

March 23, 2017 – NAPLES, FL

Pickerhead spends a lot of time in Naples, FL. So it was interesting to read that Smithsonian Magazine says it is the happiest city in the country. Perhaps it is happy because it is the butt of many jokes. It is said that all the old people in Florida live in Sarasota - and their parents live in Naples. True enough. And when a car is heard starting while you are walking through a parking lot in Naples, it is wise to locate that vehicle before continuing because you never know when some seasoned citizen might attempt some hitherto unforeseeable driving or parking maneuver.

Even though many residents of Naples are quite old, they are keeping up with the youthful trend of tattoos. The most popular is to have their arms inked with their names and addresses. The same set has come up with a new line at the local saloons - "Hi there. Do I come here often?"

Switzerland may be the best country in the world (or so says U.S. News & World Report), but there is plenty of happiness to be found here in the USA—and particularly in Florida, according to the latest data from Gallup-Healthways. For the second year in a row, Naples and the nearby communities of Immokalee and Marco Island have ranked first in their "American well-being" Index, A. Pawlowski reports for Today.

The 2016 Community Well-Being Index is based on Gallup interviews with more than 350,000 people. Researchers analyzed these conversations to measure how residents feel about their physical, emotional, financial, community and social health.

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... And through it all, the people of Naples were persistently mellow. The city is home to the least-stressed residents of the country—and this despite the persistent antics of the Florida man.

Speaking of Florida Man, here's the NY Times piece.

Dangling into the sea like America's last-ditch lifeline, the state of Florida beckons. Hustlers and fugitives, million-dollar hucksters and harebrained thieves, Armani-wearing drug traffickers and hapless dope dealers all congregate, scheme and revel in the Sunshine State. It's easy to get in, get out or get lost.

For decades, this cast of characters provided a diffuse, luckless counternarrative to the salt-and-sun-kissed Florida that tourists spy from their beach towels. But recently there arrived a digital-era prototype, @_FloridaMan, a composite of Florida's nuttiness unspooled, tweet by tweet, to the world at large. With pithy headlines and links to real news stories, @_FloridaMan offers up the "real-life stories of the world's worst super hero," as his Twitter bio proclaims.

Florida Man Tries to Convince Woman to Buy, Cook, Eat Iguanas Duct-Taped to His Bike
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And there is so much more of it in Florida, he added. “It’s not just shooting fish in a barrel,” Mr. Hiaasen said, “but shooting mutated, deranged, slow-moving fish.”

He cited the car thief who had been caught by the police in the parking lot of the Miccosukee Tribe’s casino on the edge of the Everglades. The thief had the bad sense to try to escape by plunging into a pond behind the casino.

“As soon as he hits the water, he gets eaten by an alligator,” Mr. Hiaasen said. “This is the way things must be here.”

Mr. Hiaasen, chagrined at the authorities, added: “They kill the alligator. They should have given him a Crime Stoppers award. Does this happen in Arkansas? I don’t know.” ...

Another sometime Naples resident, the Florida Panther, was featured in an article in [The Atlantic](#). This piece was hard to format, so to read it all, please follow the hyperlink.

On a clear evening this past June, in rural Collier County, Florida, an endangered panther crossed a street and was hit by a man driving home. The driver, making out a tawny, crumpled form, called a hotline. The job of retrieving the animal fell to Mark Lotz, a panther biologist with the state Fish and Wildlife Commission. Lotz called me to see if I wanted to come.

I had flown into Fort Lauderdale at the beginning of the week, renting a car and heading west across the state through what remains of primordial wetlands. Tall metal fences flanked the road, like a dull, gray hermetic seal meant to keep human traffic in and wildlife out. The fences are just one of many measures to protect fewer than 180 Florida panthers alive today, all of them in the state’s southern tip. ...

Fifteen miles Northeast of Naples is the Corkscrew Swamp Sanctuary. A visitor filmed a panther there last year. [Click on this link.](#)

We do have something serious today because Wednesday a week ago marked the 100th anniversary of the abdication of Czar Nicholas. The Reds did not gain power immediately. First there was a fledgling democracy led by [Alexander Kerensky](#), who died at his home in New York City in 1970. Before 1917 was over, Lenin overthrew the provisional government setting into motion the bloodiest century in history as perhaps hundreds of millions went to early graves. [Max Boot writes in Commentary.](#)

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Stalinist terror or any mass famine in Ukraine. There may not have been any World War II, for a democratic Russia would not have connived in Hitler's rise as the Soviet Union did. The Soviets not only helped Germany to rebuild its military in the 1920s but in 1939 Stalin agreed to the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact that set the stage for the invasion of Poland, with Soviet forces coming from the East as the Nazis invaded from the West. In a broader sense, the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact made possible World War II, a conflict that inflicted unimaginable suffering on the Soviet Union, but ultimately left Moscow in command of Eastern Europe and eager to expand its domain even farther. Mao Zedong's revolution in China probably would not have succeeded if not for Russian assistance, which was forthcoming from Stalin but would not have come from a democratic prime minister.

Simply to have avoided the rule of Stalin and Mao would have spared tens of millions from an early grave. From the American perspective, it would have avoided the costly and dispiriting wars in North Korea and Vietnam and the near-miss of a nuclear war during the Cuban Missile Crisis.

Just think of how different the world would look today if Russia were a vibrant democracy. There is no inherent reason why Russia should be at odds with the West; indeed if Russia were democratic, it would be part of the West. Imagine the European Union extending from London to Moscow, and a Europe wholly free.

That, of course, is an impossible dream, and there is no guarantee that even a democratic Russia would have avoided all conflicts with its neighbors; other democracies, ours included, have certainly acted in a belligerent fashion. (Just ask the Mexicans!) But there is little doubt that the whole history of the last hundred years would have been changed immeasurably, and for the better, if Russia had had only one revolution, rather than two, in 1917.

Smithsonian Magazine

Is This the Happiest Place in America?

For the second time in a row, Gallup-Healthways ranked this Florida city first for overall well-being

by Brigit Katz





The beach at Naples, Florida.

Switzerland may be the best country in the world (or so says *U.S. News & World Report*), but there is plenty of happiness to be found here in the USA—and particularly in Florida, according to the latest data from Gallup-Healthways. For the second year in a row, Naples and the nearby communities of Immokalee and Marco Island have ranked first in their "American well-being" Index, A. Pawlowski reports for Today.

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As David Johnson points out in *TIME*, several of the highest-ranking communities boast temperate climates and locations near the ocean: two communities in Florida, two in California, and one in Hawaii were ranked among the top ten happiest places in America. But "[h]olistic well-being is about more than good climate," lead researcher Dan Witters tells Johnson. The inland city of Boulder, Colorado, for instance, ranked high on the Index because residents reported feeling a strong sense of purpose in their jobs, and a sense of pride in their communities.

Perhaps unsurprisingly, financial stability played an important part in determining respondents' happiness. As Evan Comen, Samuel Stebbins and Thomas C. Frohlich write in *Yahoo Finance*, the median household income in a majority of the 25 highest-ranked communities is "well above" the national median income of \$55,775, while the majority of low-ranking areas reported household incomes lower than the national average.

Health—or the lack thereof—was also a crucial factor. Fort Smith, which straddles the border of Arkansas and Oklahoma, was ranked last in the survey. According to Pawlowski, the area's obesity rate is almost 40 percent, and few residents there reported having "someone in their life who encourages them to be healthy."

The survey also revealed a complicated relationship between well-being and stress. Residents of Chico, California, reported the highest levels of anxiety in the nation, and the area was accordingly among the Index's lowest-ranking communities. But Boulder, Colorado, which had the third-highest stress levels, ranked within top tier. The discrepancy between the two areas, it seems, can be chalked up to different types of stress.

"In places that have high percentages of professionals, you'll have a lot more of what's sometimes called productive stress, where people will carry out otherwise high well-being lives, but will feel the stress most days," Witters explains in his interview with Pawlowski.

And through it all, the people of Naples were persistently mellow. The city is home to the least-stressed residents of the country—and this despite the persistent antics of the Florida man.

NY Times

[FloridaMan Beguiles With the Hapless and Harebrained](#)

by Lizette Alvarez

MIAMI — Dangling into the sea like America’s last-ditch lifeline, the state of Florida beckons. Hustlers and fugitives, million-dollar hucksters and harebrained thieves, Armani-wearing drug traffickers and hapless dope dealers all congregate, scheme and revel in the Sunshine State. It’s easy to get in, get out or get lost.

For decades, this cast of characters provided a diffuse, luckless counternarrative to the salt-and-sun-kissed Florida that tourists spy from their beach towels. But recently there arrived a digital-era prototype, @_FloridaMan, a composite of Florida’s nuttiness unspooled, tweet by tweet, to the world at large. With pithy headlines and links to real news stories, @_FloridaMan offers up the “real-life stories of the world’s worst super hero,” as his [Twitter](#) bio proclaims.

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— Florida Man (@_FloridaMan) [March 20, 2015](#)

His more than 1,600 tweets — equal parts ode and derision — are a favorite for weird-news aficionados. Yet, two years since his 2013 debut, the man behind the Twitter feed remains beguilingly anonymous, a Wizard of LOLZ. (The one false note is his zombielike avatar: The mug shot belongs to an Indiana Man.)

His style is deceptively simple. Nearly every Twitter message begins “Florida Man.” What follows, though, is almost always a pile of trouble. Some examples:

[Florida Man Tries to Walk Out of Store With Chainsaw Stuffed Down His Pants.](#)

[Florida Man Falls Asleep During Sailboat Burglary With Gift Bag on His Head; Can’t Be Woken by Police.](#)

[Florida Man Arrested For Directing Traffic While Also Urinating.](#)

[Florida Man Impersonates Police Officer, Accidentally Pulls Over Real Police Officer.](#)

[Florida Man Says He Only Survived Ax Attack By Drunk Stripper Because “Her Coordination Was Terrible.”](#)

“Now I think there are people who actually aspire to Florida Man-ness,” said Dave Barry, who celebrates Florida’s brand of madness in his popular columns and best-selling books. “It’s like the big leagues. It’s the Broadway for idiots.”

The number of @_FloridaMan’s followers is 270,000. Homages have proliferated: fan art, copycat Twitter feeds (California Man, Texas Man) and, most recently, a craft beer with Florida Man’s avatar.

Florida Man is considerably more popular (and funny) than competitors like Texas Man (732 followers) or California Man (129). But is the Florida Man who Accidentally Shoots Himself With

Stun Gun While Trying to Rob the Radio Shack He Also Works At truly more wacky than, let's say, an Arkansas Man or New Jersey Man?

Longtime observers insist that he is.

Take the Florida Man whose surgically amputated leg was found in a hospital Dumpster. "The leg has a name on it," said the best-selling author and Miami Herald columnist Carl Hiaasen, who has wisely peopled his novels with fictitious(ish) Florida Men. "If this is New Jersey, the leg does not have a name on it. In Miami, the leg has a name on it, and it's the name of the person who owns the leg."

Again, this being Florida, the man sues — out of "humiliation," Mr. Hiaasen noted — because his easily identifiable leg, via a hospital tag, was unceremoniously dumped.

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There is the Florida man, high on the drug known as bath salts, who was recently arrested by police after having sexual relations with a tree. He called himself Thor and tried to stab the officer with the officer's badge. How about the mailman who recently landed his homemade whirlybird near the base of the Capitol so he could deliver letters of protest to members of Congress: also a Florida man.

In fairness, there is also @_Flor1daWoman, the only person @_FloridaMan follows. And while far less prolific, she is no less wacky:

Florida Woman Covers Husband in Barbecue Sauce, Threatens to Carve Him Up Like Roast Chicken <http://t.co/TZ5Wuxt9Ad>

— Florida Woman (@_Flor1daWoman) [April 10, 2015](#)

[Florida Woman Arrested For Tying Boyfriend Up With Cellophane.](#)

[Florida Woman Tells Police She Knew Truck Was Stolen, But She Didn't Know It Was "That Stolen."](#)

[Florida Woman Attacks Man Who Accidentally Photobombed Wedding Picture.](#)

For writers, there is no greater muse than Florida Man or Florida Woman.

“Stephen King comes here for material now,” Mr. Hiaasen said. “He’s out on the west coast.”

Roy Black, a prominent lawyer who has represented his fair share of Florida Men and Women — the kind loaded with money — said he had put some thought into why Florida breeds or inspires its own brand of crime and criminals. He said it is partly the polarized nature of the state — very poor to very rich, very liberal to very conservative. It is partly the state’s cavorting culture — South Beach, spring break, half-naked people, late-night clubs. And it is partly the legions of immigrants from Cuba, South America, Central America and Haiti who sometimes import their old-country vendettas. “Where else do you get retired torturers from Argentina?” Mr. Black asked.

California’s kumbaya vibe is absent here, and so is Texas’ ideological fervor. With so many transplants, allegiances lie elsewhere. New arrivals are often shocked to find that South Florida is segregated, cliquish, brazenly rude and typically indifferent to most annoyances, including its maniacal drivers.

“That’s the most common misconception about Florida — that we are a melting pot,” said Billy Corben, who has made several Florida-esque documentaries, including “Cocaine Cowboys,” about the rise of cocaine violence and capitalism here in the 1970s and 1980s. “We are more akin to a TV dinner, where sometimes the peas spill over into the mashed potatoes.”

“As long as the Champagne is flowing and the checks are clearing,” he added, “nobody asks a lot of questions here about anything.”

Drugs and the weather are also culprits. The steaminess adds to the seaminess. And outdoor living makes for easy viewing and recording. As Mr. Barry put it, people do drugs and act erratically elsewhere. “But it’s not warm outside all the time everywhere,” he said. “In Ohio, they stay indoors.”

Here, reinvention remains the national pastime, which is why hucksters and criminals do quite nicely.

“As they say,” Mr. Corben remarked, “Los Angeles is where you go when you want to be somebody. New York is where you go when you are somebody. Miami is where you go when you want to be somebody else.”

Hence the Ohio fugitive who was nabbed here last week in an isolated trailer park. He had been on the lam for 56 years.

The Atlantic **Can Humans Coexist With Big Cats?**

Florida has already pulled panthers back from the brink of extinction—but to keep them alive, people will have to be comfortable with one showing up on their back porch.

by Joshua Sokol

On a clear evening this past June, in rural Collier County, Florida, an endangered panther crossed a street and was hit by a man driving home. The driver, making out a tawny, crumpled

form, called a hotline. The job of retrieving the animal fell to Mark Lotz, a panther biologist with the state Fish and Wildlife Commission. Lotz called me to see if I wanted to come.

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Many more people love these rare, elusive creatures than have ever seen one. Schoolchildren voted it Florida's official state animal, and the Miami area's NHL team is the Florida Panthers.

A population this size will birth between 60 and 110 kittens each year. But recently, adult panthers have been dying in droves: most after being hit by a car on unfenced roads, occasionally after being mauled by another panther in a territorial skirmish. In 2013, 20 of the endangered cats were killed; then 33 the next year; then 43 in 2015 and 2016.

Reaching Florida's Gulf Coast, I pulled into a motel north of Naples, feeling guilty for my opportunism. I would stay within a short drive of panther country for a week. At 43 dead a year, something bad should happen to a panther every eight or nine days, although at the time the panthers were on a lucky streak verging on three weeks.

By Thursday, still nothing—then Lotz's call. "Word I got right now is it's injured and still alive," he said, "but usually they're dead by the time I get there." I ran to my rental car. ...

Commentary

[The Calamity of 1917](#)

The horrors that might have been averted if Bolshevism had been stopped.

by Max Boot

One hundred years ago Wednesday—on March 15, 1917—one of the most momentous events of the 20th century occurred: Tsar Nicholas II abdicated, thus ending 300 years of Romanov rule of Russia and setting the stage, later the year, for the Bolshevik takeover. Once Lenin was in

power, Russia was hurtling on the trajectory toward the Stalinist terror and mass famine, World War II, and the Cold War. Russia is today on a path toward a post-Soviet future dominated by a former KGB officer who seems to be plotting to reassemble the Russian Empire the Bolsheviks temporarily tore down before rebuilding and expanding it.

It is superficially contradictory that Vladimir Putin, who in 2015 sponsored over-the-top festivities to mark the 70th anniversary of the end of World War II, is ignoring the 100th anniversary of the 1917 revolutions (the "February Revolution" that toppled the Tsar and the "October Revolution" that brought Lenin to power). Those revolutions remain too contentious to suggest a simple storyline of the kind that Putin favors. He is now ruling as a de facto tsar with the same support structures enjoyed by the Romanovs.

The Romanovs are, however, hardly figures Putin can extol. The last of them was, after all, overthrown and executed along with his family. Nor does he want to embrace Lenin as his role model, because of the divisive legacy of communism in Russia. In truth, as the *New York Times* noted, Putin isn't really comfortable with the whole idea of revolutions, since he lives in constant dread of an uprising such as those that have occurred in neighboring Georgia and Ukraine (both countries that he has, not coincidentally, invaded).

But even if there is no official commemoration of 1917, how should the rest of the world think about those events? Australian economist John Quiggin was onto something with this *New York Times* op-ed suggesting that the events of 100 years ago represented one of the great "What if?" moments in modern history. For the overthrow of Nicholas II did not lead directly to communist tyranny. It led, instead, to a brief flowering of constitutional rule, with political and press freedom allowed for the first time in Russian history—and for the last time until a brief revival of democracy in the 1990s between the collapse of the Soviet Union and the rise of Putin's strongman rule.

Power passed from Nicholas's royal hands first to Prince Georgi Lvov, a liberal aristocrat, and then to the lawyer Alexander Kerensky, a slightly more left-wing but still democratic leader who had previously served as minister of war and justice. Quiggin argued that Kerensky missed his chance by refusing to sue for peace with Germany on any terms. Instead, he continued an increasingly unpopular war that Russia was losing. This led the German high command to undertake a desperate gambit with far-reaching historical consequences: As Winston Churchill later wrote, "They transported Lenin in a sealed truck like a plague bacillus from Switzerland into Russia." They figured that this radical rabble-rouser would undermine Russia's war effort. As it turns out, they were correct. The war-weariness of the Russian people ultimately gave Lenin his chance to seize power, forcing Kerensky into exile and ending Russia's brief experiment with parliamentary rule.

Can you imagine what would have happened if Kerensky had been able to stay in power? The mind boggles to think how many tens of millions of people might have died in their beds rather than suffering a gruesome and premature end. There certainly would not have been any Stalinist terror or any mass famine in Ukraine. There may not have been any World War II, for a democratic Russia would not have connived in Hitler's rise as the Soviet Union did. The Soviets not only helped Germany to rebuild its military in the 1920s but in 1939 Stalin agreed to the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact that set the stage for the invasion of Poland, with Soviet forces coming from the East as the Nazis invaded from the West. In a broader sense, the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact made possible World War II, a conflict that inflicted unimaginable suffering on the Soviet Union, but ultimately left Moscow in command of Eastern Europe and eager to expand its domain even farther. Mao Zedong's revolution in China probably would not have succeeded if

not for Russian assistance, which was forthcoming from Stalin but would not have come from a democratic prime minister.

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That, of course, is an impossible dream, and there is no guarantee that even a democratic Russia would have avoided all conflicts with its neighbors; other democracies, ours included, have certainly acted in a belligerent fashion. (Just ask the Mexicans!) But there is little doubt that the whole history of the last hundred years would have been changed immeasurably, and for the better, if Russia had had only one revolution, rather than two, in 1917.

Florida Man in Disguise



Florida Man in Drag



Florida Man Illustrates Testicle Eating Fish



Florida Man Dresses for 65° Weather



**"Have you ever been
to Florida? It's basically a
criminal population.
It's America's Australia."**

