

TRAVEL & ARTS

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UF didn't want last week's loss to derail them on Saturday. 1C

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SARAH ESPEDIDO/ORLANDO SENTINEL

Rob Greenfield harvests chaya, or "tree spinach," from the garden Monday.

Living off the land

Orlando man survives year of growing, foraging all of his own food

BY KATE SANTICH

In Rob Greenfield's grand Orlando experiment — one year growing or foraging everything he would eat — enemies abounded.

Worms invaded his squash. Squirrels ravaged his sunflower seeds. Someone surreptitiously reported his tiny house — the one he erected in an Audubon Park backyard — to the city's code-enforcement officers. And don't get him started on the

cacophony of an overhead flight path and suburban leaf blowers.

But as he prepares to cross the finish line Sunday, Greenfield is grateful for all but the noise. "I'm so glad that I did it that I'm probably going to do it again," he says. "Just not right away."

After a year of no grocery stores, no restaurants, no food trucks, not even a nibble at a friend's house, the affable 33-year-old has no interest in a fast-food burger or pricey

chop house or even a shopping spree at the local supermarket.

"That's the most frequently asked question: 'What is the first thing that I'm going to eat?'" he says. "And I just really don't know the answer to that. But ... I have no desire to eat anything from a package or anything that was paid for. I want to go to my friends' gardens. I want to cook healthy meals with

Please turn to **FORAGE, A25**

House flipping again a big deal around Orlando

Despite popularity, investors not profiting as they once were

BY CAROLINE GLENN

A few weeks ago, Carl Davis and Carrie Duvall got the keys to their newest flip, a 1950s ranch in the Mills 50 neighborhood they plan to put \$200,000 into and hope to sell for a fat profit. It'll take about eight months, and in that time, they want to remove the aluminum siding, put on a new roof, build a pool in the backyard and add a second story.

"This will be our biggest project," Davis said. And in a market like Orlando, where investment properties account for 15.1% of total home sales, they're expecting it to pay off big time.

Orlando is currently one of the top markets in the United States for flipping projects, ranked No. 8 by Realtor.com. Miami also made the list at No. 3, as well as Tampa, at No. 4.

House-flipping is back across many parts of the U.S., with the economy recovered from the recession and housing crisis that began in 2008. The rate hit a nine-year high this summer, with 49,059 homes being flipped nationwide, making up 7.2% of total homes sold, according to Atom Data Solutions.

"It's been a pretty steady increase in investor purchasing of properties. And it really hasn't slowed down," said John Murdock, a broker and founder of



STEPHEN M. DOWELL/ORLANDO SENTINEL

Carrie Duvall holds an artist's illustration of a proposed renovation of her home on Haven Drive in Orlando on Wednesday.

JMO Real Estate Group in Winter Park. "We're basically seeing a little bit of everything right now."

"We're seeing a lot of the newbies doing flipping, we're seeing people investing in longer-term investment strategies, and then I know a lot of people that are just sitting on the sidelines waiting because of the level of competition."

George Ratiu, senior economist with Realtor.com, attributes the number of investment properties to Orlando's strong economy. The unemployment rate is at 2.8%, a 13-year low; construction is booming; and home values continue to go up every month.

Another big factor is the sheer number of people moving to the area, 1,500 every week.

Online services like Offerpad and Open Door are operating in full force in Orlando, and this week GrowthSpotter reported

Please turn to **HOUSE, A13**

Seminole moms start support group for parents who lost kids to opioids



JOE BURBANK/ORLANDO SENTINEL

From left, Brandy Fulghum, Della Wiggins and Diane Stevenson, the three Seminole County mothers who founded Advocates for Our Angels.

BY GRACE TOOHEY

The Tuesday night meeting begins with their mantra: What do parents of addicts look like?

"We look like doctors, lawyers, factory workers, accountants, actors and receptionists," Della Wiggins recites, before laughing as she adds her own profession: "And hairdressers. ... We are blondes, brunettes and redheads. We have black hair or no hair — most of us have some gray hair."

"We look like you," she tells the five other adults gathered in the Altamonte Springs strip mall

Please turn to **SUPPORT, A20**

Time running out for pot petitions

Initiatives to legalize marijuana short on signatures and time

BY STEVEN LEMONGELLO

Two citizens initiatives that would legalize recreational marijuana in Florida are still far away from gathering enough signatures to get on the 2020 ballot — and time is running out.

Regulate Florida has only about 92,000 verified signatures of the required 766,200 needed by Feb. 1 to qualify. The other group, Make It Legal Florida, has about 57,000 verified signatures.

By comparison, John Morgan's \$15 minimum wage initiative hit the signature mark last week and

is now on its way to state Supreme Court review.

The petitions also face a headwind of skeptical GOP legislators in Tallahassee, who have been holding hearings this month on the potential dangers of pot legalization, as well as potential court issues and a challenge by the Florida attorney general. But the biggest obstacles right now are money and time.

"We've got a lot of grass-roots support ... but we're not getting enough [funding] and we're not getting it consistently," said Karen Goldstein, deputy director of pro-pot group NORML Florida and vice-chair of Regulate Florida. "We need someone with big, deep

Please turn to **PETITIONS, A13**

YOUR NATION, YOUR WORLD

Ceremony marks Berlin Wall opening

Leaders from multiple countries placed roses in the barrier that divided the city for 28 years. A3

Missing ex-agent probe continues

In a United Nations filing, Iran said, without elaborating, the case over Robert Levinson was "ongoing." A23

France reopens tomb to the public

One of Jerusalem's most ancient tombs allowed the public to visit for the first time in more than a decade. A24

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HOUSE

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that a Miami-based boutique private equity investment firm will launch a \$50 million fund to repair and resell foreclosed entry-level homes in Central Florida.

Still, flipping isn't what it was after the housing crash a decade ago.

"Back when the market fell and a bunch went into foreclosure, 2008-2010 in that time frame, we were telling people if you owned a house, buy another house because the market fell so dramatically," said Jeffrey Fagan, president of the Orlando Regional Realtors Association. "If people had the means, that was a beautiful opportunity to own an investment property."

Houses were priced so low, buyers could turn big profits. But now, as more people have gotten into the flipping business, and as home costs continue to increase and inventory shrinks, the profitability of fix and flips has dwindled. The median price for a home in Orlando is \$250,000, and short sales and foreclosures, once a flipper's bread and butter, make up less than 3% of sales.

An analysis released by Attom in September showed that investment properties in the U.S. netted \$62,700 on average, an eight-year-low. In Orlando, flippers usually see a 41% difference in the purchase and selling prices, according to Realtor.com.

"They have to be priced low enough for an investor to be able to make a profit," Murdock said. "When you get into bidding wars, at some point, it becomes unprofitable."

For Davis and Duvall, their new house, within walking distance from Ten10 Brewing and Santiago's Bodega, will be their fourth flip. Unlike other investors, the houses they flip are their own homes. Davis works full-time at Orlando Health and Duvall as a broker.

They work on one house at a time, living in them dur-



STEPHEN M. DOWELL/ORLANDO SENTINEL

Carrie Duvall and Carl Davis are pictured in front of their home on Haven Drive in Orlando on Wednesday.

ing construction and for a few years after renovations are completed. By living in the houses, they can avoid some of the taxes other flippers have to pay.

They bought their first property in 2010, near Lake Como Park, for \$160,000, invested \$75,000 in upgrades and sold it in 2015 for \$299,900. The home they just moved from, on East Jersey Avenue in the SoDo neighborhood, was purchased for \$135,000 in 2017, and after \$110,644 of renovations sold for about \$300,000 two years later.

"We kind of stepped back and said, 'Wow, this is really supplementing our income,'" Duvall said.

Lynn Thompson, a local investor in Ocoee, targets homes in and around the Orlando metro area that are

priced below \$200,000. Her latest acquisition was a \$136,000 home in Lakeland that she sold for \$172,000, clearing about \$22,000 in profit.

She also buys and holds houses, including about eight rental properties in Pine Hills. One cost \$85,000, and after she put in about \$15,000 in renovations has a current value of \$140,000.

Thompson, who works full-time at AdventHealth, has been flipping houses since 2007 and estimates she's rented and sold about 80 properties since then. When she needs to, she borrows money from a close friend who's a private lender but mostly rolls over profits from project to project. This year, she'll make around \$40,000 from her

real estate properties.

"The gross numbers make it look like easy money, but (in one instance) I paid over \$8,000 in fees to the title company, over \$5,000 to the buyer's real estate agent and \$1,000 to a real estate attorney," said Thompson. "Shows featured on HGTV, for example, don't usually mention these high fees. You have people coming in thinking it's really easy."

Evan Shelley, founder of Simple Sale Central Florida, said the flipping market has changed, moving away from the traditional cold-calling and door-knocking. More people are marketing their services and waiting for sellers to come to them.

His business mostly targets distressed properties, ones that might have issues

with titles, code violations, unpaid homeowners association fees or other problems. Most times, homeowners want to sell the house, and investors want to purchase to flip it, but those issues stand in the way.

One of his clients was going into foreclosure. The house was tax delinquent and had outstanding code violations. Once those were taken care of, Shelley found an investor to flip the property.

"It was a win-win-win. The former owner started a new life out of the scare of foreclosure. I made money flipping it to the investor. The investor made money flipping it to a retail buyer," he said.

But if those issues hadn't been cleaned up first, "they

never would have touched it," Shelley said.

Despite the success stories, Fagan warned against jumping into the flipping market to get rich quick. He advises people to hold on to properties and rent them out, and reap the rewards of appreciating real estate.

"They grab a house and think they can slap some paint on it and put it back on the market and make a profit," he said. "I've been in the real estate market a long time and real estate isn't that way."

Got a news tip? You can email Caroline at cglenn@orlandosentinel.com or call 407-420-5685, and follow her on Twitter [@bycarolineglenn](https://twitter.com/bycarolineglenn).

PETITIONS

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pockets to step up in a very short period of time in order for us to make the ballot.

The groups have different strategies, with one broadly legalizing pot and the other working through the existing distribution system for medical cannabis, which is already legal in Florida. And they also have vastly different methods of fundraising, with Regulate Florida getting mostly small donations and Make It Legal mostly financed by the marijuana industry.

"If I had to put money on which one makes the ballot, it would be the one with financial heft behind it, especially after they've already put money into it," said Matthew Isbell, who runs the MCI Maps website devoted to political map-making and analysis. "And at this point, if it doesn't make the ballot, every dollar they've spent is a waste."

The actual number of signatures needed goes beyond the bare minimum of 766,200, he said, with campaigns usually needing to get 50,000 to 100,000 additional signatures as a "buffer" against any challenges or duplicates.

But paid signature gathering, Isbell said, "can yield results fairly quickly. There's a big difference between a volunteer program versus a paid program."

Regulate Florida's proposed amendment would legalize marijuana for adults over age 21 and would also allow them to grow their own.

The group has been gathering petitions since 2016, raising about \$447,000 over that time from mostly small \$20 to \$50 donations. The largest single contribution was \$20,000 from Seminole County businessman Oliver Dawoud, CEO of Aventus Health.

It has gathered enough petitions to get its language looked at by the attorney general in advance of a review by the state Supreme Court.

A state study of the plan's financial impact found legal marijuana sales would at

least \$190 million per year in new sales taxes alone once the legal retail market is fully operational.

That's in line with a new report by Arcview Market Research and BDS Analytics, which estimates that total medical marijuana sales, already at \$626 million in 2018, will increase by \$1.3 billion over the next five years, even without full legalization.

But Attorney General Ashley Moody has challenged Regulate Florida's amendment, saying the 10-page text is misleading because it is too long and cannot be adequately summarized.

Despite not reaching 100,000 signatures yet, Goldstein was optimistic that they would pull through and get the needed signatures by February.

"The deadline is looming, but we have some irons in the fire this week," Goldstein said. "We're hoping something's going to break for us."

The other group, Make It Legal Florida, only filed with the state in August.

It's backed by some of the state's leading medical marijuana dispensaries, with contributions of more than \$654,000 from MedMen and more than \$1 million from Surterra, now known as Parallel.

Their referendum would be similar to the amendment that approved medical marijuana, in that all sales would be handled through designated distribution centers such as those already run by MedMen and Parallel in Florida.

That petition hasn't garnered enough signatures to trigger an attorney general review or financial impact study.

Nick Hansen, chairman of Make it Legal Florida and a regional director for MedMen, said while they're only at 57,000 signatures now, he's optimistic the group's campaign will gather enough by the deadline.

He said the group has 35 offices up across the state, each making three deliveries of petitions a week to elections offices. They're also starting a direct mail campaign, which already

includes the voter's name and address already filled out, and return postage prepaid.

Hansen said their amendment's language was written specifically to echo the successful medical marijuana initiative.

"We looked at two standards," Hansen said. "One, can it pass a court review? Standards are very high for that. They have to be short subjects and can't be conflated. We wanted to make sure we stayed in our lane. ... and didn't want to do anything that was a significant departure from what the [state] Supreme Court said was constitutional."

Secondly, he said, "What can get 60% plus of the vote? ... We need the support of people who may not ever use cannabis but who just want to make sure it's accessible and safe."

Despite everything, Hansen said he didn't see Regulate Florida as a competitive rival.

"We're one big community and movement," Hansen said. "We talk and have a good relationship, and we check in with each other periodically. I kind of feel we're all on the same team."

Goldstein said she didn't see Make It Legal Florida as a competitor, either, but for a different reason.

Florida law does not contain any language on what would happen if two competing amendments were to pass. But Goldstein interprets that to mean that if her petition passes, it would supersede the other one.

If either or both amendments face a state Supreme Court review, the makeup of the court has changed since it approved the medical marijuana amendment's language in 2016. Gov. Ron DeSantis in January replaced three liberal justices with three conservatives, tilting the court to a conservative majority.

The final obstacle is that amendments need 60% of the vote, not just a simple majority.

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