

Merry Christmas

Christmas Eve was a Silent Night perhaps made more so by the fact that many snowbirds went back to their northern nests for the holidays. However, for a variety of reasons, some decided to stay.

Carol and Don Cooksey stayed in the area because, well, the Sandestin Resort in Miramar Beach is their permanent home. However, not only have they retained their status as Destin snowbirds, they have also remained actively involved. Don, a past president, has organized numerous snowbird trips and Carol is the weekly prize distributor chairperson. What might surprise many snowbirds, however, is that they are avid collectors. Carol has a beautiful collection of Precious Moments art pieces and Don has a collection of NASA keepsakes from his 35 years as a project engineer. At this time of year, they exhibit their collection of two to three dozen Christmas Teddy Bears that date back to the mid 1980's.



"I brought one home to Carol every time I was in the doghouse," Don quipped jokingly (I think).

However, for many years, the Christmas Spirit has meant more to them than collections and decorations. With other members of Faith Assembly Christian Center, they have gathered toys to be loaded onto a horse-drawn buggy and delivered to an impoverished church community in Century, Florida on Christmas Eve. "If it weren't for this event, those children would not receive any Christmas toys at all," Don said.

Don and Carol have recruited other snowbirds to help in this charitable mission. Joe and Audrey Wolschlag are two of them.



The Wolschlags are from Illinois and have been vacationing in Florida for the past 17 to 18 years. Destin caught their attention when they used to pass through on their way to visit family on Siesta Key Island and in Venice, Florida.

"We played a lot of tennis back then," Joe said. "A friend called to tell us about a terrific place in Destin right next to some tennis courts, and we've been coming here ever since."

What the friend failed to mention was that this particular condominium in Silver Dunes sits directly on the beautiful white sands of the Gulf with an amazing view of the sunset off their front patio and an incredible sunrise view out their side window. They have enjoyed their winters in Destin even though they no longer play tennis. They both agreed that volunteering with the Faith Assembly mission has added to their holiday pleasure.



Steve and Sherry Spinner have been vacationing in this area since the mid 1990's, and finally bought a place in the Seascapes Resorts last year. After the long drive from Indiana, they preferred to settle in and enjoy a low-keyed holiday right here. "We recently drove to Atlanta to celebrate Christmas with Sherry's son and that was enough traveling for us," Steve said.

They decided to join the Destin snowbirds about six years ago after reading about it in the newspaper. A favorite activity has been the Tuesday afternoon T.G.I.T. parties because it's a great place to mingle and meet other snowbirds.

Jim and June Freeland also decided to stay at their Okaloosa Island condo and celebrate Christmas with nearby friends. Since they are renters, storage options are limited, so a tree was out of the question. Instead, they decorated the condo's artificial palm tree. They also displayed other small, decorative items that June said would get boxed up and stored over the summer months. "It's getting to be a problem though," she admitted. "The boxes are becoming too heavy to lift anymore." Still, they preferred not to trek back to Minnesota for the holidays. They had moved there from Rochester, NY to be near their grandchildren. "The grandchildren got to an age where they had holiday plans of their own that didn't include hanging around with us," June lamented. "We'd find ourselves with nothing to do, so we decided it was time to make plans for ourselves." They discovered Destin while on a trip to visit parents in Fort Myers. "We wanted to explore the southwest and had never been to this part of Florida," June said. They knew immediately that this was where they wanted to retire.



Gerry Slis had been vacationing in Destin for the past 15 years. She had unexpectedly lost her husband several years ago then found out that her high school sweetheart, David Longfield, had also suffered a sudden loss. Three years ago they reconnected and have been together ever since. "We feel very blessed to have each other," Gerry said. "We've known each other since 6th grade and had always stayed in touch," she added. They have a lot in common. Both enjoy concerts, singing and ballroom dancing. Gerry likes the fact that so many of their favorite pastimes are available here. David conceded that there was still a lot he had to learn about the Destin area and Gerry was just the person to enlighten him. They enjoyed a quiet Christmas by attending church and enjoying dinner out.

So many wonderful stories, so little space!

Don't forget to check the website, www.destinsnowbirds.org, for up-to-date information including storage locker availability, Monday morning registration and Tuesday morning meeting information. Have a Happy and Blessed New Year!