

# WOES

From page 1

around 6 p.m. nearby at The Cigar Bar, where happy hours lasts until 7 p.m. "I love my regulars," Ms. Bifano said.

## Another day, another dollar beer

The next day, Thursday, the economic news was grim again. And the scene at Hide-A-Way was the same — only busier. A full bar had spilled over onto the tables inside and to the sidewalk outside.

"Working people stop here this time of night and I enjoy seeing them," said Joe O'Shea, a retired union officer who represented long-distance bus drivers. Now 70, Mr. O'Shea has been coming downtown for 15 years. "I started at the French Connection," he said before sharing his words of wisdom about drinking: "I'll miss work because I drank too much, but I'll never miss drinking because I work too much." He was joking, but the saying has a ring of truth to it.

Tori Woodall, who makes deliveries for Wise Guys Subs & Stuff, added, "I think alcohol is the last thing to go out of your budget. You might skip lunch, but not your beers."

Some beer drinkers, however, might buy a less-expensive brand at the bar

or simply pick up a six-pack on the way home instead.

At bars and stores this August, the average person purchased \$6.19 worth of alcoholic beverages per visit. That was up from \$3.68 in August 2007, according to the Lee County Visitor & Convention Bureau. That's only enough for a cheap six-pack or maybe three happy hour drafts with tip, depending on where you go.

"The economy has an effect on beer sales," said Chris Bina, vice president of off-premise sales for Suncoast Beverage in Fort Myers. "We feel the pinch from the economy as well. What's going on, there has been some trade down, where people trade down from Corona to Bud or Bud Light.

"Also, there's an increase in draft sales, because draft in the bars is cheaper than packaged beer. They've suffered as far as bottle beer sales, but increased as far as draft beer sales."

Hide-A-Way owner Mr. Baker has seen a similar effect on liquor sales. "We're selling about 50 percent liquor to beer," he said. "But our domestic beers outsell premium beers quite substantially. Same with our liquor. Our call or well liquors outsell the premiums."

He's also noticed another trend: more credit card sales.

"I think it's showing me that my customers don't have as much spendable

cash right now," Mr. Baker said. "We used to be only about 30 percent credit card. Now we're closer to 70 percent."

At Spirits of Bacchus downtown, manager and bartender Ben Dopp said customers who once drank \$8 glasses of wine "are looking for cheaper stuff." And as for his own off-work tendencies, he added, "I pretty much stick to beer or whatever's cheap."

Even though the economy is still bad, the good news is gas prices are almost \$1.50 lower per gallon than they were a few months ago. And draft beer in a frosty glass at most happy hours downtown is only \$1 or \$2. At least by that math, if your tank holds 10 gallons, you can treat yourself to a couple of beers every time you fill up and still come out ahead. ■

Why Wear Someone Else's Label When You Could Wear Your Own?



Tom James

FINE CUSTOM CLOTHING

HAND-TRIMMED EXCLUSIVELY FOR:

Lindsey Smalls

Professional Clothier

239.404.4620

## Speakers Assembly accepting applications

The Speakers Assembly of Southwest Florida is accepting membership applications for the 2008-2009 season. The Assembly, now in its 13th year, brings political leaders, industry experts, leading economists, journalists, and educational scholars to Southwest Florida to enlighten and empower its members on current events. The group meets generally on Fridays from November to March at the Hyatt Regency Coconut Point in Bonita Springs.

"Traditionally, 95 percent of our members renew their membership from year to year, but we anticipate a few openings," says Ross Roberts, current president of the Assembly. Membership is limited to 500 and a wait list is maintained and reviewed on a first received basis.

The lineup for speakers this year is strong and includes: David Broder, political corre-

spondent for *The Washington Post*; Dr. Mark Rosenberg, chancellor, State University System of Florida; Roy C. Smith, professor of entrepreneurship and finance, Stern School of Business, John Rother, policy and strategy director, AARP; Michael Tobin, Senior War correspondent, Fox News; David Owen, staff writer and author, *The New Yorker* and contributing editor, *Golf Digest*; Maj. General Paul Valley (Ret.), consultant, media analyst and host of "Stand Up America"; and Karen DeYoung, associate editor of *The Washington Post* and author of "Soldier: The Life of Colin Powell".

Anyone interested in receiving a membership application should contact The Speakers Assembly Office at (239) 948-7909. Information and an application are also available at: [www.speakersassembly.com](http://www.speakersassembly.com) ■

## PERSONAL BANKER, SW FLORIDA NATIVE,

community caregiver.



"Florida Gulf Bank's commitment to our community encourages me to 'give back' in ways that are meaningful and fulfilling."

Pete D'Alessandro, vice president and market manager, devotes his efforts to LARC Inc. and other area organizations, balancing his time between serving his clients and serving his community.

(Pete is pictured with members of LARC Inc., serving people with developmental disabilities)

You can choose your bank, or you can choose your banker.

At Florida Gulf Bank, your banker is your neighbor, your friend, an active participant in our community. He or she is also a highly-trained expert in full-service banking, the latest technology and a unique approach, *The Power of Personal Service™*. The result? An efficient, convenient banking experience with a friendly, personal approach.

Choose your personal banker today...at any one of our eight convenient locations.

**Fort Myers:**  
9101 College Point Court · 239.332.4440  
2247 First Street · 239.332.3527  
7580 Winkler Road · 239.481.2875  
8870 Daniels Parkway · 239.225.7268  
8341 Dani Drive, at Six Mile Cypress and Colonial Blvd · 239.433.6020

**Cape Coral:**  
812 Del Prado Boulevard South · 239.985.8120  
2546 Heydon Lane, on Veterans Parkway at Sandoval · 239.433.6000

**Estero:**  
23250 Via Villaggio, at the Coconut Point Mall · 239.985.8140

**FLORIDA GULF BANK**

The Power of Personal Service

[www.FloridaGulfBank.com](http://www.FloridaGulfBank.com)



**CopyLady**  
Take charge of your documents  
**239.939.5383**  
**www.CopyLady.com** 2020 Beacon Manor Drive, Fort Myers

**WE KNOW VEINS!** | **239.694.VEIN**  
[weknowveins.com](http://weknowveins.com) (8346)

We provide comprehensive vein disease evaluation and treatment in a uniquely warm and comfortable outpatient environment with state-of-the-art medical technology and superior technical expertise. We strive to exceed your expectations in all aspects of your treatment experience.

**1510 Royal Palm Square Blvd., Suite 101  
Fort Myers, FL 33919**

**Joseph Magnant, MD, FACS**  
Board Certified Vascular Surgeon