

## **A SHORT HISTORY OF THE AMBASSADOR CLUB, PART 2: 1993-2017**

***Written by Nancy Peterson and dedicated to my parents, Burl and Dorothea Bonavia, who made #203 their second home in 1975.***

In celebration of the Ambassador Club's 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary, Ray Tapia wrote a delightful history of the Club's inception in 1967 to its comfortable state in 1992. He based his tribute on historical publications, Club documents, interviews with members, and his own recollections. Ray's fondness for this piece of paradise is evident as one reads his essay; indeed, he was an exceptional writer and, by all accounts, an exceptional man. So, with gratitude to Ray for what he started, here are some highlights of the second twenty-five years based primarily on Club documents and interviews with members. Cheers to the Ambassador Club and 50 years of many wonderful memories!

Let's begin with 1993.

Whitney Houston's "I Will Always Love You" topped the charts and Clint Eastwood's "Unforgiven" took home the Oscar. The sentiment at the Ambassador Club was no doubt somewhere in between. Because, as anyone familiar with the condo lifestyle can tell you, there is much to love and some things you might have a difficult time forgiving when living in close proximity to your neighbors. On the positive side, socializing with other residents can be the highlight of the day. According to longtime owner Evelyn Ulsh, a communal Happy Hour was regularly observed years ago. While the ladies started dinner, the gentlemen would gather poolside, favorite beverages in hand, to discuss the daily news. That might include triumphs on the golf course or international conflicts ... it really didn't matter. What did was the camaraderie. Back in the early '90s, a fairly new face at these gatherings belonged to Mac MacVicar. In 1993, he served as Secretary of the Board of Directors and so began his many years of service to the Ambassador Club. In a letter dated April 30, 1993, President Franklin Starks wrote to the owners: "This

year I asked Mac MacVicar to take on the responsibilities for Property Maintenance and report to the Board relative to gutter replacement, painting of buildings, replacement of carpet on stairs and walkways, and repair of our Riverwalk walkways. Mac has spent considerable time and effort on getting and evaluating bids.” Over the years, Mac has spent countless hours on Club business ... he is a walking encyclopedia when it comes to Club matters. It is important to note that his wife, Dianne MacVicar, has been an exceptional asset to the Club as well.

1994 brought a new manager, Don Kreamer, who would remain in that position until 2005. This position requires a person who is self-motivated, energetic, handy, organized, reliable, and diplomatic as he strives to keep 32+ owners happy. Don took over the job from a gentleman who, according to an observant owner, was often found standing in the office doorway as he “kept an eye on things.”

That was not Don’s style, nor the work ethic of any effective manager. A document from the 1990’s entitled “Responsibilities of the Ambassador Club Manager” is two full pages long, single-spaced and states the essence of the job is “the care of the property, pool and grounds maintenance” to promote “comfortable occupancy by members” and provide “a key channel of communications between service people and the Board of Directors.” Keep in mind that the manager worked part-time (usually 20 hours per week) and was often interrupted by one of his many “bosses.” Don was a gracious guy but perhaps his patience was tested during a kerfuffle about the pool. A member protested that it was too cold for swimming. Don replied that the water was kept on the cool side because no one used the pool. The back story: Before installation of a heat pump in 2012, propane was used to heat the pool and propane was expensive. Don was merely minding the budget and maybe hoping an invigorating dip would prove enjoyable!

In 1995, for insurance reasons, smoke alarms were required in each unit; a business was hired to lock up during the summer months; pool renovations took place; and the Board discussed cooking odors,

ultimately leaving that concern up to individual members. As the Board continually dealt with safety, maintenance, budget, and people issues, it's no wonder the Annual Meetings were so eagerly anticipated (all work and no play is not an Ambassador Club policy)...business was quickly dealt with and a lively party ensued. However, it didn't start out that way. According to Dianne MacVicar, "In the old, old days when the meeting was held at the Moorings Country Club, they opened the bar before the meeting. Well, you can imagine how quickly things got out of control...everything to people taking over the floor and not sitting down after several minutes all the way to the piano playing with singing." Ladies would spend much of the day preparing ... visits to hair salons and primping take time ... and they looked quite glamorous in their cocktail dresses. As for the gentlemen, they too looked pretty good and everyone enjoyed the spirited conviviality of those evenings.

1996 became the year of Diana and the docks. In December 1995, President Mac MacVicar sent out a memo to Club members stating: "John McCallum (Treasurer) and myself spend an average of 20 to 30 hours per week on condominium business and we do not feel it is reasonable to expect other Board members to spend that amount of time. A Management Company will relieve the individual Board members of a great deal of the Administrative workload." Thus, Diana Gorges was hired effective January 1, 1996, and the Ambassador Club remained a client until Diana sold her business in 2006. Diana's duties included managing the Club's finances; helping devise the annual budget; taking, and distributing, Board meeting minutes.

Meeting minutes from 1996 indicate the docks were renovated. Decking was raised one foot to prevent the docks from going under water during high tide. When the docks went under, the decks suffered (rusty nails, errant deck boards, and electrical hazards). And, in order to accommodate boats longer than 25 feet, Docks 1 and 5 were extended. As the years have gone by, fewer and fewer members have owned boats and the docks' future is uncertain. They are picturesque and provide a good platform for fishing and pelicans, but they require maintenance and money. Who knows ... Will the docks go under after all?

A notable incident occurred in 1997. The Boyers (#211) kept their boat, the *Sea Ox*, docked at the Club. On December 27, it began to sink. President Wolf Findewirth documented this unfortunate event with photos and notes. Why did the *Sea Ox* sink? Seems like it was due to a human error; if you are familiar with boats, you can probably figure it out!

Thank goodness for the Findewirths' meticulous record keeping as their input has been invaluable in putting together this history. Wolf and Anne purchased #312 in 1994 and traveled from their home in Germany every year until 2017 to enjoy beautiful Naples and to share their energy and enthusiasm with the Ambassador Club. In 1998, President Findewirth kicked off one of the Club's biggest projects ... replacing the deteriorating asphalt driveway with pavers. A membership vote held in October resulted in 22 in favor, 5 against, and 5 abstentions --- the project received a green light and Wolf became VERY busy as bids were reviewed, a contractor chosen, and work was coordinated to cause minimal disruption to life at the Club. In May 1999, the classy, new driveway welcomed members and visitors ... and Wolf and Anne triumphantly returned to their home in Germany a little bit later, and perhaps more tired, than usual.

The new millennium found Mac MacVicar at the helm once again. 2000 brought repairs to the pool (seems the south end was sinking), the formation of a Garden Committee headed by Evelyn McCann, and plans to restore the stairs plus redo the second and third floor walkways (good-bye carpeting). By this time, Mac had extensive knowledge of most surfaces at 1910 Gulf Shore Boulevard North.

The walkway project turned out to be an expensive one and a special assessment of \$1000 per unit was approved by the Board in March 2001 to defray the cost. It's important to note that special assessments have been few and far between. Board members have been diligent in projecting costs and building reserves, but they do not have a crystal ball. Fortunately, most owners understand that and support the Board's decisions.

While reading the minutes of Board meetings conducted through the years, one notices that the number of leases approved by the Board has steadily increased. As more and more owners, many of them new, opted to rent their apartments, the Club began to lose the spirit of camaraderie that pervaded when owners were on site. Attendance at the Annual Meetings dropped off and, in 2001, it became more viable to conduct the meetings poolside and enjoy a potluck supper rather than continue the soirees at Moorings Country Club. The plan worked well until 2004 --- that's when Mother Nature interfered with the festivities. In 2005, members gathered at Beau's Paradise Grill where they were warm, dry, well fed, and, one hopes, well behaved.

FIRE! On January 2, 2002, at 1:00 a.m., fire trucks hurried to the Club and put out flames in # 206. Apparently, the owners had been painting and lit a candle to cover the paint smell. A curtain blew into the candle and before long the place was on fire. The owners were present, shaken but otherwise unharmed; however, their apartment didn't fare so well. It took months before 206 was livable again. As a result of the fire, the charred southwest corner of the Ambassador Club became a sight of note on the Naples Trolley tour!

After the fire, many members reconsidered exit strategies from their own units in the event of an emergency. If doors were inaccessible, then windows could provide an egress ... except most units had awning windows no adult could wiggle through. The optional window replacement project spearheaded by Glen Aulenbach was very successful. Twenty-two units sported new gliding windows by the end of 2002.

Other safety issues were resolved in 2003. All entrance doors received new doorknobs with locks and each lock could be opened with a master key. Surely, the manager (still Don Kremer) found his job a bit easier with this improvement. Also, water shut-off valves were finally installed for the three buildings without them. Termites were tackled in the bayside buildings. An engineer inspected the seawall and

determined that, for its age, the wall was in good condition. Wisely, he did suggest that the seawall reserves be increased. One more notable 2003 accomplishment: The buildings were painted (as they are now).

HURRICANE! On August 13, 2004, Charley visited the Naples area and the Club took a hit. Roof tiles, downspouts, a few trees, and two docks were damaged, but things were far worse north of us. According to [hurricanescience.org](http://hurricanescience.org), "In the Florida peninsula alone, \$14.6 billion in property damage occurred. Areas in the southwestern part of the state were exposed to strong Category 4 winds. Eighty percent of the buildings in Charlotte County were destroyed and an 8-foot storm surge occurred in Lee County...Punta Gorda was completely leveled."

ANOTHER HURRICANE! On October 24, 2005, Wilma blitzed across southern Florida with winds in Naples topping out at 82 mph. According to [srh.noaa.gov](http://srh.noaa.gov), "Damage was widespread, with large trees and power lines down virtually everywhere...Structural damage was heaviest in Broward and Palm Beach counties ... High-rise buildings suffered considerable damage, mainly in the form of broken windows. This was observed mainly along the southeastern metro areas, but also in Naples, which underscores the higher wind speeds with height commonly observed in hurricanes." The Ambassador Club suffered \$8000 in damage: roof tiles, four trees, and two boat docks (9 & 10).

2005 found residents picking up the pieces after two hurricanes while covering their ears due to noise emanating from certain apartments. The economy was healthy, property in Naples was selling at high prices, new owners were busy renovating and most of them were NOT installing wall-to-wall carpeting. Consequently, workers were coming and going, hammers and power tools provided plenty of background noise, and the up-to-date tile and wood floors amplified every footstep to the distress of immediate neighbors. Maybe another storm was brewing!

*A note about noise: For condo dwellers, it's a chronic concern... just ask anyone who's spent time on the Board of Directors. According to the House Rules, "Consideration of others is the best way to eliminate disturbing sounds." If there is a Golden Rule for condo living, this could be it. So, please turn down the volume, don't chat on cell phones in the pool area, ensure that floors minimize sound, clear construction projects with the Board, and keep the partying under control ... or invite all the neighbors!*

During the Annual Meeting held on February 15, 2007, now back at Moorings Country Club, President Nash McCauley described 2006 as "a very challenging year for the Board." Finding a manager to replace Don Kreamer, who retired at the end of 2005, and finding a new accountant after Diana Gorges sold her firm in 2006 proved more difficult than anyone imagined. According to the Annual Meeting minutes, "It wasn't until November that some continuity returned with the appointment of Kevin Gaffney as our new accountant and Lee Rice as our new manager. Until that time, Jeff Gorski and Jay Stearns were credited with keeping the Ambassador Club operational for several months." Stepping up to plate when the Club needs guidance and expertise is a tradition that started with the first Board back in the late 1960s, and it shows no signs of stopping. Board members have been very hands-on. Take Jeff, for instance. He moved here in 2005 and immediately saw the need for landscaping improvement, oversaw development of plans, got support for the plans, and saw the plans through ... even if he was the one pushing a wheelbarrow. Today, the Club is a veritable botanical garden! While Jeff oversaw plant growth, Jay minded the financial health of the Club. According to Nash, "Jay went far beyond the duties of a treasurer by bringing our financial house in order. He placed our funds into higher interest accounts and he found our new accountant." Jay passed away in 2008.

2007, like most years, was a mixed bag. Minutes from that year indicate discussions regarding pest treatment, trees, sewer lines, insurance, walkways, leases, dock maintenance, budget, landscaping ... in other words: the usual. Unique events included hiring Scott Ross as manager, which turned out to be an excellent decision; installing a community gas grill at the south end of the pool area; and limiting master

keys to four (one for the manager, one for the president, one extra, and one for Evelyn Ulsh, who, in 2007, was the only year-round resident at the Club). Think about it: During the summer, Evelyn could use all four washing machines at once ... she had everything to herself!

Perhaps the most important function of the Board is to make sure the budget is realistic. In 2008, Nash McCauley and Mac MacVicar teamed up for some serious number crunching. The largest on-going Club expense is insurance. Making sure we are adequately insured for a manageable premium is a challenge; Club Boards, for the most part, have been vigilant in this area. Establishing reserves for costly projects such as new roofs and new air conditioners is based on educated guesswork. How much will a new roof cost in 10 years? Lots of effort goes into determining a realistic number... getting bids and using numeric gymnastics to “faturize” the costs. Once that is done, money must be set aside for the project. Figuring out where the money comes from (special assessments, increase in quarterly maintenance fees, moving money from one budget line to another) is also an important piece of the financial plan. Now, back to Nash and Mac ... they figured the roofs would need to be replaced in 7-8 years. Per the 5/26/08 minutes: “Our current replacement cost of \$63,650 is much too low. We have gotten bids for replacement options. One using shingles at a cost of about \$100G. A second is for tile at a cost of about \$150G.” Yikes! At the time, the roof reserves totaled \$30,797. Stay tuned.

Although the national economy struggled in 2009, things were looking pretty good at the Ambassador Club. Here’s a recap taken from minutes of the Feb. 18, 2010 Annual Meeting:

*We entered 2009 with a deficit of \$5,260 and we ended 2009 with a surplus of \$10,887 due to lower than anticipated insurance premiums. The reserve account saw an increase of \$21,028. Mac (Treasurer) thanked Nash McCauley (Past President) for adding Air Conditioning to the Reserves during his last term on the Board noting that 5 units had to be replaced.*



In his closing remarks, President Mel McGonnigle expressed satisfaction with all that had been accomplished (roof cleaning, walkways and sidewalks repaired/painted, both restrooms remodeled). He thanked Board members for their contributions and also Manager Scott Ross for his dedication. "Scott has a high work ethic and is adaptable, dependable, and his expertise saved our Club thousands of dollars." Those who remember Scott can confirm he is one of those guys who can build anything, fix anything, and paint without spilling a drop. During his years at the Club, he did many remodeling and maintenance jobs for owners. When he and his family moved to the East Coast of Florida in 2012, many wondered who could possibly take his place. As it turns out, the answer was in #206.

In 2010, the Club's financial condition continued to improve. Again, in the words of President McGonnigle:

*My sole purpose in volunteering to join the Board in 2009 was to determine the manner in which money was being spent and how, if possible, to reduce expenses without neglecting the structure of our buildings or the appearance of our common areas. I believe the recorded facts and figures pertaining to the past couple of years clearly manifest the results... Although there has not been an increase in quarterly assessments during the past two years, owners should not take for granted nor anticipate this trend to continue in the future. A repeat of the last two years' strict monetary policy would certainly enhance the success to that objective, but many stairway landings will have to be improved upon, upgrades to our landscape will be made, uncontrollable costs, potential emergencies and the mood of Mother Nature will more than not mean an increase of our quarterly assessments in 2012.*

While the nation continued its recovery from the Great Recession, the Ambassador Club was in good financial shape thanks to our prudent Board.

In 2011, efforts were made to reduce liability exposure for insurance purposes. These included:

- posting detailed operating instructions for the gas grill,

- developing an incident report form related to any “slip and fall” or other incident which might develop into a claim against the Club,
- inspection of each vacant unit every 14 days,
- installing a sign in the workroom marking the location of the room’s fire extinguisher,
- improving efforts to inform lessees of the Club rules,
- requiring owners who rent out their units to have appropriate casualty and liability insurance coverage (min. \$300,000)

Besides addressing insurance issues, 2011 was a big year for landscaping, painting (the landings), and development of a master maintenance schedule for work to be done yearly, every 2-3 years, and 5+ years.

Wolf Findewirth presided over the 2012 Annual Meeting since President Nash McCauley was hospitalized after undergoing bypass surgery. Through Wolf, Nash expressed gratitude to the board members who took care of business as he recuperated. Eric Gladd, a current renter at the Club, became the Manager-Who-Replaced-Scott-Ross. It’s true the commute was easy, but there was now a fishbowl aspect to the job. To Eric’s credit, he made it work. (In early 2015, Eric did move out of #206 when the owner put it on the market.)

Owner Dorothea Bonavia remembers the eerie morning of April 6, 2012. “You’ve heard the expression ‘the sky turned black’; that morning it really did.”

Here’s the *Naples Daily News* account: **Waterspout-Turned-Tornado Causes Damage in Naples**

*A waterspout came ashore as a small tornado in Naples on Friday morning, snapping trees, tossing pool furniture around but injuring no one, Naples Fire Chief Steve McInerny said... The National Weather Service confirmed a water spout hit land just before 10:30 a.m. on the 1900 block of Gulf*

*Shore Boulevard and essentially turned into the smallest ranked tornado, EFO. It came ashore near the Edgewater Beach Hotel. The tornado made its way northeast toward the Ambassador Club before dying out when it reached Moorings Bay. It tossed furniture into the pool, broke windows, snapped tree trunks in half, ripped tiles off of roofs, and lifted sliding glass doors off their tracks. "All of a sudden Mother Nature unleashed her fury," resident Malcolm MacVicar told NBC-2.*

Because of the storm, the MacVicars had to replace the sliding doors on their lanai. What a wild Good Friday!

In 2014, the Club returned to the days of rock 'n roll. Following the Annual Meeting on February 27, everyone was invited to put on their 50's attire for a buffet supper and sock hop. It took the entire afternoon to decorate the pool area for the event. Deb Cooper (#209), party planner extraordinaire, didn't miss a thing. Hula-skirted tables, floral centerpieces, a root beer float station, poodle skirts, and cardboard Chevy Bel Aires greeted party-goers as they arrived wearing their best *Happy Days*-inspired outfits. Mel McGonnigle put together a mix of great oldies, which became available on CDs, for the young at heart. The only snag appeared in the form of an uninvited guest: Rain. So what? That night there was singin' and dancin' in the rain!

The party gave us a chance to raise the roofs... leaky roofs that were replaced during the HOT and HUMID summer months of 2014. The new tile roofs are aesthetically pleasing and, as it turns out, money-saving. Because the roofs were built to withstand **very** strong winds, association and individual insurance premiums decreased substantially resulting in some nice windfalls. We are grateful to Board members and volunteers who diligently planned this project, which resulted in no special assessment.

It seems parties and rain go hand-in-hand at the Ambassador Club. On December 4, 2015, friends and family gathered poolside for Evelyn Ulsh's 100<sup>th</sup> birthday. Shortly after the crowd sang "Happy Birthday

to You,” it poured. Everyone scurried around collecting food and drink and Evie; the party swiftly moved to #108 where a great time was had by all. Interesting note: Evie, wearing a fashionable rain jacket, was the only one prepared for the sudden change in weather. Being prepared to weather storms ... Maybe that’s the secret to longevity.

Some years are smooth sailing and then there are choppy years like 2015. In his report at the 2/3/2016 Annual Meeting, President MacVicar stated that 2015 was a very active year in re-sales as we had six units sell (two were anxiety-producing foreclosures--- the first in Club history). Mac welcomed and expressed gratitude to our new owners. More good news: the Operating Account held a surplus of approximately \$23,000 mainly due to the reduced insurance premium resulting from the new roofs. Enhancements to the grounds included a shiny new bike rack resting on a paved surface precisely prepared by new owner Jimmie Lee, acid washing of the pool, landscaping additions, and installation of photo sensors for the yards lights. Certainly, these were welcome improvements, but the incoming Board had a very big project to consider.

After weathering 50 years between the Club and the bay, our seawall was in dire need of repair or replacement; this was confirmed by a thorough engineering study early in 2016. The Board determined that the best course would be replacement. To secure funds for such a major project, a special assessment would need to be approved by the Membership. In a letter to members, President Ron Holden stated: “I am pleased to report that 31 of our 32 members participated in the Special Meeting of Members held on April 22<sup>nd</sup>. The vote for the Special Assessment was 25 ‘yes,’ 5 ‘no,’ 1 abstention. On behalf of the eight Members who have been a part of the process to study the condition of our Seawall, consider alternative ‘fixes’ and estimated costs and helped to meet with contractors and evaluate their bids, I express thanks to those of you who supported this effort.” At \$4250 per Unit, the Seawall Special Assessment was the largest in the Club’s history. Getting approval and getting checks was hard work of a sort, but removing the old seawall and building a new one during the sultry summer-into-autumn months was akin to creating

a powerful earthquake and then turning chaos into order in short order. Thanks to the incredible team at Greg Orick Marine Construction for making this feat happen.

It wasn't all about the seawall for 2016. We went from six docks to three: two are new and our longest dock sports a new deck. Landscaping improvements continued, walkways were repaired and painted, and dirty movies were made of our aging sewer lines (think in terms of a colonoscopy conducted by plumbers). These videos revealed we have reached the age where our plumbing will need considerable attention. Well, there's always something.

The next big "something" turned out to be a celebration for the Club's 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary. Held on February 22, 2017, it was, to use a descriptor of the times: "YUGE." Per her custom when outdoor parties are planned at the Club, Mother Nature tried to dampen the event with rain and wind. Party planner Deb Cooper thought that might happen and months earlier made arrangements for a large tent to be erected on the north end of the driveway. By noon, Mother Nature calmed down and a blue sky burst forth. Inside the tent, tables were set, lights were strung, flower arrangements were fluffed, and memorabilia was displayed. The magical effect produced many oohs and aahs from guests as they entered Party Central after posing for photos on the red carpet (really ... a red carpet). President Ron Holden acted as Master of Ceremonies. Mac MacVicar brought rueful smiles as he traced a few expenses over the years (Wow! The numbers have certainly gone up!) and reminisced about reactions to the diving board's removal for insurance purposes (Where will we put the Christmas tree? Members wanted to know!). John van Vliet, whose family has owned #311 since the Club's beginning, gave a humorous yet affectionate speech based on his recollections. Champagne toasts were made while servers circulated with scrumptious meals. Jimmie Lee presented a slide show featuring Club improvements, our beautiful natural surroundings, and several wonderful people who have come and gone throughout the years. There was cake, a rousing rendition of "Happy Anniversary," and the symbolic blowing-out of candles by the youngest Club member (Jacqueline Peregrin) and the most senior (Evelyn Ulsh). President Ron Holden and his wife Vicki danced

to a tune from the movie *La La Land* and others soon joined in thanks to Mel McGonnigle, who put together a rockin' playlist for the afterglow portion of the evening. The next day the tent moved on to another gig and only a sprinkling of glitter remained in its place. It is very tempting to focus exclusively on the evening's magic, but the truth is someone must meticulously plan so the magic can occur. We are very grateful that Deb Cooper made her vision a reality ... and a treasured memory.

It now seems appropriate to close with words from Ray Tapia's history of the Club written 25 years ago:

"And so, the mystic chord of memory weaves on its beautiful, lasting tapestry, and as it plies its golden yarn, time moves on, turning todays into yesterdays, turning events into history, and turning history into memories. But at the Ambassador we seem to have been blessed with very special friends, and Time seems to linger here a little, as if to grant us a pause such as this, to revisit, to cherish, and to fondly remember."