

Marco Island Woman's Club History

In 1966, the Marco Island Woman's Club was chartered by a group of 16 friends to help support the Island's people and various non-profit groups. Today the Club is proud to be both an active social network for the women of Marco Island as well as a civic-minded organization with a long, proud history of serving the community. We celebrated our 50th anniversary in October 2016 and we continue to follow in the footsteps of our foremothers to grow our legacy of volunteer service. Our accomplishments include:

THE LIBRARY: One of the Club's earliest and proudest accomplishments is the founding of the Marco Island Public Library, which began as a volunteer effort in 1967. The need for a library was great since the only library in the County was located in downtown Naples. Our members worked diligently to find a permanent home, eventually approaching Deltona, who generously donated their old "Welcome to Marco" Polynesian style shack. With the tireless combined efforts of many, the shack was remodeled, carpeted, staffed solely by Club volunteers, and opened for business in 1968 with 350 books. Additional books were donated by both individuals and the Collier County Free Library, so that by 1973 there were 3,500 volumes crammed into the tiny little building. It is estimated that 65,000 volumes were circulated during the almost 6 years the Club operated the library for the County. With the Club's continued financial and volunteer support, by 1974 the library had been relocated to a new building on Winterberry Drive (now the Collier County Tax Collectors Office) that was 12 times the size of the original library and run by a paid staff. Again, the library building became too small for the Island's growing population. Finally in 1988, the present library was constructed at twice the size under a \$1.6 million County project. Click ["HERE"](#) to visit the Library's website.

GAZEBO: As an addition to the renovated library, the Club funded a lovely gazebo which bears a plaque, "Donated in 1998 by the Marco Island Woman's Club." In cooperation with the ["Marco Island Historical Society"](#), the gazebo was refurbished and relocated to the Island's Historical Museum.

THE HOSPITAL: During the 1970's Club members became increasingly aware of the need for hospital care located on the Island. The MIWC spent many of its early years gathering donations for medical equipment for the Naples Community Hospital. In 1977, the Club purchased a defibrillator for Marco's ambulance service. In 1979, all hospital donations were dedicated to a building fund for what became the Marco Island Health Care Center. The Club's name is included on a plaque which lists donors of \$25,000 or more. Club members continue to volunteer at both the Marco Health Care Center and Naples Community Hospital.

ISLAND BEAUTIFICATION & YOUTH CENTER: In the early 1970's the Club initiated the beautification movement on the Island and advocated the need for a Youth Center. In 1975, a group of citizens secured a site for the original Youth Center and Deltona issued a perpetual deed for that use at the site. It has since grown into the present-day YMCA.

THE HISTORICAL CEMETERY: By the early 1970's the Island's cemetery had become "a jungle with a path that young dirt bike cowboys had turned into an obstacle course." In 1972 the Woman's Club began to set aside funds to clear the graveyard of debris, trash and vegetation. The Club's Community Affairs Committee started the cemetery restoration project in 1977, which included restoring the main road and vegetation removal. In cooperation with many local volunteers, including inmates from the Copeland Department of Correction, the project was completed and the cemetery was re-dedicated in 1985. Over the years, the Club has donated and replaced garden features, including the Woman at the Well fountain (retired and removed), the Cemetery's flag pole, and in 2014, a heart shaped granite marker bearing the Club's motto. Club members continue to plant and tend to the Marco Island Woman's Club Garden.

EDUCATION: The MIWC has a long, successful history of providing financial support to resident high school seniors through its college scholarship program which is funded by the Marco Island Woman's Club Foundation endowment. The Foundation was formed in 1988 thanks to a \$100,000 donation from Club member Signe Gleich. In 2011, former MIWC member Verne Cabooris also left a sizable donation to the Club for educational purposes. The generosity of these two members, as well as subscriptions and gifts from donors that are earmarked for educational purposes, plus an annual donation to the Foundation from the Club's net fundraising proceeds, allow the Club to annually award a number of college scholarships to deserving Marco Island students. Click ["HERE"](#) to be re-directed to our Scholarship page.

MARCO ISLAND ACADEMY: The Club has a long history of supporting the Island's only high school, the publicly chartered (in 2011) Marco Island Academy. Over the first ten years of the school's existence, the Club provided seed money to the school's Performing Arts program; made donations in support of General Science, Marine Science and Athletic programs; and, donated \$15,000 to the Academy's successful Capital Campaign to build a permanent campus to replace the existing modular classrooms. If all goes according to plan, students will begin using the new Phase 1 building in fall 2021.

VETERAN'S PARK: In 2014, the Club funded a "Patriotic Bench" at Veteran's Park Community Park Flag Plaza and, in 2016, we funded a commemorative inscription, "Marco Island Woman's Club honors all who served and all who sacrificed for our freedom", on a memorial granite panel at the Park's Freedom Fountain.

MARCO ISLAND CENTER FOR THE ARTS: The Club believes that it is vital to a child's education to include the arts. Since 2014, we have been able to donate almost \$10,000 to the ["Art Center"](#) in support of their efforts to provide art education to the Island's youth.

MARCO ISLAND AMERICAN CANCER SOCIETY WIG ROOM: The Club made a generous donation to the Island's American Cancer Society office in 2015 to purchase new wigs for its Resource Room. ACS used the donation to purchase 27 wigs, 12 turbans and 40 wig caps, all of which were provided, at no cost, to Island cancer patients undergoing

chemotherapy. Since then the Club has made an annual donation in support of the wig room program. In 2020, due to Covid-19, the ACS closed its one person MI office and ended its onsite wig program. ACS will continue its wig program through an online voucher program. **KIWANIS KARING FOR KIDS DENTAL PROGRAM:** The Club donated \$2,000 in start-up funds to the Marco Island Kiwanis “Karing for Kids” pro-bono dental health care partnership between local dentists and the Tommie Barfield Elementary School.

GOLDEN ANNIVERSARY YEAR: The Woman’s Club celebrated its 50 years of giving back to the community in 2016. The Club is one of the oldest clubs on the Island - it shares its founding with the opening year of modern Marco Island. The Club was recognized with proclamations from the City, County and State; hosted both a legacy trolley tour with stops at sites and organizations the Club has supported over the years and a well-attended Past Presidents Tea; celebrated Founders Day with a service project Luncheon for First Responders; and donated over \$50,000 to fund college scholarships and assist local non-profit organizations - a Club record!

STITCH MAKERS: Since its inception in 2016, members of the Club’s knitting and crocheting group have made and donated hundreds of blankets and hats for pediatric patients at Golisano Children’s Hospital and hats for Manatee Elementary School students, their families, and other organizations.

MACKLE PARK: The Club donated \$10,000 to the City of Marco’s newly constructed Mackle Park Community Center in 2017. The City used the funds to commission local artist JJ Stinchcomb to design four unique banners depicting Marco’s endangered wildlife - the iconic Florida manatee, loggerhead sea turtle, gopher tortoise and burrowing owls. The original artwork hangs in the Community Center’s lobby. In August 2018, in celebration of the City’s 20th anniversary, the City lined Collier Blvd. with the colorful banners “to remind residents and visitors of the amazing wildlife that calls the Island home.”

DEMENTIA RESPITE SUPPORT PROGRAM: In 2017, the Club donated \$5,000 to the establishment of a Marco Island Dementia Respite Support Program, hosted in St. Mark’s Episcopal Church, and facilitated by the Naples Senior Center at the Jewish Family Center Services. Click ["HERE"](#) to learn more about the Respite program.

MARCO ISLAND COMMUNITY GRANTS: The Club donated \$10,000 to the Community Foundation of Collier County in 2017 to provide assistance specifically to Marco Island women and children residents in need.

MARCO ISLAND NATURE PRESERVE AND BIRD SANCTUARY: In 2018, the Club donated \$10,000 for a soon to be built classroom in the Preserve’s ["Nature Learning Center"](#) to educate both residents and visitors about the local environment and wildlife. The Preserve will be located on the Tigertail Court property that serves as the home for a pair of American Bald Eagles and other wildlife.