

'BE LIKE MIKE' FEATURE HONORS THOSE WHO PAY IT FORWARD

By **The Weekly Staff** - October 9, 2022



For the month of October, the Keys Weekly Newspapers are partnering with United Way of Collier and the Keys to remember and honor the life of Mike Forster. A business owner and community advocate, Forster led the effort to feed the Florida Keys in the days following Hurricane Irma and throughout the COVID pandemic. He served on various boards, including the United Way, and went on mission trips to Uganda to serve the hundreds of children living in orphanages.

An Islamorada councilman and Monroe County commissioner, Forster passed away on Sept. 6, 2021 at the age of 61 following a battle with COVID. Forster's goodwill and generosity has inspired many Keys residents to carry on the spirit of giving and kindness to the island chain and those in need. In continuing the legacy of Forster, United Way of Collier & the Keys and the Keys Weekly Newspapers are highlighting some of the folks in the island chain that continue to pay it forward to help their neighbors. The community is invited to spend the week leading up to Forster's birthday, Oct.17-21, to promote goodwill and generosity through random acts of kindness and sharing to social media and other channels as #BeLikeMike. Visit UWCollierKeys.org/BeLikeMike to learn more about the various ways to get involved.

THIS WEEK'S "BE LIKE MIKE" FEATURES: NOLA ACKER

MIKE LEONARD
FOR
CITY COUNCIL
★ ★ ★



**FOCUSED
ON MARATHON'S
LOCALS**

Paid for by Mike Leonard for City Council



Volunteer with Mangrove Mike's Endeavors, Key Largo Sunset Rotarian, Key Largo Community Preservation Foundation member

1. What inspires you to give back to the community? The community itself.

When I moved here from Ohio in 2006 I learned the true meaning of community.

When anyone is in need we rise up as a family to take care of our own.

2. What's the most enjoyable part about helping your community and

neighbors? Tough one. I don't really like the word serve. Everything I have been involved with through the years have been passions and all very different. Smiles of the kids at Light Up Key Largo while reading them Christmas stories, during COVID it was the little "thank you" notes left by those we were helping get food to. I guess it's the feeling of a full heart mostly.

3. What kind of impact did Mike Forster have on your life or your community?

Mike was the real deal. He embodies the word selfless. I have learned from many on this journey but he was always doing it for the people he was helping and with a smile.

THIS WEEK'S "BE LIKE MIKE" FEATURES: RICK RAMSAY



Monroe County sheriff, UWCK past president and 20-plus year member



- 1. What inspires you to give back to the community?** Seeing the impact we have on people's lives each and every day when we come out to help volunteer. Whether it's during difficult times of disasters, or COVID, we see people who are at the worst times in their lives. We can come out to try to give them back a sense of hope, a sense of a future, and help people who are experiencing some of the most difficult points in their lives.
- 2. What's the most enjoyable part about helping your community and neighbors?** When we see these people, we see the look on their faces, hear their thanks and see their true appreciation. The little bit we do just means the world to them. I'm very focused on community cleanups as well, and one of the most enjoyable parts is seeing a dirty and disheveled area, coming in with a team of volunteers, working together hand in hand as partners and seeing the after-effects of what a group of people can do. We get a chance to partner with our citizens, build these lasting relationships and see the efforts come together in a dramatic way to improve the quality of life in our communities. It's second to none.

What kind of impact did Mike Forster have on your life or your community?

I've known Mike a long time, and we were very good friends who were like-minded in our community-first approach. But the biggest impact I've seen, that I'll remember forever, is post-COVID and post-Hurricane Irma when we had so many people who were down on their luck. He was literally feeding thousands and thousands of people every week. It was so inspirational that my team members came to almost all his feedings to work side by side for something that was so good and had one of the most dramatic impacts on our community that you could ever see.

THIS WEEK'S "BE LIKE MIKE" FEATURES MIRANDA HENDRIX



Publix manager in Key West first met Mike Forster in 2018 when she helped open the Publix in Islamorada. "He'd come in to shop, and we got to know each other. Then he went through me to order 1,000 turkeys to give away for Thanksgiving dinners. He was such a giver. I started going to his food giveaways and other events and we started working together."

- 1. What inspires you to give back to the community?** Working for Publix the last 24 years has helped nurture my inspiration to give back. Our founder, Mr. George, believed we should lead with a servant's heart. He was asked one time what he'd be worth had he not given so much away. His response was, "Nothing." That has always stuck with me and inspires me to try to be the best human I can be in life.
- 2. What's the most enjoyable part about helping your community and neighbors?** The most enjoyable part for me is seeing the firsthand impact on the community. The Keys are so unique in the amount of charitable work we do, and it's rewarding to see the community come together from all walks of life.

What kind of impact did Mike Forster have on your life or your community?

Mike helped inspire me to see that even a small gesture can have a much larger impact on people. You don't have to make grand gestures. It's more impactful to give not only physical items, but your time. Being there is what truly matters.



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