



## Asprinio quietly remaking north county dining scene

ACCENT, 1D



# The Palm Beach Post

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## Florida botched COVID stats

### Thousands of cases, deaths missed in the early months of the pandemic

**Chris Persaud**  
Palm Beach Post | USA TODAY NETWORK

Florida health officials missed thousands of COVID-19 deaths in 2020, had incomplete information for millions of tests and spent millions of taxpayer dol-

lars on testing that lacked vital data, a state report released Monday has found.

From September 2020 through November 2021, the Florida Auditor General's office examined nearly 11.3 million laboratory test results and nearly

730,000 coronavirus cases documented statewide in 2020 from March through October.

The investigation found 3,082 COVID deaths the state Health Department did not include in its official counts. Those victims would have pushed the state's reported death toll up 18% higher than it was Oct. 31, 2020.

A majority of the 5.5 million-plus COVID test results — 51.5% — lacked information about the race of those tested.

About 59% lacked ethnicity information. Hispanic people are Florida's biggest ethnicity.

By mid-May 2020, 25% of Hispanics and 20% of Black people tested positive for the virus, compared with about 11% of whites, The Palm Beach Post found in examining nearly 200,000 test results the Health Department had not made public in which individuals reported

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## Fla. areas in top 10 for rent increases

Renters are 'downsizing and downgrading'

**Kimberly Miller**  
Palm Beach Post | USA TODAY NETWORK

Crushing rent increases put eight Florida regions, including Palm Beach County, into the top 10 nationwide for priciest hikes since last year, leaving Sunshine State residents and businesses in a housing bind with no quick fix.

An April review by Florida Atlantic University of 107 major real estate markets lists Fort Myers as having the top rental cost surge at 32.4% compared with the same time in 2021. Southeast Florida — Palm Beach, Broward and Miami-Dade counties — was a close runner up with a 31.7% increase.

It means the average rent in Fort Myers in April was \$2,073, according to the study. The average rent in southeast Florida hit \$2,846.

The study, which was released Monday and includes work from Florida Gulf Coast University and the University of Alabama, researched prices for homes and apartments, and included all sizes of rentals.

Following Fort Myers and southeast Florida, other state markets in the top 10 included Sarasota-Bradenton with a 30.9% increase, Tampa (27%), Port St. Lucie (25.5%), Lakeland (24%), Orlando (23.7%) and Melbourne (22.5%).

Only Sierra Vista, Ariz. and Knoxville, Tenn., broke up Florida's stronghold in the top 10 for the highest rent hikes last month.

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Over the past several months, the House Select Committee investigating the Jan. 6, 2021, insurrection at the U.S. Capitol has issued more than 100 subpoenas, done more than 1,000 interviews and probed more than 100,000 documents to get to the bottom of the attack that day by supporters of former President Donald Trump. JOHN MINCHILLO/AP FILE

## Will America watch?



Dust and a gas mask lie on the ground on Jan. 7, 2021, after violent insurrectionists stormed the U.S. Capitol in Washington, D.C.

ANDREW HARNIK/AP FILE

### Jan. 6 attack to be analyzed

**Calvin Woodward** ASSOCIATED PRESS

WASHINGTON — In a time of agonizing over other things, the Jan. 6, 2021, attack on the U.S. Capitol — and democracy itself — returns in sharp focus as a special House committee opens hearings this week on the insurrection and Donald Trump's part in it. Will Americans care?

The committee's aggressive investigation is producing a spool of plot lines that together will tell the tale of a violent uprising fueled by the venom and lies of a defeated president.

See JAN. 6 ATTACK, Page 2A

### Inside

• Filmmaker to be among first witnesses; House panel will begin sharing findings on Thursday. 3A

## After shootings, DeSantis signs school safety bill

**John Kennedy and Jason Delgado**  
Capital Bureau | USA TODAY NETWORK — FLORIDA

TALLAHASSEE — After saying little about the spate of mass shootings gripping the nation, Gov. Ron DeSantis signed into law Tuesday a measure

man Douglas High School.

The legislation was approved in March. But DeSantis, who is guiding when lawmakers send him bills, waited to receive the legislation until the day after the shooting at a Uvalde, Texas, elementary school where 19 students and

### Inside

- NY governor signs law raising age to own semiautomatic rifle. 2A
- Senate holds hearings on recent gun violence. 6A

pointed by DeSantis, to develop rules for school emergency drills, removing authority from school districts. It heightens response training and crisis intervention for school safety officers and authorizes these officers to make arrests on charter school grounds.

# ACCENT

## + FOOD & DINING



Stephen Asprinio opened AquaGrille in Juno Beach in March. It's been a hit since. MEGHAN MCCARTHY/THE PALM BEACH POST

# THE RESTAURANT WHISPERER

Stephen Asprinio made noise as the original 'Top Chef' villain, but now he's quietly remaking the north county dining scene

Liz Balmaseda Palm Beach Post | USA TODAY NETWORK

Once upon a time on reality TV, Stephen Asprinio was everyone's favorite "Top Chef" villain. TV critics called him "infuriating" and "fun to hate" and "the pretentious Vegas sommelier with the SoHo hairdo." • That was during Season 1 of the Bravo TV series in 2006, when the then 24-year-old Caesar's Palace sommelier made it all the way to Episode 8 before packing his knives as third runner-up. • The Wellington-raised Asprinio may have earned his TV fame during those days, but he's building another kind of reality today — one that's redefining the dining landscape in north county. • This is evident in the modern-coastal lines of AquaGrille, the upscale Juno Beach restaurant Asprinio, now 40, opened in March to a swell of local buzz. With a dinner menu of elevated classics and cocktails that riff on the '90s, the restaurant is big on the dining-experience factor. **See ASPRINIO, Page 2D**

## This thai chicken stir-fry piles on basil by the fistful

Christopher Kimball  
Christopher Kimball's Milk Street  
ASSOCIATED PRESS

Western cooks too often go too light on fresh herbs, treating them more as garnish than flavoring. We prefer the Thai approach, which uses ingredients such as basil, mint and cilantro by the fistful.

Take Thailand's chicken-and-basil stir-fry — gai pad krapow — which piles on basil, adding sweetness balanced by just a touch of herbal bitterness. We loved the simplicity of this popular street food, which sometimes is served with an egg on top.

In our version in the book "Milk Street Tuesday Nights," which limits recipes to 45 minutes or less, we double down on the basil, using at two different times for two different flavors. Since this recipe calls for a skillet rather than a wok, the cooking is broken into two steps. The chicken comes first, with vegetables added later to keep them crisp.

Chopped basil leaves are added to the freshly cooked chicken, which mellow the herb's flavor as the



Thailand's chicken-and-basil stir-fry piles on basil, adding sweetness balanced by just a touch of herbal bitterness.

MILK STREET VIA AP

**See STIR-FRY, Page 4D**

### THE POST CONTINUES STORYTELLERS PROJECT

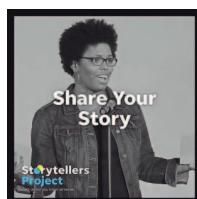
The Palm Beach Post will host its second live Storytelling night at 7 p.m. Sept. 14 at Lake Park's Black Box Theatre.

The show's theme will be "Food & Family" — and Liz Balmaseda, The Post's award-winning food and dining writer, will be one of the tellers.

Do you have a story to tell about how food has shaped your life or brought together generations of your family?

Send us your idea by July 5 by going online to: [forms.gle/f2Gtsibsvxd7iQdu8](https://forms.gle/f2Gtsibsvxd7iQdu8).

If you're selected as a teller, you'll be paired with a coach from The Palm Beach Post to prepare your story for the stage. You'll tell it live on Sept. 14 on stage, with no notes or props, to an audience of friends, family, and members of our Palm Beach County community.



Share Your Story

## Asprinio

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Asprinio says his mission is to "execute the extraordinary." That means jazzy up appetitinis, tuna ceviche tostadas served with shots of kicky leche de pantera, grilled salmon with a guava-soy glaze, slow-roasted prime rib French dip topped with melted Gruyère and horseradish-Granny Smith crème and key lime baked Alaska.

It also means luxe touches such as hot towels and tableside sauce service.

### Past successes for Asprinio

Bringing the stylish restaurant to life in the space of a former pretzels-and-beer franchise pub called The Malted Barley is the latest episode in a series of fine-dining projects for Asprinio.

He was a creative, culinary force behind Jupiter's 1000 North, the Inlet-area restaurant he partly owned by NBA legend Michael Jordan.

"Stephen was an important member of the team that helped create the original food and beverage offerings for 1000 North," says Fenton, managing partner of 1000 North.

Later, Asprinio brought his vision to another Inlet waterfront development, the Charlie and Joe's at Love Street dining complex, which is co-owned by football icon Joe Namath. There, Asprinio helped shape the complex's three unique restaurants and onsite retail shop.

"He collaborated with our chefs and mixologists to make sure all of our menu offerings are superior and that our guests have an exceptional dining experience at each of our four venues," says Mark Lessing, executive vice president of Lessing's Hospitality Group, which manages the Love Street complex.

Asprinio left his most visible creative mark on one of the walls at the complex's fine-dining restaurant, notes Lessing.

"His creativity is celebrated on the chalk wall he designed at Beacon," Lessing says of the large, black-and-white chalk mural Asprinio designed. It reads like a mad-genius chef's scribble pad.

### 'Record-breaking feat'

At AquaGrille, Asprinio has gone well beyond a consultant's role. Not only did he dream up the concept, design the space and hire the culinary talent — led by the creative, up-and-coming executive chef Peter Bartalini — Asprinio's



Server Alex Woodward talks to patrons at the new AquaGrille restaurant in Juno Beach on June 2.

PHOTOS BY MEGHAN MCCARTHY/THE PALM BEACH POST

## AquaGrille

**Located** at 14121 U.S. Highway 1, Juno Beach; 561-355-0438; [AquaGrilleJuno.com](http://AquaGrilleJuno.com)

**Hours:** 4 to 9 p.m., Sunday through Thursday; 4 to 10 p.m., Friday and Saturday

**Social hour:** Happy Hour is offered at the bar and lounge area from 4 to 6 p.m. Monday through Friday.

S.A. Hospitality Ventures owns and operates the place.

The restaurant has been jamming since opening night.

"I never expected such a huge splash. People are pouring in from all over," says Asprinio, who lives in Jupiter. "They think they're coming to a casual, little local restaurant. But when you walk in, it transports you. Like, boom, 'What is this?' You'd never expect this restaurant to be here."

Indeed, AquaGrille has added significant curb appeal to a formerly nondescript building.

**See ASPRINIO, Page 3D**



Peter Bartalini is the executive chef at the new AquaGrille restaurant in Juno Beach.

## GREEN MARKETS

**Artisan Markets:** 4 to 9 p.m. Friday, Mizner Park, 327 Plaza Real, Boca Raton. Unique artisan and handcrafted items with offerings from artisans, crafters, bakers and more.



**8th Annual Delray Beach Summer Greenmarket:** 9 a.m. to 1 p.m. Saturdays through July 30, Old School Square, 51 N. Swinton Ave., Delray Beach. Featuring fresh produce, baked goods, seafood, hot sauce, pickled products and more.

**Swank Farm Farmers' Market:** 10 a.m. to 1 p.m. Saturday, 1431 North Road, Loxahatchee Groves. Avoid crowds and parking hassles with a trip to the countryside. Shop in an open-air 8,500-square-foot pole barn for produce from Swank Farm, as well as items from 25 other bakers, growers, gardeners and artisans. Come for a cup of coffee, Danish, breakfast sandwich, listen to live music, and stock up for the week. This market is scheduled to run through June.

**The Gardens Greenmarket:** 8 a.m. to 1 p.m. Sunday, 10500 N. Military Trail, Palm Beach Gardens. Featuring 120 vendors offering fresh produce, dairy, honey, pastries, prepared foods, flowers, cheeses, spices, handmade crafts and more. Seating is available for shoppers to grab a bite, relax, and enjoy live entertainment. Hand sanitizer stations throughout the market. Open year-round, rain or shine; no pets.

**TikiMarket at the Marina:** 10 a.m. to 3 p.m.-ish Sunday, Marina Village, 190 East 13th St., Riviera Beach. Live music, farm-fresh fruits and veggies and exotic plants. Featuring vegan dishes, fresh-squeezed juices and fresh coconut milk along with breakfast treats, conch fritters, jerk chicken and barbecue, to go. Jewelry, woven hats, totes, and more. Ample free parking. Runs through June 19.

**Waterfront Market at Harbourside Place:** 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. Sunday, Harbourside Place, 200 N. U.S. 1, Jupiter. Local artisans and handmade goods. Open year-round.

**Mizner Park Green Market:** 10 a.m. to 5 p.m. Sunday, Mizner Park, 327 Plaza Real, Boca Raton. Held at the south end of the center, the market features a produce center and locally sourced

vendors offering as foods, jams, jellies, breads, honeys and more.

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## Asprinio

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script corner of U.S. 1 in Juno Beach. It may not be perched on a waterway, as are 1000 North and the Love Street restaurants, but Asprinio believes its highway location works in AquaGrille's favor in terms of visibility.

"It is in fact an amazing location," he says.

Asprinio speaks in quick-fire sentences when he talks about AquaGrille. Maybe that's because he barely has had time to catch his breath. The project came together in a flash, he says.

"It fell into our lap in the fall; and four months later we opened this stunning restaurant," says Asprinio, who signed the lease for the AquaGrille space on Oct. 15. "Giving birth to this project was that much more special to me personally because of what we accomplished in so little time. A record-breaking feat for me personally."

By comparison, 1000 North and Love Street took multiple years to complete, he notes.

### 'A savvy market'

Connect the dots that lead from the Jupiter Lighthouse waters to Juno Beach and you've got a new, well-refined layer to the area's more traditional restaurant scene.

"I'm looking to transform this market," says Asprinio, who was drawn to north county's local flavor. "There's this hometown sense here, a feeling of authenticity."

He recalls a visit some years ago to Food Shack, chef Mike Moir's iconic seafood-focused restaurant that brought creative, fresh-catch cooking to an area dominated by fried fillets and frozen veggies 20 years ago.

"That sweet potato-crusted fish they do, the quality of the ingredients — I just remember thinking, 'OK, this is the pinnacle of what is happening in Jupiter right now,'" Asprinio says. "Now with 1000 North, Love Street, AquaGrille — I feel this is the next generation of hospitality here."

He describes his hospitality vision for north county as world-class dining that embraces the local culture and connects to its community in an organic way. And he believes local diners are ready for it.



Restaurateur and hospitality consultant Stephen Asprinio chats with guests at his new AquaGrille restaurant, which debuted in Juno Beach in March. MEGHAN MCCARTHY/THE PALM BEACH POST



A hot dog gets a crown of shredded papaya at AquaGrille in Juno Beach.  
LIBBY VOLGES



Well accessorized oysters on the half shell are served at the AquaGrille.  
LIBBYVISION.COM

Lindsay Autry and Jeremy Ford opened new restaurants, Honeybelle and The Butcher's Club.

Just to the north, local star chef Tim Lipman has expanded his buzzy Culinary restaurant concept. On the Lake Park waterfront, the iconic New York chef/restaurant David Burke plans to open a modern American brasserie in summer 2024.

### Rising new dining hub

Widen the lens and it's clear that what's happening on the north county dining scene — and what's coming up — is part of a larger phenomenon in the county. In part, this is what has kept him here, Asprinio says.

"Palm Beach County in general is be-

See ASPRINIO, Page 4D

He has a savvy market here. The palates here are very educated and they are exploratory. They're all about what's interesting. They want what is new," says Asprinio.

Indeed, the north county map is

lighting up with novel and exciting dining concepts. In Palm Beach Gardens, Stage Kitchen, the Indian-leaning small plates restaurant by chef Pushkar Marathe, is a year-round sensation. At the PGA National Resort, celebrity chefs