

Jeff Stivers: You want to move here? Get a mosquito disclosure

By Jeff Stivers - Collier Mosquito Control District

Saturday, November 11, 2006

The signs of "The Season" are beginning to appear in Naples. Our already congested roadways are becoming even more clogged. There are now more cars on the road with license plates from Michigan, Minnesota, Ohio and Ontario in a single day than there have been in the last six months combined.

Fish-belly white replaces saddle-leather brown as the most common skin tone at the beach. Lines at local restaurants are almost as long as the lines of cars trying to get through the intersection of Golden Gate Parkway and Airport Road at quitting time.

More importantly, at least for the folks at the Collier Mosquito Control District (CMCD), the end of the mosquito season generally coincides with the beginning of "The Season" in Naples. The twist of fate that brings the end of mosquito season and the beginning of the tourist season together can be a problem for CMCD personnel.

We all know how the problem starts. Fred and Ethel, from Frozentoes, Minn., have retired and are tired of dealing with snow shovels, frozen pipes and icy roads all winter, so they decide to go south for the winter. Somehow they end up in Naples, where they lease a condo from late October through early April. They rather like the area, so they return to a rental property for a couple more years.

After several years of renting, Ethel decides that she wants her own place in Naples. She wants some place with enough room for the grandchildren to visit and she wants her own furniture. Fred checks the finances, decides they can afford a second home and gives Ethel the go ahead.

Or maybe it is Fred who decides he wants his own place and Ethel who checks the finances and gives the go ahead. Regardless, Naples now has two new homeowners.

After several winter seasons in their Naples home, Fred and Ethel decide that they have had enough of Frozentoes and make Naples their year round home. Therein lies the problem.

Fred and Ethel have never spent a summer in Naples and they are totally unprepared for what Mother Nature has in store for them.

July rolls around and Ethel, or Fred, gets up early to beat the heat and goes outside to tiptoe through the tulips. We all know what happens next. The phone at CMCD rings with an irate Fred, or Ethel, complaining about the hoardes of mosquitoes making it

impossible for them to enjoy their tulips. They have been in Naples for 12 years and have never seen the mosquitoes this bad.

A little investigation by the CMCD elicits the information that Fred and Ethel live on Gator Hole Court in the Fiddler Crab Marsh section of the Feeding Heron development. A few more questions confirm that this is Fred's and Ethel's first mosquito season in Naples and they were not warned, by the developer who sold them their home in January, about what they would be facing in the summer. Explaining to Fred and Ethel that their subdivision was built in what was a swamp before the bulldozers moved in, and that the beautiful mangrove areas surrounding their development on three sides are prime mosquito breeding habitat, does little to mollify them. After 20 minutes of explaining about the mosquito problem in Naples and what CMCD can, and cannot, do to alleviate it, Fred and Ethel grudgingly resign themselves, as most of us have, to 6 months of mosquitoes.

This scenario is all too common, and CMCD personnel frequently joke that there should be a mosquito-potential disclosure statement at the top of every real estate document. A rating of 1 would indicate that in a normal mosquito year the property owners would have only minor mosquito problems. A rating of 10, on the other hand, would mean property owners would need a head net just to bring in the mail and buying mosquito repellent by the case would be recommended.

We know it will never happen, but it sure would save CMCD staff a lot of headaches if people knew what their mosquito problem would be before they put their money down on a home or condo this year.

From the contest: Your votes are in, have been counted and we have a winner for the best description of just how big and bad our Naples mosquitoes are. By a margin of just 2 votes, the e-mail from BR, with his tongue-in-cheek newspaper article about mosquito control operations in the future, is our winner. He'll be receiving a package of mosquito control goodies for his efforts.

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