

May 2007

## Legislature Fails on Property Taxes

Despite his campaign promise to reduce property taxes, Governor Charlie Crist's first session of government failed to produce any changes at all. The divide between the plans of the House of Representatives and the Senate, although reduced, was found to be too huge to overcome in this session, which ended on May 4<sup>th</sup>. A special 10-day session of the legislature has been scheduled to commence on June 12<sup>th</sup> devoted only to tackling the property tax burden. There are currently 3 plans from which a new plan could be worked. The House plan, championed loudly by Representative Marco Rubio, would slash taxes by \$40 - \$50 billion over the next 5 years, ultimately wiping out property taxes altogether, but replacing some of the lost revenue with an increase in the state sales tax of up to 2.5 cents. The Senate plan offers to cut property taxes by \$15 - \$20 billion over the next 5 years through rollbacks and caps on property taxes, without any offsetting tax increase. As the session waned, and Crist saw his chance of fulfilling his campaign pledge disappearing, he waded in with his own plan that basically split the difference between the two plans in the total amount of reductions, but without increasing sales taxes. Addressing the failure to make change in his weekly email Crist has declared that he still wants to receive letters, emails and stories from homeowners to keep minds of politicians focussed on the challenge ahead in the June Session. You can tell Governor Crist your story by contacting him through his website [www.flgov.com](http://www.flgov.com).

### Worrying Survey

The Department of Homeland Security recently announced plans to help make visitors feel more welcome on arrival, which seem to be mainly based on sticking up a few 'welcome' posters and playing informational videos in various languages to help explain the procedures visitors must go through to enter the country. An offer of free help from Disney with the production of these videos was refused on the basis that it might upset Busch Gardens. However, a survey by the Discover America Partnership shows that it may take more than a few posters and videos to entice visitors back to U.S. shores.

"Travelers are more afraid of US government officials than the threat of terrorism or crime," says Geoff Freeman, executive director of the Discover America Partnership.

The Discover America survey has found that by a margin of more than two to one, the US ranked first among 10 destinations that included Africa and the Middle East as the unfriendliest to international travelers. More than half of those polled said immigration

officials are rude, and that the US government does not want their travel business.

Almost two-third came up with a concern that might surprise Americans -- foreign tourists were worried they will be detained for hours because of a simple mistake or a mis-statement at a US airport.

But the survey also found positives: 72 percent of travelers said they had a "great" time once they got into the US. Sixty-three percent said they felt more favorable toward the United States as a result of their visit.

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# Florida Homes and Travel

May 2007

## From the Editor

Did you spot last month's April fool? In amongst the weird news on page 10 was a story about an elephant on the loose at Disney – that was the one! Unlike some years when we base our April Fools on facts, this one was a complete figment of my imagination. However, it proves just how weird Florida can be, because Tim read the story without batting an eyelid! Thank you to Mark Lawrence for posting it on the Emerald Island homeowner's forum – that made my day!

We are preparing an updated article about travel insurance for the 'older' traveler looking at the best value, and the longest stay permitted. If you have a good value annual travel insurance policy for stays of up to 3 months or longer for the 70's and over, please let us know. It is a while since we last looked at this, so it is likely that some policies have changed.

On page 8 we bring to a close our series of articles outlining the general implications and requirements of long-term rentals as an alternative to short-term rentals. It has of course not been possible to go into great depth on the subject within these pages, but our intention was that the articles would give enough information for you to have an idea whether this is something you want to find out more about. We do hope to include a case history of an owner who has pursued this option in a future issue. We thank Graham Hardy and Jan Doughty for their articles regarding this subject.

A useful measure passed by the legislature is to make all gift cards and certificates in Florida non-expiring – very handy for giving family members gifts for their next visit or Christmas – particularly at today's exchange rate!

## American Accountant

Do you need assistance with your US Federal, State and County Tax filings, Property Tax, mortgage and finance advice,

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*[Certified Public Accountant – USA - Licensed in Florida] has been assisting UK owners of Holiday Rental property in Florida for the past twelve years with:- Federal Tax Returns [1040NR], Tangible Personal Property Tax Returns Withholding Certificate applications*

Contact **Jan Marie Doughty CPA**

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Call for a chat or to obtain further details.

## Tarpon Springs Climate Data – May - 1948- 2000

(All in degrees Fahrenheit)

The average high temp is	86.4°
The average low temp is	66.7°
The highest temp (on May 27 <sup>th</sup> 1995)	97°
The coldest night temp (on May 9 <sup>th</sup> 1992)	45°

## Average Florida Mortgage Rates

With zero points	Feb	Mar	April
Fixed 30 yrs	6.31%	6.10%	6.47%
Adjustable 1 yr	6.41%	6.41%	6.38%

Note: Mortgage rates are published as a service to readers to indicate trends and must not be relied on in entering into any agreement.

## How to Reach Florida Homes and Travel

### Editor

Elle Hubbard

### Letters

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# Florida Homes and Travel

May 2007

## News Roundup

**The land mark open skies** agreement reached in March has inspired airlines to announce transatlantic plans. Irish airline Aer Lingus plans flights to Orlando, San Fransico and Washington by the year's end. Canada based Zoom plans low cost flights to New York from as little as £129 starting June 21<sup>st</sup>. Ryan Air has plans for ultra lowcost flights from Stansted and Dublin to Florida and other destinations with flights from as little as \$12 starting sometime in the next 3 years.

**Orlando International Airport** saw passengers increase by 20,000 or 0.71% in January over January 2006. This is significant because unlike 2006 there were no major conventions in town during that month.

**Golf enthusiasts** in Florida before May 20<sup>th</sup> might like to visit the Museum of Florida History at Tallahassee. There is an exhibit organised by the Orange County Regional History Center celebrating the games history and popularity in Florida from the late 1800's and early 1900's. [www.flheritage.com/museum/](http://www.flheritage.com/museum/)

**Water levels** in Lake Okeechobee are at historically low levels for the time of year. Since records began the water level in April has not dropped below the 10.09 feet recorded by the Army Corps of Engineers on Easter Monday.

**Governor Crist's** refusal to have the State song 'Old Folks at Home' played at his inauguration because of it's racial undertones has begun a statewide debate on what should replace it. A website is being created by State Senator Tony Hill and the Florida Music Educators Association to collect songs submitted by the public. [www.justsingflorida.com](http://www.justsingflorida.com) should be ready by mid-May.

**A Virgin Atlantic pilot** arrested just before a flight from Heathrow airport in March following an allegation of drunkenness was not charged and resumed duties immediately. Apparently a diet being followed by the pilot initially caused a positive reading in a breath test, but a blood test showed that his alcohol levels were the same as a non-drinker.

**The Florida Board of Executive Clemency** has voted to restore the civil rights of certain ex-offenders convicted of 'less severe' crimes. They will have restored their right to vote, serve on a jury, hold an occupational licence or serve in public office. They must have completed their sentence, any probation or supervision and paid 100% victim restitution to qualify for the restoration of their rights without a hearing.

**Darden Group**, owners of Olive Garden and Red Lobster has announced it is closing or selling all 129 of its Smokey Bones Barbeque and Grill restaurants.

### MoneyCorp U.S. Dollar Update

Well they did it; the two Dollar Pound is no longer a nostalgic dream. Now what? Although Sterling at last managed to reach its highest level for a generation it has been unable to build on that achievement. The Euro is in the same boat. It has come within a whisker of achieving a lifetime best against the Dollar but has not been able to go the extra inch. If these two cannot get their act together fairly rapidly they risk a backlash from bored supporters. Treading water is not a likely option: they either move ahead or they go back down. And looking at they way they have been messing around for the last six days, down seems to be the most likely alternative. Based on the fundamentals, a downward correction for Sterling now would not necessarily mean down-and-out on a longer term basis but it sure wouldn't help.

(This update was written on 25<sup>th</sup> April 2007)

**Subscribers** to Florida Homes and Travel who open a Trading Facility will have Moneycorp's £15 fee waived for all transactions they complete with them and will receive a Privilege Card entitling them to commission free currency and a 1% improvement on the exchange rate at any of the TTT Moneycorp currency exchange bureaux locations.

### Average Daily Hotel Room Rate

Area	Mar 06	Mar 07
International Drive	\$115.83	\$121.33
Lake Buena Vista	\$134.81	\$145.73
Kissimmee East	\$83.37	\$91.67
Kissimmee West	\$59.83	\$64.41



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## Homes

**HM Revenue and Customs** will be commencing a major crackdown on undeclared overseas assets (including homes) from June 22<sup>nd</sup>. Until that time there is an amnesty in which overseas homeowners who have previously failed to declare their property – even if there has been no tax to pay – can declare their intention to disclose. Disclosure and payment of any taxes, duties and penalties owed plus interest must then be made by 26<sup>th</sup> November 2007. Last year the HMRC won a landmark case forcing Barclays to provide access to its offshore customers' accounts – with Lloyds TSB, Royal Bank of Scotland, HSBC and HBOS following soon after. All British residents are liable for UK tax on their worldwide income and gains. For further information please go to [www.hmrc.gov.uk](http://www.hmrc.gov.uk).

**A federal judge** has permanently barred Max Holcher of Naples, from promoting a scheme he calls "Tax Engineering" and from preparing federal income tax returns for others. According to the government complaint in the civil injunction suit, Holcher operates businesses known as Holcher & Company and Holcher CPA Group.

**Last month** we brought you the Pelican Pool Caddy noting that the RRP was \$29-99 and it was on sale in Pinch a Penny for \$24-95. Subscriber Steve Cotton told us he has it on sale in his pool shop for just \$22-99! His store; Pool Kleen USA, is at 4636 W Irlo Bronson Memorial Hwy, Kissimmee, 34746. Tel: 407-369-0383. [www.poolkleenusa.com](http://www.poolkleenusa.com)

**A 5 year-old boy** from Michigan died in the swimming pool of a rental home on Sandy Ridge Drive in the Windwood Bay subdivision near Davenport. Investigators believe it was an accidental drowning.

**The State** has ruled that developers must find alternative sources of water for further developments in South Florida. Any applications to increase the current 500 million gallons per day of water taken from the River of Grass that is the Everglades will be refused.

**Verizon** has begun crediting customers who were eligible for refunds due to breaks in service of more than 24 continuous hours. The refunds totalling \$63,000 go back from Feb 07 to Jun 05 and will appear as credits on bills over the next 6 months.

**Steve Trover**, CEO of All Star Vacations has been chosen to serve on the board of the Osceola Resort Area Council where he will explore issues that affect the area's thriving tourism industry. Steve is also currently on the Board of Directors of the Florida Vacation Rental Managers Association. Many of his All Star Vacation homes have been awarded Three Diamond Status by the AAA, the highest possible rating for vacation homes.

**Research conducted** by MRI Overseas Property has found that one in ten British people spend more than £4,000 every year on their annual holiday, and 73% return to the same destination. As many as one in four take at least 4 holidays a year. All this, says MRI, can add up to a lifetime spend of just under £70,000 – which could be used to finance a holiday home abroad.

**The British Government** has announced its intention to publish draft legislation later this year which will ensure that individuals owning or planning to buy a home abroad will not face a 'benefit-in-kind' tax charge for private use, if it is owned through a company. The Government will discuss the draft legislation with interested parties to ensure it achieves these aims. The legislation will be retrospective.

**Delta Airlines** has exited Chapter 11 Bankruptcy proceedings with 6,000 fewer staff, less debt and 60 more routes.

**Consumers in Florida** should benefit from a bill that simplifies the franchising of cable TV service. Currently franchising is overseen by individual counties and cities requiring a huge number of contracts to be sought for a provider to enter a market. Under the new bill the state will be in authority for granting franchises, opening up markets to competition where the consumer should be the winner. Under the bill unlimited fines can be imposed to prevent companies from 'cherry picking'.

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# Florida Homes and Travel

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**One of our subscribing** Realtors, Alan Martin of Frontline Florida Realty, has achieved Accredited Luxury Home Status designation from the Luxury Home Council. The Accredited Luxury Home Specialist (ALHS) Logo is testimony to the agent's training and expertise in the luxury home marketplace. To display the ALHS logo and be accepted into the Luxury Home Council, each member must successfully complete the Accredited Luxury Home Specialist Course, represent a buyer or seller in at least two transactions where the purchase price is at least twice the average sales price and the agent must be in good standing with the National Association of REALTORS®. Alan told us "Members (of the ALHS) must subscribe to a dedication like no others. They strive to provide exceptional service to affluent clients through rigorous education focusing on the Luxury Home Market and their understanding of the special demands of affluent buyers and sellers. Members of the Luxury Home Council are professionals; they value the client/agent relationship and are assuredly, the best in the country." To contact Alan, please see his advert at the bottom of this page.

**The Florida Association of Realtors** has not yet released 1<sup>st</sup> quarter home sales figures, although each month figures so far have shown 'soft' sales and median prices still declining. However a private survey published by Zillow.com using the online companies database of more than 70 million homes and a proprietary system for estimating median values which does not rely on properties just sold, has shown Orlando to be bucking the national trend with all four metro areas showing year on year increases over first quarter last year. The four metro areas are Lake, Osceola, Orange and Seminole counties with the increases highest in Seminole - 4.96% and lowest in Osceola at 1.73%. The same survey also showed that the Sarasota-Bradenton area had shown a 15% decline year on year in the first quarter median prices.

**A National Association of Realtors** national survey has shown that vacation home sales rose 4.7% last year - defying the 2006 downturn. The median price of the vacation homes slipped 2% to \$200,000, boosting further sales - remember this is nationally. Meantime, investment home sales declined by 29% from 2005 levels. The survey attempted to differentiate between vacation homes and investment homes, although in Orlando of course there is a huge overlap. Local realtors there say that more than 90% of vacation homes are

rental investments as well. Nationally the vacation/investment overlap figure is only 18%.

## Airline Performance Declines

The 17<sup>th</sup> Annual National Airline Quality Rating study has shown that overall industry performance in three out of four criteria was worse in 2006 than 2004. The four criteria are: baggage handling, customer complaints, denied boarding and on-time arrivals. The AQR scores for the 18 largest airlines provided the following rankings:

- |                    |                        |
|--------------------|------------------------|
| 1. Hawaiian        | 2. Jet Blue            |
| 3. Air Tran        | 4. Frontier            |
| 5. Northwest       | 6. Southwest           |
| 7. Continental     | 8. United              |
| 9. Alaska          | 10. American           |
| 11. ATA            | 12. Delta              |
| 13. US Air         | 14. Sky West           |
| 15. Mesa           | 16. COMAIR             |
| 17. American Eagle | 18. Atlantic Southeast |

Hawaiian airlines were on time 93.8% of the time, Atlantic Southeast were the worst - on time only 66% of the time. Mishandled baggage was the area showing the most consistent decline across all airlines during 2006 increasing from 6.06 per 1,000 passengers in 2005 to 6.50 per 1,000 in 2006. Interestingly, the study found that full passenger volumes were back to pre 9/11 levels, but there was about 18-20% less capacity adding to overall pressures.

**We may be a little late** with this news for some of you, but we discovered whilst on our own vacation that if one person in your party holds an e-passport then your whole party can use the e-passport lanes for immigration at MCO.

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# Florida Homes and Travel

May 2007

## Long Term Rentals, Legalities – prevention is better than cure

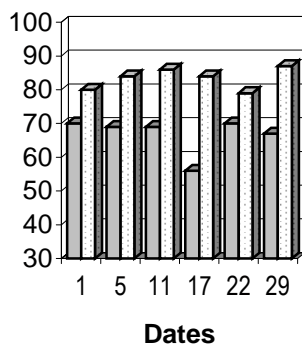
The age old saying of "Penny Wise, Pound Foolish" is very applicable when considering renting out your home long term. You need the confidence that your management company knows all the legal regulations and commitments that must be met. Only use a company where it is their core business and not a "bolt on" service. After all it's your investment that they are looking after.

They are extremely crucial to the performance of your investment. You will be depending on them to handle any day-to-day issues that arise, carry the proper insurance, pay the property taxes on time, and keep your investment fully occupied and in tip top shape. A good Long Term Rental management company is worth its weight in gold and will do all of the following:-

Key Points:-

- Background/credit checks. You don't want a serial delinquent on paying rent
- Never take a personal check for 1<sup>st</sup> month's rent or security deposit
- Use Attorney approved leases that stand up in Court
- Serve a 3-day notice pursuant to Florida Statutes 83.56(3) if rent is not paid on time.
- Serve 7-day notice for non-compliance. I.e. grass not cut. or trash not removed.
- Use only Licensed Property Managers
- Keep in regular contact with the tenant/owner to prevent many issues

**April Miami  
High/Low Temperatures**



getting out of hand, or even starting.

Owners are often concerned about evictions. This only happens infrequently, but when it does it's essential for the correct notices to be served in the correct way as it's the start of the legal process for eviction. Typically eviction involves the issuance of relevant notices, collection of notes, audit trail and all information held by the licensed property manager surrounding the causes for eviction. These are then passed over to a real estate attorney to carry out the eviction quickly and legally. The cost is approx \$300-\$500 and takes only weeks. It is a straightforward process if you know what you are doing. The strength of a specialized property manager with dedicated back office systems and software are essential to streamlined and successful evictions.

If the legal process is not followed or interrupted then the eviction process fails. For example where an owner accepts half the rental payment, then this flaws the eviction claim and we must then wait for them to not pay the next month to start the process again.

Well, there you have it. Don't be "Penny wise and Pound Foolish". This is one time that hiring the best will definitely bring you the most favourable results. It should truly be a win-win situation for everyone involved.

By Graham Hardy  
FloridaHomesOnly and Warner Quinlan

This concludes our series of articles about Long Term Rentals for Florida Properties.

To contact Graham or Mark Pagdin in the US please see their advert on page 10.

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# Florida Homes and Travel

## May 2007

### Coastal Gazette

**A State judge** has ruled that 31 properties in the Clearwater Beach area may continue as Short-Term Rental properties. Anxious not to set a precedent for any other locations, Pinellas-Pasco Circuit Judge Nelly Khouzam kept her comments very specific to the 31 properties involved and ruled that the city had forfeited its right to enforce a short-term rental ban on the owners of these properties because before 2003 (when an ordinance had banned rentals of less than 31 days) the ban had not been clearly defined or enforced. Khouzam ruled that the plaintiffs' 31 properties could continue operating as short-term rentals but would lose the exemption if they rented for longer periods of time or were destroyed.

The owners were jubilant at the ruling, but Mayor Frank Hibbard indicated that the city's legal department is looking at all options including appealing the ruling. Clearwater Beach Association, a neighbourhood group, has complained for years that the short-term renters create noise, trash and traffic in their areas. Their president made clear that they would expect the city to keep fighting on their behalf.

**Residents of Marco Island** are objecting strongly to the idea of turning the Jolley Bridge into a toll road. Jolley Bridge is the only access to the island and residents fear that the charges might force island employees to increase charges, not to mention that residents don't want to pay to access their homes! There will be a series of public meetings to get the public reaction to a toll road feasibility study – but county officials are apparently saying that if there is enough opposition the plan probably will not go ahead.

**Large parts** of Alligator Alley were shut down when over 10,000 acres of the Everglades burnt in a brush fire just after Easter.

**Sarasota County** has approved an impact fee increase for new single-family homes that will bring the total fees on a new 2000 sq ft home to \$19,600 by June 2008. Three new one-time fees that will take effect in 90 days have been added to the previous increases approved this year, which are being phased in over the next 13 months. Impact fees are passed on directly to the buyer by builders in the cost of the home.

**Former Manatee** County Administrator Bob Fernandez has been unanimously chosen to be the first Community Manager for the growing Lakewood Ranch community. Responsibilities include responsible for day-to-day operations of Lakewood Ranch, supervising the operations and maintenance department, finances, records retention and compliance with state regulations. He will report to the Lakewood Ranch Inter-District Authority.

**Macy's** has announced plans to open a Wolfgang Puck Express and a café by Todd English called Fig's in South Florida stores this year. In addition 8 stores across the state will see Macy's Taste Bars featuring signature soups, salads and sandwiches as well as Macy's brand gelato and coffee.

**Travellers** seeking connecting flights into Fort Lauderdale could soon benefit from a similar service to Ryanair. Skybus launches a new service on May 22<sup>nd</sup> between 8 locations (only Fort Lauderdale in Florida) with a promise that 10 seats on every flight will sell for \$10 each before taxes. More normal prices are around \$40 - \$50. Nothing but the seat is included in the flight, checked luggage costs more!

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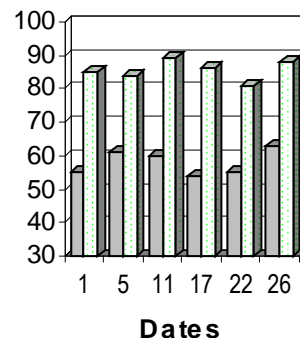
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**April Orlando  
High/Low Temperatures**





# Florida Homes and Travel

May 2007

## Online Grocery Shopping

Many of us in the UK now do our grocery shopping online at Tesco's, Sainsburys or Waitrose. We certainly do, and would not go back to the days of traipsing round a supermarket for hours on end being barged, pushed and generally abused whilst doing the weekly shop, preferring instead to sit in relative comfort and peace with only the occasional visit to Tesco's for forgotten items (its cheaper too because it cuts out impulse buying but that's another story altogether)

We have been wondering why the likes of Publix and Wynn Dixi do not do the same, Publix certainly thought about and published an "imminent" arrival of online grocery shopping in Florida a few years back only to pull out at the last minute for whatever reason and nothing since.

Well there are alternatives, for instance [www.gardengrocer.com](http://www.gardengrocer.com) is a fully-fledged online shop just like Tesco's or Sainsburys etc. You can browse and shop all of their products on the website and place your order. The website as we write is not set up for British billing addresses so you should put in Florida for the state then choose the "print and call" option and call with your payment details.

Delivery is free for orders over \$200 and although on the website it says gratuity not necessary, I suspect it is :-)) Delivery drivers are uniformed and they will deliver your groceries within a 2 hour time slot between 7am and 9pm. This is a slick website, query emails are quickly and professionally replied to and I suspect that there will be little difference between Gardengrocer and online grocery shopping anywhere else. The only problem I can envisage

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with this company is flexibility; if your plane is late it could pose delivery problems.

I have also had brought to my attention a company/website called [www.wegoshop.com](http://www.wegoshop.com), basically they go and do your shopping for you at whatever store you want. It's not exactly cheap at \$27 for \$100- \$200 worth of shopping plus a 10-15% tip, but after a LONG tiring flight it may be just the thing some of us are looking for.

I spoke to Marge Peck, associate owner, who answered a few questions for me, although to be fair most can be found on her website.

You can place an order up to 1 week before arrival, she did say that if shorter notice was required that she would do her best to accommodate but it is not always possible and any more notice than that is fine, so you can sit down and do your shopping list a month before you go if the mood takes you. They will deliver up to 10pm, ideal for later flights arriving in the evening. Once your order is confirmed you will receive a confirmation email with a telephone number on it so if you are delayed at either airport then you just have to call and delay delivery. You pay upon delivery with cash, traveller's cheques or cards.

Unlike normal shop websites you do not choose from a list of products, you basically write a shopping list of what you want and the shop you want it from, if they do not have the item they will substitute for a similar item if you request it on your list.

Gardengrocer.com does seem to be more like a conventional grocery online shop, but [wegoshop.com](http://wegoshop.com) does appeal to me as Marge told me she will shop and deliver straight away so you can even order up hot items like a cooked chicken etc.

*\*\*This years 'Hurricane Preparedness' tax break is June 1<sup>st</sup> - June 12<sup>th</sup>. Time to stock up on torches and batteries tax free!\*\**

### Florida Lottery Winning Numbers

Date	Numbers
04/28/2007	01 - 08 - 22 - 46 - 47 - 50
04/25/2007	04 - 07 - 14 - 26 - 28 - 34
04/21/2007	10 - 17 - 20 - 21 - 22 - 35
04/18/2007	01 - 05 - 20 - 23 - 31 - 38
04/14/2007	07 - 20 - 33 - 34 - 37 - 40
04/11/2007	02 - 05 - 12 - 19 - 26 - 43
04/07/2007	06 - 09 - 21 - 29 - 40 - 52
04/04/2007	03 - 13 - 19 - 22 - 49 - 53
03/31/2007	15 - 22 - 28 - 37 - 42 - 49
03/28/2007	01 - 15 - 24 - 38 - 39 - 50

Numbers are obtained from the Florida Lottery ([www.flalottery.com](http://www.flalottery.com)) as a service to readers. We cannot accept liability for any errors.





# Florida Homes and Travel

May 2007

## The Island Of Bones (part 4)

Last month we read how Keith and Kathleen explored Key West using the Old Town Trolley. They have been to Mallory Square and are now headed to the Wreckers house...

Time to get off and see the Wreckers house. Built in 1829 on Whitehead St. it was moved to Duval in 1832. That's the great thing about a wooden property, you can take it down and move on. In this case it was probably to get a comparatively elevated site, and catch the sea breezes. The house is a real gem, furnished in period style and with the cook-house, as usual, out back in the garden to reduce the fire risk. Why the Wreckers House? It was the home of Capt. Francis B. Watlington, who had a profitable sideline going in what was a thriving industry in Key West in the 19th century, shipwrecking.

A short stroll from there to Whitehead St. to get a birds eye view of the island from the top of the Key West lighthouse. Eighty-eight steps, puff-pant, and eighty-six feet later, we had a panoramic view of the island from the observation deck below the light. An interesting prospect of this crowded island with its wonderful old town houses amidst a sea of trees and Key West palms, and the later development beyond. There is a refreshing breeze up here, but the press of eager sightseers precludes lingering on this narrow platform. Traffic jams on the narrow spiral staircase slow downward progress. Two rather large American ladies having real problems half way up bring traffic to a total halt. I idly wondered if being skinny was one of the qualifications for being a keeper of the light. Pinky and Perky gave up the attempt and settled for as dignified a descent as their bulk allowed. Progress resumed, and it was on to the Lighthouse Museum, housed in the keeper's quarters, for all things nautical, military, and historical. Exceedingly interesting but taking more time than we realised. We decide to skip a visit to Hemingway's house across the way. The famed long tail cats were a neighbours, and are no great draw anyway, and the interior furnishings are not Hemingway's, according to his secretary.

It is mid-afternoon and time we were back on the wheels for the long run up to the far end of the island. Up past the Marina and the Shrimp Docks by Mallory Square, down Palm Avenue and along North Roosevelt Boulevard and the junction with US1 and back on Roosevelt Boulevard South and eventually to the Casa Marina stop, the nearest to our motel. Solares

Hill may be the highest natural point on the island but there is, coming up on our right a high white hill. Another wart says our driver. Trash, piled high and given a covering of dredged marl that creates a skin that dries hard and white. Not one of the islands prettiest sights. Digging a hole on a coral island is a mite laborious, and dumping at sea will not earn you any brownie points with the environmental lobby. So this is the method chosen to solve the problem. Whoever thought this one up, probably had no idea of its visual impact on so flat an island. Maybe someone will see the possibilities, pretty it up, and create the only ski slope in the Sunshine State? Interest fades as the roadside scene becomes that typical of urban America, diners, gas stations, motels, hotels, supermarkets and food stores. Around the corner we passed the East Martello Tower Museum and Art Gallery. Another day, perhaps. For we weary survivors of a hard days tourist campaigning, thoughts were of a nice cool shower, and a rest before exploring the delights of The Crab Shack on Caroline Street, opposite the Turtle Kraals. We had noticed, and been amused, by the sign on the end wall proclaiming "Free Crab Tomorrow". Think about it. 'Twas a wonderful meal, taken out of doors in the welcome cool of the evening. We needed a long slow amble along Duval St., the longest street in the world, after that indulgence. It has to be the longest. It stretches from the Gulf of Mexico to the Atlantic Ocean! Two tired Key Westers slept like logs that night.

That concludes our revisit of a trip Keith and Kathleen took back in the early 1990's.

Next month we will be showcasing the London Symphony Orchestra's annual visit to Florida.

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# Florida Homes and Travel

May 2007

## Weird News

### Heart not really in it?

A gunman demanded the contents of a cash register from a convenience store in Altamonte Springs, and then found himself full of concern for the attendant who began feeling chest pains. The worried baddie fetched the 60-year old clerk a stool to sit on and tried to re-assure her she would be OK. Despite originally wanting her to open the safe, he then allowed her to phone 911, even letting her get her own cell phone when the store phone would not work. A customer came in and offered further assistance to the clerk, and even spoke to the 911 operators without seeing the gunman, who then told the customer to get in to the beverage cooler. He then grabbed his loot – around \$30 plus cigarettes, wished them both a good day, apologised and left!!

### Pursuing the cool vote...

In 1969 Jim Morrison, a native Floridian and former Florida State University student, was convicted of exposing himself during a concert in Miami and sentenced to 6 months in jail. He died in a bathtub in Paris before his appeal could be heard. Now there is a campaign to obtain a posthumous pardon from Governor Crist. Crist, himself an FSU alum appeared keen on the idea – “he’s a Nole? Well, given that fact, I’m certainly willing to review it” he joked recently.

### Stop – Police

An Orlando police officer engaged in a high-speed chase followed his suspects a little too far when they lost control and drove into a tree. He also lost control and put himself up side down into a retention pond. Notwithstanding Officer Santelises sprung from his underwater vehicle and helped apprehend one of the suspects.

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### Frequent Flyer Burger Miles

How much does Jay Barr love Krystal burgers? He loves them so much that he flies 150 miles from his Cape Coral, Florida, home several times a year to the nearest Krystal fast-food restaurant. Barr picks up 24 burgers about ten times a year. He typically leaves around 6 am and is home by 8:30 am, sometimes before his wife even wakes up. To honour Barr, the fast-food company has unveiled a hamburger box and drink cup with Barr's face and an airplane printed on them. Thousands of the boxes will be distributed to restaurants in the Southeast.

### Jaw-walking

An alligator was taken into custody and placed in a holding cell in Stuart, West Palm Beach for monitoring. His crime? Jaywalking, the 11-foot alligator was found one night crawling along the street where he had been spotted a few times over the preceding couple of days. The miscreant has now been relocated to a more 'rural' location!

### Not quite Arch Criminal...

The image of superheroes hit a new low last month with the arrest of Captain America in a Melbourne bar. A Florida Doctor dressed in the famous costume apparently approached a lady with a burrito in his Lycra which he then allegedly tried to use rather inappropriately accompanied with lewd comments. When police arrived he was picked out of a line up (yes, there were more than one dressed as Captain America) at the bar by the woman he had allegedly harassed. Back at the police station he then, allegedly, tried to flush drugs down a toilet.

### The straw that broke...

The old adage goes “never work with Children or Animals”. Pity poor Cathie Ake who had been rescuing exotic animals for nearly 10 years. Cathie was being filmed by a local TV crew and was showing her newest acquisition, a 4-year old camel she had bought just 3 weeks earlier when the camel kicked her over and then sat on her. By the time rescuers got the camel off poor Cathie she was already dead. Her husband pledged to rehome the camel, which he said was probably wound up by the mating season.

### Juice anyone?

A couple of ninth graders from Palm Harbor came up with a great wheeze. Buy a bottle of apple juice from a vending machine, fill it with wee, and put it back for the next chap! Fantastic fun – except the victim's mother didn't see the funny side and called the police. Now the two funsters face being expelled as well as felony charges.



# Florida Homes and Travel

May 2007

## Theme Park News

**According to InPark Magazine** Walt Disney attractions worldwide received over 112.5million visitors. The Walt Disney Company never releases actual attendance figures, but the magazine reports that the Magic Kingdom saw a 3% increase over 2005 to 16.6 million. Epcot received 10.4 million, Disney MGM Studios 9.1 million, and Animal Kingdom just behind at 8.6 million. Typhoon Lagoon topped all the U.S. water parks with 2.05 million, Blizzard Beach was second with 1.88 million visitors.

**The Walt Disney Company** has announced that it will now offer its 'Fairy Tale Wedding' plan to same sex couples at Walt Disney World, Disneyland and on Disney Cruise's.

**An internal Disney World** memo obtained by WKMG Local 6 News reveals plans to update all of the scenes in the time travelling Spaceship Earth attraction at EPCOT. The narrative will be new and updated, there will be three new scenes and some parts will become interactive. The ride is planned to be ready for November, just after EPCOT's 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary.

**Disney World** is introducing a resort wide ban on smoking in their hotels on June 1<sup>st</sup>. There will be designated smoking areas, but smoking on patios or balconies will not be permitted.

**The now closed** Back to the Future ride at Universal Studios Orlando will be replaced by a Simpson's themed simulator ride in the summer of 2008 called 'Travel with Homer, Marge, Bart, Lisa and Maggie'. They will be going on a trip to a theme park dreamed up by Krusty the Clown.

**A 6 ft, 151-** pound baby giraffe named Rori was born at Animal Kingdom on March 26<sup>th</sup>. The baby and his 10-year old mother – Nikki – will be rejoining the herd on the savannah in the next couple of weeks.

**Walt Disney World Resort**, has announced two new projects as part of an expansion plan for the resort in Central Florida: First, a new 900-acre luxury resort anchored by the prestigious Four Seasons Hotels and Resorts and second, a 450-acre retail, dining and lodging district on the western edge of the Disney resort.

Along the northeast border of Walt Disney World Resort, Disney plans to convert its Eagle Pines and Osprey Ridge golf courses into a luxury resort and golf community. The development will include a luxury hotel, 18-hole championship golf course, single- and multi-family vacation homes

and fractional ownership vacation homes. Once terms of the project are finalized, site work could begin later this year, with a hotel opening forecasted for 2010.

Out to the west of the resort, Disney is planning a mixed-use tourist/commercial district just outside the new Beltway entrance. The master-planned development is comparable in size to Disney's Animal Kingdom. The project combines third-party branded lodging, retail and dining in a pedestrian-friendly environment. Located outside Disney's gateway around the interchange where Western Way meets the Western Beltway, early development plans include 4,000 - 5,000 low- to mid-rise, value-priced lodging units and 300,000 - 500,000 square feet of commercial space.

**Disney** has reported 2 deaths at its parks in the first quarter of this year – both older gentlemen found to have died from natural causes. There were two other serious injuries, in one an 89 year-old lady fell and broke her hip exiting from a ride vehicle in the Magic Kingdom's Haunted Mansion. Universal Studios, SeaWorld and Busch Gardens reported no serious injuries resulting from their rides in the first quarter.

**Universal Studios Orlando** has reported profits are up by 19% during 2006 despite a fall in attendance levels of 2.5% over 2005 levels. Profits for 2006 were \$41.96 million and attendance for 2006 was 11.21 million.

**Various news sources** are saying that a Harry Potter themed area could be in the offing for Orlando, courtesy of one of the Universal Studios parks.

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