

Travel



(S.F.-14C, Ro-7B, P.W.G-5C) (DWT) 13C

Thursday, December 1, 1983 O&E

Florida Snowbirds' mecca draws millions \$\$

The Florida Division of Tourism has released research information about the 39.3 million visitors who spent \$21.5 billion dollars in Florida in 1982. Michigan is listed among the top ten states of origin for domestic visitors traveling to Florida by either air or highway.

The largest number of air travelers came from New York, which accounted for 2,134,400 of the 7,834,300 air travelers, which is more than 27 percent. New York was followed by New Jersey, Pennsylvania, Ohio, Illinois, Massachusetts, Georgia, Texas, California and Michigan. Michigan accounted for 421,500 air travelers.

Georgia was the top state of origin for highway travelers, not surprising since it is the closest state to Florida. Georgia accounted for 2,698,400 auto visitors, followed by Ohio, Louisiana, Tennessee, Pennsylvania, New York, Illinois, Texas, Michigan and finally North Carolina. Michigan drivers were 933,800 of the more than 13 million total.

AIR TRAVELERS came for vacation, to visit friends and relatives and for business purposes, in that order. Car travelers came for vacation or to visit friends and relatives. In both cases an overwhelming percent stayed either in hotels or with friends/relatives. Of course more car travelers stayed in campgrounds, condominiums, trailer parks or their own homes than did air travelers.

The largest percentage of drivers, 33.1 percent entered Florida via Inter-

**1-of-a-kind
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state-75. 1-95 was a close second with 31 percent, followed by I-10, US-1-301 and US 231. More than 90 percent of the car travelers were repeat visitors; 87.5 percent of the air travelers.

Income statistics were interesting: 37.2 percent of air travelers earned \$40,000 a year or more, while car travelers were pretty evenly spread between \$15,000-plus and \$40,000-plus (less than 10 percent were under \$15,000).

Occupations were even more interesting. Air travelers: 43 percent of the men and 17.5 percent of the women were professionals, 27.1 and 25.6 were white collar managers, 11.4 and 5.9 blue collar workers; amazingly, 5 percent of the men and 35.9 percent of the women were students, homemakers or military.

AUTO VISITORS: 17.1 of the men and 8.6 of the women were professionals, 17.2 and 18.2 white collar managers, 21.3 and 7.9 blue collar workers; once again 5.1 of the men and 37.3 percent of the women were students, homemakers or military. The interesting factor in auto visitors, one which

will not surprise you, is that 32.2 of the men and 24.7 of the women were retired or semi-retired.

What all this means is that Interstate-75 is like a main street from Detroit to Florida, where "snowbirds," a significant number of them retired, flow south in the fall and north in the spring.

Here are some of the new things of interest to travelers driving to Florida this winter:

NORTHEAST. Check out the newly restored Florida Theater in Jacksonville. It first opened its doors to movie and vaudeville audiences in 1927, and it reopened 58 years later with a bangup selection of activities in October 1983. The theater is one of those Moorish palaces with stucco arches, fountains and courtyards. The \$4 million restoration spearheaded by the Arts Assembly of Jacksonville makes it a lavish new center for both movies and stage activities. Contact the Arts Assembly at 904-358-3500.

A film depicting life in sixteenth century St. Augustine, scheduled to open in January, has been postponed until March. Meanwhile you can still walk around the old city and enjoy it. Consider staying for bed-and-breakfast at the newly-restored 1783 colonial house called Casa de Solana.

JACKSONVILLE Beach also has a new "b-and-b": the 1924 Casa Marina Hotel, now a European-style inn with several themed restaurants. Jacksonville Beach celebrates its hundredth birthday in 1984, and one of the highlights will be a restored turn-of-the-century railroad station scheduled to open in early 1984 at suburban Mayport. Jacksonville's Southbank Riverwalk will also be completed along the St. John's River in the first quarter of 1984.

Scandinavian World Cruises features monthly cruises-to-nowhere from near-by Blount Island.

GULF COAST. This is the most popular destination for midwesterners, all of whom will stand up and cheer when they hear, courtesy the Florida Bureau of Tourism, that Interstate-75 is now completed to Fort Meyers and will soon be completed to Naples.

I remember the hours and hours spent driving from the Tampa area to Sanibel Island three years ago when I-75 was still just a dream with a few overpasses built against the horizon. Let me know your experience on this one; is it really nearly finished?

January 1 will see a re-enactment of the "world's first regularly scheduled airline flight" from St. Petersburg's Al-Bert Whitely Airport, where a reproduction of the Benoit Airboat has been

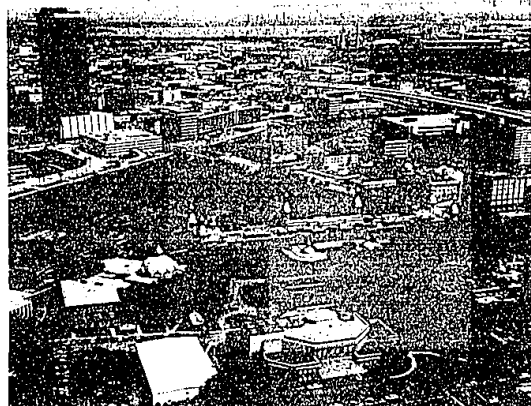
built by the Florida Aviation Historical Society.

SEVENTY years ago, according to Mary Mitchell of the Pinellas County Tourist Development Council, the St. Petersburg-Tampa Airboat Line began the first regularly scheduled airline passenger service in an airboat. An antique airplane fly-in will be held Dec. 30 and 31. The flight recreation occurs at 10 a.m. Jan. 1, 1984.

Tampa International Airport is in the middle of a \$100 million expansion.

The \$96 million Southwest Florida Regional Airport recently opened to replace the smaller Fort Meyers Airport. People Express now has non-stop flights daily to Newark from St. Petersburg/Clearwater International Airport.

Of course the event of the winter in Tampa is Super Bowl in Tampa Jan. 22. A three-day festival called Super PierFest will be held in nearby St. Petersburg Jan. 20-22. Call the Pinella County Hotline at 813-224-0018 (or 8418) for information.



The Gulf Coast area of Florida features a number of interesting communities. Above is downtown Tampa which in January will be thronged with visitors to Super Bowl XVIII. The date is Jan. 22. A three-day festival called Super PierFest will be held in nearby St. Petersburg Jan. 20. At left, visitors talk to sponge fishermen in Tarpon Springs, which is up the coast from St. Petersburg. The community was founded by Greek sponge divers.



Dianeyland, of course, is still Florida's top draw. What other place can so readily make children smile?

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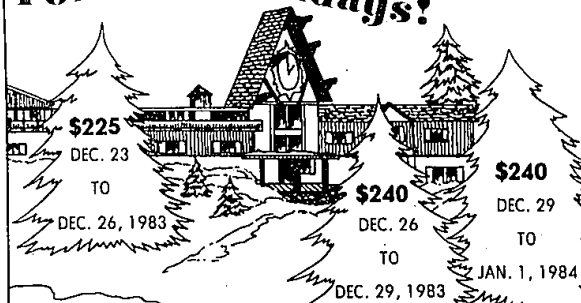
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