

NEWSLETTER#24

THERE ARE ABOUT 900 HOMES TODAY IN PORT LaBELLE WITH ABOUT 3,000 RESIDENTS. I DON'T THE AVERAGE AGE BUT MANY ARE FAMILIES WITH CHILDREN WHO ARE RENTING. THE LACK OF GROWTH IN PORT LaBELLE IS DIRECTLY RELATED TO THE FACT THAT SINCE 1974 MOST OF THE LOTS THAT HAD WATER LINES WERE BUILT ON. WHEN LOTS IN PORT LaBELLE WERE PURCHASED 20 TO 28 YEARS THE POTENTIAL OWNERS BOUGHT THE LOTS FOR A PLACE TO RETIRE. WHEN IT CAME TIME TO RETIRE THE LOTS IN PORT LaBELLE DIDN'T HAVE WATER LINES AND THEREFORE COULD NOT BE BUILT ON. THE FOLKS EXPECTING TO BUILD HERE HAD TO BUILD OR BUY SOMEWHERE ELSE AND NO LONGER NEEDED THE LOT IN PORT LaBELLE. SO NOW THAT

ABOUT 7,000 LOTS HAVE WATER LINES MANY OF THE WOULD BE HOMEOWNERS OF YEARS PAST ARE LIVING SOMEWHERE ELSE. MANY WANT TO SELL THEIR LOT(S) IN PORT LaBELLE OR GIVE IT TO THE CHILDREN OR GRANDCHILDREN OR DONATE THE LOT TO A CHARITY.

BOTH THE EAST AND WEST COASTS OF FLORIDA ARE BUILDING UP VERY FAST SO BUILDING LOTS ON BOTH COASTS ARE VERY EXPENSIVE AND GETTING HARD TO FIND. I THINK WHEN THE LAST 12 MILES OF HIGHWAY 80 ARE FOUR LANED TO FT. MYERS THE BUILD OUT OF PORT LaBELLE, ON RELATIVELY CHEAP LOTS, WILL HAPPEN.

THE WEST BOUNDARY OF PORT LaBELLE JOINS THE EAST BOUNDARY OF THE SMALL CITY OF LaBELLE, WHICH HAS A LITTLE LARGER POPULATION THAN PORT LaBELLE. THOSE OF YOU THAT GOT THE VIDEO OF LaBELLE AND PORT LaBELLE COULD TELL THAT LaBELLE IS THE LOCAL COMMERCIAL CENTER FOR ABOUT 30 MILES IN ALL DIRECTIONS.

THE 35th SWAMP CABBAGE FESTIVAL WILL BE HELD IN LaBELLE ON FEBRUARY 24th & 25th. THIS FESTIVAL HONORS ALL HENDRY COUNTY AGRICULTURE BUT ESPECIALLY HONORS SWAMP CABBAGE, ONE OF FLORIDA'S NATIVE DELICACIES, WHICH COMES FROM THE CABBAGE PALM. YOU MAY KNOW IT BETTER AS HEARTS OF PALM. IN YEARS PAST THERE HAVE BEEN 25,000 TO 30,000 PEOPLE COME TO LaBELLE TO SEE THE SWAMP CABBAGE PARADE ON SATURDAY MORNING AND THEN GO TO BARRON PARK TO EAT A VARIETY OF FOODS INCLUDING SWAMP CABBAGE WHILE ENJOYING MANY KINDS OF ENTERTAINMENT.

ACCORDING TO THE FLORIDA DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE, 82% OF THE LAND IN HENDRY COUNTY IS USED FOR AGRICULTURE. THE COUNTY IS SECOND ONLY TO PALM BEACH COUNTY IN SUGAR CANE PRODUCTION, THIRD IN THE STATE IN BEEF CATTLE AND FOURTH IN THE STATE IN CITRUS PRODUCTION. FLORIDA PRODUCES 1.5 BILLION GALLONS OF CITRUS JUICE A YEAR.

IN 1999 THE NUMBER OF FARMS IN HENDRY COUNTY WAS 403 USING 333,231 ACRES FOR PASTURE, 100,124 ACRES FOR CITRUS, 71,000 ACRES FOR SUGARCANE, 1,100 ACRES FOR CUCUMBERS, 3,900 ACRES FOR BELL PEPPERS AND 4,075 ACRES FOR TOMATOES. THE FOLLOWING ARE ESTIMATED ANNUAL RECEIPTS: LIVESTOCK \$14,788,000, SUGAR CROP \$52,890,000, WATERMELON CROP \$10,921,000, TOMATO CROP \$51,441,000, CITRUS ON TREE CROP \$100,654,000, CUCUMBER CROP \$6,109,000, BELL PEPPER CROP \$58,553,000. THESE ARE SOME FIGURES THAT ARE OF INTEREST: 31,633,000 BOXES OF CITRUS PRODUCED IN 1999 FROM 15,408,500 CITRUS TREES IN HENDRY COUNTY. 2,008,000 TONS OF SUGAR CANE HARVESTED, 546,000 BUSHEL OF CUCUMBERS, 4,243,000 BUSHEL OF BELL PEPPERS, 5,432,000 CARTONS OF TOMATOES, 806,000 HUNDRED WEIGHT OF WATERMELONS AND 97,000 BEEF CATTLE.

ALSO IN HENDRY COUNTY IS THE SOUTHERN PORTION OF LAKE OKEECHOBEE WHICH IS THE SECOND LARGEST FRESHWATER LAKE WHOLLY WITHIN THE CONFINES OF THE UNITED STATES. THE LAKE COVERS 730 SQUARE MILES OVER 448,000 ACRES WITH A NORMAL AVERAGE DEPTH OF 11 TO 14 FEET WITH A MAXIMUM WATER STORAGE OF 1.05 TRILLION GALLONS OF WATER.

RIGHT NOW SOUTH FLORIDA IS IN A SEVERE DROUGHT CONDITION AND THE LAKE IS DOWN TO 10.5 FEET WHICH FORCES WATER RESTRICTIONS ON FARMERS AND HOMES BOTH. THE LAKE IS EXPECTED TO GO TO 9.5 BY APRIL 1. WE HAVE HAD LESS THAN 1 INCH OF RAIN SINCE NOVEMBER 15. SOME LOCKS ON THE CALOOSAHATCHEE RIVER ARE NOW ONLY OPENING EVER 4 HOURS. THERE IS TALK OF CLOSING ALL LOCKS FROM THE LAKE UNTIL RAIN RESTORES THE WATER LEVEL IN THE LAKE.

I WAS DELIGHTED TO HEAR FROM SOME OF YOU ABOUT THE DATE YOU LAST PAID FOR THE RENEWAL OF THE NEWSLETTER. I WILL TELL YOU HOW THAT

HAPPENED AND IF YOU STILL THINK SOMETHING IS WRONG PLEASE LET ME HEAR FROM YOU. THIS NEWSLETTER IS ABOUT A BREAK EVEN THING FOR ME SO I WOULD RATHER YOU BE AS HAPPY WITH THIS BAD SITUATION AS YOU CAN BE. IN THE PAST YOU HAVE GOTTEN A NEWSLETTER ONCE EACH QUARTER BUT IF SOMETHING HAPPENS THAT I THINK YOU SHOULD BE AWARE OF, I SEND ANOTHER NEWSLETTER, TO KEEP YOU UP TO DATE ON EVENTS. EACH TIME I SEND A NEWSLETTER I SEND A RENEWAL NOTICE TO NEXT GROUP IN LINE TO GET THIS NOTICE REGARDLESS OF WHICH QUARTER IT IS. THIS IS WHY YOU GOT A RENEWAL NOTICE IN A DIFFERENT QUARTER. ALSO YOU MAY BE ON VACATION WHEN THE RENEWAL NOTICE COMES AND YOU SEND YOUR CHECK LATER. WHEN YOU LOOK AT YOUR CHECKBOOK LATER YOU SEE THAT YOU PAID 9 MONTHS AGO WITHOUT REMEMBERING THAT YOU PAID LATE. I CAN'T SEND AN EXTRA NEWSLETTER AND STILL BREAK EVEN. THIS IS WHY I DON'T RESPOND TO LETTERS, REQUESTING PERSONAL INFORMATION, WITHOUT A STAMP ENCLOSED.

ALL LOTS IN UNITS 1,2,3,4,5,6,7,8,9 AND UNIT 102 HAVE WATER LINES INSTALLED BUT UNITS 10,11,12 &13 (BANYAN VILLAGE) DO NOT HAVE WATER LINES INSTALLED. I HAVE HAD MANY LETTERS ASKING WHY NOT. I WILL AGAIN ATTEMPT TO ANSWER THIS QUESTION.

I AM VERY SORRY THIS SITUATION IS STILL WITH US AND WILL BE FOR SEVERAL MORE YEARS. THESE ARE TWO SEPERATE PROBLEMS WHICH I WILL TAKE ONE AT A TIME. FIRST BANYAN VILLAGE IS STILL WHERE MOST ALL OTHER PORT LaBELLE LOTOWNERS HAVE BEEN SINCE 1974, WHEN GENERAL DEVELOPEMENT CORPORATION STOPPED PUTTING IN WATER LINES TO PORT LaBELLE LOTS, THERE WERE LESS THAN 900 LOTS THAT HAD WATER LINES INSTALLED. IN APRIL 1991 GENERAL DEVELOPEMENT CORPORATION FILED FOR BANKRUPTCY AND ATLANTIC GULF CORPORATION TOOK OVER TO MANAGE THE ASSETS FOR THE CREDITORS WHO WERE MOSTLY NEW YORK BANKS. NO MONEY HAS BEEN SPENT FOR IMPROVEMENTS SINCE 1974 BUT ONLY FOR MOWING OF GRASS AND TAXES ON LOTS STILL OWNED BY THE COMPANY. WHEN ASSETS ARE SOLD THE MONEY GOES TO OPERATING COSTS AND TO REPAY THE BANKERS.

ABOUT 6 YEARS AGO HENDRY COUNTY PURCHASED THE WATER AND SEWER UTILITIES FROM AGC. IN 1998 AND 1999 WATER LINES WERE INSTALLED TO ALL LOTS IN PORT LaBELLE, EXCEPT BANYAN VILLAGE, USING THE ESCROW MONEY FROM EACH LOTOWNER. THE COST OF \$975 PER LOT IN UNITS 1 THROUGH 9 AND \$1080 PER LOT IN UNIT 102 WAS DEDUCTED FROM THE ESCROW ACCOUNTS OF EACH LOT. IF THE LOT DIDN'T HAVE ANY ESCROW FUNDS THE LOTOWNER PAID THE COST UP FRONT OR AGREED TO PAYMENTS OVER 20 YEARS. THE COMPANY (AGC) AGREED TO THE 20 YEAR PAYMENT PLAN AND THE COUNTY SOLD THESE AGREEMENTS TO GET THE MONEY TO INSTALL THE WATER LINES TO ALL THESE LOTS.

NOW TO THE SECOND PROBLEM FOR BANYAN VILLAGE WHICH HAS ABOUT 3,655. THE COST PER LOT WOULD BE ABOUT \$1,200 BUT ONLY ABOUT ½ THE LOTS ARE SOLD AND HAVE ESCROW ACCOUNTS. THE LOTS STILL OWNED BY THE COMPANY HAVE NO MONEY IN ESCROW ACCOUNTS AND THE COUNTY CAN'T SELL AN AGREEMENT FROM AGC BECAUSE OF THE CURRENT FINANCIAL CONDITION OF AGC. THE TOTAL COST TO INSTALL WATER LINES TO BANYAN VILLAGE IS ABOUT \$4,400,000 WITH AN ADDITIONAL \$750,000 NEEDED TO IMPROVE THE WATER UTILITY TO HANDLE THIS POTENTIAL LOAD. THE ESCROW MONEY FROM BANYAN VILLAGE LOTOWNERS IS ABOUT \$2,200,000 WHICH LEAVES US ABOUT \$3,000,000 SHORT. WE HAVE TWO SOURCES OF REVENUE THAT WE ARE PLANNING TO FUND THIS \$3,000,000 SHORTFALL. FIRST IS THE \$24 PER LOT PER YEAR STANDBY FEE FROM EACH VACANT LOT THAT HAS WATER LINES INSTALLED. SECOND IS THE MONEY GENERATED FROM WATER AND SEWER HOOK-UPS. THIS IS WHY I SAY IT WILL BE SEVERAL YEARS BEFORE THE WATER LINES ARE INSTALLED IN BANYAN VILLAGE.

FOR THE PAST 3 WEEKS ABOUT 2,000 INTERNET USERS IN SW FLORIDA HAVE BEEN WITHOUT INTERNET SERVICE. ON FEBRUARY 2 AN INTERNET SERVICER FROM FORT LAUDERDALE WILL START PROVIDING SERVICE TO US. OUR PRIOR SERVICE WAS BOUGHT OUT BY GALAXY INTERNET FROM INDIANAPOLIS, INDIANA WITH TIES IN SOME WAY TO A CANADIAN COMPANY. SOMEBODY DIDN'T PAY THE PHONE COMPANY AND OUR INTERNET LINES WERE DISCONNECTED.

OUR NEW INTERNET ADDRESS IS REECER@OLSUSA.COM

MAILING ADDRESS: W. HAROLD REECER
P.O.BOX 3028
LaBELLE, FL 33975

TELEPHONE 863-675-0215

