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[News](#) , [Sarasota County News](#) , [Siesta Key News](#) March 29, 2024

## Part party, part Midnight Pass update

Author: **Jane Barnett**

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## Gathering along Little Sarasota Bay serves as another rally for those hoping to restore the former tidal connection south of Siesta Key

*By Jane Barnett*

There was an air of celebration and anticipation among the hundreds of loyal Midnight Pass Society II supporters who came together on a Sunday afternoon in late February on the front lawn of The Point, a waterfront restaurant in Osprey.

The group, made up of residents from Siesta Key and nearby communities, had come to hear the long-anticipated news that progress was being made in advancing their campaign to restore Midnight Pass to its original state as it was some 40 years ago before two private homeowners closed it to protect their homes from erosion.

Opening Midnight Pass and restoring Little Sarasota Bay is the group's mission.



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Commissioner Joe Neunder addresses those gathered at Spanish Point in support of the restoration of Midnight Pass. (photo by Jane Bartnett)

Sarasota County District 4 commissioner Joe Neunder, a strong advocate for the restoration effort whose district includes Midnight Pass, addressed the gathering.

“A feasibility report to determine how to restore Midnight Pass will be completed in June, July or August,” he said to great applause and cheers. Calling the issue “one of his top missions,” Neunder pledged his continuous support. “It’s going to stay on course as long as I have anything to say about it.”

Added society president Mike Evanoff, one of the founders whose group began its work in 2021, “We’ve opened the eyes of the commissioners and government officials.”

Evanoff also owns The Point restaurant.

Michael Grouse, also one of the founders of the non-profit organization, said that “Neunder is one of the commissioners who made the restoration of the pass his issue. Everyone wants to be a part of this.

“There were four of us who sat here at The Point one day and decided to create this group. Three years later, here we are.”

The crowd, seated at picnic tables, on the lawn and under a shaded patio, enjoyed a lunch of hot dogs and hamburgers. Many shopped for shirts emblazoned with “Restore Midnight Pass.” The merchandise was selling briskly.

“We created today’s event to get people involved. This is a cause that so many people are passionate about,” Grouse said with pride.

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Musician Bain Bakley entertains the crowd. (photo by Jane Barnett)

As the group awaited Neunder's arrival, musician Bain Bakley led the crowd in chanting "Restore the Pass!" between tunes. Despite the up-beat, picnic-like atmosphere and the music, it was Neunder that the group came to hear. When the commissioner arrived, a quiet settled over the crowd.

"You're a testament to this support," Neunder told the gathering. "We're going to lean on the science to

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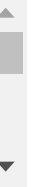
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spoke. He encouraged officials to replicate the tidal work done in northern states.

“The bay can be better,” he said. “It’s not dead, it’s different. We can help you to be successful. What you’ve been doing for 40 years didn’t work.”

Siesta Key businessman and coastal activist Michael Holderness also took the microphone. He expressed thanks to the county commissioners as well as state Sen. Joe Gruters and state Rep. Fiona McFarland, who both represent Siesta Key on the state level, as well as U.S. Congressman Greg Steube, whose congressional district includes Siesta Key, for their support.

“Restoration of the pass makes environmental and economic sense. It’s good for everyone,” Holderness stated.

Said Siesta Key resident Tim Bazell, “As a native Floridian and a local, I was enjoyed Midnight Pass when it was actually flowing back in the early ’80s. I grew up in the area and I have fond memories of the water and even better fishing. Also, as an avid fisherman and conservationist, the water south of the bay has always produced decent fishing but nothing like what could happen after that inlet is opened again.”

Midnight Pass Society II has been a strong advocate for expert studies, which made the update from Neunder a reason to celebrate.

“We need every available tool in our toolbox to get this done,” said the councilman. “Let’s follow the science to restore the historical tidal quality to the bay.”

Visit [restoremidnightpass.org](http://restoremidnightpass.org) for more information.

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A blown-up image of how Midnight Pass used to exist was on display. (photo by Jane Barnett)



Author: [Jane Barnett](#)

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By Ned Steele

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