



In the know

**COUNTYWIDE
PINELLAS TRAIL
PARTY PLANNERS
TO MEET JAN. 6**

A planning meeting to discuss the 20th anniversary celebration for the Pinellas Trail scheduled for December 2010 will be at 6 p.m. Jan. 6 at the Largo Public Library, Meeting Room A, 120 Central Park Drive. Interested citizens, officials and business and chamber representatives are invited to attend. Organizers of the event are looking for ideas, volunteers and contributions to ensure that the anniversary event will be a memorable and special day in Pinellas County's history. Suggestions and questions can also be e-mailed to pinellastrail20@gmail.com.

**SAFETY HARBOR
Theater group
plans auditions**

The Players of Safety Harbor, an adult library theater troupe, is holding auditions. They are seeking one female lead, and to fill six male roles, one female youth role, plus crew for their April production of Frederick Knott's *Wait Until Dark*. Auditions will be held from 6 to 8 p.m. Jan. 6 and from 2 to 4 p.m. Jan. 10 at the Safety Harbor Public Library, 101 Second St. N. Performances are scheduled April 9-11 at the Safety Harbor Resort and Spa Baranoff Theater. For more information, call Mary Kay Smith at (727) 724-1525, ext. 104.

**CLEARWATER
Learn how to train
dogs and cats**

The Humane Society of Pinellas County is beginning a new session for its adult volunteers to learn positive dog and cat training methods. The program, Open Paw, is to be used while working with adoptable dogs that are medium or large size, and cats, to assist with their adoptability. The training is free to volunteers with a minimum commitment of one shift each week for six months. Volunteers are also needed to help with special events at the adoption center and with the small wonders, the rabbit and small critter program. For information or to sign up for the Jan. 2 information session, e-mail bobbieb@humanesocietyofpinellas.org or call (727) 797-7722, ext. 237.

**LARGO
Free pet food offer
for those in need**

People with limited income and those facing financial hardship can receive free pet food, and pit bull and pit mix owners can have their canine companion spayed or neutered at no charge, thanks to the Florida Animal Friends license plate program. The service includes pet vaccinations and rabies shots. Apply for these programs in person between 9 a.m. and 4 p.m. Tuesdays at the SPCA of Tampa Bay, 9099 130th Ave. N, Largo. Bring Form 1040 (individual income of \$20,000 or less; add \$5,000 income for each additional person in household). Do not bring pets; appointments will be made for spaying and neutering to be performed by participating area veterinarians. For details, call (727) 586-3591 or visit spcatampabay.org.

Pinellas deaths

Detailed obituaries are published in Section B.

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North Pinellas Times

pinellas.tampabay.com

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Courtesy of Tarpon Springs High School
Matt Hodge, a student and band member at Fred J. Page High School in Franklin, Tenn., was injured when his car was hit by a train.

Tarpon band goes far to help youth

They raise funds for a Tennessee drummer, then visit him.

BY DEMORRIS A. LEE
Times Staff Writer

Dewey Williams learned of a Tennessee drummer's plight when trying to buy photographs of his son's marching band competing in Atlanta.

The photographer with images of the Tarpon Springs High School band, named grand champions at the national competition, told him of another band that had competed, too — and how one of its drummers

couldn't make the trip because he was in a coma in Tennessee.

So Williams spread the word to band members. Not only did the Tarpon band take up the cause, but an entourage went to Tennessee to see the injured drummer and deliver a donation to his family.

"At that first meeting, we raised \$700 from parents writing checks. Three weeks later, we had \$2,000," Williams said. "You can be leaders on the field,

but you can also be leaders off the field and this was a great lesson."

Williams learned from the photographer that proceeds of the picture sales were going to the family of Matt Hodge, a 17-year-old percussionist from Fred J. Page High School in Franklin, Tenn. A senior, he had been in an August crash that left him in a coma.

Williams, a retired Clearwater deputy police chief, spoke with Tarpon **» See BAND, 5**

Cultivating a passion for bamboo



JIM DAMASKE | Times

Don Eichar of Palm Harbor came to appreciate the virtues of bamboo while watching craftsmen during his sabbatical in Costa Rica. He picked up the craft and it has grown into a profession. Above, he works on a project in his Dunedin shop, Bambú Tropical. Below is a sample of his unique creations.

Don Eichar's fascination began as a sideline and has expanded into a career and a growing business.

BY ELAINE MARKOWITZ
Times Correspondent

DUNEDIN — A dozen years ago, Don Eichar heeded the call to adventure.

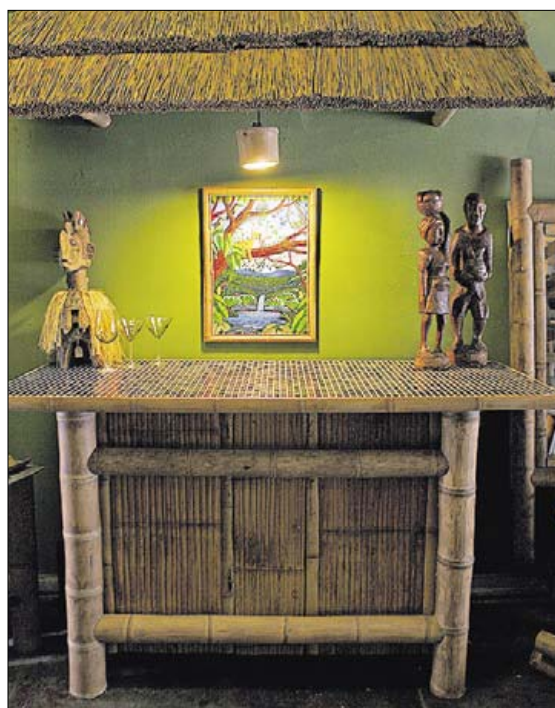
With his wife, Lynn, and the couple's 6-year-old son, the Palm Harbor resident headed to Costa Rica for a year of surfing, biking and exploring the small country from coast to coast.

From a rented guest house overlooking the Pacific Ocean, Eichar discovered bamboo and began a journey that would change his life.

"We came across several bamboo factories and I got interested watching the craftsmen make things from bamboo," said Eichar, who owned a small business that installed telephone systems.

On returning home, Eichar, 56, began using local bamboo to try his hand at furnituremaking and got hooked.

"I would go to bed at night thinking of new projects," he said.



JIM DAMASKE | Times

"This is the most enjoyable job I've ever done."

Don Eichar, owner of Bambú Tropical

In 2000, the budding craftsman imported his first container of bamboo from Costa Rica and made furniture and bamboo ceilings in his garage. The telephone business occupied weekdays and bamboo ruled the weekends.

"My first job was for a Dunedin designer who ordered a bamboo ceiling for a client in Apollo Beach," he said. "That job started my credibility."

The momentum grew. Eichar spread the word about his new passion on a Web site. Early efforts included trim work for bars and restaurants and ceilings. Within a few years, bamboo became his full-time career and the phone business ended.

Eichar now owns Bambú Tropical in Dunedin, a small yellow and green shop nestled against the Pinellas Trail. He opted for the Spanish version of bamboo in his business' name since his love for the **» See BAMBOO, 6**

'Everyone is welcome' at gay men's chorus holiday concert

St. Paul's Lutheran Church opens its arms to anyone in the community looking to worship.

BY JULIE CHURCH
Times Correspondent

CLEARWATER — For many years, the members and staff at St. Paul's Lutheran Church have opened their arms to gay and lesbian worshippers and others who don't feel comfortable at other churches.

That congenial approach took on a warmer glow over the summer when the national church-wide assembly of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America voted to recognize same-sex partnerships within the church and the hiring of pastors in same-sex relationships.

Now the welcoming effort is rising to a new level.

The church will present a special holiday concert Sunday for people of all sexual orientations and the community at large.

"Home for Christmas: A Celebration of God's Welcome" will feature members of Una Voce, a local gay men's chorus singing traditional Christmas music, and the music of Leslie Kille, a local singer-songwriter. **» See CONCERT, 6**

IF YOU GO

Holiday concert

"Home for Christmas: A Celebration of God's Welcome," a concert featuring members of Una Voce, a local gay men's chorus singing traditional Christmas music and the music of Leslie Kille, a local singer-songwriter.

When: 7 p.m. Sunday.

Where: St. Paul's Lutheran Church, 407 S Saturn Ave., Clearwater.

Admission: Free.

For information: Call (727) 446-7718.