

# WATER

From page 1

Island in San Carlos Bay on its cover in May this year with an article about waterfront living for boaters.

In fact, state statistics show nearly one of every 10 residents in Lee County owns a boat, with an estimated 51,000 registered recreational vessels here alone. It ranked fourth for boat ownership among Florida's 67 counties in 2007, behind Miami-Dade, Pinellas and Broward.

Collier checked in with 25,000 registered recreational boats, placing it near counties such as Sarasota and Monroe.

The figures from the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Association don't account for kayaks, canoes, small sailboats and other vessels without engines. One glance from any bridge suggests that thousands more boats are on Lee and Collier's waters.

The boating profile will be raised a notch in coming months with seasonal boaters flocking south to the Intracoastal Waterway in Lee County as well as popular destinations such as Gordon Pass in Collier County.

The Fort Myers Boat Show kicks off the boating season Thursday, Nov. 13, through Sunday, Nov. 16, in the River District along Edwards Drive, at the Fort Myers City Yacht Basin and in Harborside Convention Center.

More than 10,000 people from throughout Southwest Florida and beyond are expected to attend this year, said Ken Stead, executive director of the Southwest Florida Marine Industries Association.

"If you can swing it, you can get a boat for less now than you could two years ago," said Stead, a longtime boater. "From a family perspective of enjoying time together, I can't think of a better way than to do it on the water. It's not about the hardware and fiberglass. It's about the camaraderie."

The Joneses take out their Bayliner three out of every four weekends for day trips. Teen sons Austin and Dominick love it, Jill Jones said.

"We like to go out to dinner or lunch," she said.

Ask her to recount her summer and fall trips, and it reads like a guide to



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There are about 51,000 registered recreational vessels in Lee County alone.

waterfront dining: Rum Runners in Cape Coral, Pinchers Crab Shack in North Fort Myers, Lazy Flamingo in Bokeelia, Parrot Key on Fort Myers Beach. Don't forget the infamous Cabbage Key on Pine Island Sound. What about Naples? "Haven't been down there yet at all, but I hear they have good food."

Aside from waterfront restaurants, other draws for boaters in Southwest Florida include:

- **Wildlife:** The region is home to one of the highest concentration of bottle-nosed dolphins in North America. Ospreys nest on channel markers. Manatees bask in shallow areas. Otters frequent docks. Pelicans nose dive like fighter pilots.



Most days, boating here is like traveling through pages of National Geographic or Audubon magazine.

- **Fishing:** Field & Stream magazine editors noted Lee County's Pine Island Sound is among the top fishing spots in North America. Boca Grande Pass is noted worldwide among gamefish anglers for its tarpon populations in late spring and early summer. The Ten Thousand Islands in south Collier offer some of the



most pristine fishing grounds in Florida.

- **Affordability:** If you live in Fort Lauderdale, you need a brute boat that can handle the Atlantic's blue water and waves. In other words, an expensive one. Here,

the protected waters mean a skiff or a dinghy can do. So can a \$500 kayak or canoe. The average boat length is around 20 feet. The Joneses paid \$13,500 for their 17-footer. An inflatable boat at the Fort Myers Boat Show will cost roughly \$2,500.

- **Variety:** Day-tripping comes to mind first, but many boaters have long lists of activities. Cruisers anchor out for overnight gatherings. Yacht clubs and power squadrons organize trips. Nonprofits frequently organize waterway poker runs, card games in which boaters travel place to



place and raise money for charity. Sailors host regattas that attract Olympic-caliber competitors. Kayakers traverse the Great Calusa Blueway in Lee and the Paradise

## If you go

>>**What:** Fort Myers Boat Show  
 >>**Where:** Downtown Fort Myers along Edwards Drive and Monroe Street, in Harborside Convention Center and at Fort Myers City Yacht Basin  
 >>**When:** Thursday, Nov. 13 - Saturday, Nov. 15; 10 a.m.-6 p.m. Sunday, Nov. 16; 10 a.m.-5 p.m.  
 >>**Cost:** \$9 adults, children under 12 free; \$2 off coupon available at the show's Web site  
 >>**Info:** www.fortmyersboatshow.com. Show office, 334-4160; Southwest Florida Marine Industries Association, 656-7083

**Note:** You can enter to win a 2008 183 Angler center console with a T-top, 115 horsepower Suzuki motor and aluminum trailer from Boater's Warehouse and the Fort Myers Boat Show. Details and entry form are online.

Coast Paddling Trail in Collier.

- **Access:** The BoatU.S. Magazine article noted the abundance of boatlifts and docks behind people's homes here. Often, newcomers buy a house with the amenity and then become boaters just because it's there. The region also is home to a growing number of dockminiums, which allow boaters to purchase dry storage on the water through a condominium association-like set up. Marinas and public boat ramps also are in every corner of the region.

"There are marinas with space available, and that makes it conducive to enjoying the water," said Ted Maupin, a 15-year Collier resident and longtime boater.

The one drawback for Southwest Florida boaters: shallow water. They need to read charts and stay in channels until they're familiar with their whereabouts. Lee County, for example, has more than 230 square miles of inland waterways and the average water depth countywide is 4 feet.

Still, boaters overlook the potential to run aground because the region's beauty outweighs the need to be more acutely aware of where you're going, said Maupin, marine operations director at Hamilton Harbor Yacht Club, a 270-slip marina just inside Gordon Pass.

"We typically don't have deep water on this side (of Florida) but the pristine waters — and a lot of effort goes into clean and safe waters — are as much a positive impact on boating as anything," he said. ■

# Fort Myers Boat Show has something for everyone

## FLORIDA WEEKLY STAFF REPORT

The 36th annual Fort Myers Boat Show will take place along the waterfront of the Fort Myers City Yacht Basin on Edwards Drive and Monroe Street and in the Harborside Event Center Nov. 13 - 16.

This year, the show will feature 800 boats from more than 150 manufacturers with exhibits and information about indoor and outdoor water-oriented lifestyles and activities available in Southwest Florida.

Boat show attendees can view and purchase the newest models of a broad variety of vessels from dinghies to yachts and experience the newest in boating related equipment and accessories. Other activities include fishing, water-safety and scuba diving seminars and exhibits featuring vessel storage, financing options, luxury waterfront communities and more.

And if you think outdoor activities don't have much affect on Florida's economy, check out this report:

From the Congressional Sportsmen's Foundation and the National Assembly of Sportsmen's Caucuses came a report that showed:

- Sportsmen - support more jobs in Florida than Disney World (85,000 jobs



Boating is big business in Lee County. Every year, the Fort Myers Boat Show attracts hordes.



COURTESY PHOTOS

vs. 61,000).

- Annual spending by Florida sportsmen is more than twice the annual revenue of Miami-based Burger King (\$4.8 billion vs. \$2.05 billion).

- Annual spending by Florida anglers is more than three times greater than the cash receipts from the state's orange crop (\$4.4 billion vs. \$1.2 billion).

Admission to the show is \$9 per person, with children 12 and under attending free. Discount coupons are available online at www.fortmyersboatshow.com. Park and ride event parking is available at the City of Palms Park / Red Sox Stadium.

For more information about the Fort Myers Boat Show and discount tickets call 656-7083 or visit www.fortmyersboatshow.com. ■