

Tongue-in-cheek suggestions for BIGGER AND BETTER SINKHOLES

(Bill Partington wrote this letter to the Orlando **Sentinel-Star** after Winter Park's nationally renowned sinkhole swallowed a house, trees, cars, and a swimming pool on May 8, 9, and 10, 1981.)

Dear Sir:

The massive sinkhole in downtown Winter Park, although largely heralded as a disaster, is not without its good points.

- It put quiet old Winter Park, a city that has missed most of the development fervor of Central Florida, on the map. From now on, there should be less confusion with, say, Winter Haven, nor should we always have to describe our location relative to Disney World.

- No one was killed or even injured directly by the collapsing earth. By comparison, geological disasters of other areas — earthquakes and volcanos — are killers.

- The neighbors near the sinkhole acted admirably, allowing thousands of outsiders to go through their areas, even through their yards. Some residents managed to take advantage of the situation by selling lemonade, hot dogs, and beer to curious viewers. Winter Park's people were shown to be courteous, patient, and enterprising.

- The city police and fire departments showed that they could handle

the emergency beautifully. Again they have proved that a small community can enlist good people despite low potential for high pay, although they will get overtime for Acts of God such as this.

- The media have had a field day, the U.S. Geological Survey and water management planners may be listened to in the future, and public interest groups that argue that there are limits to growth may be taken more seriously. Disasters are effective in getting public attention for unpleasant subjects. Since it is now obvious that sinkholes have some benefits, it becomes clear that we may wish to try to create more. How can we do this?

1. Pave over more of Central Florida with solid parking lots, roof tops, and wider roads. These will reduce rainfall recharge into the underground water storage areas that underlie Central Florida, and will allow those cavities to collapse due to lack of support.

2. Pump out more water for lawns, parks featuring exotic vegetation, golf courses, cemeteries, and other ornamental or recreational uses enjoyed by almost everyone, living or dead.

3. Get rid of native vegetation such as trees, underbrush, dead trees, and other components of natural ecosystems, and otherwise improve

on nature by lowering water tables through such means as canals. These actions will open up more lands for development and provide profitable opportunities even for non-Florida investors. Replace the natives with exotic, energy-intensive plants that need supplemental watering and chemicals.

4. Encourage more clean industries and tourists. State Representative Fran Carlton at a recent meeting reported that tourists only contribute dollars but no undesirable impacts. (A following speaker inferred from her statement that tourists do not drive on roads and use neither water nor indoor plumbing, which I believe is incorrect.) To encourage sinkholes, we could get behind Ms. Carlton's programs.

At least one new organization, the Florida League Against Progress (FLAP), has already named Florida "The Sinkhole State," and if we follow the four suggestions listed above plus adding endless extensions for the airport, a huge convention center at all cost, allow higher and higher buildings, internationally promote Central Florida, and soften zoning or planning regulations, we can have a superb new attraction: Swiss Cheese World — a landscape riddled with sinkholes. You won't even have to pay to see it because it'll be everywhere.

Sincerely,
William M. Partington, Jr.



Notice the persistence of life in this native tree! When dropped from a height, it lands on its feet.