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# Naples Daily News

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## Collier tosses ride-sharing rules

By Greg Stanley  
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Collier County commissioners threw out their taxi, limousine and vehicle-for-hire regulations Tuesday, a move that helps Uber and others in the fast-growing ride-sharing business.

The decision will deregulate the industry once the county's ordinance is officially taken off the books in the coming weeks. Taxi companies will no longer have to buy commercial insurance and their drivers won't have to pass criminal background checks. Collier County will no longer issue licenses to taxi or limo companies.

Essentially, anyone with a driver's license will be able to operate a car-for-hire in Collier County.

The move to deregulate comes as county governments across the state decide how to deal with ride-sharing companies like Uber, which through the convenience of smartphones offer taxi services while often skirting local proof-of-insurance, vehicle inspection, criminal background and licensing requirements. Lee County has taken the polar opposite approach, and is cracking down on Uber and its drivers.

Collier becomes the second county in Florida to entirely stop regulating taxi services, behind Sarasota, which deregulated the industry in September.

See RULES, 4A

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Read social media updates from the meeting.



86°/74°  
Possible storms

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A black and yellow garden spider spins a web along the boardwalk.

## THE FOREST AND THE TREES



LANCE SHEARER/SPECIAL TO THE DAILY NEWS (2)

Naturalist Rich Kuntz points out one of Corkscrew's cypress trees. In a harbinger of the approaching season, the Ancient Forest Tours have returned to Audubon's Corkscrew Swamp Sanctuary, and will be held nine more times up to April 6.

### ■ Corkscrew Sanctuary offers ancient forest tours

By Lance Shearer  
Daily News correspondent; 239-435-3417

naplesnews.com

See more photos of Corkscrew Swamp Sanctuary.

The trees at Audubon's Corkscrew Swamp Sanctuary, the most impressive and majestic ones, are the ancient bald cypress which tower above the boardwalk and create the tallest spires of the forest canopy.

Representing the largest stand of virgin cypress trees in the world, many of these gray-

beards were already old when Ponce de Leon splashed ashore in Florida. They have survived floods, droughts, hurricanes, fires, lightning strikes and even humans — so far.

See FOREST, 4A

## Vatican City Immokalee nun one of 3 in Catholic Synod

By Maria Perez  
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Most days, Sister Maureen Kelleher of Immokalee spends her time working as a Legal Aid immigration lawyer for farmworkers and other low income residents of Collier County.

But for three weeks this month, Kelleher, 77, was one of the three nuns participating in the Catholic Synod on the Family, a summit celebrated in Vatican City where cardinals, bishops and other members of the Catholic Church from around the world discussed the vocation and mission of the family, including the approach that the Church should take regarding divorced and remarried Catholics, cohabitating couples and gay members.

Kelleher, of the Sacred Heart of Mary, said she doesn't know exactly why she was chosen to participate to be an auditor at the synod.

"I was shocked," she said of the moment when she learned she had been chosen.

Kelleher couldn't vote on the final document — only the 275 "Synod Fathers" could. But she participated in discussions of the document approved at the end of the divisive synod.

Kelleher said she is satisfied with the final document approved by the synod. The document, adopted Saturday, called for a more welcoming church for co-habiting couples and Catholics who have divorced and civilly remarried, endorsing Pope Francis' call for a more merciful and less judgmental church.

The synod exposed the split in the church between conservatives and progressives over how to better minister to Catholic families.

While there were wins for the progressive camp, like the opening of the

See SYNOD, 4A

“If there were more women involved, I think we could be more welcoming.”

Sister Maureen Kelleher

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## SYNOD

from 1A

door to case-by-case exceptions to minister the Communion to civilly remarried Catholics, Pope Francis took some swipes in a final speech at the conservatives who hold up church doctrine above all else, saying the church's primary duty isn't to condemn or judge but to proclaim God's mercy and save souls.

"He wants the Church, and the local churches to be very pastoral, not judgmental," Kelleher said.

She said she favors a church where people can come home and feel welcome.

She especially appreciates a sentence about women in the document that says a greater appreciation of their responsibilities within the Church can contribute to the social recognition on the role of women, including their involvement in decision-making and in the formation of ordained ministers.

Kelleher said her goal at the synod was to push for the Church to include women in the decision-making process.

"If there were more women involved, I think we could be more welcoming," she said.

She said some of the biggest programs and organizations in the Catholic Church, like Catholic



DAILY NEWS FILE

Sister Maureen Kelleher is a nun and an immigration attorney who helps immigrants obtain legal status. Recently she was one of three nuns to participate in the Catholic Church synod in Vatican City.

Charities, Catholic Relief Services and Catholic Health Association, are led by women. But while wom-

en have responsibilities in social work services, they are excluded from church doctrine issues.

She said she hopes this is the last synod in which only celibate men — cardinals, bishops and some superiors general — can vote and make decisions on issues that affect families. She thinks the church should open the process to families and women. To make decisions about families, she said, families should be much more involved.

"There were just a few families present," she said. "They couldn't vote."

She herself had couldn't vote either while another religious lay person, could vote. The only difference,

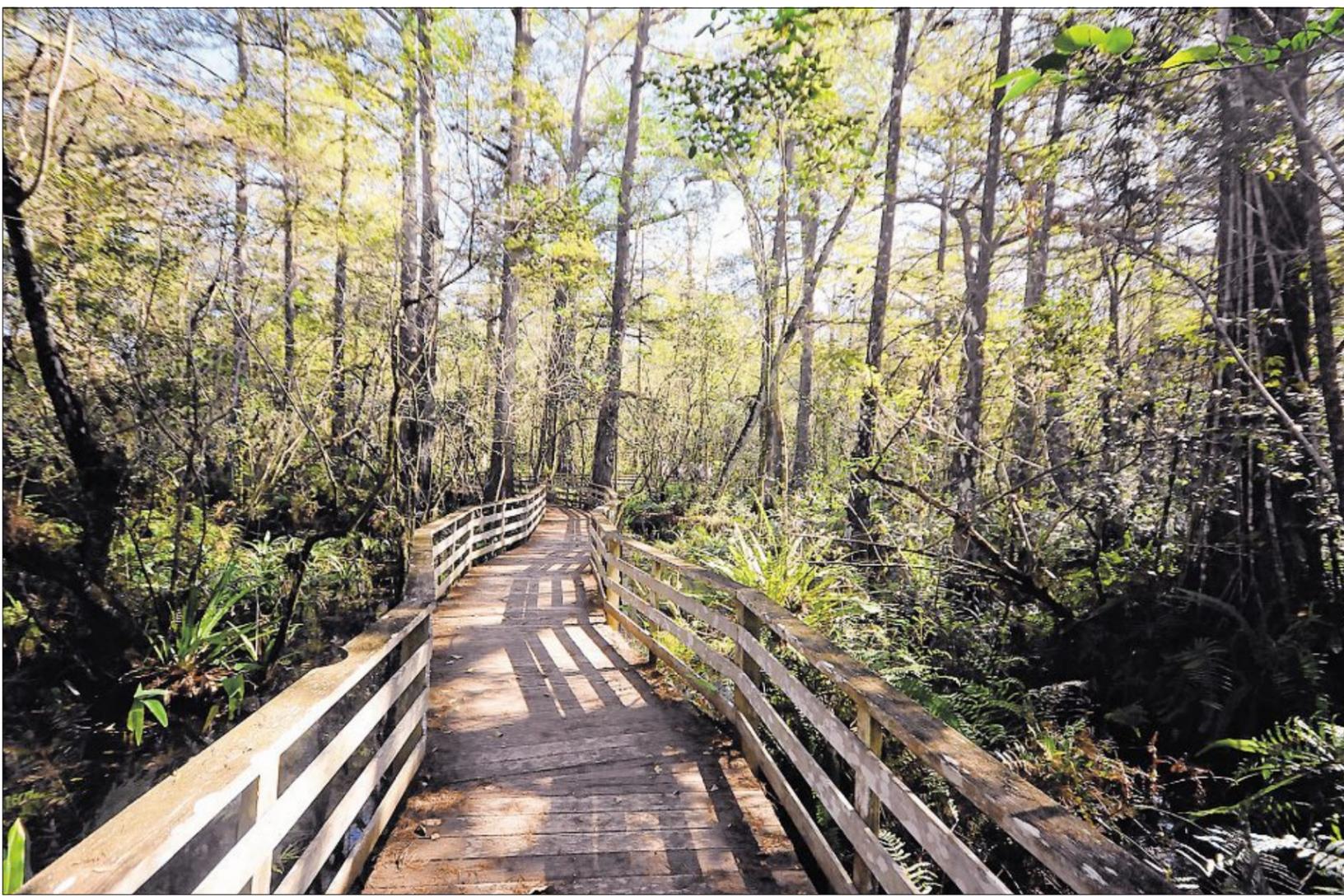
she said, is that he was a man and she was a woman.

None of the handful of women invited to the synod were allowed to vote.

Brother Herve Janson of the Little Brothers of Jesus told reporters he considered refusing to accept the invitation to participate, given that his status in the church is the same as a sister who heads a religious order of nuns.

"I was very upset, because while before the distinction (between voting and nonvoting members) was between the clergy and laity, now it has become between man and woman," he said.

Associated Press contributed to this report.



LANCE SHEARER/SPECIAL TO THE DAILY NEWS

The Corkscrew Swamp Sanctuary boardwalk takes you through the largest old-growth cypress forest in the world.

## FOREST

from 1A

With the return of cooler weather, Corkscrew has once again started up the Ancient Forest Tours, giving the chance for a small group — no more than 10 — to walk the preserve's signature, 2.25-mile boardwalk in the company of a naturalist, to learn the facts and absorb the wonder. At Corkscrew Swamp, they want you to see the forest — and the trees. Unlike the old saying about not seeing the forest for the trees, gazing at one helps you understand the other, and both are worthy of contemplation.

For the first Ancient Forest Tour of the season on the morning of Oct. 21, seven visitors joined volunteer guide Rich Kuntz, an Advanced Florida Master Naturalist, and headed out into the swamp. With the boardwalk underfoot, there was no concern for getting one's feet wet — or for having too close of an encounter with the 14 foot alligator

along the path.

Even before reaching the old growth cypress trees, a host of natural phenomena arrested the eye — Boston, strap, and rabbit's foot ferns, impressively large spiders tending their webs, and a profusion of wildflowers including narrow leaf sunflowers and bright purple pickerel weed. Once inside the cypress "cathedral," voices became more hushed, and the giant forest cypress rose overhead, many twined around with massive bands of strangler fig. Volunteers had been out early, clamping spotting scopes to the boardwalk's wooden railing, which gave visitors a close up view of an otherwise overlooked ghost orchid, another of Corkscrew's iconic inhabitants, growing high in a cypress tree.

Corkscrew managers have designated 12 of the massive trees as "Landmark Cypress," naming them after notable naturalists including John Muir, Aldo Leopold, Theodore Roosevelt and Harriet Hemenway, who pioneered the protection of wild birds,

## IF YOU GO

### ANCIENT FOREST TOURS

**When:** Gather a little before 9 a.m. at admissions desk inside the Blair Audubon Center. About 2½ hours.

**Dates:** Tours are scheduled for Nov. 9 and 18; Dec. 9 and 14; Jan. 6 and 19; Feb. 10; March 16 and April 6.

### CORKSCREW SWAMP SANCTUARY

**When:** Boardwalk is open daily from 7 a.m.-5:30 p.m.

**Where:** 375 Sanctuary Road West

**Cost:** Adult, \$12; full-time college student with photo ID, \$6; National Audubon Society member with current membership card, \$6; student (6-18 years old), \$4; children under 6, free; Friends of Corkscrew members: free with current membership card. Admission is valid for two consecutive days.

**Info:** 239-348-9151.

along with the Calusas and the early wardens who protected the birds, sometimes at the cost of their lives. Each Landmark Cypress has a sign telling more about the trees and their namesakes.

Some of the cypress are called pond cypress, and some baldcypress. There is some confusion whether they are actually two different species, or the pond cypress are merely bald cypress which haven't yet reached the size and age of the baldcypress. Each of the

cypress types is related to California's redwoods, and along with them, are the only conifers which lose their needles or leaves during the winter — hence the name "baldcypress."

The boardwalk also traverses pine flatwoods, wet prairie, and skirts Lettuce Lakes, in which a plant called alligator flag, with long green leaves, grows in the water. The early settlers could see where an alligator was lurking, said Kuntz, by the movement of the leaves.

No flags were necessary to see "Corky," the 14 foot specimen, who was sunning himself a little way off the boardwalk, although the naturalists had helpfully placed a scope allowing visitors to see close enough to conduct a dental exam. As the group watched the massive saurian, and a maybe eight-foot female who was floating mostly submerged in the lake, one more gator appeared, and laid his head right down on Corky's long tail. Seeing a red shouldered hawk swoop down on a fish for breakfast was almost anti-climactic.

If you have never been to Corkscrew Swamp, the Ancient Forest Tour will give you a very useful grounding in the area's natural surroundings. Even if you've visited the boardwalk many times, touring in the company of a knowledgeable naturalist is bound to teach you something new.

Taking the tour doesn't cost anything beyond the normal Corkscrew admission, but the excursions go out only once or twice a month, with a limit of 10 guests.

## RULES

from 1A

After an hourlong debate in crowded government chambers, Collier commissioners voted, 4-1, with Penny Taylor dissenting, to no longer regulate any for-hire drivers.

The county doesn't have the manpower or capability to enforce local rules on Uber drivers, said Commissioner Tim Nance.

The free market will need to sort out how important criminal checks

and commercial insurance are to people who need a ride, Nance said.

"That's pretty much what's happening right now anyway," Nance said. "It's not within our ability to regulate everyone. We can't reach out and regulate people on the Internet. Therefore, I don't believe we should regulate anyone. We have to be fair and allow local transportation companies to compete."

Cab and limo drivers called the decision "absurd."

Cabdriver Peter Fran-

cois, who has had to pass a background check every year since 2005, said he can't believe the public safety regulations put in place over decades could be so easily tossed out.

"If this insurance and these checks aren't necessary now, then why were they necessary over the last 30 years?" Francois said. "Why have we been paying every year? What was that for? Is public safety not important anymore?"

Francois said the move could expose cabdrivers to

major liability during an accident if their companies stop paying for commercial insurance.

"You think your insurance company will pay for you when they find out that you were being paid to drive?" Francois said. "This is going to expose drivers and it's going to expose the public."

The move puts the public at risk, said Randy Smith, owner of Naples Transportation and Tours.

"It's like the county allowing an illegal contractor to work on your house

because he's cheaper," Smith said. "Like a restaurant offering cheaper food because they don't need health inspections. Is that better?"

There are 600 licensed cab and limo drivers and 170 licensed companies in Collier County.

Uber drivers collectively have been ticketed more than \$100,000 by Collier code enforcers for violating taxi rules since the company started operating here this year, according to the county's code enforcement department.

But the county has not yet received a single complaint against Uber or one of its drivers by a member of the public, said County Attorney Jeff Klatzkow.

Ride-sharing apps such as Uber are the way of the times, said Commissioner Tom Henning.

"You just can't regulate the Internet," Henning said. "A good example is Netflix. Netflix came in and Blockbuster went out. The only thing to do is rescind the vehicle-for-hire ordinance and make it fair for everybody."