A vanishing breed...

Just a stone’s throw from swanky Longboat Key is one of the oldest operating fishing villages in Florida.

Jeanette Billings
Staff Writer

Cortezian...you won’t find that word in any Miriam Webster Dictionary, but that doesn’t mean the word isn’t real. Just a stone’s throw from swanky Longboat Key is one of the oldest operating fishing villages in Florida and that’s where you can meet a Cortezian face-to-face.

A breed of Florida native that is part fishermen, part pirate, part tarpon (fish known to put up one heck of a fight). They love Cortez, fishing, family, and the old Florida way of life, a life that much of today’s tourist driven Florida wouldn’t even recognize.

There are no time clocks to punch, no blackberry’s to check, no Bill of Sale, what there is is ice-cold beer, salty dogs (not the Oscar Meyer type, the real men of the sea type), and friendly native Floridian’s quick to share a smile and a story about their home.

It was on this balmy, sunny Wednesday that with notebook and camera in hand that I ventured over to the place that time forgot. The camera came in might handy, but the notebook, that was just about as useful as a laptop with no WiFi, so I left it by the wayside, except when I needed to jot down a name, because the stories are unforgettable when told by Cortezian’s, simply unforgettable.

My guide for the day was no other than the affable, amusing, friendly operator of Just Reel, Captain Mark (Marcos) Johnson.

I knew I was in for a fun filled day when, according to Mark, we could’n’t do anything without a cocktail from the Swordfish Grill.

The best seat in the house is a bar stool at the tiki deck where bartender Theresa Catalano served up two of her special concoctions, largely rum, orange juice, and a lot of other tasty alcoholic beverages that tasted just like the place looked tropi-

cal yet hearty.

Catalano told me that she had been working there since she was 14-years old, of course back then the place was called the Lobster Shanty, the name may have changed, but the faces had not. Catalano was still working there after thirty years and still loved it.

That’s the story about Cortezian’s they never get tired of their surroundings. I can’t imagine that any of them suffer from high blood pressure or the stresses that we deal with on a daily basis. Their worries are bigger and ancient, the type of stresses that our ancient ancestors worried about. Big Storms, that can wipe out their vil-

lage, or worse Big Government that can take away or change the beautiful 52-acre preserve that surrounds their village.

They have dealt with both of those epic battles, in regards to the first some lives are lost, and the hurt is too deep for some of them to talk about, with the later they fought and continue to fight and so far they have won. I couldn’t help but think about Bob Marley’s Three Little Bird’s Lynx.

“Don’t worry about a thing,
’Cause every little thing gonna be all right.
’Cause every little thing gonna be all right.”

If you are in Cortez’s Historic Fishing Village, every little thing is gonna be alright.