

Shell Factory & Nature Park announces plans to permanently close, sell property

Long-time owner celebrates legacy, invites community to share treasured memories

After 86 years of serving the community as a family-friendly, entertainment destination, the Shell Factory & Nature Park is announcing its plans to close. The park's final days of operation will be the weekends of Sept. 20-22 and Sept. 27-29 from 11 a.m. to 4 p.m., after which all operations will close to the public. During this time, the park's onsite restaurants, the Southern Grill and Tommy's Outdoor Café, will serve a limited menu while supplies last.

Established in North Fort Myers in 1938, the 18-acre, old-Florida roadside attraction has entertained multiple generations with amusement-style rides, arcade games, miniature golf, 50,000 square feet of gift shops, a 4.5-acre nature park with over 400 animals, birds, reptiles and fish, and much more. Despite efforts to find a buyer to take over the park's expansive operations, long-time owner Pam Cronin, who has worked tirelessly to preserve the property and its proud traditions for the past 27 years, has made the difficult decision to close the Shell Factory and sell the property.

"This has been an incredibly hard decision for me, and one that was not made lightly, as the Shell Factory has been such a big part of the community and my life for many decades," said Cronin. "We are so proud of the countless joyous experiences that the Shell Factory has provided for residents and visitors of our community, as children and families have laughed aboard the bumper boats, tried a round of mini-golf, flew on the zipline, learned about our loveable animals, enjoyed delicious food and sweet treats, discovered many unique treasures from our store and so much more."

In 1997, Cronin and her late husband, Tom, took the helm of the property when it was under foreclosure and lovingly transformed it from a roadside tourist spot to a sought-out destination for locals, seasonal residents and tourists. Over the years, the couple made extensive investments and upgrades to the property, created the Nature Park, an animal rescue, and founded The Nature Park Environmental Education Foundation, a 501(c)3 nonprofit organization. The property has two restaurants, the Southern Grill and Tommy's Outdoor Café. Adjacent to the restaurant is The Carousel Cabaret (an outlet for community involvement in the arts), a small venue, host to weddings, events and receptions of all kinds. The park has also supported many local nonprofits by serving as the host venue for countless fundraisers and events that rallied the community together in support of important community, animal and wildlife missions.

Throughout the years, the couple worked to overcome hardships including hurricanes, the recession, financial challenges and fires. After her husband's passing, Cronin continued to own and operate the Shell Factory, leading the organization through the impacts of the pandemic and multiple hurricanes. However, with any property that is over 86 years old and of this magnitude, ongoing maintenance and necessary repairs are costly. While Cronin has made significant investments to sustain the Shell Factory's continued operations, the sad reality is that the park is no longer viable in its current form.

"This is an unfortunate, yet natural evolution that we have seen countless old Florida roadside attractions like ours face. Many other classic tourist destinations that were once booming have come and gone over the years," Cronin said. "Having witnessed these changes within our industry, I feel proud that the Shell Factory has achieved such a long-lasting, 86-year history that has touched the lives of so many, and I'm grateful for the incredible journey and enduring legacy we leave behind."

Cronin is dedicated to supporting the employees during this transition and ensuring they have access to the resources and assistance they need, as well as working collaboratively with wildlife officials to safely re-home the park's 400-plus animals.

Recognizing the connection between the Shell Factory and the greater community, Cronin wishes to leave a legacy of happy memories shared at the Shell Factory on

[Facebook.com/ShellFactoryNaturePark](https://www.facebook.com/ShellFactoryNaturePark) using the hashtag #MyShellFactoryMemories.

"On behalf of our entire team at the Shell Factory, we are deeply grateful for the unwavering support and cherished memories created by our visitors, employees and community members throughout the years, including many who have cherished their own childhood memories at the Shell Factory and gone on to create new memories with their children and grandchildren in these same beloved spaces," said Cronin. "While we bid farewell to this chapter, the Shell Factory team remains committed to preserving the rich legacy of our landmark and exploring ways to honor its history and impact on the community."

About Shell Factory & Nature Park

For 86 years, the Shell Factory & Nature Park has been entertaining children and the young at heart, with something for everyone. The sought-out attraction provides a full day of fun, including amusement-style rides, arcade games, 50,000 square feet of gift shops and much more. The Nature Park offers over 400 critters, birds, reptiles and fish, with a variety of critters from an armadillo to a zebra. Visit [ShellFactory.com](https://www.ShellFactory.com).

Frequently Asked Questions

When will the Shell Factory close to the public?

The park's final days of operation will be the weekends of Sept. 20-22 and Sept. 27-29 from 11 a.m. to 4 p.m., after which all operations will close to the public.

Can I still visit the restaurants?

During remaining park hours, the Shell Factory's onsite restaurants, the Southern Grill and Tommy's Outdoor Café, will serve a limited menu. The restaurants will remain open only while supplies last. Please check our website for latest updates.

What is happening with the animals in your Nature Park?

The Shell Factory is committed to working collaboratively with wildlife officials, including the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission, to safely transport and re-home the park's 400-plus animals.

How are you supporting staff in this transition?

The Shell Factory is dedicated to supporting employees during this transition and is partnering with CareerSource and appropriate HR-related consultants to ensure employees have access to the resources and assistance they need.

What if I have an upcoming event or field trip scheduled?

Our staff is in the process of notifying organizers of all upcoming events and activities. If you have questions regarding your scheduled event, please contact us.

What will you do with remaining inventory and equipment?

Further details will be announced in the coming days on next steps. Please check our website for latest updates.

Media Requests

If you are a member of the news media and need support with a story, please reach out to the following media contacts:

- Holly Boldrin, APR, CPRC, Priority Marketing, 239-267-2638, 239-887-9335 (cell) or Holly@PriorityMarketing.com
- Emily Golden, APR, Priority Marketing, 239-267-2638, 239-565-1595 (cell) or Emily@PriorityMarketing.com