

HARD TIMES?

People define hard times in different ways. We asked people around Lee County for their definition. This is what they told us.

BY ROGER WILLIAMS

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CHARLES DICKENS MAY HAVE PUT HIS fanciful finger on the current American moment a century-and-a-half ago. "It was the best of times, it was the worst of times," he wrote to begin his novel, "A Tale of Two Cities."

And now we find ourselves facing hard times — or maybe they aren't hard times. People are hurting, or people aren't hurting. But what are hard times, really, and are these times the real thing?

Each day now, daily newspapers carry stories of people who lose their homes, or their jobs, or face a loss of income. Few have escaped a decline in personal worth, especially those whose wealth is tied up in real estate.

The Bush administration continues to avoid using the word "recession" to describe the economy, and various leaders in Washington have even suggested the economy is strong (except former Sen. Phil Gramm, a Texas Republican who suggested early this year that it isn't the economy, it's the Americans, who are whiners).

SEE TIMES, A8 ▶

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We ask you.
How bad is it
right now?
A8



Making memoirs

The Sanibel Island Writers Conference is this weekend at BIG Arts. **C1** ▶



Wizard of Arts

And other events in Fort Myers' society. **C26, 28 & 29** ▶



Cleaning up SWFL

Summit REO helps overworked banks manage foreclosures. **B1** ▶



Couture with a twist

IDC event features fashions made of tile, stone, wood and more. **D1** ▶

Help times seven at east Fort Myers United Way House

BY EVAN WILLIAMS
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Building on a prior success, United Way has opened a Lee County United Way House in east Fort Myers, bringing seven social service agencies to one spot.

The agencies all share offices in one building at 4040 Palm Beach Blvd. and work as a team to solve the complex problems of poor or struggling families nearby.

That includes medical care, mental health care, help getting food, housing or a job. There will also be social workers to address a range of simple, yet crucial problems like having a phone number or mailing address, or getting transportation.

The grand opening will be Nov. 21, but the east Fort Myers House is already open, getting a feel for what the neighborhood needs most.



EVAN WILLIAMS / FLORIDA WEEKLY

SEE HELP, A9 ▶ East Fort Myers United Way House.

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