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So what makes Venice a great place for retirees?

Locals agree with magazine that the city is a great place to retire

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VENICE -- Lucille Steen was not surprised when she saw an article in a national magazine declaring Venice a great place to retire.

After all, the city did not attain a median age of 68.8 by accident.

"No, not surprised at all," said Steen, who moved here from Connecticut. "When we decided eight years ago to retire, we looked up and down the west coast. We chose here."

Still, U.S. News & World Report used its first-ever "Best Places to Retire" issue to tell the world something Venetians have known for years.

The magazine thought highly enough of Venice to include the city on a top 10 list that also includes San Francisco, Calif., and Prescott, Ariz., but no other Florida cities.

Managing editor Tim Smart said the magazine based its list of cities, which were not ranked, on a range of quality-of-life issues including "weather, crime, proximity to health care and relative cost of living." Award-winning beaches and golf did not hurt, said the magazine's Web site.

That is all well and good, but locals such as Steen point to a number of slightly more folksy amenities that make them glad they chose Venice.

Secret beaches

Tourist brochures scream about the shark teeth at Venice Beach, but locals point to the more obscure South Venice Beach, which is only accessible by ferry, as a favorite. Secluded Caspersen Beach, the longest strip of sand in the county, is another favorite.

"That's one of the reasons we bought in this area," said Steen of South Venice Beach.

Cockpit Cafe

From the outside, the little restaurant by the Venice Airport runways does not look like much. But inside, Chef Jarda Hornacek serves up homemade soups and sandwiches.

The Cockpit is a favorite place for retirees, and everyone else, to watch planes take off and land. Locals also swear by the Cuban sandwich, which Herald-Tribune readers voted the best in the county.

Dolphins at the jetties at sunset

When the water scooters and Boston Whalers finally putter out for the night, the Gulf of

Mexico's marine mammals take the stage at the North and South Jetty. Crowds of more than 50 people have been known to gather to catch the sunset and scan the surf for bottlenose dolphins.

"The accessibility of the beaches and the accessibility of the nature ... are reasons we moved here," said Steen.

.The joy of navigating endless road construction

While not exactly a labor of love, driving around the seemingly unending road construction north of the island is a favorite gripe of Venice retirees, and it is an instant conversation starter. Tamiami Trail was also the site of a long construction project in 2003 and 2004.

"They kill me with the road. How can anybody get in and out?" said Steve Fotos, former owner of Ntino's Restaurant in Venice, in 2004.

U.S. News & World Report released the retirement issue on Sept. 24 and launched a Web site at www.usnews.com/usnews/biztech/best-places-to-retire.

U.S. News sent reporters all over the country after narrowing down a list of 2,000 candidates, said Smart, the magazine editor.

Venice stood out, he said.

"The small-town feel of Venice -- the writer came back with that," Smart said. "The overwhelming atmosphere is that of a traditional Old Florida feel."

Steen could have told him that years ago.

"We really looked on the west coast, up and down. We decided on Venice," she said.
