AN INTRODUCTION

Living in paradise is not without its complications. Perhaps the best way to describe living on this chain of gorgeous islands is to measure one's distance from the mainland. Example: Key West residents live 126 miles out to sea. Sure, we're connected by bridges but the logistics of importing goods and some services is much the same. Our water and gas arrive on a southern route. About the only thing headed north (or east, if you want to get technical) are departing tourists and seafood.

The county's geography — long and narrow — makes for many differences in our way of life. The schools are small and dispersed. Many government agencies have three offices to serve the upper, middle and lower portions of the geographic population.

The county's chief attraction is natural: crystal clear blue water and coral reefs teeming with life. The economy is built around those who come to enjoy. Locals' paychecks depend on tourism, no matter whether you're a lawyer or a convenience store clerk. There are very few violent crimes in the Keys, but we have a disproportionate amount of boating accidents compared to other counties in the state. We have a very low unemployment rate, but jobs are still scarce and housing is expensive.

Still, most locals will tell you the same thing: 'I came for the water and stayed for the people.' Conchs, misfits, wacky geniuses and regular folks with a high tolerance for others' eccentricities have made a home in the Florida Keys and populated it with a hodgepodge assembly of friends they call their Keys family. Locals are undoubtedly the strangest group of friends you've yet to meet.

— Sara Matthis,
Special Sections Editor
Florida Keys have six charter schools

Citizen Staff

The Monroe County school system has 20 schools spread out from Key Largo to Key West for children in pre-K to college. Some of the schools are big, like Key West High School with about 1,400 students; and some are small like the Ocean Studies Charter school with about three dozen students. In all, there are about 8,000 students enrolled in the district.

Monroe County is seeing an increasing number of charter schools opening its doors on the island chain. Just this year, two were added to the ranks: Ocean Studies Charter in the Upper Keys for young children and Key West Collegiate School in the Lower Keys for high school students. Both are starting out small with about 40 students each.

“Our students will be college-bound,” said Principal Debra Remsen Tripp of Key West Collegiate. “Their choice of colleges and universities should expand because of the rigorous academic work they will do during their high school careers at KWCS.”

At Ocean Studies Charter school, the youngsters are focusing on marine science. The school is stocked with numerous fish tanks and the species inside change according to the curriculum.

“Recently, one of our students was explaining the reason for lobstering limits to his parents, while they were lobstering. It’s fantastic,” said Principal Jennifer Flores.

Beyond curriculum, Flores said charter schools are increasing in popularity because the schools can embrace different teaching and learning philosophies. It also allows for greater flexibility than traditional schools. For example, Flores is a lead teacher and the head administrator. For another, teachers can choose which textbooks will work best with the current student population.

“All educators put children first, we just have more options,” she said.

There are four other charter schools in the Florida Keys — Montessori Elementary of Key West, Sigsbee Charter School, Big Pine Academy and Treasure Village Montessori. Almost 1,000 students are enrolled in charter schools in the Florida Keys, accounting for about 12 percent of the entire student population.

Charter schools receive the same per-student allocations from the state as regular public schools; about $6 million for this academic year. That means changes are being made on the district administrative level. Elected school board member John Dick has said that fewer students enrolled in traditional schools will have to coincide with a reduction in administrators and other district headquarters staff. About 84 percent of the entire school budget — $79 million — pays See SCHOOLS, page 6
Get your storm updates on Facebook

By Citizen Staff

Many local residents learned about the recent earthquake off Cuba by reading about it on Facebook. Yes, the National Weather Service has embraced social media.

“Both the Key West office of the National Weather Service and the National Hurricane Center both have pages,” said Jon Rizzo, warning coordination meteorologist the National Weather Service office in Key West. “Our followers are privy to information on our home webpage.”

To get onto the information highway, Florida Keys residents are encouraged to “friend” either the National Hurricane Center or the U.S. National Weather Service Key West Florida.

Of course, the National Weather Service also coordinates with the local cable company, radio stations and also broadcasts on marine radio weather stations. However, communication will almost certainly be disrupted by a major storm. Beyond that, it’s all good — it has never, ever snowed in the Florida Keys. Not once. Locals will tell visitors that “blood thins” and what were once acceptable temperatures in Maryland — shorts and T-shirt weather — will now make transplants tremble in their cutoffs. Everyone must judge for themselves. (See sidebar.)

During August and September, the Keys register about 5.5 inches of rainfall. In February, it’s usually only 1.5 inches.

“We’re not exactly a desert here, but compared to other cities in Florida we are the driest one,” said an official from the National Weather Service, “in terms of annual rain fall.” Beyond hurricanes, the Keys also have water spouts and tornadoes and occasional hail.

The only other temperature Keys residents take into account is water temperature. The coldest month to take a swim is in February.

**KEYS TEMPERATURES**

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**EMPLOYMENT STATISTICS**

By Citizen Staff

It’s estimated that there are about 43,000 eligible workers in the Florida Keys. Currently, the unemployment rate in the Keys currently stands at 6.6 percent, far below the 11 percent average statewide. It is also lower than the last year’s rate of 7.9 percent.

The top two employers in the Keys are government and hospitality establishments. Others find jobs in retail shops or real estate sales and management. Most businesses in the Keys are “mom and pop” organizations with fewer than five employees, about 90 percent. About 20 percent of businesses have five to nine employees.

Most new arrivals to the Florida Keys resort to taking two or more part time jobs to be able to afford the rent. While the wages are relatively high, so is the cost of living. The Keys consistently rank as one of the most expensive counties in Florida.

— statistics gathered from U.S. Census Bureau, Bureau of Economic and Business Research, Labor Market Statistics and America’s Career InfoNet.
Keys are a safe place to live

Citizen Staff

Last year, Monroe County had the fewest number of violent crimes — including forcible sex offenses, robbery and aggravated assault — reported in the last 15 years. The number of property crimes also fell. Unfortunately, it also had the highest number of murders — six.

Yet all in all, Monroe County is a very safe place to live. On average, the Keys have half the crime of similarly populated Florida counties. Most crimes are property crimes. There were about 2,500 larceny crimes reported last year and 900 burglary crimes. There were only 82 robberies reported — a crime that includes both property and person.

Monroe County Sheriff’s Office spokesperson Becky Herrin said the majority of crime is easily prevented. Lock your doors. Put your valuables away. Reinforce the locks on windows and doors.

“Probably 90 percent of the crime that we see can be easily prevented — don’t leave a bike in the front yard, don’t leave an iPod on the front seat of an unlocked car,” Herrin said.

One of the best lines of defense is communication between the Sheriff’s Office and the affected neighborhoods or just neighbor to neighbor.

At the moment there are probably 50 active crime watch areas in the Keys. Some of the groups are new, responding to a rash of boat burglaries throughout the Keys. Thieves have been making off with complete outboard motors or just the lower unit. The Sheriff’s Office recommends marking the engines with something more permanent than the serial number on a sticker that’s provided by the manufacturer. Better yet, is to prevent the theft all together. The Sheriff’s Office put out a list of recommendations that include disconnecting the battery from the trim and tilt function of the motor; keeping the trailer and boat in a well-lighted place; destroying the threads on one of the bolts for each engine; and parking the boat very close to the house so thieves can’t get access.

— Statistics from Florida Department of Law Enforcement

1950s
Theodore Samuel “Ted” Williams (1918 –2002), was an American professional baseball player and manager. He played his entire 21-year Major League Baseball career as the left fielder for the Boston Red Sox. In the 1950s, he helped make the Keys famous for its sport fishing. He is one of few men to be recognized for achievements in two sports: he was inducted into the Baseball Hall of Fame in 1966 and the Fishing Hall of Fame (IGFA) in 2000.

— wikipedia.com

Rare Species of the Florida Keys...

First State Bank of the Florida Keys was founded 56 years ago by locals for locals. Back then there were a few other local banks, but over the years they have been taken over by banks headquartered outside of the Keys.

Now there’s only one bank left that remains dedicated exclusively to the people who live and work in the Keys. Only one bank whose home and headquarters remain here in the Keys...

First State Bank of the Florida Keys!

Bank Locally - Open Your Account Today!

We’re Locals Like You!

KeysBank.com • 305-296-8535
CREATIVE
Floors & Surfaces

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CARPET • TILE • GRANITE

Your “local” flooring store

305-745-8502 • 24750 Overseas Hwy

THE Hottest Dancers in the Keys!

• Total Nudity...
• Distinctive and Tasteful
• Florida’s Most Beautiful Women
• Private Table
• Dances Available
• Full Liquor and Food Served ‘til Close
• Open ‘til 4am
• Couples Welcome

KEYS HOTTEST HAPPY HOUR
2-4-1 DANCES / 2-4-1 DRINKS
1/2 PRICE APPETIZERS
4-8PM NO COVER

Oil fortune to capitalize hotel and railroad ventures in Florida. Flagler originally intended West Palm Beach to be the terminus of his railroad system, but in 1894 and 1895, severe freezes hit the area, causing Flagler to rethink his original decision. Sixty miles south, the town today known as Miami was reportedly unharmed by the freeze. He then decided that his Florida East Coast Railway should be extended from Biscayne Bay to Key West. At the time, the Southernmost City was Florida’s most populous, and it was also the United States’ closest deep water port to the canal that the U.S. government proposed to build in Panama. The Florida Overseas Railroad was completed in 1912. The track was eventually converted into the roadbed for the Florida Keys Overseas Highway.

— wikipedia.com

Schools

Continued from page 3

for school personnel salaries and benefits.

On a positive note, Monroe County taxpayers get good return on this investment. The state Department of Education has consistently awarded the students of Monroe County with good marks. Keys students test above the state average.

While some high school graduates attend institutions for higher learning on the mainland, others choose to continue their education in the Keys. The Florida Keys Community College serves about 1,500 students every semester. The college has three campuses in the Upper, Middle and Lower Keys, although the main campus is just outside Key West. Many students take courses online. “We offer about 20 distant learning classes every semester,” said an FKCC spokesperson. “Students find it much easier to fit their schedule around online classes.”

The FKCC has just opened its first dorm. Named “Lagoon Landing” it is a 100-bed facility with a water view.

For more information about Monroe County Schools visit http://keys-schools.schoolfusion. For more information about Florida Keys Community College, visit www.fkcc.edu.
famous men of the florida keys

1930s

Ernest Miller Hemingway (1899 –1961) was an American author and journalist. His distinctive writing style, characterized by economy and understatement, influenced 20th-century fiction, as did his life of adventure and his public image. He also helped put the Florida Keys on the map. Hemingway had permanent residences in Key West and Cuba during the 1930s and 1940s, and penned most of To Have and Have Not in Key West. He lived in a house bought by his wife Pauline’s uncle. The second floor of the carriage house was converted to a writing den. Besides writing, he also spent his time fishing, drinking and carousing in fine Key West style.

between Oldham’s full-time presence and practice of medical oncology and Ahamad’s radiation oncology, the vast majority of cancer treatments are available in Key West from full-time doctors.

“We’ll still have to send patients to the mainland for things like bone marrow transplants or experimental drug trials,” Oldham said. “But there is no need to go to Miami for radiation or chemotherapy.”

Like the rest of the nation, the Keys biggest health care concerns are the aforementioned cancer and heart disease. However, we also have a high incident of dangerous accidents in the Keys. According to the Agency for Health Care Administration, the leading cause of the fatalities were falls, drowning and pedestrian traffic accidents.

Less fatal, but just as problematic for a person’s health, is the heat. About 700 people visit the emergency room annually because of the physical stress of too much work (or fun) in too much sun.

“It’s most common among the elderly. They are out in the heat, not drinking enough fluids and then they pass out or almost pass out,” said a Lower Keys Medical Center spokesperson. The patient is treated by administering fluids and checking for an electrolyte imbalance.

Besides getting care at a doctor’s office or hospital, Keys residents also have other alternatives. Free-standing surgical centers, diagnostic centers and urgent care centers are located up and down the Keys. Locals also receive care from the Rural Health Network, hospice organizations, Middle Keys Guidance Clinic, AIDS Help and Womankind. Also, the Monroe County Health Department operates four clinics, two of which offer primary care services.
1940s
Harry S. Truman (1884 –1972) was the 33rd President of the United States. As President Franklin D. Roosevelt’s third vice president and the 34th Vice President of the United States (1945), he succeeded to the presidency on April 12, 1945, when President Roosevelt died. In November 1946, he had finished 19 months in office, but was physically exhausted. His doctor ordered a warm vacation. Truman arrived in Key West in November, 1946 and took up residence at what is now known as the Harry S. Truman Little White House. While in office, he spent 175 days there on 11 separate trips. — wikipedia.com

1980s
Mel Fisher (1922 –1998) was an American treasure hunter best known for finding the 1622 wreck of the Spanish galleon Nuestra Señora de Atocha in Florida Keys waters in 1985. The estimated $450 million cache was known as “The Atocha Motherlode.” In addition to the Atocha, Fisher’s company, Salvors Inc., found remains of several other shipwrecks in Florida waters. — wikipedia.com

9 ways to enjoy the Keys waters

The water. It’s why locals live here and why visitors visit. It shapes the Keys culture, traditions, customs and schedule. The islands are all about the beautiful water that surrounds them, not the miniscule spit of land humans exist on. Our responsibility is the same — to leave things as we found them, to respect the unique environment, to keep it safe from harm because it offers us so much:

1. GLASS-BOTTOM BOAT TRIPS. This is the best way to see the reef without getting your hair wet. Trips typically last two hours and are accessible for everyone from a 2-year-old to a 90-year-old. Most boats have a galley with snacks and drinks for sale. Expect to pay about $30 for adults and half that for children.

2. SNORKELING/DIVING. The costs for a trip to the reef on a professional dive boat varies depending on how much equipment the diver owns. Forty dollars is the bare minimum for a snorkeling trip and $100 will cover someone who needs a complete scuba kit. Most often, snorkelers are welcome aboard.

3. KITEBOARDING. A great way to get into this sport is by taking a lesson. Instructors provide the experience, equipment and boat support. Expect to pay about $300 for a two- to three-hour lesson.

4. PADDLEBOARDING. Paddleboarding is an excellent introduction to Keys watersports. It has an easy learning curve and gives participants a great vantage of marine life. You can rent one for about $50 for a half-day.

5. FISHING CHARTERS. Most professional guides charge between $450 for a half-day of flats fishing to $850 for a full day offshore.

6. SAILING CRUISES. Take your pick from a historic schooner to a modern-day ferry for a tour around the island. Day cruises are slightly less expensive than the sunset cruise. Expect to pay at least $40. Ask if adult beverages are included in the price.

7. BOAT RENTALS. Expect to pay $150 to $250 for a half day on the water, depending on the size of the boat. Renters pay to top off the boat’s gas tanks at the end of the day.

8. PWC RENTALS. Join a group of Jet Skiers for a two-hour tour for about $125. (Prices depend on one- and two-person PWCs.) Riders must be 18 years old to rent a water bike. Operators under the age of 21 must pass a proficiency test that is conducted on-site.

9. KAYAKING. Kayaks can cost as little as $20 for a half day. However, joining a tour could be more fun and entertaining. In that case, the price goes up to $35 for a two-hour trip and $60 for a four-hour trip.

If you have information about a crime, call The Crime Stoppers Hot Line 1-800-346-TIPS www.tipsubmit.com
If your information leads to an arrest, you’ll be eligible for a cash reward. Paid for by the Florida Attorney General’s Crime Stoppers Trust Fund.