

# Immigrants sending home less cash

By **SATTA SARMAH**  
SENTINEL STAFF WRITER

At Caribbean AirMail, a money-wiring service on Pine Hills Road, Haitian immigrant Dagueoe Baptiste took \$30 out of his wallet and placed it on the counter.

Baptiste, who has lived in the U.S. for 13 years, was coming to the business weekly to send money to his parents and six children in Haiti.

But the slumping U.S. economy is making it more difficult for him to support them — and himself.

“Now I don’t send more [money] because food is expensive and gas is expensive,” said Baptiste, who has

been doing odd jobs such as landscaping and housekeeping after being laid off from his construction job.

According to a study released this month by the Inter-American Development Bank in Washington, the U.S. economic decline will cause remittances — money sent from immigrants to their home countries — to decrease in Latin America and the Caribbean for the first time this decade.

Immigrants will send \$67.5 billion in 2008 compared with \$66.5 billion in 2007, according to the study. Adjusted for inflation, that’s almost 2 percent less. The decrease could have an impact on the economies of coun-

tries such as Haiti, Honduras and El Salvador, where remittances make up a significant percentage of the gross domestic product.

The rising costs of basic necessities such as food and gas, increasing unemployment rates and the weak U.S. dollar have caused much of the decline.

Local money-transfer services have experienced the downturn firsthand.

Louna Veillard, a clerk at Caribbean AirMail, said transfers have decreased to 15 a day from almost 60 a day just a few years ago. She is seeing more \$20 and \$30 transfers from customers — a big drop from the usual amounts. And the \$6 charge

eats into that.

“We’ve lost a lot of customers over the last three months,” she said. “Some days I only make \$47 profit.”

Transfer services catering to the Hispanic community also have experienced a decline.

Lisbert Delfin, a clerk at Mexico Transfer on Oak Ridge Road, said her company is down to an average of three customers a day.

The company has a small booth inside a dollar store called La Campana. Even the store’s owner, Maria Herrera, said she rarely uses the service. She can’t remember the last time she sent money to her parents in Colombia.

“There’s no money,” she

said. “It has to go to food and rent.”

The weak U.S. dollar has forced families receiving remittances to cut back on basic necessities, a problem that Herrera’s parents are experiencing.

“They can’t eat equal to what they were eating last year,” she said.

The difference is so stark that one Caribbean AirMail customer, Charles Benedict, a truck driver from Pine Hills, sighed in disbelief when the clerk told him it would cost \$177 to send a 110-pound bag of rice and a few cans of beans to his sisters in Haiti.

Gregory Watson, coordinator of the remittances pro-

gram at Inter-American Development Bank, said despite the economic slump, immigrants will continue to send remittances.

“They do see this as a primary, fundamental obligation,” Watson said. “They’re going to find a way to do this no matter what.”

Until the economy improves, helping relatives abroad will continue to be a hardship for people such as Baptiste.

“I don’t know when I’ll send money again because I don’t know if I’ll have a job tomorrow,” he said.

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RED HUBER/ORLANDO SENTINEL FILE

Joy Wray attends an Orange County Commission meeting on Sept. 30 that focused on neighborhood issues involving protesters.

## ANTHONY

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### Is the grand jury open to the public?

No. What happens before a grand jury is secret. By law, witnesses, jurors and prosecutors are not allowed to talk about testimony. If they do, they may be held in contempt of court.

The media is not allowed in the grand jury proceedings. This is to ensure the witnesses and jurors are free from outside pressures.

However, participants can speak about the proceeding once the grand jury makes a decision.

### What could happen?

After witnesses are questioned and evidence is presented, the jurors will talk about what they heard and will make a decision. It takes only 12 jurors to agree when deciding what to do.

The jury could opt for a lesser degree of murder, such as manslaughter.

They can issue a “true bill,” which becomes an indictment once it’s filed with the court. The indictment remains sealed to the public until authorities

take the defendant into custody, which could happen the same day.

If jurors agree there isn’t enough evidence, they can issue a “no-true bill,” which means no indictment.

### What happens after a no-true bill?

Prosecutors can opt to present the case again.

There is no statute of limitations for murder charges, so the state can pursue them at any time.

Bianca Prieto of the Sentinel staff contributed to this report. Sarah Lundy can be reached at [slundy@orlandosentinel.com](mailto:slundy@orlandosentinel.com) or 407-420-6218.

## LIVING

FROM PAGE B1

Kissimmee. “We have nothing to relate to that.”

Lundell said the hardships of 75 years ago when millions of Americans lost jobs seem so remote that it’s tough to imagine a world without the electronic gadgets and other material goods of today. But it has crept into his thoughts.

“It has to be in the back of your mind,” Lundell said. “I’d like to think we could cope.”

Schmidt’s husband, Don, 85, wonders whether young people such as Lundell realize just what it is like to worry about every scrap of food.

If he and his siblings didn’t finish their hot cereal at breakfast, his mother chilled it, cut it into cubes and fried it up for lunch.

### ‘A lot of luxuries’

“That would be hard to take,” said Mary Dodd, 25, a server at the Crooked Bayou restaurant in downtown Orlando. “We have a lot of luxuries today.”

Dodd compares the creature comforts she now takes for granted to the Depression-

era stories her great-grandmother told her, including the times she cut out photos of watches and taped them to her wrist, pretending she had something nice to wear.

“That’s sad,” said Tabitha Maneti, 21, who works with Dodd.

Maneti said she wasn’t sure how she would cope if she had to drastically curb her spending.

“I like to shop. It makes me happy,” she said. “We’re brats. We’re all spoiled brats today.”

The generation that lived through the Depression was the first American generation that feared it would wind up worse off than the previous one, said Kriste Lindenmeyer, professor of history at the University of Maryland, Baltimore County.

That made a comfortable, middle-class lifestyle an even more desirable goal for those who survived the Great Depression.

“I think that is why they worked so hard as parents of the baby boom generation to make that middle-class ideal a reality for their children,” said Lindenmeyer, author of *The Greatest Generation Grows Up: American Child-*

*hood in the 1930s.*

It led, Lindenmeyer said, to the notion of a “protected childhood” for those younger than 18.

But has that “protected childhood” led to a coddled existence for those born after World War II?

“I think that [other] generations also have grit and determination,” Lindenmeyer said. “I don’t think that there is necessarily anything special about the innate character of the people who came of age in the 1930s and 1940s.”

### Digging ditches for \$25

Melbourne resident Nicholas Evans, 88, has his doubts.

He saw how the Depression wiped out the family’s confectionary shop in Ohio. After

that, his father had to take any work he could find.

“I remember my dad digging ditches for \$25 a week,” Evans said. “He’d dig sewers in the middle of the winter, standing in icy water.”

When there was no shoveling left to do, he shined shoes.

“How many people would do that today?” Evans asked.

It’s a question that has begun to trouble Brandon Miller, a 28-year-old software engineer from Orlando.

Miller said he is careful with money, can put off major purchases and works hard. But he adds: “I haven’t gone without anything I need.”

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## That bargain home may not really be one

By **SCOTT WYMAN**  
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SUN-SENTINEL

Real-estate ads these days include listing after listing of bargain-basement prices. But those who buy a home in a foreclosure or a pre-foreclosure sale should know that future property bills may be no bargain.

Just because someone snags a home at a low price doesn’t mean the tax bill will tumble. Property taxes could be as high as ever.

Foreclosures and short sales — in which lenders take less than what is owed on the mortgage and forgive part or all of the remaining debt to avoid foreclosure — represent a large share of the real-estate market as more owners are unable to keep up with mortgage payments. But that doesn’t matter when local property appraiser offices draw up the tax rolls.

In fact, state regulations bar counties from factoring in foreclosures and other distressed sales in which the seller is forced to accept less money than the market price. Appraisers and some

real-estate agents worry that unsuspecting buyers will expect a tax windfall.

Buyers traditionally can expect their new home will be assessed at about 85 percent of the purchase price for property taxes. When a home is purchased as a distressed sale, it is assessed based on regular sales of similar homes in the area.

The tax difference can add up.

Say someone pays \$200,000 for a home. The home likely would be assessed at \$170,000 so the property taxes would be about \$2,700 after home-stead exemptions are deducted.

Then assume this wasn’t a standard transaction, but rather a foreclosure or short sale. Similar homes in the neighborhood are valued at \$300,000. That tax bill could top \$5,400.

State law is specific that foreclosures can’t be used in setting property values.

Short sales aren’t mentioned by name, but property appraisers consider them financially distressed sales and do not use them to set tax values.

## Deliveryman fires shots at driver in his stolen van

By **AMY L. EDWARDS**  
SENTINEL STAFF WRITER

A newspaper deliveryman whose van was stolen in Orlando last week spotted his vehicle in Longwood on Monday and went after the alleged thief in a chase that involved gunfire.

Longwood police caught up with the driver of the stolen van, identified as Dennis Vazquez, 41. Vazquez was arrested on charges of grand theft auto, resisting arrest and driving on a suspended license. Vazquez also was wanted in Orange County for violating probation.

According to Longwood police, the unidentified van owner was near a Wendy’s restaurant when he spotted his van in the parking lot, occupied by a man identified by police as Vazquez.

The owner approached the van and confronted Vazquez, who drove away. He spotted his van a second time and again confronted Vazquez.

Vazquez took off, and the man followed. The two drove down State Road 434 and through side streets. As they drove down Shomate Drive, the deliveryman fired several shots.

Vazquez abandoned the van at Shomate, which is a dead end, and ran. The deliveryman called police, and officers found Vazquez nearby.

No one was hurt. Police said the deliveryman told them Vazquez pointed a gun at him.

Vazquez was booked into the Seminole County Jail.

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## Man shot dead near OBT

Orange County detectives are investigating a shooting that left one man dead early Saturday morning at the Waterways Apartments off Orange Blossom Trail.

Ronald Rodriguez, 22, was shot numerous times and found in the apartment courtyard about 12:20 a.m., according to reports. He was taken to Orlando Regional Medical Center, where he later died, deputies said.

Witnesses told investigators they saw a man running

away from the courtyard after the shooting. The K-9 unit was able to track the suspect’s scent to an area near Holden and Rio Grande avenues, but then lost it.

No arrests have been made. Earlier this year, Horacio Lopez Sanchez, 31, was found shot to death at the apartment-complex entrance. Deputies think he was the victim of an attempted robbery that turned deadly.

— **BIANCA PRIETO** and **AMY L. EDWARDS**