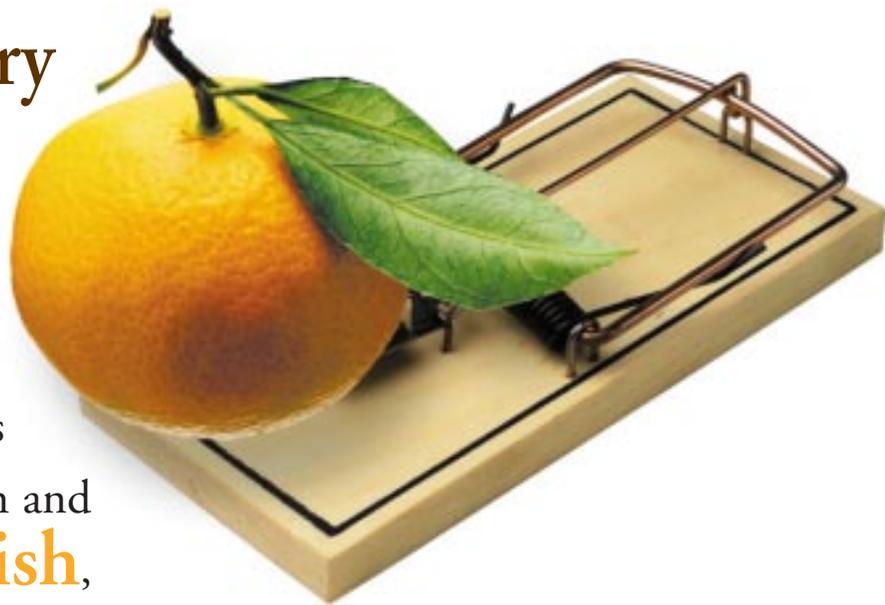


building a better mousetrap

a brief history of orlando

by Emily LeDuc

Originally inhabited by the Paleo Indians, the area that is now **Orlando** has a rich and diverse history. The **Spanish**, who first settled in Florida in the 16th century, deeply influenced the region's history by introducing cattle, the foundation of the Orlando's early economy. Spanish influences can still be seen today in the architecture of the area. Following the introduction of cattle to Florida, Orlando was a rough place where **cattle rustling** and **gunfights** were not unusual and an old west mentality prevailed. But as cattle ranches prospered, and with the expansion of the railroad, the area began to thrive and quickly became the **destination of choice** for a diverse group of people including wealthy patrons, entrepreneurs, and homesteaders.



The railroad opened access to northern markets in the late 1800's, and Orlando's fledgling agricultural markets became hugely successful, which resulted in an influx of capital to the area. Citrus groves and other agricultural crops became a major economic force that opened the door for the tourist trade. Orlando's warm, pleasant climate attracted Union soldiers back from the Civil War, looking for a place to settle down. Agriculture boomed and other trades flourished.



By the 1920's, Orlando had become a known destination and was quickly becoming a very attractive place to live for wealthy families and simple settlers alike. The Spanish architecture, mixed with impressive Victorian mansions, and modern architectural style homes, began to transform the landscape.

In the years following World War II, Orlando survived the Great Depression by relying heavily on its strong agricultural



Shuttle landing.

Lake Eola in Orlando, Florida.

trade. In addition, the Army Air Corps built two training centers in the area. Pinecastle Air Force Base would eventually become Ft. McCoy, and is still in existence today. Pinecastle was used as a Strategic Air Command unit for B52's carrying atomic weapons.

This early involvement with military technology opened the door for the development of what would eventually become Orlando's technology corridor. In 1956, the Glenn L. Martin Company, now known as defense giant, Lockheed Martin, relocated to the area. This created an influx of jobs and renewed interest in central Florida. NASA would soon follow, building Cape Canaveral and later Kennedy Space Center. By the 1960's, Orlando's population had grown to over 60,000, and the city was now the center of a major metropolitan area in central Florida that included Orange, Seminole, and Osceola counties. Orlando was growing at an astonishing rate by the late sixties, and had undergone numerous economic transformations, but nothing could prepare this popular city for what would come next.

Enter the Mouse

With the success of Disneyland in California, Walt Disney recognized the nearly unlimited potential for profit by providing visitors with a total resort experience — complete with food, lodging, and entertainment. His vision was to have ultimate control of all the money generated by the existence of his resort. In 1963, the location for Walt Disney's new empire was nearly settled — plans had been made, sites had been inspected. They were ready to go with legal matters the next day, until one fatal comment soured the deal and set Disney's sights elsewhere. At an evening dinner party with politicians and businessmen, August 'Gussie' Busch remarked,

“Any man who thinks he can design an attraction that is going to be a success in this city and not serve beer or liquor, ought to have his head examined.”



Brett Schnack

over a period of several years until his death in 1966. Five years later, Walt’s successors were ready for the grand opening of Walt Disney World in Orlando, Florida.

Ten million people visited Walt Disney World during its first year of operation. The population of Orlando exploded after the park opened, and Orlando now hosts more than 43.3 million people each year, more people than the entire population of California. It is the number one tourist destination in the world, and is still one of the fastest growing communities in Florida and the United States. Orlando currently boasts a population of 185,000 people, and Disney itself employs over 20,000.

Today, Orlando is host to 66 attractions, 88,000 hotel rooms and 3,000 restaurants. It continues to be one of the world’s favorite destinations. And you still can’t buy a beer within the gates of Walt Disney World.

Sources for Building a Better Mousetrap:

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Married to the Mouse by Richard E. Foglesong

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Walt Disney, who was not one to be challenged in public, killed the deal that night, and moved on to consider options other than St. Louis for his pet project — Walt Disney World. Lured by the forward thinking vision and limitless entrepreneurial spirit of a group of businessmen in Orlando, Walt began to purchase thousands of acres of land in central Florida. This group of local businessmen had already laid the groundwork for a stable and rapidly growing economy by courting major facilities to establish themselves in the area. Naval bases, well-developed roadways, and defense contractors provided a solid foundation to build upon. For Walt, Central Florida was an ideal location to lure East Coast residents to his new park. Walt was also looking for a way to break free of the ‘fickle’ motion picture industry. Similarly, the city of Orlando was seeking a way to ease the negative economic effects of crop freezes and defense spending cuts. Walt was confident in his choice for his new theme park, and continued to acquire land



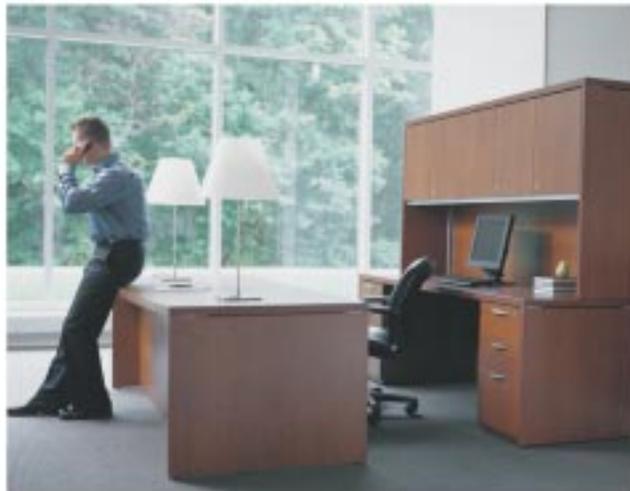
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Orlando skyline at night.



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