

Luminaries

Where the Stars Come Out Every Monday

Cover Story



Members of Peter Busch's family: (back) Tiffany, Jacob, Julia and Philip, (front) Martina holding Chico the Chihuahua, Joan, Peter, David with Bella the Jack Russell and Vito the German Shepherd.

Living and giving Busch Style

BY BILL CHURCH Special to Luminaries

When you hear the name Busch, beer and horses come quickly to mind. Both are important to Vero Beach resident Peter Busch, who owns a Fort Pierce based beer distributorship and still plays top-flight competitive polo.

A family story, which Peter swears is true, is that each of the 11 infant children of August Busch, Jr. and Trudy Busch, including Peter, got a drop of Budweiser from an eyedropper before they got milk. And Peter says he could ride horses before he could walk.

But, he says he learned another important lesson from his father, the long-time chairman and CEO of Anheuser-Busch and chairman of the St. Louis Cardinals baseball team.

"If you're going to be part of the community, you have to give back to the community," Busch quotes his dad as saying.

Peter Busch, 50, has implemented his father's philosophy to the great benefit of the Treasure Coast. He and his wife, Joan, began giving both

money and time to local causes shortly after they arrived in 1984, and have continued contributions through his company and the Peter W. Busch Family Foundation.

"We're honored to be a part of Fort Pierce and the Treasure Coast, and to us it's personal, not something we want to blow our horns about," Busch said in a telephone interview from a summer vacation at his second home, perched high in the Rockies on 60-acres in White Fish Lake, Montana, a small town of 5,000-6,000 people. The Busch family goes there for more than a month every summer and for several weeks at Christmas, but Peter keeps in touch with work from an office that looks right into Glacier National Park.

Busch bought the house 16 years ago following a family vacation at what was then a bed and breakfast. Despite temperatures in the -60 degree range during their first Christmas in the house, The Busch family is drawn by the 360 degree view of the surrounding valleys.

For the past two years, they've also owned a 660 acre ranch about 20 miles away surrounded by national forests, where they walk and indulge their love of animals by viewing the moose, elk, bears, and deer. Are they thinking of leaving us?

"Not at all," says Busch. "Florida is our home."

This summer has also brought a trip for the entire family to Lucerne, Switzerland to visit Peter's mother and their relatives, his first visit in 12 years. Busch's mother, Gertrude "Trudy" Busch, is a native of Lucerne. When the 51-year-old August Busch, Jr. was visiting Switzerland on business in 1950, he met the 24-year-old Trudy Boholzer at her parent's restaurant, and by all accounts it was love at first sight. They produced seven children.

Peter's mother still splits her time between St. Louis and Lucerne, where she lives near brothers and sisters and assorted nieces and nephews. When he was a child, Peter visited almost every year, and he loves to share with his own children his favorite Swiss activities, including climbing Mt. Pilatus and swimming in Lake Lucerne.

Despite the good life which direct descendants of brewery founder Adolphus Busch can enjoy, Peter Busch puts in a normal eight-hour day at Southern Eagle Distributing, Inc.

Peter started working on the family's 260-acre Grant Farm near St. Louis when he was a teenager, taking care of the peacocks and ducks for \$1.10 an hour. By the age of 16, he was managing the farm.

Through a mutual friend, Peter met Joan Curran who lived just two miles away. They were married in 1978. Peter dropped out of St. Louis University when Joan became pregnant with their first child and started at the brewery as a line beer bottler, working his way up to foreman. After a stint managing an Anheuser-Busch wholesale operation in Oklahoma, Busch decided against a return to the main office.

"I was never cut out for office work," he says.

With a love for Florida after many spring training hours with the Cardinals, he jumped at the chance to buy a Fort Pierce distributorship with exclusive rights to Anheuser-Busch products in the three Treasure Coast counties.

From a beginning 30 percent market share and 37 employees, Southern Eagle today owns 71 percent of the market and employs 140. The Busch's good fortune has also meant good fortune for a wide range of Treasure Coast public service and cultural institutions over the past 22 years.

The Buschs bought the Midway Road property for the Exchange Club CASTLE, which serves victims of child abuse and family problems.

In 1991, Peter and Joan launched the Fort Pierce Thanksgiving Jubilee to feed the homeless. From feeding 50-60 people, the program now provides Thanksgiving meals to more than 3,000.

Busch gave \$100,000 to the refurbishment of the Sunrise Theater in Fort Pierce and challenged others to match his donation.

In 1988, Busch bought a 460 foot World War II troop carrier, and sank it in 170 feet of water east of Fort Pierce to form an artificial reef named in honor of his father on his 89th birthday.

As you might expect with five of their six children either currently attending or having graduated from St. Edwards School in Vero Beach, Peter and Joan Busch have given generously to building projects and served on the board.

Following the hurricanes of the past few years, Anheuser-Busch and Southern Eagle contributed more than 39,000 cases of pure water from the Jacksonville brewery and distributed them all over the Treasure Coast and in the Clewiston-Pahokee area with the help of Southern Eagle employees who volunteered.

“People had no electricity, and they were so appreciative,” Busch says. “It brought tears to our eyes.”

Peter Busch’s best known public project is probably the Busch Wildlife Sanctuary in Jupiter. Founded 14 years ago, the facility provides medical care and rehabilitation for more than 4,000 injured wild animals each year.

Busch says he’s worked with great people who have contributed a lot of time and energy to all three Treasure Coast counties.

“I was only 28 when I came here,” Busch says. “Working with all these individuals has made me a better person. Money is one thing but doing more things on a personal level takes you to a better place.”

Cover photo by Tim Rice Photography: Peter Busch at his home in White Fish Lake, Montana.



Peter W. Busch relaxes with his German Shepherd, Vito, at his summer home in White Fish Lake, Montana.