

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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SNOWBIRDS ARE FLOCKING TO SUNBELT RV PARKS IN MUCH HIGHER NUMBERS THAN LAST WINTER, ACCORDING TO PARK OPERATORS

Some parks are reporting increases in occupancy from 10 to 30 percent, with many snowbirds extending their stays into April

Five years ago, Jim Harrison's campground 30 miles northeast of New Orleans was completely destroyed by Hurricane Katrina.

Undeterred, Harrison spent his life savings rebuilding the park, only to have the economy pull the rug out from under him with the worst recession in decades.

But despite these calamities, snowbirds have filled up Harrison's 120-site New Orleans East Kampground in Slidell, La. this winter, and he expects to have his best winter season yet.

"We're doing much better than last winter," he said during an early February interview. "In fact, we're running plumb full. I don't think we'll have any spaces left."

The uptick in snowbird business isn't unique to the New Orleans area. It's happening in Sunbelt destinations across the country.

"Most RV parks and resorts that cater to snowbirds are reporting higher occupancies this winter than they did last winter," said Linda Profaizer, president and CEO of the National Association of RV Parks and Campgrounds in Larkspur, Colo.

Profaizer attributes the surge in snowbird business to a variety of factors, including a stronger economy, moderate fuel prices, an improving stock market, and a strong Canadian dollar. "Another factor in our favor," she said, "is the fact that campgrounds, RV parks and resorts continue to offer the most affordable way for retirees to spend extended periods of time in the Sunbelt."

And as snowbirds search for affordable places to winter, she said, growing numbers of them are landing at private parks across the Sunbelt, from independently owned and operated parks to parks that are operated by major RV resort chains.

Rincon Country RV Resort in Tucson, Ariz., for example, has seen a 30 percent increase in winter visitors since November, said park owner George O’Leary, adding that his current winter business even exceeds his 2006 figures by 4 percent. “From November on,” he said, “occupancies have been running steadily higher.”

Shadow Hills RV Park in Indio, Calif. has experienced a similar surge in business, said park owner Paula Turner, who noted that her winter business is at its highest level since she purchased the park six years ago. “Our occupancy last January was only 75 to 80 percent,” she said. “This year, we have been running 97 to 99 percent since January 15th. We are completely booked in February and have been turning people away since the first of January.”

Chicago-based Equity LifeStyle Properties, the nation’s largest Sunbelt RV resort operator, has seen flat revenues for seasonal visitors at its Florida properties during the fourth quarter of 2009 and first quarter of 2010. However, the company is experiencing seasonal revenue increases of 16.5 percent and 23 percent, respectively, at its Arizona and Texas parks, compared to the same period a year earlier, according to company spokeswoman Pat Zamora.

Scottsdale, Ariz.-based Carefree RV Resorts, for its part, is seeing monthly revenue gains exceeding 11 percent at its 27 Florida RV parks during the first quarter of this year, compared to the same period a year ago, said company President Colleen Edwards. The company has not yet compiled estimates for its Texas parks. However, Carefree’s Texas parks have seen an increase in short-term visitors, Edwards said.

Meanwhile, La Jolla, Calif.-based SunLand RV Resorts, which owns and operates seven RV resorts in Southern California, is reporting a steady increase in business this winter. “We have seen a strong surge in new guests and many returns of people that skipped the 2009 season based on economic scares,” said SunLand Operations Manager Greg Sidoroff, adding, “Canadian traffic is extremely strong with a strong Canadian dollar and overall great weather in Southern California. Deposits for future (winter) seasons are (also) going very well.”

Of course, not every park is experiencing an upturn in snowbird business this winter. Central Park of Haines City, Fla., is full “right at the moment,” said park manager Chris Long, but the park’s overall business for the winter season has been down compared to last winter.

Chris Freed, owner of Zachary Taylor RV Resort in Okeechobee, Fla., said his business is consistent with last winter’s figures, too, but those figures were down about 25 percent from normal.

Most Sunbelt parks, however, are seeing some improvement in their business levels this winter. Consider these examples:

Alabama

- **Anchors Aweigh RV Resort in Foley:** Business levels are strong at this 112-site park near the Gulf Coast. But, then again, this park was sold out much of last winter as well. "I'm fully booked all the way to April," said co-owner Anne Stephens.
- **Bella Terra RV Resort in Foley:** This is a relatively new motorcoach only resort, which opened just over a year ago. However, its occupancies are growing. "We reached 45 percent occupancy in January, versus 17 percent in January of '09, and we expect to hit 50 percent in February, versus 26 percent last year," said Operations Manager Courtney Fox.

Arizona

- **Desert's Edge RV Village in Phoenix:** This park has seen an increase in its snowbird business, both in terms of daily and monthly visitors. "I'm very excited," said park owner Sandra Bryn. "For January, we were up 10 percent over last year. That's wonderful for us."
- **Eagle View RV Resort in Fort McDowell:** "Business is a lot better than last year," said Merlin Jones, the park's general manager. "We're up a good 10 percent. We're still receiving reservations for monthlies for February and March."
- **Equity LifeStyle Properties:** This national chain of RV resorts is reporting a 16.5 percent increase in seasonal revenue for fourth quarter of 2009 and first quarter of this year, with noteworthy revenue gains at the following parks:
 - Cactus Gardens RV Resort, a 430-site resort in Yuma, up 16.5 percent
 - Foothill West RV Resort, a 188-site resort in Casa Grande, up 26 percent
 - ViewPoint RV and Golf Resort in Mesa, up 10.5 percent.
- **Leaf Verde RV Resort in Buckeye:** Snowbird traffic is up about 3 percent at this park, according to park manager Randall Hendrickson.
- **Mesa Spirit RV Resort in Mesa:** "We're pleasantly surprised this year," said Jim Beach, general manager of National Mobile Development, which owns the park. "We're not phenomenally up."

But we're up a couple of percent." About 60 percent of Mesa Spirit's RV sites are allocated for transient RVers, with the balance being by snowbirds who spend the winter in park models.

- **Palm Creek Golf & RV Resort in Casa Grande:** "We're doing extremely well. We're up about 16.5 percent in terms of occupancy," said General Manager Wendell Johnson. And while some snowbirds arrived early, others have booked extended stays well into spring. "We've gotten a sizeable number of three month reservations for February, March and April," he said.

California

- **Bernardo Shores RV Park in Imperial Beach:** "We're doing pretty well," said park manager Ted Smith. "(The surge in business) just started a heck of a lot later. Usually by Thanksgiving we're full. We were down at least 50 percent back then. But once all these storms over Christmas and the beginning of the year hit across the country, then the people started coming." And now, he said, several of his guests are planning to stay longer than normal. "Usually, March and April are the transition months, when people start to leave. But this year we've got reservations for March and April that we haven't seen before. We've also had a couple of people checking their weather back home and they're already asking to stay another month."
- **Fountain of Youth Spa in Niland:** "We're doing a little better than last year," said Jolene Wade, the park's managing partner. The Fountain of Youth Spa has about 450 sites that are available for rent each winter season.
- **Happy Traveler RV Park in Palm Springs:** "We're full," said Diane Marantz, who owns the 130-site park.
- **Sam's Family Spa Hot Water Resort in Desert Hot Springs:** Occupancies at this 173-site park are running "about the same as last year, maybe a little bit more," according to park manager Debbie Matas. "We're getting lots of Canadians," she said.
- **Sunland RV Resorts:** This La Jolla-based RV resort company, which owns seven parks in Escondido, El Cajon, La Mesa, San Diego, Hemet and Palm Desert, has seen "a nice increase for the season as a whole," said Greg Sidoroff, SunLand's operations

manager, adding that company's Emerald Desert RV Resort property in Palm Desert is nearly sold out this month.

- **The Springs at Borrego RV Resort in Borrego Springs:** Spaces at this 90-site park were sold out in January, February and March of last year and are "essentially sold out" again this winter, said park manager Dan Wright, adding that he regularly has to turn people away for lack of space. "We have multiple people per day that call and say, 'I'd like to book a site for the rest of the winter.' But the waiting list is now so long it's becoming problematic for them," he said.

Florida

- **Cross Creek RV Village in Arcadia:** This 520-site park is experiencing slightly higher occupancies than last winter, according to park owner Bill Harvey.
- **Equity LifeStyle Properties:** While this RV resort chain is reporting flat seasonal revenues at its Florida parks overall compared to last winter, several of the company's Florida parks have experienced increases in revenues this winter, including:
 - Breezy Hill RV Resort, a 762-site resort near Fort Lauderdale, up 2.5 percent.
 - Pine Island RV Resort, a 363-site resort near Fort Myers, up 10.3 percent.
 - Royal Coachman RV Resort, a 546-site park near Sarasota, up 7.4 percent.
- **Holiday Cove RV Resort in Cortez:** This 115-site park is seeing strong business levels consistent with last winter's figures, said park co-owner David Gorin. "Camper nights and occupancy will be about even with last year for January to April, but revenue will be up based on price increases," he said, adding that the park is fully booked through the winter season.
- **Sandy Oaks RV Resort in Beverly Hills:** This family owned park, which was full last winter, has since added another 50 campsites, boosting the park to 150 sites, and it's full again this winter,

according to Anne Armstrong, the park's office manager. "Our business has been consistently strong, even with our growth in campsites," she said.

Louisiana

- **Pontchartrain Landing in New Orleans:** Occupancies at this park are 30 percent ahead of last winter's figures, said Nate Gaarder, the park's general manager. "Every year has been better since 2005," he said, adding, "Our Mardi Gras numbers this year should tie pre-Katrina figures."

Texas

- **Equity LifeStyle Properties:** This company's parks in the Rio Grande Valley are reporting seasonal revenue gains of about 23 percent during the fourth quarter of 2009 and first quarter of 2010, with notable revenue increases at the following parks:
 - Lakewood RV Resort, a 301-site resort in Harlingen, up 45 percent, with an occupancy increase of 36.5 percent.
 - Sunshine RV Resort, a 390-site resort in Harlingen, up 34 percent, with an occupancy increase of 27 percent.
 - Tropic Winds RV Resort, a 531-site resort in Harlingen, up 40 percent.
- **Hatch RV Park in Corpus Christi:** Winter Texan business is up about 5 percent at this park compared to last winter, according to park manager Randall Henderson.
- **Hidden Valley RV Park in Von Ormy:** "We're doing great," said park co-owner Teri Blaschke. "Last year we were 70 percent full from December through February. This year so far we're 80 percent full."
- **Rayford Crossing RV Resort at The Woodlands:** "It's very, very busy right now," said park owner Gwen Craig. "We are sold out to April 1st." Craig said some of her guests have also reserved sites as far out as 2014.

- **Surfside R.V. & Resort in Port Aransas:** “We’re doing real good,” said park owner Charles Rhea. “I’m just as busy as I was last winter and my reservations are looking really good through April. Today, I even made two reservations for summer.”

For additional commentary, statistics and sources on the latest camping trends in campgrounds and RV resorts or for leads on parks in your news coverage area, please contact Linda Profaizer at the National Association of RV Parks and Campgrounds at (303) 681-0401 and visit the association’s newly revised website at www.GoCampingAmerica.com. Contact information for the parks and RV resort chains referenced in this release is provided as follows:

RV Resort Chains

- Carefree RV Resorts, Colleen Edwards, (480) 423-5700, Ext. 110 or cedwards@nhcmgt.com
- Equity LifeStyle Properties, Pat Zamora, (312) 279-1490 or pat_zamora@mhchomes.com

Parks By State

Alabama

- Anchors Aweigh RV Resort, Foley, Anne Stephens, (251) 971-6644 or aarvresort@aol.com
- Bella Terra RV Resort, Foley, Courtney Fox, (866) 475-7746 or cfox@bellaterrarvresort.com

Arizona

- Desert’s Edge RV Village, Phoenix, Sandra Bryn, (602) 672-8263 or sbryn@asu.edu
- Eagle View RV Resort, Fort McDowell, Merlin Jones, (480) 789-5316 or mjones@fmy.com
- Leaf Verde RV Resort, Buckeye, Randall Henderson, (623) 293-3174 or randy@horizonrvresorts.com

- Mesa Spirit RV Resort, Mesa, Jim Beach, (480) 830-0338 or nmdcorp@hotmail.com
- Palm Creek Golf & RV Resort, Casa Grande, Wendell Johnson, (800) 421-7004 or wendellj@wholdings.com
- Rincon Country RV Resort, Tucson, George O'Leary, (520) 886-8431 or george@rinconcountry.com

California

- Bernardo Shores RV Park, Ted Smith, (619) 429-9000 or info@bernardoshoresrvpark.com
- Fountain of Youth Spa, Jolene Wade, (619) 297-1490 or foyresort@yahoo.com
- Happy Traveler RV Park, Diane Marantz, (760) 325-8518 or happytrav@aol.com
- Sam's Family Spa Hot Water Resort, Debbie Matas, (760) 329-6457 or samsfamilyspa@aol.com
- Sands RV & Golf Resort, Gary Martin, 949-361-8828 or gary@sandsrvresort.com
- Shadow Hills RV Park, Paula Turner, (760) 360-8200 or paula@dppllc.com
- Sunland RV Resorts, Reza Paydar, (858) 456-9201 or reza.paydar@sunlandrvresorts.com
- The Springs at Borrego RV Resort and Golf Course, Dan Wright, (760) 767-0003 or borregono.3@gmail.com

Florida

- Central Park of Haines City, Chris Long, (863) 422-5322 or centralpark@tampabay.rr.com
- Cross Creek RV Village, Bill Harvey, (863) 494-7300 or bharv@msn.com

- Holiday Cove RV Resort, David Gorin, (941) 792-1111 or info@holidaycoverv.com
- Sandy Oakes RV Resort, Anne Armstrong, (352) 465-7233 or info@sandyoakes.com
- Zachary Taylor RV Resort, Chris Freed, (863) 274-4214 or info@flrvresort.com

Louisiana

- New Orleans East Kampground, Slidell, Jim Harrison, (985) 643-3850 or noeast@sonic.net
- Ponchartrain Landing, New Orleans, Nate Gaarder, (504) 286-8157 or request@pontchartrainlanding.com

Texas

- Hatch RV Park, Corpus Christi, Randall Henderson, (623) 293-3174 or randy@horizonrvresorts.com
- Hidden Valley RV Park, Von Ormy, Teri Blaschke, (210) 623-6737 or info@hiddenvalleyrv.net
- Rayford Crossing RV Resort, Spring, Gwen Craig, (281) 298-8008 or rayfordcrossing@sbcglobal.net
- Surfside RV, Port Aransas, Charles Rhea, (361) 749-2208 or manager@surfsiderv.com