FEBRUARY 2025

# CASA COASTER

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## *Networking for a living*

The son of a pinball repair wizard, Jay Shapiro bounced among banks and beaches

"Working 9-to-5 is not in the bloodline"



**ONE-MAN GEEK SQUAD**

The year was 1994 and Jay Shapiro needed a roommate.

He'd been sharing a one-bedroom apartment in Midtown Manhattan with his younger brother after their father installed a partition and built a loft for a second bed in the living room.

But now his brother had moved out and the $1,200 in rent was too much for the young man in his first job out of college.

Mr. Shapiro leafed through the classified ads in *The Village Voice*, a Greenwich Village weekly, and discovered Roommate Finders. He went to their office, paid $35 and filled out a notecard with his preference for a non-smoker.

He'd been working downtown, providing desktop computer support for financial analysts at Kidder Peabody. When he wasn't troubleshooting printers and passwords, he was reading a how-to book on Microsoft Access, recently released database software.

Sensing an opportunity to improve roommate-matching in an expensive city where renters often needed to double up, Mr. Shapiro knew that software was an upgrade to notecards. He found another service in the Yellow Pages called Roommate Solutions. This version made it free to list available rooms; instead, they charged apartment seekers a placement fee if they passed an interview and found a room.

"Technically speaking, I was looking for a roommate, but I was really checking out potential future competition," Mr. Shapiro said. "When I came clean, the founder told me that she'd been thinking about closing down the business."

So, he bought it for $1,000 and started using a database to match roommates. Even when the I.T. department downtown was laid off after the investment bank was sold, he was making so much money matching roommates for other New Yorkers that he didn't need one himself.

"I felt bad so I paid the seller an extra $800," Mr. Shapiro said. "I like people."

He attributes his social graces to his mom's influence, while the tech skills and entrepreneurial bent come from dad. "My mother was a substitute teacher and my dad was an IT nerd," he said.

He grew up on Long Island before going to college in Albany, N.Y. He recalls when one of his

*Please turn to page A4*

# Residents grill their next mayor




JOHN BATTISTA

**On the heels of last month's meeting with officials from the city's Community Redevelopment Agency, the Social Committee hosted a debate among three candidates for Boynton Beach's next mayor last week: Court McQuire, David Merker and Rebecca Shelton.**

**The trio largely agreed to remove red light cameras and campaign signs but no one could explain why downtown plans from the 90s are still empty lots; each blamed greedy developers.**

**The election is March 11. Please turn to page A2 for our commentary and endorsement.**

## INSIDE

**CONDO BITES**
Great for dipping in coffee, twice-baked mandel bread is crispy and crunchy. **A6**

OPINION

# It's game on this season

**BY SANDI SACKS**

Like many snowbirds, I look to make the most of my winters in Florida by connecting with people and exploring new interests.

I checked out local resources in Boynton and beyond – cultural centers, libraries, senior centers, and even online platforms like Meetup and Facebook. While I found some options, I felt something was missing: a way to connect with my neighbors right here in Casa Costa!



**HEAD GAMEMAKER**

With nearly 400 apartments, there were bound to be others looking for connections too.

So, I used the handy BuildingLink app to put out a call: "Planning for fun and camaraderie for this Fall and Winter at Casa Costa. These activities would be free and ongoing with the goal of promoting neighborliness, learning and fun. Some ideas: gameplay, discussion groups, creative arts collaboration, exercise."

Around ten residents replied, eager to participate and even lead activities. At our first planning meeting, the ideas flowed: book clubs, dance groups, walking buddies, cooking classes, games, creative arts and crafts – the list went on. Everyone agreed: holding activities "in-house" was key to building connections here.

I'm thrilled to announce the successful launch of three incredibly enthusiastic groups: Rummikub, Scrabble and Hand and Foot Canasta. We have even offered lessons for newbies. Everything is free, facilitated by volunteers – just RSVP to reserve your spot.

While the official Social Committee does a wonderful job organizing larger events, these smaller, ongoing activities are a separate initiative designed to complement the larger gatherings and foster deeper connections within our community.

> With Rummikub, Scrabble and Hand and Foot Canasta, we've even offered lessons for newbies.

Too many choices, not enough time? That's a wonderful problem to have! If you're interested in joining or leading a new activity, please reach out to me. Let's make this winter at Casa Costa the best one yet!

*Email sandisacks@gmail.com.*

## ENDORSEMENT

### *Elect Rebecca Shelton*

We invited all four mayoral candidates to meet with us and answer 90 minutes of pointed questions. Three showed up.

Mr. McQuire and Ms. Shelton distinguished themselves as capable proponents of transparency, better policing and making city hall user-friendly. Both blamed the downtown holding pattern on greedy developers. Real estate investors are easy targets but they have revitalized nearby cities and are not to blame for the eyesore of empty lots.

Mr. McQuire's passion and preparation are clear. We love his push for beautification but fear that his deliberative style will delay decisions. He would serve Casa Costa well and we encourage Ms. Shelton to involve him in a meaningful role.

Ms. Shelton is a polished pragmatist. As a neighbor seven blocks away, she shares our struggles as with FPL. She already lives near city hall. Vote her into it.

*Endorsement by vote of event sponsors*

**EST. 2022**

CASA COASTER
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**SOUTH FLORIDA'S #1 POOLSIDE AMUSEMENT**

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# Techie matched roommates

*Continued from page A1*

father's side hustles attracted the attention of customs agents. After quitting a job at IBM, his dad started buying broken pinball machines from Europe for $50 apiece. Dad repaired the electronics, then sold the machines for $250 to private homeowners in the suburbs or loaned them to local pizzerias for a share of the quarters.

"He would get 40 of them delivered in the middle of the night," Mr. Shapiro remembers. "The neighbors were convinced he was running drugs. Government agents staked out one of the deliveries and were disappointed when they opened the crates. Meanwhile, my mom is offering them coffee and bagels."

The pinball wizard's son ran his tech-forward version of Roommate Solutions for three years. He'd been collecting cash in person and screening up to four room-seekers each day out of his Manhattan apartment, much to the chagrin of the building's property manager. The prospect of paying for office space didn't appeal to Mr. Shapiro, so he shut it all down in 1997. Besides, he was gearing up to move off the island to the Forest Hills neighborhood in Queens after getting engaged to his college sweetheart.

"That lasted six months," he said. "Her mom was crazier than Joan Crawford from *Mommy Dearest*."

He moved to Long Island City for another IT support job at a bank but Mr. Shapiro's latest side hustle took his roommate-matching acumen to another level involving a summer tradition for young New Yorkers: the Hamptons. "In the mid-90s, a coworker invited me to join their rented summerhouse," he said. "It was crazy: 55 people per weekend in a big beach house with 13 bedrooms." Mr. Shapiro took over the scheduling for subsequent summers after convincing the landlord he would keep things under control.

He met his next future wife one of these summers in the Hamptons. The marriage lasted eight years and the couple have a daughter, now 20. During the winter season, Mr. Shapiro's ex-wife lives at the nearby Hunter's Run community, and he recently ran into her while at a bar with his new girlfriend.

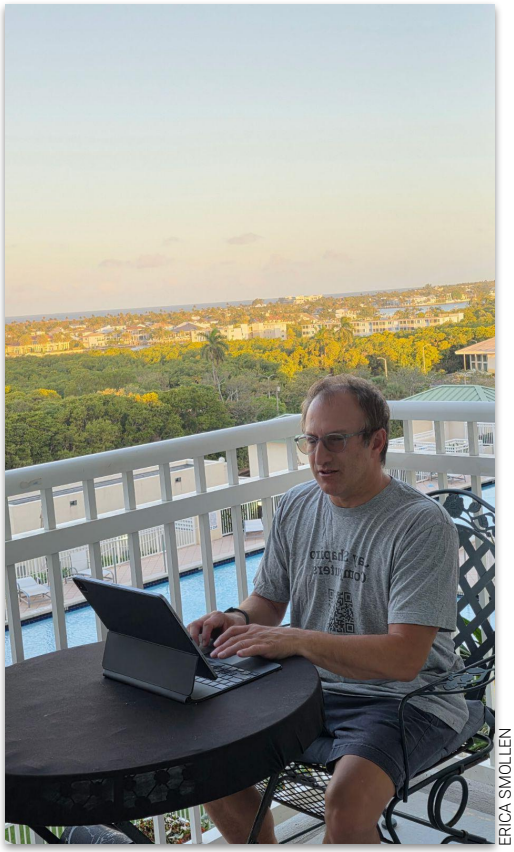
Mr. Shapiro's longest run in an office providing tech support lasted nearly a decade at PaineWebber, which was acquired by UBS Wealth Management. That desk job ended with the Great Recession in 2007, the same year as his divorce. He flew to Delray Beach, where his parents had since relocated. He told his dad that he was fed up with corporate work, which didn't surprise his father.

"Working 9-to-5 is not in the Shapiro bloodline," he said. While at UBS, he'd gotten to know his first fiancée's boss at a personal injury law firm. The lawyer needed after-hours help managing data storage devices, and also introduced the eager IT troubleshooter to others in the office building to remove computer viruses and repair hard drives.

The early days of building his own tech support business provided a series of flashbacks. A decade after shuttering his roommate-matching firm, Mr. Shapiro needed a roommate again. This time, he relied on Craigslist to look for a room to rent. One listing ended up being from Wiley, who remembered Mr. Shapiro from the shared Hamptons house years ago. And many of his first customers called on him to revive their home computers because they needed to search for jobs in the same tough economy that cost him his.

Mr. Shapiro relied on referrals and mailed postcards to find customers, and in-person consultations to fix devices. He began

*Please turn to page A5*



ERICA SMOLLEN

**Jay Shapiro Computers supports 1,000 customers for routine technical support – primarily from the business owner's phone or iPad. In the 90s, between Wall Street tech jobs, he bought a Manhattan roommate-matching business and coordinated summer home sharing at a 6-bedroom in Bridgehampton.**



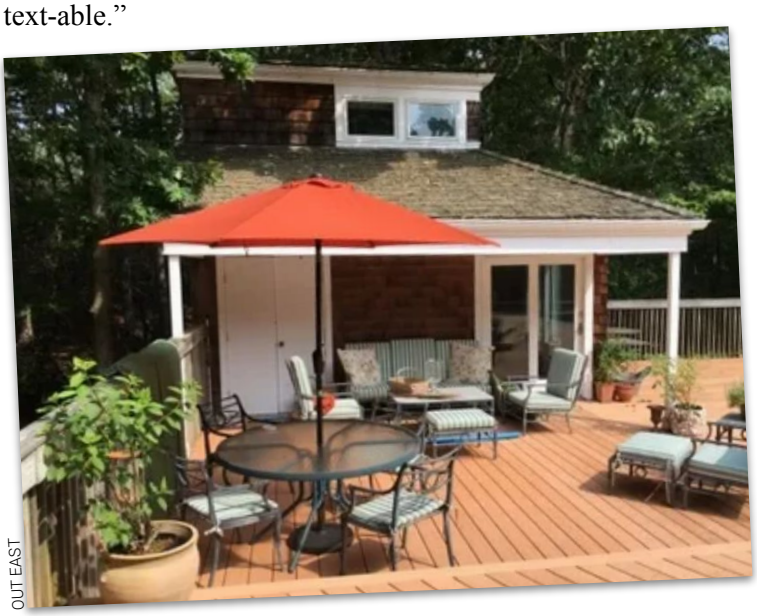

THE VILLAGE VOICE

# "Today my clients are 90% retired. Most are text-able"

*Continued from page A4*

spending winters in South Florida 13 years ago (at Casa Costa since 2007). Working from home here provides better weather and more elderly customers in need of tech help.

"Today my clients are 90% retired and range from 60 years old to 100," he said."Only 15% are up north. Most are text-able."



OUT EAST

In 2022, he moved here full-time. An ironic twist confirmed that his New York chapter had ended. The attorney who initially inspired Mr. Shapiro's entrepreneurial pivot died while riding his bicycle without wearing a helmet and hitting a pothole.

"When a personal injury lawyer kills himself from a personal injury, it's time to move on," he said.

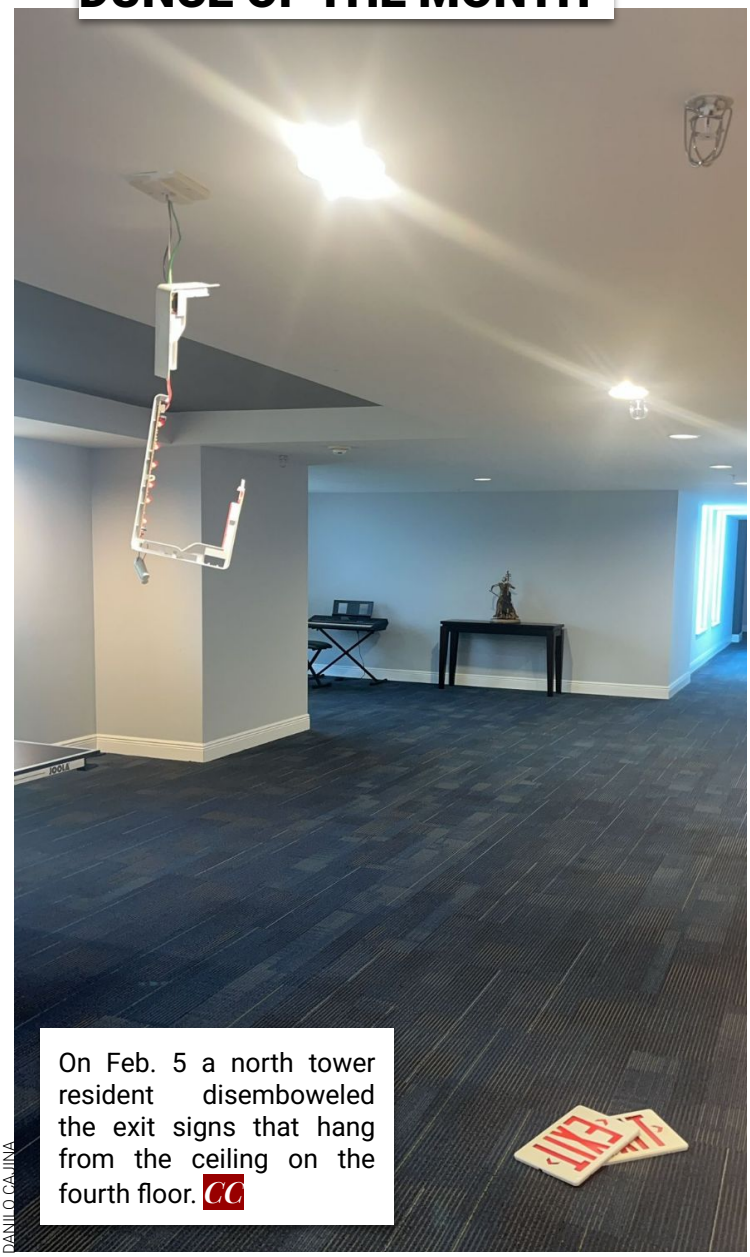
In recent years, online referral websites like Angi have helped him find customers, and he can perform a majority of work remotely, thanks to online payment processing and software that lets him view and control a customer's screen from his smartphone.

He counts 1,000 customers, some of which have relied on him for over a decade. He charges hourly and he's helped one realtor sync email systems and eliminate malware continually since Jay Shapiro Computers began. She tells him that she'd fold her business if he left her. He keeps a database and makes outbound calls to regular customers to suggest a "tune-up" of their system; he prides himself for being available when other options are closed.

"I enjoy what I do. It doesn't feel like work really," he said on a recent Sunday. "Today I have a one o'clock appointment. I can do the work from the pool." CC

*Visit JayShapiroComputers.com*

## DUNCE OF THE MONTH



DANILO CAVINA

On Feb. 5 a north tower resident disemboweled the exit signs that hang from the ceiling on the fourth floor. CC

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**Another Roberta Mann Exclusive**



# Condo Bites: Nosh Edition

With a potluck coming up on Sunday, March 30, these pages are a platform for community chefs and their signature dishes. It's your turn to share a favorite recipe with a story or special memory behind it.

*Email Belinda Battista at battib33@gmail.com*

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# Mandel bread



Mandelbrot cookies are an Ashkenazi Jewish dessert dating back to the early 19th century. Mandelbrot are closely related to the Italian cookies known as biscotti, which were first made in the Middle Ages. The word mandelbrot means almond (*mandel*) and bread (*brot*) in both German and Yiddish. In America, these tasty little cookies are known as mandel bread. Typically mandel bread is twice-baked, which makes it crispy and crunchy. They're perfect for dipping in tea or coffee. Because most of the moisture is baked out of them, they also have a fairly long shelf life.

*– Gary Green*

1 cup vegetable oil

1 cup sugar

3 large eggs

1 tsp pure vanilla extract

3 cups all purpose flour

1 tsp baking powder

½ tsp salt

1 cup semi-sweet chocolate chips *(you can substitute chopped almonds, candied fruits, etc.)*

Ground cinnamon

1. Mix together oil and sugar until combined, then add eggs one at a time; after the eggs are combined, add vanilla
2. Sift together all the dry ingredients and add them slowly to the mix
3. Once the dough is smooth and sticky, pour in the chocolate chips and stir
4. Cover the dough with plastic wrap and place it in the refrigerator for a few hours or overnight
5. Lightly oil your hands and form four long rows with the dough onto an ungreased cookie sheet lined with parchment paper; leave space between the rows
6. Bake at 350° for 25 minutes
7. Remove and turn the oven down to 250°; slice the mandel bread into pieces
8. Place pieces back on the cookie sheet on their sides and sprinkle with cinnamon
9. Bake for another 15 minutes until they've achieved the hardness you desire

*The longer they stay in the oven, the crisper they will be. If the slices are big or wide, you might need longer than 15 minutes.*



# Residents come together to peel potatoes

For Chef Taciana McDaniel, food is about more than just feeding the body – it's about bringing people together. That's exactly what happened on a Wednesday night in February, when the Social Committee hosted a pasta making night in the club room. A group of residents gathered to make gnocchi from scratch, with the chef guiding them step by step.

With a background in Culinary Arts and Hospitality Management, Ms. McDaniel has worked in fine dining, hotels, holistic health food operations and as a chef instructor. Now, as the founder of BlackBox Kitchen, she focuses on culinary classes, meal prep and unique dining experiences.

This event was a sequel to a sushi-making class last year that was such a hit that participants requested more cooking experiences.

"What sets me apart is my attention to detail," Ms. McDaniel said. "I want every person to have a memorable experience – learning, connecting, and, most importantly, enjoying the process."

"Food has the power to bring people together," she shared. "That's what I love most about what I do." CC

*Next up: create the perfect charcuterie board.*



JOHN BATTISTA



**Sharon Clark and Belinda Battista were among the gnocchi pupils of BlackBox Kitchen founder Chef Taciana McDaniel earlier this month.**

## MR. B'S NEIGHBORHOOD



*Boynton Beach and its surrounding areas feature a variety of parks and walking trails that showcase Florida's natural beauty and rich diversity. Each park offers a chance to connect with Florida's nature and each path tells its own story, from the rich ecosystems of the wetlands to the quiet beauty of native scrub.*

*As the community continues to grow, these trails remain timeless havens for those seeking tranquility and natural wonder.*

## *Green Cay Nature Center & Wetlands*

A standout destination is the boardwalk here, a 17-minute drive from Casa Costa. This 100-acre nature preserve allows visitors to walk along a raised pathway that offers a unique perspective on the wetlands. The peaceful environment provides a welcome escape while allowing visitors to observe the fragile ecosystem just beyond our city.

Established in 2004 through a collaboration between the county's utilities and parks departments, Green Cay remains a local treasure. CC



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