

NEVER DOUBT THAT A SMALL GROUP of thoughtful, committed citizens can change the world," Margaret Mead said. "Indeed, it is the only thing that ever has." She could have been describing these Southwest Floridians, each of whom—whether personally or professionally, quietly or publicly—has gone to extraordinary lengths to keep Southwest Florida's natural systems alive and thriving. Some teach, some politick. Others labor in government offices or work in classrooms. Some are well known; others shun the spotlight. What they have in common is a goal: to champion and preserve the very qualities that drew so many of us to Southwest Florida in the first place.



Champions *of the* Environment

MOST POLITICOS PREDICTED **Ellin Goetz** faced a tough sell last fall, trying to persuade her fellow Collier County residents to tax themselves to buy greenspace. This is, after all, a place known for soaring land prices, fiscal conservatism and wariness about anything that smacks of government-mandated ecology. But Goetz and some other local leaders and activists were convinced that Collier County residents are smart enough not to kill their environmental goose. So the plainspoken, no-nonsense landscape architect agreed to chair Conservation Collier, an initiative that proposed to buy land from willing sellers—as opposed to the condemn-and-coerce tactics some other locales have used—and put it permanently in the public's hands. The fact that she's married to Michael Watkins, whose family has owned the Naples Beach Hotel and Golf Club for three generations, may have helped give her credibility. Her award-winning, high-profile work probably didn't hurt either; Goetz's credits include Mediterra's Parque Celestial and Naples' Fifth Avenue South revitalization. And she'd also won respect for past volunteer efforts for green causes, especially environmental education. In the end, some 60 percent of voters approved the measure. "By God," Goetz told the *Naples Daily News* after it was all over, "when the case is made clearly, they're obviously willing to do that."