

Lost In Transition

Pricey condos are wiping out the charming seaside motels of Pinellas County's past.

By CARLOS MONCADA
and ANGELA DELGADO
The Tampa Tribune

PINELLAS COUNTY — One by one, the mom-and-pop motels with neon signs and plastic flamingos, vintage beach cottages and small seaside shops that for decades beckoned budget-minded families and tourists to Pinellas County beaches are closing their doors.

Although some have tried to tough it out, more and more are being forced out as property taxes soar and deep-pocketed developers come calling with visions of beach-

front condominiums.

As they go, so does an era of tourism dominated by quaint properties that were friendly, clean and relatively cheap.

"Having grown up in Florida, it turns my stomach," said Mary Wilkerson, an Indian Rocks Beach innkeeper for 18 years. "Because once they're gone, they're gone."

Skyrocketing real estate values are at the root of the latest wave of change taking place in the string of

See **CHANGING BEACHFRONT**, Page 12 ▶
Rising property taxes are a big issue.



Tribune photos by CHRIS URSO

Cranes and high-rise condo towers dot the horizon along Clearwater Beach, where the conversion from mom-and-pop establishments to big development began about five years ago.

Rosie DeYoung might be the last person you would expect to embrace the development in the once-quiet fishing village of Madeira Beach.

DeYoung owns the Bamboo Beer Garden, a 61-year-old open-air bar where license plates and dollar bills cover the walls and ceiling. The landmark at Johns Pass Village is part of disappearing Old Florida.

"I'm pleased with the progress that's happened and the upgrade of the area," said DeYoung, 56. "That sounds kind of silly coming from the Bamboo Beer Garden because we're probably the oldest, rustic-looking thing here."



Bar owner Rosie DeYoung, left, dances with customer Ruth Yount.



Jay Keyes, 77, has lived on Clearwater Beach for more than 30 years, moving there to manage the Hilton hotel, now a Holiday Inn.

Keyes, who owned The Bank 1890s restaurant, remembers Clearwater Beach as full of life in the late 1960s, especially at night, when the hotels had clubs. Few clubs remain, and the mom-and-pop motels are being replaced by condominiums and condo-hotels.

"The big question mark is: Are there enough of the \$200-a-night people to pick up the slack?" he said. "People staying in mom-and-pop hotels will probably be staying in less expensive hotels in the mainland. I don't think they'll stop coming to Clearwater. I'm quite optimistic when all the dust settles we're going to have a very vibrant beach again."



Keyword: Beach Development, for an interactive map of development projects on Clearwater Beach, a video report about beach residents' thoughts on their changing communities, and a guide to area beaches.

WHAT OTHER BEACHES' RESIDENTS ARE SAYING, Pages 12, 13

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