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Scenic Watch is a free bi-monthly publication of Citizens for a Scenic Florida, Inc., dedicated to the preservation, protection and enhancement of Florida's scenic heritage. Individuals, organizations and government agencies are welcome as members. [Join Scenic Florida now](#) to protect our scenic qualities.

### National News:

#### Wanted: billboard counters

*Los Angeles has a problem. Their billboards are 'secret'.*

How many of the eyesores are there in L.A.? Absurdly, that number's a secret. William Brinton is a Florida attorney working with Scenic America against billboard blight. In court, he encounters endless lawsuits, and from his office window, he's seen government-owned trees in front of billboards get chain sawed, chopped down, pulled out of the ground or poisoned -- because they interfered with the "view" of the billboards. What's happening in L.A. is "just the industry doing what it always does -- delay, delay, delay, and trying to bully people."

Florida's billboards are so public that there's an interactive [website](#) that describes every single one, down to whether it's legal and how far it is from the road.

[Click here for the complete article.](#)

It is not too late to sign up for the **Scenic Symposium** sponsored by Citizens for a Scenic Florida. [Click here](#) for the agenda and send email to [Rachel](#) to register.

#### Editors Comment:

*The survey reported on under Land Use & Smart Growth is indicative of the importance that Florida residents place on the natural beauty of our surroundings. I suspect the same survey could be conducted in any part of Florida with similar results.*

*Cassellberry leaders deserve praise for recognizing the damage that LED billboards will do to their city. They even provide for sunseting existing permits. Great idea. Cities and counties with appropriate sign ordinances can prohibit flashing, changeable and LED sign. Over 200 cities and counties now have effective billboard control ordinances..*

## Billboards

### Electronic signs no longer OK, leaders decide

March 27, 2008

CASSELBERRY - The City Commission on Monday approved an ordinance that prohibits electronic and flashing signs.

The rule makes provisions for existing electronic signs to stay until the year 2020. Existing electronic signs would have to come down if they become damaged or need replacement before the year 2020.

The commission voted 4-1 in favor, with Mayor Bob Goff voting against.

The commission has been concerned about flashing "electronic message centers," which had begun proliferating throughout the city, and LED billboards that have popped up in other parts of Central Florida.

The ordinance will help Casselberry "not have blight in our area as far as excessive signs," Vice Mayor Colleen Hufford said.

Goff, however, said the ordinance is too broad.

"I absolutely agree flashing, twirling signs are a problem that needs to be controlled, but to eliminate electronic signs as a category seems to me to be overkill," he said.

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## Cell Towers

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## Farmland Protection

### Hats off to Last Cowboys of Florida

By John Tanasychuk | South Florida Sun-Sentinel  
April 9, 2008

When most Americans think about Florida, it's our beaches, oranges and hurricanes that first come to mind.

Victor Milt, of [Boca Raton](#), would like to add cowboys to the list. Because long before the state became a tourist mecca and long before we became the fourth-most-populous state, Florida had cowboys.

Milt says that Ponce de Leon not only discovered Florida but also brought the first cattle and horses to the United States. Where there are cattle, there are cowboys. So Florida had the first American cowboys.

"From that comes all of the rest of ranching in America," says Milt, whose documentary *Cracker: The Last Cowboys of Florida*, screens Monday at the [Palm Beach International Film Festival](#). Milt's road to Florida cowboys has been a long one. He and his wife, Kim Bretton Milt, who produced the documentary, spent most of the last 35 years making TV commercials for such well-known products as Irish Spring soap and Colombian coffee. Kim grew up in Arcadia, and on trips to see her parents, her husband often wondered about the ranches and the guys on horses.

When they moved to Florida full-time in 2001, he started painting cowboys. With Kim's entree, he got to know them. The couple made a 36-minute film called *Cowboys of Florida*, which Milt calls a "poem to the cowboys." When a couple of Central Florida ranchers saw the film, they offered to put up money for a more in-depth, feature-length treatment. The current movie explores the loss of farmland and wilderness to encroaching development and makes a strong argument for the preservation not just of land but also cowboy culture.

"This is not only a way of life that's disappearing, but something that's much more important to every American in that our food supply is disappearing," says Milt. "We're giving up our food production in the same way that we gave up our oil production to outside sources."

The film includes interviews with ranching families that go back generations. There are cowhands and a cowboy minister. There are women and men, Hispanics, blacks and American Indians. Most proudly refer to themselves as "crackers."

That would include Doyle Conner Jr., former curator of the Florida Agricultural Museum and a sixth-generation Floridian who likes to "preach the gospel of Florida."

"I think Victor did a nice job," says Conner. "It was interesting and I thought wonderful that a transplanted Yankee came down here and gets hit over the head. There's a lot of history here. There's a lot of information that I had not a clue about. Victor jumped right into the middle of it."

Conner, who lives in Monticello, says too few people are interested in Florida history because there are so few native Floridians.

"To me, that doesn't make sense," he says. "If I moved to New Hampshire, I'd want to know the history."

[Charles Bronson](#), state agriculture commissioner, says what the movie does best is show the state of the cattle industry. When Bronson graduated from college in 1972, there were approximately 2 million head of cattle in the state. Now there are 1 million. In the last 25 years, Florida has gone from being the third-largest cattle-producing state east of the Mississippi to the ninth.

There are 44,000 registered farms across the state, says Bronson, down from about 50,000 10 years ago. And as much as Bronson blames development, inheritance taxes also play a role in the loss of family-owned farms. Once the head of household dies, the family has to pay what he calls "death taxes" on the assets held by the deceased.

Bronson owns two small ranches and would like to continue to own them.

"That's the culture I was brought up in," he says. "I like going out and being in open spaces. Before anyone knew that Texas was Texas, we were running cattle in Florida. Before the Spaniards landed in California, we were running cattle in Florida."

John Tanasychuk can be reached at [jtanasychuk@sun-sentinel.com](mailto:jtanasychuk@sun-sentinel.com) or 954-356-4632.

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## **GL Homes bucks trend, buys \$117 million of land**

By [JEFF OSTROWSKI](#)

Palm Beach Post Staff Writer

Thursday, March 27, 2008

Home builders are dumping land, cutting workers and otherwise retrenching, yet GL Homes is still buying. The Sunrise-based builder just paid \$117 million for 1,068 acres west of Delray Beach.

Privately held GL Homes bought the site from the Hyder family. The builder put the tract under contract during the real estate boom and closed on the deal early this month, according to property records.

"With the market the way it is, I was shocked they went through with it," said Mike Blann, general manager of Sunshine Meadows Equestrian Village, which borders GL's property.

GL officials refused to comment.

But according to plans GL submitted to county officials in 2005, about half the land it bought is west of State Road 7 and will remain farmland to satisfy county rules that require builders in the Agricultural Reserve to set aside land for rural uses. GL promised to preserve 547 acres west of Delray Beach and SR 7 to meet requirements for another project at the southwest corner of Boynton Beach Boulevard and Lyons Road.

The other half of the land in the March deal is east of SR 7 in suburban Delray. It's part of a site slated to hold 550 new homes.

"It is certainly swimming upstream to be buying land when most other developers and builders are trying to sell it," said Brad Hunter, a housing analyst at Metrostudy in West Palm Beach. "But the Ag Reserve is somewhat GL's home base. They know the area well."

GL Homes is selling houses at Canyon Lakes at the southeast corner of Boynton Beach Boulevard and Lyons Road. And in a deal outside the Ag Reserve, GL in 2005 paid \$185 million for the 4,900-acre Indian Trail Groves west of The Acreage.

GL's latest deal comes as builders face difficult times. Irvine, Calif.-based Standard Pacific has been selling parcels in Palm Beach County. Miami-based Lennar last year sold 11,000 home sites to a real estate arm of Morgan Stanley. And Levitt and Sons, a division of Fort Lauderdale-based Levitt Corp. (NYSE: LEV, \$1.60), filed for Chapter 11 bankruptcy protection.

GL appears to be getting ready for the market's turnaround, housing experts said. "They're positioning themselves to be well-stocked with land at a time when land will be scarce once again," Hunter said.

GL Homes paid \$110,000 an acre for the 1,068 acres along SR 7. Analysts say it's difficult to compare prices of residential land because of preservation rules and other factors.

But GL paid \$38,000 an acre for Indian Trail Groves, and Standard Pacific last year sold 54 acres along Florida's Turnpike to an industrial developer for \$264,000 an acre.

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## Land Use & Smart Growth

### Growth OK, but balance it with nature, survey reveals

By [ERIC STAATS](#) ([Contact](#))

9:20 p.m., Thursday, March 27, 2008

Sunsets on the beach and birdies to win on the 18th hole are big crowd pleasers in Southwest Florida.

Audubon of Florida has another one to add.

The environmental group released survey results Thursday that show 91 percent of Southwest Florida residents think that growth should not be allowed unless it balances the needs of both people and wildlife.

"Everybody's very attuned to how we've got to grow right, we've got to grow smart and we have to plan our communities with nature in mind," Audubon of Florida policy advocate Brad Cornell said.

The results come the same week U.S. Census data showed the Naples-Marco Island and Fort Myers-Cape Coral metropolitan areas were among the 20 fastest-growing areas in the nation between 2000 and 2007, coming in at 16th and fourth, respectively.

The data showed population growth slowed but still registered a 34 percent increase in Fort Myers-Cape Coral and a 26 percent increase in Naples-Marco Island.

Cornell said the survey results validate environmental groups' efforts to defeat the Coconut Road interchange on Interstate 75 in Lee County and their prolonged legal fight over development, wetlands and endangered wood stork habitat in the Cocohatchee Slough north of Immokalee Road in Collier County.

A golf course community called Mirasol has been at the center of the most hard fought of the battles in the Cocohatchee Slough.

Mirasol project manager Don Milarcik said the project is just what the Audubon survey ordered.

"I think everybody would agree to a balanced approach, and I think that's what we do now through the permitting process," he said.

Audubon of Florida, Collier County Audubon Society, the Conservancy of Southwest Florida, the Florida Wildlife Federation and the National Wildlife Federation have lost an administrative challenge to a South Florida Water Management District permit for Mirasol but have vowed to file a federal lawsuit over a U.S. Army Corps of Engineers permit issued in 2007.

Mirasol would destroy 600 acres of wetlands but it would preserve 830 acres of wetlands and 110 acres of uplands and remove thick stands of melaleuca trees that the developer contends are choking the site.

Environmental groups say Mirasol undervalues the wetlands' usefulness to foraging wood storks and that Mirasol is using faulty water quality calculations to justify wetlands destruction.

In the Audubon survey, 19 percent said they favored restrictions on growth in some environmentally sensitive areas, 14 percent favored greater wildlife protection requirements on new development and 56 percent favored a combination of the two, according to the survey.

"I think it's pretty clear the public isn't in favor of building in wetlands and wood stork habitat," Cornell said.

The survey interviewed a random sample of 400 residents in the Naples/Fort Myers area between Feb. 27 and March 4.

The survey has a margin of error of 4.9 percent and a 95 percent confidence level.

Of the respondents, 83 percent said they were full-time residents and 17 percent said they were part-time or seasonal residents.

Naples was home to 31 percent of the survey takers compared with 49 percent in Fort Myers-Cape Coral. The rest were listed as other.

### **Audubon of Florida survey results**

By the numbers

91 — Percent who strongly or somewhat agree that growth should not be allowed unless it takes the needs of both people and wildlife into account.

70 — Percent who strongly or somewhat agree that growth makes Southwest Florida a prosperous, interesting and vibrant place to live.

66 — Percent who said Southwest Florida is growing too fast and that growth should be slowed.

27 — Percent who said Southwest Florida's natural environment is deteriorating rapidly, and another 40 percent say it's deteriorating slowly.

97 — Percent who said the natural environment is very important or somewhat important to their quality of life.

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### **Scenic Highways & Trails**

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## Other Scenic News

### 12 'distinctive destinations' preserve a piece of history - including Appalachicola Bay.

BY CHERYL WITTENAUER • ASSOCIATED PRESS WRITER • April 6, 2008

ST. LOUIS -- Twelve towns -- from a French colonial village in Missouri to a town in the Florida Panhandle -- have been honored this year by the National Trust for Historic Preservation for their commitment to historic preservation and community revitalization.

The list of a "Dozen Distinctive Destinations" has been issued annually since 2000 by the National Trust for Historic Preservation.

This year's honorees are Ste. Genevieve, Mo.; Aiken, S.C.; Apalachicola, Fla.; Columbus, Miss.; Crested Butte, Colo.; Ft. Davis, Texas; Friday Harbor, Wash.; Portland, Ore.; Portsmouth, N.H.; Red Wing, Minn.; San Juan Bautista, Calif.; and Wilmington, N.C.

Ste. Genevieve was recognized as having "the most significant collection of French colonial architecture in the United States," according to the preservation group. The town of 4,400 people was settled by the French in the early 1700s, making it one of Missouri's oldest settlements and the only French colonial village left in the United States. Ste. Genevieve is located on the Mississippi River, 64 miles south of St. Louis.

Ownership of the territory was alternately French, Spanish and American, but the French traditions and architecture persisted no matter who was in charge.

Richard Moe, president of the National Trust for Historic Preservation, recalled the heroic efforts to save the French colonial structures during the Great Flood of 1993.

The buildings, he said, are "just outstanding. I'll never forget the vertical log structures that you don't see anywhere else. It's really a memorable experience to go there.

"It's a little bit off the track. That's why we want to draw attention to it."

The town boasts more than 150 structures built before 1825, including the 1785 Bolduc House, the 1792 Amoureux House, the 1818 Felix Valle State Historic Site and the 1806 Guibourd-Vallé House, with its Norman-style trusses. Visitors may also tour the historic Memorial Cemetery, where many of Ste. Genevieve's distinguished early inhabitants are buried.

Ste. Genevieve is surrounded by a state park, wildlife refuge and national forest. Throughout the year, the town celebrates French heritage balls and festivals.

Accommodations include a motel and a variety of bed-and-breakfast inns, restaurants and wineries. Its unique architecture, winding streets and bucolic setting make it a great getaway. Details at <http://www.saintegenevietourism.org> or 800-373-7007.

Here are the other 11 places chosen by the National Trust for Historic Preservation (<http://www.nationaltrust.org>) as this year's distinctive destinations.

- Aiken, S.C., which boasts historic homes like the Rose Hill garden estate along with a cosmopolitan downtown where you'll find art galleries and antiques; [http://www.downtownaiken.com/things\\_to\\_see\\_and\\_do.html](http://www.downtownaiken.com/things_to_see_and_do.html) or 888-245-3672.
- Apalachicola, Fla., a charming coastal town known for its seafood, waterfront, eclectic shops and historic buildings; <http://www.apalachicolabay.org> or 850-653-9419.
- Columbus, Miss., the birthplace of playwright Tennessee Williams boasts of its Southern history (including antebellum homes), natural beauty and culture; <http://www.columbus-ms.orgcq/jkor> 800-327-2686.

- Crested Butte, Colo., a former coal mining village in the Rockies that offers rugged beauty, history and year-round adventure, from mountain biking and whitewater rafting to fishing and skiing; <http://www.gunnisoncrestedbutte.com> or 800-814-7988.
- Ft. Davis, Texas, a 19th-Century frontier town with majestic scenery and wildlife but no traffic lights or chain stores; <http://www.fortdavis.com/> or 800-524-3015.
- Friday Harbor, Wash., a small, well-preserved community in the San Juan Island chain that is ideal for outdoor adventurers, wildlife enthusiasts and history buffs; <http://www.historicfridayharbor.orgcq/jk> or 888-468-3701.
- Portland, Ore., a big city with a scenic, small-town feel, from the enormous yet funky Powell's Books to the famed rose garden in Washington Park; <http://www.travelportland.com> or 800-962-3700.
- Portsmouth, N.H., an old New England seaport dating to 1623 with 18th-Century homes and the Harbour Trail; <http://www.portsmouthchamber.org> or 603-610-5510.
- Red Wing, Minn., one hour south of the Twin Cities, with 19th-Century architectural gems, a sweeping view of the countryside and the Mississippi River from atop Barn Bluff, and a paved 20-mile bike trail; <http://www.red-wing.orgcq/jk> or 800-498-3444.
- San Juan Bautista, Calif., dubbed the "City of History" for its Spanish colonial architecture; <http://www.san-juan-bautista.ca.us> or 831-623-2454.
- Wilmington, N.C., with riverboats, battleships, grand old mansions, gardens, Civil War sites and historic museums; <http://www.cape-fear.nc.uscq/jk> or 866-266-9690.

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Wilton Rooks

Scenic Watch Editor

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