

# **SLIPPING AWAY: More and more area residents are buying boats, but places to dock them are Slipping Away**

By **TIMOTHY J. GIBBONS**, *The Times-Union*

## **Excerpts:**

Across Jacksonville and throughout Florida, public-access marinas are vanishing as developers snap them up to build condos or houses on the property. Right now, according to state figures, there is one dry-stack spot for every 17 registered vessels in Duval County.

At the same time, the burgeoning numbers of boaters with even small vessels, which don't need marina storage, are having trouble getting access to the river as public boat ramps become increasingly choked.

"This whole thing started in South Florida some years ago," said John Lowe, executive director of the Jacksonville Marine Association. "We have lost several places in Jacksonville in the last year or two. There's getting to be fewer and fewer places to park bigger boats." And the spaces that are left are more expensive, running hundreds of thousands of dollars for a parking place.

"The slips are more expensive than the boat in it," Lowe said. "The space is still there, but it's only for the rich. That seems to be the trend."

## **Florida dream may not be reality**

"All these boat ramps could use a couple extra slips and they all need more parking. When school's out, it's insane: They're parked all the way up and down the street." Some people living near the Wayne B. Stevens ramp in Ortega where Slaton launched his boat are selling their houses because of problems with boaters parked on their lawn, he said, and even such makeshift areas fill up early once the season is in full swing.

"You better get here before 10 in the morning or there's just nowhere to park," he said.

Between 1995 and 2005, the number of registered boats in Duval County jumped by almost 5,000, to 34,071, according to the state. Meanwhile, the number of boat ramps has not increased in almost two decades, although the city is working on two new ones, which would bring the total to 23.

At the same time, the number of marinas open to the public is shrinking. Slips have also moved from being rented spaces to being sold as "dockuminiums," which boaters - in Jacksonville - have to buy for upwards of \$100,000.

"All of a sudden the cost of boating has gone up dramatically," said Herhold. "Our recreational facilities are being converted to high-end residential."

[timothy.gibbons@jacksonville.com](mailto:timothy.gibbons@jacksonville.com), (904) 359-4103