

November 30, 2007

Dear Executive Council Member:

Our meeting in Key West is coming up soon. We are returning to the wonderful Casa Marina resort January 10 – 13, 2008. The hotel has been completely renovated and restored and should be a wonderful venue to kick off the New Year. Attached is a news article about the renovation that you might find interesting.

Tae Bronner is helping me with this meeting and we have come up with what we think will be an enjoyable weekend for you and your family.

Key West will be your first opportunity to meet our new Section Administrator, Carmalita Hawkins. She is looking forward to getting to know all of us so please be sure to take the time to introduce yourself at some point over the weekend.

Committee meetings will begin Thursday at noon to allow you time to arrive in Key West and will run all afternoon and all day Friday. Contact Carmalita (chawkins@flabar.org) to schedule your meeting.

Thursday night we will have our welcome reception at the hotel. Forget your New Year's Resolutions and enjoy the view!

Friday's committee meetings will run all day. We will have boxed lunches for you to pick up and eat so that you can continue to work through lunch.

Tae has put together a wonderful excursion for spouses and guests on Friday. The group will depart from the hotel on the Old Town Trolley and go directly to one of Key West's hidden gems, the Butterfly Conservatory. At the Butterfly Conservatory, they will stroll through a climate controlled glass enclosed habitat with over 50 different species of butterflies from around the world. If you sit quietly, the butterflies will literally land on your shoulder! It is a truly beautiful and peaceful location. After the group has had a chance to relax and enjoy the beautiful butterflies, the Trolley will take them on a guided tour of Key West, ending at the Hemmingway House. The Hemmingway House was the home to one of America's most honored and respected authors. Ernest Hemmingway lived and wrote in the house for over ten years. The house is also home to over 60 unique "Hemmingway" cats. The tour is very amusing and entertaining and should not be missed during a visit to Key West. Once the group has been fully educated on the history of Key West, the Trolley will deliver them to Louie's Backyard, which is within walking

distance from the hotel, for a wonderful waterfront lunch. (Lunch is not included in the price of the event.)

Friday night's reception and dinner will be downtown at the A&B Lobster House. Trolley cars will transport us to and from dinner. We ate at the restaurant when we were there in July and it is wonderful! It is not your typical Key West sand-on-the-floor sort of place so you'll need to bring your dressy flip flops. After dinner, the Trolley will run an early and late trip back to the hotel to accommodate those individuals who would like to spend some extra time in Old Town enjoying the traditional Key West atmosphere. Because of the size of the restaurant we will be **limited on the number** of individuals we can accommodate, so there will be no on-sight registration for this event and the registration will be on a **first come, first serve basis**.

Saturday will begin as usual with our Roundtable Breakfasts, followed by the Executive Council meeting. Here's something new: lunch will not be served until the Executive Council meeting is over to avoid the mass exodus we experienced in Palm Beach. Don't worry: we will have snacks to fortify us through the meeting.

Your competitive nature will be called upon Saturday afternoon for the return of the RPPTL Section Scavenger Hunt. Last time we were on bicycles. Well, I've gotten older since then so this year's event is on golf carts (pimped-up a la Key West). We will divide into teams of 4 and be called upon to solve clues and riddles to earn points; Polaroid cameras will also be used to complete photo challenges. All of this will be organized and guided by professionals. There will also be bonus points for the team who can successfully capture (and hold on to) the famous pink flamingo. (Trickery is permitted and encouraged in obtaining the pink flamingo!) May the best team win! Everyone will be ready to relax after the scavenger hunt so dinner will be nice and easy back at the hotel Saturday night.

Dress code: Key West Casual of course. Friday night's dinner is Nice Casual.

I hope to take advantage of the weather while we are there so we will be outside as much as possible for receptions and meals. Bring a light sweater or jacket just in case it's chilly.

I look forward to seeing all of you soon!

**Real Property, Probate and Trust Law Section
Executive Council Meeting, Casa Marina Resort, Key West (Jan 10 – 13, 2008)
Sign-Up / Registration Sheet**

MAIL YOUR CHECK, payable to The Florida Bar, along with a complete copy of this registration form, to The Florida Bar. **IF PAYING WITH YOUR VISA OR MASTERCARD** please FAX the completed form to **Carmalita Hawkins** at fax number (850) 561-5825. *The Florida Bar only accepts Visa & Mastercard. Thank you!*

Your Name: _____ Florida Bar #: _____

Spouse / Guest Names: _____

Mailing Address: _____ City: _____ State: _____ Zip: _____

Phone #: _____ E-Mail : _____

Thursday, January 10, 2008

| | | Event Price | | # Attending | Total |
|-----------------------|-----------------------------|------------------------------|---|-------------|-------|
| 1:00 p.m. – 5:30 p.m. | Committee Meetings | | | | |
| 5:00 p.m. | Executive Committee Meeting | | | | |
| 6:30 p.m. – 8:30 p.m. | Welcome Reception | \$45 | x | _____ = | _____ |
| | | [\$41.86 + \$3.14 tax = \$45 | | | |
| | | RP033-210656] | | | |

Friday, January 11, 2008

| | | | | | |
|-----------------------|--|------------------------------|---|---------|-------|
| 7:30 a.m. – 9:30 a.m. | Breakfast | \$20 | x | _____ = | _____ |
| | | [\$18.60 + \$1.40 tax = \$20 | | | |
| | | RP033-210656] | | | |
| 8:00 a.m. – 4:00 p.m. | Committee Meetings | | | | |
| 9:00 a.m. – 2:00 p.m. | Spouse/Guest Event (Butterfly Conservatory, Hemingway House, and tour of Key West) | \$25 | x | _____ = | _____ |
| | | [\$23.25 + \$1.75 tax = \$25 | | | |
| | | RP033-210656] | | | |
| 2:00 noon | Committee Boxed Lunch | \$20 | x | _____ = | _____ |
| | | [\$18.60 + \$1.40 tax = \$20 | | | |
| | | RP033-210656] | | | |
| 4:00 p.m. – 5:00 p.m. | Circuit Representatives Meeting | | | | |
| 5:00 p.m. – 6:00 p.m. | RPPTL-PAC Meeting | | | | |
| 6:15 p.m. | Shuttles depart for dinner at A&B Lobster House | | | | |
| 6:30 p.m. – 9:00 p.m. | Dinner at A&B Lobster House [Choose Entrée] | | | | |
| | _____ Filet _____ Crab Cakes _____ Snapper | \$75 | x | _____ = | _____ |
| | | [\$69.76 + \$5.24 tax = \$75 | | | |
| | | RP033-210656] | | | |

Saturday, January 12, 2008

| | | | | | |
|------------------------|------------------------------------|------------------------------|---|---------|-------|
| 8:00 a.m. – 10:30 a.m. | Probate Roundtable Breakfast | COMP | x | _____ = | _____ |
| 8:00 a.m. – 10:30 a.m. | Real Property Roundtable Breakfast | COMP | x | _____ = | _____ |
| 8:00 a.m. – 10:30 a.m. | Spouse/Guest Breakfast | COMP | x | _____ = | _____ |
| 10:30 a.m. – 2:00 | Executive Council Meeting | COMP | x | _____ = | _____ |
| 2:00 p.m. | Executive Council Lunch | \$ 25 | x | _____ = | _____ |
| | | [\$23.25 + \$1.75 tax = \$25 | | | |
| | | RP033-210656] | | | |
| 3:00 p.m. – 6:00 p.m. | Scavenger Hunt | \$ 50 | x | _____ = | _____ |
| | | [\$46.51 + \$3.49 tax = \$50 | | | |
| | | RP033-210656] | | | |
| 7:00 p.m. – 9:00 p.m. | Dinner at the Hotel | \$ 75 | x | _____ = | _____ |
| | | [\$69.76 + \$5.24 tax = \$75 | | | |
| | | RP033-210656] | | | |

Sunday, January 13, 2008

| | | | | | |
|------------------------|--------------------|--------------------------------|---|---------|-------|
| 8:00 a.m. – 10:00 a.m. | Farewell Breakfast | \$ 20 | x | _____ = | _____ |
| | | [\$ 18.60 + \$ 1.40 tax = \$20 | | | |
| | | RP033-210656] | | | |

EVENTS TOTAL

_____ **RP033-210656**

▶ **PLEASE COMPLETE THE PAYMENT INFORMATION ON PAGE 2**

RPPTL Executive Council Meeting Sign-Up Sheet Continued....

Please sign up for all events you wish to attend and pay the cost (if any). There will be no on-site registration for the events. You may receive a full or partial refund (less a \$25 administrative fee) if your refund request is received by fax (fax # 850-561-5825) or by e-mail (chawkins@flabar.org) **prior to 5:00 p.m. on December 28, 2007**. There will be no full or partial refunds after 5:00 p.m. on December 28, 2007 and there will be no full or partial refunds for no shows.

MAIL YOUR CHECK, payable to **The Florida Bar**, with a completed copy of both pages of this sign-up sheet:

**The Florida Bar
Attention: Carmalita Hawkins
651 East Jefferson Street
Tallahassee, Florida 32399-2300**

CREDIT CARD: If paying with your **VISA** or **MasterCard** please FAX the completed form to **Carmalita Hawkins** at fax number (850) 561-5825 **before December 14, 2007**. Thank you!

EVENTS TOTAL FROM PREVIOUS PAGE \$ _____

210656

MAILING A CHECK WITH COPY OF THIS FORM (BOTH PAGES OF THIS FORM)

MASTERCARD VISA

PLEASE NEATLY PRINT LARGE LETTERS & NUMBERS

Card Number: _____

Expiration Date: _____ / _____ (Month / Year)

Name on Card: _____

Signature: _____

Please be sure to fax or mail both pages of this registration form.

**For additional information please contact
Carmalita Hawkins
Phone (850) 561-5619
E-mail chawkins@flabar.org**

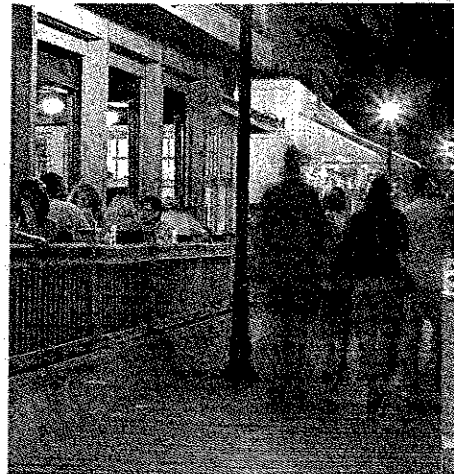
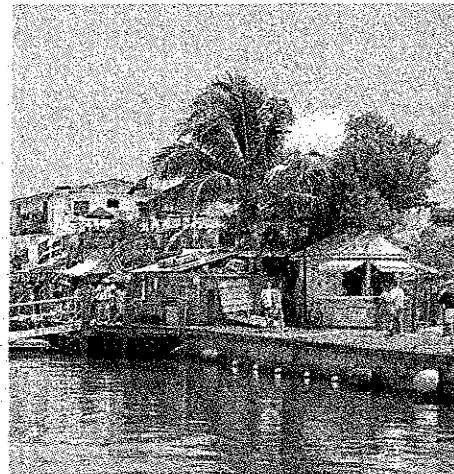
*** Please complete and return both pages of this registration form before December 14, 2007 ***

COMMITTEE MEETING SCHEDULE

| THURSDAY, JANUARY 10, 2008 | |
|--|---|
| 1:00 p.m. - 2:30 p.m. | Power of Attorney – Probate Division |
| 1:00 p.m. - 2:30 p.m. | Insurance – Probate Division |
| 1:00 p.m. - 2:30 p.m. | Title Insurance Committee Meeting |
| 1:00 p.m. - 2:30 p.m. | Real Property Litigation |
| 2:30 p.m. - 4:00 p.m. | Power of Attorney – Probate Division |
| 2:30 p.m. - 4:00 p.m. | |
| 2:30 p.m. - 4:00 p.m. | Title Insurance Committee Meeting |
| 2:30 p.m. - 4:00 p.m. | |
| 3:30 p.m. - 5:30 p.m. | IRA's and Employee Benefits – Probate Division |
| 4:00 p.m. - 5:30 p.m. | Development & Governmental Regulation |
| 4:00 p.m. - 5:30 p.m. | Power of Attorney – Probate Division |
| 4:00 p.m. - 5:30 p.m. | |
| 5:00 p.m. | Executive Committee Meeting |
| Friday, January 11, 2008 | |
| 7:30 a.m. - 9:30 a.m. Committee Breakfast | |
| 7:30 a.m. - 9:00 a.m. | Charitable Organization & Planning – Probate Div. |
| 8:00 a.m. - 10:30 a.m. | Ad Hoc Creditors Committee – Probate Div. |
| 9:00 a.m. - 10:30 a.m. | Advance Directives and HIPPA – Probate Division |
| 8:00 a.m. - 10:00 a.m. | |
| 10:00 a.m. - 12:00 noon | Landlord/Tenant Committee Meeting |
| 10:30 a.m. - 12:00 noon | Asset Preservation – Probate Division |
| 10:30 a.m. - 12:00 noon | Probate & Trust Litigation – Probate Division |
| 10:00 a.m. - 12:00 noon | |
| 12:00 noon - 2:00 p.m. | Long Range Planning Meeting |
| 12:00 noon - 2:00 p.m. | Diversity Committee Meeting - |
| 12:30 noon - 2:00 p.m. | Estate & Trust Tax Planning |
| 12:30 noon - 2:00 p.m. | Guardianship |
| 12:30 noon - 2:00 p.m. | Trust Law |
| 2:00 p.m. | Committee Box Lunch |
| 2:00 p.m. - 4:00 p.m. | Probate Law – Probate Division |
| 2:00 p.m. - 4:00 p.m. | Real Property Forms |
| 2:00 p.m. - 4:00 p.m. | Affordable Housing Committee Meeting |
| 2:00 p.m. - 4:00 p.m. | Construction Law Committee Meeting |
| 4:00 p.m. - 5:00 p.m. | Circuit Representatives Meeting |
| 5:00 p.m. - 6:00 p.m. | RPPTL-PAC Meeting |

This is the current list of Committee Meetings for the January Key West RPPTL Meeting. If you have a Committee Meeting that still needs to be scheduled, please email CHawkins@flabar.org or call me at 850-561-5619 with the name of the Committee and Time Preference. Thank you.

36 HOURS Key West, Fla.



Michael Bentz for The New York Times (bicyclists, chicken); Taylor Umlauf (wharf restaurant)

FROM LEFT Lloyd Mager, in green shirt, leads a bike tour; at the Chicken Store, where you can adopt a chicken; Key West Bight; at Turtle Kraals, which holds turtle races on Friday evenings

By CINDY PRICE

IT'S tough to slap an itinerary on Key West. The whole point of this two-by-four-mile island, after all, is to kick off your shoes and let it all hang out. But here's the rub: do Key West wrong and you might not relax. Witness lower Duval Street, that cacophony of sound, sunburn and daiquiris. (Hemingway used to drink there, but he might think twice today.) So where is the strange, laid-back island that everyone fell in love with? It's still there, if you know where to look. It's found biking through Old Town at dusk, when the porches light up and jasmine fills the air. Or kayaking across the quiet, teal-blue ocean, or catching an old-timer's tale, drifting across a lonely bar. Done right, Key West is still a place where time stands still.

Friday

5 p.m.

1 Slow and Steady

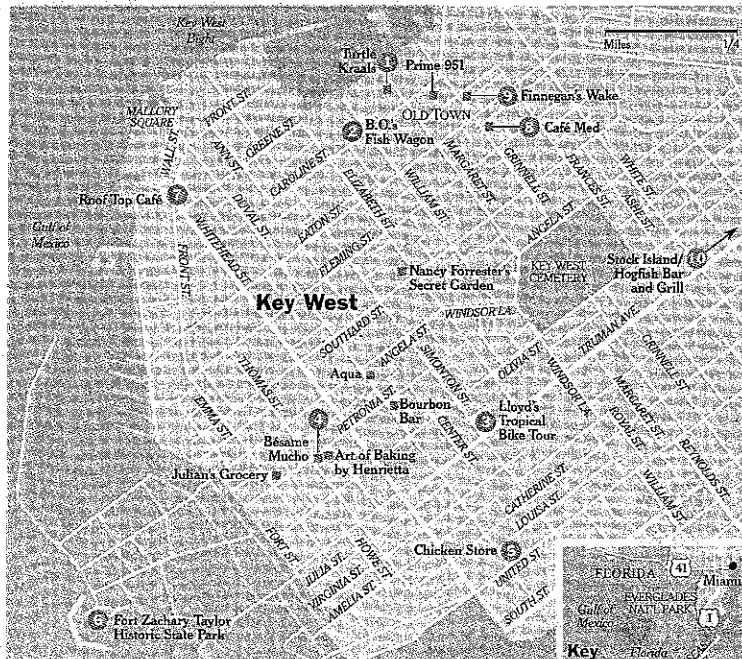
Why begin your weekend by watching two turtles race? Because this is Key West, man, and you need to chill out. Oh, and there's beer. The Friday night turtle race at Turtle Kraals (231 Margaret Street, 305-294-2640; www.turtlekraals.com) is just the kind of maverick genius this town was built

(305-294-1882; www.lloydstropicalbiketour.com) last? "In your mind," Lloyd Mager likes to tell his customers, "forever." If you only take one tour, make it this strange, awesome trip through the back streets of Key West. The Bronx-born, mango-obsessed Mr. Mager ducks in and out of private gardens (including his older brother's, much to his chagrin), hacking at coconuts with his machete, cracking jokes and spreading the local lore he has cultivated in his 35 years on the island. The stop at Nancy Forrester's Secret Garden, a stunning little rain forest with exotic parrots and an artist gallery, is worth the cost alone. The tour is \$35 and lasts (in real time, anyway) two hours

1 p.m.

2 A Cut of the Caribbean

Skip the sit-down lunch and take a stroll down Petronia Street in the historic Bahama Village. Settled by black Bahamians in the 19th century, the neighborhood is a gentle mix of old and new charms, including a cluster of shops and some surprising food finds. Stock up on candles and Kiehl's at Bésame Mucho (315 Petronia Street, 305-294-1928), then cross the street to the Art of Baking by Henrietta (316 Petronia Street, 305-295-0505; www.henriettakeywest.com) for a piping hot café con leche and coconut



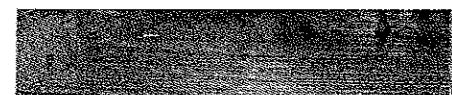
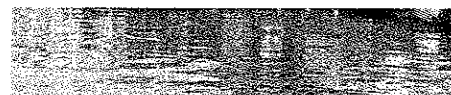
THE BASICS

How best to get to the southernmost point in the United States? Several major airlines offer frequent connections through Miami and other Florida airports, with flights from New York starting at about \$400. Many visitors choose to drive the scenic 155 miles from Miami.

A shiny new option is the Key West Express (866-593-3779, www.seakeywestexpress.com; \$98 round trip), a four-hour ferry departing twice a day from the Miami Seaquarium. You won't need a car in Key West: most people walk or ride bikes.

In a sea of boutique hotels, the Gardens Hotel (526 Angela Street, 305-294-2661; www.gardenshotel.com) has 17 impeccable suites, spread across an acre of tropical gardens, that are steps from everything but as quiet as a country inn. Rates begin at \$285 in high season.

The Mermaid & the Alligator (729 Truman Avenue, 800-773-1894; www.kwmermaid.com) has nine rooms in a Victorian-style mansion in the historic district. The Key Lime and Papaya rooms are a steal at \$168 a night each.



Michael Heintz for The New York Times (bicyclists, chicken) Taylor Umlauf (wharf restaurant)

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8 p.m.

2 No Jacket Required

You don't need to dust the sand off your feet to eat right in this town. For the perfect fish sandwich, head to B.O.'s Fish Wagon (801 Caroline Street, 305-294-9272), a hopping little open-air shack that turns out fresh food with zero fuss, as well as great live music on Friday nights. The owner, Buddy Owen, is something of a local legend, having started his operation more than 25 years ago out of a little wagon on Duval Street. Last year, Bobby Flay and his Food Network camera crew paid a visit. And no wonder: Don't miss the cracked conch sandwich (\$12), tiny strips of fried conch stuffed between fresh Cuban bread and shot with Key Lime mayo. Sounds simple, but no — heaven.

Saturday

10 a.m.

3 Rolling Mangoes

How long does Lloyd's Tropical Bike Tour

(305-294-1882; www.lloydstropicalbiketour.com) last? 'In your mind,' Lloyd Mager likes to tell his customers, "forever." If you only take one tour, make it this strange, awesome trip through the back streets of Key West. The Bronx-born, mango-obsessed Mr. Mager ducks in and out of private gardens (including his older brother's, much to his chagrin), hacking at coconuts with his machete, cracking jokes and spreading the local lore he has cultivated in his 35 years on the island. The stop at Nancy Forrester's Secret Garden, a stunning little rain forest with exotic parrots and an artist gallery, is worth the cost alone. The tour is \$35 and lasts (in real time, anyway) two hours.

1 p.m.

4 A Cut of the Caribbean

Skip the sit-down lunch and take a stroll down Petronia Street in the historic Bahama Village. Settled by black Bahamians in the 19th century, the neighborhood is a gentle mix of old and new charms, including a cluster of shops and some surprising food finds. Stock up on candles and Kiehl's at Besame Mucho (315 Petronia Street, 305-294-1928), then cross the street to the Art of Baking by Henrietta (316 Petronia Street, 305-295-0505; www.henriettakeywest.com) for a piping hot café con leche and coconut strips — long, crunchy cookie-like pastries. Walk past the iconic Blue Heaven restaurant, and look for an unmarked lime-green market, Julian's Grocery (730 Emma Street, 305-292-1222). No one would guess it, but it sells an excellent conch ceviche (\$8).

3 p.m.

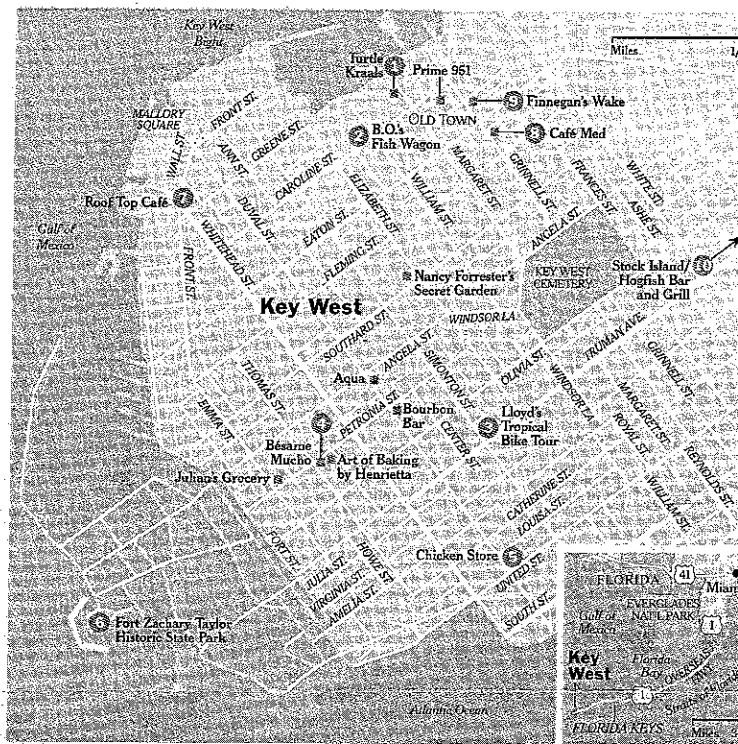
5 Chicken Run

People in this town don't kid when it comes to chickens. They're on the loose everywhere, and it's a battle — half the island is trying to save the little cluckers, the other half is endlessly annoyed. And then there are the kids stealing them for cockfights. Learn all about the Key West chicken wars at the Chicken Store (1229 Duval Street, 305-294-0070; www.thechickenstore.com), where you can hold a fuzzy baby chick, feed a rooster or buy a clever T-shirt. If the heart is swayed, you can even file for adoption.

4 p.m.

6 Sea of Options

In a town not known for its beaches, Fort Zachary Taylor Historic State Park (tip of Southard Street, 305-292-6713; www.fortzacharytaylor.com) is a beauty, with wide stretches of sand and tranquil waters. If swimming sounds tame, these islanders like their watersports (a former mayor once water-skied to Cuba to make a political statement). You can rent a snorkel set (\$10)



The New York Times

or a two-person glass-bottom kayak (\$20) from the concession area. Back on the beach, soak up the generous shade while you can; the state recently felled a row of pine trees, briefly displacing the chickens as the controversy du jour.

7 p.m.

7 Above the Fray

If you have to bite on one tourist haunt, make it Mallory Square, where crowds gather to watch the sunset. This nightly hoopla down at the historic waterfront is loads of fun, even if it's difficult to see the dipping sun between the jugglers and tight-rope walkers. If the crowds get too heavy head to the Roof Top Café (308 Front Street, 305-294-2042; www.rooftopcafekeywest.com), where you can replace the ruckus with a bird's-eye view of the bustling street and a cold cocktail.

8:30 p.m.

8 No Reservations

For a beach bum town, Key West takes its food very seriously. Ask a resident for dinner recommendations, and you'll be chat-

ting for days. Problem is, most of them require reservations — and who feels like planning in paradise? Enter Café Med (425 Grinnell Street, 305-294-1117), a pretty little restaurant tucked so deep inside Old Town that there's rarely a wait. Try the excellent mushroom soufflé with truffle oil (\$8.50), followed by a freshly seared yellowtail snapper (\$28). Also under the radar is Prime 951 (951 Caroline Street, 305-296-4000), a sexy mahogany-lined steakhouse that serves fat tumblers of martinis.

11 p.m.

9 A Seat of One's Own

Contrary to popular belief, people in Key West are not drunk all the time. But let's just say it's late, and you have some catching up to do. Finnegan's Wake (320 Grinnell Street, 305-293-0222; www.keywestirish.com) is the kind of split-personality bar you dream about. Though it hugs a quiet corner of Old Town inside you'll find live music and frothy \$5 pints of Smithwick's. Out back is even better — a secluded backyard pub where you're almost guaranteed a seat while the band plays in the distance. If you're looking to hit a drag show — and the

THE BASICS

How best to get to the southernmost point in the United States? Several major airlines offer frequent connections through Miami and other Florida airports, with flights from New York starting at about \$400. Many visitors choose to drive the scenic 155 miles from Miami.

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ever-popular Aqua (711 Duval Street, 305-294-0555; www.aquakeywest.com) is packed — check out the lively and less crowded cabaret at 801 Bourbon Bar (801 Duval Street, 305-296-1992; www.801bourbon.com).

Sunday

Noon

10 The Next Island Over

The real Key West? It's not even on Key West proper anymore, but just over the Cow Key Channel Bridge, on the even tinier Stock Island. Follow Front Street past a row of old trailers, and you'll stumble upon a little miracle: the Hogfish Bar and Grill (6810 Front Street, 305-293-4041; www.hogfishbar.com), a big clamoring seafood joint at a marina that is rumored to have been the headquarters for the Bay of Pigs operation. Grab a table by the water, and try a fresh hogfish sandwich (\$12.95), loaded with Swiss, mushroom and onion. Soak up the afternoon sun, toss some bread at the passing fish, and don't rush home. Local investors plan to develop this area over the next 10 years — they figure that when Cuba opens up Stock Island will be the next Key West. ■

Return To Splendor

Key West's grand dame, the Casa Marina, nears completion of a \$48 million renovation that will restore the vision of Henry Flagler's original design.

By DAVID COOK
Tribune correspondent

KEY WEST — As you relax under a palm tree with soft tropical trade winds stirring against the towering fronds, it's easy to let your mind wander back to a day of top hats and flapper skirts.

During the aristocracy of the "Great Gatsby" era, the Casa Marina was the hot spot for the rich and famous at the end of Henry Flagler's Overseas Railroad. Eight decades later, the resort is undergoing a \$48 million dollar renovation to return it to its original grandeur and to provide guests with the latest technologies and amenities.

On a springtime visit to the Casa Marina Resort & Beach Club, I was amazed at the transformation.

It wasn't quite like this the first time I saw the old resort hotel. As a kid growing up in Key West during the 1960s, I was always fascinated by this beachside mansion on the island's south side.

Left abandoned by the U.S. government in 1966 after housing the Army during the Cuban Missile Crisis and later the Peace Corps, the property was a magnet for a curious youngster. I remember the boarded-up windows, peeling paint and overgrown landscape protruding through a chain-link fence surrounding the property.

Exploring the shoreline of Higgs Beach adjacent to the Casa Marina, I would find myself wandering with no idea of the Casa Marina's

KEY DESTINATION

IF YOU GO: Casa Marina Resort is at 1500 Reynolds St., Key West, at the western terminus of Flagler Avenue.

RATES: In September, the resort is offering weekday rates starting at \$129 a night. That rate almost doubles during the weekend.

DINING: During the renovations, the resort will have limited food service; however, less than a five-minute walk away is Louie's Back Yard, a Key West institution next to Dog Beach in a two-story conch house next to where Jimmy Buffett once lived.

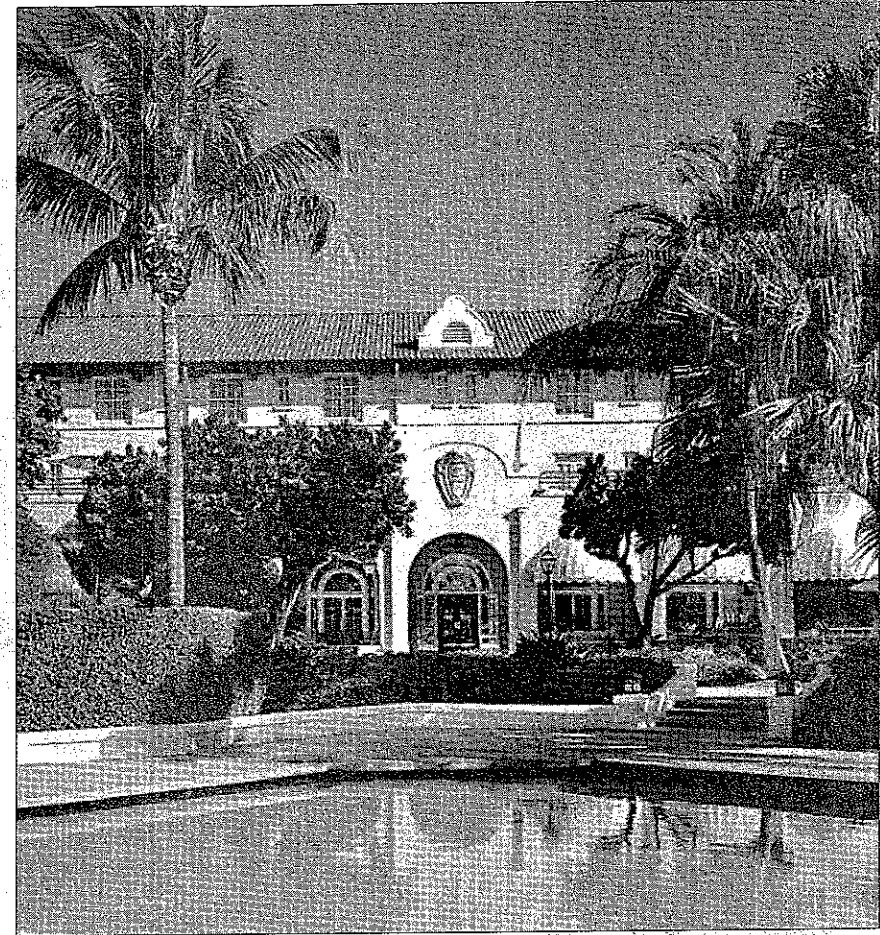
ACTIVITIES: A 10-minute walk from the Casa Marina will land you at the south end of Duval Street. Also, watersports and tours at the resort are priced competitively with other locations in Key West.

INFORMATION: www.casamarinaresort.com; 1-866-397-6342 or (305) 296-3535

history as a playground for the wealthy.

"Our mission is to restore the vision of Henry Flagler's original design," says Kevin Speidel, general manager of the Casa Marina, on the Atlantic side of Key West at the foot of Flagler Avenue.

By looking at old photographs, architect Jose Gonzalez drew up plans to re-create Flagler's concept of opening up the main building's lobby to more natural lighting. That concept was lost during a renovation a quarter-century ago.



Casa Marina Resort & Beach Club

The Casa Marina was once a hot spot for the rich and famous seeking a lavish playground at the end of Henry Flagler's Overseas Railroad. The resort is a 10-minute walk from Key West's popular Duval Street.

When the resort reopens in November, one of the most dramatic improvements to the main building will be an unobstructed view of the ocean when guests drive up to the property. Through windows and clear doors in the main lobby, guests will see a walkway in the courtyard leading to the ocean — a hallmark feature of the original Casa Marina resort.

"We have the most beachfront property of any resort in Key West, and this is a way to showcase one of our best assets as Mr. Flagler designed 80 years ago," Speidel says.

I remember the grand reopening

of the Casa Marina during the spring of 1979. The Casbah lounge became the hot spot in Key West for happy hour and late-night dancing in the disco under the stars.

It was also a popular place for weddings, as top hats and tails returned to the Casa Marina as the scene for the most formal events on the island.

That has not changed. The resort hosts 100 to 125 weddings each year, even with its limited banquet facilities.

After the renovations, that capacity will double.

J.P. Reinhard and Elise Bullarad, medical students at Drexel University in Philadelphia, are considering the resort for their wedding in May because of its beachfront location and impeccable reputation.

"They have a proven track record of success," Bullarad says. "We're looking for quality service and reasonable prices."

Speidel says first impressions are among the most important things he and other hotel manag-

See CASA MARINA, Page 5 ►
Pool concierge brings treats.



Casa Marina Resort & Beach Club

The Casa Marina claims to own the most beachfront property of any resort in Key West. Guests can relax in a hammock, play in the sand or take part in a variety of watersports.

CASA MARINA

Continued From Page 2

ers stress to employees: Make guests feel welcome with sincere handshakes, smiles and exchanges.

That's what keeps guests such as Jon Delano coming back. He and his family have stayed at the Casa Marina a dozen times during the past 20 years — through the Marriott, Wyndham and now Blackstone ownership groups. He has become accustomed to the Casa Marina's high standard of customer service and says there is no place to match its beauty.

"There is no question this grand lady needed some work, but I hope it doesn't lose its charm," he says. "We've gotten used to what the Casa Marina is all about."

Returning to the Casa Marina in March for the first time in nearly three decades, my family and I agree.

Our two teenage boys found endless watersports and beach activities that were either free or available for nominal charges. And while the Casa Marina provides opportunities for the most daring thrill-seeker with watercrafts, parasailing and scuba diving, the hallmark of the resort is relaxing in secluded beachfront coves, by getting massages, sitting under the palms or reading a book in a hammock overlooking the Atlantic.

Hourly pool treats distributed to guests from pool concierge Ulysses Ricardo Martinez are another part of the charm.

"I read about this on the Internet, and it's a really neat feature," says guest Kim Carney of Birmingham, Ala.

On the hour, like clockwork, Martinez brings around frozen Popsicles, cool towels, tropical fruit sticks or drink samplers.

During our stay, the newly renovated east wing featured rooms with a brilliant blend of sleek European design, 21st century technology and the most comfortable pillow-topped beds I've ever slept on.

The view from our room overlooked a secluded beach cove not far from where I explored as a boy. Speidel promises that all rooms will have similar treatments as the Casa Marina appears to have come full circle to Flagler's vision.

And like the grand opening of Casa Marina on New Year's Eve in 1920, the renovations will herald a new era for one of the grandest, most historical beachside resorts in Florida.

Dave Cook was born and raised in Key West, moving to Tampa in 1981 and graduating from the University of South Florida. He worked at WFLA, Channel 8, for 21 years before becoming station manager for Pinellas County schools' television station WPDS, Channel 14, in 2005.

Cuba A Major Influence In Resort's History

By DAVID COOK
Tribune correspondent

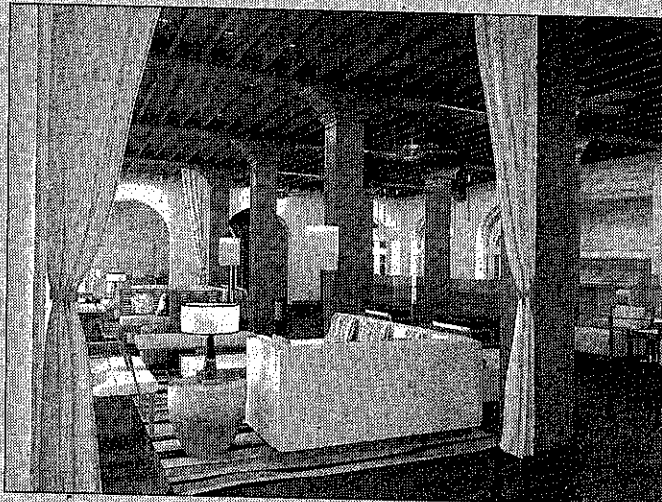
KEY WEST — In 1905, at age 75, Henry Flagler embarked on the greatest privately financed engineering projects in U.S. history. He constructed a railroad that would connect the Florida Keys to the rest of the country. At the turn of the 20th century, Key West was one of the most prosperous cities in the nation.

The cigar, sponging and shipping industries made this tiny island's 20,000 residents one of the wealthiest per capita communities in the United States, and Flagler saw a golden opportunity to link Key West with the rest of the world.

While constructing the Overseas Railroad, Flagler had the vision to extend his legendary luxury resort empire down to the final stop, Key West. His engineering marvel had created a buzz across the country as the rich and famous wanted to experience the new "Eighth Wonder of the World."

Travelers accustomed to luxurious, first-class accommodations were pampered at the Casa Marina, and it became one of Flagler's most popular destinations, especially to affluent guests staying at the resort before taking a steamship ferry to Cuba.

The Casa Marina guest



Casa Marina Resort & Beach Club

The renovation attempts to bring in more natural light, as in Henry Flagler's original design. American aristocracy, celebrities and presidents have stayed at the resort over the years.

book reads like a who's who of American aristocracy. The Vanderbilts and Astors made regular visits to "The House by the Sea." Later, in the '40s and '50s, the Casa Marina became a magnet to Hollywood celebrities and a favorite stop for President Truman. After he left office in 1957, the Casa Marina hosted a benefit for Truman and his future library.

The Cuban Missile Crisis in 1962 closed another chapter in the Casa Marina's colorful history as the popular ferry trips to Cuba were shut down because of the strained political landscape. In the decades that followed, the Casa Marina

was closed to the public as it housed the U.S. Army's 6th Missile Battalion and later became a training site for the newly formed Peace Corps.

In 1978, the Marriott hotel chain bought the property and invested \$13 million into renovating it. It reopened in May 1979.

Since then, the Casa Marina has been at the epicenter of Key West's renaissance as one of the top upscale tourist designations in the nation. In August 2005, Blackstone Properties added the Casa Marina and the Reach Resort of Key West to its portfolio of worldwide luxury resorts.