

2024 | 12th Edition

HENDRY County Guide





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**12th Edition | 2024
Hendry County Guide**

A special publication of Independent Newsmedia Inc., publisher of Caloosa Belle Independent and Lake Okeechobee News, serving Hendry County since 1922.

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Exciting Things to Do

Festivals, events, celebrations & more



○ Swamp Cabbage Festival

This festival celebrates local heroes with fun activities beginning with the Old Timers Dance and continuing with the Swamp Stomp, the Adult Country Western Dance, the Ranch Rodeo, the Legends of the Road Show, and more. The festival will be held Saturday, Feb. 24 and Sunday, Feb. 25, 2024, at 8 Park Avenue in LaBelle. You can visit their website at swampcabbagefestival.org.

○ FLW Series Fishing Tournament

These national events often take place on beautiful Lake Okeechobee. Professional anglers come from across the country to compete for cash prizes. The event is held at the Roland Martin Marina & Resort in Clewiston. The season usually kicks off in January. For more information, visit flwoutdoors.com.

○ Hendry County Farm Tour

City Farm Tour Council and UF/IFAS Cooperative Extension Service will be holding its 42nd Farm Tour of the Hendry County agricultural industry March 9, 2024. Hendry County is one of the largest agricultural counties in the state and is the largest producer of oranges in Florida with over 75,000 acres of groves. Tickets are available on www.eventbrite.com.

○ Hendry County Fair and Livestock Show

Celebrating local agriculture with a livestock show and sale, cake auction, petting zoo, exhibits, pageants, a parade, frog racing and more, this week-long event is held in Clewiston on Feb. 7-11, 2024. You can visit their website at hendrycountyfair.com.

▪ See **Festivals** on page 8

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○ Brighton Field Day Festival

Brighton Field Day Festival

The festival grounds are next to the Fred Smith Rodeo Arena, 17400 Sport Complex Road NE, Okeechobee, off State Road 721 in Glades County. This event, to be held Feb. 16-18, 2024, showcases Seminole and other Native American arts, crafts, food, dances and traditions. Call 863-467-6039 or visit their website at rezrodeo.com.

Chalo Nitka Festival

Chalo Nitka will be held on March 1 & 2, 2024 (usually held the first weekend in March) in Moore Haven in nearby Glades County. Chalo Nitka is one of the state's oldest continuing festivals. The festival grounds are located in Chalo Nitka Park off U.S. Highway 27. There are midway games, rides, a pancake breakfast and vendor booths selling food, crafts and jewelry. Events also include the Big Bass Tournament, the Frontier Days Rodeo, the Kid's Day and Small Fry Fishing Contest, the Chalo Nitka Parade and the Chalo Nitka Queen Pageant. For more info, visit chalonitka.com or call 863-946-0300.

Clewiston Sugar Festival

Country music concert, arts and crafts, farming, beauty pageants, dessert contest, farming exhibits, fishing tournament, car show and more. It will be on Saturday, March 16, 2024 at Clewiston's Sugar Festival Park, Civic Park, Osceola Avenue in Clewiston. You can visit their Facebook page at facebook.com/ClewistonSugarFestival.

Black Gold Jubilee

Celebrating the end of harvest season, this unique festival will be held April 13, 2024, shows off Belle Glade's agricultural roots and organic "black gold" soil. Food, entertainment, fireworks, a car show, a volleyball tournament, rides and more. To be held at Torry Island Campground, 5000 W Canal St. N. in Belle Glade. For more information, visit blackgoldjubilee.org.

Shop Downtown October

Saturday Market is held on the first Saturday of the month from November through March from 9 a.m. to 2 p.m., located at 8 Park Avenue. Downtown LaBelle offers vendor booths, entertainment and interactive art classes! Find out

more on the LaBelle Downtown Revitalization Corporation event page at downtownlabelle.com or on their Facebook at facebook.com/downtownlabelle

Sour Orange Festival

This event features the Sour Orange local Bake-Off, boasting delicious sour orange pies; vendors; entertainment; arts and crafts; a quilt show; recipe contests; and a photography display. The Sour Orange Festival is held January every year at 1239 Red Barn Road in Lakeport. For more info, visit facebook.com/sourorangefestival.

American Indian Arts Celebration

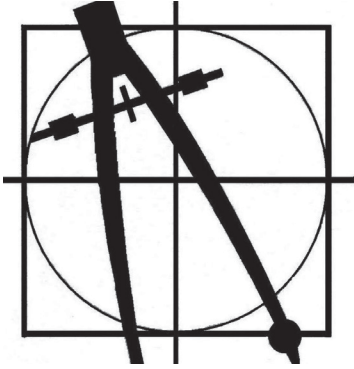
Dance! Music! Arts! Culture! The Ah-Tah-Thi-Ki Museum will host the annual American Indian Arts Celebration in November of 2024 on the museum grounds at the Big Cypress Seminole Indian Reservation, 34725 West Boundary Road, Clewiston. Enjoy traditional and contemporary arts and crafts, dance and music of the Seminole, Southeastern and other Indian tribes from across the country. Along with the Native American vendors, special presentations and wildlife shows, admission to the festival includes free parking and entrance to our award-winning, American Alliance of Museums accredited museum. Visit ahtahthiki.com or call 863-902-1113 for more information.

Clewiston Fall Festival

Organized annually by the City of Clewiston, the Clewiston Fall Festival features games, food, kid costume and pet costume contests, local vendors, a car show and more on the Saturday before Halloween. For more information, call 863-983-1492 or visit their Facebook at facebook.com/CityofClewiston-RecreationDepartment/

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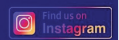
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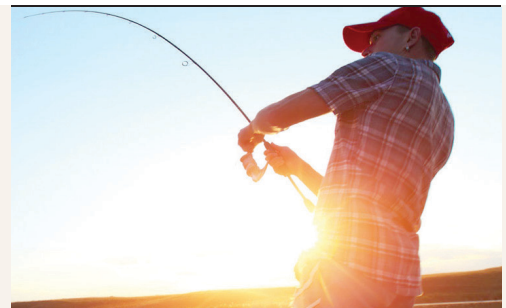
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ATTRACTIONS IN AND AROUND HENDRY COUNTY

Oh, the
fun to
be had!

Hendry County boasts a multitude of sights, sounds and scenes for tourists to explore. From hiking and biking to airboat tours, from skydiving to bird watching, there are so many things waiting to be explored at one's own pace. Here are a sampling:



Big 'O' Guide Service

A scenic Eco-Tour on Lake Okeechobee. See alligators, manatees, pelicans, exotic birds and more.

Roland Martin's Marina and Resort, 920 W. Del Monte Ave., in Clewiston. For more information, call 863-983-3151 or visit rolandmartinmarina.com.

- See **Attractions** on page 12

HENDRY COUNTY SHERIFF'S OFFICE



IN GOD WE TRUST



SHERIFF
STEVE WHIDDEN

101 S. Bridge St. LaBelle, Florida



LaBelle Admin Office
483 E. Cowboy Way,
LaBelle, FL 33935
(863)674-5600

Clewiston Sub-Office
100 E. El Paso Ave,
Clewiston, FL 33440
(863)805-5000



In an emergency, dial 9-1-1



Walking/Biking Tour

Four self-guided trails all start from the Clewiston Inn and wander through residential areas of Clewiston at 108 Royal Palm Ave., Clewiston.

For more information, please call the Clewiston Chamber of Commerce at 863-983-7979.

Dinner Island Ranch

Outstanding wildlife viewing awaits at this vast acreage site. It offers fishing, hiking, cycling, camping, hunting, horseback riding and scenic driving.

They are located 29 miles southwest of Clewiston off of County Road 833.

STA 5 Bird-Watching

In partnership with Hendry-Glades Audubon, the South Florida Water Management District offers escorted birding tours at the South Florida Birding Trail. STA 5 is ranked one of the best bird watching areas in the country.

No reservations required for walking or bicycling visits to these areas. For directions and information, please call 863-517-0202.

Audobon Society

Birding organization for Hendry, Glades and Okeechobee counties. Hendry County Tourism sponsors the annual Big 'O' Birding Festival in March. Memberships are available. For more info, please call 863-674-0695 or 863-517-0202. Visit their website at hendrygladesaudubon.org.

Jacob's Flight Services

Experience beautiful Lake Okeechobee and surrounding areas from the sky. Offered are designed, packaged scenic tours for you to enjoy the most popular sights they have to offer. You can also customize your own tour and see the destinations you choose. They are located at 1090 Airglades Blvd., Clewiston. You can reach them at 863-612-5294 or email info@jacobsflightservices.com. Visit their website at jacobsflightservices.com.

Silver Lake Preserve

This beautiful 1,876-acre tract offers a customized hunting program with some of the best year round native wildlife opportunities in South Florida. The Silver Lake Lodge can accommodate 10 guests and offers several amenities. They are located at 2860 Silver Lake Rd. N.W. in LaBelle. You can reach them by phone at 863-273-7712. You can visit their website at silverlakepreserve.com.

Florida Ridge Airports

A hang gliding and ultra-light facility offering a variety of tandem sky rides, pilot services and instruction. They are located at 12671 E. State Road 80 in Clewiston. You can reach them at 863-805-0440. You can visit their website at thefloridaridge.com.

Skydive Spaceland

Experience the thrill of diving from 14,000 feet and taking in the view of Lake Okeechobee. This park is located at 1090 Airglades Blvd. in Clewiston. Call them at 800-533-6151 or visit their website at skydivespaceland.com.

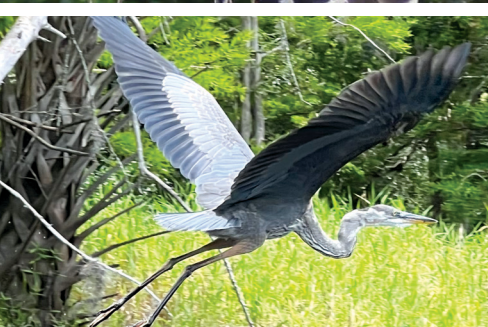
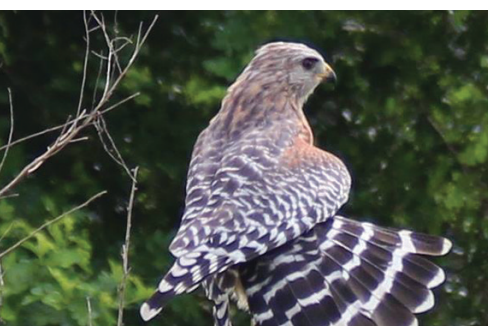
Spirit-of-the-Wild Wildlife Area

Nature enthusiasts will want to visit this site because of the year round viewing of wildlife for which the area is known. The area offers fishing, hiking, biking, horseback riding and scenic driving. It is located 12 miles south of LaBelle on County Road 832. For information, visit myfwc.com/recreation/lead/spirit-of-the-wild/.

Clewiston Museum

The Clewiston Museum is located at 109 Central Avenue, Clewiston, Florida. It houses exhibits highlighting the local area, including: Fossils, Sugar, Cattle Industry Firsts, Commercial Fishing, Flying Brits, Killer Hurricanes and Seminole Indians. You can reach them at 863-983-2870. You can visit their website at theclewistonmuseum.org. Email: clewistonmuseum@em-barqmail.com.

• See **Attractions** on page 13



Captain Hendry House

Added to the National Register of Historic Places in 1993, Hendry House was the home of Francis A. Hendry, the “Father of LaBelle.” It is located at 512 Fraser Ave in LaBelle. For more information, please call 863-675-2872. For more info on the history, please contact the LaBelle Heritage Museum at 863-674-0034. You can visit their website at labelleheritagemuseum.org/.

Uncle Joe’s Fish Camp

Located in an off-the-beaten path area of Lake Okeechobee, Uncle Joe’s offers cabins, plus groceries, tackle, live bait, docks and boat ramps with direct access to the lake. They are located at 1699 Griffin Road in Moore Haven. Reach them at 863-983-9421.

Ah-Tah-Thi-Ki Museum

Nestled in the heart of the Everglades, the Ah-Tah-Thi-Ki Museum is home to more than 30,000 unique artifacts selected to celebrate, preserve and interpret the rich history and culture of the Seminole Tribe of Florida. Ah-Tah-Thi-Ki means ‘a place to learn, a place to remember’ in the Seminole language.

To learn more, please visit ahtahthiki.com.

LaBelle City Docks

Overlooking the south side of the Okeechobee Waterway, just west of the LaBelle bridge. The City of LaBelle provides these docks, complete with electric and water, free of charge. All vessels are welcome 3 days in, 8 days out. Close proximity (walking distance) to downtown LaBelle for shopping, restaurants, and fuel. For more information please call 863-673-1191. Visit the city’s website at citylabelle.com.

Belle Hatchee Marina

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on the premises. Shopping, restaurants and motels near by. Located at 121 Riverbend Drive in LaBelle. They can be reached at 863-675-4371 or go to bellehatchee-marina.com.

LaBelle Fossil Camp

Fossil hunting and guided ecotours via sailboat, canoe, or kayak. Adventures take place along the Caloosahatchee River, where you’re 100% guaranteed to find fossils. It’s a once in a lifetime trip through Florida’s ancient past. Social distancing practiced and masks worn. Located in the heart of LaBelle. Book your adventure by email or phone: LabelleFossilCamp@gmail.com, 863-417-9333 call or text.

Port LaBelle Marina

Located on Okeechobee (Intra-coastal) Waterway East of the LaBelle Bridge. This secluded marina offers fuel, electricity at the main dock, pump-out facility at the main dock, laundry, and men/women restrooms and showers. The marina is located at 1152 Marina Drive in LaBelle. You can reach them at 863-675-2261. Visit their website at portlabellemarina.com.

Clewiston Golf Course

A beautifully maintained, championship 18-hole golf course that is open to the public. Designed in the Donald Ross Style, the course is a classic and can be enjoyed by the amateur golfer or the seasoned professional. They are located at 1201 San Luiz Ave in Clewiston. You can reach them at 863-983-1448.

Roland Martin Marina & Resort

Roland and Mary Ann Martin’s Marina and Resort pro-vides everything for the fisherman and boater. The marina features 20 of the nation’s top notch fishing guides, many lodging choices, ample float-ing dockage, a fleet of rental boats, 130 covered boat slips, fuel, bait, supplies, a tiki bar with live entertainment/karaoke and a restaurant. They are located at 920 E. Del Monte Ave. in Clewiston. You can reach them at 863-983-3151 or 1-800-473-6766. You can visit their website at rolandmartinmarina.com.

• See **Attractions** on page 14





Firehouse Theatre

The Firehouse Community Theatre has been providing a unique cultural experience in the area for over 21 years. The theatre is staffed completely by volunteers from our communities. They are located at 241 N. Bridge Street in LaBelle. You can reach them at 863-675-3066. You can visit their website at firehousecommunitytheatre.com.

Hendry County

Motorsports Park

Get ready for thrilling excitement on the Everglades clay at the Hendry County Motorsports Park, the southernmost raceway in the USA. They are located at 9985 West Hwy. 27 (9.5 miles north of Clewiston on U.S. 27).

You can reach them at 863-983-3478. Or visit their website at hendryracing.com.

The Barron Park House Gallery and Gift Shop

Barron Park House Gallery is housed in the historic Christie House which was built in 1914. Local artists exhibit their oil, watercolor, acrylic, and mixed media paintings, sculptures, and photography. Exhibits are rotated monthly. Worth a visit for any art fan. It's hidden in the northeast corner of Barron Park, at 471 N. Lee St. You can reach them at 239-843-2929. You can visit their website at artsinland.com.

Dolly Hand Cultural Arts Center

Located at the Palm Beach State College Campus, the Dolly Hand Cultural Arts Center and Theatre



holds a roster of performances designed to offer an “escape from the everyday.” They are located at 1977 College Drive in Belle Glade. You can call them at 561-993-1160 or visit their website at dollyhand.org.

Okeechobee Scenic Trail

Designated as a segment of the Florida National Scenic Trail, this route circles the second largest freshwater lake in the contiguous United States. The trail runs on top of the Herbert Hoover Dike and provides views ranging from scenic lakeside to working agricultural landscapes. There are numerous locations for access by hikers and bikers, as well as equestrians. Not all areas are paved and some portions close at irregular intervals, so please call 863-983-8101 for the latest information.

Big Water Heritage Trail

The trail's name, the Big Water Heritage Trail, stems from the Seminole word for Okeechobee, which means, “Big Water.” This successful project, implemented in 2003, is a heritage trail that identifies, links and marks sites of historical, cultural, natural, recreational and educational importance to the area. The Big Water Heritage Trail encompasses five counties surrounding Lake Okeechobee in Florida. For more information, visit the website at palmbeachtpa.org/static/sitefiles/documents/BigWaterBrochure.pdf.

Okaloachoochee Forest

The Okaloachoochee Slough State Forest contains nearly 35,000 acres, mostly in Hendry County, which extends northward near



the Caloosahatchee River and southward about 50 miles into Big Cypress Swamp. There are 38 miles of trails open for wildlife viewing, hiking, non-motorized biking, and horseback riding. Also available are four camp-grounds. To learn more, call 863-612-0776.

Fisheating Creek Outpost

The licensed concessionaire of the Fisheating Creek Wildlife Management Area provides recreational and educational opportunities to the public under contract of the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission. Now offering camping, canoeing, paddling, hiking, and eco-adventures. RV/tent sites are available. You can reach them at 863-675-5999. You can also visit their website at fisheatingcreekoutpost.com.

Gatorama

Gatorama is a family-friendly Eco Adventure Park and licensed gator farm in the heart of the Everglades. The focus is on family, fun and education. Food and drink is available from a food truck inside the park. The owners and staff invite you to play wild, get dirty and get up close and personal with Florida's apex predators. Both alligators and crocodiles live here in the Sunshine State, the only place on Earth where they exist side by side in the wild. See the Big Gator Feed Show, try your luck at our Fast Hands or No Hands Challenge or participate in one of their “Gatorventures.” Located at 10665 N. U.S. 27 in Palmdale, Gatorama can be reached at 863-675-0623. Learn more by going online to gatorama.com.



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501 15th St North

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Handy #77 *▲●
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Handy #91 *▲●
820 West Main Street

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From Coast to Coast

Explore the Lake Okeechobee Waterway

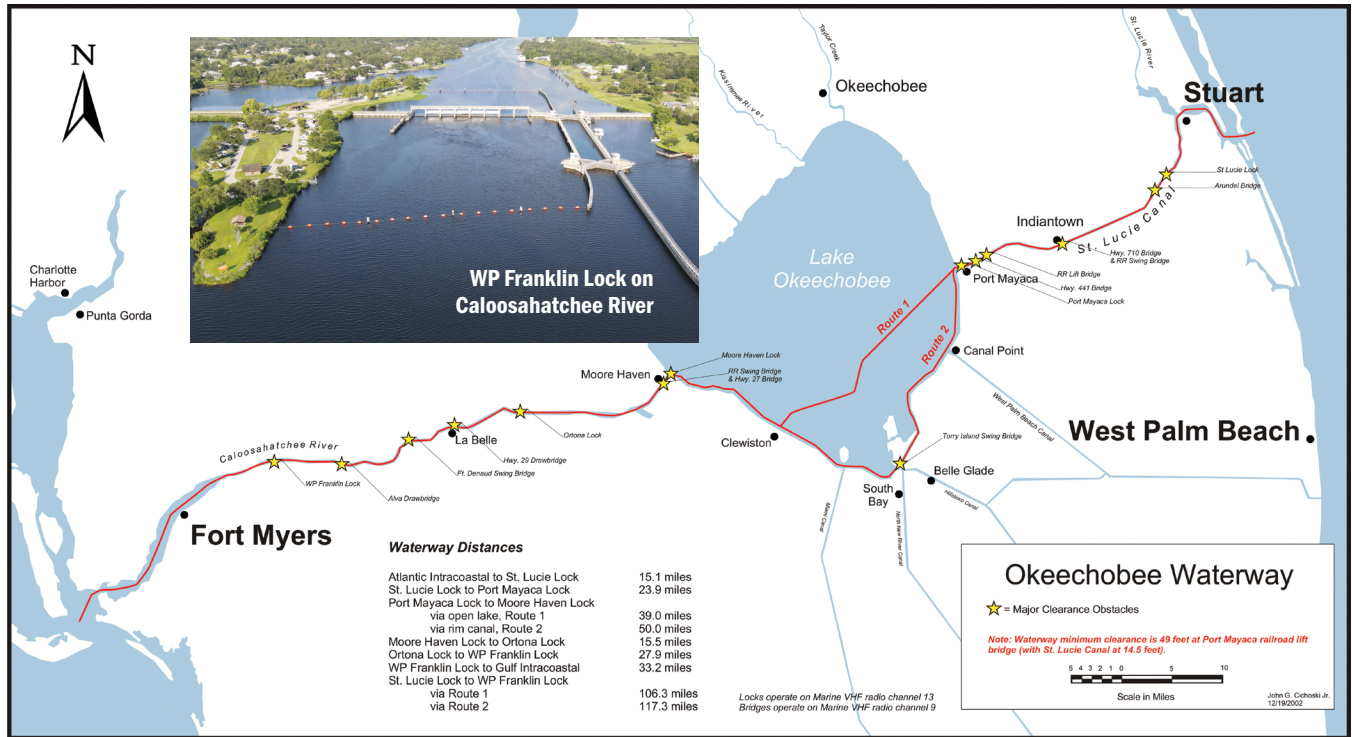
Florida boaters can travel from the east coast to the west coast via the Lake Okeechobee Waterway, which includes parts of Hendry County.

The 154-mile-long waterway extends from the Gulf of Mexico at Fort Meyers to the Atlantic Ocean at Stuart. The waterway runs through Lake Okeechobee and consists of the Caloosahatchee River to the west of the lake and the St.

Lucie Canal east of the lake. The connection between Lake Okeechobee and the St. Lucie is man-made, as is the channel connecting Lake Okeechobee to the Caloosahatchee River. Nature did not connect the

St. Lucie River to the ocean or to Lake O. In 1892 an inlet was dug from the St. Lucie River to the ocean. Between 1916 and 1924, the C-44 canal (aka the St. Lucie Canal) was dug to connect the river to Lake

- See **Waterway** on page 17



Okeechobee.

Before manmade changes, the lake was only connected to the Caloosahatchee River during the wet season, when the lake would overflow through marshes into a series of smaller lakes and into the river. Flood waters would flow through marshes from Lake Okeechobee to Lake Hicpochee, Bonnet Lake, Lettuce Lake and Lake Flirt. At Lake Flirt, water would cascade down a small waterfall into the Caloosahatchee River.

In the 1880s, Hamilton Disston dredged a canal from the Caloosahatchee River, through the smaller lakes to Lake Okeechobee.

In the days before paved roads, early pioneers used the waterways as liquid highways. Riverboats carried passengers back and forth between rural heartland and the coastal cities. Boats also hauled produce from rural farms to market and supplies back to the interior.

Today, instead of steamships

hauling freight and passengers, the Lake Okeechobee Waterway is used for recreational boating and fishing, and most boaters use the ActiveCaptain application to navigate. Go to activecaptain.garmin.com/en-US/pois/17709 to learn more about it.

There are five locks on the waterway. From east to west they are the St. Lucie Lock, the Port Mayaca Lock, the Julian Keen Jr. Lock (at Moore Haven), the Ortona Lock and the W.P. Franklin Lock. These locks, operated by the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, are operated 7 a.m. to 5 p.m. daily. The last lockage of the day begins at 4:30 p.m.

Twenty-five bridges cross various points along the Lake Okeechobee Waterway. Eleven of these bridges open for boat traffic. The lowest of the fixed bridges is the Port Mayaca Railroad Bridge with a vertical clearance of 49 feet. Sailboats that are too tall to clear the bridge are sometimes helped

under the bridge by means of the “Okeechobee limbo.” The website offshoreblue.com explains: “A crew out of the Indiantown Marina will meet your boat at the bridge and by use of plastic 50 gallon drums lined up along your rail and filled with water, lift your vessel enough to pass under the Port Mayaca RR Bridge. Once through, the drums are emptied and removed from your boat and you are on your way. The whole process generally takes less than an hour.”

The Okeechobee Waterway is usually open year-round, but during the dry season there are sometimes restrictions based on the depth of the water. Tropical storms and hurricanes can also result in some closures on the waterway.

Hendry County is home to U.S. Army Corps of Engineers South Florida Operations Office, 525 Ridgelawn Road in Clewiston, FL 33440-5399. You can reach them by telephone at 863-983-8101.



By **Alexis Crespo**
Consultant
Planning/Zoning,
City of LaBelle

City of LaBelle

plans improvements

The City of LaBelle continues to see exciting development projects and public improvements coming to fruition as we look ahead to 2024. The City is planning the final stages of the “septic to sewer” conversion project, to connect LaBelle’s historic Down-town neighborhoods to modern utilities.



This will be of benefit to homeowners and improve water quality long-term. These improvements have largely been funded by grants at no cost to taxpayers. The City has also commenced with the extension of utilities to the Lee County line via a public private partnership with Hendry County the developer of the Old Florida RV Resort.

Other private developments underway in terms of permitting and construction include final phases of single-family homes in the “Belle Arbor” community off Shady Oaks Avenue, and a 200-unit single-family subdivision south of Wal-Mart being developed by Pulte Homes.

Development and permitting applications continue to be reviewed by city staff under the direction of Superintendent of Public Works Mitchell Wills and assisted by City Planner Alexis Crespo, AICP. The City continues to implement their streamlined and coordinated permitting process that incorporates Fire Department and Building Department Review at the outset of projects to ensure a smooth process for Applicants. LaBelle’s Staff remains committed to a high level of customer service and working with property owners to achieve workable solutions and consensus.

LaBelle’s development process and procedures are guided by the City’s Comprehensive Plan, which can be accessed on the city’s website, www.citylabelle.com, and the Land Development Code (LDC) located on Municode. Every property in the city is designated within a specific future land use category, that guide whether a property can be used for residential, commercial, industrial, public or a mix of land uses. Similarly, the zoning map classifies each property by zoning district and corresponds to district regulations in the Land Development Code that specify how development can occur on the property, including setbacks, minimum home sizes, landscaping requirements, and other development information. The City continues to update its codes to be up to date with current standards and ensure quality development.

If you’re considering a project in LaBelle, or just need access to information, the city’s website is a key resource. City staff also offers pre-application meetings at no cost to the applicant to discuss development proposals and provide information regarding the applicable regulations and the permitting process. For more information, please visit the city’s website at www.citylabelle.com.



By **Randy
Martin**
Clewiston City Manager

Clewiston:

America's Sweetest Town

“America’s Sweetest Town” is the City of Clewiston, Florida. Positioned on the southwest boundary of Lake Okeechobee, the second largest natural freshwater lake entirely contained within the continental United States, Clewiston is the gateway to Lake “O” as it is affectionately known in the area. Clewiston is centrally located between the shores of the Atlantic Ocean to the east and the waters of the Gulf of Mexico to the west.

The “Sweetest Town” label is a tribute to the abundant sugarcane agricultural interests in the vicinity and the City’s proud claim as home to the corporate headquarters of the U. S. Sugar Corporation. As one of the world’s largest sugar producers, the area’s top employer and given the company’s long history of philanthropic support for the community at large, Clewiston is greatly indebted to U.S. Sugar for the plentiful contributions the company has made and continues to provide to the quality of life of this unique

▪ See **America’s Sweetest Town** on page 22

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CLEWISTON
America's Sweetest Town

James Pittman, Mayor • Greg Thompson, Vice Mayor
Barbara Edmonds, Commissioner • Mali Gardner, Commissioner • Hillary Hyslope, Commissioner
For more information visit us online: www.clewiston-fl.gov



south central Florida region.

Clewiston visitors and locals alike are fortunate to be able to enjoy a natural environment with seemingly limitless outdoor recreational opportunities available in reasonably close proximity to the community. With the noted convenient access to the lake's abundant fishing and wildlife attributes and close proximity to the wide variety of amenities offered in the more urban coastal areas on both shores of the state, Clewiston is uniquely positioned as a south Florida hub location for all. The City is home to an amazing museum, an attractive library facility and maintains numerous passive and active parks and recreational facilities including an historic and well-groomed 18 hole public golf course and bountiful water access points featuring a boat launch and ramp facility with recently improved lake access. The City also hosts one of the major access venues for hiking and biking enthusiasts to the Lake Okeechobee Scenic Trail (LOST) that borders the 730 square mile lake. This hundred-mile plus paved trail sits atop the elevated Herbert Hoover Dike which encompasses the lake perimeter and is a major segment of the Florida National Scenic Trail system. Also, nearby in Hendry County are facilities of widespread interest to the birding community including the STA-5 Reservoir which is a focal point for the Hendry-Glades Audubon Society.

Clewiston is a well-designed John Nolen community with palm tree lined and landscaped streets and abundant open space. The City is intersected by the major US 27 & 80 transportation corridor, dubbed "Sugarland Highway", which handles most of the east-west traffic through central Florida south of the lake.

City officials are focused on economic development initiatives to fortify and enhance existing commercial districts along the Sugarland Highway corridor particularly efforts to revitalize the older "downtown" sections. Clewiston has completed the sale to private interests of available parcels in its Park of Commerce entirely composed of development sites for small and medium light industrial type uses and the first of several planned industrial type facilities has been constructed in the park. The City is also experiencing significantly enhanced interest in residential, commercial and warehousing type growth in and around the community and particularly along the highway corridor.

This heightened interest is welcomed by Clewiston and has helped to promote the development of a strong partnership between the City and its municipal partner Hendry County to plan and expand access to necessary utility infrastructure to support larger scale industrial and commercial development along the highway corridor west of the City. This effort is in great part positively influenced by the planned Airglades International Airport project. Having received FAA concurrence for the sale of the public county-owned airport for private development, the buyers are engaged in steps to close on the acquisition near term with the initial phases consisting of a major cargo and freight handling facility on the site.

Despite the City's focus on economic development to generate a climate conducive for business investment and job creation in the Clewiston/Hendry County area, the City is equally committed to maintaining its' highly valued small town quality of life. Clewiston is blessed



with a wonderful citizenry and a deeply committed Board of Commissioners. The City also boasts an active faith-based community, a strong group of civic organizations and a diverse and eclectic commercial base of small businesses many of which are locally owned. As city manager, it is a genuine honor to lead a dedicated team of qualified and capable professional staff driven toward the goal of providing the highest caliber public services in the most cost-effective manner possible.

Whether you are a potential year round resident, second home owner, real estate investor, business or service provider, or a visitor looking for a change of pace vacation or interesting day-trip experience, I encourage you to further consider Clewiston.

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By **Keitha Daniels**
Director of Hendry County
Economic Development
Council

Hendry County is *prepared for growth*

Located in an ideal South-Central Florida location, and equipped with the foundational elements to advance as a premier business destination, Hendry County is poised for growth. With the coastal communities reaching capacity, more and more individuals are turning their attention inland. Our community offers a true quality of life, where homes are affordable, natural assets are abundant and available, and business is prosperous.

The Hendry community takes pride in their unique profile, and also has established long-term planning in place. Public and private leaders have worked together to enable the planned development of an estimated 43,000 residential units and 34 million square feet of mixed retail, industrial and office space. The local transportation network in the area is built out and enables any business key access to both domestic

and international consumers via major ports, rail and roadways.

Local government is a committed partner to current and future businesses and residents, streamlining regulations and reducing development costs. The new processes have resulted in an increase in new building permits year-over-year. The Hendry County Economic Development Council (EDC) is another well-established community asset focused on business, workforce and community enhancement. Through strategic partnerships with local, regional and state entities, the EDC is delivering on a promise to continually improve the community and prepare for the tremendous growth to come.

All eyes are on Hendry County. The resources, leadership, planning and commitment are in place. It's time to build.



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Hometown Healthcare providing personalized care in your own backyard

Hendry Regional Medical Center (HRMC) is a 25-bed critical access hospital delivering a personal touch through doctors and nurses whom you know and trust, in a warm and friendly environment.

Hendry Regional provides healthcare to the residents of Hendry, Southern Glades, and Western Palm Beach Counties. HRMC strives to meet the needs of the residents by incorporating modern technology with compassionate and competent medical staff to care for its patients. Convenient locations are available in Clewiston and LaBelle.

Hendry Regional Medical Center offers a modern emergency department, along with imaging services, surgery suites, laboratory services, and outpatient services.

HRMC also has 6 additional facilities located throughout Hendry County. In Clewiston the Dr. James D. Forbes Family Care Center hosts a dynamic team providing Family Medicine, Pediatrics, and Internal Medicine. Corporate Health Services offers preventative health programs for employers and their employees including worker's compensation management, testing, screenings,

site assessment's, and wellness education. Hendry Regional Rehabilitative Services offers a variety of rehabilitation and therapeutic services designed to evaluate and treat problems affecting mobility and function.

The Hendry Regional Convenient Care Center is located in the heart of LaBelle. The facility includes Family Medicine, Pediatrics, and specialty care including gynecology, surgery, and physical and occupational therapy services.

Hendry Regional Medical Center offers a wide array of specialty services for residents including cardiology, surgery, gynecology, and audiology.

Understanding the need of the community HRMC continues to add services and providers to its already expansive list. The most recent additions have been telehealth medicine, 3D Mammography, Infusion Services and additional Family Practice Providers.

At HRMC healthcare is a team effort. The staff is courteous, respectful, and enthusiastic in serving healthcare needs at any of the multiple locations. Hendry Regional has proudly been providing healthcare for over six decades, with roots that run deep within the community!



**524 West Sagamore Avenue
Clewiston, Florida 33440
863.902.3000**

Local surgical services in Hendry County reduce burden of travel



Common surgical procedures available at Hendry Regional Medical Center make recovery easier.

Traveling long distances can add to the stress and discomfort of surgery. The need to travel to and from a facility outside the community can also cause a burden for family members. Fortunately for Hendry County residents, common surgical procedures are available at Hendry Regional Medical Center (HRMC).

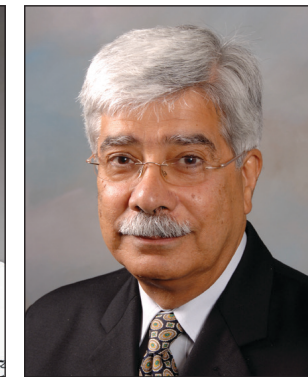
The trusted medical team at HRMC is able to perform a number of surgeries here in the community, providing convenience and comfort for patients and their families

"Having your surgery performed in the local community is a smart decision," said Dr. Barry Davis, General Surgeon. "Knowing you are near home can provide peace of mind for your family and make the recovery process easier. The highly trained surgeons at Hendry Regional Medical Center can perform common general surgical procedures like tonsillectomy, laparoscopic cholecystectomy (gallbladder removal), hernia repair, and colonoscopy. In addition, our Specialists can perform gynecological procedures to include hysterectomies or cervical biopsy.

Many common procedures can be performed with laparoscopes or endoscopes which enable the surgeon to see inside the body without having to make large incisions. Other benefits of these techniques include shorter hospital stays and faster recovery times.



**Dr. Barry Davis,
General Surgeon**



**Dr. Darayes Mobed
General Surgeon**

According to Dr. Darayes Mobed, General Surgeon, patients sometimes delay having certain surgeries for various reasons, but doing so can prolong discomfort or raise the risk of complications. "Traveling for a surgical procedure can be inconvenient," Dr. Mobed said. "The need to travel can disrupt a person's life, so he or she may opt to wait. Having surgical services available locally makes it easier for people to get the surgeries they need, when they need them."

Dr. Mobed added that it is best to follow the recommendations of physicians when elective surgery is required. When a physician recommends surgery, choosing the right facility is also important. Dr. Mobed said that convenience is one of the reasons Hendry County residents choose Hendry

Regional Medical Center.

Additionally, the convenience of local recovery services can make the transition from hospital to home smoother. The in-patient rehabilitation program at HRMC allows patients, covered under Medicare who need extended care, to stay in a hospital setting without the need to change facilities. With a compassionate nursing team on hand around the clock, recovering at the hospital following a surgical procedure can provide comfort to patients and their families.

"In many rural areas, qualified surgeons can be hard to come by," R.D. Williams, CEO said. "We are fortunate to have a team of highly trained physicians and medical providers in Hendry County." Having access to the medical care you need here in the community is a huge asset and can help you get back to your everyday life quicker.

Talk to your primary care provider about choosing the right facility for your surgical procedure. To learn more about Hendry Regional Medical Center services, please call the hospital at (863) 902-3000 or visit www.hrmc.us.



Elevating opportunities for all

By **Jennifer R. Young**
Media and Content Coordinator
Florida Southwestern State College

For more than 60 years, Florida SouthWestern State College (FSW) has been elevating the educational and career opportunities for those in the Southwest Florida area. If you've been to a doctor's office or medical facility, sat in an elementary school classroom, or supported a local business in Southwest Florida, chances are high that you've encountered FSW alumni.

Annually serving nearly 22,000 students at five locations and online, FSW offers more than 45 academic programs with two- and four-year degrees and professional certifications, several with 100 percent licensure pass and job placements rates. FSW's tuition is the lowest in Southwest Florida, and with scholarships and financial aid, 75% of FSW students graduate debt free.

FSW faculty bring world-class experience and a deep knowledge base to the classroom. Our course offerings prepare students to further their education or start their dream career with experiences that stretch far beyond the classroom. Honors courses, internships and undergraduate research opportunities are available, and FSW students

can even study abroad at the Lorenzo de' Medici Institute in Italy. Many others have traveled abroad to experience learning in countries including Ireland, France and the Galapagos Islands.

As a member of the Florida College System, FSW offers our students the benefits of articulation agreements established by the Florida Department of Education. Students graduating from FSW with an Associate in Arts (AA) degree are guaranteed by the state of Florida to "have the opportunity to earn a bachelor's degree at a state university or Florida college offering four-year degrees." Additionally, Destination FGCU, the FSW/FGCU Transfer Program, provides students with the tools and guidance they need to easily and successfully move from FSW upon completion of their Associate in Arts degree (AA) to Florida Gulf Coast University.

FSW's collegiate high schools, located on the Lee and Charlotte campuses; FSW's Collegiate Institute at Clewiston High School; and our dual enrollment program provide Southwest Florida high school

students the opportunity to accelerate their learning and earn an AA degree while they are still in high school.

FSW students have many ways to stay engaged on campus. Student clubs and activities, intramural sports, and a state-of-the-art fitness center provide opportunities for students to be socially and physically active. FSW is also known for its dedication to the arts with the Barbara B. Mann Performing Arts Hall, the Bob Rauschenberg Gallery at FSW, and the Rush Collections Gallery all located on the Lee Campus in Fort Myers.

Also, on the Lee Campus, sports fans can catch an FSW Bucs basketball or volleyball game at the Suncoast Credit Union Arena. Additionally, the arena hosts a variety of concerts, graduations, tournaments, and community events. The community can also catch an FSW Bucs baseball or softball game on our Lee Campus fields.

To learn more about FSW, visit www.FSW.edu.



Clewiston Museum is the

place to be to learn history!

On behalf of the Clewiston Museum's Board of Directors and members, I'd like to welcome you to Hendry County! You'll find that Clewiston is a warm and friendly place with a unique and interesting history that can be discovered and explored at the Clewiston Museum, which was voted Best Museum in the Lake Okeechobee News' "Best of the Lake" contest!

Since becoming the museum's director in February 2021, my time in Clewiston has been and continues to be a true learning experience for this University of Florida Statistics major with an arts management background. I truly enjoy expanding my knowledge about Clewiston's and Hendry County's rich history and I love sharing

it with those who visit the museum! There is an impressive collection of fossils and historical artifacts for you to experience when you visit...a dugong that dates back 10,000,000 years, mammoth and mastodon fossils among many others, and an exhibit about the pre-historic Native American culture that lived around Lake Okeechobee and is the earliest known culture of its kind on record in the state.

You'll see exhibits about the history of fishing in Lake Okeechobee, the construction of the Herbert Hoover Dike, the Royal Air Force flight training school at Riddle Field that was here during WWII, the Big Cypress Seminole Reservation, the cattle and sugar industries and other interesting arti-

By **Leigh Woodham**
Director
Clewiston Museum

facts about the history of Clewiston. Take time to relax in the museum's theater and view films on the history of Clewiston and how sugar is made. Be sure to check out new and updated exhibits and signage that will be installed this year, thanks to a grant from the State of Florida's Division of Historical Resources! These will showcase more of the area's fishing and sugar industry histories along with more of the museum's numerous artifacts from the WWII Royal Air Force training base at Riddle Field. It is unusual to find this quality of a collection in a small-town museum, and I feel the residents have great pride in what we have here.

In addition to the museum's fossils and

▪ See **Clewiston Museum** on page 32

Hendry County Dining Guide

Hendry County is a dining destination! Visitors to the area come from near and far for award-winning barbecue, to enjoy a meal on the banks of Lake Okeechobee or to experience our unique locally owned eateries!



CLEWISTON

Al's Gator Bait Pub & Grill
13983 E State Road 80

Beef 'O' Brady's
892 W Sugarland Hwy

Big Eaters Café
110 W Ventura Ave

Burger King
1014 W Sugarland Hwy

Café Tropical
307 E Sugarland Hwy

Cane Nutrition
300 W C Owen Ave

China Taste Buffet
930 W Sugarland Hwy

**Common Grounds
Coffee Shop**
104 Bond St. Unit A

Domino's Pizza
503 E Sugarland Hwy

Dunkin' Donuts
100 S Berner Rd

Everglades Bar & Lounge
108 Royal Palm Ave

The Galley Grill
920 E Del Monte Ave

Hawaiian Ice
444 W Sugarland Hwy

Jalapeños Taqueria #2
728 US-27

KFC
411 W Sugarland Hwy

Main Street Subs
344 E Sugarland Hwy

**Nisbet Enterprises, Inc.
McDonald's**
905 W Sugarland Hwy

Next Corner Tapas & Bar
132 W C Owen Ave

Popeye's Louisiana Kitchen
504 E Sugarland Hwy

Punto Rojo
728 E Sugarland Hwy

Scotty's Tiki Bar
920 E Del Monte Ave

Sonny's BBQ
1030 W Sugarland Hwy

Al's Gator Bait Pub & Grill

13983 E State Road 80
Clewiston, FL 33440
863-983-1050

Facebook.com/profile.
php?id=100070537072674

Hours:
Sun – Wed: 11:00 am - 10:00 pm
Thurs – Sat: 11:00am - 11:00 pm
(kitchen closes 1 hour earlier)

Al's Gator Bait Pub & Grill offers a wide range of food options including quarter and half pound burgers, sandwiches, pizza, salads, and, of course, gator bites. Their specialty burgers include the Gator Bait Burger topped with bacon, grilled onions, pepper jack cheese, and spicy sauce. Come on in for an ice cold draft or a bottled beer. They also offer wine, and for your entertainment, there are pool tables, a jukebox, and free Wi-Fi! Check their Facebook for their daily food and beer specials. Truckers and RVers are welcome!

Subway
1005 W Sugarland Hwy

Subway
940 W Sugarland Hwy

Sugar City Specialty Foods
325 E Del Monte Ave

LABELLE

7 Mares
415 S Main St.

Abbies Deli LLC
4060 NE Eucalyptus Blvd

Amigos & Beer Mexican Grill
675 W Hickpoochee Ave

Beef 'O'Brady's
21 S Lee St

Big V Restaurant
32 Hall St

Bridge Street Coffee
23 Fort Thompson Ave

Burger King
61 S. Hall St

Cactus Mex
512 Cowboy Way

China Uno
90 W Hickpochee Ave

Chinese Fortune Cookie Restaurant
505 W Hickpochee Ave #1000

Contreras Mexican Restaurant
125 FL-80

Cozy Corner
280 Bridge St

The Cuban Dely
216 S Main St Unit 4

Domino's Pizza Store 5085
870 W Hickpochee Ave

Dunkin' Donuts
31 S Lee St

El Gran Taco Loco
863 W Cowboy Way

Sunrise Restaurant
842 E Sugarland Hwy

Thomas Diner
1019 Harlem Academy Ave

Eli's Mini Cravings
420 E Cowboy Way

Forrey Grill
280 Bridge St

Hungry Howie's Pizza
180 S Main St

Infinity Steakhouse
93 Hall St.

The Launch
303 Old County Rd 78

LaBelle Brewing Company
670 W Hickpochee Ave

Laredo Taco Company
17 N Lee St

Leny's Latin American Café
36 E Hickpochee Ave

Log Cabin BBQ
480 W Hickpochee Ave

Little Caesar's Pizza
75 Bridge St

Nisbet Enterprises, Inc.
McDonald's
21 E Hickpochee Ave

Papa John's Pizza
41 S Lee St

Pelican's SnoBalls of LaBelle
55 Yeomans Ave

Trompo Tacos
3710 W US Hwy 27

Wendy's
800 W Sugarland Hwy

Pizza Hut/Wing Street
505 W Hickpochee Ave

Popeye's Louisiana Kitchen
576 W Hickpochee Ave

Red Rooster
100 S Main St

Sal-Cal Pizza
732 S. Main St

Short Cakes
311 E Cowboy Way

Smalltown Nutrition
111 S Lee St

Subway
139 E. Hickpochee Ave

Taco Bell
50 N Lee St

Taco-rriendo
420 E Cowboy Way

Two Peas Café
870 W Hickpochee Ave #500

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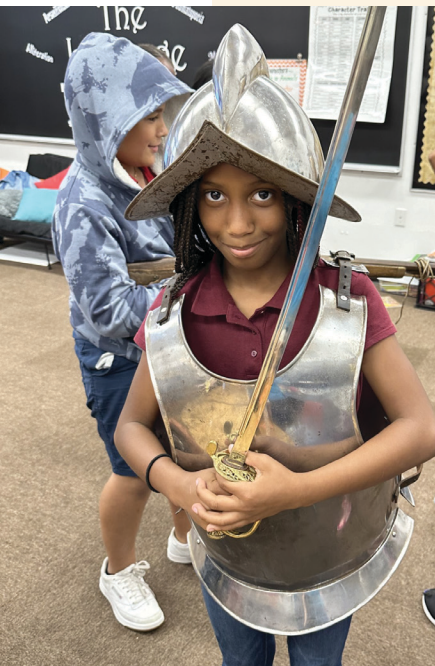
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historical exhibits and archives, we offer the community the opportunity to learn more through the Florida Humanities Council's Florida Talks Speaker Series and through other presentations by residents from the surrounding areas. We also have an outstanding student outreach program that is funded with a grant from the Batchelor Foundation. As the museum director, I go into Clewiston's schools to teach Florida history to 4th graders! Through eight sessions, the students learn about prehistoric Florida, Native American history in Florida, the European exploration and colonization of Florida, the storms of 1926 and 1928, the history of the cattle, catfishing and sugar industries in Florida and the history of Clewiston and Hendry County. In addition to our school outreach program, the museum also goes to our local festivals to share information with the community's residents and visitors. The fossil boards are a favorite as both children and adults explore the different artifacts from the prehistoric land and sea creatures that lived in Hendry County.

The museum is also here to help residents from the local area and beyond who are doing research or looking for historical photos or information. There is a wonderful archive of photos from the area

dating back to the 1910s, which has been utilized by local law enforcement, businesses, college students, professors, authors, and families who are looking for photos from past generations. The museum also houses the archives of the weekly editions of the Clewiston News from 1928 – 2009, which have also been utilized extensively for research and information.

But the museum is not just about history...the museum also values and exhibits local art. In the museum's theater, you'll find the Sue Corbin and Louise Sullivan Glades Art Gallery, which is specific to Glades area artists and showcases their talent. We also have the annual Fancy Pansy Arty Party each October, which recently allowed 18 local artists and photographers and the art students from Clewiston High School the opportunity to share and sell their work.

Last year, the museum teamed up with the Florida Trail Association and the National Scenic Trail to become a Gateway Community Partner. As the southernmost city and trailhead on the Florida Trail section of the National Scenic Trail, Clewiston is a popular destination for hikers and cyclists. The museum is now the place to visit to receive your official Florida Trail/National Scenic Trail passport stamp for Clewiston!

When you visit the museum, be sure to check

out the Picker's Corner as you come through the door. There are many interesting vintage items and antiques that just might pique your interest and they're available for purchase! You'll also want to visit the Museum Gift Shop, which is stocked full of local goodies and historical books.

While many of the programs mentioned here are free to the public, none of these great things happen without the community's support. The Clewiston Museum is a private not-for-profit organization. We rely on donations, grants, the support of the local business community and our valued members in order to operate. Anyone can become a member for as little as \$25! To learn more, visit our website at www.theclewiston-museum.org and be sure to follow and like us on your favorite social media platforms, travel websites and Google My Business. The Clewiston Museum is located at 109 Central Avenue in Clewiston. The hours of operation of Monday-Friday from 9 am – 4 pm and on Saturday by appointment. Admission is \$10 for adults, \$8 for seniors and \$5 for students and children. Contact us at 863-983-2870 or via email at clewistonmuseum@embarqmail.com.



Hendry County Census Data

Population Estimates, July 1, 2022: 41,339

Age Range

Persons under 5 years, percent: 6.5%
Persons under 18 years, percent: 25.1%
Persons 65 years and over, percent: 13.5%
Female persons, percent: 45.1%

Race

White: 83.1%
Black or African American alone, percent: 11.7%
American Indian and Alaska Native: 1.9%
Asian alone, percent: 1.1%
Native Hawaiian and Other Pacific Islander alone, percent: 0.2%
Two or More Races, percent: 2.0%

Population Characteristics

Veterans, 2018-2022: 1,210
Foreign born persons, percent, 2018-2022: 27.7%

Housing

Housing units, July 1, 2022: 16,130

Owner-occupied housing unit rate, 2018-2022: 69.7%

Median value of owner-occupied housing units, 2018-2022: \$153,200

Median gross rent, 2018-2022: \$892

Building permits, 2022: 704

Families & Living Arrangements

Households, 2018-2022: 13,289

Persons per household, 2018-2022: 2.83

Living in same house 1 year ago, percent of persons age 1 year+, 2018-2022: 85.8%

Language other than English spoken at home, percent of persons age 5 years+, 2018-2022: 49.8%

Computer and Internet Use

Households with a computer, percent,

2018-2022: 89.1%

Households with a broadband Internet subscription, percent, 2018-2022: 80.6%

Education

High school graduate or higher, percent of persons age 25 years+, 2018-2022: 69.5%

Bachelor's degree or higher, percent of persons age 25 years+, 2018-2022: 10.5%

Health

With a disability, under age 65 years, percent, 2018-2022: 8.6%

Persons without health insurance, under age 65 years, percent: 25.0%

Economy

In civilian labor force, total, percent of population age 16 years+, 2018-2022: 62.3%

In civilian labor force, female, percent of population age 16 years+, 2018-2022: 54.7%

Total retail sales per

capita, 2017: \$8,377

Transportation

Mean travel time to work (minutes), workers age 16 years+, 2018-2022: 30.2

Income & Poverty

Median household income (in 2022 dollars), 2018-2022: \$49,259

Per capita income in past 12 months (in 2022 dollars), 2018-2022: \$24,825

Persons in poverty, percent: 21.1%

Businesses

Total employer establishments, 2021: 682

Total employment, 2021: 6,891

Geography

Population per square mile, 2020: 34.3

Population per square mile, 2010: 34.0

Land area in square miles, 2020: 1,155.95

SOURCE: U.S. Census Bureau

Hendry County produces *oranges, sugar cane and more*



Agriculture has always been important to the Hendry County economy,

According to the 2017 Census of Agriculture the county is home to 436, covering 433,113 acres.

Hendry County is one of the largest agricultural counties in the state. Hendry County is the largest producer of oranges in Florida with over 75,000 acres of groves. Hendry County is the second largest producer of sugarcane, third largest in vegetable production, and fifth largest in beef cattle in the state.

The United States Department of Agriculture conducts the Census of Agriculture every 5 years. The results from the 2022 census will be available later in 2024. Data had not yet been released at the time this publication went to press.

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The history of Florida's 63rd county

ARTICLE COURTESY OF LABELLE
HERITAGE MUSEUM

Hendry County, the 63rd of Florida's 67 counties, was established by the Florida legislature in May 1923 by taking approximately half of the area left to Lee County after the creation of Collier County, was named in honor of renowned Florida cattle man Francis Asbury Hendry. Hendry first came to the area as a scout for the U.S. Army during the Third Seminole War in the 1850s. He returned after the War Between the States to set up headquarters for a cattle ranch at old abandoned Fort Thompson that earned him the title of Cattle King of South Florida.

The Upper Caloosahatchee Valley became known to

Americans of European heritage during the Second Seminole War (1835-1842) when supply depots were established along the pristine Caloosahatchee River and in the Everglades and Big Cypress - almost impenetrable regions to the south. They were periodically abandoned during the rainy season and also when U.S. troops were not systematically searching for Seminoles - the generic term for both Miccosukee and Cow Creek bands of Native Americans. U.S. troops sought to round up and forcibly move these Native Americans to the Trans-Mississippi West, making inland Florida safe for settlement by Americans steadily moving south from Georgia and the

Carolinas into a promised Eden. Native Americans resisted encroachments on their lands while American settlers and troops refused to admit the validity of Seminole claims to this virgin territory. Slowly but surely, American settlers moved into the Caloosahatchee Valley, lured by the promise of an area that would not only support tropical fruits and vegetables, but also their means of transportation - small supply boats plying the picturesque Caloosahatchee River taking them to market.

The Caloosahatchee River was both boon and bane to the hardy pioneers settling the Caloosahatchee Valley during the latter years of the 19th century. It was the source of irrigation for their crops as well as being their avenue to the Gulf of Mexico and northern markets. Yet, at the same time, the river's inability to quickly and successfully drain the area during Florida's unpredictable rainy season and after seasonal hurricanes caused settlers to abandon their homes, farms, and tropical groves along its banks. Requests to the Army Corps of Engineers to clear the Caloosahatchee of obstructions following the disastrous floods of 1878 only resulted in the U.S. Congress appropriating funds to clear the channel as far upriver as the small community of Fort Myers.

Shortly thereafter, hardy pioneers began carving a new settlement on the banks of the Caloosahatchee at the western edge of Captain F.A. Hendry's vast cattle ranch. This settlement, first known as Belle or Belle City, became LaBelle when Hendry platted the small settlement and named it in

▪ See **History** on page 37

honor of two of his six daughters, Laura Jane Hendry Thompson and Carrie Belle Hendry Evans.

It was left up to Philadelphia entrepreneur Hamilton Disston and his plans to reclaim the Everglades and construct a canal from the Gulf of Mexico to the Atlantic Ocean. Such a waterway had been dreamed of since the days of Spanish Florida — a canal that would fully connect the Caloosahatchee from its headwaters at Lake Hickpochee to Lake Okeechobee via the Three Mile Canal. Small paddle wheel steamers plied the Upper Caloosahatchee from the early 1880s until Caloosahatchee Irrigation and Navigation Locks 2 and 3 were dynamited to help release flood waters from the disastrous 1928 Okeechobee Hurricane. Dynamiting these locks did not achieve the desired result but did result in destroying the Caloosahatchee itself as the primary avenue for transportation and commerce between Fort Myers and the Upper Caloosahatchee Valley.

Vegetable farms, citrus groves, and tropical fruit plantations dominated the area closest to the Caloosahatchee during this period of early settlement in the Caloosahatchee Valley. Cattle ranching was paramount in the lush grasslands that bordered the Caloosahatchee.

However, the area south of the Caloosahatchee was home to large numbers of furbearers such as otter, fox, bobcat, and Florida Panther whose pelts were in demand for both gentlemen and ladies' hats, winter coats, and lap robes. Tropical birds were hunted for their plumes and sometimes entire carcasses that adorned not only ladies' finest millinery but also elaborate hairdos during the Gilded Age. Such high demand encouraged hunting and trapping for pelts and plumes that lasted well into the 20th century until changing fashions, wildlife conversation, and strict laws about poaching called an end to wide-spread trapping and fur trading on the streets of LaBelle.

The majority of the early American settlers in the Caloosahatchee Valley came south from North Florida, Georgia, and the Carolinas in search of open frontiers just as many of their neighbors moved west into virgin lands in Alabama, Mississippi, Arkansas, Northern Louisiana, Texas, and the Great Plains. However, Midwestern land developers such as E.E. Goodno and - in some instances - land speculators like Rev. George F. Hall from the Midwest concentrated on luring yeoman farmers and artisans from Illinois, Missouri, Kansas, and Oklahoma.

Clewiston had its Japanese settlers in the years prior to World War II, and LaBelle boasted Polish, Czech, and Italian families becoming steadfast members of the community during the early years of the 20th century as well as a short-lived return to the land by Eastern European Jewish immigrants from the Shtetls of the Russian Empire in the early 1930's.

The Seminole Indians had been forced into the Big Cypress during both the Second and Third Seminole Wars from the mid- 1830s to the late 1850s. A reservation was set up in the southeastern corner of Hendry County, and the Native Americans were conveniently forgotten (for the most part) except for visits into Clewiston and LaBelle to trade their furs and buy groceries.

The Seminoles were cattle ranchers in North Florida before the United States obtained Florida from Spain by treaty and purchase in 1819 and continued to herd some cattle even after they were forced into the Big Cypress. The plight of these Native Americans followed that of their cousins in other areas until entrepreneurs in the tribe decided to adopt the ways of their neighbors and became successful international businessmen with enterprises spanning the globe.

The possibility of rais-

ing sugar cane in the Upper Caloosahatchee Valley had been recognized as early as the 1870s.

The possibility became a reality with the push for Everglades Drainage and Reclamation during the early years of the 20th century. It led to the establishment of Clewiston on the shores of Lake Okeechobee in the early 1920s, a community that would thrive off of the new sugar mill, United States Sugar Corporation. It had holdings in the rich muck lands of Lakes Okeechobee and Hickpochee, as well as the Upper Caloosahatchee Valley. The Caloosahatchee, Lake Okeechobee, and the prime hunting lands in the area coupled with generally mild winter and spring weather, beckoned wealthy sportsmen from the North. Winter vacation homes began to spring up along the banks of the Caloosahatchee and on the Ridge in Clewiston. Many of these tourists became very active in their winter vacation communities, and some even became permanent residents.

The economy of Hendry County has been a mixture of agriculture, hunting and fur trading, and tourism since its early days. Who knows what the future has in store for our diverse population with its varied interests?



The Greater LaBelle Chamber of Commerce

By **Diane E. Fidanza**
Executive Director,
LaBelle Chamber of
Commerce

*Our membership is
LaBelle*

LaBelle ... Huge, live oak trees line the streets of this quiet, graceful little town which is nestled alongside the Caloosahatchee River in Hendry County. This is quintessential small-town Florida, where the pace is slower, the pleasures are simpler, and the surrounding nature entices you to explore its natural beauty.

For many years the Greater LaBelle Chamber of Commerce has proudly represented the businesses of LaBelle. The chamber was founded back in 1963, 60 years ago. Back then the goal of the original Chamber was to support and promote the business community of LaBelle. The businesses of LaBelle have changed a great deal over the past 60 years, but the LaBelle Chamber of today proudly main-

tains the founder's original goals – supporting and promoting LaBelle's business community.

Technology has certainly changed over the years, and the Chamber helps its membership by listing each of their 250+ members on the Chamber's website. On the website not only is the member's information listed, but if they have a website of their own their listing is linked to it. To assist their members even further, the Chamber "gets the word out" on their membership's upcoming events, or business specials, on their very active Facebook page. Both venues are excellent resources for locating information on LaBelle businesses.

The Chamber membership covers all types of businesses. The LaBelle Heritage Museum keeps

alive our history, while the Firehouse Community Theatre has entertained us for 30+ seasons. Local, family-owned shops like Davidson's Dry Cleaners, K & M Drugs, White's Furniture & Appliances, all line our streets. Two Peas Café, Sassy Basskets, The Forrey Grill, The Big V Restaurant, Bridge Street Coffee & Tea Café, and Sal Cal's Pizza are all known for their local cuisine.

LaBelle, "The Beautiful", offers spectacular nature trails. The Okaloacoochee Slough State Forest is a 32,270 acre facility approx 20 minutes south of LaBelle which features Hiking, Horse Trails, Picnic Areas, and **See LaBelle Chamber** the 15,400 on page 40



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LABELLE CHAMBER • From page 38

acres slough marsh, for which the State Forest is named, is great for bird watching. Wildlife viewing opportunities are abundant, and the State Forest is part of the Great Florida Birding Trail. The slough is one of the few places in south Florida where the historic, natural landscape can be observed.

You won't want to miss our Swamp Cabbage Festival the last full

weekend of February. Be sure to arrive early on opening day so you can enjoy the parade. At the festival, enjoy all the treats created from the swamp cabbage plant while you watch the LaBelle Rotary's Armadillo Races. Another great attraction during the weekend is the LaBelle Rodeo. Tuesday night leading up to the weekend you can enjoy the LaBelle Chamber's "Night on the Town,"

where the Chamber membership is invited to set up booths on the LaBelle Wharf to promote and introduce their business to the public. Music and local treats are part of the fun, so come one and all!

Not to be forgotten, LaBelle has always been, and continues to be, the fruit and vegetable basket for the country. This is where a great deal of the country's citrus and "row

crops," such as watermelons, tomatoes, and bell peppers, are grown. But vegetables and fruit are not the only foods produced here in LaBelle. The Hendry County Cattlemen provide a great deal of beef to area markets.

Rich bountiful land ... a lazy, winding river ... natural beauty ... friendly people. Whether "born and raised here" or "transplanted," LaBelle is the place we call "HOME."



Clewiston Chamber of Commerce

extends a warm welcome

By **Hilary Hyslope**
Executive Director,
Clewiston Chamber of
Commerce

Explore the charm of Hendry County with a warm welcome to Clewiston! The Clewiston Chamber of Commerce extends an invitation to uncover the essence of “the liquid heart of Florida” and the myriad offerings within Hendry County. Nestled along the southern shores of Lake Okeechobee, known as “America’s Sweetest Town,” Clewiston boasts a diverse array of businesses and amenities, celebrated for its agricultural prowess and renowned bass fishing.

While our town takes pride in its agricultural heritage and the gem that is Lake Okeechobee, it’s the vibrant community that truly defines us as “America’s Sweetest Town.” Clewiston’s economic landscape is poised for growth, with major

■ See **Clewiston Chamber** on page **42**



CLEWISTON CHAMBER • From page 41

Hendry County School District, Hendry Regional Medical Center, Walmart, and a range of small businesses contributing to the flourishing environment. Exciting projects, including the expansion of Airglades International Airport (AIA), are on the horizon, positioning Clewiston as an ideal location for an international perishable cargo hub.

In Clewiston, we embrace the spirit of being “out in the middle of EVERYWHERE,” offering the amenities of larger cities while retaining the cherished rural, small-town ambiance.

At the heart of our community lies Lake Okeechobee, affection-

ately known as “Lake O.” This haven has nurtured the careers of bass fishing legends like Scott Martin, a Clewiston native and the recipient of the 2015 FLW Angler of the Year award. Once you experience the allure of Lake O, you’re sure to be captivated!

Clewiston provides an array of services and amenities to meet your every need. Begin your day with a stroll along the Lake Okeechobee Scenic Trail (LOST), offering panoramic views of the lake and surrounding agricultural landscapes atop the Herbert Hoover Dike. Visit the Chamber of Commerce for guidance on activities such as airboat

tours, fishing expeditions, swamp buggy rides, or farm tours. For an educational experience, explore the Clewiston Museum or the Seminole Tribe of Florida’s Ah-Tah-Thi-Ki Museum. Indulge in pampering at one of our local day and medical spas. Dining choices in Clewiston are plentiful, catering to breakfast, lunch, and dinner preferences, with options for night owls at local hangouts.

Whether you’re relocating, starting a new business, or vacationing, Clewiston is the perfect fit for you! The Clewiston Chamber of Commerce eagerly looks forward to your visit.

LaBelle Downtown Revitalization Corporation

exudes charm and vibrancy

By **Kelly Boone**

Executive Director

LaBelle Downtown Revitalization Corporation (LDRC)



LaBelle Downtown Revitalization Corporation (LDRC), an award-winning Florida Main Street Community nestled alongside the Caloosahatchee River, exudes charm and vibrancy. The LDRC, comprising a dedicated board of directors, collaborates closely with the City of LaBelle and Hendry County Tourism to curate a delightful experience for residents and visitors. Within this historic downtown, dedicated businesses and individuals work tirelessly to uphold its economic prosperity and uniqueness. The district boasts lush, aged oak trees adorning its streets. It offers a self-guided historic walking tour, beckoning visitors to explore its myriad of distinctive shops and establishments.

The LDRC's meticulously crafted Barron Park Master Plan, endorsed by the City of LaBelle in 2023, is coming to fruition through fundraising, adept grant writing, and astute public and private investments. The LDRC is steadfast in its belief that every individual deserves a downtown of beauty

and vitality. With a thriving local economy and inviting public spaces, the district exudes a welcoming ambiance, embodying the essence of community. The LDRC is committed to commemorating the area's rich history while breathing new life into the downtown economy, which is evident through the installation of lighting, seating, and captivating sculptures throughout the district.

Furthermore, the LDRC has cultivated an environment that nurtures local entrepreneurs and small businesses, exemplified through the seasonal Shop Downtown Outdoor Saturday Market. Moreover, LDRC volunteers coordinate the cherished Annual Howl-O-Ween & Downtown Doxie Dash and the renowned Smoke Under the Oaks Rib Fest. Take the time to discover Downtown LaBelle, an authentic, flourishing gem of American downtowns, where past and future seamlessly intertwine. Join us and become part of this thriving community!

Dedicated to Excellence in Education



A message from Hendry County Schools Superintendent Michael Swindle

I am honored and excited to be leading Hendry County Schools. Hendry County is blessed with beautiful natural scenery, rich agriculture history and many diverse cultures. From Lake Okeechobee to the Caloosahatchee River, multiple state forests and beautiful farm lands, Hendry County is a great place to work, live and play!

Hendry County Schools is home to some of the best Career and Technical Educational programs available. Our students have a variety of opportunities to learn industry leading skills such as Health Care, Fire Academy, Criminal Justice Program and many others as well as opportunities to earn industry certifications that lead to rewarding careers. We also have a wide variety of athletic programs such as Football, Volleyball, Basketball as well as many other athletic opportunities that promotes physical fitness and competitions that instills ethics and the dignity of hard work.

Hendry County has seen exponential growth with over 41,000 residents – 25.1% are school aged children and we are continuing to grow. Our schools have had academic success over the last two years with all B and C schools. This would not have happened without the positive culture within our schools and the dedication and commitment from our teachers, staff, students and parents.

We are excited to be remodeling the previous CYDA facility to a new PreK Center in Clewiston to offer PreK services in one location with a higher level of inclusion. The district is also on tract to build a new high school in LaBelle and was

ranked number one in the State on the priority list for the Florida Department of Education Special Facility Use Fund with expected approval for funding the end of March 2024 and construction beginning the end of 2024.

Additionally, we have many other clubs such as Future Farmers of America (FFA), Florida Public Service Academy (FPSA), National Honors Society (NHS) and other clubs which promotes leadership and citizenship where students make a positive difference in our schools and in our community. Our focus on driving up academic achievement, coupled with multiple educational opportunities, will ensure our students are college and career ready!

As Superintendent, my goals for Hendry County Schools are simple. We will continue to strive to be a high achieving school district. We will provide safe, orderly and inviting schools where students have every opportunity and can take full advantage of their capacity to learn. We will also continue to create an educational culture where teachers continue to grow their knowledge and wisdom to better benefit our students. We are focused on increasing student achievement and opportunities available to them in every school.

Hendry County Schools is thankful to have the support of our communities, businesses, families and volunteers. Working together, we understand the importance of helping our students develop the essentials skills needed so that their full potential can be realized.

As Superintendent, I will always maintain an open-door policy. Please feel free to contact me anytime at 863-674-4642.

Hendry County

Board of County Commissioners



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Term: 2020-2024
(DEM)



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District 2
Term: 2022-2026
(REP)



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(DEM)

25 E. Hickpochee Ave., FL 33935
(863) 675-5220
www.hendryfla.net



Hendry County School Board and School Listings



Dwayne E. Brown
District 1
Post Office Box 684
Clewiston, FL 33440
district1@hendry-schools.net



Paul Samerdyke
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District 2
653 Caloosa Estates Drive
LaBelle, FL 33935
district2@hendry-schools.net



Amanda Nelson
District 3
Post Office Box 337
Felda, FL 33930
district3@hendry-schools.net



Stephanie Busin
District 4
429 Royal Palm
Clewiston, FL 33440
district4@hendry-schools.net



Jon Basquin
Chairman
District 5
139 Oak Drive
Clewiston, FL 33440
district5@hendry-schools.net

CLEWISTON

PUBLIC SCHOOLS: **Central Elementary School**

Principal: Melissa Carter
863-983-1550
Fax 863-983-1558
1000 S. Deane Duff Ave
Clewiston, FL 33440

Clewiston High School

Principal: Phillip Summers
(863) 983-1520
Fax (863) 983-2168
1501 S. Francisco Street
Clewiston, FL 33440

Clewiston Middle School

Principal: Tina Kelley
(863) 983-1530
Fax (863) 983-1541
601 W. Pasadena Avenue
Clewiston, FL 33440

Clewiston Youth Development Academy

School leader: Martin Espinoza
(863) 902-4216
475 E. Osceola Avenue
Clewiston, FL 33440

Eastside Elementary School

Principal: Denise Gibson
(863) 983-1560
Fax (863) 983-1564
201 W. Arroyo Avenue
Clewiston, FL 33440

Montura Early Learning Center

Director: Dr. Barbara Mundy

(863) 983-1417
225 N. Hacienda
Clewiston, FL 33440

Westside Elementary School

Principal: Sarah Sanchez
(863) 983-1570
Fax (863) 902-4232
205 W. Arroyo Avenue
Clewiston, FL 33440

Clewiston Adult School

Principal: Kevin Lutkenhaus
863-933-1512
475 Osceola Avenue
Clewiston, FL 33440

PRIVATE SCHOOLS:

Harvest Academy Christian School

Headmaster: Jesse Windham
863-805-0485
Fax: 863-301-3272
370 Holiday Isles Drive
Clewiston, FL 33440

The King's Academy

Principal: George Duckstein
863-983-5388
601 Caribbean Avenue
Clewiston, FL 33440

HOME SCHOOL:

Hendry County School District
Home Education Program
Office
435 E. Circle Drive, Clewiston
Diana Weiss, Home Education
Coordinator. To register, call
863-902-4222

LABELLE

PUBLIC SCHOOLS: **Country Oaks Elementary**

Principal: Robin Jones
(863) 674-4140
Fax (863) 674-4129
2052 Eucalyptus Drive NW
LaBelle, FL 33935

LaBelle Elementary School

Principal: Ansley Cockram
(863) 674-4150
Fax (863) 674-4155
150 W. Cowboy Way
LaBelle, FL 33935

Upthegrove Elementary School

Principal: Karra Rivas
(863) 983-1570
Fax (863) 902-4232
205 W. Arroyo Avenue
Clewiston, FL 33440

LaBelle High School

Principal: Tammy Bass
(863) 674-4120
Fax (863) 674-4571

4050 Cowboy Way
LaBelle, FL 33935

LaBelle Middle School

Principal: John Klinger
863-674-4646
Fax (863) 674-4645
8000 E. Cowboy Way
LaBelle, FL 33935

LaBelle Youth Development Academy

School Leader: Shaunna Prope
863-674-4590
1100 Forestry Division Road
LaBelle, FL 33935

LaBelle Adult School

Principal: Kevin Lutkenhaus
863-933-1511
4050 Cowboy Way
LaBelle, FL 33935

PRIVATE SCHOOLS:

International Christian Academy of LaBelle

863-675-4227
233 Clark Street
LaBelle, FL 33975

LaBelle City Commission



Photo courtesy The City of LaBelle's Facebook



Mayor Julie Wilkins

LaBelle, "The Belle of the Caloosahatchee," had its beginning as a settlement in the 1880s. In May of 1923, the Florida Legislature created Hendry County named for early resident and "Cattle King of South Florida" Captain Francis A. Hendry with LaBelle as its county seat. In 1925, the Florida Legislature chartered the City of LaBelle,

The regular business meetings of the LaBelle City Commission are held on the second Thursday of every month 6 p.m. at City Hall which is located at 481 W. Hickpoochee Ave. Meetings are open to the public and everyone is invited to attend. If you want to be included on our agenda, call City Hall at 863-675-2872.



Daniel Akin
Commissioner



Jackie Ratica
Commissioner



Bobbie Spratt
Commissioner



Hugo Vargas
Commissioner

Clewiston City Commission

The elected officials who serve as the Clewiston City Commission are a dedicated group of people with great pride for their community. The Mayor, Vice Mayor and City Commissioners are the governing body of the City. They set policies and rules by which the City is operated, including establishing goals and targeting issues as well as setting the tax rates.

Regular Commission meetings are held on the third Monday of each month, starting at 5 p.m. in the city hall commission chambers, 115 West Ventura Avenue. Special meetings may be held at the call of the Mayor or by a majority of the Commission.

If you have an issue you wish to discuss at a city commission meeting, submit a written request to be included on the next commission meeting's agenda. Direct your request to City Clerk Kathy Combass at Kathy.Combass@clewiston-fl.gov or telephone 863-983-1484.



(L-R); Board member Barbara Edmonds, Mayor James Pittman, Vice Mayor Greg Thompson, Board members Hillary Hyslope and Mali Gardner.



Lake Okeechobee [Photo courtesy USACE]

Hendry County Government Officials



CLERK OF COURT

Kim Barrineau

25 E. Hickpochee Ave., LaBelle, FL
33975 (Rep) Tel: (863) 675-5217 or
(863) 983-1586
Term 2020-2024
www.hendryclerk.org

SHERIFF

Steve Whidden

101 S. Bridge St.,
LaBelle, FL 33935 (Rep) Tel: (863) 674-
5600 or (836) 805-5600
Term 2020-2024
www.hendrysheriff.org

PROPERTY APPRAISER

Dena Pittman

25 E. Hickpochee Ave., LaBelle, FL
33935 (Rep) Tel: (863) 675-5270 or
(863) 983-3178
Term 2020-2024
www.hendryprop.com

TAX COLLECTOR

Patrick B. Langford

25 E. Hickpochee Ave., LaBelle, FL
33935 (Rep) Tel: (863) 675-5284 or
(863) 675-1593
Term 2020-2024
www.hendrycountyt.com

SUPERVISOR OF ELECTIONS

Brenda K. Hoots

25 E. Hickpochee Ave., LaBelle, FL
33935 (Dem) Tel: (863) 675-5230 or
(863) 983-13393
Term 2020-2024
www.hendryelections.org

SUPERINTENDENT OF SCHOOLS

Michael Swindle

300 W. Cowboy Way, LaBelle, FL 33935
(Rep) Tel: (863) 674-4642
Term 2020-2024
www.hendry-schools.org

CIRCUIT JUDGE 20TH JUDICIAL CIRCUIT

James D. Sloan

25 E. Hickpochee Ave., LaBelle, FL
33935
Tel: (863) 675-5217
Term 2022-2028
www.ca.cjis20.org

COUNTY JUDGE

Darrell Hill

25 E. Hickpochee Ave., LaBelle, FL
33935
Tel: (863) 675-5227
Term 2020-2026
www.ca.cjis20.org

Important Numbers



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Animal Control

Clewiston: 863-983-1474
LaBelle: 863-675-3381

Code Enforcement

Clewiston: 863-983-1500
LaBelle: 863-675-6355

Emergency Services

Clewiston: 863-983-1450
LaBelle: 863-674-4074

Fire Department

Clewiston: 863-983-1499
LaBelle: 863-675-1537

Law Enforcement

Clewiston Police Department: 863-983-1474
Hendry County Sheriff's Office
LaBelle: 863-674-5600
Clewiston Substation: 863-983-1440

Hendry County Emergency Operations Center
863-674-5400

Glades Electric Cooperative
863-946-6200

Clewiston Utilities
863-983-1454

Florida Power & Light
1-800-468-8243

Caloosa Belle Independent & Lake Okeechobee News
863-763-3134

Poison Control
1-800- 222-1222

Hendry County Health Department
Clewiston: 863-902-4224
LaBelle: 863-674-4041

Hendry Regional Medical Center
863-902-3000

Hendry County School Board Office
Clewiston: 863-983-1530
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40 ACRES RANCH LAND	\$1,400,000	3.5 ACRES FENCED & FILLED	\$395,000
30 ACRES RANCH LAND	\$1,400,000	1 ACRE RIVERFRONT LOT	\$349,000
5 ACRES RIVERFRONT	\$1,200,000	4 ACRES AG RANCH LAND	\$259,000
4 ACRES RIVERFRONT	\$990,000	4 ACRES AG RANCH LAND	\$249,000
3.5 ACRES RIVERFRONT	\$890,000	10 ACRES AG - 2 NEAL ROAD	\$189,000

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FORT MYERS S-41 12 ACRES & BUSINESS & LAND.....	SOLD \$5,400,000	RIVERFRONT 4 ACRES ON TAYLOR RD.....	\$895,000
PUNTA GORDA 220+ ACRES SR 31.....	SOLD \$3,500,000	ALVA 4 ACRES RIVERFRONT.....	\$890,000
PUNTA GORDA 30 ACRES AT 1-75 & HWY 17.....	\$3,500,000	FORT MYERS 4+ ACRES 9481 BAYSHORE.....	SOLD \$890,000
FORT MYERS 7.5 ACRES RV-BOAT SALES-STORAGE SITE.....	\$3,200,000	ALVA 34 ACRES BEDMAN CREEK.....	SOLD \$845,000
FORT MYERS 4 ACRES AT COLONIAL BLVD.....	SOLD \$2,900,000	FORT MYERS 2.3 ACRES METRO PARKWAY.....	SOLD \$800,000
ALVA/LABELLE AREA 12 ACRES RIVERFRONT + HOUSE + BARN + 2 DOCKS + LAGOON + 1000' WATERFRONT.....	\$2,600,000	CYPRESS CREEK RIVERFRONT LOT, DOCK & BOAT LIFT.....	\$695,000
LABELLE 70 ACRES, SR 80.....	\$2,250,000	RIVERFRONT LOT DOCK & TIKI HUT.....	\$595,000
FORT MYERS 2.5 ACRES AT N. 41 BY SUPER WALMART.....	\$2,000,000	FORT MYERS 1/3 ACRES CPD 1-75 AT BAYSHORE RD.....	\$595,000
FORT MYERS 5 ACRES AT N. 41 BY SUPER WALMART.....	\$2,000,000	CYPRESS CREEK 3 ACRES DOCK & TIKI HUT.....	SOLD \$550,000
FORT MYERS 11 ACRES AT 1-75 AT BAYSHORE RD.....	\$1,950,000	FORT MYERS 1.25 ACRES C1-A 1-75 AT BAYSHORE RD.....	\$495,000
FORT LAUDERDALE 4 ACRES AT HWY 7 (441).....	SOLD \$1,950,000	ALVA 10 ACRES NORTH RIVER ROAD.....	\$495,000
ALVA 8 ACRES RIVERFRONT.....	\$1,600,000	RIVERFRONT LOT AND DOCK ON CAPTAIN NELSON.....	\$489,000
BUCKINGHAM 40 ACRES PEACE ROAD.....	SOLD \$1,200,000	ALVA RIVERFRONT HOME SITE.....	\$429,000
RIVERFRONT 4 ACRES + DOCK, LAGOON & BARN.....	\$995,000	PUNTA GORDA 23 ACRES 15810 HUGHS BLACK RD OFF BABCOCK RANCH RD.....	SOLD \$300,000
FORT MYERS 2.5 ACRES 1-75 AT BAYSHORE RD (78).....	\$990,000	SERENGETI RIVERFRONT 1 ACRE LOT.....	\$295,000
BUCKINGHAM 47 ACRES AG-2 BUCKINGHAM RD.....	SOLD \$990,000	ALVA 4 ACRES N. RIVER ROAD.....	\$239,000
RIVERFRONT 2.5 ACRES + DOCK & HOUSE.....	\$949,000	ALVA LUXURY HOME SITE 18511 TELEGRAPH CRFEK LANE.....	SOLD \$300,000

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