

## Sanibel Icon Speaks To Volunteers

Every month, the Sanibel Historical Village holds an event for its volunteers. The aim is to help broaden their knowledge of the history of Sanibel and to meet and mingle with fellow volunteers.

Last week, island icon Ralph Woodring, whose grandfather was one of Sanibel's original homesteaders, talked to the group about his life and times.

Accompanied by his wife Jean, Woodring said they decided some years back that they didn't want their property to be developed. "We thought the best thing to do was to come up with some way to take care of it and keep it in perpetuity," Woodring explained.

The "Ding" Darling Wildlife Society had the money and the pull to make it all happen, he said. With the Conservation 20/20 program, they purchased the property, and the Woodrings have a life estate. "We're pretty happy and satisfied with the way it's going. We have set up a fund to take care of the house after we're gone," he added.

Woodring said he still fishes, but not nearly as much as he would like. "It isn't like the old days, though. "You might spend the whole day out and catch nothing," he said. In his younger years, you could catch about all you wanted, and certainly all you needed for a good dinner.

Woodring sold The Bait Box but kept the wholesale business, moving it to Kelly



**From left, Goyle Pence, Ralph Woodring and Deb Gleason**

photo provided

Road. After experiencing some staff issues and other problems, he now finds himself working five days a week again. "Some people think I'm pretty damn hard to get along with," Woodring said by way of explanation.

Dr. Bruce Neill of the Sanibel Sea School has taken over START (Solutions To Avoid Red Tide), a water quality organization Woodring started. "Water quality is a people problem," he said. "But I'm going to be here to see that it gets better."

Woodring talked about the old days in

the village's Sanibel School, remembering how the younger children were separated into a different room (a later extension that was removed when the school was moved in to the historical village).

What Woodring remembers vividly about the old days is that neighbors helped each other: "No matter how far away the neighbors were, somehow or another you would get word to them, and they would help you," he remembered.

There was no road to Woodring Point until 1941, after trying for about five years to get the county to build it. When they

were able to, the Woodring family would go once a month to Fort Myers and clean out the grocery store. "In between times, we would go to Bailey's," he said.

Woodring was a track and football star and was elected president of his senior class (he graduated in 1954). After that, he joined the Air Force, where he was elected flight commander and graduated with honors. He held a number of jobs after that, including repairing groins (cement jetties) for the CEPD (Capitva Erosion Prevention District) and working four years at South Seas Island Resort, where he worked his way up to manager.

Woodring told stories of his mother Esperanza, of her fishing prowess and her strong personality. He also warned the village volunteers, with a wry smile on his face, to be on the lookout for the ghost of Lee Greer, who died in Burnap Cottage, which is now in the village.

In closing, Woodring said, "We had a pretty darn good life on Woodring Point before the road."

The Sanibel Historical Village puts on these speaker programs for volunteers, called Volunteer Updates. They are held the first Monday of the month in Shore Haven at the Historical Village. On Monday, March 4, the guest speaker will be Mariel Goss. The wife of Sanibel's first mayor, Goss was part of the early days (early 1970s) of incorporation. Among other things, she will speak about the formation of the shared-use paths.

The Sanibel Historical Museum and Village is located at 950 Dunlop Road (next to BIG ARTS). For more information or to make a donation, visit [www.sanibelmuseum.org](http://www.sanibelmuseum.org). \*