

Newcomers Swap Snow for Sun

By Angela McLaughlin ~ THE JOURNAL

"Andy and Angie are here!"

A tasting room attendant flings open the door to the winery and calls out as we walk up. It is the second time we have been here, and already she greets us like old friends.

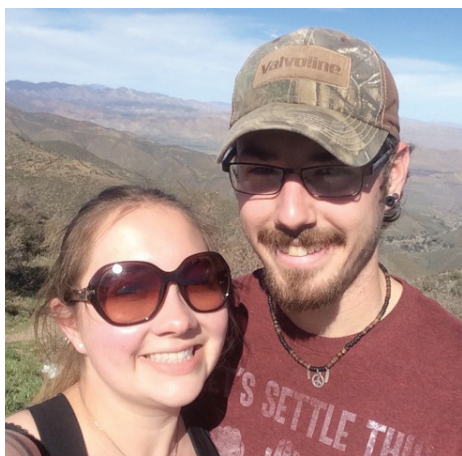
It's the first week of February, and my husband and I have just moved to Ramona as the new hosts for Collier County Park. We're nervous, lonely and looking to fit into our new community.

I'm a Minnesotan, born and raised. Growing up, we always had this idea that California was a bustling place, packed with too many people to make any real connections. When the opportunity for the park host positions popped up, we decided to make the trek into Ramona to check out the park and the town.

Driving through gorgeous, rolling foothills and stumbling upon horse ranch after horse ranch, I was reminded of the small town where I attended college. It felt like a homecoming. We were immediately enchanted by the beautiful open spaces, wide array of wildlife and the historic downtown area.

But living in a place isn't just about the scenery. It's about the people, too.

At first, people in Ramona seemed a little leery of us newcomers, with our Northern accents and funny words, *dontcha know*. (And it's "pop," by the way, not "soda.") Staring at us from



Angela and Andy McLaughlin

PHOTO COURTESY OF ANGELA MCLAUGHLIN

across the room in restaurants, some made us feel like the outsiders that we were.

But the second we mentioned we had just moved here, the atmosphere shifted dramatically. We were soon being shuffled around to meet people, handed flyers and brochures of things to do, and hearing firsthand about the history of the city we were about to become a part of.

We were frequently asked, "How did you find Ramona?" as if Ramona was some well-kept secret.

Nearly every place we go, people recognize us as the "newbies," and some places have dubbed us the "A Team." From grocery stores to

bookstores to the thrift shop on Main Street, people who see us check to see how we are doing and to ask if we've tried this place or that.

We've learned the best places to eat breakfast, where to hang out on cruise night, and that everyone has a favorite Mexican restaurant — and that they all differ from one person to the next.

Moving to a new town, and especially a new state, is tricky. We left our entire lives in Minnesota — friends, family, jobs, our home. We gave it all up for an adventure and to find something new, somewhere with beautiful weather, the ocean and near-constant sunshine. In doing so, I've lost the usual Minnesotan

"discussing the weather" aspect of conversations. When I talk to people from home, they get mighty sick of me saying, "Yeah, it's 80 degrees and sunny — again."

Ramona is quickly becoming our new home and its people our new neighbors. We didn't win anyone over with our hot dishes and tolerance for cold weather, or with an intense game of "duck, duck, gray duck."

We found that Ramonans were perfectly willing to welcome us into the fold by just using a little bit of our "Minnesota nice" and appreciating this beautiful town in the Valley of the Sun. ■

Senior Center Celebrates Cinco de Mayo



Ramona Senior Center staff celebrated Cinco de Mayo earlier this month. From left are Nancy Walker, Lora Cicalo, Senior Center board member Bob Krysak, and Amada Gallegos.

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