

# FORT MYERS FLORIDA WEEKLY®

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THE 99%  
MOVEMENT WILL  
NOT REMAIN SILENT

# OCCUPY

INSIDE: WHO THEY  
ARE AND WHAT  
THEY WANT | A8



PHOTOS BY EVAN WILLIAMS; ILLUSTRATION BY ERIC RADDATZ / FLORIDA WEEKLY

## A sampling of Southwest Florida's Santas

### SPECIAL TO FLORIDA WEEKLY

Santa Claus is as real as love, white beard, red suit and all — unlike, say, those masters of the universe on Wall Street, as the writer Tom Wolfe characterized the greediest directors of the famous money street.

And by the way, don't pull his



beard. No, sir. His whiskers are bona fide, like the man himself. That fact is made demonstrably clear each day now in malls from Port Charlotte and Punta Gorda to Fort Myers, where their self-evident affection and

COURTESY PHOTO

**Santa John Steciw at Fishermen's Village in Punta Gorda.**

SEE SANTAS, A12 ►

compassion for children is tested hourly in men who bring flesh, blood and real beards to the fanciful tale of Kris Kringle. Kids have always wanted to know.

"The kids don't change," observes Port Charlotte's Santa, Charles Hill, 74, whose 21-year Naval career included more than 10 years in the submarine service. There, patience is a virtue, just as it is in the Santa service where he's already put in a

### INSIDE



### 'The Hard Nut'

Local dancer performed in this offbeat "Nutcracker." C1 ►



### Oil country

Drilling for black gold in our backyard. A33 ►



### SpaceX

Private group partners with NASA. A46 ►



### Little rattler

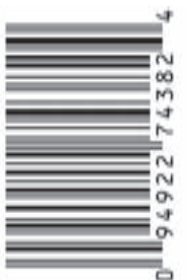
Pigmy's bite packs poison. A29 ►

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PRSR STD U.S. POSTAGE PAID FORT MYERS, FL PERMIT NO. 715	ROGER WILLIAMS A2	HEALTHY LIVING A42	ARTS C1
	OPINION A4	PETS A49	EVENTS C6 & 7
	ANTIQUES A10	MUSINGS A51	SOCIETY C32 & 33
	BUSINESS A33	REAL ESTATE B1	CUISINE C35





# Occupy: A leaderless movement with many supporters

BY EVAN WILLIAMS

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AFTER PEOPLE GATHERED IN PROTEST ON Wall Street in September, a new movement appeared around the country and world, including outside an old courthouse in Punta Gorda, in Centennial Park in Fort Myers, and along Fifth Avenue South in Naples.

"The public seems to understand very clearly what we're talking about," said Karanja Gacuca, a former bank analyst who took up with Occupy Wall Street. "It's quite simply about economic injustice and under that there are so many things, so the specifics are broad and varied. But it's about economic injustice and the control of corporations on government and all our systems."

All around the same time in mid-November, law enforcement forcibly disbanded some of the movement's tent city protests, including in New York City, Philadelphia and Fort Myers.

Protestors rallied again on Dec. 10 for Human Rights Day, dozens convening on a street corner in Naples before heading north to meet others in Fort Myers for a march across the Edison Bridge.

## Signs of the time

Occupy supporter Karen Dwyer met with a handful of others on the Wednesday before the march at a Bonita Springs storage locker armed with a list of more than 100 slogans to be used on posters. Phrases by Martin Luther King Jr. about economic injustice mingled with newer slogans such as the most prevalent, "We are the 99 percent."

The Occupy movement could be defined by decades of slogans, bumper stickers, sound bites and symbols that make up a collage of grievances. The movement's recognizable clenched fist, for instance, has been widely used, including on a poster by the Students for a Democratic Society during protests at the 1968 Chicago National Democratic Convention.

"I think it's an issue of human rights," said Bill Coughlan, adjunct professor of philosophy and ethics at Edison State College, about the Occupy message. "It's a massive sort of catchall in the 99 percent: basic human rights, opportunity to earn a living, opportunity to share in the profits, opportunities for women and minorities. It's all the same issues we've been fighting, like in the '60s."

As a self-described "leaderless" movement, Occupy's center shifts to each individual, making up a great ship of ideas with everyone and no one at the helm, supporters say. On Saturday's events, singular personalities and tastes were reflected by signs displayed along streets. Peace signs — many of them — were flashed by protestors and drivers, and a dissenting "bird" was flipped from the passenger window of a maroon pickup.

Two senior women walking together carried messages of dry, biting humor: "House for Sale, Senate Too" and "Insider Trading, Congress at Work."

## Human Rights Day protests

The Occupy movement mingled with the Coalition of Immokalee Workers by the Publix grocery store at U.S. 41 and Immokalee Road in Naples. Publix hasn't agreed to pay tomato growers a penny more per pound so field workers in Immokalee can make a better wage.

"For us in Immokalee the economic crisis is nothing new," Jordan Buckley of Interfaith Action told supporters with a megaphone while picking at the seeds of a pomegranate fruit. "Occupy is doing what the CIW has been doing for a while, highlighting the profit of the



Nick Williams and other protestors at the foot of the Edison Bridge in Fort Myers on Dec. 10.

EVAN WILLIAMS / FLORIDA WEEKLY



Jeffrey Dimas responds to Republican presidential candidate Newt Gingrich's characterization of Occupy protestors.



Occupy and Coalition of Immokalee Farmworkers convened in Naples.

big corporations at the expense of the 99 percent that make it possible."

A man who wouldn't give his name but called himself "Patrick Henry" of the Naples Tea Party arrived with his own signs: a sign that said, "Occupy Wall Street are union free-loading thugs," and a portrait of President Barack Obama with the words "FRAUD."

"Get a job!" he yelled, marching up and down the sidewalk. "Pack up and go home."

The Occupy protestors were already leaving for the march in Fort Myers. A few dozen convened at the courthouse downtown under an ominous bank of clouds and marched about a mile over the Edison Bridge and then back. Sheets of rain were coming down on both sides of the Caloosahatchee River, but the protestors and media covering the event were only misted.

The most rhythmic slogan of the day was chanted at the corner of First and Fowler streets: "Show me what Democracy looks like! This is what Democracy looks like!"

Defined as character, democracy looks notoriously messy. It has ridiculous bed-head and bleary eyes, and a hoarse voice. It's young and it's old. It's well-employed and out of work and sometimes conflicted about its own desires and beliefs. But it's out there making a stand. Following is a collection of supporters who were standing up for their varying versions of democracy with the Occupy movement last weekend.

## Profiles of the 99%



Hemping

"WHAT'S REALLY NICE IS WE'VE GOT PEOPLE out on a rainy day to speak out about what's happening in our country," said **Steven Hemping**, a leader in the Democratic Party of Naples.



Feraldi

**Nancy Feraldi** MARCHED THE BRIDGE in a pink bandana and shirt that read, "Gandhi is my homeboy." She carried a giant Occupy fist, a symbol of solidarity, and teaches an online composition course for Kaplan University.

"You might say I've been involved with the movement all my life," said Ms. Feraldi, 68. "I believe in human rights, social justice, peace, and environmentalism, saving a piece of the planet for future generations. Many people have fought long and hard for regulation to help achieve that. But eight years of the Bush administration pretty well overturned all that — deregulated it."



McDowell

**Matthew McDowell** HAS BEEN A spokesperson for Occupy Fort Myers, and lives in Naples. He said Phase I of the movement, in which protestors camped out in public places, is moving on to Phase 2 after police kicked them out.

"(Lee County Sheriff) Mike Scott, the Fort Myers Police Department, the city, all stifled our ability to assemble," said Mr. McDowell, 34.

Phase 2 plans include occupying foreclosed properties in Southwest Florida, as well as more marches, and targeting issues such as voter registration. United



States military actions were part of what spurred him to get involved with the movement.

“For me, it probably started with 9/11,” he said. “I used to be a hard-core Republican. The engagement in the Iraq War made me take a closer look at what was going on in the world. The president we have in office — he hasn’t much helped either.”

But Mr. McDowell says the basic tenets of the movement have been brewing for a long time.

“A lot of us feel like we’ve been waiting,” he said. “We haven’t had a movement like this in 50 years.”



Littlefield

**Paul Theodore Littlefield** HAS BEEN traveling across the country to different Occupy events. He has a rare brand of crazy charisma with his Santa hat, combined with a skinny frame and a long grey beard. He says he’s registered as a Republican in Maine, and a Democrat in Vermont. In Fort Myers on Saturday, he said, “We’re heading into World War III. Sometimes the safest place to be is out in the woods.”



Jones

**Brandon Jones** HAS NEVER BEFORE BEEN an activist but felt Occupy needed his support.

“I have a great job; I’m in school (studying environmental science),” said the 26-year-old Golden Gate City resident. “I’m here more for the people that it is affecting; compassion for my fellow human beings. I’d hope people would do the same for me if I were in that situation. It feels good to play a part in that; it’s an exciting time.”

Mr. Jones says he’s not sure whom he’ll vote for in the presidential election. “I’m just torn. I have a year. Definitely not Republican, that’s a guarantee. But the Democrats are not that much different.”



Ebert

“REVOKE CORPORATE PERSONHOOD” READ the sea-green lettered piece of cardboard held by **Dave Ebert**.

He participated in anti-war protests in the late 1960s in Chicago. Now 61, he lives in Cape Coral five months out of the year.

He heard about Occupy as a member of a philosophy club at Edison State College.

Mr. Ebert was raised as a Quaker and is anti-war, but also describes himself as “staunchly middle class, a snowbird, and employed full time. I’m by no means a

wide-eyed radical.”

He was there in support of one of Occupy’s main tenets: to stop corporations’ undue influence on politicians.

“They even co-opted the Supreme Court to allow corporate personhood,” he said. “It’s an insidious undermining of democracy.”

He also offers a critique of Occupy: “The movement right now is too diffused — too many different opinions.”



Dwyer

**Karen Dwyer** IS A LONG-TIME SOCIAL and economic justice advocate, and a former college English professor. She believes the movement, in only a few months, has accomplished much. “Every little bit helps,” she said. “It makes a difference in your own consciousness even if we don’t see immediate political change. Even if it doesn’t immediately change the political system, it changes us. This is about winning hearts and minds.”

She adds, “It’s only been six weeks, eight weeks. It took the civil rights movement years and years. I feel like Martin Luther King would side with us and stand with us... It’s sort of a civil rights movement for economic justice.

“I think this movement has only just begun. To say they haven’t done anything yet — it hasn’t even been a year!”



Coughlan

PHILOSOPHY AND ETHICS PROFESSOR **Bill Coughlan** picked what one of his favorite philosophers might say about the movement. “I guess I’ll go with Aristotle, who said we ought to focus on our function as a human being, which is as a rational animal, so we need to reason and to think,” he said. “I think we need to just pursue the truth and go back to basic fundamental issues about goodness and justice. The truth about ourselves, the truth about what it is to live with other human beings. It’s not me, me, me. We’re part of a society. Now what we need to do is not have 5,000 friends on Facebook — Facebook has a purpose — but let’s get to the deepness of who we are, what it means to be a friend or family member, what it means to be a neighbor.”



Fuller with daughter

**Christine Fuller**, 24, AND HER DAUGHTER Chloe Fuller-Smith, 1, helped make posters and walked over the bridge on Saturday. When she read about the Occupy

movements’ many demands online, “More than half of the stuff resonated with me,” such as outsourcing jobs to foreign countries, she said. “Basically we’re condoning slavery in another country.”

Her father is also on Social Security. “Every time I hear about cutting Social Security — where do they think that’s right? My father worked his entire life putting money into that program.”

She hasn’t taken advantage of government funded Medicaid or WIC even though she qualifies.

“We try to make everything work without being dependant on the government,” she says. “I’d love to go back to work. I’m a graphic designer by trade and would like to start my own business.”

But with day-care and other costs, that would be too expensive for her now.



Palacios

**Rodrigo Palacios**, 22, HAS LONG BEEN A supporter of the Coalition of Immokalee Workers. On Saturday, he carried an Imperial Wars sign in “Star Wars” lettering, listing military conflicts the United States is involved in.

He’s worried about equality in government, including corporate influence on politics, is “freaked out” by what Republican presidential candidates are saying and feels disillusioned by President Obama. And he sees the huge scope and breadth of the 99 percent as a good thing.

“It’s very fragmented, not one leadership, which I think makes it even more powerful,” he said. “Everyone has their own motive for being in the group. That’s what makes Occupy so nice — a rainbow of different ideas.”



Gacuca

**Karanja Gacuca**, 38, LIVES IN BROOKLYN and used to be an analyst for Wall Street banks until he was laid off in September. Financially well-off, he spends his time now helping the Occupy movement in New York, many times as a spokesperson.

Last week he answered the media phone number listed on the Occupy Wall Street page and talked openly about how he’s involved.

“We don’t have spokespeople per se,” he said. “We don’t say we have a spokesman or spokeswoman. We don’t have anyone that has an office and a desk in the occupation. We have office space that we share. People book the space for whatever it is they need at a given time. Most of us are generally either in working group meetings most of the day or are taking part in action that we are organizing. Like myself right now, I’m sitting at home, but I’ve been central to the foreclosure actions on Dec. 6. I’ve been doing most of the media and PR for that action. So I’m sitting at home responding to general inquiries right now.”

Although his previous job makes him

well-off financially, that doesn’t exclude him from Occupy, he says. “It was a well-paid position. But that’s not really the point. People whose incomes are in the so-called upper 1 percent income bracket are supportive of Occupy, so it’s no so much about individual income but rather people who desire for economic equality and justice for all.”



Flynt

**Alex Flynt**, 68, IS A RETIRED TEACHER and fireman who has followed the Occupy movement in Fort Myers and elsewhere, and he looks like Ernest Hemingway. Financially well off, he was there for people who aren’t as fortunate. “I’m not sure what kind of future we’ll have for our kids,” he said.

“The thing they can learn (from earlier protest movements), especially the young people, is they have to prepare themselves to take over some of the positions they’re criticizing... I don’t know if the younger people in this movement have a vision,” for themselves personally, as well as the movement in general. “Many are just trying to cope with life.”



Hemrick

**Ellen Hemrick** IS A SINGLE MOTHER WHO lives in Naples. She works as a speech language pathologist, but is stifled from running her own business, like she used to do, because health care costs for herself and her 2-year-old son.

“The government’s not protecting people from the health insurance industry, which I think is fleecing us,” said Ms. Hemrick, 42. “They don’t protect children — children with disabilities that I work with (as a speech language pathologist), children like my own who are on child support. I was very hopeful when President Obama was elected. I kind of naively thought he might be able to do something about this. But I’ve come to the conclusion that the Democratic Party has been held hostage by corruption.”

“I’m not against capitalism per se — I used to own a business — but there are certain things capitalism isn’t good at. It’s not good at justice. It’s not good at health and education. You really don’t want the people in charge of your health trying to figure out how much money they can make off you being sick — it just doesn’t make sense. And with education, the same thing. We want to educate our children, not run them through some mill and meet productivity standards.

“I think (Occupy) is going to be a long-term movement because it has to be. It’s not going to achieve any of its goals in a short period of time. Getting the money out of politics and corruption out of government and returning the country to real democracy is an extremely long and difficult process.”■