

Millions in cash unclaimed

State has \$17 million for thousands in Lee

BY JEFF CULL
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Florida has \$17 million in cash to give back to Lee County residents and businesses — all you have to do is ask the state for it.

A list of unclaimed property obtained by Florida Weekly shows more than 60,000 names in Lee County alone.

And nearly all of them don't know it.

Some are for small amounts — \$30 or \$40 from an old util-

The biggest single unclaimed account in Lee County is \$86,537.

ity deposit or forgotten bank account. The biggest single unclaimed account in Lee County: \$86,537. And there are more than 6,500 accounts for county residents valued at more than \$500.

Local plastic surgeon Dr. Jeffrey Lang had more than \$300,000 sitting in 29 unclaimed accounts. When contacted by Florida Weekly, Lang said he didn't realize it was so much.

"I don't know why these



accounts were turned over to the state," he said. "I don't know why they can't find me. I haven't moved. I've been in the same office for 10 years."

Lang said the money was from stock holdings and bank accounts that had been merged into other banks. He contacted the state, received the forms via email and is well on his way to collecting.

"They were spectacularly helpful," Lang said of the people

On the Web

To access the state's unclaimed property database go to www.florida-weekly.com and click on the link marked "Search Unclaimed property." Or call toll-free 888-258-2253

But that money doesn't just sit in a vault. In fact, only about \$15 million is ready cash, Sweet said. The rest goes to the

Principal State School Trust Fund to benefit education.

The education fund is expected to use \$238 million from unclaimed property this year to pay for school operations, class size reduction, teacher recognition and reading programs.

Last year the state took in \$354 million in unclaimed cash and paid a record \$101 million to 225,000 people. This year it's on pace to return about \$150 million, Sweet said. Most of the payments are in the \$70 to \$80

■ Go to page A6 to see the names of accounts in Lee County worth more than \$2,000.

SEE MILLIONS, A6 ►

County still growing at top speed

Feds say migration still strong

BY JEFF CULL
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About 75 people moved to Lee County every single day last year according to estimates recently released by the U.S. Census Bureau.

That's 27,142 new residents adding fuel to the economic engine that researchers call the fastest growing large county in Florida.

Growth, measured by Census estimates slowed slightly from the previous year — down to 5 percent from a record high of 5.8 percent in 2005. But University of Florida estimates show Lee's growth at 6.6 percent in 2006, a record high.

"It's all very good news," said Michael Reitmann, executive director of Lee BIA, the building industry association. "We still have a dynamic economy. The trend of people moving here will continue."

Census estimates put Lee County as the eighth largest in the state, just behind Jacksonville's Duval County. Since 2004, Lee has jumped from tenth place, bypassing Brevard County on Florida's east coast and Polk County in central Florida.

"It's really the fastest growing large county," said Scott Cody, a demographer with the University of Florida's Bureau of Economic and Business Research.

However, with the bulk of baby boomers reaching retirement age in the next 10 years, experts expect the growth to continue, albeit not at the breakneck pace of 2004 and 2005.

Lee's changing population

| | 2006 | 2005 | change | %change |
|-----------------|---------|---------|--------|---------|
| Lee County | 585,608 | 549,442 | 36,166 | 6.6% |
| Bonita Springs | 43,518 | 42,300 | 1,218 | 2.9% |
| Cape Coral | 154,499 | 140,195 | 14,304 | 10.2% |
| Fort Myers | 65,729 | 61,412 | 4,317 | 7.0% |
| Ft. Myers Beach | 6,874 | 6,849 | 25 | 0.4% |
| Sanibel | 6,321 | 6,272 | 49 | 0.8% |
| Unincorporated | 308,667 | 292,414 | 16,253 | 5.6% |

Source: Population estimates from the University of Florida

"Lee's growing pretty fast for its size."

Since 2000, Lee has grown by one-third with most of that growth in Cape Coral and Lehigh Acres. The

SEE GROWTH, A6 ►



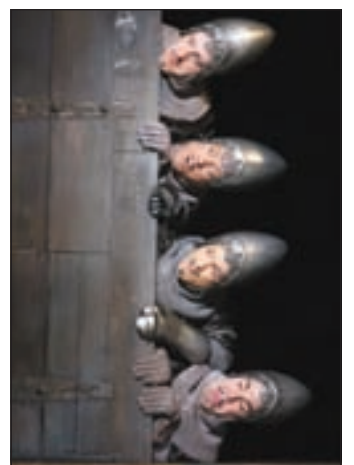
ATTRACTIONS

New dinosaur park at the Shell Factory & Nature Park. **A13** ►



BUSINESS

Don Paight talks about downtown Fort Myers. **A33** ►



ARTS

"Spamalot" headlines 2007-2008 Broadway series at BB Mann Hall. **C1** ►



COMMENTARY

Columnist Roger Williams goes NATIVE. **A2** ►

REAL ESTATE

Gulf Coast Town Center growing. **B1** ►

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| BUSINESS PLANS | A28 | ARTS | C1 | MILESTONES | C11 |
| NETWORKING | A31 | THEATRE | C7 | OUTDOORS | C15 |
| REAL ESTATE | B1 | EVENTS | C8 | CUISINE | C18 |

