

## **The Vedders' time in Venice**

Bob came to Venice, From New Jersey, in 1978 as a consultant to the Venice Gondolier. In the spring of 1979 Bob became the General Manager of the Gondolier and moved Sue and two boys Todd and Scott and a dog, Carnaby, to Nokomis. We have lived in the same residence in Nokomis for 45 years. I became Publisher of the Venice Gondolier in the 90's. After 2000 I continued to be Publisher of the Gondolier but also was Vice President of Sun Coast Media that had many weeklies and several dailies mostly in the southern part of Florida. He wrote a weekly column in the Gondolier for 23 years.

Bob served on the board and as President of the Florida Press Association and was honored by being enshrined into the Florida Newspaper Hall of Fame.

He retired from the Venice Gondolier Sun in 2011.

## **The 80's and 90's**

While at the Gondolier he was involved in many community organizations

Bob was manager of a Little League team for 15 years, served on the board for a couple of years and umpired after coaching for 5 years. He was given the lifetime Achievement award by the organization.

The first social service organization he joined and has served for over 40 years was the Sertoma Club of Venice. He served a year as its president in the early 80's.

One of Bob's other early organization's was Big Brothers and Big Sisters where he was on the Board and served one term as president.

He served with his wife as the PTA president of Nokomis Elementary (Sue did all the work)

Bob was on the board of Volunteer Center South to which he was President for one term.

He was on the Venice Symphony board for three years. Currently he is on an advisory Board for the Symphony.

In the late 90's he was on the founding of The Venice Foundation board later to become the Gulf Coast Community Foundation. He served 6 years or two terms.

He raised the money for new band uniforms for the Venice High School marching band.

He served as the game announcer for the varsity boys Soccer team for may years.

Along with John Kalajian, City Councilman, they raised the money to construct the gazebo in Centennial Park.

Bob was a member of the Chamber of Commerce Board for two terms and was its president for a year and then the following two years raised the money to add on a second story and expand the walls. This is currently the VABI building next to the north bridge.

In the early 90's he raised the money to almost double the size of the old Venice Library.

In the late 90's Bob was in charge of raising the money to dramatically transform the Venice Art Center. We doubled the size of the art center which in turn greatly increased its membership. This provided the center with a much needed main gallery and added several small galleries and a café along with a wonderful gift shop and a couple of great patios.

He then assisted in raising money for an addition to the Jacaranda Library.

### **2000-now**

In the Year 2000, Bob finally, after years of trying to get something done with the School Board and school administrators, founded the Rotary Futures Program at Venice High School to help youth go on to college or trade school. Some 20 years later, its name was changed to the Rotary Futures College Resource Center to closer reflect its mission. With the help of the Venice Nokomis Rotary Club, Community Foundation of Sarasota County and Dan Parrett Principal at Venice High School we opened in 2000. This organization is helping mostly High School youth advance to further education after high school, either college or trade school. Each year we connect families to the right school and money to make it possible. About 10 million in scholarship money every year makes it possible for hundreds of kids to go to college or trade school. He served as its president for 18 years and still remains on the board.

Bob served on the City of Venice Board of Appeals and was one of the founding members of the Venice High School Foundation

He headed the drive to raise money for a new campus on east Venice Avenue for Loveland for children with disabilities.

He retired from the Venice Gondolier Sun at the beginning of 2011. It was at this time that Bob helped establish the Library Foundation for Sarasota County with Sarabeth Kalajian and Shannon Staub. He served 8 years one as treasurer,

Also at this time I transitioned into maybe my biggest undertaking converting Venice to a flower wonderland.

### **Flowers in Venice-2011 to present**

Immediately after retiring Bob embarked on his dream of bringing flowers to Venice. Sue and Bob had traveled a lot and loved the many gorgeous places they visited. The impression that those places made spurred Bob on to make this his main retirement project. He could not understand why there were almost no flowers in the public areas.

The first thing he needed was a nonprofit that would allow him to seek grants to do much of what we wanted to do. Venice Area Beautification Inc was that organization. He has served on its board all but one year since. He is currently Vice President.

The City was a willing partner and gets credit for helping make this all happen.

The first undertaking was to start with some hanging baskets. We started with 5. We watered them and planted them. We learned a lot from that and expand to 12. We still took care of them. When we hit 20 the city took over watering them. We had two volunteers. We then worked our way to 40 baskets.

We started adding ceramic pots and more volunteers. We got to about 10 pots when we added flower fountains. The first one was at the crosswalk near the Kiosk. Over the ensuing years we would increase to 9 flower fountains of assorted descriptions. Two of them date back to 1926.

In 2017 the city embarked on a large redo of downtown both for utilities and beautification. This was an important point in allowing us to expand. They designed special poles for hanging baskets with irrigation. This allowed us to take our number of baskets to 90 and since we have added 3 more to bring us to 93. This redo allowed us to add large bowls, we have 13 of those. Overall we have 90 pots and or bowls, 93 baskets, 9 fountains and about 20 in ground planting areas. One of those areas is a pollinator garden. We are currently building a butterfly garden in Centennial Park.

We took over the Post Office landscaping, as they did not have the resources to do this.

As we went along we added 4 bronze statues, Sophia, Maria, and Olivia as well as three turtles.

In 2015 I got the City entered in the America in Bloom competition which is a national competition not just on flowers but all other aspects of what makes a great City. In 2016 we entered again and won for the cities our size. We took off a few years for the Pandemic and the city being torn up. We joined again in 2022 and once again won the best in the country for our population category.

In 2023 we bought a flower tower about 7 feet tall that is next to the Kiosk in Centennial Park.

Currently there are 19 volunteers on the Bloom team, about half of them year around.

Bob has been honored by the Venice Nokomis Rotary Club, Sertoma Club of Venice, the Sunrise Kiwanis Club, the Sun Coast Rotary club and The City of Venice Mayor's the "Pillar of the Community award".

## **The other Vedders**

### **Sue**

Sue worked at the Venice Gondolier for 25 years in charge of payroll and human resources. She helped found the Venice Library book store.

Sue has been active in many organizations since coming to Venice. She was very involved with her kids' schools. She was President of Nokomis Elementary PTO a couple of years and President of the Venice Area Middle School PTA. She chaired Project Graduation at Venice High School. She was very involved with MainStreet, with one term as president. She has worked at the Venice Library Book Store for several Years and is still working there.

She was on the MCC Foundation board and chaired the Moonlight concert.

She was on the board of Venice Heritage serving several years as secretary.

She has volunteered for TWIG leading three teams sorting clothes to help families with Foster children.

She has been awarded the Mayors award for Pillar of the Community”

### **Todd**

He went through Sarasota schools most years at Pineview where he graduated 1<sup>st</sup> in his class as a senior. He went on to medical school and is a successful Pediatrician in Charlotte, NC. He has been awarded doctor of the Year in Naples, Florida and been involved with nonprofits. He started a nonprofit in Naples for Safe and Healthy kids which is very successful to this day.

He and his wife **Beth**, a nurse, have three grandchildren, **Nora** who works for Ernst and Young, **Annie** who is in Honors at the University of North Carolina, and **Charlie** who is a senior at Riverview High School and a rower for the Sarasota Crew, He is an excellent student and is captain of the team. He plans on attending San Diego University while continuing his rowing.

### **Scott**

He attended South County schools with his High School years at Venice High. He did very well in school and was active in sports, drama, and many organizations. His senior year he was President of the Student Body.

He went on to Florida State University where he also was involved with student government.

He and his wife **Nicky** stayed in Tallahassee. Scott has been in wealth management as a CFP, first with Northwestern Mutual and now on his own where he owns his own wealth management group. They have two boys, **Vito** a freshman at Chiles High School. He is on the school basketball and football teams and is an A student.

**Will** is in 8<sup>th</sup> grade and is in honors and is a very accomplished soccer player.