 Contact: Todd Holman</p> <p style="text-align: right; font-size: 0.7em;">WA987S/L</p>	<div style="background-color: #e91e63; color: white; padding: 5px; text-align: center;">Medical/Professional Office Space For Lease</div> <div style="background-color: #ffc107; font-weight: bold; padding: 2px;">Immediate Occupancy</div> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 2,084± SF • Fully Built Out • 2,800± SF • Impact Fees Paid • Easy Access to • Imm. Occupancy • All Major Corridors • Central Ave Location <p style="font-size: 0.8em; margin: 0;">Price: \$8.00 PSF + CAM Contact: Robyn Wright or Alex Wright, CCIM</p> <p style="text-align: right; font-size: 0.7em;">WA1951</p>

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