Welcome to Sarasota

It has been described as the capital of Florida’s Cultural Coast™, the Circus Capital of the World, a community where art and nature meet. Welcome to Sarasota County, the coastal jewel perched on the Gulf of Mexico, about 50 miles south of Tampa.

BY NANCY OAKLEY

One of the key attractions of Sarasota County has been, well, its keys — six barrier islands that lie between the Sarasota Bay and the Gulf. With 35 miles of wide, white beaches, it’s little wonder they attract visitors from around the world. Perhaps the most popular among them is Siesta Key, whose powdery beaches of ground quartz were ranked No. 1 in the United States by coastal scientist Stephen Leatherman, a.k.a. “Dr. Beach.” Siesta is arguably the place to watch the sun set into an impressionist palette of gold, orange, and pink. Not to be forgotten, Longboat Key offers a cosmopolitan atmosphere, where beachfront communities, resorts, and top-notch dining abound, while Casey Key is a quiet enclave of multi-million-dollar homes. Nature lovers appreciate the trails and pine forest on Lido Key and the remoteness of Manasota Key, and divers delight in the abundance of shark’s tooth fossils off the stretch of Venice Beach.

Venice is one of many areas in Sarasota County that has some of the world’s best saltwater fishing. Of course, the inland areas offer large populations of trout and other freshwater fish. The Myakka River provides a front seat to observing wildlife, such as alligators and ospreys, from an airboat. The Oscar Scherer State Park is a favorite of hikers and campers, and Mote Marine Laboratory’s aquarium tours give up-close glimpses of dolphins, manatees, and more.
As if its natural beauty weren’t enough, Sarasota County claims a cultural life parallel to any major community. Rich in history, the area has 90-some sites listed on the National Register of Historic Places, including its vibrant downtowns, bustling with shops and restaurants — all within a stone’s throw of the waterfront.

As for the arts, the city of Sarasota is home to Florida’s oldest continuing orchestra (Sarasota Orchestra), the oldest theater company (Asolo Repertory Theatre), and the Gulf Coast of Florida’s first professional ballet company (Sarasota Ballet) and opera company (Sarasota Opera). Plus, Sarasota boasts dozens of theater companies, including the revered Florida Studio Theatre, as well as festivals for film and chamber music. The North Port area boasts an impressive Ukrainian population and Performing Arts Center. Then there’s Art Center Sarasota, where visitors can take classes or attend exhibitions, and numerous galleries, which thrive thanks to the creative spirit from the Ringling College of Art & Design. And the John and Mable Ringling Museum of Art, whose namesakes first transformed the sleepy town into a mecca for the arts, adds to that creative spirit.

John Ringling of Ringling Bros. and Barnum & Bailey Circus, and his wife Mable built a permanent home in Sarasota in 1926 — Ca’ d’Zan, a Venetian-inspired villa. A year later, Ringling moved the winter headquarters of his circus to Sarasota, bringing an influx of artists and performers. After his death in 1936, Ringling willed his mansion and staggering collection of baroque paintings and other artworks to the state of Florida. Today, residents and visitors are the beneficiaries of his generosity, whether admiring the interiors of Ca’ d’Zan, the scores of Rubens and Van Dycks in the art museum, or the memorabilia at the Tibbals Learning Center and Circus Museum. But the legacy of the big top doesn’t stop there: In 1997 husband and wife Pedro Reis and Dolly Jacobs, both veteran performers, created Circus Sarasota, a nonprofit that offers dazzling performances in a one-ring European-style circus as well as numerous education and outreach initiatives.

Outreach lies at the heart of the city’s arts community. Sarasota Orchestra and Sarasota Opera include a Youth Orchestra and a Youth Opera respectively, while the Asolo, Venice, and Players theaters also have educational programs to inspire budding playwrights and actors. And the Sarasota Ballet has Dance — The Next Generation, an arts-oriented at-risk youth retention program now in its 16th year. So pervasive is the arts community’s commitment to education that the John F. Kennedy Center for Performing Arts recently chose Sarasota as its partner for Any Given Child, a program that establishes long range arts curriculum for public schools. No doubt, the community will remain the capital of Florida’s Cultural Coast™ for years to come.

Clockwise from top left: kayaking in Sarasota Bay, Sarasota Bay Front sign, and Ca’ d’Zan, John and Mable Ringling’s Venetian-inspired villa.
Nearly 100 years ago, John Ringling, the legendary circus king, pledged, “I am going to make Sarasota one of the sights of the South ... [it] will become one of the most beautiful cities in Florida.”

When you visit Sarasota, you’ll see it wasn’t just the talk of a showman. Make the grandiose Ringling Estate that John created with his wife Mable your first stop and you’ll see that he fulfilled his promise.

Governed by The Florida State University, The John and Mable Ringling Museum of Art is The State Art Museum of Florida and arguably one of America’s finest properties — a picturesque 66-acre estate on Sarasota Bay and a captivating showplace of arts, culture, and nature.

Featuring a Venetian-inspired palatial mansion, art museum, circus museum, and a jewel-box-of-a-theater brought over from Italy and restored to its 18th-century luster, the Ringling Museum also is home to stunning grounds, a waterfront promenade, and an expansive rose garden.

Completed in 1925 at a cost of $1.5 million, Ca’ d’Zan is the Ringling’s 56-room Venetian palace. Filled with art and original furnishings, it is a tribute to the American dream. Described as “the last of the Gilded Age mansions” to be built in America, the palace reflects the splendor and romance of Italy with its Venetian Gothic architecture. Ca’ d’Zan is a combination of the grandeur of Venice’s Doge’s Palace, combined with the gothic grace of Ca’ d’Oro, with Sarasota Bay serving as its Grand Canal.

The Museum of Art opened in 1931, emulating the footprint of Florence, Italy’s Uffizi Gallery and echoing its elegance and magnificence. John’s personal collection of masterpieces fills the 21 original galleries, including paintings and sculptures by Rubens, van Dyck, Velázquez, Veronese, El Greco, and Gainsborough, among many others. The Courtyard of the Museum of Art features one of the most iconic images of Sarasota: a 16-foot bronze-cast replica of the statue of David by Michelangelo. Bathed in Florida sunlight and surrounded by palm trees, David towers high above the Museum of Art Courtyard. Expanded in 2002, the Museum of Art now showcases the Ulla R. and Arthur F. Searing Wing, built for popular traveling exhibitions, as well as highlights of Cypriot, Asian, modern, and contemporary art from the Museum’s collection. The latest addition to the Searing Wing will be unveiled on the Winter Solstice — December 22, 2011.

At more than 3,000 square feet, the Skyspace, created by James Turrell, is one of the largest and most technologically advanced of the artist’s works. It is the foundation for the Museum’s newest initiative, Art of Our Time, which introduces audiences to the established and emerging talent within the international arts community who are defining current trends in contemporary art.

Serving as the Ringling Museum’s performance gallery, the Historic Asolo Theater presents museum-quality performances that explore and exemplify the rich diversity of ideas and forms at play in the world today. Built in 1798 as the first public theater in the Castle of Caterina Cornaro in the Italian town of Asolo near Venice, the U-shaped theater was purchased in 1950 by Arthur Everett “Chick” Austin, Jr., the first Director of the Museum, and reinstalled in the Visitor Pavilion in 2006. One of three performance arts theaters at the Ringling Center for the Arts, the Historic Asolo Theater is the heart of performances for Ringling International Arts Festival. A partnership with the Baryshnikov Arts Center of New York, the festival showcases established and emerging international artists from the world of dance, music, and theater and marks the beginning of the arts and cultural season in Sarasota each October.
The Ringling Museum shares the legacy of the circus king, John Ringling, and the importance of circus history through year-round special and permanent exhibitions. The Circus Museum is home to the recently restored Wisconsin, John and Mable Ringling's private railroad car, as well as beautifully carved parade wagons, rare handbills and art prints, circus papers, business records, wardrobe, performing props, and circus equipment.

A highlight of the Circus Museum for visitors big and small is the Howard Bros. Circus Model, an authentic replica of Ringling Bros. and Barnum & Bailey Circus. Complete with eight main tents, 152 wagons, 1,300 circus performers and workers, more than 800 animals, and a 57-car train, the model is a 1:4-inch-to-the-foot scale replica and occupies 3,800 square feet in the Circus Museum’s Tibbals Learning Center. This captivating model is the “largest miniature circus in the world” and was created by master model builder and philanthropist Howard Tibbals of Tennessee.

The growth of the Museum continues with a recent opening of the Tibbals Center’s 11,000-square-foot expansion of interactive exhibition space. Inviting children of all ages to experience the atmosphere, drama, and magic of a day at the circus, the playful new space offers the opportunity to walk a high wire, fit into a model of a 2-foot-by-3-foot car made famous by clown Lou Jacobs, and superimpose your face onto replicas of circus posters.

Colorful, exotic animals, amazing performers, delightful clowns, and more are showcased in 80 brilliantly, boldly, bombastic lithographs in the special exhibition The Amazing American Circus Poster: The Strobridge Lithographing Company. Celebrating our fascinating circus heritage and showcasing how late nineteenth and early twentieth century circus posters changed the face of American advertising forever, The Amazing American Circus Poster draws from the collections of the Ringling Museum, Howard Tibbals, and the Cincinnati Art Museum. Made in America and produced in Cincinnati by the Strobridge Lithographing Company, one of the country’s leading printers for the circuses, these historic posters were distributed throughout the country from 1878 to 1939 and are unrivaled in their artistry. The fascinating illustrations and compelling color palettes provide us with a detailed portrait of the American circus in its Golden Age, when it was the premier entertainment institution in the country. With an array of dates and show titles, the posters in the exhibition span from the time of P. T. Barnum’s greatest show on earth to the Ringling Bros. and Barnum & Bailey Circus. All of the circus posters are displayed in the Ulla R. and Arthur F. Searing Wing of the Ringling Museum of Art through January 29, 2012.

The Amazing American Circus Poster exhibition was organized by the Cincinnati Art Museum and The John and Mable Ringling Museum of Art and has been made possible in part by a major grant from the National Endowment for the Humanities: “Because democracy demands wisdom.”
Tell great stories. It’s what we do.” Such is the mission statement of Asolo Repertory Theatre’s producing artistic director, Michael Donald Edwards. The company was, to use his expression, “the lodestone and trigger” for Sarasota’s arts community when, 50-odd years ago, the faculty of Florida State University established a summer acting troupe in the Ringling Museum’s Asolo Theater (an 18th-century stage shipped from Asolo, Italy). Today, the company’s facilities occupy an arts center with two theaters— the better to accommodate the rotation of the near-dozen plays from October through July— as well as the FSU/Asolo Conservatory for Actor Training season (the original historic theater is still used for one or two productions). “We’re the leading regional theater in Florida, the oldest, biggest theater in the state,” says Edwards. “And,” he adds, “a significant part of the national American theater scene.”

Though the Australian-born director has been with Asolo Rep for just six seasons (“It feels more like six months,” he jokes), he feels a strong commitment to maintaining the high standard that FSU initially set, while bringing a fresh perspective to each season’s lineup. “There had been no tradition of doing musicals until I came to the theater here,” explains Edwards, whose career has been a mix of Shakespeare, contemporary plays, musicals, and opera, including a stint at the Metropolitan Opera in New York. Under his aegis, Asolo Rep was the first company to produce Broadway’s A Tale of Two Cities, and after premiering at La Jolla Playhouse in California, Bonnie & Clyde took its next essential creative step at Asolo Repertory Theatre before heading to Broadway.

And these are only two of the “great stories,” that Asolo Rep strives to tell. This season will kick off with the classic My Fair Lady, a revised version of Yentl with new music, as well as a new review, Pulse, choreographed and starring Noah Racey, inspired by Tommy Tune. There are other surprises, such as the newly rediscovered Noël Coward comedy Fallen Angels, representing one of the first productions in the U.S. and Red, the Tony Award–winning drama about abstract expressionist Mark Rothko, produced in partnership with the John & Mable Ringling Museum of Art and presented in the Historic Asolo Theater as a co-production with Maltz Jupiter Theatre. Perhaps most surprising is Hamlet, Prince of Cuba, Edwards’s own adaptation of Shakespeare’s classic drama, which will see three performances staged in Spanish. Not only is it a sort of love letter from the artistic director to his adopted home of Florida, it is a way of keeping the tried-and-true works fresh.

All of the productions speak to Asolo Rep’s ability to take risks and try new things—a luxury afforded by the openness of the city’s audiences. “In Sarasota,” observes Edwards, “people come here for a week, then they’ll come for two weeks, then a month, and then they move here. You have the ability to enjoy the arts as if you were living in Manhattan.” In fact, many of the theater’s audiences are New Yorkers who are familiar not only with Broadway, but with seasons in London and Stratford, Canada. “They expect us to do things on that level,” Edwards says. “I feel there’s a conversation between me and our audience, between our theater and the community.” It’s all a part of a national conversation, he observes, to introduce new ideas to audiences. “We have a big job,” he asserts. And so far, a job well done.
Art is Made in Sarasota

For more than 50 years, the town has been a creative tour de force. And that hasn’t changed.

After World War II, aspiring artists and teachers came to Sarasota to attend the Ringling School of Art and Design, and many stayed in the area and achieved worldwide acclaim. From the 1950s to 80s, Sarasota was an avant-garde artist colony with internationally recognized artists including Hilton Leech, Jimmy Ernst, David Budd, Conrad Marca-Relli, Everett Shinn, Syd Solomon, and Helen Sawyer. The visual arts scene in this Florida Gulf Coast city is as dynamic as ever — and the artwork created here continues to draw worldwide attention.

Elizabeth Van Riper
Lauren’s Cache Pot, 30” x 30”
Mixed media on canvas

Fourth-generation Sarasota artist Elizabeth Van Riper is continuously inspired by nature’s exuberance. Her work appears in both corporate and private collections and has been licensed and offered by prestigious national retailers in the U.S. and abroad. Van Riper has recently launched a retail/wholesale Web site (elizabethvanriper.com) offering her fine art images as fashion and home accessories for artful living.

Craig Rubadoux
Greenhill Tango, 30” x 29”
mixed media on canvas

Craig Rubadoux settled in Sarasota in 1945 and studied with Ben Stahl at the Ringling School of Art and Design. His art is included in many public and private collections including New York’s Guggenheim Museum; Atlanta’s High Museum of Art; Sarasota’s Ringling Museum of Art; Fort Lauderdale’s Museum of Art; and St. Petersburg’s Museum of Fine Arts. Rubadoux works primarily on paper and canvas.

For more visuals, visit josephmelancon.com.

Vicky Randall
Clockwork: Six Weeks in July, 4’ x 2’ x 1’
fabricated stainless steel

Vicky Randall has been creating artwork in fabricated metals for more than 25 years. She is best known for her monumental public art installations, a wide range of which can be found in corporate and private collections in the U.S. and abroad. Learn more at vickyrandall.com.

Florencia Putterman
Crossroads, 65” x 58”, acrylic on canvas

A National Endowment Grant awardee and recipient of numerous other national awards, Putterman’s work has been featured in solo and group exhibitions in the U.S. and Europe. Her paintings are in private, corporate, and museum collections throughout the U.S., including the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York and the Chicago Art Institute. For more on her art, visit florenceputterman.com.

Jorge Blanco
Polo, 2009, 169” x 96” x 82”, aluminum and paint, from Caracas, Venezuela

A native of Venezuela, Jorge Blanco has lived and worked in Sarasota since 1999. With more than 35 years of exhibited work, his art can be found in private collections, galleries, and museums in Europe, the Caribbean, South America, and the U.S.

For more of his work, go to jorgeblancosculpture.com.

Kathleen McDonald
Lido Beach, Sarasota, FL
Acrylic, 24 x 24

Kathleen McDonald is a landscape and seascape painter, a potter, printmaker, and photographer. She is best known for her fearless use of pure color, much of it informed by her travels to exotic locals and Sarasota County beaches and waterways. More work can be seen online at KathleenMcDonald.artspan.com.

Bronzart Foundry
The Ancient Incident (Kabal American Zephyr), 1982–2006, 7’2.5” x 7’7” x 1’9”

For more than 30 years, the staff of Bronzart, a full-service, lost wax foundry, has worked closely with artists and their clients in the creation of high-quality, large and small bronze sculpture. The foundry’s work is found in private collections and major public installations. For more information and images, visit bronzartfoundry.com.

Robert Rauschenberg
Robert Rauschenberg

Drive just 30 miles south of Sarasota to the Gulf of Mexico, and you might think you’ve arrived at the Adriatic Sea. For there lies the City of Venice.

Like its Italian counterpart, this inland city is one of bridges and canals. A small, historic beach town with big city amenities, Venice was designed by famous city planner John Nolen in 1926. Its Northern Italian Renaissance architectural style, dotted with beautiful fountains and banyan trees between the beach and the inviting downtown. Stop at any of the 100-plus independent shops on Venice Avenue for the latest beach fashions and antiques, or sate your appetite at any of the sidewalk cafes and waterfront restaurants offering a global smorgasbord, from French and Italian fare to Japanese and New American cuisine. And don’t forget the many outdoor events such as the festival celebrating the city’s moniker, “Shark’s Tooth Capital of the World,” or the Downtown Venice Art Classic, held every spring.

Artists say they are drawn to Venice for the light. Whether you paint, photograph, or merely appreciate the works of others, you too will see the light at the Venice Art Center, which offers a variety of classes in practically every medium. Go ahead, get in touch with your inner Picasso with a course in abstract art or drawing, or take in one of the numerous exhibitions showcasing local talent.

Venice’s cultural life features art in its many forms. Under the guiding hand of Conductor and Musical Director Kenneth Bowermeister, the Venice Symphony, composed of musicians from across the U.S., Canada, United Kingdom, France, Germany, and a host of other countries, presents six sets of concerts a year. Start off the 2011–12 season with a holiday concert, or hear Young Ah Tak play Beethoven’s Piano Concerto No. 5 in February. Spring brings outdoor pops concerts and a local food drive. It’s one of several examples of community outreach (which also include concerts at area schools), an essential component of the Venice Symphony’s mission.

There is art, there is music — and there is theater. For the last decade, Venice Theatre has been distinguished as the third-largest and most-awarded community theater in the U.S. Two stages in a beautifully renovated historic building host a dazzling array of programming. The theater’s 62nd season includes Broadway-style musicals and comedies, intimate cabarets, contemporary cutting-edge productions, and classic family fare. Add nationally renowned concert and stand-up comedy acts, and it’s easy to see why Venice Theatre is the destination for live entertainment. Mark your calendars for June 18–26, 2014, when Venice Theatre will once again host the International Community Theatre Festival in Paradise, a gathering of troupes that stage all genres of theater — comedy, drama, opera, and circus acts — in the native languages of each country represented.

For more information, visit venicegov.com, venicemainstreet.com, veniceartcenter.com, venicestage.com, and thevenicesymphony.org.

Clockwise from far left: The King and I at the Venice Theatre, the Downtown Venice Art Classic, and the Venice Symphony.
the words “studio theater” conjure images of small stages, one-act plays, and solo performances. But six programs? National and regional premieres? A playwriting program? A festival? And some 200,000 attendees per year? Florida Studio Theatre is a testament to the power of dreaming big. Established in 1973 by Jon Spelman, FST started out as a small alternative troupe that toured prisons, migrant camps, community centers, and nursing homes. By 1977, its supporters found the company a permanent home in Sarasota’s Historic Women’s Club Building. From there, FST expanded year after year but never lost touch with its roots. Billing itself as a company where “the street meets the elite,” FST offers the best in contemporary theater at an affordable price and encourages everyone in the community to be a part of it. The company now boasts three theaters that host performances year-round, thanks to its six theatrical programs.

Of these programs, the Mainstage season plays are at the helm. Winter and summers are filled with dynamic plays and musicals of Broadway and off-Broadway fare. The program has seen 89 national premieres and 33 regional premieres across its historic Keating and Gompertz stages. From the Pulitzer Prize–winning musical Next to Normal to the heart-wrenching world premiere of Jericho, FST produces work that speaks to a living, breathing, and constantly changing community. Once their appetites were whetted with the latest and greatest of cutting-edge theater, Sarasota audiences hungered for more. In 1987, FST began offering lively music revues. Today, in the Parisian-style Goldstein Cabaret, audiences enjoy cabaret and improv, which celebrates the lyric poets of our time and presents social and political satire. And that’s not all. In an effort to draw new audiences, FST introduced daring and edgy fare that stimulated audiences by mixing thought-provoking plays, such as Edward Albee’s The Goat, with popular works such as last season’s Shear Madness.

But staging performances isn’t the extent of FST’s reach. The company makes a concerted effort to keep theater alive by developing new plays, specifically during the annual Sarasota Festival of New Plays. Here, audiences can see a play in process, thanks to the Richard and Betty Burdick Play Reading Series, while playwrights can try out rehearsals of their latest works. Even children get into the act with Under Six, featuring a collage of works by students in kindergarten through the sixth grade. It’s the culmination of FST’s Write a Play program, in which some 55,000 students across Florida, from kindergarten through 12th grade, learn the art of crafting a play. So the next time you hear the phrase “studio theater,” ask yourself, as did one famous playwright, “What’s in a name?” In the case of Florida Studio Theatre, the answer is “plenty.”
Founded in 1991 by former Stuttgart Ballet dancer Jean Allenby-Weidner, The Sarasota Ballet was one of Florida’s cultural gems, but Webb was charged with putting this regional company on the international ballet map.

The first season he received a nod from eminent dance critic Clive Barnes, who said, “It’s a sensational season. I don’t think any American company has ever done all these ballets before. It’s a rarity.” The New York Times critic Alastair Macaulay named them “America’s foremost exponent of Ashton ballets” when he saw them the next season, highlighting their “remarkable grasp of Ashton’s multilayered musicality.”

Following a career with The Royal Ballet, where he was guided by British ballet legends Dame Ninette de Valois, Sir Frederick Ashton, and Sir Kenneth MacMillan, Webb worked closely with boundary-crashing, Tony Award–winning choreographer Matthew Bourne. As rehearsal director for Bourne’s alternate version of Swan Lake, a huge hit on Broadway and beyond, Webb proved his sense of creative diversity in dance styles.

In only four seasons, The Sarasota Ballet has added 42 new ballets to its repertoire representing a remarkable range of choreographers. De Valois, Ashton, and MacMillian, and other Brits such as Peter Darrell and David Bintley are among them. Other famed choreographers include George Balanchine, John Cranko, Andre Prokovsky, Hans van Manen, and Tyla Tharp. Respected repetiteurs and choreographers work directly with the dancers, bringing the world to Sarasota and showcasing the company, now numbering 52 dancers, to today’s international ballet masters. They also enjoy a special relationship with Royal Ballet principal and American Ballet Theatre guest principal Johan Kobborg, who will return to Sarasota for his third season, preparing his Salute for January performances.

The Sarasota Ballet was the first company worldwide to add a ballet by Matthew Bourne to its repertoire when it wowed audiences with The Infernal Galop. In 2009–10, they created a sensation with There Where She Loves by Christopher Wheeldon, arguably the most sought-after classical choreographer of today.

While local critics raved, international accolades began — and the ballet blogosphere buzzed. London’s Dance Zone called The Sarasota Ballet “a high profile company with a unique repertory of genuine quality.” The Faster Times said they “danced and acted with such vividness ... storytelling is the company’s forte.” In recent visits to Sarasota, Dance Magazine was surprised to learn that The Sarasota Ballet and its dancers were performing works never before seen — not even in New York. The 2011–2012 season began with the great honor of partnering with The Suzanne Farrell Ballet at Washington, D.C.’s Kennedy Center in October. Together they performed Balanchine’s Diamonds, created in 1967 for his muse, the young Suzanne Farrell. This month, the two companies repeat these performances in Sarasota and Clearwater, paired with Ashton’s poignant love story, The Two Pigeons, a company and audience favorite.

In an already rich arts community, The Sarasota Ballet quickly became the hottest ticket in town when Director Iain Webb took the reins in 2007. The Sarasota Ballet wows audiences around the globe.
It's an exciting time for the internationally acclaimed Sarasota Opera.

Not only is the company enjoying a $20 million theater renovation, it’s about to embark on its 53rd season, topped off with a gala celebration to honor Maestro Victor DeRenzi’s 30th anniversary as artistic director.

The kickoff production is Puccini’s tender love story Madama Butterfly (Oct. 28–Nov. 15), then Bizet’s fiery Carmen takes the stage on Feb. 11 with original spoken dialogue through March 24th. Donizetti’s tale of deceit, murder, and madness, Lucia di Lammermoor (Feb. 18–March 24), is followed by DeRenzi’s first time conducting Verdi’s masterpiece Otello, which marks the final five years of the Company’s Verdi Cycle ending in 2016.

The season wraps up with Barber’s Vanessa, a continuation of the company’s new American Classics Series (March 10–24).

“Victor DeRenzi is simply the finest, most idiomatic Verdi conductor I’ve ever heard, and I’m not forgetting some much more celebrated names,” writes arts critic Lawrence Johnson. Indeed, under DeRenzi’s leadership, the company has garnered international attention as a place to experience rarely performed operatic works. He also created educational and outreach activities. Notably, the Sarasota Youth Opera Program introduces youth ages 8–18 to all aspects of opera.

One of the best parts for audiences is experiencing all this fine opera in the “Jewel on the Gulf,” the former A.B. Edwards Theater, now completely restored to its Mediterranean Revival glory. It’s quite the crescendo, considering the company’s start in 1960 with a chamber-sized repertoire in the 320-seat Asolo Theater. Recognizing the need for a theater more conducive to opera, the company bought the former A.B. Edwards lobby, new lounge spaces, more comfortable seating (replacing 50-year-old movie-style seats), and most of all, a private dining room.

Today Opera magazine hails the theater as “one of the best places to view opera,” and Musical America dubbed it “one of America’s finest venues for opera.”

Over the course of three decades, Maestro DeRenzi has produced more than 100 different operas and conducted almost 600 performances since his start in 1983. (Equally impressive, the opera’s executive director, Susan T. Danis, has spent 12 years growing the opera’s budget from $3.2 million to more than $8.5 million.)

Come see the numbers add up by calling 941.328.1300 for subscriptions or by visiting the Sarasota Opera Box Office online or in person. Join in the excitement and experience a performance for yourself. You might even find yourself shouting “Bravo!”
What’s That Sound?
The Sarasota Orchestra: Come as you are. Leave different.

For more than 60 years, the Sarasota Orchestra has been entertaining local music lovers and visitors from around the world. The 80-member orchestra performs more than 100 classical, pops, and multimedia concerts each year and thrives as the oldest continuing orchestra in the state of Florida.

With five exhilarating series, the orchestra offers patrons a diverse mix of concerts from September to May. The Sarasota Orchestra also presents the world-renowned Sarasota Music Festival each June.

Masterworks
The full orchestra presents its hallmark series of seven concerts featuring unprecedented variety and the opportunity to experience the talents of some of today’s most dynamic conductors representing differing artistic and musical perspectives.

Journeys to Genius
This popular multimedia series unveils the stories behind the great masters and provides insight into some of their most memorable works. In a fast-paced, 70-minute narrated format, audiences discover what makes these masterpieces so timeless, powerful, and exceptional.

Chamber Soiree
Ensembles made up of orchestra musicians perform seven concerts of exceptional chamber music throughout the season.

For more information visit sarasotaorchestra.org. To purchase tickets call the box office at 941.953.3434. The box office is located at 709 N. Tamiami Trail, in the Beatrice Friedman Symphony Center.

2012 Sarasota Music Festival
June 4–23, 2012

For more information about the Sarasota Music Festival, visit sarasotaorchestra.org.
Selby Gardens is focused on furthering the understanding and appreciation of plant life, with emphasis on epiphytes, and to provide enjoyment to all who visit and experience the Gardens.

Marie Selby was born Mariah Minshall in Wood County, West Virginia, in 1885 and later moved to Marietta, Ohio. She married William Selby in 1908, and together they bought seven acres of land bordering on Sarasota Bay and Hudson Bayou. Little did they realize this purchase would someday become an exquisite Sarasota bayfront landmark.

Marie Selby left her property as a gift to the community to be used as a botanical garden “for the enjoyment of the general public.” Marie Selby Botanical Gardens officially opened to the public on July 7, 1975, and has since doubled in size to 14 acres.

Selby Gardens offers visitors a rich cultural experience. Guests of all ages can stroll through the lush natural beauty of the Gardens, have lunch at the cafe or under the banyan trees, attend classes and lectures, visit the Kid’s Corner, and browse at the Garden Shop. The Gardens also offers exhibits in the historic mansion and special events including Lights in Bloom, Plant and Garden Festival, Asian Festival, and the Garden Music Series. Selby Gardens also offers majestic nuptial and reception venues to say “I Do.”

Visitors are encouraged to come often to experience the new and ever-changing display of rare and exotic orchids, bromeliads, and other luscious plants in the Conservatory and in the Gardens. Selby Gardens is a stunningly beautiful showplace that delights more than 130,000 visitors each year.

Selby Gardens is a stunningly beautiful showplace that delights more than 130,000 visitors each year.
Discovering the Secrets of the Sea

Despite humble beginnings, Mote Marine Laboratory has been on the cutting edge of marine science since the 1950s.

It's 1955. In sleepy Placida, Florida, world-renowned scientist Dr. Eugenie Clark (also known as “Shark Lady”) fashions a marine laboratory out of a one-room shack with the help of a few enthusiastic fishermen.

Fast-forward to 2011 in Sarasota and that one-room shack is now a 10.5-acre, state-of-the-art marine research facility called Mote Marine Laboratory (after benefactor William R. Mote), a 200-acre aquaculture farm east of its main campus, a smaller lab and outreach facilities in the Florida Keys, and a field station on Pine Island in Charlotte Harbor.

Mote Marine Laboratory, known for its popular aquarium and groundbreaking research, has become an integral part of the Gulf Coast community. One of the few independent nonprofit marine laboratories in the nation, Mote has a staff of 995, with more than 30 doctoral-level scientists. And while the lab is best known for its work in Florida, its scientists conduct research programs all over the world in places such as Mexico, Cuba, Argentina, the Dominican Republic, the Middle East, and even the Arctic. Its distance-learning education program, SeaTrek, reaches K-12 students worldwide.

Over the course of five decades, Mote Marine Lab has expanded to cover many areas of research, including studies of aquatic toxicology, chemical fate and effects, environmental health, marine biomedical research, marine immunology, marine microbiology, sensory biology, and behavior. Mote even has hospitals dedicated to treating dolphins, whales, and sea turtles.

One thing that hasn't changed: the spirit of discovery that drove Dr. Clark’s original research. She was the first to discover that sharks can learn, a groundbreaking idea at the time. Today, Mote’s Center for Shark Research is officially designated as a national center for shark research by Congress.

Mote Marine Laboratory also understands the link between humans and the ocean. From studies on the toxic algae that cause red tides, to research on shark immune systems that might offer treatment for human cancer, Mote tackles projects that directly affect the health of humans and ocean dwellers alike.

“One of the primary reasons we do our research is to help give the community better water quality, better seafood, and better health through research programs focusing on our coasts, on our fisheries, and on biomedical applications,” says president and CEO Dr. Kumar Mahadevan. “Many marine labs are attached to a university or to the government, but because we are independent, we can guide our research — quickly and reliably. We are able to do things that benefit our community the most because we have the support of our community.”

Mote’s influence on the local community can be measured in numbers, too. This past year, Mote Marine Laboratory staff published more than 150 scientific articles, textbooks, and book chapters, attracted more than 1,300 volunteers, and had an estimated economic impact of $71 million.

“You can sit in your ivory tower and do any kind of research you want, but you have to communicate with your scientific colleagues, and the people in the local community have to know what you’re doing,” says Dr. Clark. “That’s what I’m proud of. That Mote has developed from a tiny little laboratory where people study fish, to a place where people can come and learn.”
Mild. Smooth. Silky. The melt-in-your-mouth caviar from Siberian sturgeon has long been considered a delicacy. Unfortunately, years of overfishing badly depleted the sought-after sturgeon. Luxury and sustainability seemed incompatible until Mote Marine Laboratory opened its aquaculture park in 2001.

Mote Aquaculture Park is blazing the path for healthy and environmentally friendly aquaculture. The 200-acre facility adheres to strict health regulations and has developed cutting-edge technology to filter and conserve water. Rather than cycling in new water every five to seven minutes, Mote’s sturgeon program recycles its water for days, significantly reducing waste. The park partners with a local company to grow native wetlands plants that help filter any remaining nutrients from the small amount of wastewater. These plants are later used to restore wetlands habitats across the state.

With dwindling wild fish populations and an outsized U.S. seafood trade deficit (almost $9 billion per year), the aquaculture technology at Mote Marine Lab points the way toward a more sustainable future. This year, the Lab’s aquaculture park is helping meet the rising demand for seafood by selling about 75,000 pounds of sturgeon and two tons of caviar. The park also grows depleted saltwater species — game fish such as snook, red drum, and pompano — to help rebuild wild populations. Mote also grows corals as well, used in restocking efforts designed to help restore the continent’s only coral reef, located in the Florida Keys.

The aquaculture technology can preserve wild fish and supply seafood to a growing market with minimal impact on the environment. So how does this aquaculture-produced food taste? Hailed by chefs from Sarasota to New York, the fillets and caviar from Mote are downright delicious.

The ocean can be a mysterious place. What’s out there just below the waves? At Mote Aquarium, you don’t have to be a deep-sea diver to come face to face with hundreds of different marine species, from sharks to sea urchins.

Explore coral reefs and learn about the fish that live there. Visit the 135,000-gallon shark habitat to watch live feedings and narrated training sessions. Sign up to take a special tour through the Seahorse Conservation Lab and get a behind-the-scenes look at the lives of these curious creatures.

At Mote Aquarium you can also meet sea turtles, dolphins, and manatees. These educational ambassadors teach visitors about ways that we can help protect them in the wild. Most fascinating? These animals all participate in special research programs that help scientists learn more about their behavior and biology — knowledge that can help manage wild populations.

For a limited time, Mote is also hosting some very special guests: black-footed penguins. From now to Spring 2012, the aquarium houses the tuxedo-wearing penguins, offering guests a unique opportunity to meet the South African natives.

Like the other exhibits in Mote Aquarium, Penguin Island is about much more than entertainment. These birds were just placed on the endangered species list. The aquarium hopes that when visitors learn about the penguin’s plight, they will better understand the need for conservation, both locally and internationally.

The aquarium gives visitors a chance to meet fascinating sea creatures and to learn about the extraordinary research and conservation efforts at Mote Marine Laboratory. A visit to Mote Aquarium is a family-friendly outing that promises to educate and entertain.
Since its founding in 1926, the organization has recognized that experiencing the visual arts is not only an enriching part of being human but is, in fact, essential. Some 40,000 people flock to Art Center Sarasota in the Bayfront Cultural District annually from destinations across the U.S. and abroad, often to browse the exhibitions in the five galleries, attend an exhibition opening reception, or purchase unique original art. Over 26 exhibitions in the galleries annually ensure new artworks to view and explore at every visit. Art Center Sarasota’s curated exhibitions showcase professional local, national, or internationally known artists.

Art education is offered in classes, workshops, lectures, artist demonstrations, discussions, and a variety of cultural programs. The center is accessible to artists of all skill levels who come to broaden their horizons and young students who want to explore and nurture their artistic talent. Art Center Sarasota has thrived thanks to the many participants, corporate sponsors, donors, and students that support the organization and believe in the importance of creativity as an essential element of a thriving community.

It is a center that celebrates the arts by bringing people together and a place where the imagination can flourish. Art education is offered in classes, workshops, lectures, artist demonstrations, discussions, and a variety of cultural programs. The center is accessible to artists of all skill levels who come to broaden their horizons and young students who want to explore and nurture their artistic talent. Art Center Sarasota has thrived thanks to the many participants, corporate sponsors, donors, and students that support the organization and believe in the importance of creativity as an essential element of a thriving community.

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Great Performances

Artist Series Concerts brings a host of top performers year-round to Sarasota.

Series Executive Director John Fischer says, “Our goal is to provide entertainment experiences equal to what you find in great cities like New York, Chicago, and Los Angeles — but in the ‘always on vacation’ atmosphere of Sarasota.” What makes Artist Series Concert performances unique is the focus on small one-of-a-kind venues, which provide a true connection between the performance and the audience. Each year during its 10-month season, Artist Series Concerts offers more than 50 performances, most presented in the charming setting of the Historic Asolo Theater at the Ringling Museum of Art. The ever-popular pops programs showcase leading performers from Broadway and cabarets.
It is the history and culture of the circus that sets Sarasota apart from any other place in Florida and, for that matter, almost any other city in North America. No single organization better exemplifies the living, breathing circus in this community than Circus Sarasota. Thanks to the vision and passion of Dolly Jacobs and Pedro Reis, Circus Sarasota continues to preserve and enhance Sarasota’s lively circus legacy that began in 1927.

Circus Sarasota’s annual performance engagements have been acclaimed for world-class artistry and entertainment showcased in a one-ring, five-star European-style circus. No less significant, however, are the year-round ongoing outreach programs Laughter Unlimited, Big Top Education, and Sailor Circus, dedicated to “children of all ages” in the community. Laughter Unlimited is a program in which performers provide entertainment for, and meaningful one-on-one interaction with, residents and patients of assisted living facilities, nursing homes, hospitals, UCP, and cancer support communities. For school-aged students, Big Top Education offers a stimulating and enjoyable circus-themed curriculum to teach math, science, and reading. Sailor Circus is the longest-running youth circus program in America, serving Sarasota County students from grades 4–12. Over 10,000 students have participated in the program, and more than a million people have attended performances of “The Greatest Little Show on Earth!”

What you experience under the Big Top and what Circus Sarasota contributes to the community prove that the circus is alive and well…and living right in Sarasota!

Enriching, Educating, and Entertaining

Circus Sarasota is a unique presence in the community.

BY LANCE ELKO

A cultural and entertainment hub, downtown Sarasota boasts big city amenities including theaters, art galleries, and festivals throughout the year. Downtown’s historic district (bounded by First and State streets, and Orange and Gulfstream avenues) is listed on the National Register of Historic Places and features a stunning collection of early-1900s buildings. Stroll the wide sidewalks and check out the Kress Building, Roth Cigar Factory, and the Sarasota Opera House for a peek at the variety of architectural styles. If you’re looking for history and entertainment, don’t miss the Golden Apple Dinner Theatre. Since 1971, it’s been serving up a buffet-style meal along with world-class plays and musicals. Bonus: The theater is located near Selby Five Points Park, recently revamped and now filled with public art and lush landscaping.

Come On Down!

Sarasota’s downtown teems with history, dining, shopping, and much more.

BY TARA TITCOMBE

Revamped and now filled with public art and lush landscaping, downtown discovery is a breeze by checking out the dozens of art galleries, boutiques, and antique shops — several feature locally made crafts and goods. Then grab a bite to eat at one of Sarasota’s more than 60 restaurants. Also check out local flavors every Saturday at the Sarasota Farmers Market — a downtown tradition since 1979. And don’t miss Live It’s Friday Night, the first Friday of every month, when downtown is on full display with music, activities, and entertainment throughout the area. In downtown Sarasota, there’s always plenty to celebrate.
In Concert

The Sarasota Concert Association presents some of the world’s greatest classical music performers.

For the past 67 years, the SCA has presented a five-concert series each year featuring performances by internationally renowned symphony orchestras and distinguished soloists.

This January through March, the 2012 series will offer a stunning array of artists and orchestras at the Van Wezel Performing Arts Hall in Sarasota.

Britain’s acclaimed Royal Philharmonic Orchestra opens the 2012 season with principal guest conductor Pinchas Zukerman. A world-renowned violinst, violinist, and conductor, Zukerman is considered one of the greatest violinists of the 20th and 21st centuries.

The season continues with acclaimed American baritone Thomas Hampson. A recitalist, opera singer, and recording artist, Hampson is a star baritone of the Metropolitan Opera.

Next, Russian pianist Kirill Gerstein, one of the most prolific and charismatic young performers in classical music, will take the stage.

Then renowned violin soloist Midori will perform with conductor Osmo Vänskä and the Minnesota Orchestra. Since her debut at the age of 11 with the New York Philharmonic more than 25 years ago, Midori has established a record of achievement that sets her apart as a master musician, innovator, and a champion of the developmental potential of children.

The 2012 season concludes with the Northwest German Philharmonic, conducted by Eugene Trizigane, with cellist Amit Peled. SCA also presents “Munchtime Musicales,” a series of free concerts featuring performances by high-caliber, area-based artists. The series is designed to offer a wide variety of musical genres, including classical, folk, and jazz, featuring both vocal and instrumental performers. The series is free and open to the public.

If all the buildings dotting the beautiful Sarasota Bay, one in particular stands out; the purple and lavender, sea shell-shaped Van Wezel Performing Arts Hall.

Inspired by a pair of shells from the Sea of Japan, architect William Wesley Peters (collaborator of Frank Lloyd Wright) designed the hall to mimic their scalloped silhouette. The interior of the hall is just as impressive. Renowned for its acoustics and intimate feel, the Van Wezel Performing Arts Hall has brought world-class entertainment to Sarasota for more than 40 years.

The 2011-2012 season places both the variety and quality of the Hall’s programming on center stage. The lineup features everything from Broadway hits like Shrek the Musical and Young Frankenstein to pop legends Liza Minnelli and Frankie Valli and the Four Seasons. If classical is more your style, catch performances by the Cleveland Orchestra and violin virtuoso Joshua Bell. And when you see stand-up comedians like Jerry Seinfeld and Bob Saget, you’ll know that Van Wezel Hall offers something for everyone.

A true cultural gem, the Van Wezel enriches the Gulf Coast community through its programming, and with the help of The Van Wezel Foundation gives back by bringing the arts to life for local schoolchildren. The Foundation supports the annual Schooltime Performances, which educated and entertained more than 22,000 students from Sarasota and neighboring counties last year alone. In recognition of its outstanding arts outreach, the John F. Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts selected Sarasota as the sixth partner city for “Any Given Child,” a long-range arts education program for grades K-8.

Whether you attend a show or help inspire a child by donating to the Van Wezel Foundation, you’ll be saying one thing: Bravo!
For many years, Sarasotans have been blessed with art in all its forms. Visual arts have been central to the town’s identity for decades, but the role of performance arts has expanded greatly in recent years. Music in particular has struck a note with the community—especially the performances presented by New Music New College.

Sarasota’s New College is the official honors college of the state of Florida. It is highly selective — only 840 students attend this unique liberal arts school. For 50 years, graduates have become leaders in academics, medicine, law, journalism, advertising, and music, among other fields.

In 1998, New Music New College emerged as a program within New College — providing students who possessed musical talent and refreshingly new ideas an opportunity to create and perform throughout the community. Many Sarasotans have enjoyed the compelling and experimental sounds in galleries, outdoors, and other unconventional spaces.

The students and faculty perform original music, and NMNC also presents concerts by a host of contemporary music specialists from across the country. Director and professor of music Stephen Miles explains that NMNC is an evolving experiment, one that tests assumptions and conventions about music. “We challenge the traditional boundaries that separate music and speech, music and theater, and performer and audience,” Miles says.

New Music New College is unique not only in its musical offerings and approach to learning, but also in its integration with the community of Sarasota.
Creativity and Community

Ringling College of Art and Design inspires students of all ages—and art lovers everywhere.

BY IVY LAMB

Here I hope a famous school of artists will rise, for though life is short, art is long.”

Spoken by art collector and circus impresario John Ringling in 1931, those hopeful words—originally spoken by Hippocrates—turned out to be remarkably prescient. Today, the arts school that Ringling founded is considered one of the best art and design colleges in the world, and a vital part of the Sarasota community.

Over the course of 80 years, Ringling College of Art and Design has grown from a student body of 75 to nearly 1,400 degree-seeking students. The college offers BFA degrees in 13 disciplines, ranging from Fine Arts to Computer Animation and Digital Filmmaking, and a BA in the innovative Business of Art & Design program. Cited as the “Most Wired Campus in America” by U.S. News & World Report in 2011, the college also has received attention from BusinessWeek, which named Ringling College one of the top 60 design schools in the world (and one of only 10 in the U.S.). Ringling encourages creativity and innovation across all its disciplines, but the college reaches far beyond the student body; it also has myriad galleries and programs aimed at engaging the wider Sarasota community.

Selby Gallery, the professional exhibition space on campus, features the work of internationally recognized contemporary visual artists in addition to annual shows featuring faculty and students. The Gallery also hosts lectures, panel discussions, and performances. Many other galleries are scattered across the main campus, such as the student-directed Crossley Gallery, the Basch and Willis A. Smith Construction, Inc.

galleries, and the Patricia Thompson Gallery showcasing alumni work.

Ringling College has made its mark outside the main campus as well. In the heart of Sarasota’s Rosemary Court Arts District, you’ll find “madeby,” a unique retail gallery that showcases student and alumni work for sale.

For non-degree seeking students and community members who are interested in exploring and enhancing their creative abilities, Continuing Studies and Special Programs offers community art classes, lectures, workshops, and travel programs, in addition to the four-week intensive PreCollege Perspective program for high school juniors and seniors.

To spread the inspiration found on its main campus, the college’s two art center divisions—Longboat Key Center for the Arts and the Englewood Art Center—provide art classes and workshops, lectures, special events, and invitational and community exhibitions throughout the year designed to educate, engage, and entertain the communities they serve.

Ringling College refuses to rest on its laurels. The college is in the process of establishing the Visual Arts Education Center, which will house the newly conceived Sarasota Museum of Art (SMOA). When completed, SMOA will bring a rich array of modern and contemporary art to Sarasota, and help cement the city as the cultural capital of southwest Florida.
The Ringling College Library Association (RCLA) attracts world leaders, artists, entertainers, sports figures, journalists, and other engaging personalities to the Gulf Coast of Florida. Among the top art schools in the world, Sarasota is an affluent community filled with intellectually curious people who choose to live in this vibrant spot on the globe. One subscriber said at the end of last season, “Our community has a thirst for engaging cultural activities and the TOWN HALL Lecture Series stimulates meaningful and provocative conversation about important issues.” It’s no wonder that the series is well subscribed.

Recent speakers have included former President Bill Clinton, former Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice, international journalist Fareed Zakaria, director of the Metropolitan Museum of Art Philippe de Montebello, former Prime Minister Tony Blair, Nobel laureate Elie Wiesel, and best-selling author Malcolm Gladwell. The TOWN HALL Lecture Series offers a choice of morning or evening programs followed by a lunch or evening reception. Visitors leisurely peruse the exhibits during gallery hours or prior to performances and shows.

SCF students gain valuable hands-on experience whether they are pursuing cultural studies as a profession or hobby through additional offerings that include art history, two- and three-dimensional design, graphic design, film production, and photography/digital imaging. As the oldest and largest public college on Florida’s “Cultural Coast,” State College of Florida, Manatee-Sarasota (SCF) has a long-standing commitment to arts education and performance. Fueled by students’ energy and faculty’s expertise, SCF produces and hosts a variety of entertainment — photo, ceramic and art exhibits, theatre productions, and music concerts — at beautiful campus facilities and at venues throughout the area. Highly regarded faculty members are recognized for their professional contributions to area arts organizations such as the appointment of Robyn Wilkes, SF’s director of instrumental studies, as director of the Sarasota Pops Orchestra.

Skilled music faculty members combine performance and teaching careers, guiding students through private lessons and directing ensembles that maintain an active performance schedule in the community and in the 839-seat Neel Performing Arts Center. Student music ensembles include the Concert Choir, Chamber Choir, Music Theatre Ensemble, Jazz Combo, Jazz Ensemble, Guitar Ensemble, Wind Ensemble, and Symphony Orchestra.

Studio 84 Productions is the student acting company that performs classic and contemporary comedies, dramas, mysteries, musicals, and new works by the Theatre faculty. All shows are directed by the Theatre faculty and presented in the David S. and Anne V. Howard Studio Theatre. The Fine Art Gallery hosts exhibits by students, faculty and guest artists from around the world who mingle with the public at opening receptions. Visitors leisurely peruse the exhibits during gallery hours or prior to performances and shows.

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Who wouldn’t want to go to a university near America’s No. 1 beach? The 4,700 students at the University of South Florida Sarasota-Manatee, just a few miles from Siesta Beach and across the street from the Sarasota Bradenton International Airport, appreciate the advantages of location and a dynamic curriculum that has resulted in unparalleled growth in a little more than three short decades.

A part of the University of South Florida System, USFSM offers bachelor’s and master’s degrees in Arts & Sciences, Business, Education, and Hotel & Restaurant Management at its main campus and teaching site in North Port. With classes boasting a 15-to-one student-to-faculty ratio, there is little wonder enrollment and academic achievement have soared at this institution.

But USFSM understands that learning extends beyond the classroom. Its mission has always been to serve the region. The College of Education, for example, partners with elementary schools in two counties, while the Hotel & Restaurant Management program actively serves the area’s tourism industry. And Sarasota’s vibrant arts community figures into USFSM’s mission as well. The university has designed a unique MBA program to teach students the business of film and is integrating arts into its curriculum. This year, USFSM will continue to play host to the Perlman Music Program’s Winter Residency (see page 90).

With such an emphasis on community, it comes as no surprise that some 18,000 USFSM alums choose to stay in the region and excel at the companies they work for. While he was a student, Jason Krykwo secured an SBA loan to start Sleek Audio, a customizable headphone company. Says the COO, “To date, we have personally fit more than 1,200 professional athletes, musicians, and artists with custom earphones and have distribution in more than 50 countries. Without the support of the staff and faculty of USF Sarasota-Manatee we never would have garnered the marketing skills and international prowess that we have.”

The Perlman Music Program; Suncoast, founded to present The Perlman Music Program Winter Residency, welcomes the 8th annual return of Toby and Itzhak Perlman, the PMP faculty, and PMP musicians (ages 12–20+) to southwest Florida. The public is invited to attend 20 free musical events, including rehearsals, master classes, and works-in-progress recitals on the USF Sarasota-Manatee campus. This remarkable two-week program culminates in the Celebration Concert at the Sarasota Opera House, with Itzhak Perlman conducting the PMP Orchestra.

Join us for this uplifting artistic and educational experience!
Arts lovers know that Sarasota is ranked one of the “Top 5 Best Art Towns in America” in John Villani’s The 100 Best Art Towns in America.

It takes a community to keep our arts venues vibrant and thriving. When donors partner with the Community Foundation of Sarasota County, they can support the Sarasota Ballet, Sarasota Opera, Sarasota Orchestra, West Coast Black Theatre Troupe … any or all of the great organizations that make Sarasota an arts mecca. We make donor dreams a reality. For Good. For Ever.

The Community Foundation of Sarasota County connects donors to the organizations they love.

Arts, Culture, Community

“I begin with an idea and then it becomes something else.” —Pablo Picasso

In Lakewood Ranch, building a strong community is based upon ideas, one of which is creating a culture closely tied to the many assets in the region.

Lakewood Ranch is an 8,500-acre, award-winning master-planned community straddling Sarasota and Manatee counties on the West Coast of Florida. Just minutes from the Gulf Coast beaches and the abundant cultural assets of Sarasota, Lakewood Ranch is already home to more than 15,000 residents. The Ranch is known for its schools, Sarasota Polo Club, its own Main Street, a 75-acre sports complex, and plenty of shopping and dining.

We take many opportunities throughout the year to exhibit these assets. Delight in the arts in Lakewood Ranch by attending any of our signature events, as we showcase local and national artists, music, film, and the performing arts. Every February marks one of the most popular events of the year — Ovation. This celebration features artists from across the Suncoast on two outdoor stages with live performances, special demonstrations, and interactive booths and displays. In March, during Art at the Ranch, artisans line the street with displays ranging from pottery to jewelry and sculpture to photography. One of the most popular events, Music on Main, presents local bands or musicians playing on Main Street during the first Friday of every month. Patrons come out to dance or just pull up a chair for this street party, which attracts thousands of visitors and benefits a different charity each month.

We also partner with many arts groups in Sarasota to bring their offerings to the Ranch, including the Asolo Repertory Theatre, La Musica, and the Van Wezel Performing Arts Hall.

At Lakewood Ranch, we began with an idea … and look what it has become.
Business and Pleasure

Sarasota is proof that you can mix work and play.

Not only does Sarasota enjoy a diverse arts scene, but it also boasts a dynamic business community. And the Economic Development Corporation (EDC) of Sarasota County knows that the two go hand in hand.

Sarasota's stunning natural beauty, ideal climate, and proximity to water give the city an advantage for attracting businesses. But the arts and culture of the community are what make Sarasota stand out. Just ask Roxanne Joffe, president and founder of CAP Brand Marketing, who moved her business to the area in 2004. "I lived in New York City for most of my adult life, and I was envying the art and culture that I was accustomed to," she says. "I didn't see the volume and the richness in other cities in the South that I saw here in Sarasota."

Along with a strong business environment, and rich arts and cultural offerings, Sarasota boasts superior educational institutions and a growing population providing a talented workforce for local companies. Rob Campbell, CEO for Voalté — a healthcare software solutions company — recognizes the importance of the arts in the workplace. "I believe any healthy community has to have great diversity," he says. "Even in technology we spend a lot of time on designing, staging, and creating compelling stories for user experiences. So access to the arts community is really critical."

Campbell also notes that the creative environment relates to an innovative business community. "In the last ten years, I've seen a good amount of blossoming entrepreneurship and high-tech startups," he says.

Such characteristics are enhanced further by warm and welcoming Sarasotans. Joffe's business has been embraced by the community — and she feels completely accepted. "Quite a few CEOs tend to retire here," she says, "and I've found a few of them who have become my mentors."

The EDC — a public-private partnership — works hard to ensure that businesses are not only accepted, but welcomed, and the same goes for employees relocating to Sarasota. "This area is juxtaposed with amazing people and professional leaders," Joffe says. "It has not been difficult to integrate into the community."

There is perhaps no better example of an individual becoming an integral part of the community than Piero Rivolta. The Italian-born novelist, poet, and businessman moved to Sarasota in 1980 where he established Rivolta Yachts, developed various real-estate projects, as well as created an international chamber music festival called La Musica. But he was first drawn to the area because of its arts and culture. "We decided to move to the United States...and our choice was simple: Florida," says Rivolta. "But coming from Milano and being involved for generations in the cultural and artistic life there, we needed a place that could give us similar opportunities. We were lucky — we found Sarasota."

Just like Joffe, Rivolta found a place to lay both his business and personal roots. "Sarasota became my home," he says. "It is the center of my life and is so deep in my heart that most of the books that I write reflect these sentiments."

Sarasota is a unique community that supports business just as much as it supports the arts. "We decided to move to the United States...and our choice was simple: Florida," says Rivolta. "But coming from Milano and being involved for generations in the cultural and artistic life there, we needed a place that could give us similar opportunities. We were lucky — we found Sarasota."

Contact the EDC of Sarasota County by calling 941.309.1200 or by visiting edcsarasotacounty.com.

Clockwise from left: Roxanne Joffe, president and founder of CAP Brand Marketing, Sarasota Business District and Harbor, and Piero Rivolta.
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