

September 2001

## Prices Up But Rentals & Satisfaction Down

For the second year running our Property Management Survey reveals that owners secured fewer rentals and are growing more dissatisfied. A free 10-page supplement listing the full results of the 2001 Property Management Survey is enclosed with this month's newsletter. This year's survey lists 159 property managers, 36 more than last year. With the Internet having a bigger influence each year, this year we have included for the first time Property Manager's web site and e-mail addresses where we have been able to obtain them. So what are the overall results? Owners obtaining their own rentals, and that is most of you, achieved an average of 25.46 weeks in 2000. This is the worst result since 1995. In addition property managers achieved an average of 12.43 weeks of rentals for owners in 2000, which was the worst result since 1996. As you will see from the 10-year summary on page 6, the combined result of 37.89 weeks of rentals is the lowest since 1995. One bright light is that the relatively few owners who let their property manager secure all their rentals achieved a record average of 31.03 weeks. Since 2000 was a good year for Florida tourism, and there are already troubling indications of 2001 being a tougher year, it is hardly surprising that many owners are not happy, which inevitably sets the scene for lower satisfaction scores and the highest proportion of owners changing property managers since 1995. (Continued on page 6)

### Rental Regulation Problems

Islamorada in the Florida Keys plans to ban short-term rentals. The Village Council passed the first reading of a new ordinance on 12<sup>th</sup> July. Provided they apply within 60 days of the new ordinance becoming final, existing homeowners who were licensed to offer short-term rentals as of May 1999 will be able to continue renting for periods of less than 30 days until April 30<sup>th</sup> 2003. Then rentals will have to be for 30 days or more. The Islamorada Chamber of Commerce estimates that there are 400 vacation rental properties inside the village boundaries. One owner Robert Geisler, a Palm Beach County lawyer, is threatening to sue the council to halt the new ordinance. Owners reckon that the new ordinance will involve the loss of \$26 million to owners and local businesses. In Pasco County, Chuck Grey, a prominent local real estate figure, is leading a campaign to loosen that county's September 1999 ordinance that he says has killed off international sales of vacation homes.

Abbey National is now offering mortgages and remortgages in pounds to UK residents secured against vacation homes in Florida. They are being provided by its subsidiary First National (Tel: 020-8909-7600). One of the first to offer them is British Home Loans Florida, a licensed mortgage broker based in Orlando who can be contacted by freephone from the UK on 0800-096-5989. A flexible tracker mortgage linked to British base rates and 3 and 5 year fixed rate ones are available.

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### Abbey National Lends For Florida

### Green Card Lottery Time Again

Foreign homeowners who would like to be able to live and work in the USA have a chance of obtaining a green card in the DV-2003 lottery. Entries have to be submitted to arrive between noon on October 1<sup>st</sup> and noon on October 31<sup>st</sup> 2001. Winners will obtain their green cards from October 1, 2002. For the ninth year in succession most UK people, and those born in most of its dependencies, are excluded from the lottery. Only people born in Northern Ireland qualify, because the US considers this part of Ireland. Other excluded countries are Canada, China (except Hong Kong), Colombia, Dominican Republic, El Salvador, Haiti, India, Jamaica, Mexico, Pakistan, Philippines, South Korea and Vietnam. All these countries are excluded because they had more than 50,000 US immigrants in the past five years. 55,000 green cards are available, but this includes those awarded to spouses and dependent children of lottery winners. To be eligible you, or your spouse, or in some circumstances a parent, must have been born in an eligible country. Remember that husbands and wives can submit separate applications even though if either win the other can still gain a green card as a dependent. There are a few changes from last year. First of all the mailing addresses are different. Photographs are also now required of the applicant and all his or her dependants, and the photographs must conform to the specification listed in the instructions. The definition of qualifying work experience also now uses a different Department of Labor database. The Department of State points out that the procedure is simple enough for most people to apply without assistance from an attorney, nevertheless there are many people who would prefer you to think otherwise, and offer to help you for a fee. However an attorney's help may be advisable in complicated situations, for example because of overstaying a visa on a previous visit, which is now an offence for which you can be barred from entry to the USA for varying penalty periods. There are minimum educational qualifications, and winners must be able to show that they will not be a burden on the state. The conditions aren't that onerous, so if you are eligible you certainly should not be put off applying if you want the opportunity to live and work in the USA. As the application procedure isn't of interest to everyone, if you wish to apply you can obtain the sixteen pages of instructions at <http://shusterman.com/toc-lottery.html> or <http://travel.state.gov/visainstructions.html>. We have added the Shusterman immigration attorney's web site [www.shusterman.com](http://www.shusterman.com) to the *News Links* part of the *Useful Links* section of our own web site because it is the best site we know off for immigration information.

### Saved On This Occasion

In May 2000 we reported the sad tale of a Scottish couple who lost their Osceola County vacation home because they failed to pay their property taxes. The county placed a lien on the property and sold the tax debt. After the required minimum period the people who bought the tax debt foreclosed on the property. It was auctioned on the court steps for just over half its \$140,000 value. However by the time the tax debt, interest, penalties and court costs were deducted, the owners eventually got back less than half their money. The couple, who had no mortgage on the property, were advised that there was no legal precedent for being able to recover their home.

Interestingly there has since been a case where a judge has overruled a foreclosure. In this case Robert and Linda Hammer lost their \$235,000 home in Clearwater because their homeowners association foreclosed on them for non-payment of dues totalling \$650. Robert is a long-distance truck driver and is away from home for weeks at a time. The debt arose while Linda was battling colon cancer and fell behind on many things. The house was sold at the foreclosure auction for \$36,100 but the buyers also had to assume the \$125,000 mortgage. Senior County Judge Stephen Rushing overturned the foreclosure sale by ruling that Linda's failure to make payments was excusable in the particular circumstances. A humane decision, but not one to rely on if you fall behind on critical payments.

### Orlando Climate Data for Sep 1974-1999

(All in degrees Fahrenheit)

The normal high temp. is	88 to 91
The highest temp. (on Sep 3, 1988)	98
The coldest Day temp. (on Sep 20, 1985)	74
The coldest Night temp. (on Sep 20, 1981)	57

### Fort Myers Climate Data for Sep 1931-1999

(All in degrees Fahrenheit)

The normal high temp. is	88 to 91
The highest temp. (on Sep 7, 1996)	97
The coldest Day temp. (on Sep 9, 1971)	75
The coldest Night temp. (on Sep 27, 1991)	64

### Mortgage Rates

With zero points

Jul 11 Aug 15

Fixed 30 yrs	7.375%	7.00%	First Union Nat'l Bank
Adjustable 1 yr	6.75%	6.50%	First Union Nat'l Bank

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

# Florida Homes and Travel

September 2001

## News Roundup

**Tropical Storm Barry** hit Florida's Panhandle coast near Destin on August 6<sup>th</sup> causing one death, power outages and flooding. As we completed this issue **Tropical Storm Chantal** was threatening Mexico's Yucatan Peninsula.

**Sharks** attacked and injured 6 surfers during a surfing competition on August 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> at **New Smyrna Beach** on Florida's Atlantic Coast. There have been 17 shark attacks in this area this year, confirming the area's long standing reputation as the highest risk place in the world. Sharks congregate in the area because of the fish migrations along this coast. Most of the shark attacks are considered accidental and there have never been any fatalities. An 8-year old boy was also attacked on July 6<sup>th</sup> in Pensacola and had his arm severed by the shark.

**Huntington Bank** is to sell its 139 Florida branches but will retain its Florida mortgage and car loan business. **First Union** beat off a rival bid from **SunTrust** and has acquired **Wachovia**, whose name it plans to adopt.

An alligator killed a 2-year old girl in **Polk County** on 23<sup>rd</sup> June. She had climbed over the back yard fence and gone down to the edge of Lake Cannon. This is the second death this year. A 70-year old man was killed in May in a pond near his **Sarasota** home. This takes the state total to 11 alligator deaths since state records began in 1948.

The last 11-mile section of the 42-mile **Suncoast Parkway** opened on August 11<sup>th</sup> from S.R. 50 in Hernando County to U.S. 98 near Citrus County.

**Visit Florida** says that 20.9 million visitors came to Florida in the second quarter, 11.4% up on 2000. They also released the 2000 Canadian visitor numbers of 1.97 million, which to everyone's surprise was up 16.4% from the 1.69 million in 1999.

**Busch Gardens** has reopened its new *Rhino Rally* ride after a June 26<sup>th</sup> rollover accident that injured two visitors. The track has since been modified.

**Disney** is abandoning its expansion plans for *DisneyQuest* and is closing its only other location in Chicago. The Orlando location will however remain open.

Following a death from **West Nile Virus** in northern Florida, health officials issued a medical alert for 17 counties surrounding Tallahassee. There is no known cure for the potentially fatal mosquito-borne virus.

**Four Manatee Sanctuaries** and twelve Manatee Refuges have been named by the US Fish and Wildlife Service in Florida. Only local property owners will be allowed water access in the sanctuaries, and all boaters will be limited to low-speed no-wake operation in the refuges. 10-digit dialling has commenced in **Broward County's** 954 area code with the arrival of a new 754 area code on September 1<sup>st</sup>. It will be mandatory from April 1<sup>st</sup> 2002.

**SeaWorld's Discovery Cove** is such a success that it is to be expanded by about 15% by June 2002.

Two visitors were killed parasailing at **Fort Myers Beach** on July 11<sup>th</sup>. The mother and her 13-year old daughter from Kentucky fell over 200 feet to their deaths when their harness broke as a storm hit the area. There are currently no regulations governing parasailing operators. **Universal Orlando** annual pass holders can now only reserve one ride at a time with the *Universal Express* system. Until July 31<sup>st</sup> they could reserve up to three rides. Universal has laid off another 24 staff in its marketing division, a month after 20 earlier lay offs.

The **Florida Brits Club National Convention** is being held in Birmingham on September 9<sup>th</sup>. For details contact the club's organizers Peter & Jean Stanhope on 01904-471800. We look forward to meeting some of you there.

Florida Lottery Winning Numbers			
Date	Numbers	Winners	Jackpot \$m
Jun 23	01-07-12-16-18-32	1	\$28m
Jun 27	15-25-26-34-41-42	0	\$3m
Jun 30	02-03-07-30-49-52	1	\$7m
Jul 4	16-18-20-21-25-27	0	\$3m
Jul 7	05-18-29-33-49-53	0	\$5m
Jul 11	02-18-36-37-43-47	0	\$7m
Jul 14	07-10-15-35-41-45	0	\$12m
Jul 18	04-20-39-41-46-50	0	\$16m
Jul 21	18-27-37-40-43-46	0	\$23m
Jul 25	13-18-28-29-30-31	1	\$28m
Jul 28	07-31-36-42-43-50	0	\$5m
Aug 1	15-24-28-32-50-51	0	\$7m
Aug 4	04-05-20-38-40-49	1	\$11m
Aug 8	05-08-11-13-23-40	0	\$3m
Aug 11	13-23-27-43-44-50	0	\$7m
Aug 15	04-15-25-28-34-51	0	\$10m
Aug 18	01-04-17-32-52-53	0	\$15m

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.

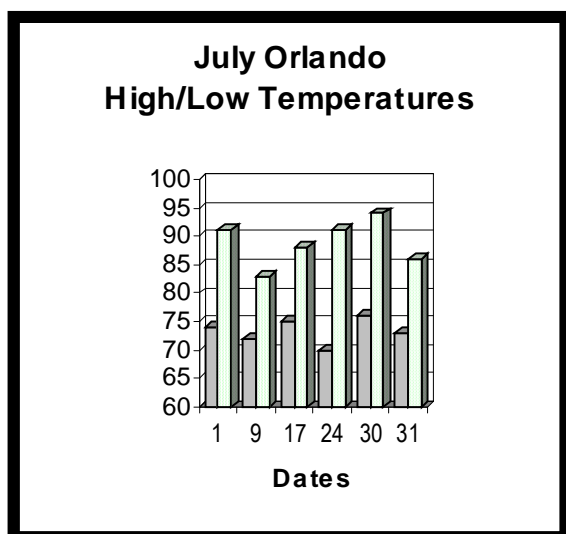
### Homeowner News

**HomeLife Furniture**, the 8<sup>th</sup> largest US furniture retailer that was once part of Sears, shut down all its 130 stores in mid-July when it announced that having failed to raise more money it would have to liquidate. Customers with outstanding orders should check [www.ehomelife.com](http://www.ehomelife.com) or call 877-570-2336 or 847-649-7000.

**Sears** is selling its pest-control business to **Terminex**. The majority of Sears 250,000 customers are in Florida. Terminex, the largest pest-control company in the USA, has over 4 million customers. About 1,000 Sears workers will lose their jobs as a result of the acquisition.

**Car Insurance** rates are up an average of 10% throughout Florida. This year the state has approved increases for over 60 insurance companies. State Farm, the biggest insurer, has increased rates by an average of 6.4% though the largest increase is 12.5%. Allstate, the second biggest, has increases averaging 6% and Progressive Express another big insurer averages 12.8%.

It was four years ago that I wrote about running out of patience with those horrible rubber toilet flappers that fail after as little as a year, and can run up enormous water bills when they start leaking. I replaced mine as an experiment with the combined **Fluidmaster 400A Toilet Repair Valve and the Bull's Eye Super Flapper Kit** from Home Depot that cost \$7.89 plus tax. Fitting it was a breeze, and I promised to let you know if it lived up to its promises. Well four years later it is still going strong without any problems. I wholeheartedly recommend that you fit one and say goodbye to the annual flapper woes.



**General Electric** has quietly changed its mind and is now offering to fix dishwashers affected by its late 1999 design defect recall. 3.1 million dishwashers were affected by the fault that had caused over 50 fires, but many owners refused to take up GE's offer of a rebate towards a replacement. The affected models built between April 1983 and January 1989 under both the GE and Hotpoint brand names are models GSD500D, GSD500G, GSD540, HDA467, HDA477 or HDA487 with a serial number with a second letter of A, M, R, S, T, V or Z. The label with these details is located on the inner edge of the tub. The fault is in a sliding switch that is used to choose either heated or unheated drying. GE has been telephoning owners who contacted them about the rebate offer but then didn't take it up, and is now offering to fix the fault free of charge, something that consumer groups were demanding from the beginning. They came and fixed ours in less than 10 minutes. The "repair" consists of rewiring the sliding switch so that the dishwasher is permanently set to either heated or unheated drying. GE's recall hotline is 1-800-599-2929.

Do your **Deed Restrictions** ban the use of clothes lines? If so they must now be changed. In order to promote energy conservation the law has been changed and Florida Statute 163.04 paragraph 2 states that clothes lines may not be prohibited. Homeowners Associations etc., are still allowed to set "reasonable" limitations on the use of clothes lines, such as their location and the hours or days of use, but can no longer ban them.

Overseas readers who buy a **Cellular Phone** for use in Florida may not be aware of a significant technological difference in an emergency. Most cellular networks in Europe have the technology to pinpoint the location of a caller, so the emergency services can be accurately dispatched even if the caller has only the vaguest idea where they are. This isn't the case in Florida yet, but hopefully soon will be. By October cellular companies are supposed to begin offering the technology to allow the emergency services call centers to locate a caller. Many cellular companies won't meet the deadline and have sought extensions. The Federal Communications Commission has admitted that it is expecting the system to be only 95% effective by 2005.

Internet Services keep arriving that offer owners new opportunities for gaining rentals from a worldwide audience. The latest is from **Last Minute Villas** ([www.lastminutevillas.net](http://www.lastminutevillas.net) or tel: 01527-854037) that specializes in late availability bookings. Their lowest cost Silver Option allows you to list two last minute bookings a month up to 6 weeks in advance for an annual fee of \$75 or £50. There are two other packages on offer.

# Florida Homes and Travel

September 2001

## 2001 Survey Results (Continued from page 1)

The good news is that rental prices of 2 and 3 bedroom homes were either up on 1999 or the same, whereas owners of 4 and 5 bedroom homes had more mixed success at increasing rates. Our survey discovered that owners of 3 bedroom pool homes managed to increase their median peak season weekly rate by \$28 (£20) and their low season rate by \$14 (£10). Owners of 2 bedroom pool homes achieved an increase of \$28 (£20) in their median low season rate but nothing for peak rates. Owners of 4 bedroom pool homes didn't fare so well, suffering a \$14 (£10) reduction in median peak season weekly rentals, though they achieved a \$7 (£5) increase in median low season rates. Owners of 5 bedroom pool homes achieved the best peak season price increase of \$105 (£75) but also suffered the biggest drop in low season prices of \$42 (£30). Reviewing the data and owners comments we believe that many owners are finding it harder to fill low season weeks, regardless of the price.

However on a positive note more owners achieved 40 or more weeks of rentals in 2000 than in 1999. 16 owners (8.6%) secured 40 or more weeks for themselves compared to 13 (7%) in 1999. A further 17 owners (9.1%) achieved 40 or more weeks in combination with their property manager. In 1999 it was 16 owners and 9%. The same trend was visible last year, so there is a growing number of owners achieving 40 or more weeks.

Visit Florida says that 2000 was a record year for visitors to Florida. Foreign visitor numbers to Florida as a whole for 2000 were 3.9% up on 1999 at 6,026,000. Of these 3,013,000 visited the Orlando area. However many of our subscribers rely on rentals from the UK and in 2000 1,312,000 were from the UK. That is quite an increase from the 1,157,000 UK visitors to Orlando in 1999, so there was no shortage of British visitors last year. Hotels in the Orlando area increased their average occupancy and their average daily rate in 2000, despite over 3,500 additional rooms being built since 1999. This suggests that since only the vacation home sector is suffering lower occupancy, it must be because supply is outstripping the number of visitors wanting this type of accommodation.

If you do the sums you will realize that if every British family visiting Orlando for a two-week vacation were to spread themselves evenly across the year, then every owner would currently enjoy maximum occupancy. But that is utopia, and the reality is that many UK visitors

come during the peak season, and many also choose to stay in a hotel or motel. That is why with a growing number of new vacation homes it is important for owners and management companies to try and secure non-UK bookings in order to cast the net wider. The Internet is the best tool for doing this. Every owner should ensure that their home is on the Internet through either your own web page, one of the many vacation home marketing sites listed on our web site, or through a booking system run by your property manager. It is now more important than ever before to market your home worldwide.

### Average Rental Weeks Achieved 1991-1995

	1991	1992	1993	1994	1995
Owner	18.80	20.90	21.83	20.20	22.46
PropMg	8.90	11.80	8.96	10.77	11.74
<b>Total</b>	<b>27.70</b>	<b>32.70</b>	<b>30.79</b>	<b>30.97</b>	<b>34.20</b>

### Average Rental Weeks Achieved 1996-2000

	1996	1997	1998	1999	2000
Owner	27.28	26.38	27.41	25.72	25.46
PropMg	11.86	14.87	14.03	13.38	12.43
<b>Total</b>	<b>39.14</b>	<b>41.25</b>	<b>41.44</b>	<b>39.10</b>	<b>37.89</b>

This year for the first time we gathered information on pool heating charges. Of the 172 owners who shared this information with us only 9 have unheated pools. Of the rest 37% have electric pool heating, 29% solar, 20% gas, 13% have a combined electric and solar system, and 1% have a combined gas and solar system. The predominance of electric heating isn't surprising, as mains gas is only available in limited areas in Florida. Hardly anyone charges for solar heating, which also isn't surprising since it costs nothing extra to operate, and is inadequate in the coldest months. The average extra weekly fee for pool heating charged by the remaining 102 owners was \$98 (£70), though quite a few of the owners with gas systems said that they are reviewing their charge after very high gas bills this last winter. An interestingly different approach taken by a few owners, is to charge the same price year round, and make a big marketing point of offering free pool heating in the winter.

The overall conclusion is that the most successful owners are still doing well, but lots of others, including many newer owners, are beginning to struggle in a vastly more competitive market. Successful marketing, and nurturing satisfied renters for repeat business and referrals, should be the top priority for all owners.

### Worms and Possums

We like to find you some offbeat places to visit to make a change from the usual attractions and these two certainly fit the bill.

Years ago one autumn grey, windy and cold Sunday morning, our youngest daughter asked if I would do her a favour? Take her and a yard square open wooden frame, a watering can and my old jerry can full of water down the lane to fields near the river. It seems we were kitted out for a worm hunt. My, my, you learn something every day. No hounds for us, just the aforesaid kit. Perhaps it was for her Biology A Level, I forget now. Tackle unloaded, frame placed on the edge of the field, watering can filled with water previously laced with a generous measure of potassium permanganate to a pretty deep blue shade. What now thinks I? "You pour, I'll count" said daughter, I dutifully watered the soil inside the bounds of said wooden frame, mind agog with speculation. Well, what happened next was quite amazing. A multitude of worms literally leapt out of the ground. Big ones, small ones, fat ones, thin ones, all wriggling and squirming. OK what has all this to do with sunny Florida?

Florida Crackers reckon that any guy worth his salt knows how to fiddle for worms. No never fear it doesn't involve any musical skill with the violin, nor any other stringed instrument. This pastime is regarded as a sport in the more rural parts of Florida. So much so that an International Worm Fiddling Championship is held in Caryville every year on the Saturday before Labor Day, which is September 1<sup>st</sup> this year. Eager folk gather to take part in what must rate as one of the most unusual contests, where perfectly rational individuals compete to see who can be the best International Worm Fiddler. Folk gather from far and wide to see this annual battle for the title.

Keen contestants, many of them veterans of previous hard fought fiddling events, take up their places inside the 25 foot square area that is allocated to each contestant. At this point I must point out that the use of potassium permanganate is not allowed. The modus operandi is to drive a stake into the ground inside your roped off square and make the stake vibrate in such a way that the worms in your patch wriggle their way to the surface, in all probability out of curiosity. As each worm breaks the surface judges count them in the thirty minutes that each competitor gets to try his skill. Ideas vary as to the best way to get your stake vibrating in an effective manner. Some rub the stake with wooden

handles, others with pieces of hardwood, and there are those who maintain that rubbing across the top of the stake with a file is best. It's all good fun and the major event in the festival each year where, in addition to the Worm Fiddling, there is a variety of Big Eats and much fun and spectacle to ensure a jolly good day out. On another day, trying to be good, we had deliberately missed having breakfast after leaving the motel as we had heard that a pancake breakfast was one of the food features at today's venue. Very scrumptious they were too, but apart from mid morning coffee we'd had nothing since. Tourism being the hard work that it is, lunch became the uppermost thought in our minds. Have you ever had a bite of Possum? Come now, you old Florida hands. Surely you aren't going to have to admit that you haven't heard of this delicacy? Why it's an old American staple food. You must have heard of it. It's the creature that plays dead when its survival is threatened. Hence the old American saying "Playing Possum".

The Opossum, to give it its correct name, has been man's saviour for generations past on this continent when times were hard. This little rat like furry creature, about the size of an overfed domestic cat, has been around since the dinosaurs roamed the planet. North America's only marsupial, it breeds prolifically, making it a regular source of food and fur in good times and bad. Why, it is so highly regarded here in Wausau that the citizens have erected a granite obelisk in its honor. And in 1992 the Florida Legislature proclaimed the first Saturday in August as the state's Possum Day. Wausau's Possum Festival on that day draws around 10,000 people every year. Possum and Taters feature large on the lunch menu as you might expect. It was good and filling. A stick to yer ribs kinda dinner, a bit like a greasy pork.

There is a lot to do at the festival, but for us it was time now for a lazy few minutes listening to the bluegrass and country and western music and dozing in equal parts in the welcome shade of the trees. The shutters must have gone down for a spell, as the next thing I knew was when Madam enquired if I intended staying flat on my back all the afternoon. "Just playing Possum Maam" I replied. The Possum King and Queen contest attracted many hopeful couples dressed in an astonishing variety of garb, from the sublime to the downright weird. We gave the Corn Pone judging and the cow calling contests a miss as Madam was intent on spending her dollars at the Arts and Crafts.

Both are located in Washington County to the west of Tallahassee. Wausau is south from I-10 (exit 18) towards Panama City, and Caryville is north of I-10 at exit 16.

# Florida Homes and Travel

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The **Florida Vacation Rental Managers Association** now has a web site <http://fvrma.org> which has a list of current members. This is particularly useful for subscribers outside the Orlando area, which is covered by the **Central Florida Property Managers Association** [www.cfpma.com](http://www.cfpma.com). Both organizations have done a lot to protect the interests of vacation homeowners, and we recommend that if your property manager is not a member you should ask them why? We have added links to both web sites from the *Homeowner Links* section of the *Useful Links* on our own web site. We have also added to our web site articles on *Legal and Tax Requirements for Florida Vacation Homes*, *US Taxes for Foreign Owners*, *UK Self-Assessment Tax Return Tips and Changes Needed to your UK Will?* as these are some of the most common queries we get from new owners. The link from the web site is shown as *Tax Issues, etc.*

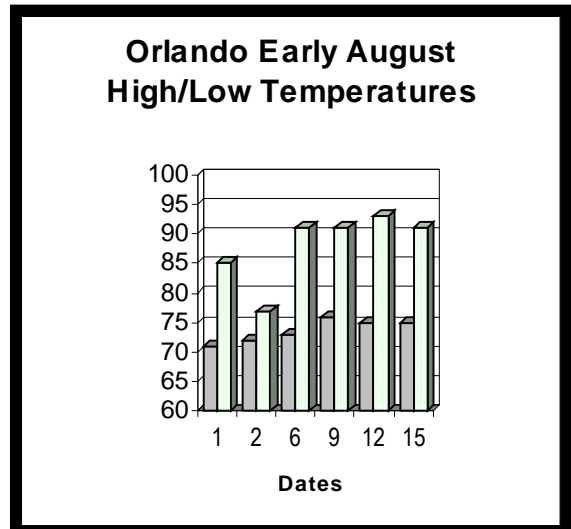
**Sinkholes** are a risk in many parts of Florida, but Spring Hill in Hernando County is currently suffering from an unusually high number. In the last two weeks of July sixty-five sinkholes opened up in a residential area bounded by Hwy. 19, Spring Hill Drive and Mariner Boulevard. Five homes had to be evacuated and three of them have been condemned. Most homeowner insurance policies cover sinkhole damage. The rash of sinkholes is blamed on heavy rain in mid-July that followed a prolonged drought. The ground conditions in Spring Hill make the area particularly prone to sinkholes. Statewide each year there are about 150 confirmed sinkholes.

Environmental groups have asked the **Consumer Product Safety Commission** for a federal ban on the use in children's playgrounds of a wood preservative that contains 22% arsenic. There is growing pressure on the Environmental Protection Agency to complete its study of the cancer risk from skin contact. Chromated copper arsenate (CCA) is widely used by factories treating lumber for use in playgrounds, decks, railings, picnic tables, fences and docks. An average 5-year old playing for only two weeks on playground equipment made from CCA treated lumber may absorb more than the recommended lifetime level of 1 in 1 million cancer risk. The scare has resulted in children's playgrounds being closed for testing all over Florida. Many tests have revealed high levels of arsenic leaching into the soil from CCA treated lumber. Disney World banned it in Animal Kingdom, as have a number of countries like Switzerland. Others including Australia, Denmark, Germany, Sweden and New Zealand have imposed or are planning restrictions. So if you are building anything with treated lumbar, you might be wise to buy non-CCA treated lumber, even if it costs more.

## 2001 2nd Quarter Home Prices

Despite fears of a recession, sales of existing single-family homes in Florida continue to set new records. The latest figures from *The Florida Association of Realtors* reveals that resale prices of single family homes were up 8.7% compared to the 2<sup>nd</sup> quarter of 2000. A record number of single family homes, 45,693 were resold in the second quarter, 5.9% more than a year ago. Naples, the state's most expensive location, was the only one to suffer a drop in median resale prices, but it often suffers major swings that are down to the values achieved by a few high value properties. The largest number of home sales was in Tampa Bay with 8,648, Orlando was 2<sup>nd</sup> with 6,866 and West Palm Beach 3<sup>rd</sup> with 4,899.

District	Median Price	Change 2Q01-2Q00
Daytona Beach	\$97,000	+8.7%
Fort Lauderdale	\$172,200	+18.5%
Fort Myers/Cape Coral	\$133,100	+10.4%
Fort Pierce/Port St Lucie	\$104,400	+2.7%
Jacksonville	\$118,000	+14.5%
Lakeland/Winter Haven	\$84,100	+11.8%
Melbourne/Titusville	\$101,500	+10.3%
Miami	\$157,900	+16.3%
Naples	\$250,800	-3.1%
Orlando	\$120,900	+12.5%
Pensacola	\$106,300	+3.4%
Punta Gorda	\$95,600	+6.8%
Tallahassee	\$127,200	+3.8%
Tampa, St Pete & Clearwater	\$119,300	+12.3%
W Palm Beach, Boca Raton	\$147,700	+4.1%
<b>All Florida</b>	<b>\$127,400</b>	<b>+8.7%</b>



### Too Good To Be True

The DeConna Ice Cream Company near Ocala could barely keep up with demand. For some reason the local ice cream company suddenly found the big supermarkets were more than happy to stock their brand. Something about customers asking for it? Whatever, why should they worry about suddenly finding success. The South Florida Sun-Sentinel had heard the growing chorus of dieters saying how great DeConna's Big Daddy Vanilla ice cream was, and the label said a 12-ounce serving was only 100 calories and 2 grams of fat, only a third of many other ice creams. However when the paper tested it the result came back as 300 calories and 7 grams of fat. DeConna say that no one noticed the error on the label when it first went into production in 1995, though they have changed it now. Dieting fans all over Florida are now in mourning!

### Water To And Fro

Four years ago the South West Florida Water Management District (Swiftmud) put the damper on Robert Thomas's lucrative bottled water deal. He had signed a deal years before with the Zephyrhills Spring Water Company, a subsidiary of Perrier, to let them tap his spring. It had become so successful that they needed to be allowed to increase their usage from 301,000 gallons a day to 2.6 million, but that was just as the drought started and Swiftmud said no. For four years they have fought. Now peace has broken out over a strange deal. He and Zephyrhills can draw an extra 30,000 gallons a day provided they replace it with an equal quantity of similar quality from somewhere outside the Hillsborough River basin. So tankers will have to bring in water each day from afar, so that another 30,000 gallons of real Zephyrs Hills Spring Water can be bottled. Strange indeed!

### Be Trendy, Get A Turnpike Shirt

Those Florida Turnpike toll collectors' shirts that are decorated with Florida scenes from 1930's postcards have become a must have for lots of visitors and residents. After many requests they are now on sale at \$39.99 each plus tax and they keep selling out such is the demand.

### Pepsi's Expensive Error

Pepsi have also had a printer's error but this one hit their wallet rather than their waistline. Pepsi did a promotion with Circle K convenience stores. Of the five winners one would get a Dodge Ram pickup, and the four runners up would get an expenses paid trip for two to the July 7<sup>th</sup> Pepsi 400 Race at Daytona. Unfortunately the printer created too many winners, 55 in all! The rules clearly stated that only one truck would be given away and the other four winners would get the trip, but Pepsi decided to put on a brave face and gave away 11 trucks and took all 55 winners on the trip. After all the \$400,000 gained them a lot of embarrassing publicity!

### The Technology Works

Some people don't have much faith in technology. Hernando Simmons was one who learnt the hard way. While on house arrest he ganged up with two others to rob the Huntington Bank branch in Tavares. Witnesses said that one of the men had a house-arrest bracelet around his ankle, so Florida's Department of Corrections quickly studied the Global Positioning Satellite data for its charges and spotted Hernando's unauthorized trip. They arranged for the Sheriff to pick up the surprised bank robber at his home. Oh ye of little faith!

### But Big Brother Is No Fun

Acme Rent A Car in Connecticut is also a fan of GPS systems. They installed them in their rental vehicles to monitor renter's driving and buried in the small print of the rental agreement they added that vehicles driven in excess of posted speed limits will be charged \$150 per occurrence. James Turner was livid when he found that Acme had deducted \$450 extra from his checking account for three violations of 70mph speed limits. He took them to the small claims court, but the judge has deferred the decision to the Department of Consumer Protection. Acme now puts a bold warning on its rental agreements but is adamant that the system stays. If they win, Florida's car rental companies might copy them. What a money-spinner that would be for them.