

Punta Gorda ~ 2nd Best Place To Live!

Money Magazine lists top 300 counties

By John Hackworth ~ City Editor

It won't be on the newsstand until this weekend, but that didn't stop callers from dialing the Charlotte County Chamber of Commerce offices as early as 8 a.m. Wednesday.

Money magazine has ranked Punta Gorda - actually the Punta Gorda Metropolitan Statistical Area, which includes all of Charlotte County - as the second best place in the U.S. to live. Only Madison, Wis., beat out Charlotte County among the 300 areas listed in the magazine's 10th annual list.

The news not only delighted county officials and chamber members but created a swarm of nationwide curiosity about this tiny county in Southwest Florida.

"You couldn't have made a better day for me," said Punta Gorda Mayor Lindsay Harrington when he heard the news. "I have to go out and buy a dozen magazines."

Pat Gorman, a retired Washington, D.C. lawyer and the official greeter for both the Charlotte County chamber and the Punta Gorda Business Alliance, said he was not surprised at the ranking.

"I've been here 18 years, and I agree with everything in the article," he said. "My business partner and I discovered this place after driving from Clearwater to Marco Island., trying to decide where to retire. I just think this is terrific news."

Charlotte County climbed from 61st. on the list in 1995 to No. 2 this year based on improvements in education, housing and leisure activities.

Ira Hellman, a spokesman for Money magazine, said data is collected on each city in categories that include: economy, healthcare, crime rate, housing, transit, weather, arts and education. Each area is ranked according to national percentile.



Florida's Best

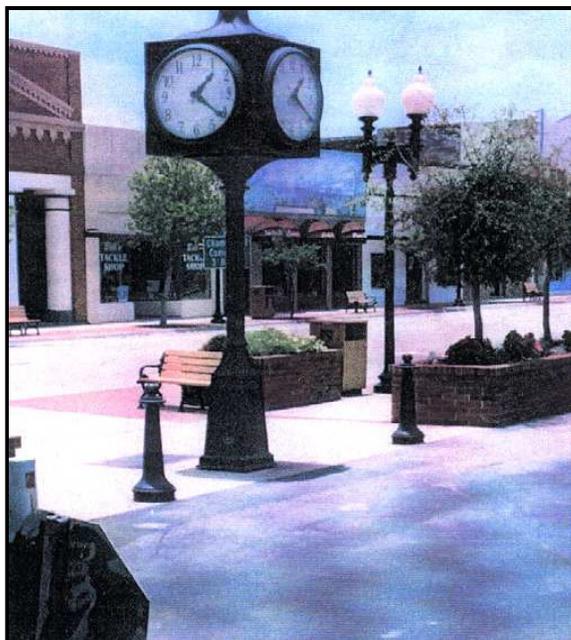
The Florida cities on Money Magazine's 1996 "best places" list. Numbers in parentheses show 1995 ranking.

2. Punta Gorda (61)	22. Miami (67)
4. Fort Lauderdale (6)	23. Sarasota/Brandenton (14)
6. Fort Myers/Cape Coral (34)	25. West Palm Beach (26)
7. Gainesville (1)	26. Brevard County (53)
10. Lakeland (41)	27. Daytona Beach (13)
11. Tampa/St. Petersburg (11)	29. Fort Pierce (59)
12. Orlando (17)	37. Ocala (5)

	15. Naples (10)	53. Tallahassee (55)
	18. Fort Walton Beach (28)	54. Pensacola (22)
	20. Jacksonville (3)	94. Panama City (99)

Noreen McCarthy

Punta Gorda Realtor



PUNTA GORDA, FLORIDA

- λ Area Population: 126,509
- λ Unemployment Rate: 4.6%
- λ Three-Bedroom House: \$165,000
 - λ Property Tax: \$1,700
- λ Top State & Local Income Tax: None
 - λ Sales Tax: 7%
- λ Violent Crimes Per 100,000 People: 297
- λ Annual sunny days: 264

λ For more information: 941-639-2222

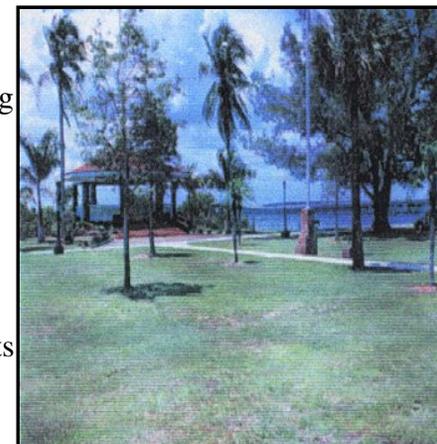
You' ve probably never heard of Punta Gorda. Don' t fret. The picturesque Gulf Coast area of southwest Florida has been a well-kept secret waiting to be exposed. Truth is, plenty of Americans have been voting with their feet to establish this metro area, which includes all of Charlotte County, as one of the best places to live in the country. The county had the largest population growth of any in the U.S. during the 1980 (90%); since 1990, the populace has ballooned by another 16.7%. Even so, Punta Gorda is still tiny enough to be MONEY' s Best Small Place to Live in America (page 77) as well as our Best Place in the South (page 85).

It' s easy to see why Violent crime is 59% below the national average; it' s sunny two out of every three days, no one' s in a hurry; a

best yet, Punta Gorda' s economy topped all 299 other metro areas in the ranking.

The future looks equally bright. Indeed, the economic forecasting from NPA Data Services projects that Punta Gorda' s 16.3% job growth between now and 1999 will lead the U.S., clocking in at nearly triple the national average. "The Southwest is the current frontier in Florida," says Stan Geberer of Fishkind & Associates, an economic consulting firm in Orlando. Budding entrepreneurs, take note: Retiree-rich Charlotte County has the highest percentage of people over 65 in the country (35.1%) - three times the national average - so products or services geared to older Americans have tremendous potential here.

But don' t expect to find only retirees in Punta Gorda. Lately younger people visiting their parents and grandparents are deciding to stay. They' re drawn by a cost of living that' s at 5% below the national average, plus typical three-bedroom houses costing \$165,000, according to Century 21. In idyllic Punta Gorda Isles, most homes have at least 2,000 sq. ft., with a pool and canal out back.



The town of Punta Gorda itself is Florida' s version of quaint. The revitalized downtown still has cobblestone streets and gas lamp streetlights, patterned after the Spanish style of the 19th century. You needn' t worry about crowds either. Once you get away from U.S. Highway 41, the pipeline through most of the county, Punta Gorda is pretty quiet. Churches outnumber nightclubs (11 to 1), and you' re far more likely to see sandals and shorts than designer garb. Little League, bingo and gardening are top priorities for residents when they' re not sailing in Charlotte Harbor or enjoying the white sand beach in nearby Englewood.

Punta Gorda is the kind of place many newcomers quickly learn to love. For instance, Jerry and Patricia Hayes, 45 and 41, aren' t the slightest bit sentimental about leaving New York City two years ago. "I wear shorts to work and have time to ride a bike, which I haven' t done since I was a kid," says Jerry, a former Wall Street broker who now sells real estate. Adds Patricia, a nurse "My friends from New York are overwhelmed by the beauty of the water and the people here. Some of them have started to house hunt.

Our Town Charlotte Published by the Sun Herald Newspapers

There are early evenings when driving into Punta Gorda from the north can take your breath away.

As you reach the peak of the bridge spanning Charlotte Harbor, the bright red of the sun setting to your right illuminates the historic section of the approaching city. Beneath you, sailboats large and small cut patterns through the water like a skater on ice as joggers and picnickers dot the park on the other side.

As you reach the bottom of the bridge, you begin to enter the heart of what Money magazine described as the second best area in the United States in which to live.

Welcome to Punta Gorda.



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The only city in Charlotte County, Punta Gorda is about 100 miles south of Tampa on the Gulf Coast between Sarasota and Ft. Myers. The city originally was founded in 1887 on the idea that all the waterfront land would be for public parks. That changed when homeowners eventually outvoted the man running the city and started a new destiny for the town by the harbor.

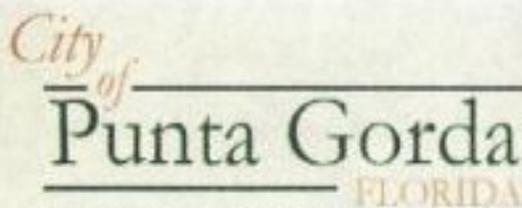
The name Punta Gorda, which means "fat point" when translated from Spanish, was given to the city because a broad part of the land in Punta Gorda juts into Charlotte Harbor. The harbor itself is somewhat unique, as it is the

point where the Peace River meets the ocean.

The city is bounded by the harbor on one side and by rural land on the other. That rural land is home to large tracts of citrus, cattle and swamp with ranchettes that produce meat and fruits. The rural land eventually meets up with the borders of North Fort Myers.

The city of Punta Gorda is a rich mix of cultures and age groups, as families, retirees and winter residents share neighborhoods. One of the hallmarks of Punta Gorda is its bountiful offering of [clubs, organizations and civic groups](#).

Civic involvement spills over into city commission meetings, where the town is still small enough for folks to know the mayor on a first-name basis.



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POPULATION AND RACE

	ALL AGES		18 YEARS AND OLDER	
	Number	Percent	Number	Percent
Total Population	14,344	100	13,167	100
One race	14,247	99.3	13,108	99.6
White	13,569	94.6	12,635	96
Black or African American	454	3.2	320	2.4
American Indian and Alaska Native	24	0.2	23	0.2
Asian	112	0.8	87	0.7
Native Hawaiian and Other Pacific Islander	4	0	2	0
Some other race	84	0.6	41	0.3
Two or more races	97	0.7	59	0.4

Fast Facts

[Money Magazine Article](#)

[Welcome Punta Gorda Business!](#)

HISPANIC OR LATINO AND RACE

Total Population	14,344	100	13,167	100
Hispanic and Latino (of any race)	285	2	205	1.6
Not Hispanic or Latino	14,059	98	12,962	98.4
One race	13,973	97.4	12,906	98
White	13,373	93.2	12,475	94.7
Black or African American	447	3.1	316	2.4
American Indian and Alaska Native	23	0.2	22	0.2
Asian	112	0.8	87	0.7
Native Hawaiian and Other Pacific Islander	3	0	1	0
Some other race	15	0.1	5	0
Two or more races	86	0.6	56	0.4

Source: US Census Bureau, Census 2000 Redistricting Data (Public Law

94-171) Summary File, Matrices PL1, PL2, PL3, and PL4.

Detailed 2000 Census information will be forthcoming upon release by the US Census Bureau.

1990 Census Information - General

Population	10,747
Median Family Income for Punta Gorda	\$40,288
Median Family Income for Charlotte County	\$29,522
Percent of Persons in Poverty in Punta Gorda	8.4%
Percent of Persons in Poverty in Charlotte County	7.5%
Median Value of Owner-Occupied Homes in Punta Gorda	\$168,200
Median Value of Owner-Occupied Homes in Charlotte County	\$77,200
Median Age in Punta Gorda	62.1 Years
Median Age in Charlotte County	53.6 Years
Persons per Household in Punta Gorda	2.05
Persons per Household in Charlotte County	2.23

Various Related Statistics

1980 Census Population	6,800
1996 Estimated Population	12,308
1997 Projected Population	12,831
July, 1993-January, 1997 Permitted Single Family Homes	616
July, 1993-January, 1997 Permitted in Multifamily Structures	111
1997 Projected Seasonal Population	16,550
1997 Estimated Median Family Income in Punta Gorda MSA	\$36,900



City of Punta Gorda FLORIDA



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DEMOGRAPHICS

The Beautiful City of Punta Gorda is located in Southwest Florida, on the banks of the Peace River and the Gulf of Mexico. Punta Gorda is the only incorporated area in Charlotte County, Florida. Punta Gorda has a unique Downtown historical district with several sites on the National Register. The City also has a picturesque waterfront area with a harbor and many waterfront publicly accessible parks.

Punta Gorda has traced its roots to a landing at Live Oak Point on the Peace River by Hernando DeSoto in 1539. Punta Gorda is Spanish for "Broad Point" and refers to the broad point of land jutting out into Charlotte Harbor. Early Spanish attempts to colonize the outer islands in present day Charlotte County were thwarted by Calusa Indian tribes and the area was slowly settled as the English migrated to Charlotte Harbor on the opposite banks of the Peace River.

Punta Gorda has a current population of 14,000 residents and a prosperous business community. Charlotte County has a total population of 136,773 residents, with a continued projected growth rate. The area continues to enjoy a booming economy with a cost of living well below the national average. The City of Punta Gorda's violent crime rate is 59% below the national average and Charlotte County has the lowest crime rate of any county in Florida. The City employs approximately 270 employees in all of the various operations, including a police force of 47 and a fire service of 26. The area also enjoys a significant tourist visitor population, enjoying the Florida Sunshine and the boating waterways. Charlotte Harbor, Peace River and the other waterways offer excellent sports fishing as well as the opportunity to see manatees and other wildlife.

Punta Gorda is in the midst of major community revitalization and beautification efforts. With historic preservation as a priority, the City has secured State Historic District status. The City Streetscape Program is restoring an Old Florida atmosphere to central district streets by adding brick lanes, street lamps, benches, brick planters and flowers and shade trees. The residential areas feature many brick streets lined with huge old royal palms and many old Florida-era tin roofed homes with verandas.

Unique shops and restaurants are being added throughout the City, expanding the fine reputation of Punta Gorda charm. There are three elementary schools, a middle school and high school with a performing arts theatre under construction. There is a hospital and significant additional medical treatment facilities in the City.

Fishermen's Village is situated on a beautiful pier in the mouth of the Peace River and Charlotte Harbor and hosts a multitude of unique waterfront shops

Striking a Balance



At first glance, Punta Gorda, population 14,000, is a sleepy, small town on the Charlotte Harbor. There are no high-rises, no throngs of tourists, no movie theaters. At lunchtime you can still get a parking space in the bank lot and a table — no wait — at a popular waterfront eatery. Reminiscent of another era, a town clock chimes the quarter-hour.

But a closer look reveals an active business community, a can-do attitude at City Hall and taxpayers willing to open their pocketbooks to support the city's rejuvenation. It also reveals a homogeneous, primarily retirement community where modest homes start in the upper \$100,000s to low \$200,000s. The end result: It's still a small town with lots of Old Florida charm, civic pride and forward mo-

mentum but with soaring property values.

The city has an eye for historical detail and visual appeal. When IMPAC, an international consulting firm, wanted to locate its training center along the waterfront, the city worked with the company to ensure that the facility's design was in keeping with the town's architectural style. Larger-than-life murals adorn city buildings, capturing scenes from its railroad and steamship past. Modern sculpture is displayed on street-corner pedestals.

The Punta Gorda Business and Community Alliance boasts 450 members from banks to shopkeepers and continues to support City Hall's efforts to clean up downtown by getting local businesses involved. Historic Sullivan Street — a block of restored, rainbow-col-

ored old residences-turned-retail — is one example.

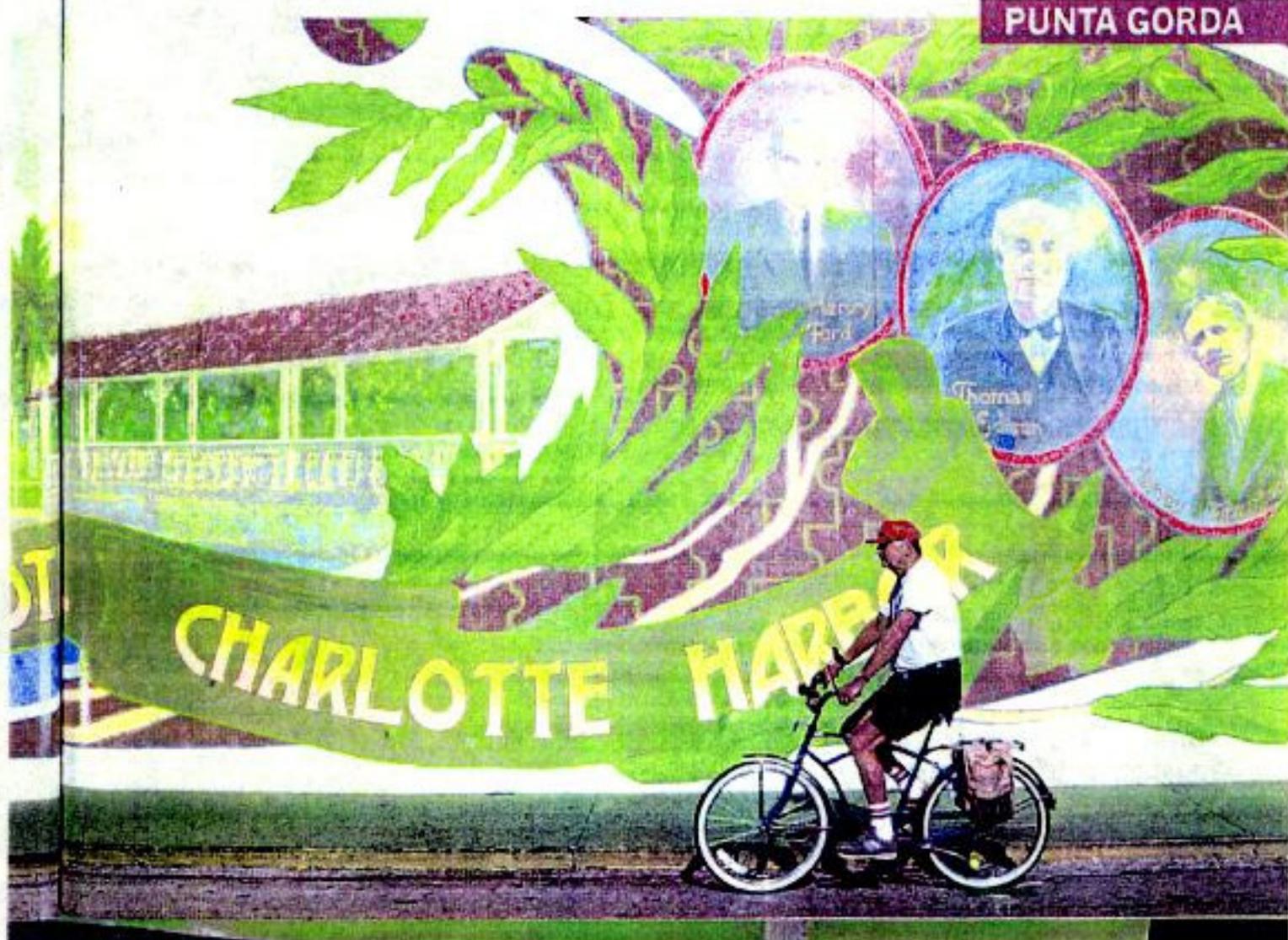
The city has its first woman mayor and first African-American and Jewish council members. It's getting ready to break ground on a new performing arts center at Charlotte High School, a joint project between the city and a local theater company. In all, there are about 12 construction projects downtown. And there's an emerging service industry, which is bringing in younger families, to support the retirement community.

Phyllis Smith, a former City Council member who chaired the initial revitalization committee in the mid-'80s, believes Punta Gorda has found the right balance to promote growth without getting too big. "This is the best-kept secret in Florida," she says.

—*Stacie Kress Bunker*



Punta Gorda's residents are mostly retirees of means. Property values are soaring.



PUNTA GORDA

Cruising In Paradise

Rated by Cruising World Magazine as the number one chartering destination in the U.S., and number three in the world, Southwest Florida is truly at the "hub" of the wheel of Southern Cruising. Whether you prefer the "Ritz" or the remote, dining ashore or afloat, shelling or sightseeing, we have it all! Now let's take an armchair cruise through beautiful Southwest Florida. Welcome aboard!



Fort Myers sprawls along the banks of the Caloosahatchee (meaning "river of the Calusa" Indians), 12 miles up river from the Gulf of Mexico. The river is part of the Okeechobee Waterway, which begins at Stuart, on Florida's east coast. The estates of both Thomas Edison and Henry Ford in downtown Fort Myers are just two of the

shore-side attractions for the cruising tourist. Beautiful riverfront homes and a variety of marina facilities, including the City Yacht Basin, make a cruise up the river quite relaxing, with both interesting and convenient stops along the way. If you're lucky, you might even have a pair of "wake-dancing" dolphins escort you on this delightful sojourn.

Heading north from Fort Myers, the Intercoastal Waterway winds its way through the barrier islands of Sanibel, Captiva, Cayo Costa, and Gasparilla, which make Southwest Florida famous. Our passage takes us first through Pine Island Sound. Fifteen miles long and four miles wide, the Sound is protected by the barrier islands to the west and Pine Island to the east, and affords the cruiser countless islands and keys which offer unlimited anchorages and abundant bird and marine life to observe.

If there is a landlubber in your crew, many fine marine facilities and award-winning restaurants dot the islands. Two resorts, Tween Waters and South Seas Plantation, offer such things as fine dining, entertainment, specialty shops, canoeing and jet ski rentals. And you will want to be sure to catch the famous Florida west coast sunset from any of the island beaches. If you prefer anchoring, try the bight on the inland side of the Wildlife Refuge on Sanibel Island. When there's a northeasterly breeze, you may want to drop the hook in the lee of York or Chino islands on the mainland side of the ICW channel. If you plan to head out into the Gulf from here, Redfish Pass between Captiva and North Captiva is navigable; however, it is best to ask for local knowledge for Mother Nature's latest changes to the cut.



No cruise through Southwest Florida is complete without a stop at Cabbage Key. This picturesque island has been made famous by such well-known cruisers as Jimmy Buffet. Rumor has it that Cabbage Key was the inspiration for Jimmy's song, "Cheeseburger in Paradise!" And there's nothing quite like a cool libation at the island bar which is decorated in a unique wallpaper - dollar bills! The former home of mystery writer Mary Roberts Rinehart, this island estate has been transformed into a world-famous "watering hole" for cruisers from near and far. A stop at Cabbage Key is a must in any skippers float plan.

One of the most beautiful of the barrier islands is Cayo Costa. A tropical paradise, the island is now a State Park and offers excellent shelling, beachcombing, swimming and dramatic sunsets. The southern tip of the island offers a lovely day anchorage on your cruising itinerary.



When the wind picks up, Charlotte Harbor at the northern tip of Pine Island Sound offers beautiful and protected cruising. For this reason, and its close proximity to the enchanting barrier islands, the Harbor is the home of our own ASA (American Sailing Association) Sailing School at Burnt Store Marina, one of the nicest marine resort facilities in the area.

Directly across the Harbor to the west is Boca Grande (big mouth) Pass, a commercial shipping channel as well as home to the world-famous tarpon and the hundreds of fisherman who pursue them. Every summer the world's richest tarpon tournament is held here. The Pass is well marked, providing easy access between the Gulf of Mexico and Charlotte Harbor in all kinds of weather conditions.

To the north sits the town of Boca Grande on Gasparilla Island. The island was named for one of the most famous early settlers, the Spanish pirate Jose Gaspar. Gaspar and his roving "banditos" strategically stationed themselves just off the channel where they could easily pillage passing ships of their precious cargoes.

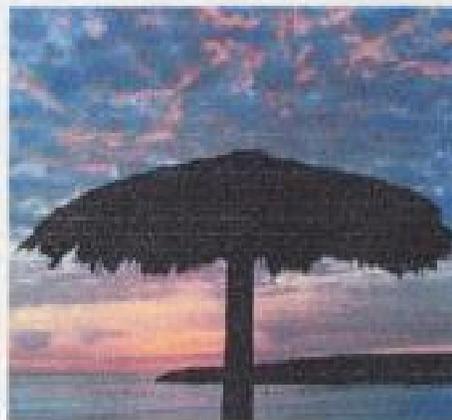


Now that you've had a "taste of the islands" of Southwest Florida, let's head south from Fort Myers and sample another area of beautiful cruising, including Naples, Marco Island and the Everglades.

Heading south, the ICW ends for a time and the Sanibel Bridge forms the gateway to the Gulf and the coastal communities of Naples and Marco Island. Once through the bridge, you'll commence the 26 mile passage to Naples, the first stop on our cruise toward the state's southern tip. The prominent fishing pier makes for an easy landfall to Gordon Pass and the entrance to world-renown Naples.

Anchor amid the mansions lining the canals leading to town or tie up at the City Docks. Either way you can experience the sights and sounds of the mecca for the rich and famous. Not all the dining is five star, however. There are dock side dining spots and pubs for a variety of cruising pocketbooks.

Not very far away lie the Florida Keys and Key West. The cruising choices just go on and on. May fair winds and calm seas be yours.



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Florida's Islands

BY JANET GROENE WITH GORDON GROENE



Florida's map is dotted with places that call themselves islands, but most are connected to the mainland by bridges and causeways. A true island getaway means leaving your car and taking a boat or seaplane to your destination. It means a total Robinson Crusoe vacation, a Gilligan getaway. The boat ride may be only a few minutes across a canal-size waterway or a voyage lasting an hour or more. You



may have to bring everything with you, including tent and food, or you could laze in the lap of luxury at a premium-priced resort. Here are some choices to consider. All are accessible by ferry or water taxi.

* Useppa Island

For centuries before Ponce de Leon visited Pine Island Sound in 1513, Calusa Indians had a thriving village on the island we now call Useppa. It's so small, you can walk from one end to the other, yet it was a major settlement for the Spanish, for Civil War troops, and for the rich and famous at the turn of the century. It was even a training center for troops that fought at the Bay of Pigs. Why, then, does Useppa Island remain such a deep, delicious secret?

The Useppa Island Club has been so private that cruising guidebooks warn boaters not to dinghy ashore. Until recently, the only strangers who could be accommodated were guests of members. Now the welcome mat is out. The original mansion, built by Barron Col-

** Close to Burnt Store Marina and Punta Gorda
A true island getaway means leaving your car and*

lier in 1912, has been transformed into the charming Collier Inn, where a lavish continental breakfast is included in the rates; lunch and dinner are available by reservation. The rambling mansion has a cozy library, a pubby bar with grand piano, and several dining rooms.

* Cabbage Key

It's another island in Pine Island Sound, just a stone's skip from Useppa. Like Useppa, Cabbage Key has a long history dating to pre-Columbian times and into the millionaire era, when mystery writer Mary Roberts Rinehart built a home here in 1938. The key's modern claim to fame is that Jimmy Buffett was inspired here to write "Cheeseburger in Paradise." Walk the beaches and nature trail, climb the water tower for a view of the sound, or rent a boat for fishing or sightseeing.

Little Palm Island Resort

The resort has been a retreat for the rich and famous since it was Harry Truman's private fishing club. Park at the welcome center on Little Torch Key, and take a launch to the island. Lose yourself among the rustling palms, sandy beaches and palm-thatched cottages, each cleverly screened by shrubs and flowers.

The (very expensive) restaurant is popular with day-trippers, so the exclusivity slips a bit when another boatload of tourists unloads on the island for lunch. Take a meal plan. There's no TV or radio to invade your privacy.

* Safety Harbor Club

Don't confuse North Captiva Island with its sister island, Captiva, which can be reached by car. This one is reached only by a launch from Pine Island. The Club is an upscale village rather than a full-service resort. Units have everything needed for housekeeping, including a full kitchen, linens, cleaning supplies, paper products and laundry, but bring everything else—food, drinks and toiletries.

The Club has a freshwater fishing lake, heated swimming pool, three miles



of Gulf beach, tennis courts, and a clubhouse with books and videos.

Greyfield Inn

Cumberland Island National Seashore is just across the state line in Georgia, but the Greyfield Inn's launches pick up guests at the waterfront in Fernandina Beach in northeast Florida. Built as a home for a daughter of Lucy and Thomas Carnegie in 1900, the mansion is now a plush inn. Luxurious accommodations are heated and air conditioned, but guests are asked not to use the radio-phonie except for emergencies. Only one piece of luggage per person is allowed, no smoking, nor children under age 6.

* Palm Island Resort

Palm Island Resort off Cape Haze (west of Punta Gorda) is exotically remote, yet surprisingly affordable for a couple or family. Every villa has a kitchen, one bath per bedroom, washer and dryer, screened porch or terrace, private telephone line and at least two TV sets. Dining at the resort's restaurant is so good that locals come over on the ferry for the evening.

The resort has one of the longest, widest, sandiest beaches on the Gulf of Mexico, plus shelling, fishing, wildlife watching and streaky red sunsets. Swim in the five heated pools. Rent a boat. Play tennis.

Pelican Inn

The incomparably fine, white sand of the Florida Panhandle surround Dog Island, which lies four miles off Carrabelle, an hour southwest of Tallahassee. Rooms sleep up to four and have a kitchenette. Sliding doors open onto a private deck or balcony. The island has drinking water and linens are provided, but bring everything else you'll want to eat and drink. Arrive by ferry, seaplane, charter boat or airplane, or in your own airplane to land on the grass strip. Most of the island is in trust for the Nature Conservancy.

Fisher Island

More than 500 families live an island idyll on Fisher Island, in the shadow of Miami's skyscrapers. In 1925, Miami Beach developer Carl Fisher traded the island to William Vanderbilt in exchange for a 220-foot yacht.

Even by millionaire standards, the mansion that Vanderbilt built in 1926 was an eye-popper. Restored, it's the centerpiece of an exclusive club that has six restaurants, a par-35 championship golf course, 18 lighted tennis courts, a marina, European-style spa, and a commercial center with a gourmet market, bank and a few shops.

Banana Bay Resort

The resort itself is an idyllic hideaway on Marathon Key midway down the Florida Keys, but it has its own island,

Florida's manatees have steadily declined in number despite efforts to protect them.



taking a boat or seaplane to your destination.

Pretty Boy Rock, where you can be the lone castaways. Just a few hundred yards off the resort's marina, the island has a two-bedroom, two-bath "conch" cottage with air conditioning, ceiling fans, South Seas decor and a master suite with sunken Jacuzzi tub and a walk-in, double-head shower. One or two adult couples can be accommodated and you must arrive during daylight hours or stay the first night in the resort. Bring your own supplies or submit a provisioning list. No maids will invade your solitude, and you'll do your own cooking in the complete kitchen.

Islands to Camp

Hontoon Island State Park

Timucuan Indians and their Amerindian ancestors recognized it as a superb campground as early as 10,000 years ago. Today, their shell middens and a replica of the totem they left can still be seen on this island in the St. Johns River.

One-room cabins have four or six bunk beds with vinyl-covered mattresses (no bedding), a screened porch, outdoor grill, ceiling fan and one electrical outlet. Hot showers and flush toilets are provided. Bring everything except drinking water.



*Cayo Costa State Park

This barrier island was a home to the Calusa Indians. It has miles of beaches on the Gulf of Mexico, acres of pine forest filled with skittering wildlife, oak hammocks, mangrove swamps and a wealth of bird activity.

Bring a tent or sleep in one of the cabins, which have three bunks with plastic-covered mattresses and nothing else except an outdoor grill. The island



has no electricity, but drinking water is available. Arrive in your own boat.

Caladesi Island State Park

One of the few large Gulf of Mexico barrier islands that has escaped development, Caladesi Island is reached by scheduled ferry service from Honeymoon Island State Recreation Area.

Boat, fish, sun and swim on the picture-postcard beaches, walk the nature trails, and hunt for seashells. If you arrive by boat, anchor offshore or dock at

the 99-slip marina. Bring your own and all other supplies. A snack bar, bathrooms with showers are avail-

Fort Jefferson National Monument

A seaplane or fast catamaran takes you to the Dry Tortugas, 70 miles from where U.S. 1 ends at Key West. Primitive camping is available, but you to bring everything with you, including drinking water.

The fort is a showplace of brick geometry, as well as a magical wonderland filled with bird life.

Cumberland Island National Seashore

See Greyfield Inn, above. Camper bound for the campgrounds arrive by the ferry out of St. Marys, GA. Bring everything with you except drinking water. Well water is found in the backcountry campsites, which have facilities, but it's recommended that water be boiled or treated. Inn facilities aren't available to campers, although meals can sometimes be reserved in advance. Phone before you leave mainland. ■



It All Started Right Here

The white sandy beaches, water teeming with fish and forests abundant with game have drawn people to what is now Charlotte County for thousands of years. The many shell mounds attest to the consumption of shellfish by generations of Native Americans. Other artifacts prove they also caught fish in nets of native fibers and feasted on the plant and animal life as well.

Spanish explorers were the first Europeans to colonize continental North America, and this is where it happened. In 1521 Juan Ponce de Leon brought colonists with horses, cows, pigs, and with seeds for farming. The Calusa, however, gave them a reception that was fatal to Ponce de Leon and sent the expedition fleeing back to Cuba. This discouraged Spanish settlements in this part of Florida, but the abandoned livestock found a comfortable home there.

The first seasonal visitors appeared nearly 300 years later. They came not from the North, but from the South, and not for the weather, but for the fish. Cuban fishermen had discovered the bounty of Charlotte Harbor and came seasonally to harvest the plentiful mullet. They built camps on the barrier islands and shipped their catch back to Cuba. They preserved the fish by salting and drying them. These visitors found the natives more receptive. They brought trade goods, employed the natives in their fish camps and even inter-married with them. Temporary fish camps became permanent settlements and visitors became residents, just as they do today.

Charlotte Harbor became a staging area for both sides during the Indian Wars but never a battlefield. Further settlement would have to wait for hostilities to cease. The Civil War brought a similar

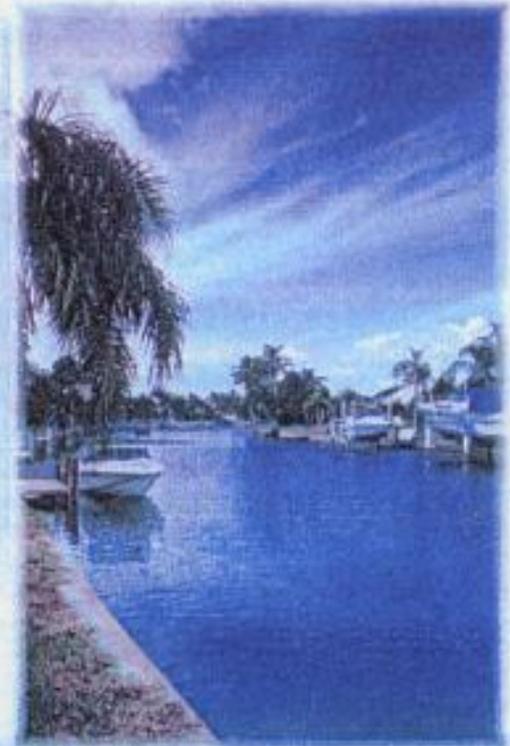


situation. Union soldiers roamed freely from their post at Fort Myers and Union sailors from the blockading ships

were unchallenged on the waters. Confederate blockade-runners, however, did use Charlotte Harbor to make stealthy runs to Cuba and other foreign ports as well as other Confederate ports. The difficulty of overland transportation to other parts of Florida and the South prevented Charlotte Harbor from becoming a major port for such activity. Mainly they carried cattle to Cuba in exchange for Spanish gold and manufactured goods.

Settlers moved in quickly when the shooting stopped, with most choosing home sites near the shores of the Gulf or along the numerous rivers. A dock built for leading cattle to run the Union blockade formed the nucleus for the first settlement in what is now Charlotte Harbor. They first called it Hickory Bluff, but later accepted the post office designation of Charlotte Harbor. Harbor View, Grove City and Englewood followed in quick succession as more and more people found their paradise on earth. What are now the two major communities came later.

In 1884, Isaac H. Trabue founded a town he called Trabue across the bay from the community of Charlotte Harbor. The land sales with which he hoped to finance further development did not materialize, and in 1887 impatient residents took over. They incorporated the town and changed the name to Punta Gorda. Trabue had been astute enough to have a railroad come to his town though, and this assured its success. Punta Gorda became the business hub of the area and it blossomed. An ice plant enabled commercial fishermen to ship their catch by rail to inland cities. Farm produce also used the train. Punta Gorda is



still the only incorporated city in the county.

Port Charlotte is a new concept of a town planned and developed from scratch by Mackle Brothers and General Development Corporation starting in 1954. In less than ten years it surpassed the older town and hasn't looked back. A world-wide advertising campaign aimed at retirees and those about to retire in places affected by unpleasant winters found a receptive audience. Mackle established real estate offices in all the major northern cities and in many foreign countries. They brought prospects by the trainload and plane-load to inspect Florida's wonders and "get in on the ground floor." Today Port Charlotte claims nearly 120,000 residents.

Information provided by the Charlotte Harbor Area Historical Society.



the information you need all the time.

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Punta Gorda, FL

Region: South
Population: 130,426



Photo: Brian Smith

Statistical snapshot
Some quick facts about Punta Gorda, FL, and how it compares with the other cities in each category.

Category	City stats	Nat'l Avg.	Rank
POLLUTION			
EPA watershed rating (100 is best; 0 is worst)	26.4	31.79	138
Air quality rating (200 is best; 0 is worst)	100	118.90	172
CRIME			
Property crime yearly per 100,000 people:	2,812.3	4,619.73	29

Web resources:

Here are links to some of the web's premiere search engines, databases and services, pre-loaded with search parameters for Punta Gorda.

- Major Search Engines:**
[Infoseek](#)
[Lycos](#)
[WebCrawler](#)
[Yahoo](#)

Maps:
[Map of Punta Gorda, FL](#)

Note: Figures are based on most recent data available as of annual cutoff date for analysis. Sources and credits: National Oceanic & Atmospheric Administration; American Chamber of Commerce Researchers Association; Bureau of the Census; U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics; FBI Uniform Crime Statistics; Bowker's Library Directory; National Assn. Of State Budget Officers; Standard & Poor's; Expansion Management; Bureau of National Affairs, Commerce Clearing House, U.S. Bureau of Publishing, House Committee on Taxation; Runzheimer;

EPA, HUD, BUREAU OF ECONOMIC ANALYSIS

Violent crime yearly per 100,000 people:	322.9	558.36	69
ECONOMY			
Cost of living index (average=100)	98.4	100%	125
Recent unemployment rate:	3.1%	4.04%	109
Job growth since 1998:	-0.93%	1.30%	39
Forecast job growth to 2010:	34.71%	15.39%	2
Municipal bond rating:	AA	AA	1
HOUSING			
Median price for 3-bedroom home:	\$139,230	\$155,829	107
Change in average home value since 1998:	3.69%	4.81%	216
Utility costs: (Average for an 1,600 sq. ft. home)	\$90.0	\$110.59	59
QUALITY OF LIFE			
Average commute time (mins):	19	19.51	141
Pro sports index: (100 is best; 0 is worst)	54	47.32	95
Arts & culture index: (100 is best; 0 is worst)	40	46.17	121
WEATHER			
Sunny days: (Number of days per year with clear or partly clear weather)	264	213.14	
Average July high (degrees Fahrenheit):	91.5	86.73	
Average January low (degrees Fahrenheit):	52.3	27.02	
Average annual rainfall (inches):	54	36.30	
Average annual snowfall (inches):	0	23.10	



SUNDAY, MAY 13, 2001

The naked truth about our town

Good morning. Perhaps you, too, are asked just where is it you live in Florida and what is it like.

The Peace River rises to the north and east of us. It meanders for more than a hundred miles on a very gentle slope between cattle ranches, woods and citrus groves to join the Myakka River in the estuary here between Punta Gorda and Port Charlotte. As it seeks to mingle its fresh water with the salt waters of the Gulf of Mexico, it flows into the bays created by the barrier islands that shelter it from the rougher waters of the Gulf. The watershed that contributes its rainfall to the river is over 4,000 square miles. The surface of the estuary alone covers 270 square miles. We have hundreds of miles of waterfront on canals, rivers, islands and the Gulf of Mexico beaches. Our area is defined by the rivers and our warm winters.

We are a friendly place. The spirit and friendliness are captured in our informal swim of the river on July 4. Men, women and children all start swimming together from the foot of the bridge in Port Charlotte. Most of us make the two miles to Fishermen's Village. Some paddle across using an old inner tube. Others are buoyed up by a life jacket or pink noodle, others get a boost from fins. Some go naked — and I mean *naked*. Bathing suits are recovered from a boating friend by the time they emerge on the other side of the river.

Our April Punta Gorda Block Party is a big deal. If you have a friend or acquaintance you have not seen this past year, he or she will be drinking beer or lemonade at the block party along with 40,000 others there to enjoy the food and music.

We think our air show year in and year out is the best in the state.

The Arcadia Rodeo is an honest-to-goodness cow-town show with local as well as national talent.

Volunteerism, the old-fashioned good neighbor kind, is alive and well here. Our Cultural Center provides a sociable place for retirees to make new friends and become involved in a new community.

This is a safe place with a retirement population where half the adults do not go to work. That means plenty of good restaurants and great health care from five area hospitals.

Golf is more than popular. We have three dozen golf courses within a 30-minute drive of the river.

The protected waters of the Peace River supply a growing population of snook, snapper, mullet and redfish. The number of boaters is amazing. Nearly one in four households owns a boat. It may be anything from a flat-bottomed skiff to a luxury yacht.

We are famous for our Boca Grande Tarpon tournament. Presidents from Teddy Roosevelt to George Bush have fished Boca Grande Pass.

The names Alligator Bay, Hog Island, Gulf Cove, Pine Island, Gasparilla Island, Cayo Costa, Useppa and Cabbage Key, Boca Grande, Cape Haze conjure up images of relaxation and romance and visions of Florida as it was 100 years ago. It can still be found here in the nooks and crannies of our bays and rivers.

Forbes ranks city fifth in poll

Punta Gorda among the best for business, careers

Staff Report

Once again, Punta Gorda is receiving national recognition as one of the best cities in the country.

This time around, Forbes magazine has ranked the city's metropolitan area — which includes all of Charlotte County — No. 5 in its list of the Best Places for Business and Careers, out of 94 smaller metropolitan areas in the United States.

Forbes offered the list, which it develops in conjunction with the Milken Institute, as an online exclusive on its Web site, forbes.com, in addition to the ranking of larger U.S. cities.

According to the site, the list reflects "the most dynamic economic spots in America," with the best "conditions for growth in the medium term, where knowledge and environment meet to foster the most wealth creation."

The list of smaller metros, all with 1999 populations less than 177,000, is "based on growth in jobs and earned income, plus a measure of activity in critical technologies that foster future growth."

A chart shows that, in Punta Gorda, six-year employment levels (measured in the thousands) went from 33.63 in 1995 to 40.75 in 2000. Other factors considered were relative wage and salary growth, and high-tech concentration.

Ranked above Punta Gorda, as Nos. 1 through 4 respectively, are:

- Greeley, Colo.
- Medford-Ashland, Oregon
- Rochester, Minn.
- Greenville, N.C.

Punta Gorda skyrocketed from a ranking of No. 218 last year.

Cheap living in Charlotte

If you live in Charlotte County, the Florida Price Level Index reports it's the cheapest place to live in of any costal county from Tampa Bay to Key West. The FPLI measures differences among counties in the cost of purchasing a specific market



**BOB
CARPENTER**
Business Columnist

basket of goods and services at a particular time. The florida base line is \$100.

The five most expensive counties to live in are: Monroe County/\$107.78 (Key West); Broward/\$106.91 (Ft. Lauderdale); Miami-Dade/\$106.84; Palm Beach/\$105.62 and Pinellas/\$103.34 (St. Petersburg).

Charlotte County ranks 29 of the 67 counties with an index of \$94.31. Sarasota County is sixth most expensive (\$100.57), Collier is eighth (\$100.09), Manatee ranks 10(\$99.27) and Lee ranks 16 (\$96.59). For your information, the cheapest county to live in is Jackson County in the Panhandle with an index of \$87.80.

The FPLI scores the index based on market basket prices in five areas, typically used by the consumer, most widely available for purchase and with as much consistency in quality as possible.

Most items are priced by state officials visiting at least three retail outlets in each county and recording the sales price. These vary from "mom and pop" stores to retail chains. The other areas include housing, apparel, transportation plus health-recreation-personal services. Most are taken from public record charges.

Housing has 30 items surveyed like rent, insurance, utilities, taxes, appliances, etc. Food consists of 32 items like white bread, Kellogg's Corn flakes, pork chops, whole milk, coffee, baby food, beer, eggs, sugar, cola, wine, etc.

There are 17 items surveyed in the apparel index, which include men's blazers, women's slacks, boys casual shirts, women's Timex watches, women's panties, Pampers, dry cleaning for a man's suit, etc.

Transportation items surveyed total 14, and include the price of motor oil, tow charges, auto repair charges, steel belted tires, a Chevrolet Cavalier, unleaded self-serve gasoline and auto insurance.

The health-recreation-personal services index covers 25 items like aspirin, eye exams, hospital lab fees, newspapers, Kodak film, cigarette cartons, hand lotion, men's haircuts, tennis balls, toothpaste, safety deposit box fee, dog food and computer diskettes, to name a few.

In the Charlotte County market basket of \$94.31, based on florida's rate of \$100 in goods and services, the food category is highest of the five indications at \$98.30; health-recreation-personal services is next highest at \$98.22; transportation is \$96.06, then apparel costing \$92.62.

Believe it or not, housing is the lowest at \$90.67. And, it seems to be getting cheaper to live here each year. For the 1997 FPLI we ranked as the 15th most expensive county, the dropped to 20th in 1998 and the latest 1999 survey we ranked 19th of 67 counties.

Bob Carpenter is executive director of the Punta Gorda Business & Community Alliance. To reach him, call 639-3270

Are we lucky or what?

By CAPTAIN RALPH ALLEN

I've received several recent reminders of how lucky we are to live around Charlotte Harbor. Some of these little reminders have had to do with the local people, and others have concerned our great local boating and fishing.

People first. This is a great place to live. I took a writer from *Fort Lauderdale Sun Sentinel*, Steve Waters, fishing last week, and after our fishing trip, I helped him load gear into his car. I noticed that his car's radio antenna was missing and made some comment. He said that he had a "Miami antenna." His original antenna had been broken off the car by vandals. He figured that if he didn't replace it, it would be a sign for the local thieves that he didn't have an expensive stereo in the car and they probably wouldn't bother breaking in to find out. That's not a plan many of us follow here in Charlotte County, where the crime rate is low.

A few days later, one of our fishing guides took a trip to the east coast of Florida. Upon his return to Punta Gorda, this guide, who moved here from the New York City area, described the traffic on eight-lane I-95 as

THE REEL WORLD

"packed as tight as a parking lot and moving at 65 miles an hour." It occurred to me that the traffic here in Charlotte County could be a whole lot worse.

Last weekend, the first leg of the extremely popular and successful Red Snook Tournament Series was held at Fishermen's Village in Punta Gorda. A record 93 boats braved less-than-ideal weather conditions and fished in the event to raise money for several good causes, including several youth programs and conservation of our resources. Charlotte Harbor can support this kind of event because it's a huge body of water (some 270 square miles) and because it is teeming with strong populations of many different species of fish.

There are times when boats fishing on Charlotte Harbor crowd each other, but overall there is usually plenty of room out there for the numbers of boats currently fishing here. Some of the 93 tournament boats from last weekend may well have not even seen another tournament boat during the entire fishing day.

Yes, Boca Grande Pass is often overcrowded during tarpon season. Yes, Turtle Bay can have lots of boats on a beautiful spring weekend. Yes, some other popular parts of the harbor are getting fished hard and there are more boats every year.

But compared to many other much more crowded fisheries around the country, including some parts of the Chesapeake Bay, Long Island Sound, the Great Lakes and even some mountain streams, we've still got it made.

Don't forget the fish. There are lots of fish here. Charlotte Harbor is an estuary (a place where salt water and fresh water mix) and such brackish waters are the most productive waters in the world. Brackish water tends to support much more aquatic life than does fresh water, and brackish water also is more productive than is open ocean salt water. Yes, on occasion, the fishing is slow in Charlotte Harbor, but that's true of all fisheries everywhere since sometimes fish just don't bite as well as we'd like.

Charlotte Harbor is home to lots of fish and many different kinds of fish. How many kinds? No one knows the answer for

May 3, 2001



Fort Lauderdale *Sun Sentinel* outdoors writer Steve Waters, left, Captain Ralph Allen and Rebecca Dawes, right, were subjects of *Sun* photographer Jonathan Fredin's photo during last week's media day event. They were fishing in the Punta Gorda Isles canals.

sure, but it's not a difficult task to come up with a list of a hundred or so species that local fishermen get to catch, see or use for bait.

Don't believe it? Get out pen and paper and give it a try. Almost anybody who fishes much in local waters will quickly be able to list up to 50 or more species and most avid anglers can come up with a 100 or more species. The marine biologists who study such things say that there are close to 300 species in the harbor if you really get technical.

I was born and learned to love fishing in Missouri, but after fishing avidly there until about age 15, I doubt that I had ever caught more than 15 species of fish in the Show-Me State. That's much different than fishing here in Charlotte Harbor where catching 15 different species is a possibility on a single fishing day.

Does that sound preposterous? I've been keeping records for nine years on the catches at the annual CCA Kids Fishing Day held each July at Fishermen's Village. During that nine-year span, the least number of species landed by the kids on a single day

was 13, the most was 30. That's

not the number of fish they caught — that's the number of different species. That's amazing.

There are big numbers of each of many different species of fish here, too. Tales of hot anglers catching 50 snook in a day aren't too rare and even 100-snook days are sometimes boasted. The same goes for redfish, and catching 100 trout in a day isn't really that uncommon. One Boca Grande tarpon guide I know told me of landing more than 30 tarpon in a single charter trip. That's landed, not hooked and lost, and those were adult tarpon, not baby fish.

I can't think of any place I'd rather live, work and play.

Let's go fishing!

Captain Allen owns and operates the King Fisher Fleet of deep-sea fishing, back-bay fishing and sight-seeing excursion boats from Fishermen's Village in Punta Gorda. He can be reached by phone at (941) 639-0969 or e-mail at captain@kingfisherfleet.com for fishing or boating information or for any questions or comments you would like to see covered in this column.