

# Market snapshot: Hidden River, Sarasota County

By Chris Angermann, Herald-Tribune / Friday, October 4, 2013

As one of the best-kept secrets in Sarasota, Hidden River certainly lives up to its name. Few know of this private, gated community that caters to horse lovers and pilots. It is the only neighborhood with its own aircraft landing strip from New Port Richey to Fort Myers, according to the website FloridaAirportHomes.com.

Located 13 miles east of Interstate 75 and to the south of Fruitville Road, Hidden River has just 108 properties and 95 owners on 781 acres. One section of Hidden River borders Myakka River State Park. With dense forest canopy, lush vegetation and abundant wildlife, it is hard to tell where Hidden River stops and the state park begins, were it not for the river itself, which forms the border. That wooded section is also home to an ancient Caloosa Indian village site.

The section to the north is more open to accommodate the airstrip and plane traffic; aircraft get priority on Hidden River roads.

The area was developed by Frank Smith, who also developed South Gate and Oyster Bay. Smith had his fingers in a number of enterprises. He designed a piece of heavy machinery for digging irrigation ditches on behalf of Minute Maid, and later sold the patent to Caterpillar. He was so driven that his doctor advised him to slow down if he didn't want to be the youngest man in the cemetery.

So, in 1957, Smith bought 1,000 acres in east Sarasota County where he could relax and raise cattle. He partnered with the University of Florida to perfect a strain that would be immune to various diseases. One result of his breeding experiments was a bull named Zero that weighed 2,450 pounds at its death and is buried near the original Hidden River Meeting House.

## PHOTO GALLERY: See more photos from Hidden River



After platting the area, the first lots were sold in 1966. By then, Hidden River had been reduced to its current acreage, with Myakka River State Park and the Crowley Museum Nature Center taking the rest for their use.

Properties were up to 30 acres; today, 5 acres is the minimum lot requirement for building a house. Homes had to be at least 1,750 square feet under air. Many of the early residences are 1960s and '70s Florida ranches, but there also







are homes on stilts as well as two-story, Key West-style edifices with decks and wrap-around porches that were built in the past decade.

Originally, two soil-cement runways were built there, but the county decided that one was enough for an aviation community. Today, the remaining east/west runway, 2,330 feet long and 50 feet wide, is paved with asphalt. A clubhouse is nearby, with 5 acres of parking for the aircraft of guests. Most of the 3.5 miles of roads in Hidden River can be used by residents to taxi their planes to private hangars at their homes.

Katty Caron, a Realtor with Premier Sotheby's International Realty, has lived in Hidden River since 2004. She has several properties listed, including a spectacular waterfront home on the Myakka River with a five-car garage and 4,761 square feet of living space.

"It's a beautiful place with gorgeous views, and very serene," she said.

Caron learned to fly in Hidden River — taught by her neighbors — and now owns a Cessna 172 built in 1961. She is enthusiastic about the neighborhood. "It's really fun! Where else can you fly in and out and park your plane at your back door?"

She also appreciates having plenty of space. "I love the 'old Florida' feel it has, and the fact that you're not so close to your neighbors."

Hidden River residents may value their privacy, but they're also a social bunch. They hold holiday parties, Halloween hayrides and Easter egg hunts at the community recreation area, which includes a lake, picnic area and kayak and canoe access to the Myakka River.

Twice a year, there are spot-landing contests for aircraft — the winner lands closest to a target on the runway. Plaques and medals are handed out at the party and barbecue held afterward. A women's club, formed in 1999, hosts TGIF parties and community breakfasts.

Most of the residents — a mix of retirees, working professionals and families — live in Hidden River year-round. But Caron said the community is changing.

"A younger crowd is coming in because some of the original owners are getting older, and it takes a lot to care for the large properties. I've also been getting a lot of foreigners who are looking at the listings, wanting a second home."

Although, Hidden River may seem off the beaten track, it is only a 15-minute drive to the Interstate and less than half an hour to downtown Sarasota. And the community has high-speed, fiber-optic Internet access. "It's nice to have when you're working out of your home office, and just about everyone here has one," Caron said.



Four houses are on the market, ranging from \$279,900 to \$1.35 million; three vacant lots are priced from \$108,900 (for 5 acres) to \$599,900.

“If you’re into horses or airplanes, or even motorcycles and fast cars, this is the community for you,” Caron said.

