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Orlando Family magazine

APRIL 2024



THRILLS & CHILLS

The latest attractions at the area's theme parks

plus **AROUND CAMPUS**

A discussion on the current state of higher education

MAYOR BUDDY DYER

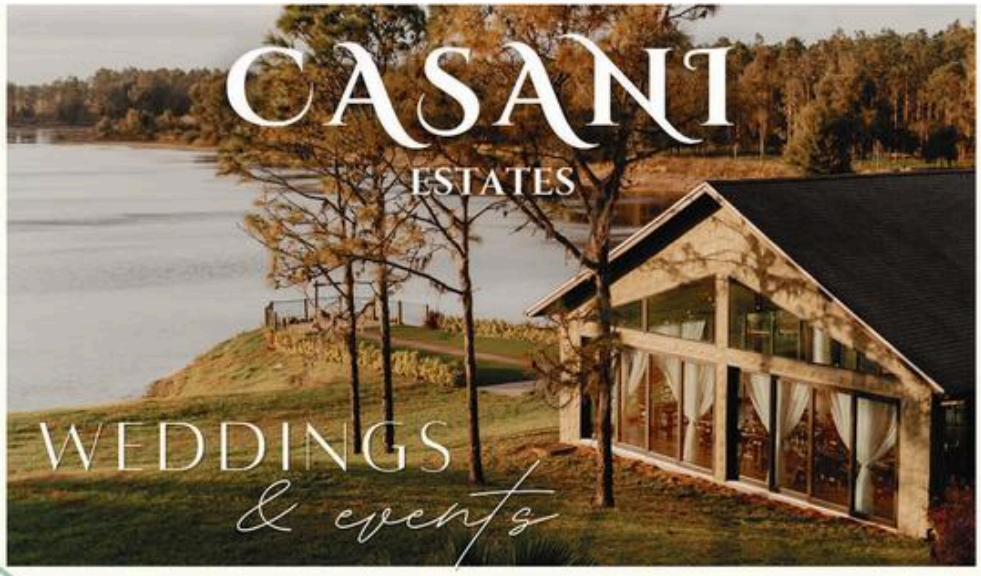
Orlando's biggest booster remains focused on the future

page 12: Top Vets

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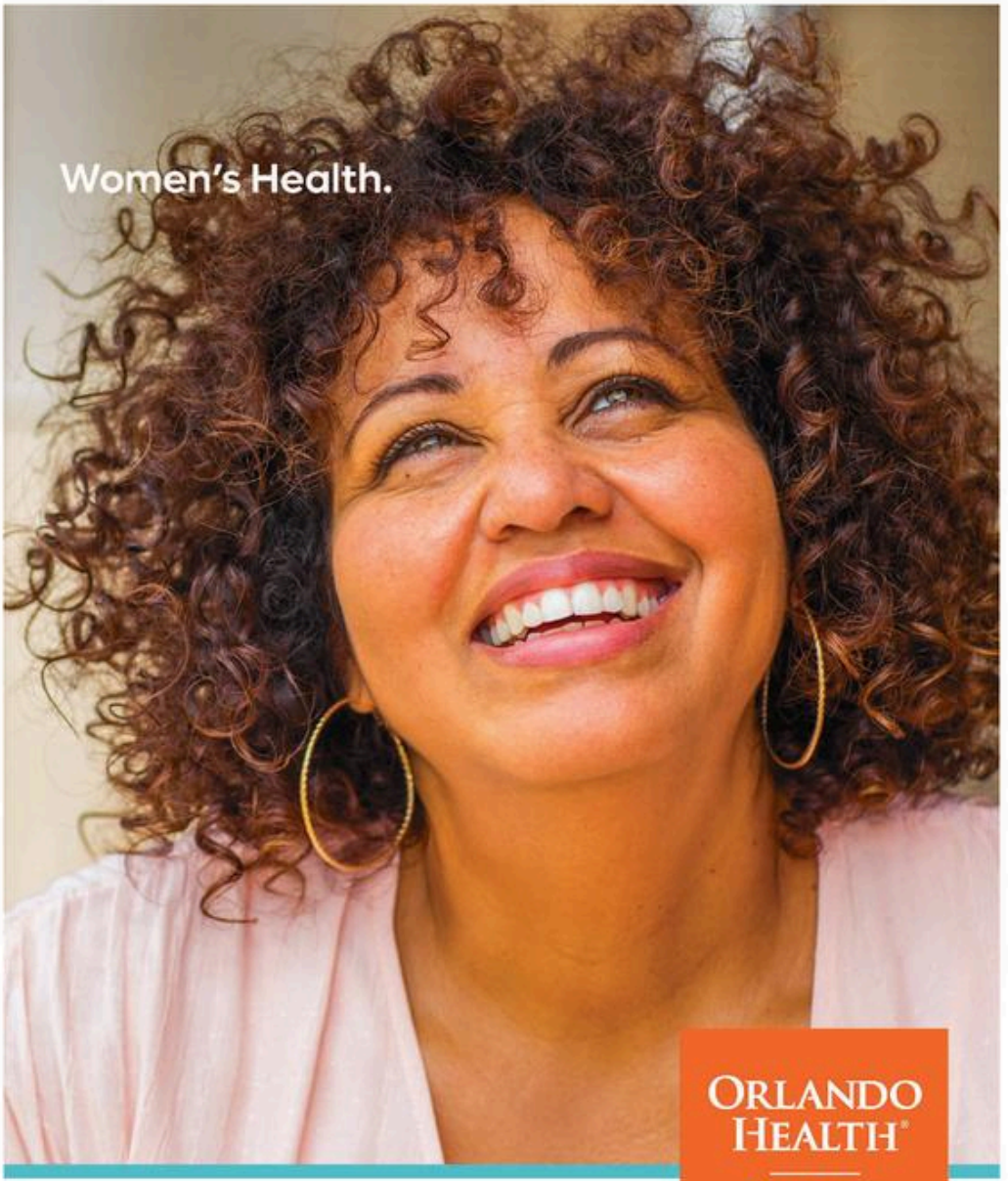
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ICON Park photo courtesy of VIATOR, TOURS / Shutterstock.com

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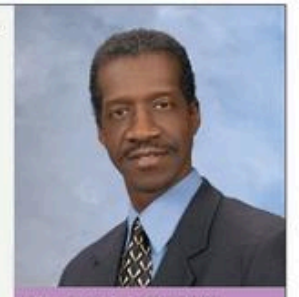
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Home Front

EDITED BY KAREN NIMETZ

by the Numbers

20 The number of acres of the tropical beach complex at the newly opened Evermore Orlando Resort.

2.3 million The number of digital books borrowed in 2023 from the Orange County Library System. OCLS is No. 44 of all standalone public libraries and one of 152 total public library systems worldwide that surpassed 1 million digital checkouts in the last calendar year.

18th Florida's ranking of most stressed states, according to wellness brand Komowa. Based on stress factors such as money, work and health, the study used data from the CDC, U.S. Census Bureau, Bureau of Labor Statistics and more. Tennessee ranked as the most stressed state in the country.

2,400+ The number of participants at the third annual School Spirit Run hosted by the Foundation for OCPS at SeaWorld Orlando. The three-mile course was an opportunity for participants to traverse through SeaWorld with proceeds from the run benefiting the Foundation for OCPS.

28,633 Total square footage of the upcoming Market by Macy's at the popular shopping destination Winter Garden Village.

117th Orange County Public Schools' ranking of the Top 250 Most Envied School Districts in the US, according to Test Prep Insight. The online education company conducted a survey of 3,000 parents to discover what districts they would hypothetically most want their children to be schooled in, if given the choice.

DATEBOOK



ORLANDO BOAT SHOW
APRIL 5-7

THE SHOW FEATURES 19 OF CENTRAL FLORIDA'S BOAT DEALERS representing more than 80 manufacturers with approximately 400 boats on display. *Orange County Convention Center, North Hall B*

DISNEY PRINCESS—THE CONCERT
April 8
Disney's beloved songs come alive on stage with animation, theatrical effects and a host of Broadway and television stars. *Steinmetz Hall at the Dr. Phillips Center for the Performing Arts, DrPhillipsCenter.org*

CENTRAL FLORIDA EARTH DAY
April 20
The 19th annual event featurs presentations, food demonstrations, environmental education, a kids' zone, food, an artist corner, an animal haven, live music and more. *Lake Eola Park (east side), CFEarthDay.org*



THE AIR DOT SHOW ORLANDO
April 20-21
The U.S. Navy Blue Angels and U.S. Air Force F-22 Raptor Demo Team will be headlining this year's show. *Orlando Sanford International Airport, AirShow*


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THE WALLFLOWERS
April 23
The two-time Grammy Award-winning band has sold over 10 million albums internationally. *Plaza Live Orlando, PlazaLiveOrlando.org*

MRS. DOUBTFIRE
April 23-28
Based on the beloved film, this musical comedy tells the story of an out-of-work actor who will do anything for his kids. *Walt Disney Theatre at the Dr. Phillips Center for the Performing Arts, DrPhillipsCenter.org*

MARCELLO HERNANDEZ
April 26-27
The Florida native, stand-up comedian and current *Saturday Night Live* cast member will be performing four shows. *Funny Bone Comedy Club, Orlando.FunnyBone.com*

ALWAYS... PATSY CLINE
April 26–May 19
This show is based on a true story about Cline's friendship with a fan from Houston who befriended the star in a Texas honky-tonk in 1961, and continued a correspondence with Cline until her death. *Garden Theatre, GardenTheatre.org*

HARLEM GLOBETROTTERS
April 27
The world-famous basketball team brings their 2024 World Tour to town, as they compete against their rivals, the Washington Generals. *Addition Financial Arena, AdditionFiArena.com*


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Hit

The Salvation Army Orlando Area Command recently announced the grand reopening of its Women's and Children's Shelter. Funded by the Orange County government and supported by various stakeholders and donors, the renewed facility aims to improve living conditions and services for women and children in the community.

The School Board of Orange County and the Orange Classroom Teachers Association have reached an agreement on compensation and health benefits for instructional staff for the 2023-24 school year. Under the agreement, instructional staff would receive a historic 9% average raise.

The city of Orlando recently unveiled plans for a new $30 million 10-acre park, "The Canopy," which will be built beneath I-4 in downtown. Construction will begin in early 2025 and is expected to take about two years to complete.

When it comes to affordable food and drink from the concession stands, the Orlando Magic were ranked amongst the worst in the NBA. Online gaming company Betway analyzed every arena in the league and their research showed that no professional basketball team has a worse concession stand-per-square-foot-ratio than the Magic's Kia Center.

Officials have recently confirmed positive cases of bird flu amid multiple swan deaths at Lake Eola. The city of Orlando is taking all necessary precautions recommended by the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission and local veterinarians to keep the area safe and to prevent the spread.

The once-eradicated measles virus has made a comeback, with several cases recently reported in Central Florida. Officials say that vaccination protects against disease transmission 97% of the time, and two shots confer a lifetime of immunity.

Miss





JUST ONE QUESTION

Although Orlando's dry season typically runs from mid-October through the end of May, we have seen a lot more rain than usual these past few months. So, we wanted to know: **"What is your favorite rainy-day activity in Central Florida?"** We asked these Central Floridians and here's what they had to say.



Fouzia Gardee Singh, Owner, Blo Blow Dry Bar in O-Town West
"My favorite rainy-day activity is to stay in. I don't get to do that often, so when the opportunity arises, I like to take advantage. My favorite things to do are play games with my son, order some good Chinese food, and binge watch a series on Netflix with my husband and two dogs."



Jonathan Ciccone, local technical manager
"On rainy days, I like to visit the Orlando Science Center with my girlfriend, Swan. Then we head home and snuggle with our dogs, Walter and Pollyanna."



Sarah and Kyle Sleeth, Managing Partners at Floyd's 99 Barbershop, Orlando
"On a rainy day, we love to enjoy time as a family. We will typically check off the chores we need to do like haircuts and grocery shopping early in the day so we can spend the rest of the day as a family. Our go-to activity on a rainy day in Central Florida is Topgolf!"



Mary A. Rubin, author of *The University of Central Florida Trivia Book*
"You can find me at Boardwalk Bowl. I joined a league and have been working toward improving my average score, which is currently 116. Bowling is the perfect sport for a rainy day!"

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Embarking on a New Journey

Whether you're looking to purchase or rent, Giant Recreation World offers a wide selection of top-of-the-line RVs and a dedicated team to help you embrace a new lifestyle and community.

By JOHN ANTHONY



AT GIANT RECREATION WORLD, it's not just about the destination. The journey is an equally important part of the adventure.

A family-owned and-operated business since 1976, the company boasts three locations in Winter Garden, Ormond Beach and Palm Bay. Those decades of experience combined with a highly skilled team allow customers to rest assured that they're dealing with industry experts, no matter which location they are visiting. And whether you're in the market to rent or to buy, you'll be in good hands thanks to an extensive range of options to choose from, in both brand and class.

But, the experience at Giant Recreation World doesn't end once you drive off in your new RV. In fact, it's quite the opposite as you enter into this new lifestyle.

"We often hear from our customers that the RV lifestyle is all about reconnecting with family and revisiting a time where wholesome fun is at the forefront of their summer agendas," CEO Larry McNamara says. "And as a local business, we are proud to help families create those memories and build strong family values."

And because Giant Recreation World houses its own service department, customers are able to bring in their vehicle for necessary repairs—though it should be mentioned that because the company works with so many different manufacturers, obtaining necessary parts can sometimes delay the turnaround time in fixing a vehicle.

What's more, customers are encouraged to bring in their RV once a year for a service checkup and the findings are recorded as part of a Carfax-esque report card. Having these detailed reports allows owners to fetch top dollar for their trade when the time comes.

But perhaps one of the biggest things to help Giant Recreation World separate itself from the competition is they are Central Florida's only dealership to offer a lifetime warranty for customers who purchase a new RV, and select pre-owned RVs. That warranty covers things long after the coverage that was included by the manufacturer lapses, such as all major appliance, certain suspension, brake, and water system components to name a few.

"It really does set us apart, to offer a lifetime warranty many items are taken care of by any certified RV Repair center with no deductible. It's peace of mind," says McNamara.

Of course, not everyone is looking to purchase an RV—at least, not right away. And for them, Giant Recreation World offers an expert rental division.

McNamara says that while a lot of dealerships don't offer rentals at all, "we do it for a very specific reason."

With a rental, people can test the waters before making a big splash. The rental fleet is also brand new, with Giant Recreation World currently renting 2025 models so folks can get an understanding of what the features are, how they drive, etc.

For those who think renting may be an arduous process, Giant Recreation World is ready to take the wheel to help.

"We are here to get you on the road to your next family adventure. Our staff is here to get you set up with the best vehicle based on your needs, budget and plans. If you're uncomfortable driving the RV to your final destination, we can even have the vehicle delivered and set up at the location where you intend to stay," says McNamara.

Of course, if you're talking RVs, then a golf cart conversation is not far behind. Giant Recreation World's golf cart division is located at Winter Garden, right across the street from one of its RV dealerships. It has its own showroom and sales department, and the location also offers parts, repair and maintenance. The company features a rental division for golf carts, too, much in the same way it rents RVs.

"It's an integral part of the RV lifestyle. Once you park your RV, everyone likes to ride around the RV park in their golf cart," says Dwayne Adams, marketing manager.

With summer approaching and family excursions awaiting, now is the perfect time to consider an RV, and the folks at Giant Recreation World are eager to help guide you along the process. You can learn a lot by visiting one of the quarterly on-lot sales events complete with a catered lunch, plenty of giveaways and most importantly, a knowledgeable staff ready to answer any questions you may have.

You can also check out McNamara on his weekly podcast, "The RV Hour," where he covers a variety of topics and offers advice. The show also airs on Florida Man Radio 103.1 FM every Sunday from 10-11 a.m.

For those considering the RV life, stopping in at one of Giant Recreation World's three locations is the first step. And there's no pressure; instead, customers are made to feel extremely comfortable as they are introduced to all the RV world has to offer.

"We are heavily focused on our attention to detail and customer service," says McNamara. "We are not just selling somebody an RV, they are entering into a lifestyle with us."



Giant Recreation World

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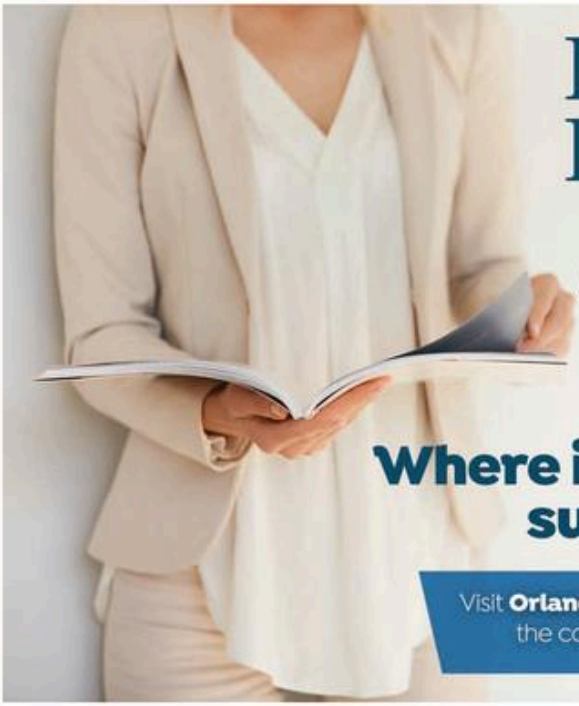
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Your Vets for Life

A longtime leader for pet care in Central Florida, **Winter Park Veterinary Hospital** is always striving to do more for its clients and patients. By MATT COSENTINO

There's a tradition at Winter Park Veterinary Hospital in which every new hire to the team is asked to read a book by Dr. Spencer Johnson titled *Who Moved My Cheese?* A guide to preparing for change in the workplace—and learning how to embrace it—the bestseller's theme fits in perfectly with the philosophy of a practice that has been one of Central Florida's leading providers of animal care for decades.

They have earned that reputation by treating thousands of beloved pets over the course of 40 years, but Winter Park Veterinary Hospital refuses to rest on its past success. In fact, the family-owned and-operated business is always on the lookout for ways to get better, whether it's through continuing education, the use of new technology or the adoption of medical advancements.

"Employees know from their first day that we're constantly trying to tweak things to find a better way," says Billy Hess, practice manager and the son of owner Robert Hess, DVM. "One of our core values is change. We've embraced that as a fundamental tenet of our hospital culture. Everybody knows that we're always looking to do something different; not just chasing shiny objects but doing things that are strategic and fit within our core values and that are going to make things better for our clients and our patients."

Technology, of course, plays a major role in all medicine today, and Winter Park Vet is proud to be one of the only offices of its kind in Central Florida offering a CT (computed tomography) machine, which provides advanced diagnostic imaging capabilities and is especially useful in dental procedures. The practice also utilizes laser therapy—common in college and professional sports, Hess points out—which promotes recovery after surgery and can also help reduce pain and inflammation in arthritic dogs.

Advanced surgery options, such as a canine knee stabilization procedure that is cost-effective and achieves better results than traditional, non-specialist knee surgeries, are also part of the approach. It's no wonder that Winter Park Vet gets many referrals from other veterinarians or requests for second opinions.

"Some owners either can't get into a specialist or don't necessarily want to go that route because specialty medicine is so expensive," Hess says. "Having a large team and a medical director who makes sure we're on the forefront of general practice medicine enables us to have a lot of different perspectives working on a case and makes sure that we have the resources to provide the type of medicine to solve those complicated cases."

Often, the practice welcomes in pet parents who have tried multiple vets and are afraid they're never going to find a solution to their animals' issues. "We've worked really hard over the past two years to be a haven for people who didn't have a place to go," Hess says.

That has been the mantra of the practice ever since Dr. Hess assumed ownership in 1983, two years after joining the team as a veterinarian. He and his wife Jean steadily built the practice over the years, and their son developed the same love for animals as his parents.

Throughout the Hess' tenure, Winter Park Vet has remained a family practice, even while many other veterinary offices in the region have been taken over by massive corporate groups. Those practices may retain their original name and local branding to deceive clients, but in fact their money is going to hidden private equity groups.

"That structure is fundamentally a different value system and a lot of people aren't really aware of it," Hess says. As a locally owned and operated practice, "Clients' money stays in the community here, and there it's going out to wherever their investors are. I think that's significant and I think it matters."

Winter Park Vet has long been recognized as one of the leaders in exotic pet care in Central Florida, and it is the main veterinarian for the Audubon Center for Birds of Prey, treating eagles, owls and other birds. The team also encourages residents who find injured animals like turtles or possums to bring them to the office, where the staff will help get them to a rehabilitation facility so they can be returned to the wild. Winter Park similarly tends to animals after hurricanes, and Hess remembers one occasion when over 100 baby squirrels were being fed in the office after a storm.

The team is very community-minded as well, sponsoring a yearly internship at Audubon, setting up a scholarship to the University of Florida and working with the Boys & Girls Club to give tours to students and possibly get them interested in veterinary careers.

Clearly, the practice is always seeking to help in as many ways as possible, and that is one thing that will never change about Winter Park Vet, from the Hess family down to every last member of the staff.

"Our leadership team has been with us for decades and they help to make the daily decisions to provide care for our patients and our pet parents," Hess says. "That's the driving force behind the decisions that we make. It's not a corporate agenda or anything along those lines. Pet parents need to do their research before figuring out where to take their pet."

Comfortable and Compassionate Emergency Care

Winter Park Veterinary Hospital expands its level of emergency services to better serve the community

Life can be full of unexpected emergencies, which is why Winter Park Veterinary Hospital is giving pet owners peace of mind by offering emergency care seven days a week. Pets will see a friendly and familiar face upon arrival, helping calm nerves and make the process easier and more comfortable than a stressful, scary ER visit.

What's more, the practice is now also offering Urgent Care hours (by appointment) on Saturdays and Sundays from 2 to 9 p.m.

FAR FROM FINISHED

Orlando mayor BUDDY DYER has led the city for more than two decades, but in the midst of his final term he's still motivated to do more.

BY KAREN NIMETZ



HAVING BEEN MAYOR OF ORLANDO SINCE 2003, Buddy Dyer is now the longest-serving mayor in the city's history. After winning reelection this past November, Dyer announced this mayoral term will be his last. But, before he leaves both the office and a legacy behind, the self-proclaimed "happiest mayor in America" has plenty more he wants to accomplish.

A Central Florida native, Dyer has strong ties to the community, so we were thrilled for the opportunity to sit down with the married father of two sons to discuss his years leading Orlando, his future plans and more.

Q&A

You were born in Orlando and grew up in Kissimmee. What are some of your fondest childhood memories of Central Florida?
One of my fondest memories of growing up was being able to go outside until the sun set and watching all the fireflies and lightning bugs. There were many years that I played baseball, and I was in as many as three different leagues.

You have mentioned that this will be your last term in office as mayor of Orlando. What are some of your major goals for this final term?
My goal has always been to ensure our city is a vibrant, economically viable and thriving city for everyone, now and into the future. I will continue to develop Orlando as the "Metacenter of the Metaverse" and continue to attract and nurture an environment where companies with emerging technologies of all kinds can prosper.

Additionally, we look forward to the implementation of DTO 2.0 and the completion of Phase Two of our Creative Village with the transformation of the Bob Carr Theater that will add to the innovation and educational hub and technology ecosystem that exists in the Parramore neighborhood.

Transportation is also front of mind as we look to expand SunRail to the airport and I-Drive, as well as create more transit options for our community. We are also committed to creating a Pulse memorial through taking a thoughtful, collaborative approach to understand the history of the effort and to ensure there is a memorial that honors the victims, those impacted by the tragedy and pays tribute to the resiliency of Orlando.

What would you like your legacy as mayor to be?



Choosing partnership, unity and collaborating across party lines to get things done for the betterment of our city. Together with our community, we've worked to make Orlando one of the greatest cities in America. That didn't happen by accident, but with strategic partnerships and working together for the greater good.

What is a typical day in your life like?
There is no typical day in the life of the mayor. Even what is on my calendar is not likely to be exactly what I do on any given day. We try our best to anticipate things, but there are many surprises that come up.

How would you describe Orlando to someone who has never visited our city?
While it is a city that is known worldwide, it's also one that people may not realize what it's actually like to live here. It's an incredibly diverse and welcoming city that offers an array of amenities for all ages and a very high quality of life.



Left: With wife Susie and dog Sammie Below: With his mother, son Trey and grandson Forrest.



How do you think Orlando compares to other major cities in the country?
We don't like to compare Orlando to other cities, but we do like other cities to compare themselves to Orlando. However, we do believe we have all the high-quality amenities of a very large city and yet still have a small neighborhood atmosphere.

How did you get the nickname Buddy?
My father's name was John Dyer, and I am John Dyer Jr. My dad's nickname was "Butch" and my mother did not want me to be called "Little Butch." So, I became "Buddy." My son John Dyer III is nicknamed "Trey," and my grandson is John Dyer IV and he's "Forrest." We now have five generations where we have not had a female born in our family, yet.

What are your favorite things to do in Orlando?
It's evolved over time. When my children were young, or in high school, the things I liked to do generally revolved around their activities. Now one of my favorite things to do is to walk in various neighborhoods and parks around our city and take [our dog] Sammie for a stroll.

Orlando is often referred to as the "Theme Park Capital of the World." Do you have a favorite theme park ride?
Theme park rides are like children. I can't pick among them.

What is something most people are surprised to learn about you?
I played rugby at Brown University and John F. Kennedy Jr. played on the team, along with the president of Bank of America, Brian Moynihan.

Left: Observing a child learning healthy cooking at the Edible Education Experience



Universal Epic Universe

Coming Attractions

THE THEME PARK CAPITAL OF THE WORLD CONTINUES TO EVOLVE IN NEW AND EXCITING WAYS. FROM THE LATEST IN RIDES AND EXPERIENCES TO A BRAND-NEW THEME PARK, THE BEST IS TRULY YET TO COME FOR CENTRAL FLORIDA. by **Karen Nimetz**

One

big perk of living in the Orlando area is being in the center of all the amusement park action. With a wide range of upcoming rides and shows to experience, there is surely something for everyone to enjoy. Here's a look at what's new and what's to come at the major theme parks and area attractions that Central Florida has to offer.



Journey of Water, Epcot

UNIVERSAL ORLANDO

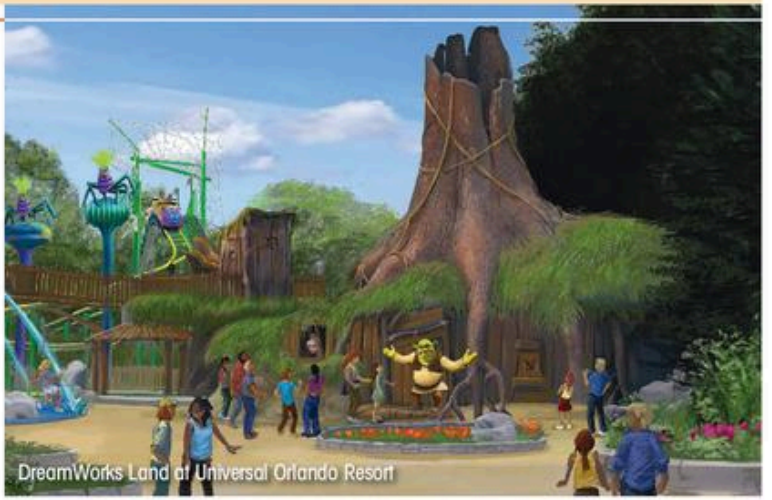
Epic Universe

Set to open next year, Universal Orlando's long-awaited fourth theme park, Epic Universe, promises to "transport guests to expansive worlds featuring more than 50 awe-inspiring attraction, entertainment, dining and shopping experiences that come together to create an unforgettable adventure that is nothing short of epic." The new "worlds" will include **Celestial Park,** the heart of Epic Universe and the first world that guests will encounter at the new park.

Comprising of lush living gardens nestled along shimmering waters and surrounded by architecture inspired by astronomical and mythological elements, Celestial Park will offer "portals" to the other worlds, which include **The Wizarding World of Harry Potter – Ministry of Magic, Super Nintendo World, How to Train Your Dragon – Isle of Berk** and **Dark Universe,** where monsters roam in a world of myth and mystery. Also, inside the park will be the **Universal Helios Grand Hotel,** designed to transport guests to a world where the heavens and earth unite. The hotel will feature 500 rooms, one-of-a-kind views and its very own dedicated entrance into the theme park.

Universal Studios

Debuting this summer will be **DreamWorks Land,** a new themed area inside Universal Studios. The expansive space features new rides, attractions, retail opportunities and eateries inspired by DreamWorks Animation's beloved characters from *Shrek, Trolls* and *Kung Fu Panda.* Guests of all ages will be able to explore **Shrek's Swamp** just outside of his 35-foot-tall tree-stump cottage. The nearby play area is best suited for "little ogres" and features four fun slides, wet play areas and a playground where guests can climb, bounce and splash around as well as venture into Shrek's outhouse. The area also features **King Harold's Swamp Symphony,** where guests can create their own melodious masterpiece as they trigger a choir of ever-changing frog ribbits by continually stomping on an array of interactive lily pads.


DreamWorks Land at Universal Orlando Resort

In the center of **Trolls Village** sits a fountain featuring *Trolls* characters Poppy and Branch, where "fantastamazing" energy flows and guests can relax and "find their happy place." The area also includes a family-friendly rollercoaster, **Caterbus,** where riders will escape evil spiders as they speed along a bright orange and yellow track. Younger fans will be able to play in **Poppy's Playground,** a shaded play area nestled under a giant, 20-foot mushroom. This area will comprise colorful flowers and bugs with an array of bouncing and climbing structures.

Inspired by the hit *Kung Fu Panda* films, **Po's Kung Fu Training Camp** brings the Panda Village to life. Within both wet and dry play areas, visitors will have the opportunity to help the pandas wash and dry their laundry with enormous water cannons, dump buckets, giant fans and more. There will also be oversized merry-go-round noodle bowls



Legoland

from Mr. Ping's Noodle Shop. Additionally, **Po Live!** is a digital, interactive meet-and-greet experience that gives guests the opportunity to interact with the famous Dragon Warrior himself.

DreamWorks Land will also feature **DreamWorks Imagination Celebration,** a multisensory adventure that combines hit pop songs, high-energy dancing, advanced technology and more to create an imaginative party atmosphere that will transport guests to the worlds of their favorite characters within the all-new **DreamWorks Theater**. At **DreamWorks Character Zone,** guests can meet and interact with their favorite DreamWorks characters like Gabby from *Gabby's Dollhouse* and more.

WALT DISNEY WORLD

Epcot

This past October, **Journey of Water,** an all-new attraction inspired by *Moana,* opened at the park. Offering a lush and tropical walking trail, the interactive experience allows guests to see water in its various forms throughout the water cycle and have the chance to interact with it in magical ways like Moana did with the ocean. An attraction for all guests, the area features accessible pathways, wet and dry path options, and shaded areas to rest in. As guests walk along the trail, they will come across Te Fiti, who is seen protecting water as it travels through the water cycle. Other beloved characters from the movie are carved in rock formations. Across the way, guests will have the opportunity to meet and take photos with Moana in a new area of World Nature.

Guests of Epcot will also enjoy seeing a new statue of Walt Disney. Unveiled late last year, the statue, entitled **"Walt the Dreamer,"** can be found at a new area of the park, Dreamers Point (behind Spaceship Earth) overlooking another new section, **World Celebration Gardens,** which includes lots of greenery, shade and seating.

Magic Kingdom

Coming this summer is the highly anticipated musical boat ride **Tiana's Bayou Adventure,** where New Orleans artist Sharika Mahdi's artwork served as inspiration for the attraction. As they enter the queue, guests will be treated to the sweet scents of beignets frying and artwork from Louisiana artist Malaika Favorite as well as an original metalwork weathervane from third-generation master blacksmith Darryl Reeves and his apprentice, Karina Roca. The ride picks up right after the end of *The Princess and the Frog* film. As guests float through the cypress trees and Spanish moss of a beautiful Louisiana bayou, they will encounter dozens of entirely new audio-animatronics figures as well as authentic New Orleans music. This ride takes over for Splash Mountain, which permanently closed last year.

Animal Kingdom

One of the newest additions to the park is not a ride or an attraction but rather a precious baby elephant born this past December. **Corra,** the 3-foot, 300-pound-


Disney's Animal Kingdom

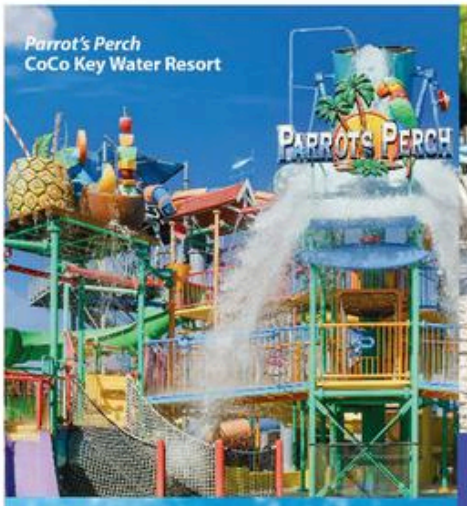


WHERE CHARACTERS COME TO PLAY

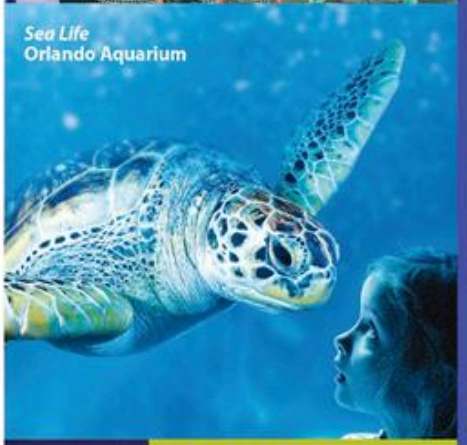
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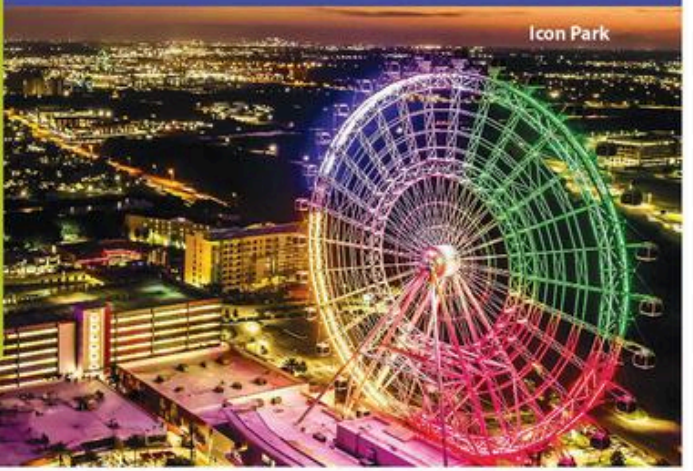




I-DRIVE DISTRICT

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plus baby, made her park debut in February and enjoys staying close to her mother Nadirah, who was also born at Animal Kingdom, while exploring her new surroundings at Kilimanjaro Safaris. Corra joins three generations of female elephants living together, one of the few herds to do so at a facility accredited by the Association of Zoos and Aquariums (AZA).

SeaWorld

SeaWorld is celebrating the 60th anniversary of the first park's opening in San Diego in 1964, as well as SeaWorld Orlando's 50th anniversary, which took place this past December. The company is currently commemorating the special occasions with its **"So Much More to Sea"** campaign, which includes many new shows and attractions, such as a new Cirque-style live entertainment show. Coming to the park later this spring is **Penguin Trek,** an immersive family coaster. Riders will board unique snowmobile-styled ride cars transporting them on an expedition through the Antarctic wilderness with two launches, at speeds of up to 43 mph, on a 3,020-foot track that traverses both indoors and outdoors, with a grand finale arrival at the penguin habitat, where guests can see real live penguins.



Legoland

The first-ever life-sized Lego Ferrari 296 GTS arrived at the park last month as part of the resort's new **Lego Ferrari Build and Race** attraction. The interactive attraction promises to put the "power, speed, and luxury of Ferrari directly into the creative hands of guests of all ages."

As guests approach the garage of the new attraction, they are greeted by the lifelike vehicle, which has working headlights, a driver's door that opens and a roaring engine. It is 15 feet long by 7 1/2 feet wide by 4 feet tall and weighs almost two tons. Creating this

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The Wheel at ICON Park, Orlando

masterpiece took a team of 10 nearly 1,900 hours to build. Designed for visitors to "stretch their minds and creativity," the attraction features three unique zones for guests to build, test and customize their car before participating in a virtual race for the coveted checkered flag. Younger drivers are also able to create their own designs in the Lego Duplo build zone, complete with larger bricks for smaller hands.

This fall, Legoland will also feature a brand-new freestanding aquarium, **Sea Life Florida Resort.** It will offer a diverse range of marine life, captivating exhibits and a voyage of oceanic exploration, complete with the ultimate seascape: The Theme Park Under the Sea.

LOCAL ATTRACTIONS

International Drive

International Drive is expected to have a unique new animal encounter attraction later this year. **Cool Zoo Wildlife Center** will offer 10,000 square feet of indoor wildlife experiences and interactive education. Guests can explore the exhibits and learn about animals up close, such as sloths, kangaroos, lemurs, alligators, snakes, capybaras and porcupines. There will also be educational attractions and activities ranging from gemstone mining to fossil finding in a 360 virtual reality machine. Also, coming to I-Drive later this year will be **SENSO Beach Club,** a new 40,000-square-foot entertainment complex, featuring two pools, multiple bars and a rooftop area.

Old Town

For over 30 years, Old Town has been a popular destination for both tourists and locals alike. The 18-acre property is comprised of over 70 unique shops, restaurants, bars, rides and family-friendly attractions. Strolling the tree-lined brick streets feels as though you have stepped back in time, especially with events such as the weekly car show, **Saturday Nite Classic Car Cruise.**

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Leaders in Higher Education Roundtable 2024



Central Florida's colleges and universities are well positioned to tackle today's challenges while meeting the unique needs of their students.

University of Central Florida

BY MATT COSENTINO

LEADING A COLLEGE OR UNIVERSITY HAS NEVER BEEN AN EASY JOB, but there is no doubt that the men and women charged with pushing institutions of higher learning forward have faced one major challenge after another over the past decade—with varying degrees of success. From escalating costs and the pandemic to student mental health issues and racial inequities, these obstacles have even raised some critics to question the future of college in the United States, although statistics show that the path toward the best-paying careers still goes through postsecondary education.

Fortunately for Central Florida, the region is rife with institutions that are pivoting their approaches to better suit today's landscape and with influential leaders who are concerned about their students' future as well as their college experience. *Orlando Family Magazine* spoke with several to find out more about how their schools are adapting to the changes that have been thrown their way.

What do you believe is the biggest challenge facing higher education in 2024?

Dr. Grant Cornwell, president, Rollins College: The biggest challenge we have right now is government intervention in our business. One of the hallmarks of American higher education's success is its independence from outside influences. We safeguard freedom of inquiry and expression; what is taught and how it is delivered is the purview of the faculty, who are experts in their disciplines. Faculty do not teach or conduct research to please me, the board of trustees or elected officials. They are independent minds working together to solve

problems according to their disciplinary standards of excellence and integrity. Government interference risks weakening one of our country's strongest assets.

Garry Jones, president, Full Sail University: When looking at the industries that our graduates serve, the emerging technology industry reports a severe deficit in the number of skills-based employees needed to meet the demand created by the rapid, ongoing tech evolution. Encouraging people with a propensity for EmTech to continue their education in pursuit of careers in a market hungry for talent, in part, will help answer that call, [and] offering various educational formats is also key, so Full Sail recently launched DC3—a dynamic, digital-centric education platform that offers online courses featuring short-form, subject-specific courses taught by Full Sail grads and other leading industry professionals. Through this effort, career support for our alumni, as well as new students, has been enhanced through their acquisition of new, specific skills that have become more accessible and affordable.

Dr. John Nicklow, president, Florida Institute of Technology (Florida Tech): The relevance of a college degree is under attack in some circles, and while higher education fosters critical-thinking skills, expands career opportunities, improves lifetime earnings, and increases health outcomes and overall quality of life, education specifically in fields like science, technology, engineering and mathematics leads to gainful employment in great careers. A 2023 study from Georgetown University found that by 2031, 72% of jobs in the U.S. will require postsecondary education and/or training. For STEM jobs, that percentage is certainly considerably higher. That kind of education is our focus at Florida Tech. The talent pipeline must be fed in order for our economy to remain competitive with other parts of the world. Graduating students with those STEM-related skills is our primary mission and one we take very seriously.

Why is graduating on time important?

Dr. Paul Dosal, senior vice president for student success, University of Central Florida: I think these days, with the cost of living that so concerns all of us, graduating on time has assumed even greater importance in that I think it's the best way for our students to manage their debts. If the student has to spend six years instead of four years to get that degree, that means two years of not pulling in a salary on top of two years of paying tuition and fees and housing. There's a great expense involved with extending graduation, so managing debt levels is best done through timely graduation. If you're going on to law or medical school, you're going to incur debt there, so getting you out on time with limited or no debt is important.

What are some of the obstacles students can face on the path to graduation, and how do you help students cope with those challenges?

Dosal: Emotional well-being is more and more identified by students as a top impediment. Students are dealing with higher levels of stress and anxiety for a number of reasons. It's a concern of ours. We have to promote student well-being in order to promote their success, and increasingly they're the same thing. So being able to offer support to our students before those things escalate into more serious forms is really important. We need to make sure that students know that we have a team of professionals who are here to help them, to support them along the way, and to help reduce those stresses and anxieties.

Finances are always an obstacle as well. We serve a high number of limited-income students—about 35% of ours—and a lot of them have to work to pay the bills and to help the family out. If we have students working 20 or 30 hours a week, that's less time they can spend in class, studying or taking advantage of everything the university has to offer, which is quite a bit.

What advice do you have for families whose children will be entering college?

Dr. Kathleen Plinske, president, Valencia College: Please don't believe that you must take on debt or that the cost of college makes higher education out of reach. At Valencia College, the cost for full-time enrollment is less than the cost of a meal plan at a residential university. The total tuition cost for an associate degree from Valencia is around $6,000. Very few of our students graduate with any debt at all. You have an excellent, local, affordable option for higher education at Valencia College.

Cornwell: For families whose children will be entering college, it is critical to encourage independence and exploration. Rollins offers clubs for every interest, immersion programs, study abroad and so much more. This all is part of a student's personal growth while at college. Families should also emphasize to their students that they should seek help when needed. Advisors, professors, mental health and other support services are available for those struggling academically or personally. Resources are available and should be sought early. Maintaining physical and mental health in college is paramount.

Not every student comes to college on a traditional path. How does your university help non-traditional students such as veterans or those already established in their careers?

Dosal: We have students come in from so many different backgrounds, including veterans or students with some kind of disability, and we have offices and staff set up to help students with those kinds of backgrounds. We have an office that's in charge of supporting our veterans and military-affiliated students, and it's important to provide those students with care but also a sense of belonging, that the university values them and we want to make them feel at home on this campus. In a larger sense, since we are such a big campus with so many students, we need to be able to offer support to any student who needs it at any point during their undergraduate career. We've set that up with a coordinated care management system that includes the office of veterans' success and student accessibility services; those are two critically important offices for our students' success efforts.

How has your institution been preparing for the "enrollment cliff" that is coming, in which the number of traditional-aged college students will decline significantly?

Plinske: At Valencia College, we have something for everyone—from high school students who are dual-enrolled at Valencia, to senior citizens interested in lifelong learning, to recent high school grads looking to enroll in college for the first time, to working adults looking to upskill or change careers. In fact, the spring 2024 semester reflected the highest enrollment in a spring semester in Valencia College's history. We are planning for continued growth to serve the growing Central Florida community.

Are you concerned that legislative DEI restrictions will have an impact on the number of minority students who will be attending college, or on the campus experience they will have?

Cornwell: Rollins is committed to diversity as is written in our Diversity, Equity, Inclusion and Belonging Strategic Plan. For Rollins College to thrive in its mission and its markets, the demographic composition of our campus community, our students, faculty and staff, must become more diverse. This is an inevitability that we embrace. We must attract a broad diversity of students with our offerings, and retain them, because of the quality of the education we provide and the welcoming and inclusive environment they will discover. We must attract a broad diversity of faculty and staff, so that the points of view and identities they represent reflect the national and global contexts within which our graduates will work and live, and retain them because we have a campus culture that enables all to thrive.

With costs continuing to be an issue, are partnerships and mergers with other colleges or outside businesses critical in moving higher education forward?

Cornwell: Rollins College comprises three schools: an undergraduate liberal arts college, the Hamilton

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Florida Institute of Technology

Holt School for working adults seeking to advance themselves professionally, and the Crummer Graduate School of Business, which is the top-ranked MBA in Florida. Business partnerships are particularly important for our business school.

We recently hired Anil Menon, a visionary leader, as the new dean of the Crummer Graduate School of Business. We are reimagining the business school of the 21st century, which goes far beyond offering different MBA programs or doctorates in business administration. Rollins College is looking to partner with corporations and businesses in the Central Florida ecosystem to participate in specialized certification and training programs for executive leadership. For example, we recently hired one of the most well-known thought leaders in artificial intelligence to teach the connection between AI and business strategy. The Crummer School will be offering an entire suite of new programs that are not tied to the MBA degree but are still focused on the needs of our local economy.

Do today's students expect more in terms of career preparation, and are you expanding opportunities for internships or experiential learning?

Jones: Career preparation and hands-on, project-based learning are at the very heart of Full Sail's educational mission. Our university curates educational experiences that closely emulate the industries we serve and they are offered at an immersive, accelerated pace, allowing students to graduate in approximately half the time of a traditional bachelor's program. Each campus and online degree program has an established schedule of courses that students take in a prescribed order. For example, initial courses are foundational with students matriculating next into courses focused on skills based upon their chosen career goals. Full Sail undergraduate students take part in a series of project and portfolio classes where they are challenged to both learn and create. The result is their movement through a curriculum where they are building a professional portfolio that better assists them with the launch of their career.

Professional development is also woven into our university's undergraduate degrees to help students with career readiness. This includes career modules pertaining to résumé fundamentals, networking and personal branding. Full Sail maintains a robust career development department of approximately 100 employees, a home to dedicated career advisors who assist students in connecting with companies looking for talent. Exclusive career events are provided throughout the year, both on campus and virtually, featuring employers from numerous notable companies and brands.

Nicklow: Yes—this is always a high priority for Florida Tech. Meeting the region's future workforce challenge requires action, and it requires action now. Since its founding 65 years ago at the dawn of the Space Age, right alongside NASA, Florida Tech has welcomed that challenge. Our independent, private university has grown into one of the nation's leading STEM institutions while helping to populate key industries, from aerospace and cybersecurity to psychology to high-tech manufacturing, with our in-demand graduates. And the Central Florida workforce has, in turn, benefited greatly.

But success is not the same as growth. Evolution must be intentional. The time has come for Florida Tech to set a course forward with intentionality and focus. We have a newly launched strategic plan designed to better position the university to supply the talent pipeline that this region and beyond will need in the coming decade. We're calling it "Forward Together, Boundless Potential."

Florida Tech educates global thinkers, resilient problem solvers and future leaders who are ready to support industry and societal needs by responsibly integrating science, technology and other key disciplines to advance knowledge across the universe. Our strategic plan is the launch pad. From there, we will build on that mission, continuing to develop as a premier institution for improving the human condition through innovative research and a one-of-a-kind education for graduates who are relentless in their pursuit of understanding and solving the critical challenges of tomorrow. I think that's higher education's highest calling—and where our industry makes its most meaningful contribution.

Are there certain majors that have been in demand in recent years? Do you anticipate any areas of study becoming more prominent in the near future?

Jones: With the world becoming more digitized daily, we are heavily focused on the integration between entertainment media and emerging technologies. Full Sail's fastest-growing degree offerings are those under the banner of emerging technology, and based upon the regular input we organize from this and other industries we serve, I expect continued growth in employment demand in the areas of cybersecurity, IT, artificial intelligence, IoT, and simulation and visualization, to name a few.

Plinske: We have seen significant growth in programs that prepare students directly for the workforce, including our Accelerated Skills Training programs (which range in length from two to 24 weeks) and our baccalaureate programs. In particular, we've seen tremendous growth in interest in programs related to semiconductors (given the investments in NeoCity), including our 22-week

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Roundtable *(continued)*

program in robotics and semiconductor manufacturing as well as our 15-week program in precision optics. In addition, our baccalaureate degrees in business and organizational leadership and software development have been popular with students and our local employers.

This has clearly been a turbulent time for higher education, from the pandemic to economic factors. Are you confident that colleges will persevere and overcome these challenges?

Cornwell: Coming out of COVID, students and families realized that online learning was not delivering on the value proposition of higher education. They seek Rollins because our classes are small, personal and in-person. Learning takes place in the context of human relationships between the professor and students, as well as students with one another, in a learning community. The learning is much deeper, and there is much greater accountability for learning, which is absent from large lectures or online settings.

Regarding economic factors, our students have access to ample aid. For nine out of 10 Rollins students, the net cost after receiving some sort of financial aid or grant is far lower than the sticker cost. Each year, about 96% of our students receive more than $80 million in combined federal, state and institutional aid, allowing them to take advantage of the full Rollins experience.

Nicklow: Florida Tech's outlook is quite bright—we are well positioned to continue enhancing our resources in service to our students and the community. My vision is to make Florida Tech the top choice for students interested in STEM fields from all over the state, nation and world. To achieve that, we must continue to expand Florida Tech's academic excellence and research enterprise, attract top faculty and staff, and give students a one-of-a-kind, great experience. This will also help us become the preferred partner for businesses, industry and government. At Florida Tech, I'm optimistic about our growth because we focus on those in-demand programs, applied research and industry partnerships.

I do think that we in higher ed must, however, do a better job of telling our story—of connecting the dots explaining why a college degree is worth the investment of time and money. A college degree is nothing less than life-changing for so many people—and those are the stories that matter.

Finally, I'm also very excited about the future of this region. The high-tech corridor at the heart of Central Florida has tremendous potential to enrich the lives of so many—from technological innovation to economic infusion, the positives are realized every day. We can always do more as a community to maximize those benefits. That requires coordination and collaboration, and Florida Tech is excited to be an instigator for those discussions, wherever and whenever possible. We are not only in this region, we are of this region, and fully committed to remaining a champion for its bright future.

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Overcoming the Odds

Even as infertility becomes less stigmatized and more openly discussed, it's still a difficult road to go down. But the region's experts in **reproductive medicine** are here to help individuals struggling to conceive a child—even when it seems like all hope is lost.

By Madeleine Maccar

For many, the dream of growing one's family is a natural progression building on previously checked-off personal milestones like coupling up, establishing a career and putting down one's roots.

But for those hopeful parents whose dreams of having a biological child have been thwarted by infertility, that indefinite pause can seem like an interminable, heartbreaking slog through invasive questions, expensive treatments, and cautious optimism dashed by reality month after month.

Fortunately, the Central Florida region is home to some compassionate and capable doctors well-versed in innovative, effective methods for helping local families grow by two tiny feet, no matter the difficulties they've faced along the way.

According to data from the National Institutes of Health (NIH), an estimated 9% of men and 11% of women in America have experienced fertility problems. To further break down that impact on couples trying to conceive, the NIH notes that there's an even split among the root cause of infertility: It can be attributed to the male partner, the female partner, or a combination of both partners and unknown factors with equal frequency.

Despite infertility happening to roughly one in 10 men and women, it is a fairly new development for the issue to be openly discussed rather than swept under the rug like a shamefully guarded family secret. And as the area's professionals are quick to explain it's a health issue that can be caused by factors beyond a couple's control, its stigma is an underserved one.

Dr. Zamip Patel, a urologist at Orlando's Southeast Male Infertility & Urology practice with fellowship training in andrology/male infertility, adds that it's an even newer development for men to not only discuss but also consider their role in a couple's difficulty to conceive a child, emphasizing that "you're no less of a man" when complications like low sperm counts, abnormal sperm function, past injuries or chronic health problems are at play.

And with social media, shifting societal norms and increased education about what causes infertility all contributing to more open exchanges about a journey that a surprising number of people can keenly relate to, he hopes to see that trend of vulnerable honesty continue on its promising trajectory, especially since conversations can help set a precedent to normalize something that's more common than previously realized.

"The stigma in general of infertility, it is becoming less and less of one as IVF [in vitro fertilization] has become more and more accepted and, by extension, infertility in general tends to become something couples talk about more, which they certainly didn't before," says Dr. Patel. "This isn't something wrong with you or something that you did wrong. … Generally speaking, the thing I try to remind a lot of men of is that all of our ancestors had this problem before, it just wasn't talked about as much and we didn't see it as much because men reproduced earlier on in life and now, of course, since both men and women reproduce later, we start to see much more of these things."

Dr. Zakia Lachgar is a licensed acupuncture physician who also holds a doctorate in Oriental medicine, a master's degree in biomedical science and a certification in the LIfe FErtility BioTherapy program. She combines her training and expertise in both Eastern and Western medicine to care for her patients holistically while also identifying the exhaustively personalized care that will help them get the most from the acupuncture treatments that have been shown to help with infertility in both men and women.

In fact, she notes that acupuncture's benefits in the area of reproductive medicine extend to regulating menstrual cycles, increasing blood flow to both the uterus and the ovaries, and reducing overall stress, in addition to improving implantation rates and providing additional support to patients undergoing assisted reproductive treatments such as IVF.

"We use acupuncture to help with balancing hormones, such as lowering the cortisol levels and increasing endorphins, and it also helps with decreasing inflammation and increasing blood flow, which would increase the uterine lining so it helps with the implantation when a patient is trying to conceive," Dr. Lachgar begins. "There is no one cookie-cutter treatment. Every single treatment is based on the patient's needs, so we look at their lab work and we also look at their lifestyle, we look at their body composition, we look at what they tend to be deficient on and what they need more help with. … We work a lot with fertility doctors directly, so our program goes hand in hand with what they're doing through treatments like IVF or IUI [intrauterine insemination]."

Treating infertility with artificial insemination procedures, especially IVF, is an incredibly timely topic both medically and socially. As hotly contested debates about when life begins have already influenced legislation in Alabama, they've also made national headlines and sparked conversations about reproductive challenges, education and freedom across the country—and, as Dr. Patel points out, with 2% of all births now being the product of IVF, "everyone has been touched by IVF, whether you know someone who's done it or you'd had it done yourself."

"It's a hot-button topic with the Alabama ruling and a threat to IVF across the nation that I don't think that the general public, or even a lot of lawmakers, really have a firm grasp on," he notes. "But I think that that's part of the problem, that you have a lot of people in key decision-making positions who really don't have the scientific background or the understanding of where this is heading, what it means and what the actual implications are. … The first IVF done in this country was in '96, and at that time, it was a crazy environment because lawmakers didn't know what to do with it. I remember hearing the phrase 'playing God' a lot, but that's not what happens here: You have an embryo and that embryo is a potential life—yes, it's a potential life, but it's a potential life like a seed is a potential tree. It's likely, but it's not guaranteed. It would be wonderful if every embryo made it, but that's not even close to the truth."

And while there are still challenges ahead, whether it's achieving the scientific breakthroughs that will yield even more promising numbers for couples trying to conceive or effectively cutting through the static of misconceptions to fight for individuals' reproductive rights and safety, there is always hope for couples who think infertility is a life sentence—and plenty of opportunities to correct the misinformation that still plagues the world of reproductive medicine.

"We discuss everything from food therapy to lifestyle to exercise to stress management, all of which have an effect on our body and our health in general, because your lifestyle and your stress matter—people think that because everyone is stressed that it doesn't matter, but that stress might affect you differently and, after a while, that chronic, low-grade stress does have an effect on your cortisol level, which will have an effect on your progesterone, which will have an effect on your fertility directly," Dr. Lachgar says. "It all comes down to educating patients in what we can offer and what we can do, and what would be the benefit of acupuncture for them. I think education is key for patients to reach their goals, especially when it comes to infertility. Infertility can be a long road, which is why they need to feel comfortable in really addressing their core issues. In most cases, we can help, and our patients know that we're 100% invested in helping them reach their goal."

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The Importance of Autism Advocacy



Autism Acceptance Month not only acts as a reminder to celebrate the differences within our communities, but also works to highlight both the resources and struggles those with autism face.

By Chelsea Valcourt

DESPITE ONE IN 36 CHILDREN RECEIVING AN AUTISM DIAGNOSIS, there's much about the disorder that is shrouded in myths, conspiracies and stereotypes. Autism Acceptance Month provides an annual space to highlight the importance of official diagnoses, to demystify the stigmas, and to encourage awareness and acceptance of those with autism.

"As discussions of autism signs have become more mainstream, stigmas disappear," says Ellen Fittro, chief clinical officer at InBloom Autism Services. "At InBloom, our caring and professional clinicians recognize how amazing and unique each and every child is, and celebrate each child's strengths and differences."

It all starts with a diagnosis.

An autism diagnosis can be life-changing, although it may be challenging to get. Misconceptions surrounding what it means to have autism and the causes of it can have detrimental impacts on the ability to procure an accurate diagnosis.

"There are many misconceptions about autism and that's what makes Autism Acceptance Month so important. Some common myths or misguided beliefs are that autism is caused by vaccines, is solely a childhood condition, that there's one identifying behavioral signifier and that only boys have autism," says Benito Aragon, vice president of marketing, communications and business development of Quest Inc. "Each of these misconceptions can lead to stigma, so public education is so important."

Rising trends on social media encourage self-diagnoses based on a set of behaviors associated with those on the autism spectrum, although these behaviors are oftentimes not official diagnostic characteristics. Things like obsessing over a singular song or tapping your foot when impatient have now become the basis of self-diagnosis, leading to an overcrowding of resources by those who don't need them, the misdiagnosis or under-diagnosis of other mental, attention or neurodevelopmental disorders, and a fundamental misunderstanding of what it means to be on the autism spectrum.

Self-diagnosis is not the only large hurdle many will face when handling an autism diagnosis. It can be harder for females to receive a diagnosis, as they often find it easier to mask their symptoms.

"The female brain is quite different from the male brain in that there is a lot of intuitiveness. A female that's not on the more [severe or typical side of the] autism spectrum can usually figure [social interactions] out, but they're having to do it in a more intellectual way rather than a natural one. When they can't pick up on an interaction, they'll often act like they do, which is something males don't do as often. We don't know exactly why," says Dr. Krista Marchman, founder and director of Educational Consulting Associates, Inc. "That's the challenging part."

This complex form of masking makes it more challenging to diagnose a girl or woman with autism. In fact, a 2017 study published by the American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry found that the male-to-female diagnosis ratio is close to 3:1.

Despite the many hurdles in receiving a diagnosis, its importance should not be understated. An early diagnosis allows for a more complete understanding of one's own mind and can guide parents as they seek to make the best decisions for their child. Early intervention may also help close the gap in associated social, motor and speech delays.

"Recent studies have found that when diagnosis and intervention were delivered before the third birthday, improved social communication skills were indicated," says Marchman. "If a child does not receive intervention for social communication and other developmentally delayed skills such as motor functions, speech, sensory integration, etc., and there are impairments in joint attention and early social responsiveness, then later social learning can be significantly impacted."

There are many resources available for those with autism and their families in Central Florida.

Educational Consulting Associates acts as a starting place for individuals with autism, focusing on comprehensive and early childhood neurodevelopmental evaluations. However, Marchman's work doesn't stop there, as she also works with adults in order to provide diagnoses that may have been overlooked in their childhood.

With an experienced professional and educational background in diagnostic evaluation, educational therapy and parenting consultation, Marchman is deeply familiar with the importance of an accurate diagnosis. Understanding the complex

nuances between diagnoses and how different disorders present in those of different ages and genders, is the key to her success.

"I specialize in evaluation and diagnosis as well as psychoeducation for parents and those working with autism. I've evaluated children through adults on the spectrum for over 25 years," says Marchman. "My efforts have become especially focused on appropriately evaluating adults who have been misdiagnosed or overlooked as being autistic, as well as on girls and women on the spectrum as they can present very differently from the male phenotype. I also provide workshops for mental-health professionals on adult autism and girls on the autism spectrum."

For more than 30 years, Devereux Florida has been helping those with a wide range of mental and neurodevelopmental disorders.

"We have seen firsthand the life-changing impact that can be made when behavioral treatment is delivered in a clinically sound approach that also addresses the impact to a child's mental health," says Michelle Llorens, executive director of Devereux Advanced Behavioral Health Florida. "Devereux offers an array of services—from children's residential treatment for those with the most intensive needs, to community-based services for parents and caregivers to be supported and provided with tools to prevent situations from escalating to a crisis level."

In addition to a myriad of other services and to better cater to the needs of those with learning and developmental disabilities, the organization offers The Devereux School, an accredited K-12 program school located on its Viera Campus. A low student-to-teacher ratio, up-to-date technology and constant communication with children's care providers ensures a tailored educational experience.

At InBloom, behavior analyst board-certified clinicians work with the children to provide applied behavior analysis (ABA) therapy. Through ABA therapy, skills are taught by combining tasks with activities that the child prefers, making learning those skills something to look forward to. During therapy sessions, children work on a variety of different skills such as communication, social, play and more.

"ABA is supported by decades of research demonstrating its effectiveness for improving the quality of life for individuals with autism," says Fittro. "ABA therapy continues to evolve and places a strong emphasis on creating a compassionate and motivating learning environment.

Close attention to both developments in abilities and changing interests of the children ensures a consistently tailored plan, and ongoing discussions with parents and caregivers help to relieve anxiety and keep everyone on the same page.

Recognized and accredited by the Behavioral Health Center of Excellence, FoundArt also provides applied behavior analysis therapy but infuses it with artistic expression in order to make learning and building new skills an enjoyable activity for their students. They work closely with schools and





families to individualize their services to the needs of the individual child.

"Most children gravitate toward art. The color aspect of art motivates them and we try to incorporate that into the therapy so that they're drawn more to the intervention that we're working with," says Ever Quinones, operations manager for FoundArt. "Giving them an art project to collaborate with other kids in a social setting can help implement different skills and target different behaviors that the child may otherwise not gravitate toward."

FoundArt also offers caregiver training in the different approaches they can take toward working with their children.

Despite the myths, autism isn't just a childhood disorder. While associated delays can improve over time, their impacts often last a lifetime. In addition, sometimes a formal diagnosis isn't received until well into adulthood. Quest Inc. understands this and has expanded programs to assist those with autism beyond adolescence.

"Transition services for those we serve is one of the distinguishing factors of what we do at Quest," says Aragon. "Families face critical, and often daunting, decisions as their child approaches adulthood. We offer life-skills training, employment training and job placement opportunities as well as residential and recreational opportunities that help with their transition. Oftentimes, families are completely surprised by the abilities and independence that are gained through these programs, offering them insight into a more independent life for their child than they ever thought possible."

In 2021, Autism Awareness Month became Autism Acceptance Month. It marked a significant change in society's relationship with those with autism. While it is still important to raise awareness of the challenges those with autism face and the important resources available for them, Autism Acceptance Month highlights more than that. It takes a compassionate and understanding community to ensure those with autism find their place and feel included in society.

A growing trend of acceptance makes it possible for those with autism to continue developing their motor, social and emotional skills outside of their designated classrooms and allows for families to enjoy a day out without fearing judgment by ill-informed strangers.

"Autism Acceptance Month provides an opportunity to further education and understanding of autism," says Llorens. "To learn more about how our community can support those in need through specific action [and] encourage acceptance of people with autism to promote a more inclusive society."



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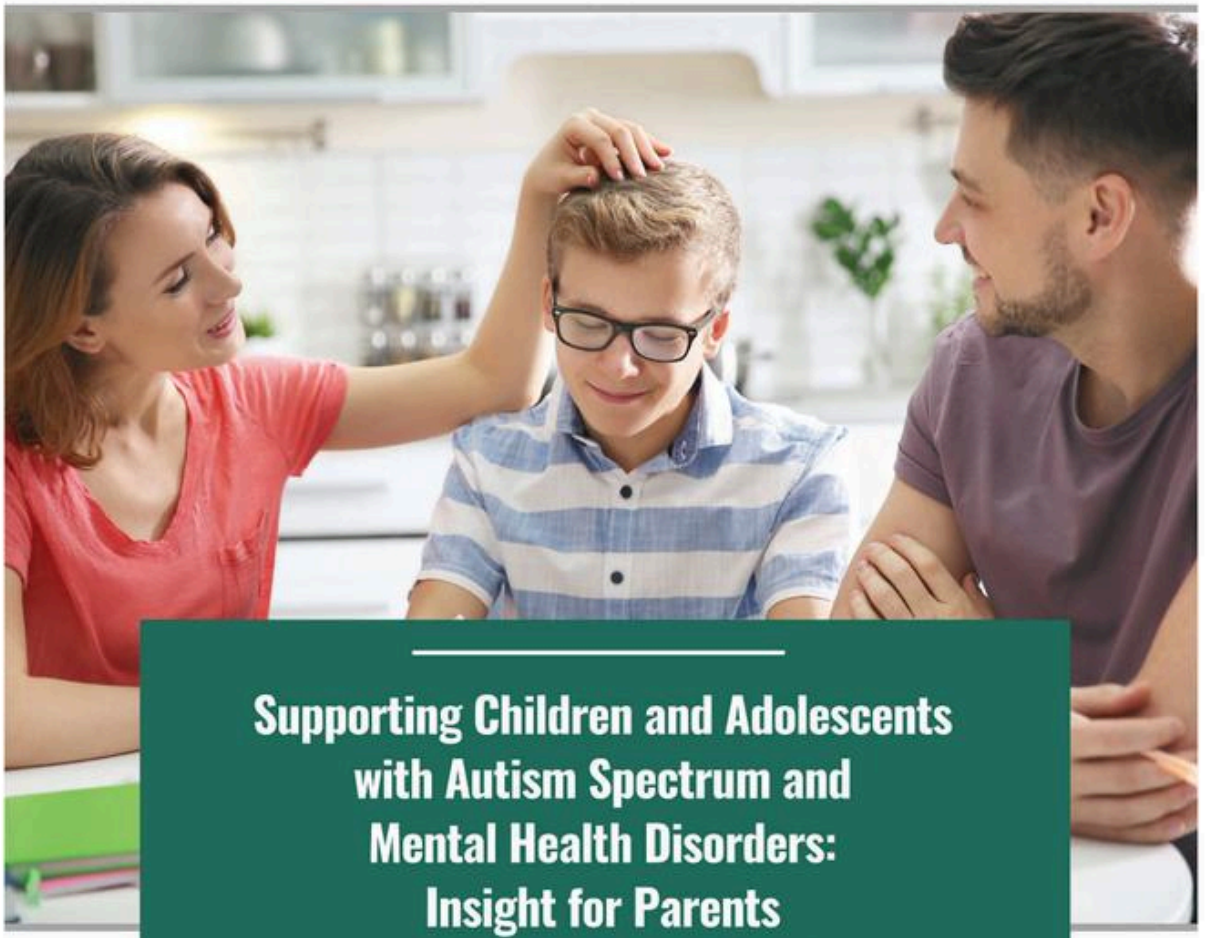
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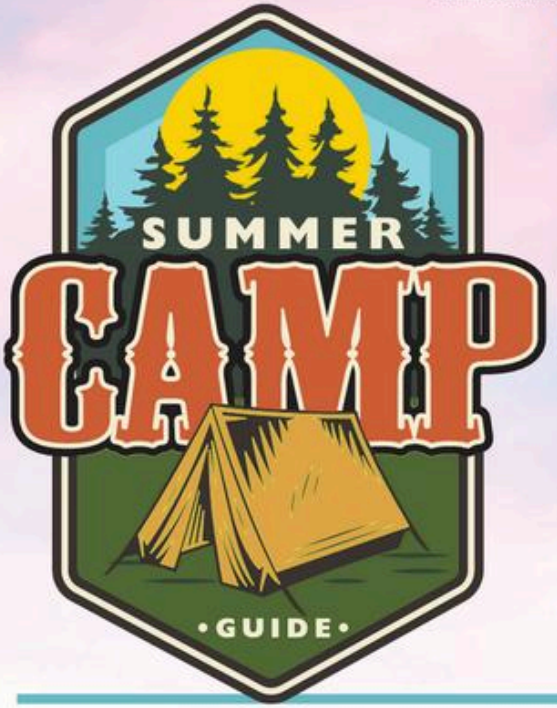
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Keep your child active this summer at an Orlando Magic Youth Basketball Camp!



SCAN ABOVE TO REGISTER OR VISIT
ORLANDOMAGICCAMPS.COM

FUELED BY:

ORANGE COUNTY REGIONAL
HISTORY CENTER
DOWNTOWN ORLANDO
TheHistoryCenter.org

For Ages 6-11

ADVENTURES IN HISTORY SUMMER CAMP



WHERE HISTORY & FUN COLLIDE!

Our **Adventures in History Summer Camp** program provides a safe and fun learning environment! Camps combine cool historic facts with STEAM content and hands-on activities. Register for a week or up to 10, with varied weekly themes.

Scan to register your child!

May 28 – August 2

65 E. Central Blvd.
Orlando, FL 32801
407-836-8500

UNITED ARTS





SUMMER CAMP GUIDE

ALL AROUND INTEREST CAMPS (continued)

Trinity Preparatory School Summer Programs
5700 Trinity Prep Lane, Winter Park
TrinityPrep.org/SummerPrograms
Trinity Prep hosts academic, enrichment and athletic courses for middle and upper school students.

YMCA Summer Camps
YMCACE.org
Join us for camp at your local YMCA Family Center! Youth in grades 1-5 will enjoy a wide variety of reimagined, unique sessions this summer including sports, aquatics, STEM, service learning, the arts, and much more!

ART INSTRUCTION CAMPS

Crealdé School of Art
600 St. Andrews Blvd., Winter Park
642 W. New England Ave., Winter Park
(407) 671-1886 | Crealde.org
Immerse yourself in a summer of fun and creativity with professional artists on Crealdé's Lakeside campus where art and nature inspire your inner artist.

EDUCATIONAL CAMPS

Camp Invention
Several Central Florida Locations
(800) 968-4332 | Invent.org/local
Spark your child's curiosity and creativity at Camp Invention®! This nationally acclaimed K-6 program brings all-new, hands-on STEM fun. Register using LOCAL25 by 3/27 to SAVE $25 at invent.org/local.

Full Sail Labs
221 S. Semoran Blvd., Winter Park
(407) 673-6249 | FullSailLabs.com
Full Sail Labs offers creative, collaborative STEAM-based summer camps for kids and teens in topics they're passionate about including entertainment, media, art, and technology.

BGO
SPORTS ACADEMY

SUMMER CAMP

SUMMER SPECIAL RATE		FIELD TRIPS ARE ON FRIDAY'S	
Week 1	May 29th - May 31st	----------	----------
Week 2	June 3rd - June 7th	6/07/2024	Bowling
Week 3	June 10th - June 14th	6/14/2024	Movie
Week 4	June 17th - June 21st	6/21/2024	Mary Balloons
Week 5	June 24th - June 28th	6/28/2024	Chuck e cheese.
Week 6	July 8th - July 12th	7/12/2024	Sanford Zoo
Week 7	July 15th - July 19th	7/19/2024	Crayola
Week 8	July 22nd - July 26th	7/26/2024	Science Center
Week 9	July 29th - August 2nd	8/02/2024	Gatorland
Week 10	August 5th - August 9th	8/09/2024	Movie



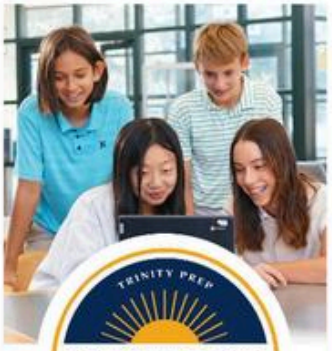
Regular Weekly / Daily Rates

8:30 a.m - 5:30 p.m $225 WK RECREATIONAL (6-12 YRS. OLD)
9:00 a.m - 3:00 p.m $185 WK PRE-SCHOOL (4 - 5 YRS. OLD)

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EDUCATIONAL CAMPS (continued)

In-Home Tutors
(407) 459-1231
Orlando.InHomeTutors.com
In-Home Tutors Orlando offers custom-designed programs in your home this summer, aimed at both academic recovery and enrichment. All grades and subjects, including ACT/SAT prep.

Orange County Library System Summer at Your Library
(407) 835-7323 | OCLS.Info/Summer
This summer, the adventure begins at your library! Grab your books and your compass and set your path toward completing the summer reading challenge. Fun, educational, and free events and activities will be available for all ages from June 1 to July 28. Registration opens May 1.

Orange County Regional History Center
65 E. Central Blvd., Orlando
(407) 836-8500 | TheHistoryCenter.org
We provide a safe and fun learning environment that combines cool historic facts with STEM content through hands-on activities, interactive guest-speaker programs, and exciting field trips.

Orlando Science Center
777 E. Princeton St., Orlando
(407) 514-2112 | OSC.org
Orlando Science Center's camp programs inspire students to get excited about STEM as they create, experiment, make new friends, and develop 21st Century skills. Programs available for Preschool – Grade 6.



Stay COOL This Summer!

LEARN TO SKATE CAMP — Weekly Starting May 28

ORLANDO ICE DEN HOCKEY CAMP — June 17-21

Solar Bears Hockey Camp — July 22-26

Daily Public Skating Sessions!

ORLANDO ICE DEN

Orlandoiceden.com

VISION OF FLIGHT YOUTH AVIATION SUMMER CAMP



SUMMER CAMP

Ages 10 -18

ORLANDO EXECUTIVE AIRPORT

ALPHA Session: July 8th - 11th

Bravo Session: July 22nd - 25th

(9 AM - 3 PM Daily)

Camp Iterniary:

- Ground School Basics
- VR Interactive Flight Simulation
- Drones / UAV Build and Test Fly
- Special Guest Speakers
- Instruction Flight (Real Flight Time)
- Lunch & Snacks Provided

For more info: (407) 719-0912 • info@visionofflight.org

Register Today! VisionofFlight.org

CJP SUMMER CAMP 2024

School Age Summer Camp (VPK Grad – 2nd Grade)

Daily art, science and exploration, bible lessons, outdoor activities.

Fun-filled in-house field trips:

- Pottery Painting
- Animal Encounters
- Foam Party
- Science Demonstration
- Character Visit
- Olympic Obstacle Course

Fun Fridays: Alternating Splash Days & Movie Days w/ a pizza lunch!

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407-678-8660

admin@redeemerwp.org

3377 Aloma Ave., Winter Park

KIDS



FULL SAIL LABS

INSTRUCTOR LED | PEER COLLABORATION | STEAM CURRICULUM

2024 SUMMER CAMPS

TEENS







SUMMER CAMP GUIDE

EDUCATIONAL CAMPS (continued)

Synapse (STEM) Education
9717 Eagle Creek Center Blvd., Ste., 130, Orlando | (407) 574-8904
SynapseOrlando.com
Exciting, fun-filled, hands-on week-long summer workshops for youth ages 5-15 who like activities involving Science, Technology, Engineering and Math. It is a place to learn and have fun doing it!

The Vision of Flight
Orlando Executive Airport
365 Rickenbacker Dr., Orlando
(407) 719-0912 | VisionofFlight.org
The "Vision of Flight" STEM Aviation summer camp offers kids ages 10 to 18 four exciting days of youth empowerment through real world aviation experiences. It's unlike any other camp in Central Florida!

OVERNIGHT CAMPS

Warren Willis United Methodist Camp
4990 Picciola Rd., Fruitland Park
(352) 787- 4345
WWUMCC.org/Summer
The countdown to Summer 2024 has begun! Don't miss your chance to experience the ultimate summer adventure at Warren Willis Camp! Secure your spot today!

PERFORMING ARTS CAMPS

Orlando Family Stage
1001 E. Princeton St., Orlando
(407) 896-7365
OrlandoFamilyStage.com
Summer Camps return with creative drama, musical theatre, productions, and more for students in pre-K through 12th. Visit our website to view all available Summer Camps. Based on stories from beloved books, movies, and musicals, all camps welcome both beginners and experienced performers. It's Summer fun with something for everyone!

PERFORMING ARTS CAMPS (continued)

Orlando Shakes in Partnership with UCF
812 E. Rollins St., Orlando
(407) 447-1700 ext. 254
OrlandoShakes.org
With options for students Grade 3 – 12, young performers will take center stage to perform their hearts out in thrilling performing arts camps from Orlando Shakes!

The Ritz Theater
201 S. Magnolia Ave., Sanford
(407) 321-8111
RitzTheaterSanford.com/summer-camp
Ritz Theater offers two exciting Summer Camps designed to instill the love of theater from theater basics for juniors and musical play production from start to finish for seniors.

SPECIAL NEEDS CAMPS

Quest Camp Thunderbird
909 E. Welch Rd., Apopka
(407) 237-7336 | Questinc.org/camp
Quest's Camp Thunderbird offers adults and children with developmental disabilities a classic summer camp experience in a beautiful lakeside setting. Celebrating 60 years of summer fun!

SPORTS CAMPS

Brown's Gym Orbit Sports Academy
740 Orange Ave., Altamonte Springs
(407) 869-8744 | BrownsGym.com
Brown's Gym's offers full day and half day summer camp programs for girls and boys, ages 5 to 13 years. Camps include daily gymnastics, martial arts & ninja, cheer, and/or dance instructions. Activities and camp themes vary by week.

Orlando Ice Den
8701 Maitland Summit Blvd., Orlando
(407) 916-2550 | OrlandoIceDen.com
Stay cool this Summer at Orlando Ice Den with daily Public Skating sessions, Learn to Skate, and Hockey Camps! Register online today!

Orlando Magic Youth Basketball Camps
OrlandoMagicYouth.com
Elevate your child's skills this summer by registering them for an Orlando Magic Youth Basketball Camp! Boys and girls, ages 7-17, of all skill levels.



ORLANDO SCIENCE CENTER
SUMMER CAMPS
SPACES AVAILABLE FOR GRADES 5-6



Many camps are already full. Act now so your budding scientist doesn't miss out!
osc.org/summer-camps

ONE SCHOOL, MANY CHOICES - Champion Preparatory Academy
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Day School On-Campus
- Grades Pre-K (VPK) - 12th grade, Christ Centered, 21st Century education
- Choice of 1, 4 or 5 days per week
- Enrichment: STEAM Lab Robotics, Culinary Arts, Theater, Music, Art, Spanish, Entrepreneur, Swimming, Beta Club



Homeschool Academy (Choice of our Full-Accredited Private school or Non-private school for FES-UA or PEP scholarships.)
- Guidance Counselor; curriculum, recordkeeping, field trips, graduation, Florida Bright Futures

Homeschool Microschool (One or two day a week enrollment options)
- Mon.-Enrichment/Elective Classes K-12
- Wed.-Academic Classes K-2
- Thurs.-Academic Classes 3-5

Online Virtual School
- Over 400 Christian and secular courses (3-12)

Scholarships accepted: FTC FES-EO, FES-UA, PEP

Champion Summer Camp 2024
Register for 1 week or all 5 weeks Summer Camp June-July

CHAMPION PREPARATORY ACADEMY
407-788-0018 ext. 108
admissions@championprep.org
www.championprep.org
251 E Lake Brantley Dr. Longwood

SPECIAL ADVERTISING SECTION

SUMMER CAMP

RITZ JUNIOR THEATER CAMP
DIRECTED BY BARB KELLAR
5-Days Beginning June 24, 2024, 9AM-2PM

RITZ SENIOR THEATER CAMP
ANASTASIA YOUTH EDITION
DIRECTED BY JAMAAL SOLOMON
15-Days Beginning July 8, 2024, 9AM-3PM

REGISTRATION NOW OPEN
www.ritztheatersanford.com/summer-camp





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* To Learn More
* Register for Camp
* Scholarship Request
* Scholarship Qualification Details

TUITION
Junior Camp: $200
Senior Camp: $400

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WWW.WWUMCCC.ORG/SUMMER

Orlando Family Stars

Each month, Stars features exceptional students, student-athletes, educators and all-around boons to the Greater Orlando area.

Al Honor

Lake Highland Preparatory School girls basketball coach Al Honor earned his 300th career win earlier this season in his 13th year with the program. All of Honor's victories have come at LHP, and he has guided the Highlanders to six state championships as well. The 2021 Naismith Girls Basketball Coach of the Year award, he was also recently named one of the 100 Most Influential People in Women's College Basketball by Silver Waves Media.

OCPS spelling bee winners

Orange County Public Schools recently announced the top three students of its first regional Scripps Spelling Bee: Elvis Avetis of Discovery Middle School, Nathan Crabbendam of Sunridge Middle School and Velvizhi Sethirayar of Orlando Gifted Academy. The event, hosted by the Foundation for OCPS at Walt Disney World Resort, showcased the talents of 24 student finalists. These three exceptional spellers will represent OCPS from May 26-June 1 as they compete against the nation's finest young wordsmiths. Disney will help fund expenses for these students as they compete in Washington, D.C.

Wawa

Wawa recently launched the "Buy a Kids Meal, Make an Impact" initiative, an extension of the convenience retailer's Fly Beyond program that expands access to fresh and nutritious foods to underserved communities through local Feeding America Food Bank partners. Now through July 28, for every Wawa Kids Meal purchased, Wawa will donate funds to local food bank partners, such as Second Harvest Food Bank of Central Florida, to provide meals to the community. On average, food bank partners can provide three meals for every $1 donated. Together, Wawa and its customers will be able to fund approximately 45,000 meals per week and nearly one million meals total throughout the duration of the program. The proceeds will support the local Feeding America Food Banks within the store's operating area.

Marquice S. McGee

Petty Officer 3rd Class Marquice S. McGee, a native of Orlando, was recognized as Warfighter of the Day aboard the Nimitz-class aircraft carrier USS George Washington in February. Warfighter of the Day is a command program where the ship's captain personally recognizes an exemplary sailor for his or her accomplishments, and McGee was selected for his leadership skills. He is known for motivating and inspiring his peers, and strongly represents the "Spirit of Freedom," the ship's nickname. McGee joined the Navy two years ago and serves as an aviation boatswain's mate responsible for launching and recovering naval aircraft.

KNOW SOMEONE WHO DESERVES STAR TREATMENT?
Submit your nominees to Karen@OrlandoFamilyMagazine.com

Palate

By Karen Nimetz

TOP FIVE:

FRIES

A quintet of tasty things to try this month



JOJO'S FRIES
AT JOJO'S SHAKEBAR POINTE ORLANDO
These crispy waffle fries are topped with a trio of cheeses—mozzarella, provolone and cheddar—along with bacon, chives and sour cream.

ITALIAN POUTINE
AT THE DAILY POUTINE DISNEY SPRINGS
This unique combination of fries features mozzarella, pecorino Romano and turkey Bolognese sauce.

ZUCCHINI FRIES
AT GRAFFITI JUNKTION THORNTON PARK & CURRY FORD ROAD
A healthier alternative, this platter of "fries" consists of Panko-crusted zucchini dusted with Parmesan cheese. It is served with house-made horseradish sauce.

TRUFFLE PARMESAN FRIES
AT EDEN BAR (ENZIAN THEATER) MAITLAND
Tossed in truffle salt, these crispy French fries are sprinkled with shaved Parmesan.

LOADED FRIES
AT MRS. POTATO RESTAURANT KIRKMAN SOUTH
These Guy Fieri-approved fries are loaded with real cheddar, bacon and green onions, as well as a choice of either ranch or blue cheese dip.

RAISE A GLASS:

BOURBON

Libations you're sure to love

WHITE-OAK MANHATTAN
AT BÖSENDORFER LOUNGE (GRAND BOHEMIAN HOTEL) DOWNTOWN ORLANDO
This cocktail consists of the distinctive taste of Bulleit Bourbon with the flavor of classic angostura bitters and orange bitters.

APPLE BOURBON INFUSION
AT SEASONS 52 DR. PHILLIPS
Both sweet and spicy, this drink features apple- and cinnamon-infused Bulleit Kentucky Straight Bourbon Whiskey, lemon and angostura bitters.

BANSKY SMASH
AT CAFÉ TU TU TANGO INTERNATIONAL DRIVE
A powerful concoction comprised of Maker's Mark bourbon, Aperol and passion fruit purée.



Side Dish

EDITED BY KAREN NIMETZ

IN THE KITCHEN

A CULINARY QUESTION OF THE MONTH

We polled 30 Central Florida residents and asked them: **"What is your favorite type of salad?"**

The results are in:

Caesar: 7 votes

Greek: 7 votes

Cobb: 6 votes

Caprese: 5 votes

House: 5 votes

Lettuce celebrate Caesar and Greek as our top two choices. Here's what one local resident had to say about her favorite type of salad:



Chauniqua Major,
head of public relations, Whatever's Good PR + Marketing
"I love a hearty salad with lots of organic greens, avocado, carrots, seeds and nuts with a light olive oil dressing. These salads are filling, packed with nutrients and easy to make with whatever I have in the fridge."

GOOD EATS

The best thing we've tasted recently...

MOM'S CUBAN at @ THE DINER

WE RECENTLY TRIED THIS hearty sandwich. It is pressed with homemade pulled pork and ham, and is topped with Swiss cheese, pickles and mustard. The dish is served with a choice of either fries, house potatoes or mac and cheese. We opted for the mac and cheese, which was equally delicious.



QUICK BITES

What's new and notable on the local dining scene

A new high-end Japanese restaurant, **Sorekara,** will soon open in Baldwin Park.

Voodoo Bayou is expected to open sometime this year on Restaurant Row in Dr. Phillips.

Tommy Bahama Marlin Bar opened in Winter Park Village this past January. The eatery allows guests to shop and dine in the same location.

Parea Greek Taverna will open this fall in Maitland in the space formerly occupied by Outpost Kitchen.

A new Mediterranean restaurant, **Helena Modern Riviera,** will soon be opening at ICON Park.

Birria 1983 has taken over the downtown space formerly occupied by Graffiti Junktion on Church Street.

Dim Sum House, offering authentic Cantonese cuisine, recently opened in Clermont.

Vicky Bakery recently opened on South Semoran Boulevard.



RESERVATIONS

Foodie events to fill your calendar

Now through May 19
SEVEN SEAS FOOD FESTIVAL
at SeaWorld
With more than 50 fresh global cuisine choices to pair with over 75 refreshing wines, cocktails and craft brews, SeaWorld invites guests to experience food and drink offerings from around the world. *Select dates, included with park admission, food and beverage prices vary.*

April 18
FOURTH ANNUAL CORKS AND FORKS MAITLAND
at Venue on Lake Lily
The event features samples of signature dishes from some of the finest local chefs and restaurants along with wines, spirits and beer. *6-9 p.m. (rain or shine), tickets range from $65 to $125, with all proceeds benefiting Venue on Lake Lily.*

April 27
SCIENCE OF WINE
at Orlando Science Center
The 12th Annual Science of Wine fundraising event, benefiting Orlando Science Center (OSC), offers a chance to celebrate while also exploring OSC's four floors of interactive exhibit halls, tasting gourmet hors d'oeuvres along the way from several local restaurant partners. *7-10 p.m., tickets starting at $110.*



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