

## Snowbirds receive warm welcome

No one has extended a warmer welcome to the snowbirds than Destin area houses of worship, and there are many of them. In fact, when Duane Hall of Michigan was acclaiming the hospitality of his church, Cornerstone Presbyterian, he said it was located on Church Street, but quickly corrected himself to say it was located on Beach Street. That was, perhaps, a “Freudian slip.” Beach Street could be thought of as “Church” Street since there are no fewer than five churches located on the half-mile stretch from US Hwy 98 to Kelly Street. They include Cornerstone Presbyterian, Destin Church of Christ, Destin United Methodist, First Baptist and Corpus Christi Catholic Church, and all have opened their doors and hearts to the visiting flocks.



Destin United Methodist Church recently hosted the 23<sup>rd</sup> annual “Sounds of the Season Christmas Concert,” an evening of spectacular holiday music presented by the Mattie Kelly Arts Foundation in conjunction with UMC, Destin Assembly of God and Village Baptist Church. Not only were snowbirds welcomed to enjoy the performance, but, according to Kim Cannon, music minister at UMC (and a favorite Roost entertainer) nearly 10% of the singers in the Community Choir were snowbirds. “We start practice in September,” he said, “and the snowbirds join in as they arrive.”



Snowbirds looking for a worship service on the beach are invited to join UMC’s 7:30 a.m. Sunrise Service and a 4 p.m. Sunset Service every Sunday at Henderson Beach State Park. There is also a 7:30 a.m. Sunrise Service behind the Crab Trap Restaurant on Scenic Highway 98.



Father Tom Guido, pastor of Resurrection Catholic Church on Miramar Beach Road says that the snowbirds are a vital part of the parish. “They bring different ecclesiology,” he said. “They are an infusion of fresh blood from many diverse places and I’m impressed with their involvement in daily Mass and activities such as Bible Study groups and M.O.R.E.”

M.O.R.E. (Men of Resurrection) is an organization that reaches out to people in need. This year, snowbirds were barely unpacked before they were helping with collections and distributions for the victims of Hurricane Michael. “Snowbirds are welcome to participate in all of our activities,” says Dana Janousek, parish administrative assistant. “In fact, there are so many snowbirds here at Resurrection that they have formed a snowbird group that meets every Thursday morning after Mass,” she said.

The Destiny Worship Center on Poinciana Blvd. is an interdenominational church that offers inspiration and meditation through the leadership of Pastor Steve Vaggalis. Snowbirds are not only welcome to come and worship, but are encouraged to join a group of other snowbirds as a part of their “Small Group Ministries” facilitated by Jim Perry. The Fireside Café, located in the church lobby, offers a welcoming way to ‘break bread’ with both locals and visitors. Max Hornsby, a church member and professional chef, began the food service several years ago exclusively for church-related events. However, when word got out about the exceptional quality of his work, Pastor Vaggalis made the decision to open the venue to the public. The café serves breakfasts and lunches Tuesday through Friday from 7am to 2pm. Most menu items are just \$5 or less. Any profit made goes into the church’s mission activities which, this year, include helping the victims of Hurricane Michael.

Linda Blackwood, Assistant to Senior Pastor at Village Baptist Church on Matthew Blvd., wants the snowbirds to know that Village offers a number of opportunities for snowbirds to “get plugged in while they enjoy the beautiful Emerald Coast.” Those opportunities include a Sunday School class especially geared towards snowbirds, the Silver Sounds Choir, an assemblage of singers that perform for area nursing homes and other venues (no auditions required), a fellowship of snowbirds that meet weekly for coffee, giveaways and guest speakers and the Happy Hearts Senior Ministry, a group that meets monthly for lunch and camaraderie.

Pastor Toy Arnett of Faith Assembly Christian Center on Geronimo Street, engages several Destin snowbirds in an annual Christmas Eve expedition. They load a horse-drawn carriage with food, clothes and gifts and head to St. Luke’s Baptist Church, an impoverished community in Century Florida at the Alabama border. Once there, the congregations join together for fellowship and worship. According to Don Cooksey, an organizer for the event, if it wasn’t for this event, the children of St. Luke’s Baptist would not receive any Christmas toys at all.



No doubt, there is a Church, Temple, Synagogue or Mosque in the Destin area to meet every snowbird’s needs. I encourage you to check out their websites because, as I said, no one will make you feel more welcome. Don’t forget to also check out the Destin snowbird website at [www.destinsnowbirds.org](http://www.destinsnowbirds.org). And mark your calendars for the Big Registration on January 3, from 1 to 3 p.m.

A very Merry Christmas, and as Tiny Tim once said, “God bless us, every one!”