



Mount Dora is known for the Lakeside Inn (left) and its shopping district with antiques shops, restaurants, boutiques and specialty stores.

# Mount Dora scores again in top 100 towns

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MOUNT DORA — If it weren't for the Spanish moss dripping from the oak trees outside David and Joan Vokac's room at the Lakeside Inn, it's a strong bet that Mount Dora would not be listed in the couple's latest book, *The Great Towns of America*.

Of course, Mount Dora, a lakeside community well known in Central Florida for its antiques and boutiques, had other things going for it, David Vokac said.

The small town in Florida's center gives visitors easy driving access to theme parks, beaches and other major attractions, he said. It also gives out-of-staters a good feel for old Florida.

"Mount Dora is the prettiest inland village of Florida," Vokac said. "It provides a great base for people interested in exploring interior Florida. It just doesn't get any better than Mount Dora."

For those reasons, Vokac said, Mount Dora is the only Central Florida town listed in his travel guidebook, subtitled the *All New Guide to the 100 Best Getaways for a Vacation or a Lifetime*.

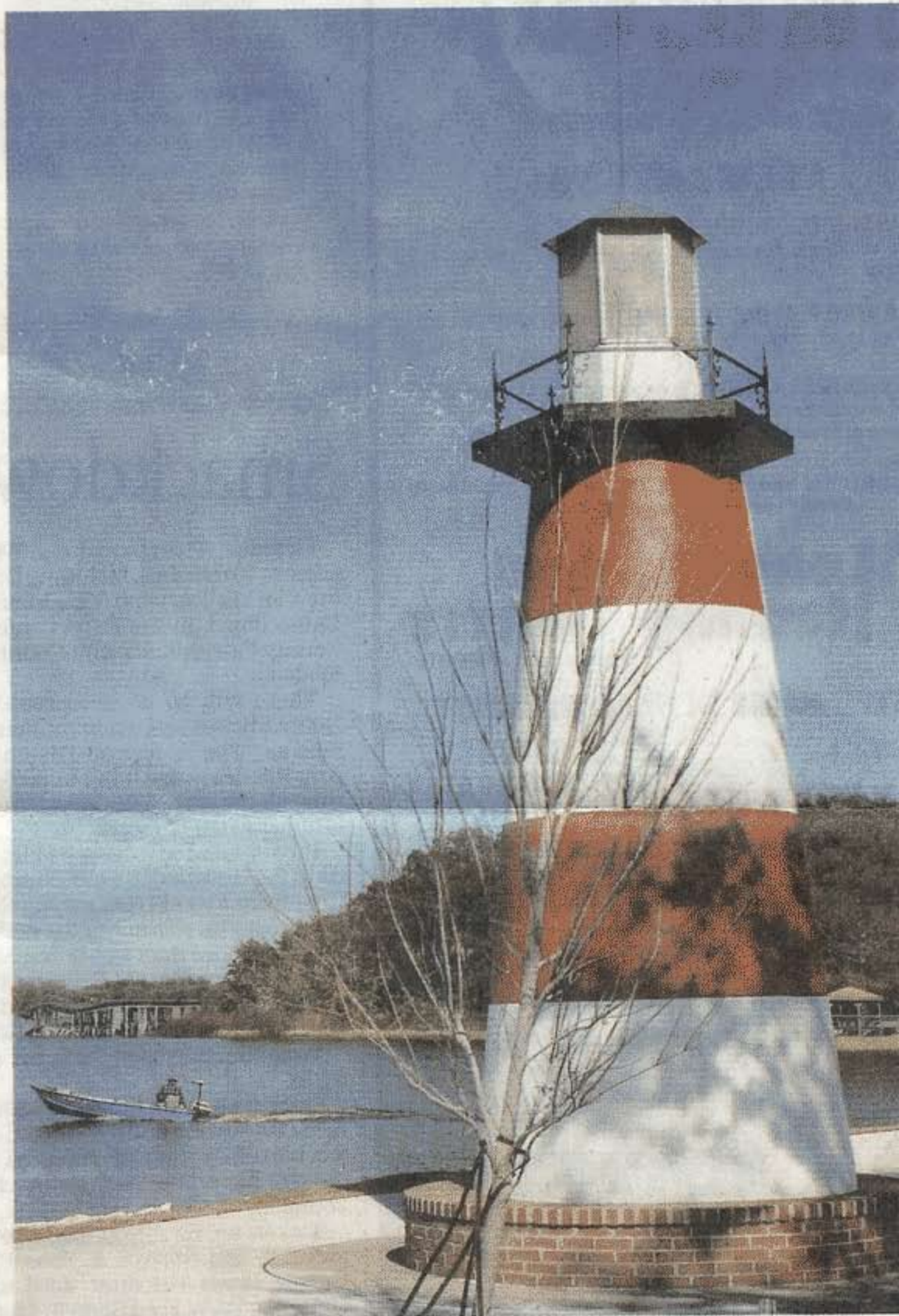
It's also one of five Florida municipalities that made the Vokacs' list. The others are Key West, Naples, St. Augustine and Vero Beach.

The Vokacs are former urban planners from San Diego who decided years ago to ditch their desks, pencils and code books in favor of crisscrossing the nation in search of the 100 best communities.

Their first book, *The Great Towns of America*, published in 1998, listed Mount Dora. But the Vokacs were skeptical that Mount Dora could hold on to its charm the second time they visited for their follow-up book.

During the nation's real-estate boom in the past decade, many Americans fled large urban areas for small towns, helping improve the local economies of those communities.

That meant that Mount Dora faced stiffer competition



PHOTOS BY TOM BENITEZ/ORLANDO SENTINEL

The Mount Dora Lighthouse overlooking Lake Dora is one of the many historical features highlighted in 'The Great Towns of America' by David and Joan Vokac.

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