

WINTER PARK'S INSPIRING NEW MISSION

Explore the City Dedicated to
Bringing Arts and Culture to All.

BY JACKIE CARLIN AND MICHAEL MCLEOD

Tucked away just a few miles from the hustle and bustle of Orlando's world-famous attractions and theme parks sits a charming, historic city that was once a winter escape for wealthy Northerners. With its brick streets, gorgeous chain of lakes and Spanish-moss draped trees, Winter Park, Florida, has long been beloved for its charming shopping districts and award-winning restaurants. Now, the city is an internationally renowned destination for arts and culture.

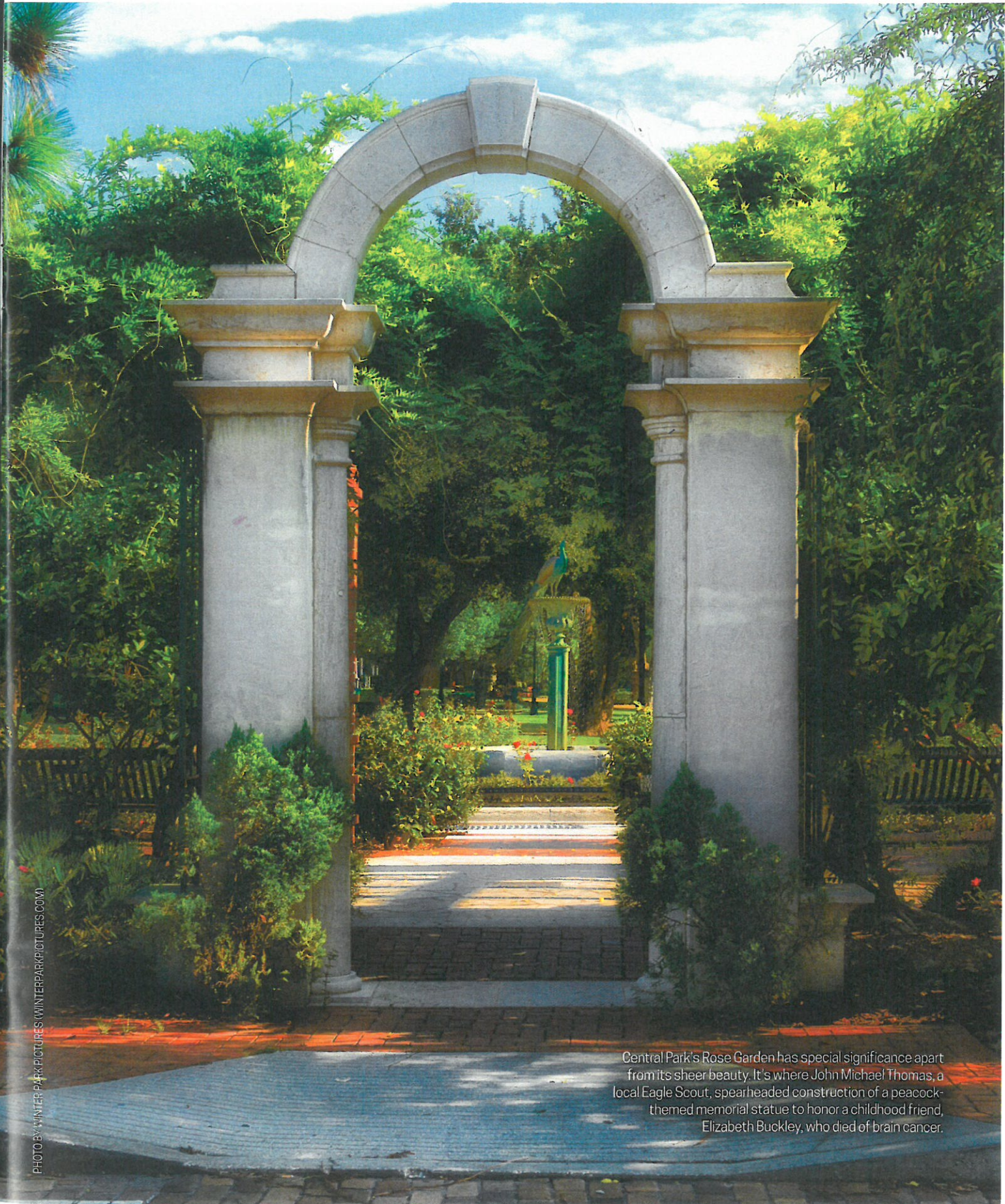
"It doesn't matter where you go in our city, you're going to see art," says Clarissa Howard, the city's director of communications who also coordinates promotional efforts among a consortium of local arts organizations. "Arts and culture have always been, and will always be, a key part of the Winter Park experience."

The city has long supported public arts and cultural experiences for its residents and visitors. At the heart of the city is Central Park, which runs most of the length of the Park Avenue shopping and dining district. The park itself

features several pieces of original art, including a sculpture by famed Czech-American sculptor Albin Polasek.

A former resident also donated a rose garden within the park for all to enjoy. At the northern end of the park sits the Charles Hosmer Morse Museum of American Art, which houses the world's most intriguing collection of works by Louis Comfort Tiffany, the legendary glass artist.

And nearby, the historic African-American community is celebrated at the Hannibal Square Heritage Center through photography, oral histories and public art works.



Central Park's Rose Garden has special significance apart from its sheer beauty. It's where John Michael Thomas, a local Eagle Scout, spearheaded construction of a peacock-themed memorial statue to honor a childhood friend, Elizabeth Buckley, who died of brain cancer.

PHOTO BY WINTER PARK PICTURES/WINTERPARKPICTURES.COM



winter park Florida

arts & culture

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Winter Park has rolled out an initiative that brings together its plethora of arts and cultural organizations to jointly promote their programs and activities.



World-renowned Park Avenue is the dining and retail hub of Winter Park. Within a radius of just a few miles, there are numerous museums, galleries and arts organizations.

The city also hosts two highly regarded sidewalk arts festivals each year, in the fall featuring Florida artists and in the spring featuring artists from around the world.

In 2016, the city decided to take steps to nurture and foster even more participation in the arts for its residents and visitors. One of the results of a yearlong visioning process was the creation of an Arts and Culture subcommittee comprised of more than 20 organizations and a new vision statement for the city:

Winter Park is the city of arts and culture, cherishing its traditional scale and charm while building a healthy and sustainable future for all generations.

Today, these member organizations have joined forces to help raise the visibility of arts opportunities within the city. By pooling marketing dollars and cross-promoting, they've recognized that they can contribute even more to the community's cultural life than they could on their own.

"Our goal wasn't to replace their efforts, but to supplement and support," says Craig O'Neil, Winter Park's assistant director of communications. "We meet once a month to talk about how we can best promote arts and culture in Winter Park as a destination. It's been really exciting to watch this movement grow, and we're already making great progress."

With a new logo, brochure, hashtag (#WPInspires) and online calendar of arts and culture happenings (cityofwinterpark.org/visitors/arts-culture), the subcommittee is off and running. And its members are planning their first major event since forming — the inaugural Weekend of the Arts, which will be held February 16-19.

"We'll be highlighting a specific event for each entity during that weekend," Howard says. "There will be more than a dozen different events that you can attend on each day."

In addition to the physical and emotional benefits that have long been associated with participation in arts, Howard and O'Neil say there is a growing body of research that touts the tremendous economic impact of a strong cultural scene within a community.

They point to the recent *Arts & Economic Prosperity 5* study, conducted by Americans for the Arts to document the economic impact of the nonprofit arts and culture industries in 341 communities and regions in all 50 states.

In Central Florida, the study found that the arts generates nearly \$400 million in economic activity, with \$46 million generated by Winter Park's arts-oriented nonprofits and the audiences that support them.

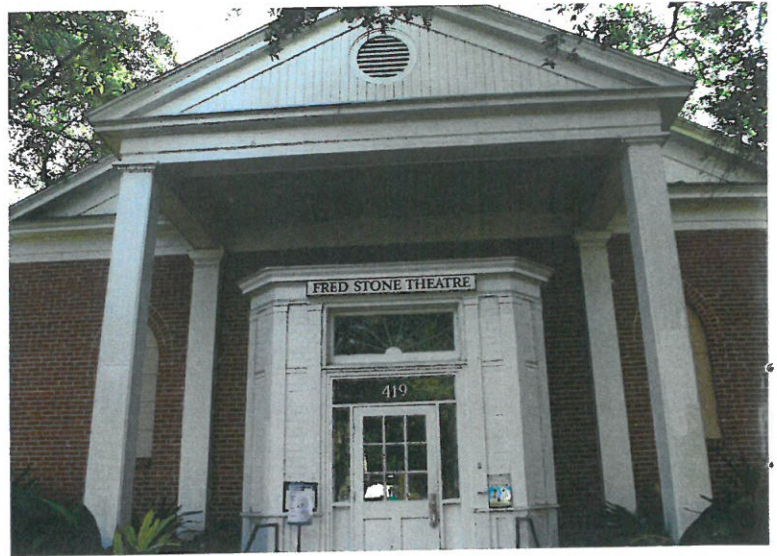
"Arts initiatives like this are such an economic driver for cities," says O'Neil. "People think that cities and counties are always just giving money to arts organizations, but the money that these organizations bring in through the ripple effect is pretty tremendous."

Despite the economic impact, at its heart, art inspires. And that's why the word *inspire* is a key component of the city's focus.

"#WPInspires is our mission," says Howard. "It's why each of these entities has joined together to share the news about their offerings. The arts touch all ages, all races and all socioeconomic backgrounds. It just really brings people together — and that's what we love about it, too."

Art and culture, Howard adds, is not discriminatory — and much of it is free for the taking: "Whether it's for an afternoon, a long weekend or you want to move here and spend a lifetime enjoying all the city has to offer, every day in Winter Park is a special experience and we invite you to be inspired."

On the following pages are brief profiles of the city's major arts organizations throughout the city.



The Annie Russell Theatre (above left) and the Fred Stone Theatre (above right) are both on the campus of Rollins College. Both are named for famous performers with college connections. “The Annie,” as locals call it, offers a full season of popular productions. The Fred Stone presents sometimes avant-garde, student-directed plays.

THE ANNIE RUSSELL AND FRED STONE THEATRES

Rollins College has two historically significant performing-arts venues on its campus — the Annie Russell and Fred Stone Theatres, both named for early 20th-century entertainers.

“The Annie,” as it’s called by locals, was designed by architect Richard Kiehnel in a Spanish-Mediterranean style and dedicated in 1932. It was funded by Mary Louise Curtis Bok — the only child of publishing magnate Cyrus Curtis — and dedicated to Russell, a renowned British-born stage actress who had moved to Winter Park.

Russell taught drama at the college, and appeared in several productions at the theater bearing her name. Some say her ghost still haunts the ornate little jewel-box of a theater, which is on the National Register of Historic Places.

The Fred Stone is a black box theater named for a performer who managed to work his way through five different forms of entertainment during the span of his long career.

Starting off as an acrobat and a tightrope walker in the circus, Stone later added minstrel shows, vaudeville, Broadway and feature films to his resumé. Born in a Colorado log cabin in 1873, he would take a turn at writing as well, completing the autobiography of his friend, Annie Oakley, following her death. Stone received an honorary degree from Rollins in 1939.

The Fred Stone Theatre is just as versatile, appropriately enough, as its namesake. “The Fred Stone has seen it all,” says box office manager Chelsea Hilend. “It’s served as a church, a classroom, a performance hall, a faculty room, and — at least once, for a classmate of mine — a wedding venue.”

Despite its supposed haunting, the building’s less ethereal architectural quirks most intrigue its lighting designer and production manager, Kevin Griffin.

“The Annie is not symmetrical,” he says. “Visually, it appears so, but actual measurements confirm that the left and right sides are off by a few inches. This tells us the final work was done with more of a craftsman’s eye than mechanical specificity.”

Visit rollins.edu for information.

THE WINTER PARK AUTUMN ART FESTIVAL

Ordinarily, the Winter Park Autumn Art Festival has at least one thing going for it: the weather. There was a rare exception in 2016, thanks to Hurricane Matthew, when the festival had to be cancelled.

But ordinarily, Central Park is a gorgeous seasonal setting for an event devoted exclusively to Florida artists — and a community that appreciates them.

The free, 44-year-old annual event, hosted by the Winter Park Chamber of Commerce and presented by the Rifle Paper Co., is open from 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. on the second weekend in October.

It features 180 artists, whose works encompass ceramics, drawings and graphics, fine crafts, jewelry, mixed media, paintings, photographs and sculptures. In addition, the Crealdé School of Art presents workshops for children ages 5 and up during the festival, which also features musical entertainment.

“We’re very excited about this year’s festival, and the artists who are traveling from across Florida to share their work,” says Betsy Gardner Eckbert, president and CEO of the Winter Park Chamber of Commerce. “I love seeing people from miles around enjoying the art and our community.”

Visit winterpark.org for information.

THE BACH FESTIVAL SOCIETY OF WINTER PARK

It all started with a birthday bash. In 1935, the Winter Park Bach Festival Society was created to commemorate the 250th anniversary of the birth of 18th-century German composer Johann Sebastian Bach.

The festival has celebrated quite a few birthdays of its own since then, and is now the third-oldest such festival in the country.

It’s devoted to performing a broad range of classical music concerts featuring its own orchestra, a 150-voice choir and an international lineup of guest artists.

The main event is the Bach Festival itself — held during a two-week span each winter. Bach masterpieces are highlighted, of

The Winter Park Autumn Art Festival (top right) features the work of Florida artists. The Bach Festival Society of Winter Park (center right) offers classical fare, while the Blue Bamboo Center for the Arts (bottom right) showcases everything from jazz to rock to bluegrass and even spoken-word performances.

course, but programming also includes works by other composers as well as events such as organ recitals, contemporary concertos and themed evenings saluting eras of music.

Throughout the year, the society's musicians are involved with educational programs for children, and satellite choirs for both young and old. The organization also takes on special projects, such as a 2014 partnership with Orlando Ballet to present *Carmina Burana* — a monumental, 24-movement cantata.

The devotion to classical and contemporary music that drives the festival is epitomized by its sixth artistic director, John Sinclair, whose belief in the power of classical music — he thinks that doctors should prescribe it — has made him a community icon, albeit a humble one.

Says Sinclair, who has wielded the baton since 1990: "I've watched us turn from a local-talent choir to a regional choir. I think it says a lot about the organization's drive to succeed. I don't think it says a lot about me."

Visit bachfestivalflorida.org for information.

THE BLUE BAMBOO CENTER FOR THE ARTS

Back in the early 1980s, Chris Cortez and Mark Piszczek were up-and-coming Orlando musicians, playing for a jazz-fusion group whose repertoire included a tune they wrote themselves.

The group was called "Blue Bamboo." It no longer exists, but the name lives on, as does the musical partnership of Cortez and Piszczek, at the Blue Bamboo Center for the Arts.

The pair, along with Chris' wife, Melody, pooled their financial resources and their love of good music to create the center, transforming a warehouse on Kentucky Avenue, just south of Fairbanks near Interstate 4, into a cleverly repurposed performance space.

Though it's only been open a year, Blue Bamboo is already a hip hot spot, thanks to a \$250,000 renovation and an eye-opening, broad-ranging slate of performances featuring everything from bluegrass to blues and beyond — including a 25-member clarinet ensemble, a classical guitarist and a mezzo soprano opera singer.

The acoustics are excellent in the 100-seat concert space. Beer, wine and snacks are available for purchase. Admission is reasonable (\$10-\$20). And most of all, there was a lot of talent in Central Florida looking for a home — and found it at Blue Bamboo.

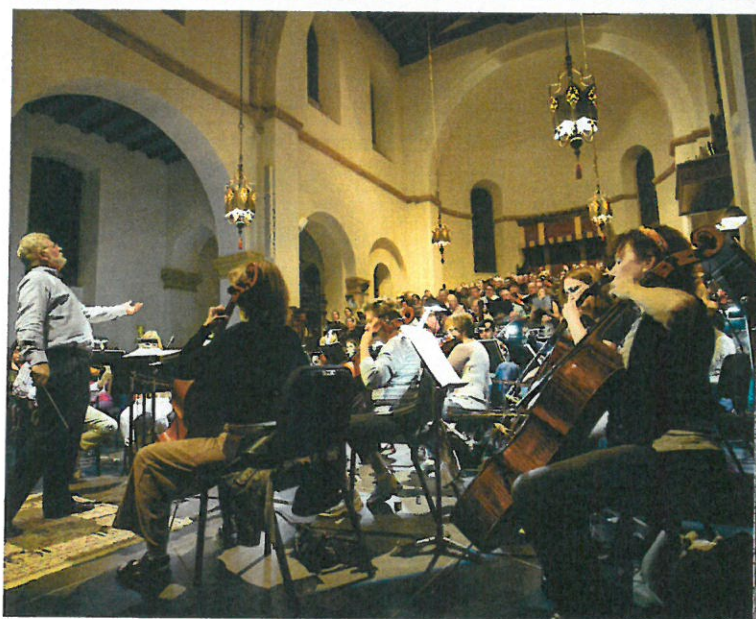
"Blue Bamboo is a place for jazz, classical music, theater, dance and all the performing arts," says Cortez. "It's also a place for the visual arts — we have a gallery space. It's a home for the kind of music that so often has trouble finding a home elsewhere."

Visit bluebambooartcenter.com for information.

CASA FELIZ HISTORIC HOME MUSEUM

The homes that Winter Park architect James Gamble Rogers II designed in the 1930s play no small part in the history, personality and architectural elegance of old-school Winter Park. All his buildings are community treasures. One in particular.

It was commissioned in 1932 by Massachusetts industrialist Robert Bruce Barbour, who was charmed by the hybrid Spanish,



THE BLUE BAMBOO CENTER FOR THE ARTS PHOTO BY RAFAEL TONGOL



The Casa Feliz Historic Home Museum was once a private residence. Designed by legendary architect James Gamble Rogers II, it was rescued from the wrecking ball, moved to city property and lovingly restored through a grass-roots campaign led by citizens.

Mediterranean and Colonial Revival style that was Rogers' specialty. This one was designed as an Andalusian-style masonry farmhouse. Its name: Casa Feliz.

When a new owner purchased the home in the early 2000s with plans to tear it down and build a new home on the lakefront site, preservationists raised more than \$1 million to move it across Interlachen Avenue to a site on the Winter Park Golf Course, in an enterprise that required an array of 20 large, pneumatically leveled dollies

Casa Feliz then became a happy home for the community at large.

The restored mansion, which is on the National Register of Historic Places, is now an architectural museum and a center for musical events, weddings and private parties.

"There isn't a day that goes by that I'm not reminded of how proud the residents of Winter Park are of this house," says executive director Susan Omoto. "We intend to keep the momentum going when it comes to promoting an appreciation for this historic treasure."

Casa Feliz sponsors an annual architectural colloquium and free musical performances most Sundays in its lobby. Docent-led tours are also available of the home, which is just steps away from the city's legendary shopping and dining district along Park Avenue.

Visit casafeliz.us for information.

THE CORNELL FINE ARTS MUSEUM AND THE ALFOND INN

They are a pair, these two. The Cornell Fine Arts Museum overlooks Lake Virginia from the back side of the Rollins College campus at the southern end of Park Avenue. The Alford Inn is a \$30 million boutique hotel built three years ago just across Fairbanks Avenue from the Rollins College campus and a short walk east of Park Avenue.

Rollins, in fact, owns the 112-room hotel, as well as a contemporary art collection on display in its lobby, hallways and conference rooms. That means hotel visitors get to be entertained and enlightened by a professionally curated collection that also serves as a resource for the college's professors and their students.

It's all thanks to the vision and generosity of art collectors — and Rollins graduates — Ted and Barbara Alford, who were involved with the conception and financing of the hotel and its art collection. Profits from the hotel's operation endow a scholarship fund.

The Alford offers free tours, led by Cornell docents, that include wine at a bargain price — surely the classiest happy hour in town.

Ena Heller, director of the Cornell, has a friendly, ongoing debate with Jesse Martinez, general manager of the Alford. "I say the Alford is an art museum with guest rooms," she says. "He says it's a hotel with an art museum in it."

They are, of course, both right.

Visit thealfondinn.com and rollins.edu for information.

THE CREALDÉ SCHOOL OF ART AND THE HANNIBAL SQUARE HERITAGE CENTER

First, there's the name: "Crealde." It's thought to be a blend of two words: the Spanish word for "creation" and the old English word for "village." In any case, the name was an invention of CrealDé's founder, the late William Sterling Jenkins, a local home-builder who was also an accomplished artist.

The story behind the name makes sense. After all, Jenkins thought of the CrealDé School of Art as a creative village.

The school and its related offices, classrooms and galleries opened in 1975 on the shore of a lake in east Winter Park. It offers classes in just about every art form you can imagine: photography, painting, ceramics, sculpture, paper-making, jewelry



The Cornell Fine Arts Museum (above) on the campus of Rollins College has one of the most eclectic collections in Florida, including some Old Masters. The college also owns the Alford Inn (top right), in which pieces from the Cornell's contemporary art collection are on display. The Crealdé School of Art (bottom right) features gallery exhibitions and classes in photography, painting, ceramics, sculpture, paper-making, jewelry design, fabric arts and book-making, among other disciplines.

design, fabric arts and book-making, among other disciplines.

In 2007, the school established an outpost across town: the Hannibal Square Heritage Center. Its mission, in part, was to preserve the history and heritage of the city's historically African-American west side community.

When Crealdé stages its three annual art exhibits, works are displayed in both locations, with guests migrating from one to the other during opening night celebrations.

It takes a village. East side, west side, all around the town.

"At the core of Crealdé's mission is the belief that the arts are for everyone," says executive director Peter Schreyer. "Each individual has a story to be told, and something creative to contribute."

Schreyer says the school strives to carry forth Jenkins' mission to make art an integral part of community life — and a positive force in the lives of individuals — by offering stimulating, educational, hands-on arts experiences and gallery exhibitions.

Visit crealde.org for information.



GladdeningLight (top left) is a nonprofit that stages an annual symposium on the general topic of the symbiotic relationship between art and spirituality. The Winter Park History Museum (center left) stages exhibitions on various aspects of the city's colorful history, while the Winter Park Public Library (bottom left) features activities for kids and an array of services for grown-ups. Mead Botanical Garden (facing page) is the city's ecological jewel — a 48-acre urban oasis encompassing wetlands, hammocks and several outdoor venues that are popular for such outdoor activities as weddings.

GLADDENINGLIGHT

Randall Robertson, a former sports-marketing entrepreneur and longtime Winter Park resident, figured he needed a retirement career. So he studied to become a minister.

Then, after deciding that the pulpit wasn't for him, he found another way to pursue his spiritual interests.

In 2011, Robertson founded GladdeningLight, a groundbreaking interdenominational nonprofit that brings together writers, thinkers, musicians, visual artists and spiritual leaders to explore the places where art and spirituality intersect.

GladdeningLight's major event is an annual symposium, open to the public, that features spiritually oriented speakers such as Christian mystic Richard Rohr, poet David Whyte and writer/broadcaster Krista Tippett, host of the PBS program *On Being*.

The symposium was held at All Saints Episcopal Church on Lyman Avenue for the first few years. But then, as interest grew and crowds became larger, it relocated to the Rollins College campus in 2017.

"Gladdening light" is a reference to what scholars consider the first Christian hymn. Written in Greek during the third century, the hymn is an elegant entreaty for spiritual illumination.

Robertson emphasizes the inclusiveness of the symposium and other GladdeningLight events, such as art exhibitions and guided tours of inspirational places around the world: "GladdenLight is open to all, and representative of thoughtful spiritual seekers both inside and outside traditional religious practices."

Visit gladdenlight.org for information.

THE WINTER PARK HISTORY MUSEUM

Forget, for a moment, the fashionable restaurants, elegant shops and upscale autos cruising down Park Avenue, and imagine a time when the height of luxury living in Winter Park was taking a mule-drawn trolley to the newly built Seminole Hotel.

Gaslights! And steam heat! What will they think of next?

The wonders of that era, among others, are remembered and celebrated at the Winter Park History Museum, located in the old railroad depot on New England Avenue.

Over the years, exhibits have included looks at railroading, the turpentine industry and Winter Park High School in its sock-hop days. A recent exhibit recalled Winter Park during World War II, using photos, oral histories, films, letters and other artifacts. An upcoming exhibit examines hotels and motels in the city's past.

Today, the museum attracts about 14,000 visitors each year and sponsors an array of programs and events, some of them collaborations with other organizations. It's family-friendly: A charming children's show, *Princess of the Peacocks*, is enjoying — like the town itself — quite a long and colorful run.

"We have a wonderful history, and the museum is keeping it alive



for people of all ages,” says executive director Susan Skolfield. Visit wphistory.org for information.

THE WINTER PARK PUBIC LIBRARY

The Winter Park Public Library dates back to the town’s horse-and-buggy days, when nine women met to establish what they called the Winter Park Circulation Library Association in 1885.

Their enterprise was only open in cool weather months because many of its well-to-do members spent sweltering springs and summers in estates up north. The library’s first home: a front porch and hallway of an organizer’s winter cottage on Interlachen Avenue. Dues: \$1 a year.

A new library, built in the early 1900s, featured two fireplaces, indoor plumbing and a children’s section. The current building on New England Avenue, which opened in 1979, was just two floors, and designed to accommodate a tree that grew in an atrium at its center. The needs of the library grew even faster, though, and a third floor was added in 1994.

None of that compares to what’s next: A new, \$30 million Library and Events Center complex about to be built in Martin Luther King Jr. Park. The collection of three buildings will include a two-story library, a single-story events center and a portico drop-off pavilion.

The complex, which is expected to open in 2020, is being designed by Sir David Adjaye, a London-based, British-Ghanaian architect

ADVISORY BOARD HELPS KEEP ART FRONT AND CENTER

You don’t need four walls and a gift shop to make an art museum. Sometimes fresh air and blue skies will do just fine as a setting.

“A museum without walls” was the goal of the Public Art Advisory Board, which was established in Winter Park in 2003, says Jan Clanton, one of the early masterminds of the volunteer group.

Its initial project was a temporary exhibition of sculptures in Central Park. Several similar temporary projects followed, as did installation of a permanent sculpture, Molecular Dog, in Hannibal Square’s Shady Park.

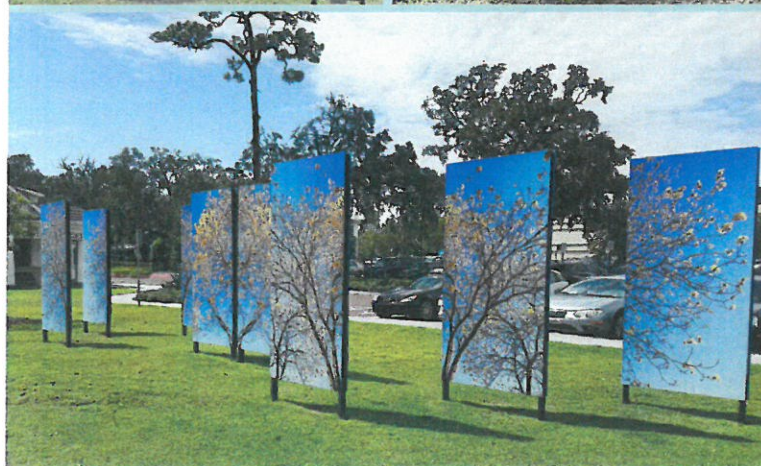
The board’s formal task is “collecting, preserving and interpreting notable works of art and implementing educational opportunities concerning public art for the benefit of Winter Park residents and visitors.”

Board members advise the city commission about art, administer a Public Art Trust Fund and oversee conservation of artwork owned by the city.

In recent months, on the heels of the city’s recent visioning initiative, the board has added coordination and communication to its goals, says Clanton, who retired from her post in the education department of the Orlando Museum of Art after a lengthy career.

“The mission of the Public Art Advisory Board has evolved over the years,” she says. “We like to be active in thinking up ways that art can be incorporated into the city’s development, whether you have benches that are art pieces or you’re working with schools. There are just so many different ways we can be a force.”

Visit cityofwinterpark.org for information.





The Charles Hosmer Morse Museum of American Art is internationally known for its unparalleled collection of the luminous leaded-glass windows and lamps created in the studios of Louis Comfort Tiffany. Its holdings also include other late 19th- and early 20th-century American art.

who designed the acclaimed Smithsonian National Museum of African American History and Culture in Washington, D.C.

Though the buildings will be impressive both architecturally and technologically, the library's core mission won't change, says Mary Gail Dufresne Coffee, director of community relations.

"We will continue to be a place where education, entertainment and enlightenment happens every day," she says. "Our vision is to inspire learning, open minds and transform lives."

The library's values, she adds, are: "Lifelong education, serving as a trusted community resource, equal access for all residents, innovation that's responsive to changing community needs, and providing a place for connection and open exchanges of ideas."

Visit wppl.org for information.

MEAD BOTANICAL GARDEN

Mead Garden is one of the hidden jewels of Winter Park, an urban oasis tucked away at the end of South Denning Drive, across the railroad tracks and bounded by Pennsylvania Avenue and Howell Creek.

The garden honors a scientist whose fascination with natural wonders involved traveling by horseback and sheltering in wigwams in the late 19th century as he explored still-untamed stretches of the Colorado Rockies in search of undiscovered flora and fauna.

Theodore L. Mead would eventually settle in Central Florida. When he died in 1936, two of his Winter Park friends worked to secure a 48-acre natural haven of wetlands and hammocks, where a botanical garden would be created in his memory.

Dedicated in 1940, the garden has evolved over the years into a free, dawn-to-dusk retreat offering a variety of programming, including community gardening, summer camps, horticulture in the greenhouse, guided bird and herb walks and classroom field trips. It's also a popular spot for weddings and other special events.

Maintained by the City of Winter Park's Parks and Recreation Department, the garden is operated and continually improved by individual volunteers and organizations such as the Florida Native Plant Society, the Winter Park Rotary Club, the Boy Scouts, the Girl Scouts, the Geneva School, and the Winter Park Garden Club — among many others.

"This is a place that has meaning to a lot of people in Winter Park," says Cynthia Hasenau, executive director. "What's happening here is the result of exemplary volunteers."

Visit meadgarden.org for information.

THE CHARLES HOSMER MORSE MUSEUM OF AMERICAN ART

It's hard to imagine Winter Park without The Charles Hosmer Morse Museum of American Art, a Park Avenue powerhouse whose old-world luster emanates from its unparalleled collection of the luminous leaded-glass windows and lamps created in the studios of Louis Comfort Tiffany.

Founded by Jeannette Genius McKean in 1942 and named for her philanthropist grandfather, the museum is also forever linked to her husband, Hugh McKean, a Rollins College president who, as a young man, studied with Tiffany at his lavishly appointed Long Island country estate, Laurelton Hall.

In 1957, Hugh and Jeannette salvaged truckloads of art and architectural elements from Laurelton Hall, which had fallen into ruin after Tiffany's death and further damaged by fire. Their decision to bring the gilded Art Nouveau treasures to Winter Park for safekeeping would help define Winter Park as an arts mecca.

The McKeanes spent decades as stewards of the collection, becoming the aesthetic king and queen of Winter Park — "the town's gyroscope," as former Rollins president Thaddeus Seymour likes to call them. When they died, they left behind a priceless



Many works by sculptor Albin Polasek are on display in the lushly landscaped grounds of the Albin Polasek Museum & Sculpture Garden (above), on the eastern shore of Lake Osceola. Next to the museum, which was once Polasek's home, is the restored Capen-Showalter House, which, like Casa Feliz, was saved from demolition, moved and restored. It's now used for museum offices and special events. The Winter Park Sidewalk Art Festival (below right) is one of the biggest and most prestigious outdoor art shows in the U.S. It's held every spring.

heritage in their privately funded museum.

Its holdings — apart from the world's most extensive array of Tiffany jewelry, pottery, paintings, sculptures, and leaded glass — also include other late 19th- and early 20th-century American art.

Tiffany highlights include a restored Byzantine-Romanesque chapel interior, a terrace from Tiffany's estate decorated with multicolored glass daffodils, and galleries that evoke the beauty of Laurelton Hall — and the guiding philosophy behind it.

"If the Morse has one controlling belief, it's that art is life enhancing, and that every individual is better off when art is a present and significant part of their life," says Laurence J. Ruggiero, the museum's director.

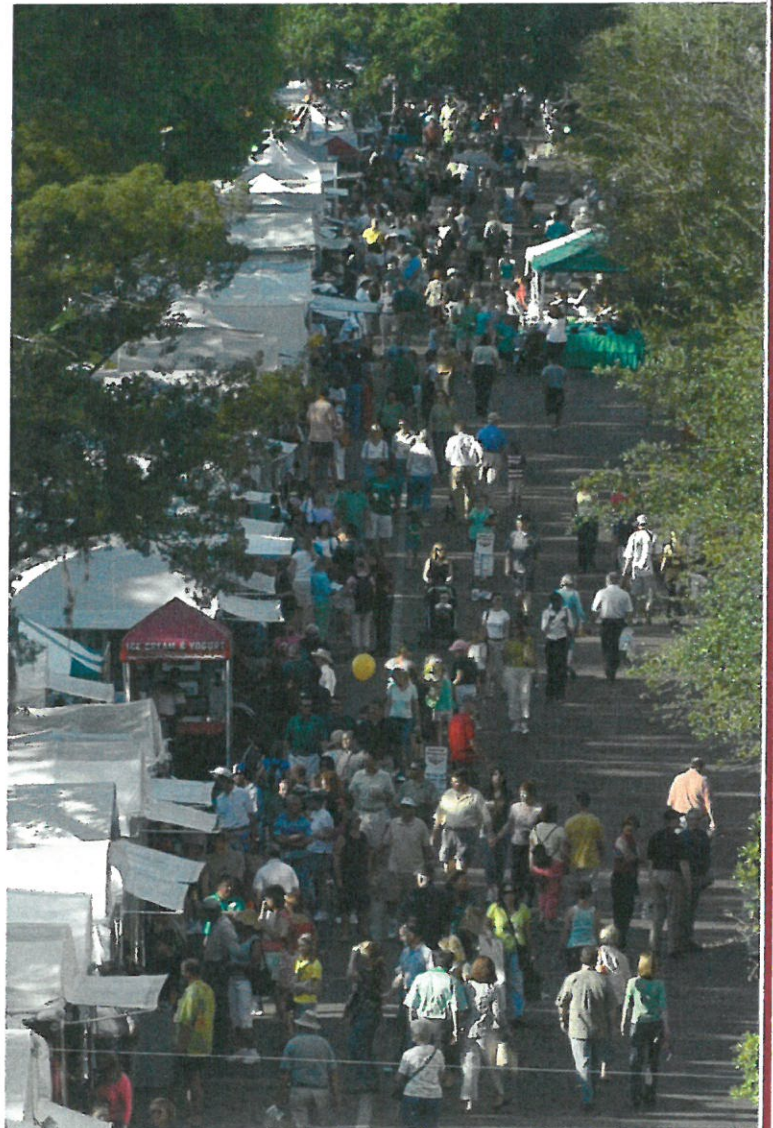
Visit morsemuseum.org for information.

THE ALBIN POLASEK MUSEUM & SCULPTURE GARDEN

As a boy, Albin Polasek loved carving small wooden figures. As an adult, he worked at a considerably larger scale, crafting a 28-foot statue of Woodrow Wilson; larger-than-life bronze warriors and mythological figures; and a breathtaking, life-sized rendering of Christ on the cross, his face beatific despite his suffering.

Many of Polasek's works, including the crucifixion sculpture, are on display in the lushly landscaped grounds of the Albin Polasek Museum & Sculpture Garden, on the eastern shore of Lake Osceola.

That was where Polasek, who immigrated to the U.S. from the Czech Republic, built a retirement home for himself and his wife in 1950, after he retired as head of the sculpture department at the Art Institute of Chicago.



THE ALBIN POLASEK MUSEUM & SCULPTURE GARDEN PHOTO BY WINTER PARK PICTURES (WINTERPARKPICTURES.COM)



The Winter Park Institute at Rollins College brings scholars, artists, activists, entrepreneurs and thought leaders from an array of fields to campus. It's headquartered in historic Osceola Lodge, former home of industrialist and philanthropist Charles Hosmer Morse, one of Winter Park's most important historical figures.

Though Polasek suffered a stroke shortly thereafter and was partially paralyzed, he devised a way to continue sculpting. He poised a chisel over a work in progress with his one good hand, while an assistant would stand by his side with a hammer and strike it at Polasek's command.

Using this painstaking method, the artist continued his life's work unabated, creating an additional 18 major works by the time he died in 1965.

His studio/home and a collection of 200 works — as well as galleries displaying traveling exhibitions — are under the stewardship of the Albin Polasek Foundation, which owns and operates the complex, which is on the National Register of Historic Places. In 2014, the historic Capen-Showalter House was floated across Lake Osceola and reassembled adjacent to the museum.

"This renewed home will be used to host many of our events and will benefit residents and guests to Central Florida for years to come," says Debbie Komanski, the Polasek's executive director.

Visit polasek.org for information.

THE WINTER PARK SIDEWALK ART FESTIVAL

When the Winter Park Sidewalk Art Festival made its debut in the spring of 1960, the volunteers who created it wondered if they could attract the attention of enough artists and art lovers to make the event work.

So far, so good.

The 2018 festival is slated for Friday, Saturday and Sunday, March 16, 17 and 18. Some 225 artists — selected from among more than 1,000 applicants — will showcase their work for an estimated 350,000 people.

Artists compete for 63 awards totaling \$72,500. The Best of Show winner is purchased for \$10,000 by the Winter Park Side-

walk Art Festival Board and donated to the City of Winter Park. Previous Best of Show winners are on permanent display at the Winter Park Public Library.

Youngsters can create their own artwork at the Children's Workshop Village. Easel painting is a popular activity, and budding artists can take their creations home with them. The Leon Theodore Schools Exhibit showcases art by students in Orange County schools.

There are sculptures, drawings, paintings, photography, mixed media and a variety of other genres on display at the festival, which is consistently rated among the most prestigious in the U.S.

Festival traditions include the selection of original art for the official festival poster, which is sold at the event. Posters from prior years are considered collectible by festival fans. Also during the festival, admission to the Charles Hosmer Morse Museum of American Art is free.

The mission of the festival — which is still run entirely by volunteers — hasn't changed since its beginnings decades ago, says past president Alice Moulton. "The event offers an enjoyable, fulfilling and profitable experience for artists," she says. "Plus, it enhances art appreciation, art education and community spirit."

For more information visit wpsaf.org.

THE WINTER PARK INSTITUTE AT ROLLINS COLLEGE

Great speakers have been turning up at Rollins College since 1926, when larger-than-life figures such as Carl Sandburg, Justice William O. Douglas, Dale Carnegie, Edward R. Murrow and Admiral Richard Byrd were invited to the campus.

Back then, the college called its speaker series — which was held outdoors — the Animated Magazine. It drew thousands of people to Mills Lawn and attracted national attention.

The Winter Park Institute at Rollins College is the modern evo-



Don't expect to see heavy drama at the Winter Park Playhouse, a nonprofit theater where the musical comedy and cabaret performances are the specialty. Not surprisingly, the intimate 123-seat venue is always packed. Plus, its outreach program, dubbed REACH, brings musical theater to underserved children, homebound seniors, day nurseries and community centers.

cation of that tradition, bringing scholars, artists, activists, entrepreneurs and thought leaders from an array of fields to campus. Now, though, they speak indoors at one of several venues.

Past institute speakers have included wildlife crusader Jane Goodall, documentarian Ken Burns, author Bill Bryson, poet Maya Angelou, director Oliver Stone, feminist icon Gloria Steinem, and journalists Nicholas Kristoff, and Jane Pauley. Former two-term U.S. poet laureate Billy Collins, the institute's senior distinguished fellow, offers annual readings that always pack the house.

In addition to open-to-the-public presentations, the visiting luminaries spend time on campus interacting with students and faculty members with in-class discussions and master classes.

This season's speakers have included presidential historian Jon Meacham, artist Candy Chang, activist Lauren Bush Lauren and Collins, who read from his recent *New York Times* bestseller *The Rain in Portugal*. Still to come are astronaut Story Musgrave (March 6) and basketball legend Kareem Abdul-Jabbar (April 4).

"More than ever as we begin our 10th season, the Winter Park Institute at Rollins College is proud to continue the college's heritage of bringing preeminent scholars and artists to our doorstep," says Gail Sinclair, the institute's executive director.

"These inspirational speakers engage the campus and the community in enlightened conversations about the world's most current interests and issues and challenge us to participate in dialogue about our role as global citizens."

Visit rollins.edu for information.

THE WINTER PARK PLAYHOUSE

Fifteen years ago, Roy Alan and his wife, Heather, announced their intention to establish an off-Broadway beachhead in Winter Park by

staging a musical called *I Love You, You're Perfect, Now Change*.

It was the first of many performances at the Winter Park Playhouse, the couple's nonprofit enterprise on Orange Avenue. The charming musical-theater haven, the only professional musical theater in Central Florida, features a piano and a bar in the lobby, a mainstage series and frequent cabarets in its intimate, 123-seat venue.

Its outreach program, dubbed REACH, brings musical theater to underserved children, homebound seniors, day nurseries and community centers.

Roy was a tap-dancing whirlwind during his early performing years, and over the span of a 50-year career worked as a director, a choreographer and a stage manager. Heather boasts an impressive resumé of stage and screen credits as well as a business degree.

Many playhouse performers are professionals who have full-time theme park jobs by day and relish the chance to branch out into musical theater and cabaret by night. The theater also sponsors the Florida Festival of New Musicals, which showcases new works by up-and-coming composers and playwrights.

Roy has his own pet name for the playhouse. "I call it the 'forget your troubles' theater. You come in here and you just escape, forget about everything going on out there."

Visit winterparkplayhouse.org for information. ■



GB EXTRA

Visit GrowingBolderMagazine.com for a link to the Arts and Culture Subcommittee's calendar of events and to learn more about each of the participating arts organizations.