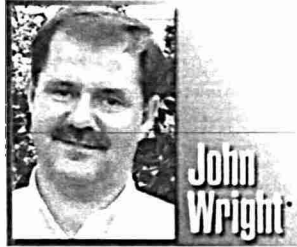


Michael Saunders arrival is a big deal



Last week, we welcomed a new business to Punta Gorda that underscored what the Chamber and the entire city has been striving towards for many years now. When **Michael Saunders & Company** selected our city to open up a new real estate office at a time when real estate is still in the doldrums, we were both thrilled and curious as to why we have been selected. So we invited the founder and namesake of the company to address our latest Chamber breakfast meeting to get our answers.

First of all, Michael could not fathom why so many people in Punta Gorda would want to get up and attend a 7:15 a.m. meeting! She spoke of the early beginnings of her own empire and how she started out with a vision, a small amount of borrowed money, a strategic plan and a list of values to which she and her firm would strictly adhere. She then pointed out that is exactly what Punta Gorda has done over the last five

years and that our vision was clearly visible for all to see. A reborn city has emerged, one that Michael Saunders recognizes as being a success story. Her feeling of community and the warmth and friendliness of our people is clear to understand. By winning her heart, we have been rewarded with the desired result — a new business that will attract even more businesses to realize their own Punta Gorda dreams.

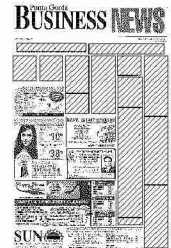
The Chamber Board of Directors is also pleased to announce that **Dorothy Strunk of Creekmore Livingstone** has accepted the position as chair elect of the Chamber Executive. Dorothy will be “crowned” chair of the board at our annual banquet, which takes place Sept. 11 at the Isles Yacht Club. Coming behind Dorothy up the executive ladder will be **Ed Wotitzky of the Wotitzky law firm**, who assumes the role of vice chair this year, replacing **Stephen Bloomberg of FGCU**, who is imminently departing to Oklahoma for a promotion. Stephen has been an incredible board player and has headed both our Government Affairs and Business Development committees during his time with us. We sincerely wish him

well in his new venture.

The Punta Gorda Chamber is already planning for our signature event, the annual **Wine & Jazz Festival**, scheduled for Feb. 19. Each year, this event has grown in stature and attendance, and we are thrilled to be close to an announcement of a major name in the jazz world as headliner. Having been overwhelmed by performances from **Spyro Gyro, Ramsey Lewis, The Rippingtons, Mindi Abair and Peter White** in previous years, we really did not know where the path to a successor would lead. This year, the name found us because the Punta Gorda Wine & Jazz Festival not only has a reputation among wine and jazz enthusiasts but has also become a must-perform location on the jazz circuit.

Once the ink is dry on the contract, you’ll all be among the first to know who it is. Tickets to the event will go on sale shortly after Thanksgiving. The VIP section sold out within two weeks last year, and we were very close to selling out of regular tickets, too. Mark your calendars and watch out for the breaking news in the coming weeks.

For the last four years, the Punta Gorda Chamber of Commerce has Char-



lotte County Appreciation Day with the Rays at Tropicana Field,

St. Petersburg. This year, the event has moved to a Saturday evening, with a concert immediately following the June 26 game. The Chamber has negotiated four specially priced packages for our group, ranging from VIP Club Seats at \$155 to lower-level outfield tickets at \$22. Tickets are now available for purchase on a first-come first-served basis in our online payment center at www.puntagordachamber.com. We will mail out all tickets purchased on the next business day.

This is a great evening out and gives us the opportunity to cheer on our local team, as well as fly the Charlotte County flag high. Since last week,

we have added the possibility of a coach from Punta Gorda to take a group of up to 55 to and from the game. For an additional \$20 per person, we can travel in comfort to and from the Rays park in St. Petersburg. To reserve the coach, simply call us on 941-639-3720. Also added since last week is a free concert at the park after the game by the **Bare Naked Ladies** at no extra cost. Book early to avoid disappointment.

Due to popular demand, we have added an extra June date to our fun trolley/boat combos. The extra tour departs at 10 a.m. June 11. Go on a guided tour of the city, followed by a leisurely cruise up-river to see the city and surroundings area from the waters of the Peace River. Reserva-

tions need to be made in advance by calling 941-639-3720. Tickets are \$20 per person and limited to 26 people per tour. Hop aboard this wonderful trip around our area (weather permitting).

The weekly **Farmers Market** continues from 8 a.m. to 1 p.m. every Saturday on Taylor Street in front of the old courthouse. Don't miss this opportunity to get your fresh produce and much more.

Punta Gorda — where it's happening on the harbor — every day, every week

Charlotte *Sun* is a proud Gold sponsor of this Chamber.

Contact John Wright at jwright@puntagordachamber.com.