



COURTESY PHOTOS

Apollo Beach Woman's Club executive board members are preparing for the club's final meeting on May 13. From left are Sheila May, treasurer; Ann Robbins, vice president/membership; Claudia Gasset, president; Jeanette Doyle, vice president/programs; and Roz Hensor, secretary.

Apollo Beach Woman's Club ends its decades-long run

By LOIS KINDLE
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After 67 years of service, scholarships and sisterhood, the Apollo Beach Woman's Club is closing, marking the end of one of the community's longest running volunteer organizations.

Once more than 150 members strong, membership has steadily dropped over the years — especially following COVID — though 76 women still remain. The issue is more than declining membership, however. It's that no one is stepping into the required leadership roles that keep the club going.

"We aged out," said Claudia Gasset, the club's president for the past three years. "No one wants to assume our board positions or committee chairs, and there doesn't seem to be an interest in participating in activities like our book club, cultural events and fundraisers."

"In January, we had 16 board and committee openings," she continued. "Only one person showed interest in remaining on the board and two committee chairs said they would stay."

Gasset, who joined the club in 2015, has served on the board every year since — starting as secretary and serving as president twice for a total of five years.

"I'm sad," she said of the closing. "I plan to keep all the club records for at least a year in case someone wants to pick it back up."

Jeanette Doyle, a 25-year member and current vice president of programs, shares her feelings.

"It's really a shame," she said. "It seems as though we should have had a plan in place to ensure this didn't happen. We just needed younger members to step into leadership roles."

"The club has been terrific for networking, making friends and participating in projects and activities that benefit the Apollo Beach community — including scholarships and, occasionally, supporting a local cause or business. I've met so many interesting people, and I will truly miss it."

The Apollo Beach Woman's Club was founded in 1959. Members originally met in private homes, then gradually moved to larger locations, which over the years included the old Holiday Inn, Sunset Grill,

Apollo's Bistro and the Ruskin Moose Lodge.

"We never really had a home," Gasset said.

She described the 501(c) 3 charitable organization as having been "primarily a social club back in the 1960s for the ladies of Apollo Beach to meet each other and then slowly began adding programs and activities to support the community."

"We've given supplies and cash to Mary & Martha House; food items to Backpacks on a Mission; college scholarships to area high school graduates, Girls of the World and the Firehouse Cultural Center summer camp program; school supplies and annual Angel Trees for Doby and Apollo Beach elementary schools; item donations to ECHO; and more."

While 30-year member Ann Mastroianni is saddened by the club's demise, she sees matters more universally.

"It's a combination of many things," she said. "It's more than younger members not stepping up. They're still very busy working and raising children."

"It's a big loss for the community, because our members have contributed so much over the years."

Even some of the younger seniors in the club can relate.

"I wish I didn't have to work," said 25-year member Jeannie Bush, of Wimauma. "Otherwise, I'd commit. Still, I'm only one person."

"I'll miss all of our ladies and the camaraderie we've had," she added. "We've been together such a long time. Some of us will continue getting together, and some will join other clubs. But it just won't be the same."

The Apollo Beach Woman's Club has awarded \$131,200 in scholarships since it began keeping records in 2018. After it disburses 21 \$1,500 scholarships to graduating seniors at Lennard and East Bay high schools during the club's final meeting on May 13, any remaining funds in the club's account will be donated to several nonprofit groups selected by the board.



The Apollo Beach Woman's Club recently recognized the milestone membership anniversaries of the following ladies: Jeanne Bush, 25 years; Nancy Vance, 30; Anne Mastroianni, 30; Liz Pedersen, 10; and Dottie Myers, 10 years.



Apollo Beach Elementary School social worker Gabby Segura is seen here with Angel Tree Christmas gifts donated by Apollo Beach Woman's Club members for students in need. The annual project is but one of many community efforts members have supported, including scholarships for local, graduating high school seniors.



Vesta Follies donates proceeds to local groups

The Vesta Follies distributed proceeds from its 2026 production to four local organizations, with cast members presenting checks to the SCC Emergency Squad, Samaritan Services Meals on Wheels, KP-Cares and the East Bay High School Music Department.

Additional revenue will be used for improvements to the Kings Point theater, benefiting both performers and audiences.

The Vesta Follies is an annual musical variety show that highlights local talent while raising funds for community organi-

zations. This year's production, *Movie Musical Night at the Follies*, drew more than 1,000 attendees and featured performances inspired by popular movie musicals.

This annual event requires months of planning and rehearsals. Director and choreographer Diane LeFrancois thanked the cast for its commitment and the community for its continued support.

Plans are underway for the 2027 Vesta Follies, scheduled for March 12-13, 2027. You won't want to miss this one. It's gonna be big.

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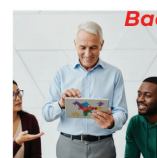
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Thurs May 21
10AM - 11:30AM

- **Physical Therapy & Balance:** Benefits for balance and fall prevention. Expert panel: Jill Farester, OT, & Matthew Lehtonen.
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Wed May 27
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- **Veterans & Home Care Benefits:** Discover how to unlock valuable home care support at no cost to you with Assisting Hands Veteran Advocates.
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