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**Hermitage Artist Retreat Presents**

**Historic Home Tours**

**September 7, 14 and 21 at the Hermitage**

*These free tours explore the property’s colorful history and offer up-close views of the historic structures that now serve as live-work spaces for visiting artists.*

The Hermitage Artist Retreat is offering historic beachside property tours, Friday, Sept. 7, at 10 a.m., Friday, Sept. 14, at 10 a.m., and Friday, Sept. 21, at 6 p.m. These free, one-hour walking tours explore the property’s colorful history and offer up-close views of the 106-year-old main building and four other historic structures that now serve as live-work spaces for visiting artists. The Hermitage Artist Retreat is located at 6660 Manasota Key Road in Englewood. *Reservations are required and only available through email at reservations@hermitageartistretreat.org.*

According to Bruce Rodgers, the Hermitage’s executive director, the Hermitage is a thriving oasis of living history and natural splendor. “Artists from around the world draw inspiration from this special location,” he says. “These unique structures have survived more than 100 years despite Mother Nature’s harshest tests. We’ll share engaging stories of the colorful characters and artists who’ve stayed here.” He adds that the tour begins with a video overview of the retreat.

The Calusa Indians were the original inhabitants of the site; their heritage lives on in the many middens and archeological sites in the area. In 1907, Swedish immigrant Carl Johansen bought a parcel to build a homestead for his family. The Johansens moved out in 1916; their house sat vacant into the 1930s, when it became a nudist resort called The Sea Island Sanctuary. After that, the property exchanged hands several times until, in the early 1990s, writer Ruth Swayze and her daughter, Carroll, an artist, spearheaded a community effort to save the buildings from beach erosion. At the time, Patricia Caswell was the executive director of the Sarasota County Arts Council, the organization that ultimately leased the property from the county in 2000 to turn the buildings into the Hermitage Artist Retreat.

Caswell is now the Hermitage’s co-founder and program director. She says that tours of the Hermitage have been popular in the past. “If these tours sell out, we plan to add more. It’s our delight to share this heritage with as many people as possible.”

**About the Hermitage Artist Retreat:**

The Hermitage is a not-for-profit artist retreat located at 6660 Manasota Key Road in Englewood, Florida. It invites accomplished painters, sculptors, writers, playwrights, poets, composers and other artists from all over the world for residencies on its beachfront historic campus. Artists are asked to interact with the community during their stay and, as a result, Hermitage artists touch thousands of Gulf Coast community residents with unique and inspiring programs each year. Hermitage programs are supported, in part, by philanthropist Gerri Aaron; by an award from the National Endowment for the Arts; by Sarasota County Tourist Development Tax Revenues; and by the Department of State, Division of Cultural Affairs, the Florida Council of Arts and Culture and the State of Florida (Section 286.25 Florida Statutes). In addition, the Hermitage awards and administers the prestigious Greenfield Prize, an annual $30,000 commission for a new work of art, rotating among visual art, music and drama. The Hermitage also partners with the Aspen Music Festival and School to award the annual Hermitage Prize to a composition student during the Festival. For more information about The Hermitage Artist Retreat, call 941-475-2098, Ext. 5, or visit the website at www.HermitageArtistRetreat.org.