

Market snapshot: Gulfshore and Twin Shores, Longboat Key

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Long before condo towers, golf courses and beach resorts, two unusual communities existed on Longboat Key. In the late 1940s, Gulfshore and Twin Shores were adjacent campgrounds in the middle of the island. They catered to northern visitors who were willing to brave the mosquitoes and primitive amenities for the beauty and serenity of Florida.



The marina at Twin Shores on Longboat Key.
STAFF PHOTO / HAROLD BUBIL

As the camps were on one of the narrower parts of the key, visitors could enjoy the beach and ocean right across the street on one side of Gulf of Mexico Drive, and scenic Sarasota Bay on the other. From sunrise to sunset, they could enjoy spectacular vistas, fishing, swimming and boating and the leisurely, laid-back atmosphere of old Florida.

Before long, the snowbirds brought their Airstreams and other recreational vehicles. In some cases, they would leave them all year, build additions or bring in mobile homes, turning the campgrounds into trailer parks.

In 1996 and 1998, respectively, Gulfshore and Twin Shores were purchased by residents and turned into co-ops, with each resident owning a share. Separate boards and associations, which by law owned the land and leased it to the shareholders, were created.

Today, both communities are established neighborhoods, consisting mostly of single- and double-wide mobile homes. They are well-kept and attractively landscaped. Flower beds, shrubbery and palm trees throughout add to the charm and atmosphere.

Gulfshore is nearly twice as large — it has 177 mobile homes to Twin Shores' 89, but both communities have similar facilities and regulations.

Both are restricted to 55-and-older residents and don't allow pets. Both have a clubhouse, laundry and business office, a marina with boat slips, kayak launches and fishing piers, and a deeded beach across Gulf of Mexico Drive. Nearly identical monthly fees — \$182 in Gulfshore and \$186 in Twin Shores — cover water, sewer, garbage, recycling, management and ground maintenance.

Gulfshore has a community swimming pool and does not permit rentals. Twin Shores has shuffleboard courts and allows rentals. It also has a building of four villas on the bay that can be rented.

Dia Wilson, a Realtor for Barrier Island Realty, recently sold those villas, as well as a property that will house four more.

"Twin Shores is a wonderful community," she says. "Everybody helps each other;

they all work together in harmony. It's very special."

Fred Bes, the manager of Gulfshore for the past four years, has a similar experience. "It's a real neighborhood. People tend to go out, meet with each other and engage in activities."

There are welcome-back parties for snowbirds and holiday get-togethers to which everyone brings a dish. A busy social calendar in both communities includes men's and women's golf groups, classes, sport fishing, card games and bingo. In season, there is always something going on.

According to Wilson, around 10 percent of the residents live there all year. The rest are snowbirds. They include retired lawyers and former real estate agents. There are World War II veterans and a silver medalist from the 1952 U.S. Olympic hockey team. Some families have owned homes there for several generations.

Amy Parker, a 93-year-old full-time resident, came to Twin Shores in 1952, when she and her husband still lived in Ohio. They bought a lot in 1974 by the boat basin and put a new home on it in 1982. Parker has lived there ever since.

"It's a nice community with lots of nice people," she said. "We were here before the first condos were ever built, and we have the best part of Longboat Key."

With the opportunity to live affordably at the beach, both Gulfshore and Twin Shores will continue to attract retirees who care about their communities.

Year-to-date for both neighborhoods, five mobile homes have sold, priced from \$62,000 to \$160,000, in addition to the villas in Twin Shores.

There are 21 active listings, ranging in price from \$74,000 to \$144,500. In addition, a two-bedroom, two-bath block house at the front of Gulfshore is available for \$225,000.

Sharon Hightower of Edgewater Real Estate said most units are sold furnished. Hightower will hold an open house at Gulfshore from 1 to 4 p.m. today and Sunday.

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