




FLORIDA KEYS

Mike Forster, former Islamorada mayor and popular Keys restaurateur, dies from COVID

BY DAVID GOODHUE

UPDATED SEPTEMBER 06, 2021 6:47 PM



Dr. Andrew Pastewski and registered nurse Julio Valido, who were part of the Miami Herald docuseries 'Inside the COVID Unit,' discuss on July 23, 2021, what is happening at Jackson South one year after the filming for the documentary concluded. BY [EMILY MICHOT](#) 



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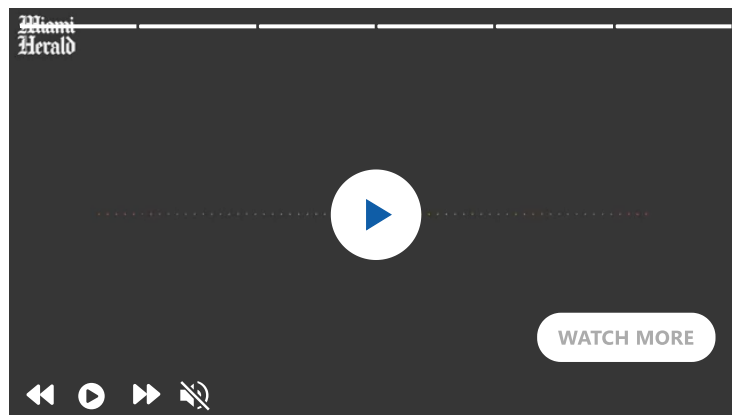
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In the weeks after officials in the Florida Keys shut the island chain down because of the then-new COVID-19 pandemic, Mike Forster began mobilizing to feed those he knew would be among the most in need. Restaurant workers.

Starting with organizing a shipment of [10,000 pounds of meat](#) from frozen food giant Cargill Protein for Keys food banks in April 2020, Forster then [began offering free meals](#) to servers, bartenders, cooks, bussers and other Keys wait staff out of his popular Islamorada eatery, Mangrove Mike's.

“Unfortunately, I think we’ll have a very good turnout,” Forster said just days before he was set to launch the service.

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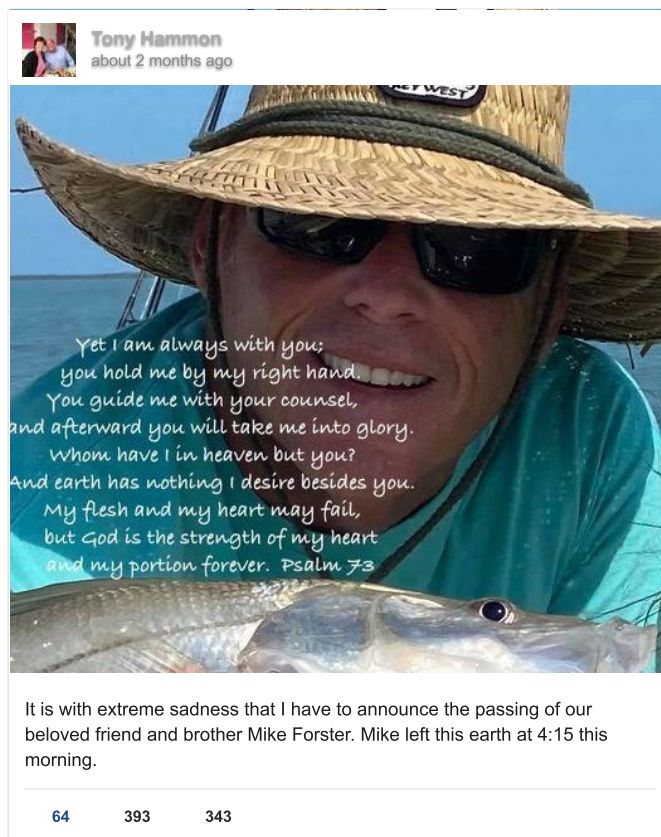
That effort led to a larger endeavor of creating a nonprofit to feed those in need up and down the 120-mile archipelago, which was starved of tourism, its number one industry.



Mike Forster and Michael Rempe stand inside a truck containing donated meat from Cargill Protein in April 2020. Contributed

Early Monday morning, Forster, 61, succumbed to pneumonia caused by COVID-19, his friend Tony Hammon said.

“Mike left this earth at 4:15 this morning,” Hammon posted on his Facebook page.



Forster was currently a Monroe County commissioner. He served [five terms on the Islamorada Village Council](#), and was mayor twice.

Born in Virginia Beach, Forster grew up in South Florida and attended Gulliver Preparatory Academy in Kendall. He moved to the Keys in 1990 where he managed and owned several restaurants before opening Mangrove Mike's.

He was equally known as one of the Keys' most popular leaders in the hospitality industry and even more so for his charitable efforts in raising money for those who were sick, or the families of community members who had died, or when the Keys were hard hit by disasters like Hurricane Irma in 2017 and COVID-19.

"Islamorada loses one of the kindest most loving members of the community. He was a friend to all and gave back everything he could to those in need. He will be missed dearly," Debbie Mucarsel-Powell, former U.S. congresswoman whose district included the Keys, wrote on social media Monday.

Monroe County Mayor Michelle Coldiron released the following statement:

"Mike passionately gave his all to the Florida Keys. He fed everyone with food, with love, with encouragement, with positive words, and with hugs. He considered us all one Keys family. Mike never said, 'we can't do it,' but always 'let's figure out how we can.' He passionately fought for all to have a quality of life to sustain living in the Keys with housing, fair wages, and protection of the environment. He showed his love for the Keys environment and people with all of his heart and soul. Rest in Peace, my friend."

Forster is not only remembered as a ceaseless advocate for people in need in the Keys, he also accompanied Hammon, who is pastor emeritus at Island Community Church in Islamorada, on several missions to Uganda.

Mike Forster is seen here with several children in a village in Uganda, where he went on several annual missions to help poor children. Courtesy of Tony Hammon

Hammon said Uganda became another calling to Foster, where he began a program to provide shoes to poor children in the African nation.

“We put shoes on children who never had shoes on their feet before,” Hammon told the Miami Herald/FLKeysnews.com Monday.

Hammon kept the Keys informed of Forster’s condition almost daily ever since he was transferred from Mariners Hospital in Tavernier on Aug. 20 to Baptist Hospital in Kendall, where he was placed on a ventilator and sedated two days later.

Forster, who was vaccinated, according to his family and friends, showed signs of improvement as the days went on. However, last Wednesday, Hammon told his followers that the situation took a turn for the worse. Forster still required 100% oxygen from the ventilator and continued to be sedated.

“That means his lungs have been severely damaged,” Hammon wrote on Sept 1.

Soon after news of Forster’s death broke, tributes on social media were nonstop.

“I am speechless and heartbroken this morning. My True friend, community leader and Mr. Everything passed away this morning from complications after a battle with COVID,” Bobby Dube, an officer and spokesman with the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission in the Keys, wrote. “The Keys will never be the same! This man had the biggest heart and ALWAYS gave back to our community — high school, fund raisers, fishing tournaments, etc. He was especially supportive of all law enforcement and first responders and his generosity over the years was over the Top. RIP Mangrove Mike!”

Forster’s loss was felt in South Florida beyond the Keys. The University of Miami Sports Hall of Fame issued a statement on Monday mourning his death. Forster partnered with the group through Mangrove Mike’s for its Keys fishing tournaments, and he hosted the events as part of his duties as Islamorada mayor.

“He was a great guy to be around and enjoyed life to the fullest. He will be greatly missed. Rest in Peace, Mike,” the group said in the statement.

Forster is survived by his three sisters and one brother, his sister Jo-Ann Forster said.

“He never married,” she told the Herald. “Too busy looking where he could make a difference.”

Forster was also a devoted owner of two Vizsla dogs, Henry and Joy, named after his friends, legendary Islamorada backcountry fishing guide Hank Brown and his wife, Joy. Hank [died in 2016 at the age of 86](#), and Joy passed in 2019.

However, Jo-Ann Forster said her younger brother became like family to many in the Florida Keys, including the staff and customers at Mangrove Mike’s. They are also his survivors, she said.

“I so admire him for that. He really did know what was important in life, and you see it in all the posts and calls and tears. He left Miami as a kid knowing what he wanted,” Jo-Ann Forster said. “Money was not on the list. He had a fishing rod in his hand when he was about 3 or 4, and that’s all he needed to know about where he was headed. He loves the water and fishing and the serenity that surrounds that. His legacy will live on and all that love him and his family.”

This story was originally published September 6, 2021 11:39 AM.



Mike Forster died Monday, Sept. 6, 2021, after being hospitalized for COVID-19.

DAVID GOODHUE

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David Goodhue covers the Florida Keys and South Florida for FLKeysNews.com and the Miami Herald. Before joining the Herald, he covered Congress, the Environmental Protection Agency and the Department of Energy in Washington, D.C. He is a graduate of the University of Delaware.

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Lawrence Gladsden

RIP. Had 3rd booster been available...

Like · Reply · 2 · 8w



Joanna Ahrens

What a shame. Only the good die young.

Like · Reply · 1 · 8w



George Pinson

He was definately one of the GOOD Ones. Guess the Lord needed another angel.

Like · Reply · 1 · 8w



Bill Becker


What an incredible loss for this community. Mike was an inspiration as a dedicated leader. He was passionate about everything he did, whether it was feeding the hungry, advocating on behalf of Florida Bay, or just fishing the backcountry, Mike loved the Keys. His passing leaves a big hole in our lives. Hard to believe he's gone.

Like · Reply · 4 · 8w · Edited





Delio Diaz


Was he vaccinated?


- 

Linda Camacho
Apparently so.
Like · Reply · 8w
- 


Jim Mooney
yes
Like · Reply · 8w
- 


Jim Mooney
Yes
Like · Reply · 7w
- 

Delio Diaz
RIP
Like · Reply · 3 · 8w
- 

Linda Camacho
A real shame. He was loved. R.I.P.
Like · Reply · 2 · 8w
- 

Suzan Mendosa
Fairly new to Fla, yet after reading about this gentleman and his care and support of his community makes me feel as if I knew him. Deepest condolences to his family and all who considered Mike a friend.
Like · Reply · 1 · 8w
- 

Geronimo Schmidt
It seems the good guys died young. Did he had any other conditions that left him vulnerable? Was he really vaccinated? Any evidence of this , like a vaccination card? Family and friends may be incorrect or lying. It is not unusual to get COVID even if vaccinated, but complications and death from it is rare for the vaccinated...unless you are also fighting some other condition.
Like · Reply · 1 · 8w
- 

Jim Mooney
Mike was Vaccinated
Like · Reply · 7w
- 

Michael McCoy
Great guy and contributed so much to so many here in the Keys. He is already missed greatly.

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BY ALEX DAUGHERTY

UPDATED NOVEMBER 04, 2021 6:04 PM



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During a meeting of Florida's 27-member U.S. House delegation on Wednesday, Rep. Debbie Wasserman Schultz said a bipartisan infrastructure bill that's currently in procedural limbo but expected to pass includes nearly \$13 billion in funds that could be spent on



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