

12/5/06

Heading North  
by  
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Well my friends, Thanksgiving 2006 has come and gone with none of us the thinner as a result. I'm sure many have done their fair share contributing to America's overweight population. Judy and I had a great time visiting in-laws in the Tampa area and the food was truly plentiful and scrumptious. Many of our neighbors were out of town visiting family in the hinterlands for Thanksgiving as well and though they all said their experience was great, it sure felt good to get back home to The Villages. As predicted, the highways were filled to capacity with vehicles coming and going on this most-traveled holiday of the year, purportedly over 40 Million on the road this year.

Now, everyone is gearing up for the next major holiday, maybe not the one most traveled but certainly the one most anticipated. Christmas, the symbolic celebration of Jesus' birth, stirs within us the spirit of goodwill toward our fellow man, the giving of gifts and again, gathering of families around the globe to share old memories and establish new ones. We all know Christmas has been bent completely out of shape and taken on an entirely new persona in many people's minds but the majority in this country still knows the reason for the season and that is the birth of the Christ child.

Let's be honest folks, gift giving, for whatever reason is not a bad thing and although the good book says it is better to give than to receive, I still enjoy opening gifts from friends and family who have taken their time to purchase, or produce an item and then wrap it up prettily so that I might be blessed. Of course, the local retail stores are very happy for all of us good people to come into their establishments and leave lots of printed images of Jefferson, and Franklin behind. Thanksgiving to Christmas is the largest shopping season in the whole year and many stores' success is determined by how well their Christmas shopping goes. I promise you, Judy and I will be doing our part and if our nation's economic condition is determined in part by what we spend at Christmas, this should be a banner year.

Judy and I will be heading north for the Christmas holiday and be visiting our 6 children, 13 grand children and 2 great grand children, in addition to other family members and friends, over a two week period and come back to FL in the year 2007. We're looking to have a super time although neither of us is looking forward to the projected cold weather that we will be driving into. Our blood has thinned to the point our bones begin to ache whenever the thermometer reaches 50 degrees so we're not too keen on exposing ourselves to 20, 30 and 40 degree temperatures for an

extended period. However, the warmth in our hearts for just being with our kids and grandkids will more than keep us comfortable while away... we are eagerly looking forward to seeing everyone after a six month absence.

Speaking of Christmas... does everyone have his or her gifts already purchased? Don't be like me and wait until the very last minute. How many of you folks out there have participated in on-line shopping in a serious way. I'm not talking about a book from Amazon, or a good deal on a "whatzit" off E-Bay, I'm talking serious buying like purchasing a car; a whole new wardrobe; new furniture for the house, etc.. A friend of mine recently purchased a brand new Toyota on-line from his home in FL and took delivery in Ohio. Another individual purchased a one year old SUV, sight unseen, on E-Bay from his home in Virginia, for over \$18,000 and took delivery on the car in South Carolina where the seller had driven from his home in Alabama. These are serious buyers.

I haven't as yet become a serious on-line buyer because I have the same fears as most of you... Fear of Identity theft; Fear of Mis-use of my credit card number; Fear that articles purchased will not be delivered; and just plain Fear of the unknown in general. I did become a member of Pay-Pal, an internet company which makes it simple to pay for and/or be paid for articles bought or sold on the internet. Interestingly enough Pay-Pal may also be used to transfer money from one individual to another... similar to the way Western Union is well known for its money transfers. Belonging to a service like Pay-Pal also allows you to list your credit card number with only one source on-line, thereby reducing the potential for hanky-panky with your money flow. I will say, however, I keep getting bolder and bolder in my purchases and as yet, I've had no bad experiences to show for my activity, and it certainly is painless.

Well, whatever manner you choose to purchase your gifts you best get off your duffs and "get 'er done." By the way... my shirt size... 17 ½ inch neck and 34 sleeves.

Have a great week.