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ARTFUL REVIVAL
How the power of the creative spirit is energizing Florida’s cities

FINDING FLORIDA
LAUREN GROFF’S LITERARY PATH TO HOME

DEFYING GRAVITY
SEA AND SKY INSPIRE SARASOTA SCHOOL’S SOARING DESIGNS

LENS OF MEMORY
RECALLING ANDY SWEET AND THE LOST WORLD OF SOUTH BEACH

BREAKING BARRIERS
JERALDINE WILLIAMS ON A LIFE OF FIRSTS

A REFUGEE’S JOURNEY
FROM BAGHDAD TO JACKSONVILLE
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Finding shared values

T

hree times a year I have the privilege of writing comments in this space. Usually, I want to celebrate a program we are funding, or highlight the theme of this edition of FORUM, or bid farewell to a colleague like Jon Wilson, who has graced these pages with his skillful and perceptive writing for too many years to count.

But today I want to say “thank you” to our members; a deep and sincere thank you for your support of the humanities and the Council over the years. You have inspired a deeper understanding of, and commitment to, Florida and have allowed the Council to support community partners who share the state’s history, literature, culture, and personal stories.

I sometimes wonder what motivates you to be so generous. Our recent surveys show you love reading FORUM, but I sense you believe in something more fundamental; that the humanities are indispensable for a free and diverse society to thrive and we all need to stand together to make the case.

When the National Endowment for the Humanities was created in 1965, one of its sponsors, Congressman Frank Thompson, said this in support of the legislation: “If we have no intellectual, aesthetic, or moral opportunities as we move into automation, we will be, indeed, a sick society, and much of the sickness…is due to the fact many people lack that purpose which comes from values deeper than power.”

Finding the purpose which comes from values deeper than power describes what the humanities offer that other forms of education cannot. This is why everyone who cares about the development of our next generation should call their school boards and demand that the humanities be taught. It is why libraries, museums, and historical societies ought to be supported. Helping us all find that purpose which comes from values deeper than power is the humanities’ gift to democracy. It is the source of wisdom and vision in our citizens. Power, whether measured by wealth, political influence, celebrity, or military might, is not and never has been.

At its core, the humanities help us better understand what truly matters to each of us and offer some insight as to what matters to others. This deeper human understanding allows us to discover shared values, and that is the heart of building community. As the eminent Judge Learned Hand wrote, “the spirit of liberty is the spirit which seeks to understand the minds of other men and women.”

Thank you, members, for taking part in this cause. And thank you, Jon Wilson, for crafting your words so carefully for so long.

Steve Seibert

We would like to acknowledge the generous support of the National Endowment for the Humanities and the State of Florida, Department of State, Division of Cultural Affairs and the Florida Council on Arts and Culture.
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Lourdes Alvarez, left, Marina Williams, and Evan Williams pose for our cover in front of artist Ricky Watts’ mural, one of many created during St. Petersburg’s annual SHINE festival. Watts, based in northern California, painted this work in 2015 during SHINE’s first year. Marina and Evan co-own ARTpool, a gallery space and boutique shop in the Grand Central District, and Lourdes works alongside them. Special thanks to Marina and Evan’s dog, Franklin, who sat patiently through the three-hour photo shoot. Photography by Chris Zuppa.
Igniting a spark in the center of it all

Take a look at an historic photograph of any American downtown, be it little more than a village’s dusty crossroads or the heart of a growing metropolis, and you’ll see the bustling signs of life in progress:

Apron-clad shopkeepers make change behind counters crammed with life’s necessities; farmers peddle the produce of their fields from the backs of carts; crowds in their Sunday best mingle in the town square for a concert, a speech, a picnic.

It was the act of people gathering together that gave vibrancy to these town centers of yore: to buy and sell, to worship, gossip, debate, commiserate, create, laugh.

And then came the post-World War II years: Highways and unlimited gas enticed us to the golden promise of grassy suburbs and mega malls. Little by little, businesses shuttered, and the downtowns began to empty; by the ’70s the lights were dim, if not completely out.

But lo and behold, the American downtown wasn’t dead, only desperately in need of revival.

In this issue of FORUM, our cover story highlights the vibrant reawakening of urban centers around our state, thanks to the power of creative, entrepreneurial and civic-minded Floridians with a passion for arts and culture.

Travel with us to Miami, St. Petersburg, Deland, Gainesville, Pensacola, and Eau Gallie — from Wynwood Walls, to the Dali Museum, to the Florida Mural Trail — as we tell the story of how the determination and imagination of artists, visionary thinkers, city leaders, and businesspeople have sparked a migration back to the city center, where a collective, creative spirit is thriving.

Speaking of the creative spirit, two-time National Book Award-nominated writer Lauren Groff kicks off our occasional series of essays about Florida, State of Inspiration. When this native of Cooperstown, New York, moved to Gainesville with her husband a dozen years ago, she was a reluctant Floridian, and her essay chronicles how the words of fellow writers helped her learn to deeply appreciate the wonders of her adopted state.

Also in this issue, we introduce Florida By Design, in which we explore unique Florida architecture styles. We begin with a look the Sarasota School (also known as Sarasota Modern), which pays homage to the sea and sky and climate of our coasts with its walls of windows and soaring ceilings. And we step inside a recent example, which came to life through the shared vision of a noted architect and owners.

Here’s a story that’s bittersweet for me because it’s about a person I knew slightly, and a place, my hometown, that I know so well. Years ago, before South Beach, became synonymous with supermodels and super flashy clubs, it was the far less fashionable haven of Eastern European Jewish retirees, many of whom were Holocaust survivors. In the late ’70s and early ’80s, their singular world was chronicled by the young photographer and Beach native, Andy Sweet, whose affinity for his subjects was reflected in every frame, and his partner-in-photography, Gary Monroe.

Tragically, Sweet was murdered at age 28, and for years much of his work was lost. But through the perseverance of his family, a new book, and a soon-to-be widely released documentary, his images of that now-vanished world live on.

There are so many more stories within these pages, and we hope you enjoy each one, but before I close, I’d like to mark a couple of transitions.

Jon Wilson, who has been so pivotal to FORUM and the Florida Humanities Council for the last dozen years, is retiring as communications consultant. You will still see his contributions in our Florida Book Awards issue, which he’s helped steer for years, but he’ll be spending more time traveling, enjoying grandparenthood, and myriad other interests. I will be forever grateful to Jon, who made me feel so welcome when I came aboard a year ago, for his writing and editing talents, his wit, and his unfailing kindness. And I am so pleased to welcome a new colleague, communications consultant Tom Scherberger. Like Jon, Tom is a veteran of decades at the St. Petersburg (now Tampa Bay) Times. Tom’s freelance experience is wide and varied, including writing for Visit Florida’s website (and FHC’s own Walking Tours) and the AARP Florida Bulletin. He also was communications director at USF St. Petersburg, where he got to know the Florida Humanities Council and some of our scholars. We are thrilled he’ll be joining us as we work, issue by issue, to make your FORUM magazine the best reflection of our state it can be.

Thank you so much for reading, and as always, for supporting the humanities in Florida.

Jacki Levine

Have an idea or feedback for FORUM? We’d love it if you’d share it with us. Write Jacki Levine at jlevine@flahum.org
FORUM Contributors

Basma Alawee, born in Baghdad, Iraq, arrived in the United States in 2010. Trained in Iraq as an engineer, since moving to Jacksonville she has worked as a math, science and social studies teacher at Foundation Academy, as a volunteer for World Relief and Lutheran Social Services, and as a refugee advocate with the Florida Immigrant Coalition. She is the co-author of a handbook, Learning from Within: Stories in the New World, and has been named recipient of a 2019 OneJax Humanitarian Award. She lives in Jacksonville with her husband and two daughters.

Ron Cunningham is former editorial page editor of The Gainesville Sun. A University of Florida graduate and former editor-in-chief of the Independent Florida Alligator, he was a reporter at the Fort Lauderdale Sun Sentinel, higher education reporter at The Gainesville Sun, and Tallahassee bureau chief for The New York Times Florida Newspapers.

Bill DeYoung is the author of Skyway: The True Story of Tampa Bay’s Signature Bridge and the Man Who Brought It Down and Phil Gernhard, Record Man. Nationally recognized for his music journalism, he has been a writer and editor at various Florida and Georgia newspapers for more than three decades.

Lauren Groff is the author of The Monsters of Templeton, shortlisted for the Orange Prize for New Writers, Delicate Edible Birds, a collection of stories, and Arcadia, a New York Times Notable Book and winner of the Medicci Book Club Prize, and finalist for the L.A. Times Book Award. Her third novel, Fates and Furies, was a finalist for the National Book Award in Fiction, among many other awards worldwide. Her most recent collection of stories, Florida, was also a finalist for the National Book Award. In 2017, she was named by Granta Magazine as one of the Best of Young American Novelists of her generation. In 2018, she received a Guggenheim fellowship in Fiction. She lives in Gainesville with her husband, two sons, and dog.

Seyeon Hwang from Seoul, South Korea, is a fourth-year doctoral student in urban and regional planning at the University of Florida. Her research looks at the impact of the global refugee crisis on cities on a local level through a case study of Jacksonville. She earned a Master of International Development from University of Pittsburgh; Master of Public Policy from Seoul National University, and a Bachelor of Arts in political science from Yonsei University in Seoul.

Nila Do Simon is a native Floridian whose writing has appeared in Marie Claire magazine, The New York Times and Flamingo Magazine. She is also the editor-in-chief of Venice, a luxury lifestyle magazine covering Fort Lauderdale. She has won several Florida Magazine Association awards for her feature and headline writing. When she’s not writing, editing and photographing, Nila has been known to throw a few elbows on the basketball court, hit a few forehand winners, and toss a semi-perfect spiral.

Barbara Peters Smith writes about health and aging for the Sarasota Herald-Tribune and edits its Health+Fitness section, and has served on its editorial board. She has a bachelor’s degree from Northwestern University’s Medill School of Journalism and master’s in American studies from the University of South Florida. She has been a fellow in the Gerontological Society of America’s journalism program, and at Columbia University’s Age Boom Academy.

Chris Zuppa is a visual storyteller who has produced videos for clients including Hillsborough County Schools, Moffitt Cancer Center, and Visit Florida. He was a photojournalist for the Tampa Bay Times (formerly the St. Petersburg Times) for nearly 12 years. He won first place in the news video division at the 2013 National Press Photographers Association’s Best of Photojournalism competition and a regional Emmy as part of a team for a video project about high school football in Pahokee.
From ‘selfies’ to cowmen, these programs highlight state’s heritage

By Jon Wilson

History, contemporary life, literature, and photography are among the subjects that Florida Humanities Council community grants are helping showcase this year.

All the open-to-the-public programs are engaging and enlightening. Check out the samples below to see.

Meanwhile, you can learn more about our grants and how to apply for one at floridahumanities.org/what-we-do/grants/.

Preserving Gainesville’s history, one synchronic selfie at a time

The 21rst century brought us the age of the “selfie,” named the 2013 word of the year. It is, of course, a photo that you take of yourself, usually with a cellphone. Sometimes they are frivolous, but young photographers also are recognizing the phenomenon as a powerful way to preserve history. They are creating Synchronica: Framing Time, a visual art and humanities project of 150 self-portraits and statements by high-school age youngsters in Gainesville.

The ambitious project intends to engage the community in recording its shared history on the 150th anniversary of the city’s incorporation. It also will produce a time-stamp connecting today’s Gainesville to the future city. The word “synchronic” refers to a thing that exists in a moment in time. The cellphone camera “provides a mechanism of self-portraiture unlike any since perhaps the invention of the looking glass,” says project director Russell Etling.

As part of the program, high school art teachers will distance students from the superficial nature of selfies by giving them historical context to the art of self-portraiture — which has existed since daguerreotype pioneer Robert Cornelius took a picture of himself in 1839. Gainesville’s Parks, Recreation, and Cultural Affairs Department is the program sponsor. The photos will be exhibited in the Historic Thomas Center from April through August 2019.

They risked their lives on chug boats to freedom

Named for the noise that their battered engines made, “chug boats” carried Cubans to freedom during the repressive Castro years. Usually packed to the gunwales, these makeshift vessels had to slog 90 miles across the Florida Straits as passengers prayed for safety and dreamed of deliverance to America. Once ashore, the boats languished on the beach or drifted away as nautical trash.

Now they are part of history.

The National Park Service and Key West Tropical Forest and Botanical Gardens are preserving the chugs and their American stories. The nine vessels on display at the gardens, along with such items as medicine and children’s backpacks, offer rare insights into the lives of the refugees and the social and economic conditions in Cuba. Printed material and audio tours tell the tale of each chug and its passengers, and now, with a grant from the Florida Humanities Council, new signage will further highlight the history.

The collection has been on display since 2009, says Misha McRAE, Key West Tropical Forest and Botanical Gardens executive director. “The grant is to upgrade the signage about each of these chugs — to better tell the story that people put their lives into these boats to get across the 90 miles.”

The collection was gathered starting in 2008. Since Key West was the site of many of the landings, McRAE says, a couple of the chugs were recovered from auto junkyards while others landed in backyard beaches and donated by residents. “You start to get an idea of how desperate they must have been, to decide to cross with 20 people crammed into a boat the size of a Honda Civic,” says Josh Marano, archaeological technician at Biscayne National Park. “Not a lot of people really want to talk about that horrendous journey, but these vessels are now tools for discussion.”

The Cuban “chug boats” exhibit at the Key West Tropical Forest & Botanical Garden illustrates the peril Cuban refugees faced on their voyage.
Taking an artistic look at Florida’s cattle culture

Florida’s past and present cattle industry is one of the state’s most popular subjects. Books, lectures, tours, and art celebrate the romantic and rugged lifestyle of Florida’s cowmen, as they are called in Florida’s cattle industry.

The Albin Polasek Museum and Sculpture Gardens in Winter Park is hosting a collaborative exhibition with the Florida Cattlemen’s Association. It showcases a legacy five centuries old. Lay of the Land: The Art of Florida’s Cattle Culture, focuses on the art of the people sometimes called “crackers.”

The objects and art on loan come from the association’s vast network of members and their private collections. These cattle families are rich in Florida history and include Seminoles and other minority groups who founded and helped settle early Florida.

The exhibition runs through April 14, 2019.

Orlando series pairs regional writers with authors from around the world

Orlando’s Urban Think Foundation, a major cultural engine in central Florida, has become a friend to accomplished regional writers. Urban Think’s program, Burrow Press, offers a quarterly reading series called Functionally Literate. It pairs award-winning writers from around the world with top authors from Florida’s heartland. For example, a November 2018 event featured Orlando’s first poet laureate, Susan Lilley, with Linda Buckmaster, poet laureate of Belfast, Maine, and author of Space Heart, a hybrid memoir that includes nature writing and a cultural history of 1960s Space Coast Florida.

Since its founding in 2010, the nonprofit Burrow Press has provided more than 1,000 opportunities for writers to publish and share their work. It is one of the only independent literary presses in Florida and its stated mission is to enrich central Florida’s cultural landscape and to publish the best contemporary literature by both new and established writers.

“Functionally Literate is one of the most energetic, creative, and successful reading series in the country. They seem poised for continued and sustained national attention,” says author Jeff VanderMeer, an alumnus of the Functionally Literate series.

Two more reading series events take place at various arts venues in March and April, 2019. Learn more at burrowpress.com/fl.

Tampa photo arts museum reaches out to emerging, minority artists

Worthy, even entrancing art sometimes falls into obscurity because showcase venues are not readily accessible. The Florida Museum of Photographic Arts in Tampa intends to remedy that.

Its gallery and speaker series will give voice to artists in the community who do not have access to gallery shows or exhibition opportunities. The series specifically wants to represent minorities and local and emerging artists.

The program includes lectures about visual representations of race, gender and femininity; the work of prominent names in contemporary photography, such as Andy Warhol and Yasumasa Marimura; personal experience after a family member is diagnosed with Alzheimer’s; and works focusing on women in a street photography series.

The museum has developed numerous community programs such as the free Children’s Literacy Through Photography project for at-risk youngsters and fee-based adult photography classes, workshops, and children’s summer camps.

The series runs through Oct. 15, 2019.
For more about the museum, visit fmopa.org.
Florida Humanities Council welcomes five new board members

DANNY BERENBERG, Jacksonville, is founding partner of GiftsCounsel.com. He counsels clients in strategic planning, capital campaign planning and management, major gift solicitations, donor research, and development system audits. He is a graduate of the University of Minnesota Law School.

SALLY BRADSHAW, Tallahassee, is owner-operator of Tallahassee’s Midtown Reader, an independent bookstore. She served two terms on the Florida Board of Education. She was Governor Jeb Bush’s chief of staff and was senior advisor to his presidential campaign. She earned a political science degree from George Washington University.

THOMAS LUZIER, Sarasota, is a Board Certified Real Estate Lawyer and a Sarasota native. He is a partner at Williams, Parker, Harrison, Dietz & Getzen. He is past chair of the Board of Trustees of the Marie Selby Botanical Gardens and served on the Board of Directors of the John and Mable Ringling Museum of Art Foundation. He is a graduate of Cumberland School of Law and Emory University.

JANET SNYDER MATTHEWS, Sarasota, is a scholar, author, and historical consultant. She was an Associate Director for the National Register of Historic Places and State Historic Preservation Officer for the Florida Department of State. She earned a doctorate and master’s degree at Florida State University, and a bachelor’s degree at Kent State University.

PATRICK YACK, Tallahassee, is Executive Director of Florida Public Media, an association of 24 public radio and TV stations. He is also an adjunct lecturer at the University of Florida. He spent 30 years as a newspaper reporter and editor and has been a Pulitzer Prize juror and guest commentator for NPR Weekend Edition. He is a graduate of Southern Methodist University.

What we’re watching

View these videos at floridahumanities.org/blog

The Florida Humanities Council’s video archives are filled with gems worth seeing — or hearing — again. These two short videos and one podcast (below), created with the support of FHC, are sure to entertain and inform.

The Springs: Jewels of Florida

This documentary educates while reminding you why Florida’s springs are singularly awe-inspiring. Visually beautiful, this 2013 film, created by Makayla Wheeler, is a primer on the springs and why they are so vulnerable and worth preserving.

A Bear Story

There are bears in these woods, and this segment from the Florida Wildlife Corridor Expedition documentary invites you to visit them close up yet from a safe distance. It features an interview with researcher Joe Guthrie, who presents the story of the University of Kentucky’s bear research in Central Florida.

Florida After WWII

Highways, air conditioning and pesticides: According to University of South Florida St. Petersburg historian Gary Mormino, these were three of the developments that transformed Florida, for better or worse, into an American paradise after World War II. In this podcast, Mormino is interviewed about Florida’s development, the subject of his 2005 book Land of Sunshine, State of Dreams.

What we’re reading

In each issue of FORUM, we share the joy of reading with a book suggestion by a Florida book lover.

In this issue, Jill Rourke, head librarian at the Apalachicola Margaret Key Library, recommends two favorites.

“Historical novels are a delicious blend of history and the imagination, peeling back time and space and often — through great characters — letting us view history through a slightly different lens,” she writes.

“The Underground Railroad” by Colson Whitehead blew my socks off! Whitehead envisions the Underground Railroad as an actual working railway operating on a network of tracks and tunnels beneath Southern soil.

Young Cora risks everything to escape the shackles of slavery. It is a novel of terror, cruelty, humanity, and courage beyond measure."

Her next selection is The Women of the Castle by Jessica Shattuck. “It chronicles a trio of women enduring the hardships of post-WWII Europe, the challenges they face and the sometimes brutal choices they must make to survive,” she says. “A story of dark secrets and painful revelations, this novel is ultimately about love, forgiveness and the bonds of shared experience.”
A pioneer’s journey from The Bottom

Integrating a university, first lady of FAMU, meeting Mandela — Jeraldine Williams recounts her life out front

Interview by Jacki Levine

When Jeraldine Williams was growing up in East Ybor City during the post-World War II years, her mother would take her to downtown Tampa every Wednesday for “lessons.”

“She showed me the signs that said ‘colored’ and ‘white only,’ right there on the water fountains. I had to learn that,” says Williams. “I was a black child being taught by my mother.”

Beginning with her first ancestor captured into slavery, Williams says, “each generation taught the succeeding generation to survive.”

While Williams’ parents schooled her in safely navigating life in segregated Florida, they also instilled a deep self-confidence, nurtured by her multicultural neighborhood, dubbed The Bottom, because the land sloped downward to the city’s lowest point.

“They made me feel like I could do everything,” she says.

So that’s what this lawyer/journalist/civic activist has done.

Jeraldine Williams, born in 1946 — in the first month of the first year of the Baby Boom generation — has carved a path lined with firsts:

First African-American to attend the University of Florida’s College of Journalism and Communications; first African-American to win a medal in the a national William Randolph Hearst Writing Competition; first African-American female manager of Freedom Federal Savings and Loan in Tampa, and, the youngest ever first lady at Florida A & M University.

In her unpublished memoir Up to The Bottom, she recounts these firsts, and her time as a general assignment reporter for the St. Petersburg Times; earning an MBA from Clark Atlanta University; juggling her role as First Lady at FAMU with motherhood and law school at Florida State University; a stint as staff attorney for the Florida Department of Insurance; owner and publisher of Tallahasee’s Capitol Outlook newspaper.

All by the age of 35.

Williams’ trail led her to Africa, first in the ’80s, to connect with her “genetic continent;” then, in 1994, she was tapped as a special observer for South Africa’s first post-apartheid all-race national election.

Moved by her desire to help as the country transitioned from apartheid to democracy, she returned a few months later and stayed for five years.

That’s when she got to know President Nelson Mandela. Among her treasures is a photo of Mandela wishing a Merry Christmas by phone to her disbelieving mother as Williams looks on.

But that’s another story, among the many this member of the UF College of Journalism and Communications Alumni Hall of Fame member and winner of the Tampa NAACP’s Living Legend Award shares.

Your life began in East Ybor City, in a neighborhood called The Bottom. How did growing up there prepare you for all that came later?

Ybor City had many cultures living there: Sicilians, African-Americans, Cubans. The community and the church and the school encouraged me on every level.

My father owned a mechanic’s shop one block from our house, the only black man in our area to own a business structure. Everybody looked up to Judge Williams. To this day, when home I introduce myself as Mr. Judge’s daughter.

I did not know what the physical and emotional landscapes of life were for “colored” people in the South. Mamma did. Trips downtown with my mother were opportunities for lessons about separation of the races.

By the time I was 4, I had learned survival skills … When I boarded city buses, Mamma instructed me to pay my fare and move to the back. If back seats were all taken, and whites occupied one side of a two-seat bench toward the front, I had to stand. I did not understand why I could not sit in an empty seat. Those were powerfully harsh lessons for a preschool child, taught by a loving mother with a sweet spirit.

As black students in Hillsborough County, we knew we got the white students’ used books. Rev. Clarence Williams, who lived across the street, could only read Biblical scriptures;
however, he brought me books — advanced for my grade level — from the homes of white students who had discarded them.

From 1963 to 1967, black and Sicilian men checked with Daddy to ensure he had the financial resources to keep me enrolled at the University of Florida.

In 1963, you became the first African-American to attend UF’s journalism school, one of 14 black students to attend UF that year. What was that like?

I was 17 years old and was heading to college during the firestorm of the civil rights movement. A year before, two people had been killed in riots during the integration of the University of Mississippi. George Wallace was calling out troopers to stop integration in Alabama. This was the backdrop against which I made the decision to go to UF.

My parents were afraid for me, but my father was going to protect me. They attended UF’s family orientation weekend and stayed in the dorm with me. They went with me to make a statement: “Don’t you bother her.” And my parents drove up every other weekend to make sure I was all right.

You’ve said you learned an important lesson at UF that has served you through your life. Tell me about that.

I was a top student, but I didn’t have it when it came to my physical science class. I went to my professor. I thought, this man is being paid to provide a service to me and I’m going to ask him for help. I said to him, “I’ve got to make at least a C, but I don’t know what you’re talking about.” He said, “Jeraldine, meet me in the classroom every Saturday at 10 a.m.” He responded the way I wanted him to respond. Before that, I couldn’t do that kind of thing. By the time I left school, I am figuring I will ask for whatever I want. I learned that bravery and assertiveness at UF.

During your senior year, you became the first African-American to win a medal in the prestigious national William Randolph Hearst Writing Competition. How did that come about?

I'd gained confidence writing for the black newspaper in Tampa, the Florida Sentinel Bulletin, from 1959 through 1963.

But what made the difference was the advice I got to turn tart lemons into sweet lemonade.

In those days, the UF journalism students had a class at The Gainesville Sun. One day our class went to lunch at a nearby restaurant. It’s 1967 and I’m the only black in the class. When we sat down, the waitress placed a place setting for everyone except me. I looked around and nobody acted like they noticed. I said I was leaving.

When we got back to the office, our professor, Hugh Cunningham, told Ed Johnson, The Sun’s editor, what happened.

“Let’s find a way to make this meaningful,” Johnson said to me. ”I want you to write me a three-part series on town and gown, police community relationships, and public accommodations.”

With those stories, I qualified to be among the elite journalism students who could take the national timed examination, the final part of the competition.

Professor Cunningham timed me. In the end, I did a jam-up job but forgot to put the dateline on the story and so I came in second. That taught me a big lesson: When you put on your shoes, tie your shoelaces.

Jeraldine Williams
Occupation: Semi-retired attorney
Home: Plant City
Family: daughter, attorney Salesia Smith-Gordon; son, engineer Walter L. Smith II, and grandson, Walter L. Smith III

Jeraldine Williams takes in the view on the University of Florida campus after speaking at a Martin Luther King Jr. commemoration event.

PHOTO BY JACKI LEVINE
My competition scores then were the highest our university had ever earned. The news report was carried by the Associated Press with a picture of me, Vice President Hubert Humphrey, and William Randolph Hearst Jr.

I sent the Hearst prize check back from Washington, D.C. to Daddy in The Bottom. Nearly all of the residents had a chance to touch that $1,500 check. It was like a million dollars to them. Professor Cunningham told me that the Hearst Foundation board said they had never seen such a soiled check. I smiled. I knew that The Bottom had celebrated again.

**In 1977, you became first lady of Florida A&M University, when your then-husband, Walter Smith, was named president. What were the highlights of your experience?**

I was the youngest FAMU first lady ever — eight-to-10 years older than the senior students. I felt empowered to reach out and encourage other African Americans, females especially. Also, I challenged male ROTC cadets at the university pool to swim and dive so that they could earn advancement at summer camp. I was honored to represent the university at a state dinner at the White House, when President Jimmy and Rosalynn Carter entertained the king and queen of Jordan.

My choice to attend law school was a matter of elimination. I had already earned an MBA. I decided against a Ph.D. and an M.D. I liked being the hostess with the mostest, and as the mother of an elementary and a middle school student, it was tough on me, but I was determined to finish law school.

**Tell us about the Christmas you spent with Nelson Mandela and his family. I understand you met him through your son, Walter Smith II, who was close friends with his (unofficially) adopted granddaughter.**

His granddaughter invited Walter and me to spend the Christmas holidays with them in Qunu, the village where Mandela grew up.

I told her I would want to surprise the president with a gift. I bought the largest Christmas tree in the country. In the village, his was the only house with electricity so I bought lights for the conifers lining the driveway. I went to a shop and said I need toys. The entire village comes up to Mandela’s house. I got Coca Cola to fly in the largest tent and TV screen in the country, to show movies for the children.

Mandela was asleep when we got there and he awoke at 3:15 a.m. as always to go for his walk. He looked out and saw all these beautiful lights.

In the morning I got dressed to meet the president, but wanted to make sure everything was perfect, so went outside to see.

I walked back in the house and ... there he was. I almost died. He said, “you must be Jere. I awoke to go for my walk, there were all of these twinkling lights. What elves have come to make this possible?”

The next day, Walter and I had lunch with him. That’s when he called my sister and daughter to say Merry Christmas. When he called my mother and said this is Nelson Mandela, she was giving him a fit. At first she didn’t believe it. I was shaking my head and saying, “Oh Lord, please step in!”

**How has Florida changed since you were growing up, and what are the ongoing challenges?**

Florida is more like Ybor City — multi-ethnic. Handling hatred is the ongoing challenge. The scope has broadened to include race, age, religion, sexual preference. Tolerance and patience will prevail over the hatred and desire to discriminate and cause harm.

**You’ve served on the boards of multiple groups benefiting children, founded the East Ybor Historic & Civic Association, and even convinced the city to create a park in your old East Ybor City neighborhood. What is your greatest contribution to your community and state?**

Bequeathing to my children the capacity to identify need and serve in response to that need. As a teenager, I served my state when I qualified to enter, then enrolled into the state’s bastion of segregated higher education.

When I got back from Africa, I told the Lord I wanted to give back every five years. I’ve always exercised, so I trained to do my first marathon, for Lymphoma and Leukemia, in 2001. Five years later, I’m 60, the spirit told me to do 60 miles for my 60 years and raise $6,000 for breast cancer. At 65, OK, I looked at the television, I could see in the background runners in front of the Egyptian pyramids. I raised money and ran a marathon there for children here with disabilities.

**What books would you recommend, besides the Bible?**

Right now, I’m reading Michelle Obama’s autobiography, *Becoming*. For all of us, there are fundamental paths we take toward becoming the best that we can be.

**What’s your advice for a young person starting out?**

As a grandmother, I advise my 14-year old grandson to travel, study, and listen so that he can learn about himself and others. I find that people do not like that with which they are unfamiliar and/or those with whom they have no relations.
Awakened to the wonder of the word

A mesmerizing professor’s passion for literature inspired a student’s own lifetime of teaching

By Sherry Friedlander

Before I enrolled in professor O.B. Emerson’s American literature class as a sophomore at the University of Alabama in the 1960s, I was not an avid reader or a particularly deep thinker. Perhaps I am selling myself short and had more substance than I credit myself with, but I had yet to discover how to tap into my inner latent resources.

Dr. Emerson taught me to do just that: to discover and consider the depth of thought, symbolism, and themes in literature instead of simply considering surface value.

He was well loved and greatly admired, a true Southern gentleman, soft spoken but with a commanding and colorful presence. He took each student on a journey into the personality and personal life and times of each author we studied, and through an intense and thorough analysis of each work.

From the first time I entered his classroom, I was mesmerized. His lectures were full of information that made me want to remain in class and eagerly and excitedly await the next meeting. He inspired me to read everything I could of American literature, and to buy every novel so that I could build my own personal library — a shrine to Dr. Emerson. I could never have imagined myself delving into the work of William Faulkner or James Fenimore Cooper or Herman Melville with such gusto, or wanting to wear T-shirts with portraits of the authors on the front.

Dr. Emerson was in his 50s at the time I took his class; ancient in the eyes of a college sophomore. Short in stature and slight in build, he always dressed in a suit and tie and could easily have passed for a brother of writer Truman Capote with his accent and delivery. I learned he was quite a Faulkner fan. In fact, a popular rumor was that he had somewhat of a Faulkner memorial in his home.

My teacher showed me that I could travel the history of our country through works from different literary periods. And he taught me that they were all there for my taking. Because of him, I became a voracious reader, and today I am even more appreciative of America and its background.

I have taught American literature myself, always with Dr. Emerson and his guidance in mind. I try to emulate his methods for my students and in own my private world of discovery of these classics.

Because of him, I realize that interest in and passion for literature can be awakened at any age with the right approach. He is also responsible for developing my interest in the lives of the authors and the connection between their thoughts and their writing.

Dr. Emerson died in 1990, leaving an incredible legacy. He left warm memories for his students and a monumental reputation for being an enlightening, interesting, effective, motivating, and knowledgeable teacher.

He is with me in most everything I read, teaching me and profoundly enhancing my enjoyment, thoughtful appreciation, rich interpretation, and discovery of new ideas through reading.

Sherry Friedlander was born in Tampa and taught high school English, including for almost 30 years at A.P. Leto High School in Tampa. She has been a staff and adjunct faculty member at Hillsborough Community College for 50 years.
A tale of two cities

The shiny and bright may lure visitors to Fort Lauderdale, but its historic heart captures the imagination

By Nila Do Simon

Contrast flashy new hotels with the nearby Bonnet House Museum and Gardens, a peaceful plantation-style compound built in 1920, an ode to yesteryear with its swans gliding on the lake and playful monkeys hiding in the trees.

Like many millenials, I try not to wake up earlier than I need to. Fort Lauderdale changed that.

You see, the sun reveals itself in more brilliant ways in Fort Lauderdale than in other parts of the world. Here, sunrise might as well be considered the Eighth Wonder of the World, a life-affirming moment reserved for the few who set their alarms for the pre-dawn hours. With an abundance of apologies to the Maldives, Hawaii and Santorini, they ain’t got nothing on Fort Lauderdale’s daybreak.

A seaside metropolis sandwiched in between glitzy Miami to its south and ritzy Palm Beach to the north, Fort Lauderdale has carved its own history as a former rural enclave turned hotspot filled with towering high-rises and cultural institutions. Perhaps it is that mollifying orange sunrise that entrances visitors, beckoning them to call Fort Lauderdale home. Or perhaps there’s more to it. Let’s examine.

When a young Ohioan named Frank Stranahan arrived to a backwater region threaded by rivers and canals in 1893 to run his cousin’s overnight camp and ferry crossing, it’s safe to say he was unaware of the city’s potential. The 27-year-old established himself as a kind businessman who was said to cut fair deals with the local Seminole tribe. Three years after Stranahan’s arrival, real estate...
tycoon Henry Flagler completed the Florida East Coast Railway tracks to Fort Lauderdale, bringing more settlers to this area.

Before the influx of European settlers to Fort Lauderdale, small groups of Native Americans inhabited the area. After the United States secured Florida from the Spanish in 1821, Colonel James Gadsden surveyed Broward County. He wrote that roads would be impractical to build because “the population of the route will probably never be sufficient to contribute to [its maintenance],” which today seems laughable as the city has the 10th-highest population density in the state — and climbing.

In the years following the expansion of the Florida East Coast Railway tracks to Fort Lauderdale, the city became an agricultural distribution center for local farmers.

As Fort Lauderdale developed commercially, so did its reputation — and not always in the most sophisticated way. In the 1960s, Fort Lauderdale earned fame as the nation’s spring break capital, a haven for the revelling collegiates. This reputation was enhanced by the 1960 film “Where the Boys Are,” which gave a Hollywood spin to the city’s spring break shenanigans.

Oh, how times have changed.
Today, Fort Lauderdale is a tale of two cities, where the brand new collides with the traditional and beloved. Go to the beach, and you’ll be welcomed by shiny brands such as the Ritz-Carlton (its restaurant’s brunch includes specially delivered kosher bread from Miami’s famed Zak the Baker) and W Fort Lauderdale (with a seen-and-be-seen rooftop pool that, is, well, revealing). Contrast that with The Bonnet House Museum & Gardens, a peaceful plantation-style compound built in 1920. Located only a few blocks north of the aforementioned hotels, it is an ode to the quiet days of yesteryear with swans gliding on its lake and playful monkeys hiding in its trees.

Head to the city’s downtown and you’ll be met with one of the greatest examples of the new towering over the old, quite literally. Icon Las Olas, a 45-story contemporary apartment building abuts — and hovers over — one of Fort Lauderdale’s long-loved institutions, the two-story Stranahan House Museum, the original trading post and community center built by Stranahan in 1901. It’s a visual dichotomy of what the city has come to represent — how contrasting concepts are able to not only co-exist, but also be neighborly.

Cultural options inhabit every corner of Fort Lauderdale. There’s the Nova Southeastern University Art Museum, which houses a collection of American realist painter William J. Glackens’ works. Music lovers can nod their heads to the beats coming from downtown’s Revolution Live, a gritty venue that has seen performances by the likes of Katy Perry, The Weeknd and Lady Gaga.

And the counterculture is alive and well at FATVillage and MASS District, two artsy neighborhoods catering to a crowd that delights in street art and independent shops. Take Brew Urban Cafe, for example, an amalgamation of a coffee shop with a huge book collection, bar and music venue that shares studio space with a photography company. Or The Wander Shop, a petite retail boutique with specially curated apparel and accessories, whose 27-year-old owner, Melissa Foltz, first started selling items out of a 1963 Airstream Overlander.

To write about Fort Lauderdale and not mention its 165 miles of navigable waterways is to forsake its well-earned nickname as the Venice of America. On any given day, dozens of vessels meander the rivers and Intracoastal Waterway for just a taste of that calm water.

Sure, Fort Lauderdale has several identities, so it’s hard to put a finger on how to define it. To some, it’s this; to others, it’s that. Despite all of its iterations, there’s one thing that remains constant: a sunrise that is the envy of all other sunrises.

Nila Do Simon is the editor-in-chief of Fort Lauderdale’s Venice Magazine.
A quick look at more gems:

Because of Fort Lauderdale’s many facets, it’s best to come prepared with knowledge and context. Download Florida Humanities Council’s free Florida Stories walking tour app floridastories.org, created in partnership with The Fort Lauderdale Historical Society, which gives you insights to the can’t-miss sites of the Venice of America.

Hugh Taylor Birch State Park
3109 E. Sunrise Blvd.
954-564-4521

Adjacent to the famed A1A and a short walk from the glitzy beachside hotel and high-rises, this urban oasis is filled with rustic activities — including paddleboarding, camping and fishing — that should keep you busy for most of the day. There’s even a charming restaurant called Park & Ocean serving casual meals against the backdrop of the Atlantic Ocean.

St. Bart’s Cafe
441 S. Fort Lauderdale Beach Blvd.
954-832-9004

It’s a scientific fact that coffee tastes better when overlooking the ocean. At least that’s how it feels when sipping java at St. Bart’s Cafe, an oceanside eatery with ample sidewalk tables to soak in the rising sun.

Rooftop
1 W. Las Olas Blvd.
954-523-1956

For the best views in the city, there’s no better spot than Rooftop, an aptly named swanky lounge with 4,000 square feet of open-air space atop an eight-floor building. Its posh vibe (think lush foliage and unending views of the bustling Las Olas Boulevard) is enhanced by a hand-crafted cocktail menu and some of the city’s most fashionable people.

Regina’s Farm
1101 Middle River St.
954-465-1900

If you’re lucky enough to be in Fort Lauderdale on a Saturday night, dine at Regina’s Farm, a rustic backyard experience. Regina opens her private home nearly every Saturday night to serve traditional Brazilian food from the Minas Gerais region (all proceeds support the neighborhood church). She recreates her native countryside home, complete with chickens running around the backyard and firepits blazing in pockets of space.

Fort Lauderdale Antique Car Museum
1527 SW First Ave.
954-779-7300

For an area known for boating and beach lifestyle, it’s ironic that one of the world’s best car museums is located here. Known colloquially as the Packard Car Museum, the Fort Lauderdale Antique Car Museum houses the largest collection of Packard cars and memorabilia from 1900 and beyond, as well as an exhibit dedicated to Franklin D. Roosevelt.
Finding a literary trail to love

It took her fellow writers to open the eyes of this reluctant Floridian to the wonders of her state

By Lauren Groff

I was born and raised in Cooperstown, New York, a tiny village that is also the birthplace of the great early American writer James Fenimore Cooper. When I was a nerdy teenager, I read all of Cooper’s work and was so delighted by the sense of depth and history that his books gave to my understanding of my hometown that, afterward, whenever I was preparing to move to a new city, I made it a practice to come to know the place first through literature, preparing for what I was to encounter through the eyes of the writers who had previously loved and written about it.

At 17, I read Jules Verne to understand Nantes, France, where I was an exchange student after high school; I read Emily Dickinson for Amherst, Massachusetts, where I went to college; I read Thomas Hardy and Oscar Wilde and a panoply of greats before my study abroad in Oxford; then, after graduation, I read Edgar Allan Poe for Philadelphia, Mark Twain for the San Francisco Bay Area, and Wallace Stegner for Madison, Wisconsin, where I received my MFA. In 2006, I lived in Louisville, Kentucky, for a post-graduate fellowship and was reading the work of Louisville native Z.Z. Packer when my husband moved home to Gainesville, Florida, and a few months later, I moved to be with him.

Yet my reluctance to live in Florida was so great — and I was, honestly, so tired from my decade of peripatetic life — that I failed to do this most basic task of introduction when my husband and I bought a house in Gainesville. I came to Florida without having first experienced it through the visions of the master storytellers from our state. Because it wasn’t my decision to move here, I felt trapped in Gainesville and, out of some sort of misplaced pique at having to live in
this hot, humid, buggy, and wildly strange environment, for far too long I continued to resolutely ignore Florida literature, and I blame my first years of unhappiness in Florida on my own bizarre pigheadedness. Last, I found that I was so unhappy that I knew I had to do something to change myself; the place sure wasn’t going to change itself for me.

And so I turned to the great solace and nourishment of literature. I started with Oranges, a slender, beautiful nonfiction book by John McPhee about the orange groves in the center of the state, and finished reading it in one sitting, having sustained a tiny revolution in my heart. I finally understood through McPhee that this place was worthy of close, precise, caring attention, which is another name for love.

From McPhee, I expanded to Zora Neale Hurston, whose Their Eyes Were Watching God slayed me and made me understand how difficult life in Florida might have been before
Inspired by its subtropical birthplace and spirit of competition, the Sarasota School of Architecture lives on — old and new — blurring indoors and out in its sculptural designs.

By Barbara Peters Smith

Small towns are not generally nurturing birthplaces of great architecture, which relies so heavily on transformative cultural moments and large pots of money to help it happen.

The Sarasota School of Architecture was a quietly dazzling exception to this rule.

For 25 years beginning around the time of America’s entry into World War II, the stars aligned in this former fishing village on Florida’s Gulf Coast to form a constellation of 15
The 2016 Butterfield House was designed by Carl Abbott, a former student of Paul Rudolph’s at the Yale School of Architecture and the only architect of the 15 original group members who maintains an active practice today.

In this issue we launch Florida By Design, exploring the history and traditions of uniquely Floridian architecture styles.

architects whose careers overlapped and intertwined. They taught and inspired each other, emulating, outdoing, and competing. And by gathering in this one counterintuitive spot they created a legacy of pioneering construction for a subtropical climate, while celebrating Floridians’ perennial desire to blur the boundaries between indoors and out.

There is no one signature of the Sarasota School, which incorporates influences from the Bauhaus, International Style, Frank Lloyd Wright and even boatbuilding techniques gleaned from Navy shipyards after the war.

But you know it when you see it: The best of these sharp, sculptural buildings defy gravity, floating above the coastal flatland, welcoming the sky through generous windows, borrowing the muted ivory tints of their exteriors from the surrounding clouds.

“The Sarasota School sprang out of its special circumstances of location, personalities and talent to reach its zenith of world architecture prominence in the 1950s,” wrote architect and historian John Howey. “For postwar Sarasota, the task was to create a better place, to delineate
Florida BY DESIGN

Howey’s 1995 book, “The Sarasota School of Architecture,” reads like an elegy for an underappreciated modernist aesthetic, an attempt to document the school’s importance before crucial evidence could be erased. But the timing was fortuitous — just in advance of a sweeping revival of interest in all things mid-century mod.

Paul Rudolph, one of the Sarasota School’s most galvanizing forces and certainly its most prominent member in the profession, died just two years after Howey’s book came out. At the time, few residents of Sarasota could have told you who Rudolph was. This fall, the Sarasota Architectural Foundation, which now draws enthusiasts to its lectures and tours from all over the world, celebrated its 100th birthday with a series of tribute events.

An iconic fixture in studies of Rudolph’s work is a modest but ebullient structure on a Siesta Key bayou, just west of Sarasota’s downtown. The Healy Guest House — a 760-square-foot cottage completed in 1950 and dubbed “Best House Design of the Year” by the American Institute of Architects — is also known as the Cocoon House for its use of a polymer spray deployed to mothball warships in the Brooklyn Navy Yard.

The Cocoon House hugs the banks of Bayou Louise, hovering over the water so that when you stand inside its walls of glass and jalousies, you almost feel as though you’re swimming. The guest house is in good company: Nearby is Rudolph’s 1955 Cohen House, gracefully updated in 2009 by Sarasota School architect Tim Seibert; and the 1947 Revere Quality House — meant to showcase a copper manufacturer’s wares — that Rudolph designed with Ralph Twitchell. Considered the founding father of the Sarasota School, Twitchell opened a Sarasota practice in 1936. Just next door to the Revere house — facing the Cocoon House as if in intimate conversation across the slender bayou — is a new addition to the neighborhood. The 2016 Butterfield House was designed by Carl Abbott, a former student of Rudolph’s at the Yale School of Architecture and the only architect of the original 15 who maintains an active practice today.

Abbott’s approach has been described as taking the principles of the Sarasota School and pushing them into new formulations that incorporate his fascinations with disparate sources, including Wright’s work as well as that of the Mexican architect Luis Barragán and the American Louis Kahn — and even ancient Mayan mappings of the heavens. The architecture critic Michael Sorkin called attention to Abbott’s ability to create a livable

| The living room in the Butterfield House offers a dramatic vista of Siesta Key Beach, Bayou Louise, and the Healy House. |
Carl Abbott is a former student of Paul Rudolph, who taught at the Yale School of Architecture. Abbott was commissioned by Leslie Butterfield and Steve Sadoskas to design their home.

Sarasota’s Revere Quality Institute House was designed in 1948 by architects Ralph Twitchell and Paul Rudolph for the Revere Quality Institute, funded in part by the Revere Copper and Brass Company. This was part of a post-World War II program to advance “better architect-builder relations and the general improvement of the quality of speculatively built houses.”

The Cocoon House, also known as the Healy Guest House, was designed by Paul Rudolph and called “the Best House Design of the Year” when it was completed in 1950.

Carl Abbott is a former student of Paul Rudolph, who taught at the Yale School of Architecture. Abbott was commissioned by Leslie Butterfield and Steve Sadoskas to design their home.
dialogue between inside and outside: “This open architecture is motivated by the horizons of infinity and virtually no space in Abbott’s work is disengaged from what’s beyond it.”

Abbott says his freedom to interpret and build on what Sarasota School adherents accomplished allows him to pursue his ideal of site-specific design. It’s a process that began at Yale, when he and his classmates — including world-famous architect Sir Norman Foster — were taught to concentrate on living spaces, and not just structures.

“It’s part of what Rudolph was teaching us. He said, ‘I don’t want you to copy me.’ He wanted us to find our own voice,” Abbott says. “I don’t consider myself a disciple of Rudolph. I admire him amazingly, and he pushed me in ways that I never expected. Norman and I would go to dinner almost every night and then go back to work, and we would talk about our projects all the time. Rudolph said you learn more from your classmates than you’ll ever learn from any instructor — and he was right about that, too.”

After growing up in coastal Georgia and spending his teens in Fort Myers, Abbott studied architecture at the University of Florida and worked in Sarasota briefly before graduate school at Yale. He worked with Foster and Richard Rogers at TEAM 4 in London, then in I.M. Pei’s New York office, before returning to Sarasota in 1966 to start his own practice. The structures he has produced, in Florida and elsewhere, form an authentic bridge from the Sarasota School’s glass walls to 21st century ideas of placemaking, while remaining true to Rudolph’s edict that people “need caves as well as goldfish bowls.”

“In every building I’ve ever done,” Abbott says, the intent “is to have number one, an opening to nature. Louis Kahn would do these amazing very solid structures, with peek-holes to nature. And they were like a womb that you go in for protection and look out at nature; it’s like nature is a bit frightening. I’m dealing with something where you have very much a backbone, and then the other side is totally not there. How do you make light, fragile walls seem fragile? I do it by making other things seem heavier.”

These days, Abbott prefers to conceive buildings as a design architect, and on the Butterfield House he worked with Leo Lunardi as the architect of record.

“At the front end of the project, I’m totally in charge of the design,” Abbott says. “When we get to the working drawings, I become less involved — but I am still involved. I want to see it built, and I want it to be built right.”

Leslie Butterfield, a software executive and artist from Houston, came to Sarasota with her husband, Steve Sadoskas, an engineer. Their introduction to Florida was Leslie’s father, John, who was already familiar with the Sarasota School. They found the site on Bayou Louise and envisioned a multigenerational house surrounded by a tropical lagoon, with an upper-story view of the Gulf of Mexico.

Leslie Butterfield paints in her studio, with a view of the Healy House.
“We were looking to do something with my father,” Butterfield says. “We didn’t know what we wanted. We just knew we wanted modern.”

Taking a boat tour of Sarasota Bay, Butterfield and Sadoskas fell in love with Abbott’s 1997 Dolphin House, a symphony of planes and angles poised on the north shore of Siesta Key. “But we never thought Carl Abbott would be interested in doing our little house,” she says.

And then he flat-out asked for the commission.

At 3,500 square feet, the Butterfield House is unassuming by contemporary standards for custom Florida architecture. But it looked for a time that it would be impossible to fit everything they wanted on the site. After the existing house was demolished, Butterfield and Sadoskas learned how restrictive island construction would be, with hurricane codes and elevation requirements — plus 30-foot setbacks from the water and a nonexistent but platted roadway.

The limitations intrigued Abbott. After visiting the site repeatedly, he devised a scheme for a long, multilevel structure that would, at the water’s edge, rotate by 45 degrees — much like a Florida lizard creeping along, then pausing to turn its head.

“I said, ‘I really would love to work on your house with you. I feel that I need to speak with the Rudolph house across the way,’” Abbott recalls. “They said my calling them meant a lot to them. Because you don’t normally do that; I don’t beg people for work.”

A visitor approaches the Butterfield House along a solid and serene wall that leads to the waterfront pool, where slim lozenges of sunlight infiltrate a wooden deck overhead onto the expansive, shady plaza. A short climb to the front door accesses an entry hall with another winding staircase beyond — there’s also an elevator — that leads to a third-story main room.

When you emerge into the glass-enclosed space, you are so immediately conscious of greenery along the bayou, the precise Gulf horizon beyond, and a 180-degree swirl of monumental clouds that you no longer feel connected to the ground. The effect is heady and disorienting.

Then you find the Butterfield House’s deliberate focal point: the small-scale perfection of Rudolph’s Cocoon House. And you feel the elegant correspondence between the two masses, like an easy balance of earth and sky.

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Home is where you find your muse.
At first, Clyde Butcher thought Florida was boring, and certainly not worth photographing.
Until he followed a rickety boardwalk out into the Big Cypress National Preserve, near Everglades City.
“T thought, ‘I’m from California and I’m not going to get into the water with gators and snakes,” Butcher recalls. But that boardwalk “got me into the cypress stand, and the beauty of it all just blew my mind.”

Since then, Butcher has spent much time wading hip-deep through swampy waters with the gators and snakes. Today, he is renowned for his haunting, black-and-white photos of the Florida Everglades.
“The thing about Florida is that you have to get into it. It’s not a place you can photograph from a car like Yosemite,” Butcher says. California long a distant memory, he now has a home in the Big Cypress as well as galleries in nearby Venice and St. Armands Key. “I wanted to live where I wanted to photograph,” he says.
The street artist known as DAAS paints murals all over the world. A native Floridian, he continues to spend much of his time in St. Petersburg. “It’s my favorite city to live,” he says, “for the environment, proximity to the ocean, beautiful beaches and the progressive attitudes of the huge art community there.”

Eleanor Blair, an accomplished landscape artist, has worked in New York; Aspen, Colorado; and Sarasota. But she ultimately moved to Gainesville for its “sense of community.”

Blair recalls her first showing, at the city’s 1972 Spring Arts Festival, still an annual event, as an “astounding experience” where she felt embraced and supported.

Blair’s downtown studio and art gallery are part of a lively arts and culture tapestry that has helped awaken a once-moribund downtown Gainesville.

These are just three of the thousands of artists who, either by birth or by choice, call Florida home. And in communities across the state, the energy behind this creative spirit is powering a renaissance that is helping to create jobs and revitalize city centers.
Consider that a mutual commitment to invest in arts and culture now constitutes a key plank in a new strategic planning initiative partnering the University of Florida with its host city, Gainesville.

“When people love where they live, the level of pride is deeper, and there is greater investment in growth, shared prosperity, and economic vitality,” states the plan’s goal to more closely align UF and city objectives through the arts. Town-gown cooperation to develop a series of “art hubs” throughout the community "will improve and enhance social, physical, and economic aspects of Gainesville neighborhoods on a grand scale,” and, in turn, “more rapidly propel UF’s Strategic Development Plan’s aims.”

Lucinda Lavelli, dean emerita of UF’s College of Fine Arts and co-author of the arts component of the strategic plan, says that fostering a lively arts and cultural environment is crucial for a city like Gainesville that seeks to attract and retain a highly skilled workforce.

“Creativity is a quality that employers are looking for,” she says. “And we know that exposure to the arts feeds creativity. It may not directly relate to your specific job … coding or working in a research lab … but it’s like cross-training the mind. It feeds your vision and understanding and perspective. Your world view changes.”

And that’s just one Florida city’s arts initiative.

In Miami alone, the arts constitutes a $1.4 billion annual economy. St. Petersburg, with its major downtown museums and booming arts scene, has shaken off its sleepy retirement image to become a sun-dappled home to the creative spirit.

DeLand deployed the arts to save its historic downtown. In the heart of Melbourne, the Eau Gallie Arts District has exploded into a colorful and lively town center.

Pensacola has determined that quality of life requires more than beaches — it needs opera and ballet and theater and more. Fort Lauderdale has built an artsy tropical Riverwalk on a bend of the New River where Seminoles once canoed to barter for goods.

Boynton Beach is becoming a refuge for artists who can’t afford rents in trendier South Florida cities. Jacksonville’s Urban Arts and Facade Program is changing the very look and feel of downtown. Tallahassee has transformed a dilapidated cluster of warehouses into Railroad Square Art Park, attracting studios, cafes, a brewery, and even a pinball emporium.

And so many cities — from Sebring to Key Largo to Pompano to Palatka to Destin to Havana — are embracing urban street art that Visit Florida has mapped out a “Statewide Tour of Florida’s Mural Art” for ambitious roadtrippers.

“Florida is a great arts state,” says Randy Cohen, vice president for research and policy at Americans for the Arts, a national advocacy group that has done extensive studies linking the arts to economic development and quality of life.

“It has so many cities, small and large, where the arts are an important presence. Miami is an international destination for arts and culture, but even places like Ocala, with its fabulous painted horse project, has found a way to integrate the arts across the community.”

And make no mistake, arts and culture really do mean business in Florida.

Americans for the Arts compiles a comprehensive economic impact study, updated every five years. And its Florida numbers show that the arts have a $4.68 billion annual impact. In the Sunshine State, the arts support 132,366 jobs, draw 41 million visitors a year (including 10.6 million from out of state), and benefit state and local governments to the tune of nearly $500 million in tax revenues.
Beyond such numbers lie the incalculable quality-of-life impact on communities, including their ability to attract and retain companies and a highly skilled workforce.

Because “Miami has rebranded itself around arts and culture, they are getting an influx of people from New York, Boston, L.A.,” and elsewhere, says Richard Florida, author of The Rise of the Creative Class. He adds: “My wife calls it the great migration.”

Which is not to say that creating a community of the arts is cheap or easy.

Miami-Dade County has spent more than $1 billion in public funds to promote the arts and cultural events over the course of three decades. But it is an investment that is now bearing healthy returns. According to the county’s Department of Cultural Affairs, more than 16 million people attend cultural events there every year. And attendees spend, on average, $35 more than price of the event itself — for food, parking, beverages, hotel stays and more.

“A vibrant arts community is good for local business,” Cohen says. “It puts cheeks in seats and derrières in cafe chairs.”

In recent years, St. Petersburg has steadily increased the amount of grants it awards to nonprofit organizations in the city’s seven separate arts districts, from $172,000 to $355,000 a year.

“The arts are why St. Petersburg did not fare so poorly in the recession,” says Wayne Atherholt, the city’s director of cultural affairs. “We have created an environment that is friendly to arts. At the time our own convention and visitors bureau focused solely on the beaches.”

In smaller communities, finding money to support the arts tends to be more catch-as-catch can.

“We’re really good at begging,” says Lisa Packard, director of the Eau Gallie Arts District. EGAD’s latest mural project, Anti-Gravity Project 2017, was financed by “100 percent fundraising … we asked everybody we knew. We even we had a Facebook campaign.”

Cities that can draw on sources of private philanthropy have a leg up. Over the last decade, The Knight Foundation has given nearly $100 million in support of the arts in Miami. Pensacola has a large Impact 100 chapter, a network of female philanthropists who are asked to donate $1,000 each to help support community grants of $100,000 or larger. This year Pensacola Impact 100 granted more than $1.1 million to 72 nonprofits with cultural or educational missions.

Among other things, Impact 100 funding allowed the First City Arts Center to expand its ceramics studio, acquire a mobile glass-blowing furnace, and expand its art outreach programs into low income schools.

“I call it the ‘dragon wagon,’” says Joe Hobbs, a Pensacola glass-blower who works at First Center. “We take out to the schools, and just being able to see the kids’ faces as you are shaping a glowing glass ball is the coolest thing.”

“The arts improve both our personal and community wellbeing,” says Cohen. “They help make people feel better about today and more optimistic about tomorrow.”

They also serve to reveal hidden aspects and undercurrents of the Florida experience that people might not otherwise comprehend.

Just like Clyde Butcher’s fabled Florida mountains, those majestic clouds that his photos often portray jut out of the Florida swamplands and into the stratosphere.

“Clouds are our mountains,” he likes to say. But unlike other mountains, “ours change into something new and different every day.”
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When you live and work work in Toronto, you might want to head for warmer climes when the snow starts to fall and the wind starts to blow.

And when your name is Richard Florida, well, South Florida might not seem like a bad place to winter over.

“My wife and I spend our winters in Miami,” says Florida, professor of urban studies at the University of Toronto, and author of the bestselling *The Rise of The Creative Class*.

Florida has long argued that investments in the arts are essential for cities that want to attract and retain “creative class” workers — scientists, technicians, artists, start-up entrepreneurs.

“Miami has mainly been a service-driven economy,” says Florida. “But it is becoming one of the leading entertainment centers in the world. A hub of media that wants to produce in both English and Spanish.”

Perhaps it is indicative of that city’s media prominence that “The Daily Show” decamped south to record its shows leading up to the week before the midterm elections in the beautifully restored Fillmore Miami Beach at Jackie Gleason Theater. The 1950s-era Jackie Gleason Theater, which became home to the late comedian’s weekly show in 1964, has undergone a multi-million dollar renovation to become a state-of-the-art entertainment venue.

Miami’s cultural renaissance has been a long time in the making, and has required a serious and ongoing commitment on the part of government, private philanthropy and business.

“About three decades ago Miami decided that it no longer wanted to be this sleepy little tourism destination. And over those three decades the county invested more than $1 billion in cultural building,” says Michael Spring, director of Miami-Dade Cultural Affairs.

That investment included construction of the 2,372-seat Miami-Dade Auditorium, as well as smaller venues, such as the South Miami/Dade Cultural Arts Center, The African Heritage Cultural Arts Center and the Joseph Caleb Auditorium.

The $470 million, glass-and-steel Adrienne Arsht Center for the Performing Arts, named for the businesswoman who donated $30 million to its construction, has been credited with having a $1 billion economic impact on the surrounding community.

“Miami has a lot of magical places, literally hundreds of cultural destinations,” says Spring. “We didn’t just build things, we built things at their highest standard for cultural facilities. We are competing with the top places in the world.”

And it isn’t just public investment that is transforming the city. Since 2008 the Miami-based Knight Foundation has given nearly $100 million through its Arts Challenge Grant program.

“What’s great about that is that they really encourage small groups and are looking for innovation, they want organizations that will think outside the box,” said Laura Bruney, director of the Arts and Business Council of Miami.

This year’s Knight Foundation grants, $50,000 each, were targeted at organizations with proposals to better integrate the arts into the digital age. One grant went to the Bass Art Museum so it could employ 360-degree photography to share exhibits with remote audiences.

The more than three-decade-old Miami Book Fair International, which annually draws hundreds of authors and hundreds of thousands of visitors, is another factor in Miami’s cultural coming of age.

The arrival of Art Basel Miami Beach in 2002 was a major coup for the county. Art Basel annually hosts the world’s most prestigious art fairs, in Switzerland, Hong Kong and now Miami. In 2018, Art Basel Miami Beach, which has become the country’s top art fair, attracted more than 250 galleries and 4,000 artists from around the world. In 2017, some 82,000 people attended the December fair.

Where there’s art, there’s coffee: Miami’s Wynwood Walls district has attracted coffee shops and design studios to satisfy the area’s patrons.
And as if to illustrate that investment does indeed follow investment: More than two decades ago the late Tony Goldman, of Goldman Properties, began buying up warehouses in the dilapidated Wynwood neighborhood with the idea of turning it into an art district. Today, this vibrant neighborhood has more than 70 galleries and museums, including those with extensive private collections, as well as restaurants, cafes, breweries and other thriving businesses.

“It’s a perfect example of an enlightened business owner who saw that area 25 years ago, saw the potential and turned it around,” Bruney says. “He bought warehouses and donated them to arts groups. He invited international street artists to do different artwork on the walls.” The Wynwood Walls street art murals draw visitors from around the world. Wynwood has become such a magnet for new investment and development that property which once went for $50 per square foot is selling for $300.

Still, for all of this rapid change and new construction, Miami retains a certain old city cache’ for many of the artists who work here.

“My parents left Cuba when I was one year old; they lost everything and had to start over in this new climate in Miami in 1960,” says Xaviar Cortada, a painter who uses his art to draw attention to sea-level rise and other problems facing his community. “Miami is as real as it gets, and it is still my favorite place in the world.”

He adds: “I think of Miami as a process, not a place. Historically, the Seminoles, the Haitian refugees, the Cubans, they were all reinventing this place. We have grit. We fight off the horse flies. We are resilient. Through our art we help define the growth of this remarkable city.”

The Adrienne Arsht Center for the Performing Arts in Miami provides a backdrop for a passing trolley. The Arsht Center is Florida’s largest performing arts center and one of the largest in the United States.
Hank Hines knows a thing or two about Surrealism. "Max Ernst said the essence of creativity is taking two disparate things and creating a spark from their placement together," he says, quoting the painter who was a pioneer of the artistic movement. "We took a couple of disparate things ... a sleepy retirement community and the most challenging artist of the 20th century ... and it created a spark."

Salvador Dali and St. Petersburg. What a concept.
And those two disparate things created not just a spark, but eventually ignited a dazzling $30 million structure of glass and concrete that picks up and amplifies the light and color and motion reflecting off the great bay over which The Salvador Dali Museum, housing the personal collection of Reynolds and Eleanor Morse, has perched since 2011.
All this because an ambitious group of St. Petersburg residents in 1982 somehow managed to lure out of Ohio the largest collection of Dali’s work outside of Europe and into a temporary home inside an old marine warehouse in downtown St. Petersburg.
“In a sense,” says Hines, executive director of the Dali, the history of the museum is “the history of the revitalization of an arts city writ large. It’s definitely symbolic of where things have gone in St. Petersburg.”

And why not? St. Petersburg is where the arts were born in Florida.
“The arts in St. Petersburg started back in 1915 when the Florida Winter Art school opened. It was the first in the state,” says Hines. “And in 1917 the first art museum south of Atlanta opened here (now the Morean Arts Center). The arts have been connected to St. Pete for over 100 years.”
This from Wayne David Atherholt, director of the Mayor’s Office of Cultural Affairs: “We’re completely committed to the arts,” he says. “You’ll find arts just about everywhere here, from hotels to electric boxes to buses wrapped with a mural and literal..."
streets painted and art exhibits in many breweries and coffee shops and restaurants even.”

If the Dali is the crown jewel in St. Petersburg’s cultural tiara — attracting more than 400,000 visitors a year and generating $70 million annually in economic impact — it is not the only jewel, or even the largest.

The James Museum of Western and Wildlife Art, which opened in 2017, houses the personal collection of Tom and Mary James and occupies twice the space of the Dali. The Morean Arts Center (with its Chihuly Collection), the Museum of Fine Arts, the St. Petersburg Museum of History and The Florida Holocaust Museum together entice 1.2 million people a year visit local museums. Their operating expenses total more than $22 million a year.

And that’s not counting the Museum of the American Arts & Crafts Movement, a $90 million project scheduled to open in 2019.

“I was in St. Petersburg a year ago, at the Morean Arts Center, and it really floored me,” says Randy Cohen, vice president for research and policy at Americans for the Arts “They were having their 100th annual community arts exhibition. What I loved about it is how they engage their entire community.”

And that’s just the museums and theaters. To further promote the city as a destination for artists and art lovers alike, St. Petersburg has designated no fewer than seven separate arts districts.

“We provide grant money to arts organizations” to the tune of about $555,000 a year, Atherholt says. “And we fund arts and cultural programming primarily for benefit of our residents.”

One city-funded event is the Shine Mural Festival, which literally sets out to “paint the town” by inviting local and international artists to create new wall murals. In three years the festival has produced more than 50 murals around the city.

One of those muralists was Carrie Jadus, who, inspired by her own training as an electrical engineer, completed a mural of inventor Nikola Tesla on the side of a building housing a company called Genius Central.

“Tesla being the primary pioneer and genius in our field it just seemed appropriate,” she says.

If the Dali is the crown jewel in St. Petersburg’s cultural tiara — attracting more than 400,000 visitors a year and impacting the local economy to the tune of $70 million annually — it is not the only jewel, or even the largest.

That Jadus is now a successful working artist is itself something of a tribute to the community’s commitment to home-growing its own talent. Jadus’ introduction to the arts began when she enrolled in Gibbs High School and its magnet program, the Pinellas County Center For The Arts. “It was a really fantastic experience. And I certainly see that sort of mentoring as contributing to St. Pete’s success in fostering a substantial arts community.”

Having grown up locally, Jadus says, “I don’t have lot to compare it to, but I’ve been able to make a good living for myself and my kids” as an artist.

Thanks at least partially to its extensive commitment to the arts, downtown St. Petersburg has in recent years experienced a boom in new office buildings, hotels, condos, shopping, restaurants, bars and more. And, drawn by its vibrant arts and entertainment scene, it has become home to a new generation of more active retirees, but also those decades younger — from creatives in their 20s to young families reinvigorating older downtown neighborhoods.

One of the keys to downtown’s success lies in a history of decision-making aimed at protecting the waterfront from runaway development, dating back to the first decades of the 20th century, when a provision was added to the City Charter that requires a vote before waterfront parks can be sold, donated, or in some cases, leased. In 2011, the voters approved an amendment to create a Downtown Master Plan that promotes an integrated plan for the area. Even the Dali had to be approved by city referendum to build its new museum on the edge of Tampa Bay.

“The Dali is beholden to the city for providing us this great waterfront opportunity,” Hines says. “We had the highest positive vote of any referendum. This community embraced making the Dali forefront to the city and not be tucked away as it had been.”

As an artist, he reflects, “Salvador Dali wanted to revitalize art. He thought modernism was a dead end.”

Thanks to the Dali, its sister institutions and its thriving artists colonies, St. Petersburg has turned revitalization of the arts into a civic culture.
Mr. Martin Luther King Jr. looks out over the city that, in 1951, writer Zora Neale Hurston deemed “the one spot on earth” that made her feel at home. “Darkness cannot drive out darkness, only light can do that,” King admonishes from a mural painted on the wall of a business.

EGAD!
That’s not so much an exclamation as a state of mind. A summons to be part of something vital and different.

It is what prompted Tony Soland to move his Standard Collective “lifestyle boutique” out of a fashion mall and into the Eau Gallie Arts District (EGAD), a once-moribund downtown tucked in between U.S. 1 and the Indian River.

Soland’s business sells vintage clothing, local arts and, well, let’s just say he has an eclectic inventory. He also hosts live comedy and music performances and aerial yoga sessions.

Soland painted the mural of Dr. King on his store wall. But why EGAD?
“I like to be surrounded by creativity and culture,” Soland says.

Mission accomplished.

The Eau Gallie Arts District, established in 2010, is alive with creativity and culture.

One of the arts district’s first goals was to start a public art program, and the evidence of its success is the dozens of murals enlivening the walls.

Just a few buildings away is a wall mural full of flying girls. In a nearby alley lurks a toothy shark. In one mural an astronaut floats through inky space in tribute to EGAD’s proximity to Cape Canaveral. Not far away is a cartoonish anti-war mural that has some folks up in arms and others praising its insight.

“Conformity is the safe haven for the unimaginative” a window mural states. And the only unusual thing about that window is that looks into an empty storefront. This in a district that is renovating aging buildings as quickly as possible to keep up with the demand for more space.

“We have a 1 percent vacancy rate; we’re full,” says Lisa Packard, EGAD director. “We have a high demand for space and no place to put them.”
“If you had been here in 2000 you would have seen very few businesses,” she says. “Highlands Avenue had a 35 percent vacancy rate.”

It was a sad state of affairs for Eau Gallie, a city NASA scientists once called home, where Hurston wrote *Mules And Men* and raised eyebrows when she performed at the local high school to a mixed-race audience.

The city ceased to be in 1969, when it was annexed into Melbourne. But its downtown remained, and languished, until local merchants banded together a decade ago to launch the arts district. With the help of state grants, EGAD was born.

Jody A. Carter, for 22 years owner of Art Expressions, credits the late Link Johnson, an Eau Gallie florist, for rallying local merchants behind the drive to revitalize the historic downtown.

“It was his vision to bring the community together and make Eau Gallie like it used to be,” she says. “He wanted to make it focused on the arts. And we really had no choice, people were driving right past us.”

“We have a brand-new Irish pub,” Packard said. “We have nine hair salons, four restaurants and a fifth opening soon. We used to have just one.”

Not to mention the Foosaner Art Museum, the Eau Gallie Civic Center, the historic Rossetter House Museum and Gardens, Brevard Symphony Orchestra headquarters and a small performance amphitheater tucked away in a corner of Eau Gallie Square. Right next to the Yoga Garden.

“Ballet, performance art, we’ve got it all covered,” Packard says.

“Things have definitely changed,” Carter says. These days “we desperately need more parking.”

And as it happens, EGAD’s success didn’t just breed more success. It also invited controversy.

As part of its 2017 Anti-Gravity murals campaign, EGAD commissioned Los Angeles artist Matt Gondek to paint a 100-foot mural that quickly gained local notoriety as the “exploding cartoon.”

Gondek’s work is bright, colorful, and filled with easily recognizable characters — Homer Simpson, Wile E. Coyote, Daffy Duck, Hello Kitty.

All of them cheerfully waging cartoonish mayhem on each other.

Conceived as a tribute to Pablo Picasso’s much darker 1937 anti-war masterpiece “Guernica,” Gondek told reporters he never intended it to be controversial.

The Melbourne City Commission saw it differently.

The city “rewrote the mural ordinance over it,” Packard says.

Going forward, finished murals are expected to look exactly like their submitted conceptual sketches. “In the artistic world that ain’t gonna happen,” Packard says. “We may have to tap dance on that a little bit going forward.”

Still, “when you have a community of artists, you don’t want to just” play it safe, she says. “If it’s controversial, all the better. That means people are talking about it.”

To tour the Eau Gallie Arts District, download the Florida Humanities Council’s free Florida Stories walking tour app and follow the route in Eau Gallie.
Erica Group gave DeLand its wings.
She didn't mean to.

Funny story: While doing social media for a downtown clothing boutique, Group found that posting photos of staffers wearing the merchandise brought in customers who'd say, “I want that dress.”

So she took staffers into the back alley to photograph them against a pair of green metal doors. And just to make it more interesting, she chalked out a pair of spreading wings.

“I thought, ‘Don’t worry, it’ll wash off in the rain.’”
And it did. But not before people began to troop into the alley to photograph themselves about to take flight.

When the wings did wash away, Group was asked to redraw them. And then again. Until, finally, she painted the wings so they wouldn't disappear.

And then another funny thing happened. Group was appointed artist-in-residence by the West Volusia Visitors Bureau and commissioned to paint even more wings.

So far she's done biplane wings at the airport, fairy wings in Cassadaga, and scrub jay wings in Deltona.

All because she walked into the alley with a piece of chalk.
“’This is a great town to be an artist in,” says the owner of Erica Group Designs. “You can't turn a corner without seeing art somewhere.”

But here's the thing about this city's commitment to the arts: Group's flight of winged fancy aside, DeLand's art renaissance did not occur by serendipity.
DeLand, home of Stetson University, had a plan all along:
For the 15 historic murals that run downtown's length and breadth.
For the baker's dozen creations you can view along the Sculpture Walk.
And those ugly metal utility boxes ubiquitous to every American city? Most of DeLand's have burst out into riotous colors, exotic designs, reproductions of vintage postcards and more.

All according to plan.
“We began in the late '90s when we started our Main Street DeLand program,” recalls Mayor Bob Apgar. “We started with the murals program. And from there it really grew.

“That was the seed that made us recognize as a community that downtown art can be an attractor,” he says. “DeLand remains the same, but the art is changing constantly.”

It is perhaps symbolic of its commitment to the arts that right next to City Hall is crouched a bronze female figure cast by Costa Rican artist Jorge Jimenez Deredia.
Dereda has placed identical sisters of DeLand's "Continuacion" in Florence, Italy; and Valencia, Spain.
And again, none of this happened by accident. DeLand became a Valencia-style city of the arts through years of relentless, targeted promotional campaigns conducted hand-in-hand by city government, the Chamber of Commerce, downtown's Main Street Association, Stetson, the Museum of Art and other partners.
“We were never afraid to fail,” Apgar says. “When the community brings us an idea, we might say ‘not now,’ but we never really say no.”

Which is how this small city of fewer than 35,000 residents arrived at a juncture where some 90 special events a year occur downtown. They include craft shows, antique auto parades, bike rallies, and quilting bees. Two intriguing signature events: “Wine, Women and Chocolate,” and the Halloween-themed “Monsters On Main Street.”

Then there’s the almost magical conversion each Friday night of once-seedy East Georgia Avenue into Artisans Alley. There, hundreds of people converge to sample the local fare, wander past display stands, taste Persimmon Hollow Brewing’s latest and drop into quirky Café Da Vinci — hands down the hottest music venue for miles around.

All of which helps explain why downtown DeLand has a 97 percent occupancy rate, including more retail businesses than many larger cities can boast. “And most of our businesses are locally owned,” says Leigh Matusick, until recently DeLand’s longtime vice mayor. “We’re unique, we’re not big commercial.”

And the arts is unquestionably key to that vitality.

The DeLand Museum of Art alone is a major draw. Just one exhibit this year, “The Magical World of M.C. Escher,” brought thousands of visitors to town. And the beautifully restored, 1920s-era Athens Theater sells about 27,000 tickets a year to plays, films and other events.

“When the museum had its Escher exhibit visitors would get a sticker,” recalls John Wilton, artist and museum trustee. “For three months the streets, restaurants and stores were full of people wearing those stickers.”

It is not for nothing that the locals call their city “The Athens of Florida.”

Although Matusick prefers “Delightful DeLand.”
On a cooling autumn weekend, while the Gators had a bye week, Gainesville threw a huge party for its favorite son.

A city park where the late Tom Petty played as a boy was renamed in his honor. Friends, family, fellow musicians, and thousands of fans showed up for two days of live music at Depot Park and nearby Heartwood Soundstage, a state-of-the-art concert venue and recording studio, where, in an earlier incarnation, a young Tom Petty recorded some of his earliest works.

This was Gainesville’s second Petty tribute since the rock star’s death in October 2017.

“It was pretty amazing,” says Bob McPeek, Heartwood’s co-owner, who has been part of Gainesville’s music scene for 45 years. “We had music inside and music outside. We had people from as far away as Hong Kong, Scotland, and Canada.”

Jessica Hurov, tourism director for Visit Gainesville, figures the national coverage of the Tom Petty celebration amounted to $1.7 million worth of promotional advertising for the city.

“That’s not a bad return on investment” for the $20,000 her bureau spent as a Petty Festival sponsor.

Still, the activity generated by Gainesville’s tribute to its rock legend was relatively constrained compared to the fuselage of screaming guitars that would jolt the town the very next weekend.

The 17th edition of Fest, an annual celebration of punk rock music, drew 300 bands and attracted thousands of punk rock enthusiasts from around the world.

For three days, Fest fanatics strolled through the streets of downtown Gainesville, eating at restaurants, filling up hotel rooms. As it turns out, Gainesville is not all about football.

“We have a music story to tell,” Hurov says. “We have a huge market opportunity to grow band-tourism with signature events that we can grow year after year.”

This, after all, is the college town whose music legacy has spawned at least two books: Marty Jourard’s Music Everywhere: The Rock And Roll Roots of a Southern Town, and Matt Walker’s Gainesville Punk.

This is a town that has nurtured no fewer than nine Rock and Roll Hall of Fame inductees: Mike Campbell, Stan Lynch, Benmont Tench, Ron Blair, Stephen Stills, Don Felder, Bernie Leadon, and, of course, Tom Petty and Bo Diddley.

Singer Minnie Ripperton lived here. Petty’s Heartbreakers, the Dixie Desperados, Sister Hazel, Less Than Jake and countless other bands had their genesis here.
“We used to joke that there must be something in the water,” Mike Boulware, a longtime Gainesville musician and one of the organizers of a campaign to purchase the old Masonic Temple on Main Street and convert it into a Gainesville music museum.

“It will not be just a rock museum,” says Jeff Goldstein, a former Gainesville-area concert promoter who launched the campaign. “It will include every type of music that has been part of Gainesville’s history … opera, country and western, rock.”

If that effort is successful, the museum would be within walking distance of the recently restored Cotton Club, the “Chitlin’ Circuit”-era night spot where B.B. King, Ray Charles, Bo Diddley, Brook Benton, James Brown and other black entertainers played back in the days when white venues were mostly off limits.

As a lively city of the arts, Gainesville has murals — its 352 Walls project is bringing in street artists from all over the world. It has theaters, among them the 45-year-old Hippodrome State Theatre, and performing arts centers, both at UF and Santa Fe College. It has world-class museums in UF’s Samuel P. Harn Museum of Art and Florida Museum of Natural History. The newly opened Cade Museum for Creativity and Invention, the legacy of Gatorade developer Robert Cade, showcases the art of science.

But what distinguishes Gainesville’s arts scene from other Florida cities is a music legacy that promises to be increasingly vital to the local economy as signature events attract more and more visitors.

“For a long time this was kind of the Bermuda Triangle of band promotion,” Boulware says. “That’s changed. Now Gainesville is becoming a destination.”

And it’s not just attracting visitors. Gainesville’s music scene is also key to attracting and retaining the city’s youthful high-tech workforce.

“Music has become really important to the creative economy,” says Richard Florida, author of “The Rise of the Creative Class.”

Florida ranks cities according to their ability to attract creative workers — artists, scientists, technicians, entrepreneurs and so on. Gainesville ranks 13th in the nation by Florida’s reckoning.

“Without question Gainesville is Florida’s creative economy leader, far out in front of the major Florida metros,” Florida says. “It is playing in the same league as Boston, San Francisco, and D.C. And music has been under-appreciated for its importance to the creative economy.”

Tom Petty could have told him that.

“Homegrown in the headphone,” Petty’s song Gainesville begins. “Gainesville was a big town.”
Artful Revivals: Pensacola

Vacation Artfully

Seaside Pensacola’s motto celebrates this small city’s big commitment to culture and imagination

A wall is a terrible thing to waste. And they certainly don’t waste them in Pensacola, the 460-year-old Gulf of Mexico seaport perched over a glistening bay on Florida’s western border.

Wall murals are popping up everywhere. Bigger than life depictions: A vintage Pensacola postcard writ large. African-American jazz musicians in full jam mode. An express train barreling through the orange groves.

And, dominating the sprawling Jefferson Street Parking Garage, 3,000 square feet of Pensacola history — from the primitive galleons that transported Don Tristan De Luna and his conquistadors to the Blue Angels jets that still streak overhead.

Veronique Zayas and fellow artist Somi Choi have staked out a downtown law office on which to paint a mural celebrating Pensacola as a city of the arts.

It’s a mural, Zayas says, intended to send “a positive uplifting message that captures the vibe of the city. There is a huge sense of community here” among artists.

Case in point: Zayas and Choi began working together at last year’s annual 12-day Foo Foo Festival (named for the musical bands on 19th century sailing vessels).

Says Zayas, “We did the Cubed event together,” in which local artists were invited to paint the sides of 8-by-8 foot cubes. The challenge was to incorporate themes from the Thirty Million Word Initiative, based on a study which found that, by age 4, children from lower-income families are exposed to 30 million fewer words than kids raised in higher-income families.

Having previously lived in Dallas, Zayas says what she likes most about Pensacola is that it is small enough to foster such artistic collaborations. “It’s a size where people are able to get out there and participate and make something happen.”

Pensacola glassblower Joe Hobbs agrees. Hobbs has lived and worked in California, Alabama, and Texas. And at his previous job, at an Austin glass studio, “I was making good money.”

“But I was drawn back” to Pensacola, where Hobbs had once attended college. “Since I’ve become an adult and have kids of my own, it’s just a nice place to live,” he says. “The cost of living is great. Pensacola has really been supportive, and people here are appreciative of fine arts.”

For a city of 52,900 people, Pensacola supports an astonishingly rich and varied cultural milieu — most of it concentrated in and around the historic downtown.

It has a symphony orchestra, an opera house and a ballet theater.

It is perhaps telling that, in a community best known for its white beaches, sunshine, and emerald waters, a major marketing theme is “Vacation Artfully.”

The circa-1925 Spanish Baroque-style Saenger Theatre is a world-class playhouse. But it’s not to be confused with the Pensacola Little Theater, which has also been around in one form or another since the 1920s.

Then there is the Pensacola Museum of Art, the First City Arts Center, the Switzer Center...
For Visual Arts, the 10,000-seat Bay Center, the Vinyl Music Hall, The TAG Gallery, The Mattie Kelly Arts Center and, of course, The National Naval Aviation Museum, home to the aforementioned Blue Angels.

There's more. About 70 gaudily painted "Pelicans in Paradise" sculptures are scattered about the city, a legacy of the Pensacola News Journal's 2004 outdoor art project.

The Graffiti Bridge is, literally, a railroad bridge covered with graffiti (and said to be Pensacola's oldest art installation).

Oh, and those cubes Zayas and her fellow artists worked on? They are now permanent exhibits in Museum Plaza.

In Pensacola, even the parking meters are covered in art.

“When I first moved here, I was shocked by how much was going on in such a small area,” says Caitlin Rhea, managing director for First City Arts Center, who arrived three years ago. “I came from Boston where there's a million things going on, but here you still have to pick and choose from among all the festivals and events.”

The First City Arts Center is a creative collective where artists share studio space with art students who attend classes in ceramics, glass-blowing and other art forms.

The Center's Gallery 1060, so named for its address on N Guillemard St., provides studio and exhibition space to 12 artists — jewelers and sculptors and painters and glass-blowers.

“We do shows that change every six weeks,” she says. “These are all professional artists. It's very competitive.”

The Visit Pensacola tourism bureau's website boasts that “Pensacola is the only city from Tampa to Mobile, Alabama, to host such a diversity of cultural experiences.”

Or as Zayas puts it, “We tell people that we work where they vacation.”

Besides her painting, Zayas owns a graphic design business. “There is so much business growth going on in the city, and people here have a sense of the importance of good design, so I feel like we're at the sweet spot of growth right now.”

It’s an excellent time, she says, to be an artist in Pensacola.
Long story short: The street artist from Jacksonville known as DAAS was working as an assistant to the Daytona street artist known as Perego when the call came.

“IT was Universal Studios in Japan,” recalls DAAS, who has had his name legally changed. “They were interested in finding an artist who could do performance live painting on stage. And Perego said ‘I do know somebody; he’s right beside me.’”

Which is how DAAS ended up dividing his time between Japan and Florida.

And how he came to paint elephants and pandas in Kathmandu, space girls and space men in Osaka, a flower child in Shanghai, a daydreamer in Sicily and young soccer players in Jordan.

Not to mention a little girl and her rabbit pals in St. Petersburg, a gorilla in Gainesville and a tribute to, um, monkey romance in Miami.

The world holds infinite possibilities these days for street muralists like DAAS.

“In the past, most murals were commissioned works done according to client taste. In Florida you got a lot of ocean themes,” says DAAS. “Now you’re seeing a lot of murals by artists who have a very unique and specific style.”

“It’s really exploded,” he says.

Around the world. Across America. And not least of all, in Florida.

Up for a road trip? Google “Florida Mural Trail” and gas up for a long journey. According to Visit Florida, no fewer than 30 Florida cities have initiated public mural projects. You can start in the Keys and work your way north, or begin in Pensacola and head east.

Indeed, the popularity of this art form is such that it has even coined a new term, the “mural economy.”

Much of the credit for the popularity of urban murals in Florida undoubtedly goes to Tony Goldman, the businessman who turned a dilapidated Miami warehouse district into Wynwood Walls, an outdoor museum of international street art.

“I think it’s the perfect example of enlightened business owner who saw the potential of that area 25 years ago and began to turn it around,” said Laura Bruney, president and CEO of the Arts & Business Council of Miami. “He bought the warehouses, donated them to arts group, invited international street artists to do their artwork on the walls.”

Horses seem to trot in front of the Jacksonville skyline in this mural by artist DAAS. (Work in progress above.)
Thanks to the walls project, the Wynwood neighborhood has become one of Miami’s hottest entertainment districts, sporting breweries, restaurants, art galleries, retail shops, dance spots and more.

The mural economy writ large, in other words.

The relationship between mural cities and the global network of street artists is very much mutually beneficial, says Russell Etling, cultural affairs director who oversees Gainesville’s 352Walls project.

Murals “better brand Gainesville as a cultural destination” and draw more visitors to town, “he says.

As for the artists? “They use their murals as a calling card to introduce the world to their art form,” Etling says. “It gets posted online and picked up around the world through their fan base.

They can go on to sell their studio art for 10 to 20 times what they were paid for the mural.”

Back to the Florida mural trail. If you like history, try Palatka.

One mural celebrates Billy Graham’s early career at a local church.

Another depicts a Civil War river battle on the St. Johns River ... including a cannon that, eerily, seems to follow you as you pass by.

When the Eau Gallie Arts District commissioned an artist named, what else, Shark Toof, to paint a mural of a, what else, toothsome shark, “everybody in town freaked out. It was going to kill tourism,” recalls EGAD director Lisa Packard. “Now it’s one of the most photographed things in Brevard County.”

And St. Petersburg’s annual Shine Festival has filled the Sunshine City with so many murals of such dazzling variety that regular walking and bicycle mural tours are offered and free mural maps handed out.

“I got involved in murals because of the Shine Festival,” says St. Petersburg artist Carrie Jadus. “It just sparked a wave of excitement, being able to turn the corner and see so many different murals.”

And it is fair to say that one mural city can beget another. Etling credits downtown business owner Stathe Karahalios for pushing Gainesville’s 352Walls project.

More than half a dozen Karahalios-managed downtown buildings now sport murals.

“It adds value in a lot of different ways,” he said, “It brings more people into the downtown area. And it makes downtown a safer place to be because art relaxes people.”
Photographer Andy Sweet captured the vanishing world of South Beach’s elderly Jewish community before he, and much of his work, was lost. But his poignant images were found again, and a world came back to life.

By Bill DeYoung
there’s a moment in *The Last Resort*, the 2018 documentary about the late Miami Beach photographer Andy Sweet, that all but explains the unlikely chemistry between the cherubic, shaggy-haired 20-something and his subjects, the elderly Jewish residents of South Beach in the late 1970s.

In the film, Sweet’s fellow partner-in-pictures, Gary Monroe, is remembering a night the two spent photographing a packed dance floor at the 21st Street Community Center. As they weaved in and out between the swaying couples, snapping away, Sweet told his friend “I feel like I’m dancing with them.”

Looking at Andy Sweet’s voluminous body of work, photo after photo of old people smiling, laughing, relaxed and looking directly into the lens of his camera, it becomes obvious that they felt like he was dancing with them too. Somehow, he belonged.

“Andy always went for the joy,” says *The Last Resort* producer/director Dennis Scholl. “And you see that over and over again.” Sweet’s color photos contrasted sharply with those of Monroe, who shot “studies” of South Beach residents in solemn black and white.

“You particularly feel it when you look at them against Gary’s photographs, which were absolutely, technically spectacular,” says Scholl. “And he was willing to take a more broad emotional range. Andy went for the joy in his photographs and boy, do we respond to that.”

At first, Andy’s sun-drenched photographs seem informal, like snapshots. But the composition — the combination of light, shadow, color and subject — reveals a much deeper artistic sensibility.

By the mid ’70s, South Beach’s roughly two square miles at the southern end of Miami Beach were alive and thriving with fixed-income retirees who dined, swam, played Mahjong and Canasta and kibitzed under the glorious Florida sun. Many were Holocaust survivors, just learning to smile again after one last exodus.

They’d abandoned New York, New Jersey, or the Midwest, weary of the bitter winters and drawn by the promise of warm winds, gentle surf and day-to-day camaraderie with others like themselves.

South Beach wasn’t considered fashionable, in the way of Miami Beach proper with its restaurants, swanky nighteries and country clubs (many of them labeled “gentiles only”), with The Jackie Gleason Show and the world-famous Fountainbleu Hotel. Many of the aging South Beach resident hotels, built in the years following World War II, were paint-chipped and plaster-cracked and had seen better days; still, rents were reasonable, and on every corner there was a synagogue or a good deli.

For the transplanted Jews, it was paradise.

Sweet preserved, in rich, lifelike color, a world that has long since vanished. The elderly Jews, the hotels with their makeshift shuls, sitting porches and dining rooms, the community centers and their sprightly New Year’s Eve parties, are just memories in South Beach, dust and
SWEETNESS AND LIGHT

A musical gathering on South Beach, circa 1979.

ghosts, replaced by preserved and renovated Art Deco hotels, trendy clubs, high-end price tags and upscale young tenants.

Gone, too, is Andy Sweet, brutally murdered in his Miami Beach townhome back in ’82, at the age of 28. Andy is a memory, as much a part of the past as the people he so happily danced with, as the South Beach he’d so lovingly chronicled.

His death shocked and saddened the community. When he died, *The Miami Herald’s Tropic Magazine* ran a cover story on his death and documentary photography, “Andy Sweet: A Portrait.”

From the earliest days of his relationship with Ellen Sweet Moss, Stan Hughes remembers, she’d point to framed images on the wall of her South Florida apartment. “This is a photograph by my dead brother,” she’d tell her new boyfriend, who wasn’t sure how to react.

“There was tragedy under the surface,” Hughes says, “and I didn’t want to poke at it.”

Andy’s father, municipal judge Nelan “Chick” Sweet, stopped practicing law after his son’s murder, citing a lack of faith in Miami’s legal system (it took several years, but Andy’s killers were eventually tried and convicted).

“The first time I met the parents,” recalls Stan Hughes, “Ellen’s mother was immediately asking me ‘What do you think we should do with his stuff?’” Hughes, a Chicago-bred fine artist and designer, recommended they digitize Andy’s negatives to preserve them.

“I should have pushed harder,” Hughes says. “It was such a new relationship. We were mostly concerned about each other. And frankly, the pictures that they had printed and put up weren’t Andy’s strongest. I wasn’t bowled away by what I saw.

“It took me a few years before I realized there was real value there. That Andy had a voice.”

After his death, the Sweet family kept Andy’s carefully curated negatives in a climate-controlled art storage facility.
Andy Sweet is a memory, as much a part of the past as the people he’d so lovingly chronicled.
They never were digitized. The company relocated and the negatives were lost. Much heartache, and a lawsuit, followed. Hughes remembers the day: Audrey, Ellen’s mother, said “Well, his negatives are gone. Lights out, sayonara. His work’s gone and everything’s awful.”

It stayed awful until one autumn day in 2006 when Hughes — now married to Ellen and a well-integrated part of the family — went on an innocent exploration. “It was just one of those commercial storage spaces where you’d put Grandma’s old couch,” he recalls. “Ellen’s son had a comic book collection in there. I hadn’t paid much attention to what all these boxes were.

“But there it was: WORK PRINTS. I opened a box. It was all these big prints he’d made. All this stuff. And I was like ‘My God! Nobody’s lost.’ But I felt incredibly stupid, like I should have known it was there. Why didn’t I look? We could have done this sooner.”

Hughes had stumbled upon 1,600 printed photos — 9x9 work prints, 8x10 contact sheets and 16x20 finished prints — many with Andy’s wax-pencil notes on the back.

There was the South Beach of the 1970s again, a beguiling population of suntanned old Jewish men and women, on the sand, in the pool, on the porch, radiant and in love with life. All those years, shuttered in storage, and now they were free once again to tell their stories.

Many of the prints had faded, their chemical colors dimmed with age. Hughes scanned and digitized each one, then set about enhancing the color palettes using Adobe Photoshop.

To get the hues right, he consulted with Gary Monroe. “What were Andy’s colors like?” Hughes asked.

Monroe’s reply was succinct. “Think beach ball,” he said.

It’s impossible to tell the story of Andy Sweet without Gary Monroe. Recently retired after 30 years as a professor at Daytona State College, he famously brought the Highwaymen, Florida’s historic African-American landscape artists, to light. Monroe is a world-renowned photographer who won a Fulbright scholarship to document the impoverished residents of Haiti.

In the 1970s, he and Andy Sweet, both Miami Beach High School graduates, were inseparable.

“Andy was impetuous and irreverent, and I say this in the best sense of the word,” Monroe explains. “Nothing was sacred to him. Everything was fair game. His was sophomoric humor, more often than not over the top, bordering on gross. But just about each of his observations were as insightful as they were poignant.”

They both realized that the old-world culture wasn’t going to last forever.

After studying photography at the University of South Florida, then at the University of Colorado where they earned Master of Fine Arts degrees, the two friends returned to their hometown to begin what they planned as a 10-year project documenting South Beach and the people who moved in and stayed. They received grants to support their work, including one from the National Endowment for the Arts.

Eight years after Andy died, a selection of their photos appeared in a hardcover book called Miami Beach. The limited edition was never republished and is out of print.

And then Andy’s negatives were lost. The Last Resort — it debuts on DVD in March and on Netflix in April — is part of a renaissance of interest in Andy Sweet’s idiosyncratic, irresistible photos. A coffee table book, Shtetl in the Sun: Andy Sweet’s South Beach, 1977–1980, was just published, spotlighting more than 100 of his best pictures.
He wasn't a planner. He'd show up somewhere, smile and introduce himself, and with permission granted, put his black Hasselblad camera to his eye and begin shooting. “We were young and cute,” Monroe smiles, “and reminded the seniors of their grandchildren.” Usually, all it took was a few words of Yiddish, and the young men were accepted.

“People related to Andy,” says Ellen Sweet Moss, Andy’s sister. “Look at the photos, a lot of the people are looking back at him and smiling. I guess they realized he wasn’t making fun of them. I thought he was. But he wasn’t, and they seemed to enjoy him a lot.”

Over the last few years, used copies of the 1990 Miami Beach book began selling online for $150 and more.

Ellen and Stan have established the Andy Sweet Photo Legacy, encompassing a website, a Facebook page, the documentary and the new book. “I'm doing this because his work is amazing,” Andy’s sister says. “My parents felt like this, before they passed away, that they wanted Andy to be known, for people to see his work.

“His photography was art, when a lot of people weren't doing it as art.”

It’s been compared to the classic photography of Diane Arbus, who memorialized less-than-glamorous, regular people with fabulously non-self-conscious images. Like her, Andy preferred spontaneity: click the shutter and look for the gold later.

Not that he looked at it that way, according to Monroe. “Andy was informal, like his photographs. We both made pictures that mattered, which found a resolve that was right for who we were.

“Of course, this kind of discussion would bore Andy and he never discussed his work or ideas about photography, at least not with more than a word or two, or a wiseass quip. I don't think Andy had more than a handful of serious conversations in his life, and although committed to his art he was not at all interested in talking about it.”

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From Baghdad
to Jacksonville
My voyage as a refugee to a new life in Florida

By Basma Alawee
As told to Seyeon Hwang

I was born into a large and close family in Baghdad, Iraq. Our home was a gathering place for cousins and other relatives — we all had a strong bond. My parents were teachers at the elementary schools my siblings and I attended.

I have a quite vivid memory of the first Gulf War when it broke out in 1990. I was only 4 years old but can still remember the bombing and power outages that swept the city multiple times. My parents stayed awake every night to make sure we were safe and sound during the turmoil.

As a teenager, I would frequently tune to the radio to keep up with the news about the wars in the region, never knowing that I would one day be pushed out of my homeland and become a refugee. When I was 17, the regime of Saddam Hussein was toppled.

Looking for safety

One night in 2006, my fiance (now husband) had spent the evening with my family and they suggested he stay overnight because it was dark and dangerous outside.

In the middle of the night I heard men whispering outside, followed by loud, creaking sounds as our gate was pushed open. The men rushed into the house. My father, brothers, and fiance were forced to the ground by the men, who turned out to be American soldiers.

When my father and brothers yelled that we were not the family they were looking for, a soldier stepped on the head of one of my brothers to quiet him.

It was an extremely shameful and intolerable moment. My mother brought our IDs to show them that we were, indeed, not the family they were searching for. The soldiers finally admitted their mistake, apologized, and left. We called ourselves lucky because so many people were victimized in similar incidents. Misinformation and miscommunication...
were rampant, sometimes threatening the safety of innocent people. A year later, my fiance and I married. My eldest daughter was born in 2008, and the following year, armed with a degree in chemical engineering from Baghdad Technical University (now part of the University of Baghdad), I joined the Ministry of Oil.

My husband had been working for American companies since 2003. He loved his job and truly believed he could bridge the miscommunication between the Iraqis and the U.S. government, but his safety was often in jeopardy. Once, he witnessed his workplace bombed as he was on his way to work. In the eyes of certain Iraqis, the U.S. was an adversary and this made his job life-threatening. My family and I would pray every morning that he would return safely from work.

The mere thought of escape was disheartening. I loved my family and did not want to leave them behind. But a series of threats against my husband led us to consider it. After a long debate, my husband applied for a special immigrant visa for Iraqi and Afghan refugees working for the U.S. government. The vetting was slow and draining and took more than a year and a half until, finally, we were notified we would be resettled in the U.S.

In fear of persecution or attack, I had to keep our departure secret until the day we left. I was able to say goodbye only to my parents. I kept my entire journey secret for the first two years, even from my cousins and friends, to ensure that my family in Iraq was safe.

Finding a new community

When we filed for our visa, the vetting process included providing information about a sponsor in the U.S. who could attest to our identity. Our sponsor was a member of the U.S. military still in Iraq, whose family lived in Daytona Beach.

Since Daytona Beach lacked the necessary infrastructure to resettle refugees, we were resettled in Orlando.

Telling their stories

By Seyeon Hwang

Growing up in a divided Korea, I witnessed the conflicting ways in which many South Koreans viewed North Koreans. In movies and novels, North Koreans were portrayed as tragic protagonists evicted from their homeland during the Korean War. But outside of fiction, the public reaction to North Korean refugees, better known as “defectors,” was often hostile. People might show compassion for the reunification of families torn apart by the division between North and South, but would resist housing more North Korean refugees in their neighborhoods.

I had experienced being an outsider myself. As a child, my family lived for a year in Louisiana, where my parents were on sabbatical from their university professorships in Seoul. I was the only Asian in my school. That experience inspired a desire to explore how stories and memories shape belonging, and vice versa.

Globally, we see an unprecedented number of people who have been forcibly pushed out of their homelands — 68.5 million as of 2017 — many of whom have sought shelter and asylum in urban areas.

Asylum-seekers and refugees differ from immigrants or migrants. They are victims of forced eviction whose only choice to escape political persecution is relocation. The term “refugee” refers to someone who has been granted an official status that secures legal protection; asylum-seekers have applied for refugee status or are planning to apply.

“Immigrants” and “migrants” are those whose movements are intended to improve their well-being and are not the only option for survival.

But today, the distinction between immigrants and asylum-seekers has blurred. Various factors other than political persecution have led to the increased number of evictions.

Historically, Florida has been a leader in providing safe haven for refugees from all over the world: more than 1 million from Cuba since 1959; Haitians in the 1980s; those fleeing the Soviet Union and Southeast Asia during the Cold War; from South Sudan, Democratic Republic of Congo, Myanmar, and Bhutan throughout the 1990s and 2000s, and from Latin American and Middle Eastern countries in the 21st century.

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But when we arrived in 2010, life was a disappointment. I had thought we would be able to find a job easily and quickly. We could not afford to go to school without working so we had to keep looking for jobs. Once, I applied for three to four positions, only to be rejected for being “overqualified.”

The neighborhood where we were first placed was unsafe. I heard stories of residents mugged in the streets. I gradually realized I had to learn through my own experience those things not taught at the resettlement agency orientation. For instance, I took a self-defense class to be prepared to protect myself.

My husband and I left Orlando a few months after a traumatizing car accident. We felt the need to spiritually confide in a Muslim community to regain strength and resilience, but Orlando did not have one that was well established. By that time, I was enjoying my first job as a teacher. As much as I cherished the friendship and life we had built in Orlando, we decided to start fresh and moved to Jacksonville in 2011 to be close to a larger Arab community.

**My American life**

In Jacksonville, my husband works as a director of a school cafeteria while volunteering as a soccer coach. I work as an advocate for refugees and women who need a voice.

I am proud of where I come from and encourage my children not to forget their ethnic and cultural roots. I organize cultural events so Americans can learn about my culture. I am also committed to building a stronger spiritual foundation among Muslim refugees and women to empower them to become better citizens.

At the same time, I celebrate the occasions that ordinary Americans do. I invite friends and neighbors for Thanksgiving and Christmas. I want to demonstrate to my children that Americans are different in their cultural traditions, but also the same in many ways.

Over the years, I have come to know many friendly and warm-hearted Americans. During the six years I worked as a teacher, I was deeply involved in the refugee communities and somewhat disconnected from the American communities. But in the last year that I have been working fulltime as a refugee advocate at the Florida Immigrant Coalition, using my skills in event organizing and planning for refugee advocacy, I have discovered the need for communication to bridge the gap between refugees and Americans.

Many Americans have complimented my work and nominated me for awards, which has helped me understand better the “American” part of the city and how they perceive refugees. I truly believe that more refugees should step out of their comfort zones and share their stories with the rest of Jacksonville. The city is diverse but there has to be more communication for everyone to recognize it.

**Concerns and comforts**

As a naturalized U.S. citizen, I am concerned about the future of my children and this country, particularly in the way that Muslim women and refugees are perceived and treated.

After eight years of living here, when people point fingers at me and whisper or throw slurs, I still see myself struggling as a refugee. This year, as I was driving out of a parking lot, someone shouted that I should be deported. There are still many misperceptions we need to work on.
While some difficulties remain, I have been fortunate to have been surrounded by people with good intentions. When I was pregnant with my second child, I was working as a substitute teacher because I could not find a fulltime job. My husband and I were struggling financially and I was in despair. Near the end of the pregnancy, fellow teachers threw me a shower for the new baby.

Surely, I was thankful for all of the gifts that helped us overcome a financially difficult time, but I was most touched by their act of kindness. They not only taught me the custom of a baby shower, but also the feeling of being welcomed and accepted.

Nowadays, I throw baby showers for others because I want them to feel the same way I did. And at the holidays, we invite people for dinner at our newly purchased home, just as I was invited.

Being a Jacksonvillian and Floridian means I have become open minded and welcoming of Americans from various backgrounds, without losing sense of my own cultural identity.

I still miss every part of my life back in Iraq: waking up in the morning to a popular song on the radio; the scent of freshly brewed tea; the neighbors who cared about us like brothers and sisters.

I dearly miss family gatherings, such as those during Ramadan. Every detail of these gatherings are now memories. That is why I try to hold as many events as I can during Ramadan for the Muslim community — to make them feel more at home.

But at the same time, I organized a dinner called “Refugees for the Jews” in the aftermath of the mass shooting at the synagogue in Pittsburgh. Ten refugee families cooked for Jewish families for consolation and spiritual recovery, bridging the gap between refugees and Americans.

I recently invited my parents to visit us in the U.S., but due to restrictions it is unclear whether they will be admitted to the country even for a short period.

My work is helping me overcome the fear that has been lingering in me as a refugee. I am hoping to achieve more as I advocate for millions of refugees around the world — and protect the American values in the country that I now call home.

Basma Alawee lives in Jacksonville with her husband, Ali Aljubouri, a cafeteria director and volunteer soccer coach, and two daughters, who are in elementary school. Alawee was interviewed by University of Florida department of urban and regional planning doctoral student Seyeon Hwang as part of the Florida Humanities Council-supported program, Remembering Refugees in Jacksonville, Florida: Oral Histories of Resettled Refugees. Alawee is part of the FHC’s Speaker Series.

Most recently, nearly 300,000 Puerto Ricans displaced by Hurricane Maria relocated to Florida (though as American citizens, they are neither immigrants nor refugees).

In Jacksonville alone, more than 6,000 refugees have established homes in the city since the late 1980s.

But the fascinating journeys of these refugees have rarely been shared. As a doctoral student at the University of Florida College of Design, Construction and Planning, I was inspired by these stories and decided to focus my dissertation on the experience of refugees in Florida.

As an immigrant myself, I was intrigued by how their memories as refugees shape their lives after resettlement. I chose Jacksonville, the state’s second-largest community of refugees, to counterbalance the heavy scholarly focus on Miami as a refugee destination.

At the University of Florida, I was further inspired to develop a project to tell the stories of refugees by the classes I was taking through the Samuel Proctor Oral History Program (SPOHP). So I approached World Relief Jacksonville, the oldest resettlement agency in the city, which agreed to connect me with refugees who might be willing to tell their stories. And I received a grant through the Florida Humanities Council to conduct my work.

My goal was to document and preserve the unique experiences of refugees, to understand the cause of their flight and the process of resettlement in Jacksonville.

But beyond that, I wanted to share their stories of struggles and survival with the local communities, students, and public.

For so long, the experiences of refugees have been depicted as mere outcomes of the resettlement system designed and run by the government. I wanted to break the existing paradigm and give authority to the refugees themselves through storytelling.

So I interviewed 15 refugees who had moved to Jacksonville between 1999 and 2016. Their ages, languages, religions, and countries of origin varied, as did the topics they chose to talk about.

The videos were edited and screened at an event that featured refugees’ stories and discussions with a panel. The interviews will be permanently archived for public access within the SPOHP at UF.

What have I learned through this process?

Every interview was an acknowledgment that refugees are not just recipients of humanitarian aid or social welfare but agents of their own lives. Many of them found opportunities in Jacksonville that supports their families. One refugee started his own supermarket that sells products from diverse parts of Asia and another refugee is now a resettlement caseworker who helps other refugees. Their stories represent who they are and what they are capable of in this new country.

To truly welcome and accept refugees, we must go beyond an act of momentary sympathy. We should, instead, listen to their voices and connect with them on a long-term basis.
air-conditioning or hurricane advisories. I read Marjorie Kinnan Rawlings’s magisterial, slow-moving *The Yearling* and was so entranced by her vision of mid-central Florida in the late 19th century that I made the pilgrimage multiple times out to her house in Cross Creek, and even cooked a few meals from her cookbook *Cross Creek Cookery*. After Peter Matthiessen won the National Book Award for *Shadow Country*, his utterly gorgeous and wild novel about the Florida frontier, I let the book sit on my shelf for a year, a little cowed by the grand scope of his project, but when I finally read the book, I was so moved I could hardly read anything else for weeks afterward. It is still the most brutal, stunning, vicious, light-filled Floridian work that I know of. Slowly, I expanded my scope of reading to other writers, and began to learn how to love Florida through the eyes of Joy Williams, Karen Russell, Marjory Stoneman Douglas, Cynthia Barnett, Jack E. Davis, and up to the relatively new Florida writers Kristin Arnett and Sarah Gerard.

Yet the Floridian writer whom I love the most fervently was one of the first Europeans to try to encounter Florida on its own terms: William Bartram, a Quaker naturalist who came through the South in the 18th century to describe it for a more cosmopolitan Northern and English audience. I return to him often and take profound pleasure in his ecstatic, almost wild-eyed visions of the state. Bartram taught me many lessons in his *Travels*, but the ones I return to again and again in my own writing are these: that the eyes of the outsider can see things in the state that those who were born to it may miss, and that there is deep joy in the teeming wilderness here. After 12 years as a Floridian, I rue the first few years I lived in the Sunshine State without the deepening and clarifying visions of the writers who taught me how to love this place where I have found myself.

Lauren Groff is a New York Times bestselling author of three novels, *The Monsters of Templeton*, *Arcadia*, and *Fates and Furies*, the short story collections *Delicate Edible Birds*, and her latest, *Florida*. She has won the Paul Bowles Prize for Fiction, the PEN/O. Henry Award, and the Pushcart Prize; has been a finalist for the National Book Award twice, as well as many other honors. She lives in Gainesville with her husband and two young sons.
“That’s my mentor right over there,” Abbott says, gesturing toward the window. “And I didn’t want to dominate it.”

The newer structure’s clean lines conceal a trick — a last-minute change of direction calibrated on the location of the Cocoon House and the sun’s position at Winter Solstice — that is more easily experienced than understood. For Lunardi, the architect who worked with Abbott to make the concept work, this is the genius of the Butterfield House.

“I’ve had the privilege to work with a lot of talented designers and architects,” Lunardi says. “But I think what makes this building unique is that you look at it and you get it right away. You can go through and see the details, but the architecture is this massive mood — light and shadow and form.”

Sadoskas remembers the “aha day” when he and the Butterfields grasped Abbott’s vision. They had been traveling back and forth from Houston, with video conferences in between. They met on the property in the rain, with a card table and an umbrella. Abbott and Lunardi stacked Plexiglas boxes on the table to show them how the house could work.

“We could see that everything we’d been asking for,” Sadoskas says, “you could have on this lot.”

For Abbott, the Butterfield House process — working with engaged clients, a capable partner like Lunardi and an experienced and innovative builder like Pat Ball — validates his decision to chart a course in Florida, instead of pursuing high-profile projects on the international stage like his friends Foster and Rogers.

“I grew up in a tiny, tiny town, and I’ve always liked small towns,” he says. “And I like to have contact with clients. When you get really big, you can’t do that. I’ve been blessed to see both sides.”

To learn more

The Sarasota Architectural Foundation (Sarasotaarchitecturalfoundation.org) celebrates the Sarasota School of Architecture movement and advocates to preserve midcentury modern structures that exemplify its forward-looking principles. The foundation offers guided tours of iconic buildings throughout the year.

Suggested reading:
The Sarasota School of Architecture, 1941-1966
by John Howey

Paul Rudolph: The Florida Houses
by Christopher Domin and Joseph Kind

In/Formed by the Land: The Architecture of Carl Abbott
by Carl Abbott

Leslie Butterfield, an artist herself, and her husband, Steve Sadoskas, decorate their home with artwork from local artists. Their 11-year-old cat, Sundance, enjoys the view.
I woke just after 4 one morning and texted a friend to ask if he’d like to join me in Bushnell and motor over to Lake Apopka to get some early morning photos of wetland wildlife. After he said “no way,” we met at McDonald’s and headed out. As we were leaving the parking lot, we learned the park was closed, so we hatched Plan B and turned toward the Circle Bar B Ranch State Park, just south of Lakeland.

As the eastern sky began to brighten, we rounded a curve and saw something remarkable: an isolated tree in the middle of a misty field, behind which the sun was just cracking the horizon.

Early morning light changes by the minute, so we wheeled off into the ditch and scurried over a low fence, onto a wet, newly planted hay field. I took 119 exposures within 10-15 minutes. In this one, my friend captures the way the sun was slicing through that tree and mist, a wonderful and rare thing to see. The photo speaks to that irrepressible drive no serious photographer can deny: to capture, whatever it takes, a scene that is uniquely beautiful and will never happen again in exactly the same way.

Emilio “Sonny” Vergara is former executive director of the Southwest Florida Water Management District, the St. Johns River Water Management District, and the Peace River/Manasota Regional Water Supply Authority.

Now retired in Spring Lake, he is a writer and photographer who captures “combinations of light, color, and form that stir the heart.” He recently published the hardcover FLORIDA! Images of Natural Florida. View his work at skyshadowphotography.com

Do you have a photo for State of Wonder? Please email Jacki Levine at jlevine@flahum.org
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