NOVEMBER 2024

CASA COASTER

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Ryan Booker checks in

"Everything is hospitality" to new property manager

As Hurricane Milton approached Tampa Bay, Ryan Booker made landfall at Casa Costa.

A veteran of high rise hotel operations, Mr. Booker was appointed our new property manager on Oct. 6, making him the fourth in property history under Castle Group's tenure.

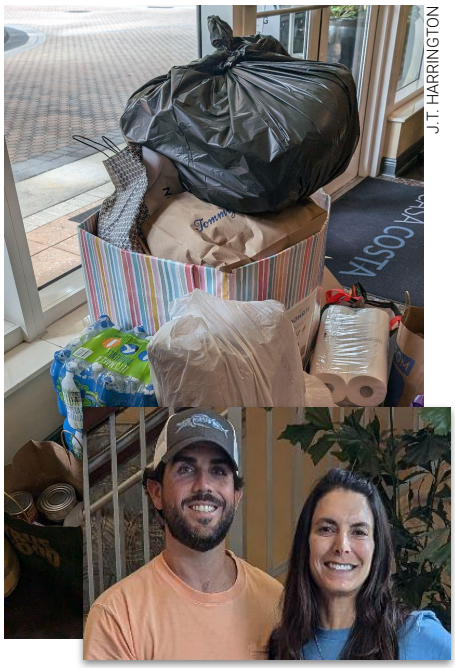
A graduate of University of Nevada, Las Vegas in hospitality administration and business management, he was drawn to the challenges and opportunities of taking the reigns at a resort condominium undergoing two capital improvement projects in the midst of budget season.

"I didn't count on a hurricane watch my first week, but the community rallied together," Mr. Booker told the *Casa Coaster*.

He gained a reputation for reinvigorating full-service properties across five states for Hilton, Marriott and Wyndham before Castle Group recruited him. He said he sees similarities between managing hotels and mixed-use properties like Casa Costa.

"Security, maintenance, amenities, customer service, value for money – these elements are important everywhere," he said. "If we focus on raising the resort quality, property values will rise." *CC*

Residents deliver storm relief



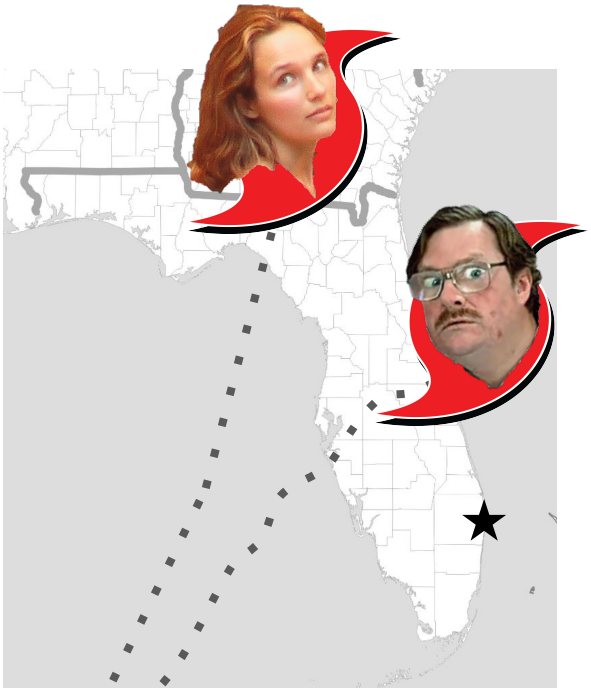
J.T. HARRINGTON

Phishunt Charters boat captain Robert Pully and his girlfriend and first mate Natalie Naffis are no strangers to rough seas.

But when the north tower residents learned that friends on Florida's west coast had "lost everything" in severe late-season storms, the duo planned a trip with food, clothes and supplies.

They coordinated with Casa Costa staff to spread the word and residents donated in a 24-hour blitz. The outpouring filled the entire trunk and back seats of a westbound SUV on Oct. 11. *CC*

Natalie Naffis: "We are blown away by the response of our neighbors."



A TALE OF TWO STORMS: A duo of hurricanes hammered Florida's gulf coast and beyond in the span of two weeks. Experts called both of them the storm of the century. On Sept. 26, winds from Helene, a category 4, knocked out power to the property nearly 30 times in 20 hours. After breaking records for intensification, Milton made landfall on Oct. 9 and tore the roof off Tropicana Field in St. Petersburg before crossing the state.

Can you identify the two namesakes above? Turn to the back page for the answers.

INSIDE

MEET THE CANDIDATES
With three board seats up for grabs, four owners make the case for the job. **A4**

OPINION

De-iguanaing and re-imagining

BY BOBBY HALL

I've lived here for almost a decade and have been teaching water aerobics classes three times a week for nearly half of that time. I've been part of the Grounds Committee and live in a townhome that exits to the fifth floor. This is all to say I spend a lot of time on the pool deck.



When the pools reopened last year, I thought it was important to buy umbrellas for shade. When some umbrellas broke, I thought it was important to fix them. For some reason, it was a fight for these very basic elements of a resort condominium.

For the last few months, unwanted neighbors have joined us on our pool deck. When the city removed landscaping by the pond, iguanas climbed trees and walls to our fifth floor and higher. The board asked for my help.

Iguanas are invasive to Florida and destroy the terrain. But despite their prehistoric appearance, sharp claws, teeth and tails, iguanas are scared of humans. If they are raised as pets, they can become more comfortable – but just ask our board vice president, who once had a pet iguana: they don't like humans. Stomp your feet and they run away. Water is their "safe space," so they may jump in the pool when startled. Their poop may contain dangerous bacteria, but not when it dries out. Chlorine in the pool destroys bacteria in seconds.

Iguanas may not be native, but they were here before Casa Costa. Please be patient and unafraid.

I learned all this from a parade of experts at companies with names like Iguana Busters and Iguana Masters.

We've set out traps, redoubled clean-up efforts and are wrapping trees to prevent further traffic from the pond. Longer term, we shouldn't have plants that attract iguanas; our landscaping currently offers them a salad bar.

* * *

Speaking of the future, I was speaking with our board president about how our pool deck is designed. A few months ago, we visited a similar property in Ft. Lauderdale. Their pool deck is half the size of ours but theirs feels bigger. Ours is broken up into so many sections, and why do we have a white fence? So many walkways and gates and ramps and steps and levels make for an awkward layout for events and even sunbathing. Around our pools, there's barely enough space for loungers and then it drops off. If we wanted cabanas, where would we even fit them?

We're saving toward a $3 million pool deck resurfacing project in a few years. Instead of simply reinforcing and waterproofing a poor design, let's look into how to make the pool deck itself bigger and more functional. For instance, the landscaping east of the pools is invisible from most angles and currently an iguana buffet. It could be another five feet of deck or steps or cabanas. Remove the fence. Replace the small, heavy gazebo with a gigantic, stunning pergola for usable shaded space.

The next time you're stomping around the pool deck, squint your eyes and imagine what could be.

Mr. Hall is chairperson of the Grounds Committee.

CORRECTIONS

Due to an editing error, a front page article misstated two dates: when the board met recently to change building rules and a previous time the rules were revised ("Board tweaks six rules," Oct. 2024). The board met Sept. 17, 2024 and the last revision was July 2019. The *Casa Coaster* regrets the errors.

Email corrections or clarifications to casa.coaster.news@gmail.com.

LETTER TO THE PUBLISHER

Stop the iguana hysterics

There are far fewer iguanas around here than there once were. After 13 years looking off our balcony, there was a major problem a while back. On a cold day, you could see the big males sitting on top of the mangrove trees.

We have been at the pool on two occasions recently when an iguana walked up and a resident on the opposite side of the pool stood up and started screaming despite my attempts to let her know it was not a physical threat. I even walked over to the iguana and showed how it will turn around and go back into the bushes. Iguana fear is completely irrational.

One time an iguana actually jumped into the pool to cross to the other side because of the hysterical screaming. It was in and out of the pool as quickly as possible to get away from her. I realize there is disease potential but in all my years here I have never seen an iguana doing laps, and we have great views of both pools.

From our observations, iguanas on the pool deck do not disturb the vast majority of residents.

Iguanas can be an annoyance but, in our opinion, they add to the Florida charm. The landscaping is beautiful and we would not want to see wrapping around palm trees or any other man-made detriment to the view. In my opinion, a survey of regular visitors of the pool would vote overwhelmingly against eradication.

PAUL FERWERDA
CHRISTY FERWERDA

Letters may be edited for length and clarity.

CASA.COASTER.NEWS@GMAIL.COM

Dodging the storms in style



BLACKBOX KITCHEN



JOHN BATTISTA

Residents learned to make sushi rolls, celebrated departing property manager Sue Gutierrez, played Canasta and Bingo, and then dressed up their dogs for a Halloween parade.



J.T. HARRINGTON





MARNA ATKIN

ELECTION SPECIAL

Meet the candidates

Term limits create three vacancies for the board of directors; which owners will replace the veterans?

We spoke with the four candidates on what led them to run for a board position at Casa Costa. Owners may cast their votes electronically starting Nov. 20 and the election itself is Dec. 4. *CC*

Former oil trader now drills down on budgets

Originally from Chicago, Ronald Hirsch bought at Casa Costa with his wife, Elaine, a decade ago to be closer to his son. He has been a full-time resident since his grandchildren were born.



Ronald Hirsch

With a career rooted in finance as a broker on the Chicago exchange, he brings monetary know-how to his roles here. His surname is German for "deer."

Mr. Hirsch served on the board as treasurer in 2017, before resigning in early 2018 to join the finance committee, where he continues to contribute today. His work includes reviewing monthly statements and budgets, providing him with a deep understanding of the complexities of managing a large property.

"I want to get closer to the projects happening here," he shared, noting that his financial background could be an asset. He expressed a strong desire to help restore the property to its former prestige. "The building's landscaping used to be a real selling point," he recalled. "I want to see it restored to what it once was."

Although frustrated by a lack of progress in some areas, the candidate expressed optimism that its current restoration investments put Casa Costa ahead of some neighboring properties.

He wants to provide tools to the management team to elevate Casa Costa to the luxury building it was designed to be. "I don't want to micromanage the staff, but I do want to ensure that things are done right," he said.

Steel City native looks to bridge communication

For the past ten years, Roberta Mann has called Casa Costa home, living here with her husband, Donnie, and their dog, Rosie. Originally from Pittsburgh, she built and ran a successful clothing business for over 25 years before becoming a realtor and relocating to Florida to be closer to family. Though initially hesitant to leave Pittsburgh, she quickly embraced the South Florida lifestyle and is now deeply rooted in the Casa Costa community.

Up north, Ms. Mann was active on her HOA board, giving her a solid foundation in community governance. She has brought her passion for community engagement to her role on the social committee, where she has served as chair for six years. This experience connected her to many residents who feel comfortable sharing



Roberta Mann

their concerns and ideas with her.

The candidate sees herself as a "sounding board" who can relay residents' concerns to the board and improve communication. She views open dialogue as essential to success and plans to continue fostering it as a board member. She aims to be a voice for the community.

"My main goal is to restore our building to the five-star property it was designed to be," she said.

Finding energy from "the voices within"

Over his career, Frank Ameo rose through the energy industry ranks to an executive managing a $500 million budget and overseeing 2,000 employees. From northern New Jersey, he and his wife have lived here part-time since 2020. Mr. Ameo, still an energy industry consultant, believes his career ensuring safety and environmental compliance will serve him well in advocating for residents as a board member.

Mr. Ameo brings a solid understanding of condominium governance, having served on condo boards in the Garden State. Here, he's already served on the budget committee and is currently active on the grievance committee. He says he is encouraged by the direction of the building, emphasizes the importance of ongoing maintenance and hopes to contribute to the momentum by joining the board. "I'm excited about the building's future," he said. "We're on the right track."

ELECTION SPECIAL



Frank Ameo

Listening to residents is a priority for the candidate. “Good ideas come from the voices within,” he notes, emphasizing that he looks to bring residents' feedback to both the board and building staff.

Mr. Ameo envisions a collaborative approach, with board volunteers and the management group working as a team to elevate Casa Costa to the high standards everyone desires.

Passion and persistence define former VP

Originally from New York City, the candidate nicknamed Bobby spent his career in the liability insurance industry before retiring here full-time with his wife, Iris. With family nearby, Casa Costa became an ideal home base.

When he was elected to the board for 2022, Mr. Hall used skills he gained through his insurance jobs: negotiation, persistence, public relations and conflict resolution. He was re-elected and served as vice president the following year. With plans to relocate, he resigned the position shortly before the end of his term, though he remained actively engaged. He continued teaching water aerobics three days a week, a group he initiated during the pandemic.

The couple didn’t move, and now Mr. Hall is eager to rejoin the board. Over the years, he’s been most active on the grounds committee, focused on the property’s curb appeal and safety initiatives. He’s a spirited contributor at events like Bingo – even occasionally as the caller for the evening.

He calls Casa Costa as a “jewel in the rough” and is passionate about representing every homeowner as he helps to shape our direction.



Robert Hall

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From UNLV to MBWA, new leader is at your service

As everyone knows by now, Ryan Booker is our new property manager. He began his role in mid-October. I had the opportunity to sit down with him soon after to learn more about the person who will be guiding our building through its ongoing renovations and beyond. Our 90-minute



MISTER B'S NEIGHBORHOOD

conversation covered his background, management style and vision for the community, leaving me optimistic about the positive changes ahead.

I arrived at the management office for our meeting and knocked on the glass window, expecting Marsha to open it so I could announce my appointment. To my surprise, she opened the office door and invited me inside. After a brief introduction to Ryan, we walked to the bakery for coffee and a chat. On the way, Ryan mentioned that residents would now be welcomed into the office to speak with the team, signaling a shift towards greater accessibility – a theme that came up throughout our discussion.

Originally from Oakland, Calif., Ryan has traveled the country in different roles within the hospitality management and service industries. He was a high school athlete and went on to play football at the University of Nevada, Las Vegas. He played outside linebacker for the Rebels' defense.

"I wanted to be the guy doing the hitting, not getting hit," he told me. These days, at 6-foot-4 and 260-pounds, Ryan continues to stay active with boxing and team sports.

His college experience at UNLV propelled him into the hotel business. Watching operations of major casino resorts on the Strip just over a mile from campus inspired him to pursue a career in hospitality management. For 11 years after college, Ryan gained hands-on experience in every aspect of the industry: security, front desk, maintenance, management. He's worked at casino resorts, luxury hotel chains and timeshare condo properties. This diverse background gives him a unique perspective on managing a mixed-use property like ours.

Much of our discussion centered around Ryan's plans for Casa Costa. His enthusiasm and management expertise came through clearly. He intends to walk the property daily, proactively addressing issues before they escalate. At one of his first daily morning meetings with the team, he emphasized the importance of paying attention to small details and looking for "low-hanging fruit" to improve. For example, when he and our chief engineer Dan noticed that the front garden needed mulch, the maintenance team handled it instead of bringing in landscapers at six times the cost. This small change made a noticeable impact on the property's aesthetic and was done in a few hours.

Ryan embraces a philosophy of "management by walking around." The MBWA idea was a signature of Hewlett-Packard's founders in the 1970s to stay connected with their employees, encourage informal interactions and get firsthand insights into the business. Ryan has already connected with many residents through his daily rounds. Last week, he stopped by a water aerobics class to chat. After our meeting, I saw



JOHN BATTISTA

him at the front desk, greeting residents as they entered . He stressed the importance of visibility and open communication, saying that while he employs various ways to keep residents informed, he is always available for one-on-one conversations. When he received an email from a concerned resident this week, he followed up with a phone call for clarification, aiming to resolve issues directly and effectively.

Ryan aims to be a problem solver. "I will do everything in my power to assist residents while upholding the community's goals, safety and standards," he said, adding that his overarching goal is to elevate Casa Costa as a premier community. "This is a beautiful building that could use some enhancements. I'm here to help improve the living conditions,"

I walked away impressed and encouraged. With his hands-on approach, hospitality-first mentality and excellent team around him, Ryan Booker seems well-equipped to guide Casa Costa into an era of excellence. Here's to an exciting journey ahead! CC

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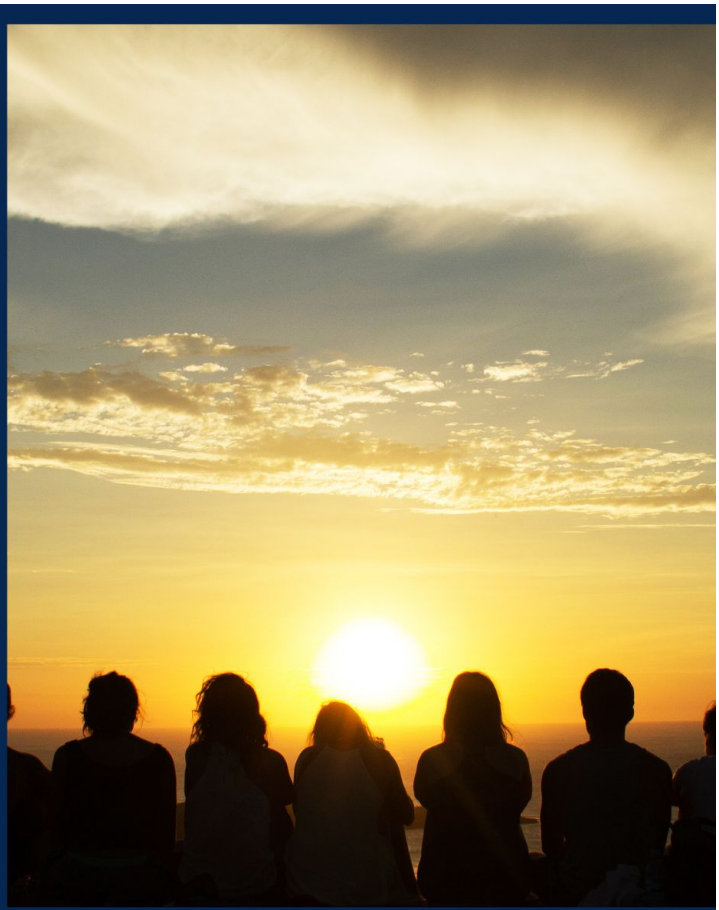
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SOUTH FLORIDA'S #1 POOLSIDE AMUSEMENT

DUNCE OF THE MONTH







DANILO CAJINA

SOUTH TOWER, FLOOR TWO DOUBLE WHAMMY: On Oct. 26, someone slammed open the door to the garage so hard, the handle smashed through the drywall. While staffers waited for their repair work to dry, they did it again. *CC*

ANSWERS TO A TALE OF TWO STORMS:

Hélène Grimaud, 54, is a French classical pianist and wildlife conservationist. **Milton Waddams**, as portrayed by Stephen Root in the 1999 cult classic film *Office Space*, is a mumbling workplace drone who was fired but no one told him.

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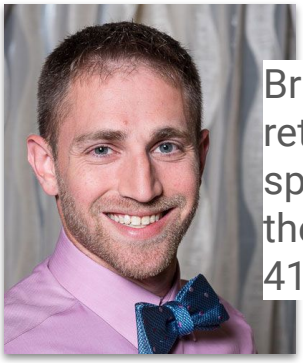
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