



COURTESY PHOTO

Boat slip sales have slowed at Hickory Bay Boathouse off Bonita Beach Road.

warmly optimistic about the town and its climate for art and business.

“Most of my pieces are in the hundreds of dollars, and I’m trying hard to get them into the \$50s,” she notes. “You have to hit that price point because times are hard and money is scarce, but to make an artistic piece under \$100 — that’s difficult because of the time and effort.”

Only a few blocks away, across old U.S. 41 and in the historic district on Shriver Avenue, Joe Skelly of Platinum Properties is selling a house right on the river. Across the 50 or 60 feet of dark water lies an area now vacant, known as Bamboo Court, where the city hopes a developer will someday build quaint shops and homes in a mixed-used environment, says Mayor Nelson.

Skelly also lives next door to the for-sale house. He raised his kids in the neighborhood “with a tree house in the big old oak trees, tree swings, and we used to swim in the river — people still do, and they kayak past here all the time,” he says.

He likes the mix of Hispanic and Anglo families, too, as well as the wide range of lifestyles, he adds.

“This home I’m selling was built in 1947, mine was built in ‘46, and they’re the old Florida cottages with the hardwood floors and heartwood pine,” he explains. “It’s two bedrooms



FLORIDA WEEKLY PHOTO

Beverly Fox’s jeweler business is struggling.

and one bathroom. It has a garage — I’ve converted my garage to an apartment — a good working fireplace in the living room, a kitchen overlooking the river, and a deck that was added.”

With all the extras — appliances, parking, good air conditioning, he says — the list price is \$250,000, and

that list is for reasons that reflect the hard times in Bonita, and elsewhere.

“The lady who lived there paid \$375,000 for the house two years ago, but she can’t afford to live there anymore, so she’s doing a short sale, or the bank is,” says Skelly.

Over at Dolly’s Produce Patch and Eatery on Bonita Springs Boulevard, meanwhile, co-owner Dolly Scott (with her son, Randy), whose in-laws bought the property in the early 1950s and built a little motel (now razed) when she was just a teenager, is approaching tough times a different way.

Fewer people are coming in, so instead of raising prices much, she’s cutting down on portions during her breakfast and lunch service.

“I’ve noticed a definite slowdown, so I started to do portion control,” she explains. “The American people think their plate needs to be piled so high they can’t eat it all, and I’m saying, ‘If you clean up your plate, you can have more, but I’m not piling it on just to throw it in the garbage.’ That’s the way I raised my kids, that’s the way I was raised (on a farm in Minnesota), and I don’t want to cook all this food just to throw it away.”

Her Father’s Day special this week, for \$7.95, was “a Popeye omelette with spinach, of course, to make Daddy strong — yum, yum — and a Popeye omelette with shrimp, for the sailors.”

That was typical of past prices, and so are her baked goods and homemade pies (bananas went from 39 cents a pound to 70 cents a pound but the price for her banana cream pie remains \$17, she says).

She’s raised her other prices only a few cents or a dollar, even though vendors who deliver food now charge her an extra gasoline tax on every order.

She works seven days a week, and someday she might sell the restaurant, she mentions.

“But would anybody want my place? Not now, not in this climate. I’m struggling like anybody else. And I do not want to get rid of any of my employees. If we all pull together we will come out of this together, okay. It’s just a matter of looking out for each other.”

Nearly everyone around her would echo that opinion, which Dolly Scott follows with this one, too.

“I say just get on your knees and thank God every day that you can work, and you have a job. Hopefully it turns around soon, and I’m too much of an optimist to think it won’t. I’ve been through too many other hard struggles to get defeated by a little think like this economy.” ■



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