Powered by The Gainesville Sun Gainesville.com

This copy is for your personal, noncommercial use only. You can order presentation-ready copies for distribution to your colleagues, clients or customers here or use the "Reprints" tool that appears above any article. Order a reprint of this article now.

# Large sinkhole opens up at Jonesville-area home

*By Cindy Swirko*
*Staff writer*
*Published: Saturday, May 12, 2012 at 9:14 a.m.*

Saturday got off to a routine start for Robin and Rhonda Matheny — making breakfast, getting the paper. Until.

"I walked out to get the paper in the driveway," Robin Matheny said. "She hollered at me, 'Come quick.' I ran across the yard and didn't even look at the back. I didn't see until I got in and looked out the back. I don't know what to think. It's a horror movie."

*Brad McClenny/ Staff photographer*
A large sinkhole opened up in the backyard of Robin and Rhonda Matheny in the Jonesville area, west of Gainesville. The Mathenys will be moving from the home.

Comment on this topic at The Sun's Facebook page.

The horror is a giant maw of a sinkhole — about 80 feet long and 40 feet wide and growing — in the Mathenys' backyard at 11958 SW Fifth Avenue in the Jonesville area.

It was discovered about 8 a.m. Saturday, though the initial cave-in likely happened late Friday night. A 24-foot-long storage shed was on the verge of toppling into it, and the ground showed signs of giving way close to the Mathenys' swimming pool.

But the family was able to get a boat and some toys out of the way and were taking in stride what will likely be a major hassle — if not a danger.

Viewed from a safe distance from the edge, a barbecue grill and cooler could be seen inside the sinkhole. Water could not be seen, but it could be heard as more of terra firma crumbled in. "It's quite impressive," said Jeff Harpe, Alachua County Fire Rescue district chief.

Rhonda Matheny said the couple was playing cards with friends Charles and Lenda Page about 11 p.m. Friday night when she heard a noise that she thought may have been thunder. No one checked outside at the time.

But Saturday morning she looked outside and saw that the ground had collapsed

"I couldn't believe it," she said.

The sinkhole continued to grow throughout the day as more of the unstable earth gave way. Robin Matheny said the house is insured for sinkholes. An insurance adjuster came to the house Saturday afternoon and told the Mathenys, who are retired, that they cannot continue to stay in the home.

Chris Gilbert, senior specialist with the Alachua County Environmental Protection Department, studied the sinkhole and said it is not posing an environmental hazard at this time.



Exhibit INT206
June 26, 2012

Robin Matheny said neither the house nor pool has shown any signs of shifting earth that could foretell a sinkhole, such as cracking.

The Mathenys have lived in the house for 37 years.

He had barbecued by the shed the night before and has driven over the spot that is now caved in several times over the past few days. Robin Matheny said a heavy rain fell Tuesday and Wednesday.

Sinkholes are common in Florida — though not the size of the Mathenys' monster.

Florida's limestone terrain is porous, allowing the acidic water to percolate and dissolve some of the limestone, according to the state Department of Environmental Protection.

Erosion can create extensive underground voids. The collapse of overlying sediments into these underground voids produces sinkholes.

They often form during droughts because the groundwater table is low.

When a heavy rain then occurs, the weight of the surface water can cause the earth to cave into the void.

The Mathenys' sinkhole was the talk of the neighborhood on Saturday. Friends stopped by to gape or to bring the family sandwiches and snacks.

Robin Matheny said he does not know what will be done with the sinkhole or his property.

“It happened. What can you do about it?” he said. “I just hope it doesn't swallow up the pool, but you never can tell.”

Copyright © 2012 Gainesville.com — All rights reserved. Restricted use only.