

Gainesville

Where Nature and Culture
Meet in North Florida

PHOTO BY GENE BEDNAREK/SILVER IMAGES PHOTO AGENCY

The circa-1920 Thomas Center
is home to art galleries and
performance space.

Coming of Age

Discover Gainesville's new diversity. By Ted Spiker

For many outside of Florida, Gainesville may be best known for two things: Gatorade and Tim Tebow. But those who truly know this city understand its depth and its three-dimensional environment — a cool balance of nature, culture, business, sports, and education.



Hippodrome State Theatre

Home to the state's oldest university, the University of Florida (UF), Gainesville retains its funky, college-town vibe. But many say its appeal is much more diverse nowadays.

"It used to be a hippie town — a really cool, very grassroots little town, but also very progressive," says Stephanie Ivey, owner of Ivey's Grill and a resident since 1987.

Today, Gainesville offers many of the amenities of a larger city (championship-level sports and a rich arts community) without some of the hassles (rush hour).

Located in the north central part of the state about half-way between the Atlantic Ocean and Gulf of Mexico, the city has a population

of about 125,000. Served by the Gainesville Regional Airport, the area is convenient to popular destination spots like Orlando. But visitors and residents find plenty to keep them

busy in Gainesville and Alachua County.

Spend the afternoon at the circa-1920 Thomas Center, a restored Mediterranean

Revival-style manse filled with art galleries, history exhibits, and 1920s period rooms, all surrounded by landscaped gardens. Then head to the downtown district to savor Asian and Pan-Latin-inspired dishes (see dining on page 88). Afterward, check out the live-music scene or catch a play or film at the Hippodrome State Theatre, housed in a historic Federal Building.

Culture vultures will enjoy the new Asian wing at The Harn Museum of Art in UF's Cultural Plaza. And kids (and the young at heart) will love the teaching zoo at Santa Fe College, where they can stroll the 10-acre forest and commune with cuddly critters from fur to feathers (monkeys to parrots).

Nature lovers can also get a close look at local wildlife in nearby Paynes Prairie Preserve State Park, home to bison, horses, sandhill cranes, and more than 270 bird species. Many visit Gainesville's nearby parks and waterways for hiking, biking, snorkeling, and canoeing.

"We love the Ichetucknee River for the clarity of the water and the beauty of the scenery," says

Linda Demetropoulos, nature and cultural manager of the city's Division of Cultural Affairs, who spends leisure time kayaking in the area. "Gainesville is one of my favorite places in Florida because of the beauty, especially the tree canopies."

Many also point to Gainesville as a city that supports new business and technology. The new Innovation Square located next to the UF campus will develop into a place where science, technology, and business merge to bring new ideas to the marketplace.

"What you find here is a community that's incredibly entrepreneurial in nature," says Brent Christensen, president and CEO of the Gainesville Area Chamber of Commerce. "Gatorade was the university's product that gave it fame and fortune in the marketplace, but now the university is even more committed to find more Gatorades, whether it's in the life-science field, the green-energy field, or the information-technology field."

Part of that spirit comes from the constant influx of young minds into all areas of the community, whether it's business, arts, or athletics. Part of it also comes from the one-degree-of-separation residents feel with each other. When popular pizza place Satchel's temporarily closed after a kitchen fire, supporters raised more than \$35,000 to help pay out-of-work employees. (Satchel's plans to reopen in June.)

"There's a constant feeling of vitality, and we're seeing that more than ever before," says



From top: Future plans for Innovation Square; tubing on the Ichetucknee River; Ben Hill Griffin Stadium at University of Florida

Gainesville Mayor Craig Lowe. "Gainesville has a very diverse population and a large international community. It's a midsize city with many things you find in a large city, but you still maintain the quality of life that's so special to us."



Paynes Prairie Preserve State Park

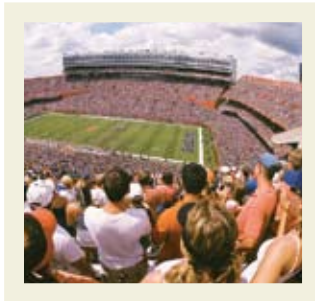
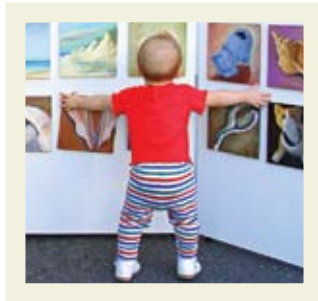


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left: Korea, Gilt Wood Seated Bodhisattva, Joseon Dynasty (1392-1910) 17th century, museum purchase, gift of Michael and Donna Singer
right: China, Covered Jar, Qing Dynasty (1644-1911), 18th century, museum purchase, gift of a private donor

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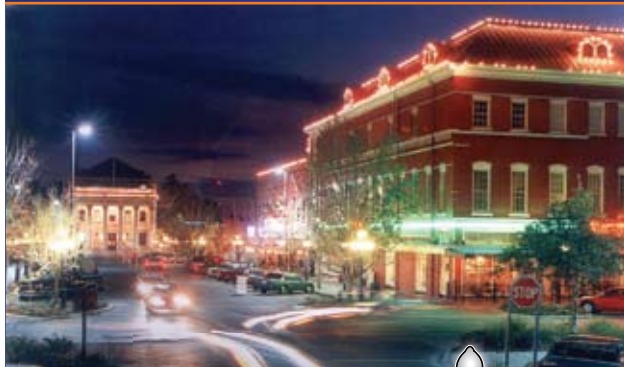
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Gainesville |



Researcher at Innovation Square

Reaching Higher

From high tech to higher ed, Gainesville is on the cutting edge. **By Chris Eversole**

When Augi Lye graduated from the University of Florida (UF) in 2006, he got offers from across the country. But the 2006 grad decided not to move.

Lye decided to stay in Gainesville to work for Prioria Robotics, a company founded by UF grads that builds portable unmanned aircraft.

"I took a big pay cut from what I could have made in a big city, but I figured that Prioria was getting started like all big companies get started," Lye says. His gamble on Gainesville paid off. After working for Prioria for two and half

years, Lye pursued the technical side of a more artistic pastime — the cello. He launched his first company, ToneRite, which makes a device that

increases tone, playability, and balance in string instruments. Lye then started a computer gaming company, Trendy Entertainment, which has grown to employ 30 techies — thanks to the success of its Dungeon Defenders product.

UF researchers and graduates like Lye have long defined Gainesville's economy. The late Dr. J. Robert Cade, a UF scientist, created

PHOTO COURTESY OF UNIVERSITY OF FLORIDA DEVELOPMENT CORPORATION



Rather than relying on the solid education and health-care sectors, Gainesville works actively to attract new business.

Gatorade in the 1960s to keep Gator football players hydrated on the field. In 1985, UF physician Bill Petty, his wife Betty, and UF biomedical engineer Gary Miller started Exac-

tech, a manufacturer of joint replacements. Today the company employs more than 600 people and boasts more than \$200 million in annual sales.

While these high-tech spin-offs keep the Gainesville economy

growing, its foundation remains higher education and health care. With an annual economic impact exceeding \$8.76 billion, UF has an



enrollment of 50,000 students and employs more than 13,800 full-time workers, as well as an additional 12,500 student and part-time workers.

Health care closely follows higher education's impact on the local economy. The cornerstones are Shands at UF, the university's academic medical center, and North Florida Regional Medical Center, both of which *U.S. News & World Report* regularly ranks within the top 50 in various medical specialties.

"Health care is one heck of an economic engine," says Brent Christensen, president and CEO of the Gainesville Area Chamber of Commerce. "Like higher education, health care buffers us from extremes in the economy."

And so does diversity: Insurance adds another important ingredient to the economic mix. Nationwide Insurance has its regional headquarters in Gainesville, which is also home to AvMed Health Plans.

But rather than relying on the solid education and health-care sectors, Gainesville works actively to attract new business. In fact, it has more incubators per capita than any other U.S. city, according to Ann Collett, vice president of Innovation Gainesville, a community-wide effort led by the chamber and the Council for Economic Outreach to bring high-skill and high-wage jobs to town.

Lye, for example, started his companies in the Downtown Technology Center, a business incubator created by Ken and Linda McGurn. The McGurns helped transform the downtown

PHOTOS (FROM LEFT) COURTESY OF UNIVERSITY OF FLORIDA DEVELOPMENT CORPORATION, TRENDY ENTERTAINMENT

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Gainesville is home to the University of Florida, one of the nation's ten largest public universities.

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The University of Florida - By the Numbers

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Clockwise: Shands Cancer Hospital; UF&Shands researcher; neurosurgery at Shands.



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Upgrade to Green

Travel through the Gainesville Regional Airport (GNV), which serves more than 350,000 passengers annually, and the first thing you'll notice is the welcoming, sunny terminal complete with rocking chairs and fountain. The recent face-lift, part of a \$7 million multiphase renovation project, also includes deeper changes such as a new, energy-efficient HVAC system.

Passengers flying in might also spot the airport's recently installed solar panels on the terminal roof. Not only are the panels a green source of energy, GNV is able to sell back up to 300 kilowatts of power to Gainesville Regional Utilities through its Solar Feed In Tariff program. By participating in the tariff program, the airport gains revenue and helps Gainesville maintain its status as a national hub for green technology. gra-gnv.com

business district into a vibrant destination featuring locally owned restaurants and bars, as well as government offices and space for technology companies.

The newest, largest incubator is UF's Florida Innovation Hub, a 48,000-square-foot building located midway between the campus and downtown. Its abundance of office space, laboratories, conference rooms,

and other resources support new startup companies, which use technologies that spring from university laboratories. Take Synogen Development Group, a tenant that has invested in and mentors new medical technology companies, helping young entrepreneurs build their businesses.

The Innovation Hub is part of a much larger entrepreneurial development, the roughly 40-acre Innovation Square at the University of Florida, which focuses on cutting-edge creativity and technology development. Both public and private sectors are working together to develop the square into a new live, work, and play community.

With so many resources for businesses, Gainesville attracts growing companies like MindTree Limited, a global IT and product engineering company. MindTree recently selected Gainesville for its United States expansion, slated to bring in 400 new, high-tech jobs over the next five years.

But while the city is reaching toward the future, Gainesville is also preserving the legacy of its previous innovators. The Cade Museum for Creativity and Invention will honor Gatorade inventor Dr. Robert Cade at its future home in Depot Park just south of downtown.

The museum is one of many examples of the dynamic economy being fostered by Innovation Gainesville. "We have a community that allows cool things to happen," Collett says. We couldn't agree more.

PHOTOS (LEFT AND TOP RIGHT) COURTESY OF SHANDS (BOTTOM RIGHT) BY SARAH BESS KIEWEL

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The greatest discovery in the world is just a discovery until it is delivered in a usable, functional form. The scope of its resources as one of the nation's largest public universities and a strong commitment to research enable UF to continue its long history of transforming scientific breakthroughs into products that benefit mankind. During the last decade, UF generated over 100 spinoff companies that now employ more than 1,000 people in the state of Florida.



UF Research at a glance - Fiscal 2011

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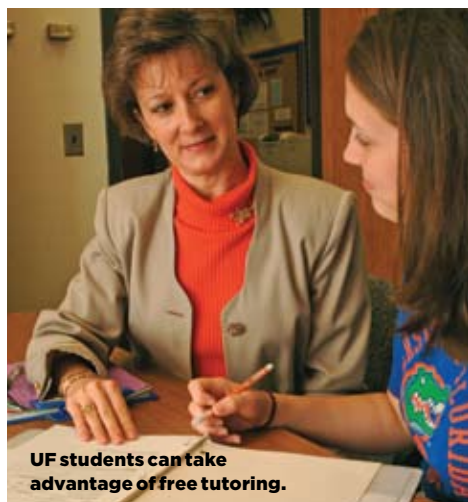
Gainesville

Students stroll through UF's historic portion of campus.

Knowledge is Power

And Gainesville boasts powerhouse educational institutions. By Ted Spiker

While the area boasts several colleges, Alachua County is perhaps best known as the home of the University of Florida and Santa Fe College.



UF students can take advantage of free tutoring.

University of Florida

With an enrollment of 50,000 and more than 5,000 faculty members, the University of Florida (UF) is one of only six public land-grant universities in the country offering colleges of medicine, veterinary medicine, agriculture, and law, all on one central campus.

Tracing to 1853, UF moved to Gainesville from Lake City in 1906. Today, the campus stretches over 2,000 acres, and includes state-of-the-art facilities like the Shands teaching hospital. Clinical

researchers there conduct groundbreaking studies on gene therapy, cancer, neurological diseases, and much more. In 2010–2011 alone, the university received more than \$619 million in research funding.

“If you’ve noticed a trend here — innovation — that’s no accident,” says Win Phillips, senior vice president and chief operating officer. “It’s what we do, and we do it exceptionally well.”

UF students also do exceptionally well. About 90 percent of incoming freshmen score above average on standardized testing. As for athletics, UF has 27 national team championships and 203 Southeastern Conference championships under its belt, but it’s also the only SEC school to have placed 100 or more student-athletes on the Southeastern Conference Academic Honor Roll for the past 14 years.

Students and faculty point to the fact that UF, like Gainesville, has the advantages of a large entity while still remaining intimate.

“I can’t think of another university that would appeal to me like UF does. It has the research, but the colleges are small enough to remind you that it’s made up of people,” says Professor Emeritus Paul Doering, a UF alumnus and one of the world’s leading pharmacy experts. “When a person closes their eyes and thinks about a university, what more could come to mind than the UF campus?”

PHOTOS COURTESY OF UNIVERSITY OF FLORIDA

Where innovation connects with the people and resources to succeed.



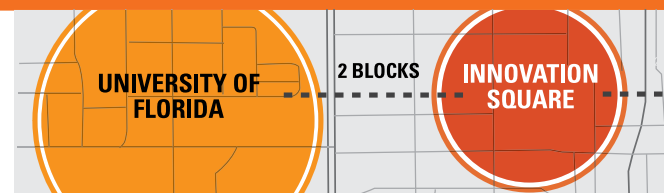
The Florida Innovation Hub at UF

Tech-based companies and breakthrough ideas are thriving at the University of Florida’s Innovation Square.

At Innovation Square, UF has created a live/work/play community that cultivates and inspires creative thinking, fosters constant interaction between entrepreneurs and investors, and fuels ideas that drive progress.

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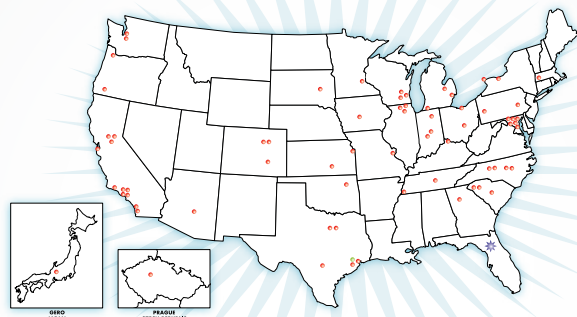
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Santa Fe College

Established as a community college in 1965, Santa Fe gained approval to offer four-year degrees in 2008. Now the college offers both two- and four-year degrees, with flexible part-time and online programs, to approximately 25,000 students. An additional 9,000 students take advantage of Santa Fe's continuing education and enrichment courses each year.

"With the population of Florida growing year after year, and more high-school students seeking college education, Santa Fe welcomed the opportunity to provide bachelor's degrees, especially to students in our region who need to study part-time and continue working," says Ed Bonahue, provost and vice president for academic affairs.

Santa Fe is well-known for programs in biotechnology, digital media, and the arts, as well as for the Santa Fe College Teaching Zoo, the only nationally accredited zoo on a college campus. The five-semester zoo animal technology program gives students instruction, training, and clinical experience.

In addition, Santa Fe has strong



Santa Fe College Teaching Zoo

PHOTOS (FROM TOP) GENE BEDNAREK/SILVER IMAGE® PHOTO AGENCY; COURTESY OF SANTA FE COLLEGE

programs in the health field, such as nursing, respiratory care, surgical technology, radiographic technology and medical imaging, dental hygiene and assisting programs, and cardiovascular technology.

"Gainesville has become a regional hub for health care and related life-science activities," says Santa Fe College President Jackson Sasser, "so if I had to name one cluster of programs where we really partner with our com-

munity and respond to community needs, it would be health sciences."

Santa Fe also reaches out to the community through its Center for Innovation and Economic Development (CIED), which nurtures local businesses. One of the most successful CIED companies is Student Maid, a cleaning service started by a UF graduate that employs honor students. Just another example of how Santa Fe impacts the Gainesville community.

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Culture & Nature

By Alisson Clark

Gainesville's many ways to play

Canoes along a typical north Florida spring

Step into the Thomas Center, a Mediterranean Revival-style hotel turned cultural oasis in downtown Gainesville, to experience one of the area's many attractions that have drawn tourists for more than a century.



Thomas Center

Luminaries like Robert Frost wintered here in the 1930s, doubtless drawn by palm trees and mild winters, as well as the lively intellectual and cultural community of a college town.

Today, those lures remain, along with a host of new attractions. The newest is the 26,000-square-foot David A. Cofrin Asian Art Wing at the Harn Museum of Art on the University of Florida campus. A showcase for the museum's 2,000 Asian works from 2500 B.C. to the present, the wing also includes a rock garden and water garden with koi ponds and bonsai.

"So much of Asian art reflects nature, so the art you see inside is embodied by the gardens outside," says Tami Wroath, the Harn's director

of marketing and public relations. Of course, you won't want to miss the Harn's other treasures, such as Monet's oil on canvas, *Champ d'avoine* (Oat Field). Curators rotate exhibitions from the museum's collection of 8,300 works, ranging from Ancient American to contemporary.

Steps away, you'll find the rest of UF's Cultural Plaza, including the Florida Museum of Natural History. A draw for families as well as nature- and history-lovers of all ages, the museum's interactive exhibits let visitors explore a cave, a Native American hut, and a Florida estuary. In the mu-

seum's Butterfly Rainforest, hundreds of free-flying butterflies flutter amid a 6,400-square-foot screened enclosure filled with tropical plants and waterfalls.

Another top attraction for nature lovers is the Santa Fe College Teaching Zoo, where visitors can explore on their own, or take a guided tour (reservations required) with a student who's learning to care for the resident ocelots, monkeys, otters, and other animals — more than 75 species in all.

"It's different from a typical walk around a zoo because you're getting information about the animals from someone who takes care of them," says director Jonathan Miot. "You get to learn about the animals' personalities."

The zoo attracts more than 30,000 visitors per year, but there's more to experience at Santa Fe College. You'll also find youth and

adult shows at the Kika Silva Pla Planetarium as well as art galleries featuring student and faculty work.

Outdoor Adventure

Just outside of Gainesville, snorkelers, hikers, and paddlers flock to the crystal-clear springs at Ichetucknee Springs State Park. For John Moran, whose nature photos are published in *National Geographic* and *Time* (see his work at Harold's Frames & Gallery downtown), the springs have held a lifelong appeal.

"Whenever I visit the springs, seeing that glimpse of shocking blue through the trees literally takes my breath away," he says. When visitors dip a toe into the water, 72 degrees year-round, they might have the same reaction.

"In the heat of summer, it's delightfully alluring," Moran says, "but there's never a bad time to visit."

Other outdoor adventures abound at Paynes Prairie Preserve State Park, where bike paths such as the Gainesville-Hawthorne State Trail afford sweeping views of the savanna. Devil's Millhopper Geological State Park fea-



Above: Nepalese, Carved Conch Shell, 17th century, at the Harn Museum of Art. Below: Popular student restaurant The Swamp



PHOTOS (CLOCKWISE FROM TOP): LEFT COURTESY OF VISIT GAINESVILLE; MUSEUM PURCHASE. GIFT OF DR. AND MRS. DAVID A. COFRIN/HARN ART MUSEUM; GENE BEDNAREK/SILVER IMAGE PHOTO AGENCY (2)



Herlong Mansion Historic Inn & Gardens in Micanopy

tures a sinkhole revealing lush tropical plants, while the Kanapaha Botanical Gardens bloom gloriously year-round.

For some, getting outdoors means joining sports fans in their pilgrimage to Ben Hill Griffin Stadium, home of the Florida Gators football team. Tailgating is a favorite pastime here, but you'll also find NCAA Division I



Hikers at Paynes Prairie Preserve State Park

competitions throughout campus in baseball, basketball, soccer, volleyball, gymnastics, and other sports. And those teams weren't without supporters: Well over a million loyal fans attended 186 home events in 2010–2011.

A Step Back in Time

While Gainesville's college-town vibe is

all about what's new and next, many of the nearby small towns hark back to a simpler time. Alachua and High Springs boast main streets out of yesteryear lined with shops and restaurants. History buffs will delight in a meal at The Ivy House, a 1902 Vic-

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Spring Moonlight Walk
Kanapaha Botanical Gardens
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Newberry Watermelon Festival
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newberrywatermelonfestival.com

Downtown Festival & Art Show
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gvlculturalaffairs.org

ButterflyFest
Florida Museum of Natural History
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Heart of Florida Asian Festival
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University of Florida Homecoming Parade
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Primavera

Running annually from March through April (spring equinox to Earth Day), Primavera showcases Gainesville's top spring arts events, including festivals, theater, and even farm-to-table cuisine. To learn more, visit primaverafestival.us.

torian in Alachua, or the award-winning Great Outdoors Restaurant in High Springs, built as an opera house in 1895. In nearby Newberry, locals chow down at Newberry's Backyard BBQ, while athletes converge at Easton Newberry Sports Complex, a Junior Olympic Archery Development Program.

In quaint Micanopy, guests at the Herlong Mansion Historic Inn & Gardens stay in the midst of what some call "the little town that

time forgot." The oldest inland settlement in Florida, Micanopy offers visitors a glimpse back to the late 1800s and early 1900s, and plenty to explore. Settle in for a slice of pizza at Blue Highway, and then stroll the shops and restaurants downtown. Admire antique cameos at Delectable Collectables, take home some local honey from Mosswood Farm Store, or lose yourself searching through rare and used tomes at O. Brisky Books.

Culture Connection

The arts thrive and blossom in Gainesville.

Attracting legendary artists such as Wynton Marsalis and Billy Joel, Gainesville's cultural scene has the draw of much larger cities. Its myriad artistic opportunities even attracts new residents, according to Michael Blachly, director of University of Florida Performing Arts.

"It happens all the time," Blachly says. "People who have relocated here tell me they would never have thought of coming here had this (University of Florida Performing Arts) program not been part of the cultural landscape."

UF Performing Arts' largest venue, the Phillips Center for the Performing Arts, not only hosts touring shows like Monty Python's *Spamalot*, but also commissions new works and hosts world premieres from artists such as the Soweto Gospel Choir.

On campus or off, the city's arts scene hums with energy. See a play at the Hippodrome State Theatre, or take in a performance by Gainesville's resident dance company, Dance Alive National Ballet. Stroll the downtown Artwalk, filled with artist demonstrations and live music on the last Friday of every month.

"There's a lot going on in downtown Gainesville any night of the week," says Eleanor Blair, a painter whose studio is part of the walks. She suggests visiting the Bo Diddley Community Plaza — named for the late, great area resident — for a free concert (part of the Let's Go Downtown "Free Fridays" Plaza Series that runs May through October).

Gainesville also hosts nationally ranked events like the Downtown Festival & Art Show in October, which features more than 250 artists and attracts more than 100,000 visitors every year. More fine art and free jazz can be found at Santa Fe Spring Arts Festival in April.

Annual events like the Heart of Florida Asian Festival celebrate cultural heritage, while others like the Hoggetowne Medieval Faire are just plain quirky. Whether you love live music, fine art, or medieval jousting (or all of the above) Gainesville's got you covered.



Marjorie Rawlings' home in Cross Creek

A Small Place of Enchantment

Experience Old Florida's literary legacy. By Ivy Lamb

In 1928, future Pulitzer Prize winner Marjorie Kinnan Rawlings made a radical move when she set her sights on the Sunshine State.

Seeking inspiration, she left a successful journalism career in Rochester, New York, and moved with her husband, Charles Rawlings, to the small,

rural community of Cross Creek in Alachua County. Enamored with the landscape and people of north Florida, Rawlings turned her pen toward capturing her surroundings.

In 1930, Maxwell Perkins — the legendary editor to F. Scott Fitzgerald, Ernest Hemingway, and Thomas Wolfe — published Rawlings' story "Cracker Chidlings." When asked if she had material for a novel, Rawlings replied that she was "vibrating with material like a hive of bees in swarm."

After her divorce, Rawlings lived with a Cracker family for a short time ("Cracker" refers to the rural descendants of Florida's earliest settlers), learning how to hunt, fish, and make moonshine. She wove the experiences into her first novel, *South Moon Under*.

In 1939, Rawlings won a Pulitzer Prize and widespread popularity for her third novel, *The Yearling*, a coming-of-age story about a boy and his pet deer.

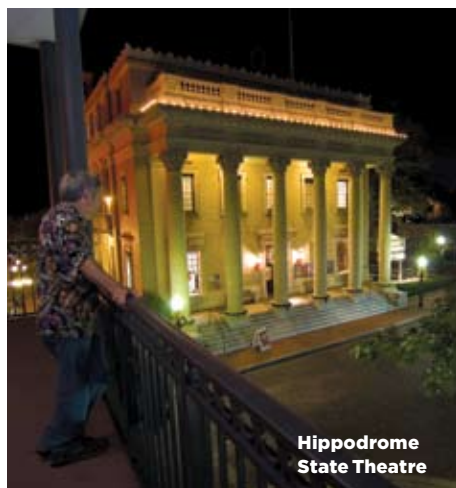
"I do not know how anyone can live without some small place of enchantment to turn to," Rawlings wrote after her move to Cross Creek, secluded in acres of lush, hardwood forest and fragrant citrus groves. The place never lost its magic for Rawlings, inspiring works still beloved by her many readers.



University of Florida Symphony Orchestra performing at the Bandshell on UF's campus



Alyssa Blitch and Zakk Varnedoe in Room to Dance



Hippodrome State Theatre

PHOTOS (CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT) COURTESY OF UNIVERSITY OF FLORIDA; VISIT GAINESVILLE; SANTA FE COLLEGE

Take a Tour

Rawlings' home and farm have been restored with original furnishings and artifacts. Guided by park rangers in period dress, visitors step into the 1930s at the house and adjacent orange grove. In 2007, the Marjorie Kinnan Rawlings Historic State Park became a National Historic Landmark. For more info, visit floridastateparks.org.

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Trivia Pursuit

Fun facts about Gainesville and Alachua County
By Ivy Lamb

Horse Haven

Alachua is a great place to retire — especially if you're a horse! In 1984, Peter and Mary Gregory began caring for abused and abandoned horses on their 140-acre farm. Today, the nonprofit Mill Creek Farm has grown to 265 acres for its 133 equines. Visitors are welcome on Saturdays (don't forget to bring carrots). millcreekfarm.org



History of Rock

Thanks to its jammin' college music scene, Gainesville has a connection to nine Rock and Roll Hall of Fame Inductees including the late Bo Diddley, Tom Petty & the Heartbreakers, Stephen Stills (of Crosby, Stills & Nash), and former Eagles band members Don Felder and Bernie Leaton. rockhall.com



The Wall of Wings

The McGuire Center for Lepidoptera and Biodiversity at the Florida Museum of Natural History is home to more than 10 million moth and butterfly specimens — one of the largest collections in the world. Visitors can see many of them on the nearly three-story "Wall of Wings" and watch scientists at work in the labs. flmnh.ufl.edu/mcguire

Walk on the Wild Side

If you want to do some gator spotting outside of Ben Hill Griffin Stadium (home to the Florida Gators), you're practically guaranteed to see the real deal on the LaChua Trail in Paynes Prairie Preserve State Park. This three-mile hike offers scenic views of wet prairie and marsh habitats, and plenty of basking alligators. floridastateparks.org



Culinary Aces

Math, English, and ice carving: It's all part of a regular day for the students in Eastside High School's culinary arts program, where running a restaurant and catering service is part of the curriculum. Culinary students have taken first place in state competitions for the past eight years and have won top honors on the national level. sbac.edu

Astronomy 101

Interplanetary travel is possible on Gainesville's Solar Walk — a 4 billion-to-one scale model of the solar system spanning nearly a mile along NW 8th Avenue. Each planet has its own marker designed by a regional artist, and an informational plaque. old.floridastars.org



Gator's Aid

In 1965, Dr. J. Robert Cade and a team of researchers found that overheated University of Florida football players weren't able to replenish their bodies with vital electrolytes and carbohydrates. This discovery inspired them to develop a sports drink to keep them hydrated on the field. Two years later, the Gators credited their first Orange Bowl win to (you guessed it) Gatorade.





Dragonfly Sushi and Sake Company

Diverse Appetites

Gainesville's dining scene goes independent and local.

By Alisson Clark

In the 1990s, chef Bert Gill had a dream that seemed far-fetched — that this midsize college town would someday boast a culinary scene worthy of foodie road trips.

Today, Gill's restaurants — Mildred's Big City Food, New Deal Cafe, and Blue Gill Quality Foods — are part of a burgeoning independent restaurant movement that's bringing Gainesville ever closer to that vision.

"It's similar to towns such as Natchez, Mississippi, and Athens, Georgia, that are thought of as culinary destinations," Gill says.

"I always wanted Gainesville to be a place where food is important, and now it's headed that way." That's thanks in part to his eateries near the University of Florida, which emphasize locally sourced ingredients, such as local beef used in the pimento cheese-slathered Blue Gill Burger.

But the epicenter of independent restau-

rants is the city's revitalized downtown, featuring dozens of diverse choices. Here, diners sip creative cocktails at the stylish Dragonfly Sushi and Sake Company, savor Pan-Latin delicacies, such as paella and

empanadas, at Emiliano's Café, or hang with hipsters at The Top Restaurant, where the menu offers dishes like Argentinian chimichurri with organic tempeh.

The independent spirit extends beyond the downtown as well. Take the local eggs and fair-trade coffee at The Jones Eastside. Then there's the beloved Satchel's Pizza (slated to reopen in June), where you can eat a slice in the old Volkswagen bus out front.

How best to wash down all this local goodness? Try sipping some freshly roasted joe from Sweetwater Organic Coffee (available at area stores and restaurants), or visiting Swamp Head Brewery, where you can sample award-winning beers brewed on-site. With so many unique, local spots, wining and dining in Gainesville is always a one-of-a-kind experience.



PHOTOS (CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT) COURTESY OF DRAGONFLY SUSHI AND SAKE COMPANY; VISIT GAINESVILLE; SWAMP HEAD BREWERY

Where to Stay



Magnolia Plantation

If you're looking for a unique place to stay, Gainesville's Historic Southeast Bed and Breakfast District has four restored Victorian inns featuring 1800s-style street lamps and stately wraparound porches — all within walking distance of downtown.

Cindy Montalto, co-owner of Magnolia Plantation Bed & Breakfast Inn and Cottages, notes that her guests are just as likely to be business travelers as couples. "B&Bs aren't just for romance," she says. "We have everything that a hotel has and more."

Other lodging options abound in Gainesville. Travelers who love to be in the midst of it all will enjoy the Hampton Inn downtown, while the Reitz Union Hotel on campus or the Hilton University of Florida Conference Center are convenient for visiting the University of Florida. If you're planning a conference or meeting, the Gainesville Conference Grant (offered twice a year) can reimburse thousands of dollars in meeting expenses. Find out more at visitgainesville.com.



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