



UNITED WAY

Collier and the Keys

February Newsletter

Tax season is in full swing! Now through April, United Way of Collier and the Keys is offering FREE tax prep through our Volunteer Income Tax Assistance (VITA) Program. We're incredibly grateful for our dedicated volunteers who ensure those in need get their full refund and accurate filings.



Collier County VITA Information:

Location: UWCK Office
9015 Strada Stell Ct #204
Naples, FL 34109

Location: First Horizon Bank
5247 Golden Gate Pkwy
Naples, FL 34116

Schedule: Every Wednesday
Now – April 30, 2025
9 a.m. – 3 p.m.

Schedule:
March 1
9am – 3pm

[Make Appointment](#)

[Download Flyers](#)

Monroe County VITA Information:

Key West

Harvey Government Center (Board of County Commissioners Meeting Room)
1200 Truman Ave

Tuesdays: Mar 4, 11, 18, 25;
Apr 1, 8, 15
10 a.m. – 2 p.m.

Big Pine Key

Community Center
(Winn-Dixie Plaza)
179 Key Deer Blvd

Thursday, Mar 6
2:30 p.m. – 6:30 p.m.

Marathon

Marathon Library
3490 Overseas Hwy

Wednesdays: Mar 5, 12, 19, 26;
Apr 2, 9
10 a.m. – 2 p.m.

Key Largo

Key Largo Library
101485 Overseas Hwy

Thursday, Mar 13
10 a.m. – 2 p.m.

***No Appointment Necessary**

[Download Flyers](#)



Thank you to First Horizon Bank for two successful VITA Saturday events (so far) and for providing a welcoming space—your partnership makes all the difference!

UWCK Announcements

UWCK-UAE Coral Reef Learning Exchange Visits UAE

United Way of Collier and the Keys (UWCK) embarked on a groundbreaking Coral Reef Learning Exchange with the United Arab Emirates (UAE) from February 3-8, bringing together UWCK leaders and top coral reef experts for a week of exploration and learning.

Organized by the UAE Embassy in Washington, DC and led by Dana Al Marashi, Head of Cultural Diplomacy, the delegation included UWCK President & CEO Tiffani Mensch, Keys Area President Leah Stockton, Reef Revitalization Project Liaison Jessica Dockery, and selected marine biologists and coral restoration experts from across the U.S.

"Experiencing firsthand how the UAE is tackling coral restoration was invaluable," said UWCK President & CEO Tiffani Mensch. **"This partnership helps us share best practices and build real solutions for global marine challenges."**

The trip included key site visits and discussions, including:

- Atlantis the Palm Aquarium tour & briefing
- Jumeirah Al Naseem Turtle Rehabilitation Lagoon tour
- Burj Al Arab Hotel Marine Conservation tour
- Fujairah Research Centre briefing & tour
- ***Coral reef dives*** at Dibba Rock in Fujairah
- Environment Agency Abu Dhabi meeting
- NYU Abu Dhabi networking event
- SeaWorld Abu Dhabi tour & briefing

"There are more similarities between Florida and the UAE's environmental conditions than I realized," said Caitlin Lusic, Delegate & Field Conservation Manager, The Nature Conservancy. "There's plenty of opportunity to learn from each other in helping corals adapt."



Environment Agency



Museum of the Future



Desert Experience



NYU Abu Dhabi



Fujairah Research Centre



Atlantis the Palm Aquarium

"I'm excited to see how coral reef conservationists are beginning to coordinate with each other on a global level. **Planet-wide challenges require planet-wide solutions**, and it's motivating to see the US and UAE recognize the help they can give each other from half a world away," said Riley Garvey, Delegate & NOAA Coral Reef Management Fellow, American Samoa.

Looking ahead, we're excited for the next phase of the Coral Reef Learning Exchange—stay tuned for more updates soon!

Click [here](#) for a timeline of the UWCK-UAE partnership.
Click [here](#) to check out our social media posts from the trip!

UWCK Receives \$100,000 United Way Grant



UWCK is honored to receive a **\$100,000 United Way Community Resiliency Innovation Fund Transformation Award** to strengthen disaster recovery efforts.

This grant will help us launch a transformative initiative to empower volunteers, nonprofits, and community leaders with the tools needed to help individuals navigate disaster recovery resources.

Our efforts will include:

- A comprehensive training program to equip community leaders with critical recovery and climate adaptation knowledge.
- A dedicated website to serve as a hub for accessible, up-to-date recovery resources.
- Strategic outreach efforts to ensure those most in need can easily access support.

This fully documented model will be piloted locally and prepared for replication.
Read our recent news release [here](#).

Final Year of UWCK's Marine Science Scholarship – Apply Now!

UWCK is now accepting applications for the final year of its Marine Science Educational Advancement Scholarship! This scholarship supports Monroe County residents pursuing degrees in marine science or marine technology-related fields, helping to build a strong local workforce for reef restoration efforts like NOAA's Mission: Iconic Reefs.

Since 2022, UWCK has awarded nearly \$70,000 to aspiring marine scientists. Applications are open through April 24. Click [here](#) to learn more or apply.



Scholarship recipient Kristen Szpak ('24-'25) works with young scientists collecting environmental data at Island Dolphin Care. Thanks to UWCK's support, she has begun her PhD research on field-based learning and student engagement!

UWCK President & CEO Attends United Way of Florida Capitol Days

UWCK President and CEO Tiffani Mensch connected with fellow Florida United Way CEOs in Tallahassee at **United Way of Florida Capitol Days** on February 18 & 19.

She thanks Senator Ana Maria Rodriguez (District 40) for taking the time to learn about the critical work being done in Monroe County and expresses gratitude for leaders who prioritize local impact.



Drag Queen Bingo Raises \$1,090 for UWCK



Drag Queen Bingo raised \$1,090 to benefit UWCK! The fun-filled event was held every Sunday from January 26th through February 23rd at 22&Co in Key West, from 5-7 p.m., and hosted by QMitch.

Special thanks to UWCK LAB members Karen Neely and Jordan Upchurch for their help in organizing these successful events!

In The News

- [Naples Daily News – Big Green EGGfest benefiting UWCK](#)
- [WGCU – Free Income Tax Assistance](#)
- [WLRN – Keys marine biologists, leaders learn about reef restoration efforts in UAE](#)

In The Community



Community Foundation of the Florida Keys recently hosted its annual Unsung Hero lunch, where UWCK proudly honored Jeannette Chiari, a dedicated volunteer with our Volunteer Income Tax Assistance (VITA) program!

For eight years, Jeannette has led our Marathon VITA site, providing vital Spanish translation and ensuring smooth operations. Her dedication has doubled the number of people receiving free tax assistance each year, helping more families achieve financial stability.



Kierstin Bayer's home dedication, made possible by UWCK and many generous supporters.



Brandi Horton, UWCK LAB Chair, reads to students at Plantation Key School during Celebrate Literacy Week.



Ashley Jones, UWCK's VP of Community Impact, at the 27th Annual Senior Expo at North Collier Regional Park.

Save The Date!

RSVP Now: Women United Networking Event!

**WOMEN
UNITED**

Join UWCK to connect, learn what's ahead, and get involved. Bring a friend and help make an impact!

- March 27th
- 5:30 PM – 7:00 PM
- Fifth Third Bank (2100 Tamiami Trail N, Naples, FL 34102)

RSVP NOW!

IN CASE YOU MISSED IT – UWCK Board Member and Women United Chair, Janet Pogar, has pledged to match every new donation to Women United in 2025, up to \$10,000! We encourage members to donate at least \$100 annually, and with this match, your gift will go even further to impact more lives in our community.

DONATE NOW!

Save the Date and Get Your EGGfest Tickets Now!

We're grateful to once again be a beneficiary of Sunshine Ace Hardware's EGGfest! Join us Saturday, March 22, from 11 AM to 3 PM at Riverside Park in Bonita Springs.

Purchase your tickets [here](#).



Sunshine **ACE** Hardware
EGG
fest

Benefiting:
 **UNITED WAY**
Collier and the Keys

SATURDAY
MARCH 22ND, 2025

Big Green Egg

11 AM - 3 PM

Riverside Park | Bonita Springs
Register at: SunshineAceEGGfest.com



Donate

UWCollierKeys.org

Join the Movement! Ready to make a difference in Collier County? Visit VolunteerUWCK.org to register and discover amazing opportunities to give back!

United Way of Collier and the Keys | 9015 Strada Stell Ct, Ste 204 | Naples, FL 34109 US

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