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Where Are We? By Butch Swank - butch@goodladandswank.com



Photo: Butch Swank, President of Southwest Florida Business Alliance; Owner of Goodlad & Swank Insurance, LLC

If someone asks where you live and they're not very familiar with Florida, you say Fort Myers, right? Mentioning places like Bonita, Estero, or Lehigh usually gets you a blank stare. In these times when people argue over everything, I imagine one thing we can all agree on is that over the past twenty years, the city of Fort Myers and Southwest Florida, in general, have grown tremendously. After all, this place is pretty danged awesome, and that's exactly why we live here, right?

In sports, we've all heard the term momentum used by commentators. It's when your team can do nothing right or, if they have good momentum, they can do no wrong. It's so much fun when that happens and downright painful when your team doesn't have it. I am a fan of the Gators and Buccaneers and am far, far too familiar these days with the bummer side of momentum. Did you know that governments can have momentum, too? I took a second to look up some interesting numbers, and as I mentioned earlier, Southwest Florida is a huge place, so I focused my research only on the City of Fort Myers proper. In 1900, Fort Myers had a population of 943 and

grew to 51,971 by 2000. From 2000 to 2022, the City of Fort Myers added 40,274 people, making a grand total of 92,245, and that number is increasing rapidly. So, in twenty-two years, this one community within all of Southwest Florida added nearly as many people as it took to gain during the previous 100 years. That's astonishing growth!

Here's the part where you say, "Why is Butch giving me a math and history lesson while I'm supposed to be pleasantly enjoying my increasingly rare free time?" Great question! I am so glad you asked! I frequently write about different government departments, and my current favor-

ites are the Lee County Commission and the School District because I and many, many others see a big gap between what we want to see being done and what is actually being done. After seeing those recent population numbers, I had this moment where it became clear to me that what I'll call "Fort Myers" is stuck with the exact same momentum they've had for 100 years. To be fair, it certainly worked well for that period. Now, in the past 20ish years, they're falling behind, and I don't see a ton of evidence they intend to change anytime soon. The old saying "If it ain't broke, don't fix it" might be the most charitable way to characterize today's

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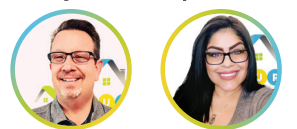
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