

Seascape Resort Destin, FL

"It's the simplest thing I've ever seen in my life. What used to take a day for me to set up now takes an hour."

Fred Marks, Owner, Miracle Strip Wireless (manages wireless at Seascape Resort)

Challenge

Provide reliable high-speed wireless to 5,000 owners and renters in a sprawling resort on Florida's Gulf Coast

Use solar power to fill in gaps in wireless coverage on the beach and around the lake

Maintain uptime despite hurricanes and salt air

Results

The solar WiFi system requires considerably less ongoing upkeep and management than previous homemade solutions

Free amenity attracts vacationers looking for added value—from college students to senior citizens

Initial network impressed Seascape enough to persuade them to deploy Meraki property-wide



The Seascape Resort in Destin, Florida is a getaway destination for vacationers, as well as home to hundreds of condominium owners. The 1330 unit resort consists of several high rises and a handful of two-story multi-unit buildings. The buildings are positioned along the beachfront, around several lakes, and beside an 18-hole golf course.

Guests at the resort had complained about not having Internet access in their condos or on the beach. The challenge: both areas lacked any sort of electrical infrastructure. Seeking a solution, the homeowners association called on Fred Marks, owner of Miracle Strip Wireless, a local Wireless Internet Service Provider (WISP), and Meraki customer.

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Marks knew a thing or two about WiFi – he had worked at Compaq when the company helped Starbucks offer some of the first commercial paid WiFi in its cafes. He also had a passion for solar technology, and had cobbled together several solar WiFi radios over the past several years. But his homemade solutions – using 60 watt arrays and third-party repeaters – were difficult to set up and would lose power on cloudy days. “The number of panels I needed to power just a few access points was ridiculous,” Marks says. “And if there were clouds, my batteries dried up way too quickly.” In his research for a better solution, he discovered Meraki.

When the call came in from the Seascape Homeowners Association, Marks surveyed the property and weighed extending electrical wiring to the beach and lake areas. “It was clear that it was absurdly cost-prohibitive to get electrical out there.” Instead, he proposed a solar solution.

As a proof-of-concept, Marks deployed three Meraki Solar units around the lakefront property's courtyard. From setting the post to making the connection took him less than an hour. “The deployment was done quickly, and the network was up and functioning on the spot,” Marks said. “They were so impressed. That's how we got the contract.”

Seascape now offers WiFi as a free amenity. Some of Marks' other deployments use tiered paid access for guests to subsidize the free access owners receive.

With his significant solar experience, one thing in particular sold Marks on Meraki. “It has better power management than I have ever seen. Even when we'd have a week of clouds, it kept a full charge. Amazing,” says Marks.

The ease of deployment appeals to Marks because his territory is in hurricane country, and even on fair days, he has to deal with high winds and corrosive salt air. Meraki units are designed to withstand the elements. In fact, Marks says that in the event of a hurricane warning, he can quickly gather up all of his Meraki units until the storm passes, and then re-deploy WiFi as a public service afterwards, even if the power is out.

Marks caters specifically to resort and condo communities in the Florida area and has deployed Meraki in several other properties, as well. “Solar WiFi is just ideal for resorts,” he says. “Particularly because not everybody has it. It gives them a competitive advantage in this market. And it's nice for them – and for us – to say we're going 'green'.”

When we spoke to Marks it was Spring Break in Florida, and he was watching the college kids on the beach with their iPhones and laptops. “They are eating it up. There was no internet here last year.”

In particular, Marks noted on his Meraki Dashboard that usage on iPhones on many of his clients' networks was way up recently. He chalks it up to sunbathers on the beach who – despite the lack of a 3G network on this barrier island – are finally able to stay connected, even as they unwind.

