

SOUTH FLORIDA  
Sun Sentinel

## TRAVEL &amp; LIFE

Editor Mark Gauert guesses his close encounter happened with a bull shark.  
VW PICS/UNIVERSAL IMAGES GROUP VIA GETTY

# OUT OF MY DEPTHS

There are those who **get out** of the water when there's a shark, and those who **get in**

By Mark Gauert

South Florida Sun Sentinel

The "bucket-list" trip to Bimini called for stops for conch fritters, a tour of the Dolphin House Museum — and a boat tour, "where we go swimming with reef sharks."

So, the last time I went swimming near a reef, I saw a shark. A big shark.

So big, I had not been swimming near a reef, or even an ocean, since then. "Then" being about 25 years ago. (Just checked the calendar. Yes, *that* long.)

Don't get me wrong, I loved the "swimming with reef" part. Not so much the "shark" part.

I'd just dropped over the side of a dive boat anchored near White Banks Dry Rocks in John Pennkamp Coral Reef State Park off Key Largo. I finned in close to the reef, pulled my mask and snorkel over my face and dove about 10 feet down to the white sandy bottom.

It was beautiful there. So beautiful, if I hadn't been wearing a snorkel, I might have gasped.

The sun was high, and the light filtered straight through water the color of an aquarium. I watched schools of tropical fish sway and squirt through the coral formations. I'd been snorkeling before, but never this deep or far from shore. I loved the feeling I'd floated into a new world.

I went up for air, took a deep breath, and eagerly dove back — scanning for even more vibrant life among the coral. Everywhere I looked was something I'd never seen before.

Then I saw something bigger than I'd ever seen under the water, scything toward me on the far edge of the reef.

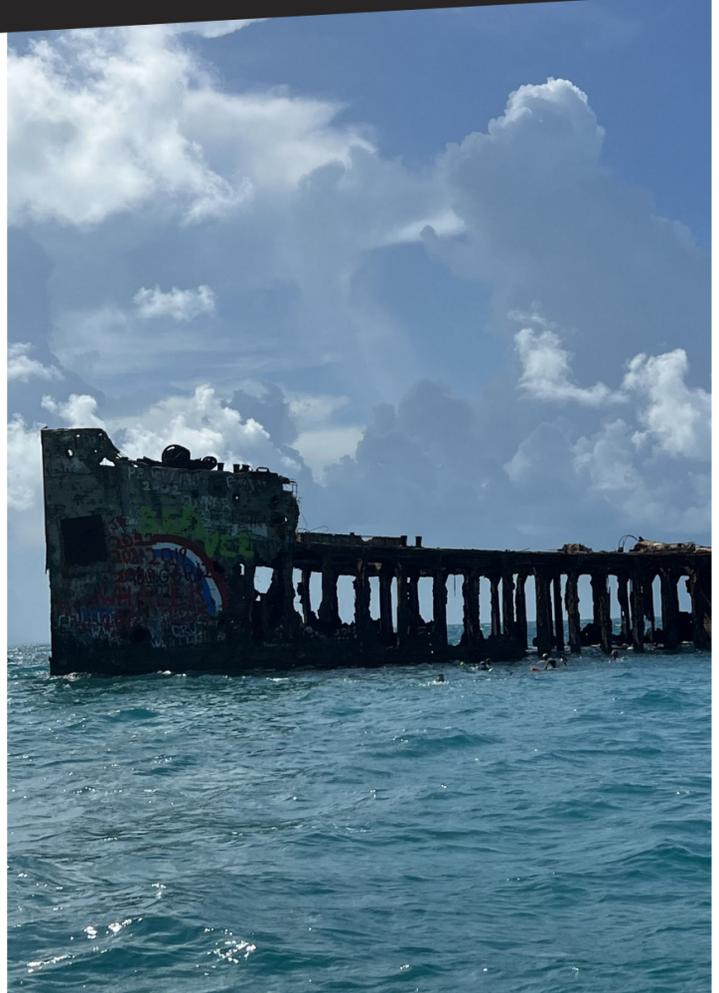
I'd seen pictures of sharks before, and I was pretty sure I could scratch nurse, tiger and hammerhead sharks from the suspect lineup here. The one in front of me was different from those sharks, shaped like a muscular gray torpedo, with sharp triangles of fins jutting atop, along the sides and down to the tail. I wouldn't pick bull shark out of the lineup — spoiler alert — until much later, and I'm still not sure how big it was. I know they say everything looks bigger underwater, so I can only conservatively estimate the shark coming toward me was 200 feet long.

OK, maybe 300 feet. *Conservatively.* Certainly bigger than any predator I'd ever been 20 feet away from, in the sea, land or air. Unless you count the auto-loan guy.

My first impulse was to go deep, move close to the reef and try not to appear to be any part of the food chain. But that was only going to work so long because of the pesky air problem separating me from the rest of the items on the buffet line.

I moved closer to the reef, held the outer limit of my breath — and watched the muscle-bound torpedo turn its snout (and mouth!) toward me. Then, just as it got close enough for me

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Snorkeling off the wreck of the SS Sapona near Bimini. RESORTS WORLD BIMINI

## TRAVEL



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## 'A new era for downtown Boca'

Mizner Park Cultural Center changes its name, vibe

By Rod Stafford Hagwood

South Florida Sun Sentinel

The Studio at Mizner Park is rebranding and reaching for new heights.

The performance space in downtown Boca Raton — known in the past few years as the Mizner Park Cultural Center — is making a bid to be a buzzy venue with more elevated service when it relaunches on Dec. 16 with an open house. Also, Potions in Motion has signed on as the on-site caterer and will produce the bar program.

"This long-awaited and much-anticipated opening is poised to usher in a new era for downtown Boca," says Peg Anderson, president of the Cultural Arts Association Board, the organization responsible for managing the space.

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The Studio at Mizner Park has a theater that seats up to 279 people, a multipurpose space that can transform into a banquet/party room or second performance space, as well as a lounge with a full bar and outdoor terrace. EDUARDO SCHNEIDER



For the first time on camera, Casey Anthony sits down to share her side of the story since her culture-defining trial and acquittal 11 years ago. COURTESY

# Casey Anthony breaks silence in upcoming Peacock special

By Amanda Kondoloy  
Orlando Sentinel

Since her trial and subsequent acquittal for the murder of her two-year-old daughter Caylee 11 years ago, Casey Anthony has largely stayed out of the spotlight. However, Anthony will finally be telling her story as part of a new limited series, “Casey Anthony: Where the Truth Lies,” streaming later this month on Peacock.

The three-part series is helmed by Alexandra Dean

(“This Is Paris,” “Bombshell: The Hedy Lamarr Story”) and will include Anthony’s account of the investigation and subsequent trial; and gives Anthony the chance to speak directly to speculation surrounding her actions at the time.

“Since her acquittal in 2011, public opinion of Casey Anthony has been largely shaped by the media convinced of her guilt. Casey had never given an in-depth or on-camera interview explaining her

actions until now,” Dean said, adding that the series is “a startling psychological portrait of Casey Anthony and a complete narrative of what she says happened to her daughter weighed against multiple sources of potential evidence.”

In addition to the interview with Anthony herself, the docu-series will also include never-before-seen archival footage and the defense’s evidence.

“As a filmmaker and journalist, my interest was in getting closer to the

unbiased truth by hearing all sides of the story — from opposing voices to Casey herself. While having access to Casey was critical, it was even more important that we had complete editorial control over the outcome of the reporting we did,” Dean said.

The first episode of “Casey Anthony: Where the Truth Lies,” will debut Nov. 29, exclusively on NBC streaming service Peacock.

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The wreck of the SS Sapona near Bimini. RESORTS WORLD BIMINI

## Gauert

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to see into its eye, it turned and powered away. Just like that, nightmare over!

Unless that meant it had started to circle me? I tried to remember everything I’d ever learned — mostly from the definitive reference, “Jaws” — and to ascend calmly without making any “Yo, sashimi over here!” splashing movements. I broke water, gasped a deep breath and started finning as microscopically as possible toward the dive boat, worried the shark was going to come up for me just like it did for poor Chrissie Watkins, the first victim in Jaws.

It’s not so much what you see as what you can’t see that makes swimming in the ocean with an apex predator so unnerving. And the few more yards I swam without looking into the water were the longest I can remember. Finally at the ladder on the side of the dive boat, I pulled up my mask, spit out the snorkel and kissed the first rung before climbing out. “Hey, why are you coming out so soon?” the dive boat captain boomed. “Because there’s a big shark down there!” I said. “Big shark?!?” two guys who hadn’t yet gone into the water said. “Where?” “Uh,” I said, motioning toward the reef. “Somewhere over there?” And they jumped in!

And there, friends, is the difference between people: Those who get out of the water when there’s a shark, and those who get in. All people made it back to shore that day. The two guys were disappointed they missed seeing the shark. The dive boat captain — who, come to think of it, sounded a lot like Quint from Jaws — told me he was pretty sure the shark I saw was one they knew well around White Banks Dry Rocks because it only had one eye. “He probably didn’t see you until he came right up on you,” he said. “You probably scared him, and he swam off.” I scared him? Maybe, I thought. I only knew he

scared me. Enough to keep me out of the water — until my bucket-list trip to Bimini this past summer. I worked up my nerve and dropped over the side of the boat anchored near the wreck of the SS Sapona, about 3 miles off the southern tip of South Bimini Island. Reluctantly, after 25 years. I finned in close to the wreck, pulled my mask and snorkel down over my face and floated on a pool noodle with the current over the white sandy bottom below. Baby steps — did I mention the pool noodle? — because I wasn’t ready to dive just yet. The sun was high, and the light filtered straight through water the color

of an aquarium. I watched for schools of tropical fish swaying and squirting through the remains of the old wreck. But there were hardly any fish at all that day — just me, my pool noodle and a big, empty ocean. Don’t get me wrong, I loved the swimming with the wreck part. But for reasons I can’t really explain, I missed the “shark” part. And I wondered if I was more like the two guys back on the dive boat 25 years ago than I knew. Mark Gauert is the editor of City & Shore magazine, which is published by the South Florida Sun Sentinel. He can be reached at [mgauert@SunSentinel.com](mailto:mgauert@SunSentinel.com).

**I broke water, gasped a deep breath and started finning as microscopically as possible toward the dive boat, worried the shark was going to come up for me just like it did for poor Chrissie Watkins, the first victim in Jaws.**

## Center

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“The Studio at Mizner Park will bring a year-round calendar of fresh and diverse programming to the area.”

Stephanie Siegel is the newly name executive director charged with booking acts for a roster being billed as “multidimensional, multigenerational” — that means that there will be something for the diverse audiences here in South Florida, she says, but with an emphasis on trendier fare for everyone from parents looking to entertain children to adults wanting leading-edge experiences.

“So when you think about the programming, I think it’s going to be a little more edgy. It’ll be cosmopolitan, more energetic, right? Something that will activate — like people can have dinner here and then come to your show. Who doesn’t love that? That’s so fun.”

So far, the December calendar has:

**Saturday, Dec. 17, noon-3 p.m.** — “Holiday Extraganza at The Studio” with holiday baking crafts and sing-alongs with Jeff Kaye and Krescendo. Cost: \$15 for adults; \$10 for kids.

**Saturday, Dec. 17, 8 p.m.** — “Ring in the Holiday with Celebrity Housewives” featuring reality TV stars from the “Real Housewives” Bravo-TV franchise including Ramona Singer, Margaret Josephs and Marysol Patton in a panel discussion and VIP cocktail reception. Cost: \$69 a person; \$99 for VIP cocktail reception.

**Sunday, Dec. 18, 10:30 a.m. and 1 p.m.** — “Sean Green Dance Factory” with the choreographer of the Miami Heat dancers who is also a judge for the Miami Dolphins cheerleader auditions and founder of Out of the Box dance intensives in West Palm Beach. At 10:30, there will be a “Tik Tok Hip Hop Dance Party for Kids” age 5-12 for \$55 per person (snacks and drinks included). At 1 p.m., there will be “Girls Night Out” for \$75 per person (champagne and small bites included).

**Dec. 24-Jan. 1, various times** — “Sarge the Comedian” brings his standup act back to Boca Raton, where he is a longtime favorite. Known not only for his comedy but also his vocals and self-taught virtuoso piano skills, Sarge grew up the adopted black son of a Jewish couple in Brooklyn. Cost: \$49-\$78.

**Jan. 22, Feb. 12 and March 19, 2023** — “Rock and Roll Playhouse” is for the whole family with a performance of iconic rock music — Grateful Dead on Jan. 22; Stevie Wonder on Feb. 12; Bob Marley on March 19 — as well as games, movement, stories and music playing for children age 1-7. Cost: \$17.50 in advance; \$20 at the door.

The Studio is also upping its game with the food and drink being offered through Potions in Motion, according to Siegel. It means “we’re gonna have a really elevated kind of food and beverage service that I don’t think is offered anywhere else. It’s not just concessions, like hot dog stands, pretzels and [inexpensive] chardonnay. I think we’re gonna have more of a selection, which would also be a draw for



The Gallery is a lounge on the second level with a full bar and outdoor terrace with views of Mizner Park. Next to it is the kitchen where Boca Raton-based Potions in Motion will operate as the venue’s exclusive in-house caterer. EDUARDO SCHNEIDER

people.” Some South Floridians may remember when the building was the The International Museum of Cartoon Art, which opened in 1996 and never attracted much attention, closing in 2001 with the burden of a \$2 million debt. After years of sitting in the dark unused, there were further construction delays before the space was reborn as the Mizner

Park Cultural Arts Center in 2010. On and off for a few years between 2012 and 2014, regional theater talent staged readings, plays and musicals there, often calling the performance space The Studio at Mizner Park “The Mizner Park Cultural Arts Center was actually called ‘The Studio’ for a moment in time,” recalls board president Anderson, an active civic

and community leader for more than 20 years. “We have come full circle, embracing the history of the venue as we look forward to an exciting, inviting future.” **IF YOU GO** **What:** The Studio at Mizner Park **Where:** 201 Plaza Real, Boca Raton **Information:** 561-203-3742; [TheStudioAtMiznerPark.com](http://TheStudioAtMiznerPark.com)