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There are a number of places in Florida that seem to swim free against the sky. Didion’s Miami buildings that “seemed to swim free against the sky” and Lanier’s Ocklawaha River, the “sweetest water-lane in the world,” and DeSoto’s Miami buildings that “seem to swim free against the sky” reflect the diversity of places in Florida.

We also looked at the work of an eclectic collection of writers, from Aldous Huxley to William Styron, to illustrate their take on Florida. Huxley’s Orlando, the “sweetest water-lane in the world,” and Styron’s Miami buildings that “seem to swim free against the sky” reflect the diversity of places in Florida.

This issue includes many different voices, but they all express a common yearning for physical places at once alluring and comforting. Surely in its way, a familiar skyline can be as soothing as a languid waterway.

Florida offers many havens for body and spirit. That so many seek waterways is not unexpected. Waterways beg some critical questions. Is the Florida dream over? How do we create a sense of place and define our statewide identity? How does a state become a community? How do we create a sense of community, create more livable space?

“Community depends upon a diversity of people regularly associating with one another beyond the portals of home and work,” sociologist Ray Oldenburg writes in this issue. Oldenburg’s concept of a “Third Place,” where people regularly gather for conviviality, mutual support, and conversation, inspired a number of our state’s thoughtful residents to contribute their ideas about the magic they find in special locations.

In this issue of FORUM we asked some top scholars and writers to share their ideas on these questions. We wanted them to contemplate how people in this sprawling, constantly changing state of growth can connect with each other, carve out a sense of community, create more livable space.

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FHC explores cultural ties between Florida and the Caribbean

Florida, the southernmost state of the continental United States, has been called the northernmost province of the Caribbean because of its historical connections with its neighbors to the south. During the next year, FHC will explore this cultural intersection through a grants initiative, a weeklong seminar for Florida teachers, several speakers’ bureau programs, and a thematic issue of FORUM magazine.

FHC invites scholars and community organizations to submit grant applications for projects with public programs that interpret and analyze historical and contemporary ties between Florida and the Caribbean. Successful projects may accomplish this by focusing on such topics as ancient pre-Columbian trade routes and exchanges; the European impact through conquest and settlement; the dynamics of immigration at various periods of history; or cultural connections (literary, architectural, legal, religious, artistic, etc.) between Florida and the Caribbean.

Archaeological evidence suggests a long stream of pre-Columbian trade and cultural exchange between native tribes of Florida and the Caribbean. The interaction has continued to the present day, with Bahamians, Cubans, Haitians, Puerto Ricans, and Jamaicans among those who have contributed to Florida’s cultural potpourri. For information, applicants may contact FHC Director of Grants Susan Lockwood at slockwood@flahum.org.

FHC’s Florida Center for Teachers will delve into this topic at a weeklong seminar for 30 Florida teachers this summer. Participants and scholars will contribute to a website providing teaching materials and curriculum projects.

FHC’s Road Scholars speakers’ bureau will offer a broad range of presenters who will engage community groups across the state regarding the two regions’ shared history. Speakers also will discuss the adaptation and assimilation of Caribbean immigrants who have brought their cultural practices, including their art, music, food, and religion, to the United States.

FORUM magazine will focus on the topic with multiple perspectives from humanities scholars.
FHC Board elects five new members

FHC’s Board of Directors has elected five new members to replace five whose terms recently expired. The new members, who will serve three-year terms, are:

Norma Goonen, provost for academic and student affairs at Miami Dade College. Previously she was dean of Farquhar College of Arts and Sciences at Nova Southeastern University, vice president for academic affairs at St. Thomas University, and associate dean at Florida International University. She holds a Ph.D. in educational leadership from the University of Florida; an M.S. in adult education, administration and supervision from FIU; and a B.A. in English from FIU. Her awards include recognition by Dade County for her community service work.

Donald Pemberton, director of the Lastinger Center for Learning in the College of Education at the University of Florida. Previously he was president and founder of the Pinellas County Education Foundation and of Take Stock in Children (selected as one of the top mentoring programs in America). He was a guidance counselor and teacher in the Pinellas County School District. Pemberton earned a Ph.D. in counselor education and an M.A. in guidance and counseling from the University of South Florida and holds a B.S. in social studies education from The Ohio State University.

Brenda Simmons, executive dean of liberal arts and workforce programs of study at Florida Community College at Jacksonville. She is immediate past president of the National Council on Black American Affairs, is on the advisory board for the School of Education at Harvard University, and is involved in several other professional and community organizations. Her academic degrees, in English and American literature, include a Ph.D. from Indiana University of Pennsylvania, an M.A. from Clark-Atlantic University, and a B.A. from Bethune Cookman University.

Niara Sudarkasa, scholar-in-residence at the African-American Research Library and Cultural Center in Fort Lauderdale. Previously she was president of Lincoln University in Pennsylvania. Sudarkasa served as associate vice president for academic affairs at the University of Michigan, where she was professor of anthropology, and was on the faculty of New York University. She earned her Ph.D. and M.A. in anthropology from Columbia University and her A.B. in anthropology from Oberlin College. Sudarkasa holds 13 honorary degrees; has received nearly 100 civic and professional awards; and has served on the boards of more than 20 educational, civic, and professional organizations. She is a past associate dean for humanities and social sciences at FGCU. Previously he was the director of the Honors College and an associate dean at Florida International University. He holds a Ph.D., M.A., M.S., and B.A., all in English, from Florida State University. Among his professional associations, Wisdom is a member of the Sanibel Writers Conference Committee.

Florida’s U.S. Senators view The Florida Dream

Sen. Bill Nelson and Sen. Mel Martinez attended a February showing in Washington, D.C., of FHC’s public-television documentary, The Florida Dream, which traces the state’s dramatic growth since World War II. Florida House, the state’s embassy on Capitol Hill, sponsored the showing.

Classroom poster chronicles Spanish Colonial Florida

Teachers, don’t miss the opportunity to order this new poster chronicling Florida’s Spanish Colonial history. Created by FHC with funding from the National Endowment for the Humanities, this colorfully illustrated poster provides a timeline and lots of information comparing Floridás history with that of America from 1565 to 1821. To order, teachers may log on to FHC’s website at www.flahum.org/teachers. The poster is free, but there is a nominal charge for shipping and handling. English and Spanish versions in PDF format will also be available for download.
This issue of FORUM explores the idea of “community” in 21st-century Florida, one of the top states for sprawl. A half-century of unprecedented population growth has left Florida with massive housing tracts, complex highway systems, and ubiquitous strip malls—the familiar sprawl developmental style prevalent throughout the United States. Sociologist Ray Oldenburg of the University of West Florida argues that the car-oriented lifestyle required to live amid sprawl makes it difficult for people to connect with others in their communities.

“A few decades ago I began noticing some effects this was having on society,” he writes in this issue of FORUM. “Though our culture supposedly was advancing, it seemed that we were evolving lifestyles that were unduly isolated, stressful, and expensive. Our circles of friends and acquaintances were shrinking; children needed to be protected far more than in the past; and more and more otherwise-healthy individuals were behaving like shut-ins. Someone or something was killing community, I concluded.”

Oldenburg blames zoning laws and post-World War II developmental patterns for undercutting our ability to socialize informally in the natural ways that sustain a sense of community. France has its sidewalk cafés. Germany has its beer houses. England has its pubs. But in many U.S. towns and cities, the corner grocery store, the neighborhood diner, the local tavern, and other such community meeting spots have all but disappeared. Besides that, people don’t have as much time to socialize anyway because they commute long distances between home and work, home and shopping, home and friends.

In his groundbreaking book, *The Great Good Place* (1989), Oldenburg introduced the idea of finding “third places,” informal gathering spots beyond home and work (the first and second places) where people can socialize on a regular basis with a wide range of others in their communities. We took this idea a step further and asked two dozen Floridians around the state to tell us about their third places. Read what they say in this issue’s section entitled, “A place where everyone knows your name.” We’d love to hear about your third place. Share yours and read others by logging on to our website: www.flahum.org.

Such quality-of-life issues are the predominant concerns raised at public hearings around Florida, reports Charles C. Bohl, director of the Knight Program in Community Building at the University of Miami School of Architecture. Bohl is one of the proponents of a growing movement around the state to create more livable, sustainable communities. Starting with the New Urbanism movement in the 1980s, they have used a planning...
process called “place making” to help create designs for hundreds of walkable towns, suburban town centers, and revitalized urban and suburban areas.

In embracing place making, municipalities have been moving away from old zoning codes that designate the categories of what can be built where. “Instead,” Bohl writes in this issue of FORUM, “citizens and civic leaders are working together with designers to envision their community’s three-dimensional character—the neighborhoods, work places, market places, and gathering places that will preserve and enhance the community’s quality of life and unique identity.” Bohl provides a variety of photographs that show some of the results across the state.

But our focus isn’t just on the Florida community of today and tomorrow. We also look at the character and strengths of some Old Florida communities. In the first of what will be a regular column, acclaimed Florida novelist Connie May Fowler considers how the cultural identity of a hurricane-ravaged coastal community is connected with the sea, with seafood, and with one iconic seafood restaurant. Fowler’s column, “Savoring Florida,” will focus on our state’s many cultural flavors.

Over the years, many writers have shared their perceptions of Florida. We’ve included excerpts of some of these by such writers as Marjorie Kinnan Rawlings, Ernest Hemingway, Joan Didion, John D. MacDonald, and others—and paired them with images of Florida places.

We also examine the “intelligent design for living” created more than 300 years ago to sustain our nation’s oldest permanent European settlement: St. Augustine, on Florida’s northeastern coast. Architectural historian Elsbeth Gordon tells how a multicultural, multiethnic community formed America’s first cohesive vernacular architecture.

Finally, we look at how a historic Florida community nurtured one of our most celebrated writers, Zora Neale Hurston. An excerpt from Valerie Boyd’s respected Hurston biography, Wrapped in Rainbows, shows how Eatonville, the oldest incorporated black town in the United States, helped forge the character and inspire the imagination of a trailblazer in literature and folklore. We include paintings by Jules André Smith that reflect the people and the spirit of Eatonville in Hurston’s time.

It is not easy to depict, define, create, or measure a sense of community in Florida. Writers, artists, photographers, social scientists, planners—and even magazines—have tried. Perhaps the only experts are the people who live here—and they know it when they have it.
“You see fast-food outlets and office parks and shopping malls rising out of vast barren plains of asphalt. You see individual subdivisions spreading like inkblots, obliterating forests and farms in their relentless march across the landscape. You see cars, thousands of them, moving sluggishly down the broad ribbons of pavement or halting in frustrated clumps at choked intersections or packed in glittering rows in front of every building. You see a lot of activity, but not much life. You see the graveyard of livability. You see communities drowning in a destructive, soulless, ugly mess called sprawl.”

Richard Moe, President, National Trust for Historic Preservation
The scene described at left is all too familiar in Florida, one of the top states for sprawl. Traffic jams, fields sprouting housing tracts, far-flung neighborhoods seemingly devoid of people—all are symptoms of our lives amid sprawl.

A few decades ago I began noticing some effects this was having on society. Though our culture supposedly was advancing, it seemed that we were evolving lifestyles that were unduly isolated, stressful, and expensive. Our circles of friends and acquaintances were shrinking; children needed to be protected far more than in the past; and more and more otherwise-healthy individuals were behaving like shut-ins. Someone or something was killing community, I concluded.

It wasn’t always this way. Prior to World War II, people knew their neighbors. They knew the shopkeepers. They knew the local druggist. They knew the mailman. They knew the cop on the beat. They knew all the kids on the block. They knew the gang at their favorite haunts. All of these community contacts enriched their lives and promoted civic involvement. Such casual, daily give-and-take with a diverse assortment of people from throughout the community provided valuable information, entertainment, and relaxation. But sprawl has robbed us of that.

How did this happen? And what can we do about it?

The stage for sprawl was set in 1926 when the Supreme Court upheld single-use zoning, which soon became the most prevalent approach in the United States for both small towns and large cities. No longer would neighborhoods be allowed the mix of residential, retail, shop, and office use that had put essential goods and services within walking distance of homes—and put life on the streets.

Instead, under single-use zoning, housing units could be located only among other housing units; stores and restaurants had to be grouped together; office buildings needed to be built by other office buildings, etc. The building industry favored single-use zoning because it brought a much faster return on investments than mixed-use development.
But there was an insidious, hidden cost. As people’s daily activities were separated according to zoning categories, the natural socializing that creates and sustains a sense of community was diminished. As the urban architect Raymond Curran put it, “personal isolation and independence from community” are the major characteristics of the way we live now.

Our technological advancements played a big role in this shift. The automobile became the mode of transportation, and it could connect all things. And since it could go anywhere, things could be located anywhere. Congestion was inevitable, and it was compounded in large cities by the ill-advised decision to run interstate highways right through them, a mistake Germany avoided when building its autobahns. The precious social hour that adults enjoyed between work and home was lost to commuting in heavy traffic. Life became more stressful.

Also compounding matters was a shift in our national economic policy that went into high gear after World War II. The emphasis changed from establishing a favorable balance of trade to achieving the highest possible rate of internal consumption. “It is un-American not to buy!” President Eisenhower proclaimed. And, on the heels of 9-11, President Bush advised us to “Go shopping!” The imperative was to have as many people working and spending as possible.

This emphasis, along with the social isolation brought on by single-use zoning, helped fuel the feminist movement. Life within the privacy fences was hardly fulfilling; women entered the work force outside the home and became wage-earners. The one-earner, one-car family became the two-earner, two-car family.

Single-use zoning effectively sterilized residential neighborhoods. The sidewalks became empty, or there weren’t any sidewalks, or the developers made them so narrow that two people couldn’t walk abreast. At any rate, there was no longer anything to walk to. The once-popular “place on the corner” no longer existed. On the corner was just another private home. Residents had to get into the car for virtually every activity.

The home became an oasis that had to provide more than ever for its residents. What a boon to our high-consumption economy this has been. Houses have grown bigger as families have become smaller. The average new house built in America today is twice as large as the average house built in Europe. In the absence of community and its sense of belonging, we try to compensate with more private space, more entertainment gadgetry, and more attempts to show an uncaring world that we are doing well.

We rely more now on family, close friends, and co-workers. But we don’t learn as much from them as we would from a diverse mix of community acquaintances, because they are too like-minded. And as we become more insular, our involvement in civic life diminishes.

What can we do about this? In The Great Good Place, a book I wrote in 1989, I developed and introduced the rather simple concept of the “third place” and assessed its application and vitality in the United States today. Community depends upon a diversity of people regularly associating with one.
another beyond the portals of home and work (the first and second places). Third places are the informal gathering spots where people can get together, such as coffee shops, diners, taverns, beauty parlors, barber shops. In past days, they probably included such places as soda fountains, grist mills, gun shops, feed stores, post offices, etc. The best of these third places have been within walking distance and cost little or no money to visit.

Third places have served many important functions for people in their localities. They are “ports of entry” where newcomers can get a quick orientation to the neighborhood and what it offers. They are “staging areas” in times of emergency. (Many men, seeking to be helpful after Hurricane Andrew, found they had no such place to join others.) Third places unify the neighborhood. (In the heyday of the American tavern, 80 percent of the trade typically came from within a two-block radius.) They lower the cost of living as the “members” help one another, provide information, and give or loan tools and other useful items. They are a spiritual tonic in that friendship and laughter make for easier days. They make it possible for people to have a goodly number of friends and meet them often.

Third places play a crucial role for the citizens in a democratic society. John Dewey put it well: “The heart and final guarantee of democracy is in the free gatherings of neighbors on street corners to discuss back and forth and converse freely with one another.” Unfortunately, those in charge of urban development have adopted a paternal attitude toward citizens and what they need; a vital public life has low priority. The places that would otherwise bring us together in our neighborhoods are forbidden by law. And, even if the law were changed, in many areas there is insufficient density to support a cafe or a coffee shop.

How do we cope with sprawl in trying to salvage some sense of community? Individual attempts to overcome the isolation inherent in sprawl point up the extent of the problem. One man, after moving into his first house in a modern subdivision, made several copies of an invitation to a cocktail party at his house and walked around putting them in doorways. A woman who lived alone in another subdivision opened her house five days a week during daylight hours to all the neighborhood’s small children and their mothers.

The dearth of gathering places these days has given new life and new purpose to several older establishments. A few years ago I was invited to speak to the management and staff of the Central Florida YMCA in Orlando. An annual survey of the membership found that the desire to “be with people” ranked much higher than ever before. After existing for years as a service-for-fee gymnasium, they determined to become a “third place.” I was invited to the Greater Los Angeles YMCA for the same purpose and with the same result. The Houston YMCA has done the same thing on its own.
The nation’s libraries are reshaping their facilities and their offerings. Challenged by the book chains and the Internet, they have learned from both. Comfortable seating, coffee, toddler rooms, small theatres, even beer-tastings are reported. “What patrons wanted,” said one library director, “was a place to meet people and relax.” Library visits have recently increased by 28 percent nationwide.

Churches and synagogues are adapting to meet third-place needs. I spent considerable time with the Community Christian Church in Naperville, Ill., after which they built a new church affectionately called the “Big Yellow Box.” It has no stained-glass windows and no high ceilings. The clergy wear no vestments and the main entrance is through their Ground Level Café, which is open to everybody. There are classrooms everywhere and carpeting that is safe for small children as they run about. When parishioners are scattered as they are today, more than formal services are needed to preserve some semblance of community.

Though the efforts of the libraries, the churches, the “Y’s” and of private-sector movements are much-needed and admirable, the future looks grim. Government has failed miserably at preserving downtown vitality against the continual addition of big-box stores at the edges of our cities. It has failed to preserve any cohesive overall urban design. It has failed to halt the corporate colonization of the public realm. Social Impact Assessments might as well not exist. These studies—predicting how proposed projects or policy changes may affect the daily lives of people in a community—are usually done by consultants to developers. Apparently the assessments need only conform to patterns already established, and that portends only more sprawl.

There is much talk about “smart growth,” the “new urbanism,” the “new suburbanism,” etc., but will there be any space left for “enlightened” development? Will any substantial portions of the environment be reclaimed? Will anything within the next decade or two stop the juggernaut big-box corporations from advancing sprawl at a rapid clip? Worst of all, perhaps, sprawl has given the citizenry a few things it will be reluctant to give up, and reform measures will not be roundly applauded. When I visited Seaside on northwest Florida’s Gulf Coast (a “new urbanism” showcase) I walked behind visitors and listened to their comments. The most common negative went like this: “Oh, look how close the houses are to one another—I wouldn’t like that.”

Another View:

“But sprawl has its defenders, chiefly those millions of citizens who made the choice to live in the suburbs and unincorporated areas. Urban sprawl may be messy and tweak our urbane sensitivities, but it also represents the free-enterprise outcome of the most propertied and affluent society in history. Sprawl has allowed the working classes to become homeowners, a powerful tenet of the American dream.”


RAY OLDENBURG is a professor emeritus of sociology at the University of West Florida in Pensacola.
Folk Art
from the Permanent Collection

January 11 – June 31, 2008

Featured will be some of the ‘masterworks’ of 20th century American folk art to include paintings by Nellie Mae Rowe, Howard Finster, Mr. Eddy Mumma, sculpture by Edgar Tolson, and Tim Lewis, ceramics by Louise Rose Goodman and mixed media construction by Bessie Harvey and O.L. Samuels.

Robert Robesp, Florida, Jesus Walking on the Water, oil and acrylic on canvas
Guadalupe Victor Coler, New Mexico, San Ysidro, watercolor and pine sap varnish on wood
Alyce Harris, Florida, Devil with Angels in Its Tail, acrylic on canvas
Louise Rose Goodman, Arizona, Bears, ceramic with pine pitch glaze

The Mennello Museum of American Art
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The Mennello Museum of American Art is owned and operated by the City of Orlando.
A place where everyone knows your name...  

third place, n. 1. an informal local gathering spot (beyond home and work, the first and second places) where people can regularly get together for conviviality, mutual support, and conversation.  

BY JON WILSON  

What is your third place? Log on to www.flahum.org, and share your thoughts. Read what other Floridians have to say:

Bill Belleville
Sanford  
Author, documentary filmmaker  

Such a “Third Place” for me would be in the little historic downtown of Sanford. It’s only a few small blocks in size, and is both intimate and authentic. No chic-chic stuff, as of yet. There’s a little plaza, Magnolia Square, with a fountain and benches and an old clock on a pedestal; that’s sort of the heart of the downtown. There’s a farmers market in the plaza on the weekend, and on some days, musicians play there in a jazz ensemble. My barbershop (with its old swirling barber pole) is just around the corner, and my favorite independent book store is a few steps away. No admission, no queues, no marketing whack upside the head to make you think you’re having a good time.

Jerrilyn McGregory
Tallahassee  
Professor, Florida State University  

On a special birthday, a Cuban-American colleague presented me with a fine cigar. I then began to frequent cigar bars, especially when traveling. These sites should...

Bill Belleville's barbershop, just around the corner from Sanford's town square.

Bartender Mia Lawrence at the Florida Cigar Company & Lounge in Fort Lauderdale, a favorite place of Jerrilyn McGregory's.
not be confused with merely cigar-friendly spaces. Never noisy, seldom quaint, often cigar bars project a swanky, masculine ambiance. We cigar smokers consider ourselves a different breed from cigarette smokers, too; rather than a habit, cigar smoking constitutes a choice. As an African-American woman, cigar bars offer me another form of community. Over the recent holiday, while researching festivals in St. Croix, I found myself stranded on the opposite side of the island from my lodging. I wandered into the Lost Dog Pub to consider my options; and, of course, a fellow cigar smoker from Cleveland insisted on transporting me back. I never leave home without ’em.

Luerner Herrera
Orlando
Actress/singer

The independent coffeehouse near my home is Mobile Mud Coffee. They’ve got a great open mic night, fantastic coffee, wines, and beers…It’s like having the living room I always wanted (and with someone to make you great coffee).

Christine Stenger
Ocoee
Guidance counselor

I would have to say my neighborhood Publix. I am guaranteed to see neighbors, former teachers, pals, and even former students. We always stop and talk and play catch-up on what is happening in our lives.

Rachel Blechman
Miami
Lawyer

I am active in the Funding Arts Network, a philanthropic giving circle that supports the arts in Miami. We hold our board meetings at the United Way…and that is our “Third Place.” I go there monthly to see people with whom I share common interests and to work on our common goal of bringing high-quality visual and performing arts to Miami. We socialize, we visit, we work, and we accomplish wonderful things together.

Susan Gladwin
Tallahassee
Researcher, Department of Oceanography, Florida State University

I am 100 percent Panera’s. My knitting group meets there about once a month. We sit there for about an hour and a half, and that’s always cool—eight or 10 women taking up a huge table. We see college students, couples, people with friends. I go there two or three times a week on my way to work because I can get breakfast and lunch at the same time, and I see men on cell phones and laptops talking to people as if they’re talking from the office.

Cary Hardee
Madison
Lawyer

The place in Madison is the Yellow Pine Restaurant, also known as the Yellow Pine Truck Stop, although it has not been a truck stop for 40 years or more. It is the gathering place in Madison for all sorts of people. The food is pretty good, but the service isn’t so good generally. It isn’t fancy…but folks keep coming back to it.

What is your third place? Log on to www.flahum.org, and share your thoughts.
J. Allison DeFoor
Lawyer, former judge, former Monroe County Sheriff
In Key West, it is the outdoor Cuban coffee shops. That is where all of the gossip and news is traded. For Florida’s business/legal communities, it is a few select hotels such as the Breakers, Ponte Vedra Club, and a few others.

Sherry Treadwell
North Redington Beach
Floral designer
I got to know nearly all of the people (women, men, and their kids) in my neighborhood through dog walking. I got a puppy and walked him twice or more a day. Then the lady across the street got one, and she walked. New people moved in, and they had two dogs. As the months rolled on, we had no fewer than 12 to 15 dogs walking. We looked like a parade. The point is that if there were two of us or 10 of us (not everyone walked at the same time) we walked, talked, laughed, cried. We planned events, surprise parties, outings to the movies or dinner. We helped each other with personal problems, discussed politics, witnessed our faith, and even babysat for each others’ kids and/or dogs! A closeness developed…all this with dogs in tow! I can honestly say that walking my dog in my neighborhood gave me the greatest feeling or “sense of community” that I have ever had. We were family, we cared, we shared; it was real.

Carolyn Williams
Jacksonville
Professor, University of North Florida
One of my favorite spots in Jacksonville is the garden at the Cummer Museum. This garden is located on the waterfront of the St. Johns River and is over 100 years old. It is serene and very beautiful. One can stroll the grounds or sit and commune with the wonderful plants and a magnificent giant tree. You can enjoy the surroundings alone, or meet with friends for quiet conversations or just to enjoy the place together.

Phil Igney
Pensacola
Music minister
Over the years I realized the church was more than just a gathering place for worship and fellowship. To be sure, the church was a safe sanctuary where my family was loved and cared for, and a place we could develop our musical and
leadership skills in very practical ways. But the church was infinitely more than that to us. It was, in a very real sense, our lifeline. It was (and remains to this day) an extended family in which we found acceptance, compassion, and genuine, selfless love. It is not only a place where everybody knows your name, but a place that nurtures us for the long haul.

Dorothy Downs
Miami
Art historian
The Chart Room Bar at the Pier House in Key West. It is a small, famous spot where we go to unwind. It’s popular with locals and tourists alike. Never know who you will see there! Long ago I saw Truman Capote and Tennessee Williams there. Treasure hunter Mel Fisher was a regular. Plus the local characters, including us.

Mike Nabors
Pine Island
Master captain, fishing guide
The Matlacha Bridge is known as the fishingest bridge in Southwest Florida. At any one time there can be between six to 20 people fishing off the small drawbridge. On a nice Friday or Saturday night, there may be 50 or more, but there always seems to be someone. The unique thing about the folks who fish is that they come from all walks of life. You have the Hispanics with their yo-yo reels, a hand-held device that looks like a spool. You have fairly well-to-do folks with high-end fishing equipment including bridge nets. And you have everyone else. It is kind of a gathering place for everyone. If someone gets a large fish on, anyone within shouting distance will assist the person to succeed in landing the fish. You hear all dialects and languages, from inner city to far eastern. There are fat people, skinny people, and a fair amount of handicapped. It is a place kind of like no other, where everyone fits in and no one is above anyone else.

Taylor Volosin
St. Petersburg
Student
Sunset Beach is my favorite place to be. It’s under-appreciated even though it has one of my favorite views in the city. It’s rarely crowded, usually nice and breezy, and it gives my friends and me a place to hang out and have fun. Sunsets really are amazing there. It’s truly the perfect view.

Myra Mendible
Fort Myers
Professor, Florida Gulf Coast University
Versailles Restaurant in Little Havana—where you’re likely to spot politicos or dignitaries dining on humungous platefuls of lechon (roast pork) and moros (black beans and rice) in a place so teeming with activity that you might think it’s dinnertime and not 2 a.m.! It’s a place where political chatter and local gossip are sometimes bitter, but the café cubano is always strong and sweet. It’s still the first place I go on my monthly visits to Miami—and still the place where I always take my out-of-town friends for dinner or just a drive-by shot of coffee at the counter. While it’s grown to a chain of restaurants in Miami, only the Little Havana locale has the mystique and history. It’s the oldest one, started by Cuban refugee-turned-millionaire Felipe Vals.

Viviana Carballo
Miami
Author, food connoisseur
Miami, being such a young city without much history, is barren of neighborhoods as such. There are geographical areas like Kendall or Coral Gables or downtown; but, this being a car culture, there are not any “neighborhood” gathering places. Neighborhoods are not densely populated as they might be in other major cities. Besides, nobody walks; we stay in our air-conditioned isolation. I have no “third place” here. The closest is Books & Books in Coral Gables, but it is too far for me to just go and hang. Anyway, since it’s not in my neighborhood, I don’t really know anyone. We had a Border’s
or staff from the nearby Youth Conservation Camp. Occasionally, a county politician or a game warden, both considered forest celebrities at the time, would stop by and join in. The weathered-clapboard, tin-roofed store was filled with cane poles, leather tack, galvanized buckets, and dry goods and produce. The place of congregation was the front porch on or around an old Coca-Cola drink box and a cast iron bathtub full of earthworms. Here, petty arguments over property and family were born, and a few disagreements were laid to rest; hunting trophies, especially big-antlered bucks, were bragged about (in and out of season, but never when the game warden was there); and racy jokes were told, sometimes the same ones over and over. The porch-side meetings truly captured the spirit of the Scrambletown community, and while the Cracker folks didn’t realize it at the time, the little country store was the glue that bonded them. It’s still there today, original floor and all, but now with fancy soda coolers. And the forest Crackers still gather out front.

Allison Hogan
Gainesville
Student
I meet up, chat, and have fun with friends during jams at fellow musicians’ houses. You meet and find a common thread with people from all walks of life. You can be at a jam with an English professor educated at Princeton, a Chilean immigrant who drives rickshaws downtown in the evenings, and a farmer—people you would otherwise likely not meet in your daily activities. We’re all brought together to see what kind of music we can create. One person can really make the difference. You can be jamming with the same group for an hour and think “This is getting pretty tired,” when a new banjo player comes in and starts rippin’ some great tunes and completely transforms the vibe. Plus, you learn a lot of new tunes from other people you might never have been exposed to otherwise. Having to learn the chords to a song on the spot teaches you to be quick on your feet! Plus, going to jams and playing music gives you the opportunity to express a different part of yourself than you can at a routine 9-to-5 job.

Arva Moore Parks
Miami
Author, filmmaker
I do have a favorite hang out. It is the University of Miami Library, where I frequently go to do research. It has become the place on campus to be—a lively, friendly setting. The kids call it “Club Richter,” the library’s name. When I go there I see a lot of people I know. There is now a Starbucks in the breezeway. Since I often sit at the microfilm reader right in the main passageway, people stop to say hello. Sometimes I leave the reader and go with them to have a cup of coffee at Starbucks.

Peggy Sheffield
St. Petersburg
Actor and mom
A friend of mine had a small business/hobby, dealing wholesale cars. He moved a few times into increasingly larger places to house the vehicles (no car lot, thank you, all kept indoors and pampered). He kept a fridge full of sodas, and Jimmy Buffet sang away. It was so interesting how people, well, guys really, would just come by and hang out. I started calling it his “Man Cave.”

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MY HAPPIEST CHILDHOOD MEMORIES revolve around my father and food. There's something about a girl watching her father cook mullet and oysters he wrestled from the sea with his own big arms, especially when her father dies when she's but 6 years old, that leaves her with a star-gazer's longing for handmade, heart-loved food—a longing, she'd learn, that has less to do with sustenance than with the soul's journey.

The need to assuage that childhood ache brought me in 1994 to Apalachee Bay's lightly tread shores where I rediscovered my youth's sea-born joys in a variety of places, including a restaurant that has for 63 years remained perched like a great bird above the Ochlockonee River.

George's Café and Bar was founded in 1945 by George Petrandis, a Greek immigrant who with wife Bulah raised enough money, one meal at a time, to bring their relatives, one person at a time, to America. In 1985 their son, Angelo, with wife Arline, renovated the original building, and Angelo's Seafood was born. More recently, Angelo's son Thomas and wife Jennifer joined the business, prompting yet another name change. Angelo and Son's Seafood Restaurant is bigger than its predecessors but remains a cultural and culinary cornerstone for this community lying within an eye's wink of river, sea, and forest.

Angelo's is one of the few constants in a land perpetually challenged by nature's vagaries, developers' bulldozers, and Tallahassee's lawmakers. It is, in some respects, the community's heartbeat. The Petrandis family's resilience, independent spirit, and salt-of-the-earth work ethic provides a public face for a small, often embattled community that—thanks to the fickle ways of man and nature—finds itself forever testing the wind. In a place where the only traffic signal is a blinking light and where most people identify themselves as fishermen or Realtors (or both), we depend on Angelo's to remain an authentic representation of what is good about us.

The Gulf of Mexico is an awesome force as is its bounty. Here there's a near-reverence for blue crab, grouper throats, and bivalves. When the mullet are running, people are happier. There are still families on this coast that literally depend on the Gulf hand-to-mouth. Mullet fishing is a noble profession, net ban or no net ban. And the fact is, something as humble as mullet—which I have come to think of as our state fish—can, when they are running strong, allow a family to go to bed with full bellies, content in the knowledge that at least for the time being, the lights will stay on.

There is something soul-stirring about being among people who intimately understand the link between the fish swimming in the sea and the flounder sizzling on the plate—especially when it's their knowledge and skill that ferried our supper from sea to table. Why do we give thanks before a meal? Because something had to die for us to gain sustenance. This ancient, most basic of human tenets is intact, palpable, when you live among fisher folk. And it's one of the primary reasons Angelo's remains a beloved beacon on what has come to be known as the Forgotten Coast.

George Petrandis built this icon just after World War II, using earnings from selling sandwiches to nearby Camp Gordon Johnston, an amphibious training facility. Far from his native country but steeped in his adopted homeland's dream, George epitomized America's triple play: hard work, entrepreneurial moxie, and thriftiness.

His was the only establishment on the Forgotten Coast where you could get a seafood dinner and a cold beer. Leon and Wakulla Counties were dry, but Franklin County, its...
southern footprint on the northern shore of Ochlockonee Bay, was not. So George built his restaurant over the shallow waters of a wet county, and his patrons walked via a dry-county pier to food and libation. For years, George’s was the only place locals could buy legal liquor unless they ventured into the no-man’s-land of inner Georgia, which at the time was thought of with the same dismissive glaze as if it had been Outer Mongolia.

Given the restaurant’s historical and cultural importance, when Hurricane Dennis ravaged the area on July 10, 2005, ripping into Angelo’s as if its pecky-cypress boards were toothpicks, our shock and despair ran deeper than it had with past storms. As we struggled to rebuild, we kept checking our community pulse, asking, “What is Angelo going to do?” As stunned as we were by the damage in our own neighborhoods, seeing Angelo’s vanish from its perch over the Ochlockonee caused many to fear that a rebound was impossible, that the restaurant’s destruction signaled the final blow to a way of life already hanging by a perilous thread thanks to environmental pressures and mega-developers.

Amid the ruins, “For Sale” signs became as ubiquitous as dandelion weeds. But quitting is not part of the Petrandis mindset. Angelo decided even before the storm hit that he’d rebuild. “There was no question,” he said. “This is what we do. We cook. We feed people. Always.”

Despite their resolve, the family faced tough—some said insurmountable—odds. Initially they were told they wouldn’t be allowed to rebuild over water because the state owned all submerged lands. But they did their homework. Because their riparian rights predated 1951, they found themselves to be a Florida rarity: private owners of a precious stretch of the bay’s belly.

The new structure is big, bold. Diners sit 25 feet above sea level in a building supported by nearly 100 pilings driven 38 feet deep. The exterior walls, 8 inches thick, are solid concrete. There’s enough stainless steel strapping to stop a freight train. Everything exceeds state mandates. Twice the size of its predecessor, the kitchen is a state-of-the-art wonder so well tuned it would make Ratatouille’s heart leap.

Amid the concrete and steel are homages to the previous restaurants, including pecky-cypress paneling made of salvaged lumber from the bottom of the Apalachicola River. And there’s “the wheel,” a circle of gleaming wood hanging from the ceiling—a replica of the one lost in the storm. It is a symbol of life continuing, of Angelo learning to cook in his father’s kitchen, of Thomas learning in his father’s kitchen. And by extension, it’s me watching my father bring a heaping tray of steamed oysters to the table, saying, “Sunshine, this is some goooooood eating!” It’s the hope of every child and every parent who intuit that food is about the wheel, that the wheel is about life, that life should be—at least once a day—about the treasures a happy cook brings to the table.

When the restaurant reopened last August, people viewed the event as evidence the coast was finally bouncing back from the worst wallop it had suffered since Hurricane Kate in 1985. Storms linger in the minds of those who live through them. The survivors worry, cry, curse, and wonder, when is the next one going to strike? How bad will it be? We search for signs of normalcy, longing for the moment we can, without guilt, laugh over plates overflowing with oysters, mullet, crab, grouper, hush puppies, cheese grits, and—wow!—escargot.

We are again celebrating Angelo’s whole broiled Gulf fish, its natural flavor spiked just right with fresh onions, lemon, and parsley. And we are marveling over Thomas’s adventuresome new dishes—borrowing from Europe, Asia, and beyond—and his smoked-mullet spread with the nuanced depth of the finest gourmet pâté.

My eyes misted when I first stepped foot into the new Angelo’s—and not because the Petrandis family had rebuilt but because they had done so with such definite intent that there was no missing the message: Normal was back, bigger and better than ever.

The community grew stronger when the Petrandis clan renewed its charge to offer up Apalachicola Bay’s bounty with artisan care. Our bellies are full, our hearts joyful: we’re back in the wheel, rolling with life’s journey, body and soul.

CONNIE MAY FOWLER, acclaimed Florida novelist, is the author of numerous books, including The Problem with Murmur Lee, When Katie Wakes, Remembering Blue, and Before Women Had Wings.
A residential area in the foreground, with the mid-rise and high-rise buildings of downtown Tampa in the distance.
While the current slowdown in housing is allowing Florida’s booming communities to catch their breath, the state’s population is still projected to nearly double within the next three decades. By 2030, Florida will need another 11.4 million housing units and 10 million square feet of commercial space, according to the recent Brookings Institute study, *Toward a New Metropolis: The Opportunity to Rebuild America*.

This may sound ominous to longtime Florida residents who list “quality of life” issues as their major concerns at public hearings across the state. But perhaps they can make the most of this “opportunity to rebuild America.” By reforming the planning process, regulatory codes, and real-estate development practices, Floridians can use the upcoming growth to transform areas of sprawl into distinctive, desirable places to live. They can preserve more historic towns and landscapes, enhance suburban regions to be well-rounded sustainable communities, and build a greater variety of places for a greater variety of people and lifestyles. By embracing a planning process called “place making,” they can help Florida grow out of its adolescent years and grow up gracefully.

Given the extensive development over the past decade it is not surprising that citizens throughout much of Florida are concerned about the amount, type, and location of growth. They are increasingly turning out to oppose any type of project, and they are changing local planning and zoning regulations to make it extremely difficult to develop or redevelop property. There is a strong sentiment that any new development is bad development. “No Growth” movements have coalesced in older towns and cities because citizens view new development as damaging to the historical character and sense of place. The proposed “Hometown Democracy” ballot measure, which would require voter approval for any changes to comprehensive land-use plans, is simply the latest statewide expression of how contentious growth and redevelopment have become in local communities throughout Florida.

Much of this conflict occurs because the current process doesn’t engage citizens early enough to play a meaningful role in guiding community plans, codes, and development proposals. Also, the plans and codes are often so legalistic and opaque that virtually no one can envision the actual buildings, streets, and public spaces they will produce. Citizens are regularly disappointed. Every additional subdivision, office park, and shopping center is seen as degrading quality of life, adding traffic, reducing open space, and putting pressure on public services and resources such as schools, libraries, and water.

In addition, developers find that regulations are often out of sync with what their market studies indicate people are seeking for residential and commercial space. As a consequence, developers work in isolation, unveiling designs and proposals for their property only at the last minute, for fear they will be attacked. Market studies also keep developers heavily focused on delivering projects that meet the narrowly defined interests of their buyers or renters and not on how their projects fit into the larger community. Interest groups, developers, elected officials, and citizens end up locked in protracted conflicts over each and every proposal that comes forward. In many communities this has led to endless revisions of existing comprehensive plans, zoning ordinances, and other regulations—making it increasingly difficult to build anything.

What will Florida look like in 30 years? More importantly, what will it live like? If the state’s population continues to skyrocket as is projected, will Florida continue to produce strip-mall sprawl and cookie-cutter housing developments? Or will the current generation rethink the way Florida has been developed over the past half-century and seize the opportunity to create more livable communities?
near anyone. Sometimes this results in preserving the worst of sprawl and blight while making it impossible to build the types of neighborhoods and places that people love. It prevents both good and bad outcomes and creates an increasingly contentious and litigious development environment, adding millions of dollars to development costs that are passed on to homebuyers, renters, and businesses, and fostering incivility in our public process.

Given this situation how can citizens develop a positive path forward, take charge of their communities' futures, and take full advantage of this golden opportunity to build and rebuild Florida's towns, cities, and suburbs? The answer is twofold.

First, the same old plans, codes, and public process simply won’t do; they need to be reformed. Like politics, all land use and development is local. It will take homegrown local-government and citizen-led initiatives to reassert public leadership in the planning, design, and development of our communities. As the great town-planning pioneer Raymond Unwin wrote a century ago, through town planning citizens should “be able to express their needs, their life, and their aspirations in the outward form of their towns, seeking, as it were, freedom to become the artists of their own cities, portraying on a gigantic canvas the expression of their life.”

Second, we need new, economically viable, private-sector models for reshaping our current, standardized real-estate formulas. These models could help us reconfigure our mass-produced subdivisions, apartment complexes, office parks, retail sprawl, and fortified condominium enclaves into attractive, walkable, mixed-use neighborhoods, towns, and cities. In recent years this community-building approach to planning and development has been called “place making.”

Place making seeks to reform the process in order to produce attractive livable places that build upon and enhance our communities. The difference has been summed up by Vince Graham, the developer of attractive walkable communities in South Carolina: “If what you sell is privacy and exclusivity, then every new house is a degradation of the amenity. However, if what you sell is community, then every new house is an enhancement of the asset.” Several Florida communities have already embraced place making and begun reforming the way they plan for growth and redevelopment. Their focus has shifted away from zoning areas according to designated land-use. Instead, citizens and civic leaders are working together with designers to envision their community’s three-dimensional character—the neighborhoods, work places, market places, and gathering places that will preserve and enhance the community’s quality of life and unique identity.

In a series of public meetings and workshops, they consider alternatives. The weeklong community-visioning efforts, often called charrettes (a French term), are a cross between an intensive community design studio and a town meeting. Instead of using the jargon, two-dimensional maps, charts, and numbers of typical land-use planning methods, charrettes use a visual language that the average citizen can easily understand. By viewing photos, drawings, and three-dimensional computerized graphics, people can envision how their neighborhoods and towns might evolve as they “grow up.” If well-crafted, the resulting vision communicates the essentials of community character preferred by residents. Fortunately, Florida has
a number of world-class planning and design firms adept at coordinating community visioning and translating the visions into plans, regulatory codes, and buildable projects.

Because Florida is a large, diverse state, the visions for communities in different places vary widely. “High rise” can mean as little as two or three stories in communities like Winter Park, six or seven in Jupiter, a dozen in Coral Gables, and 30-plus in Miami. People in each community need to decide for themselves if they envision a quaint mixed-use village center, a mid-rise town center, or a full-fledged downtown in their futures. Do they see a future of sleek, contemporary glass-and-steel buildings, a mix of traditional stick-frame and masonry structures, or an eclectic mix of many building types and materials?

Questions of character and vision are not simply about how a community will look in the future, but how it will live: What types of activities, lifestyles, and everyday experiences will neighborhoods, marketplaces, work places, and gathering places support? Will there be public places for community celebrations and holiday festivals; locations for a farmers’ market, crafts fair, or arts festival; public settings with attractive atmospheres for weddings, receptions, graduations, and retirement parties; restaurants where visitors, family members, or business associates can meet for a quiet dinner, business lunch, or a night on the town?

Are there safe, attractive public places where young people can gather to skate, hold “jam sessions” playing music, and socialize? Are there “great streets” with beautiful tree canopies, sidewalks, and buildings with attractive facades where people love to walk? Are there other streets where it’s easy to find coffee shops, restaurants, taverns, and sidewalk cafes to catch a bite to eat, meet a friend, or leisurely sip a cup of coffee or a glass of wine while watching the world walk by? Is there a neighborhood park within a five-minute walk of every home where kids can play while their caretakers read a book or take a nap on a bench in the sunshine?

Should the city’s ugly parking lot become a village green, a more formal town square, or a parking garage lined with shops or townhomes? Is the essence of the community character now and in the future to be that of a rural hamlet, a village,
a town, a mid-rise urban village, or a city neighborhood with a more urbane character? Or can such character be created or preserved within a larger community or metropolitan area?

Once a community vision has been articulated, a regulatory plan can be drafted. The vision and the plan are implemented through a form-based code, which incorporates the specific three-dimensional standards to be used by public agencies, property owners, and private developers. Unlike conventional zoning, which focuses primarily on the type of land use allowed in large areas of communities (residential, retail, office, for example), regulating plans and form-based codes explicitly define the types of places appropriate to each part of a town and the types of buildings, streets, and parks that represent the successful ingredients for each type of place.

Instead of zoning for separate pods of retail, office, and multifamily residential uses, a place-making approach identifies the ingredients necessary for a bustling mixed-use downtown, a quiet “small town” neighborhood, a quaint low-rise village center, a dynamic live-work neighborhood, a convivial market place, a small neighborhood park, or a grand central plaza. Streets are defined not simply in terms of the quantity and speed of traffic they handle, but in terms of their character and their ability to provide safe and attractive places to walk, set up sidewalk cafes, and create great locations for homes and businesses. The mix of land uses is still part of the formula, but it is much more loosely defined and tied to the character of the place and the building types imbedded in the vision.

Most of the current battles over growth in Florida’s communities concern minutiae in existing plans, codes, and development proposals. None of this can adequately be resolved until clearly illustrated, citizen-informed visions have been articulated. In the same vein, community visions will rarely be implemented unless plans and codes are adopted to put the visions into action through each new and rebuilt street, building, and park. With these tools in place, the starting point for developers will be based on the community’s vision rather than vice versa.

Florida now has dozens of communities—new and old—that are benefiting from envisioning their futures. They have incorporated strong place-making tools and methods to coordinate and shape their growth. If this trend continues, Floridians around the state just might be able to take advantage of a once-in-a-century opportunity to reshape their growing communities into more livable, enduring places.

CHARLES C. BOHL is director of the Knight Program in Community Building at the University of Miami School of Architecture.

Images provided by Charles C. Bohl
BOCA RATON MALL / MIZNER PARK
The failed Boca Raton Mall, called a “greyfield” site because of its surrounding acres of gray asphalt parking lots, was transformed into a mixed-use town center called Mizner Park. It includes urban housing, retail shops, restaurants, a museum, an amphitheater, and public gathering places. The project has borne out the potential rewards to cities willing to enter into public-private partnerships and commit public resources to create town centers.

WATERCOLOR AND ROSEMARY BEACH
Watercolor, located on Northwest Florida’s Gulf Coast, is one of several communities designed as resort towns, combining traditional place making with cutting-edge natural resource planning. The first such resort town, the 25-year-old Seaside, is still studied as the laboratory and lyceum of the New Urbanism community planning movement. In addition to Watercolor, other Florida resort towns include Rosemary Beach and Alys Beach, which is one of the first storm-fortified projects in the world.

DADELAND/KENDALL
The Downtown Kendall project involves retrofitting housing and shops into the current low-density “sprawl” development across from the Dadeland Mall on Kendall Drive in Miami. The goal is to create a transit-oriented downtown for Kendall, which has no traditional town center and is at the end of the Metrorail. This plan involves multiple properties and projects coordinated according to a plan developed by the architectural design firms of Dover Kohl and Duany Plater-Zyberk working for the local chamber of commerce.

HAILE VILLAGE CENTER
Haile Village Center, near Gainesville, is a 45-acre project begun in the mid-1990s that pursues a local retail strategy departing from the standard shopping-center formats and tenant mixes. It is a walkable village center added to the large, suburban, master-planned community of Haile Plantation. The preservation of a mature landscape and the building-by-building approach to shaping the village center produced an authentic place that does not attempt to deliver a specific formula or stylistic impression. This is a handcrafted traditional neighborhood development, one that will continue to become all the more real as a result of the developer’s willingness to disperse ownership among individual business owners within the village center.

BALDWIN PARK AND CELEBRATION
Baldwin Park, near Orlando, is designed as a pedestrian-friendly ‘traditional neighborhood development’ (TND) that incorporates a variety of housing types, shops, offices, parks, and a town center. It is developed on the site of a former military base. TNDs have been constructed in all corners of the state and are designed to reflect their localities. The most famous TND is Celebration, developed by the Walt Disney Company. Others include Amelia Park (Fernandina Beach, near Jacksonville), Southwood (Tallahassee), Longleaf (New Port Richey, near Tampa), Tioga (Gainesville), and Naranja Lakes (Miami-Dade County).
Silver Springs
The Underwater Photography of Bruce Mozert
Gary Monroe
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MY ST. AUGUSTINE IS A SACRED PLACE. It is the grandmother of American cities—a symbol of many “firsts” in things the United States holds dear: It won the European race to permanently settle North America; it was first to introduce European agriculture, plants, and animals; it was first to plant a permanent Christian cross in its sand and first to build a Spanish mission; and it was the first to grant amnesty to enslaved Africans and build them a town and fort of their own.

Since my interest is architecture, I would add another first: a oneness of architecture. Out of centuries of human experience came an intelligent design for living. Isolation from the world made it simultaneously provincial and original. I view it as America’s first cohesive vernacular architecture drafted on site and shaped to place. Its shell-stone material met real needs of the climate and frontier. Its architectural design withstood the effects of time and of four changes in government—and was the creation of people from many different cultures, ethnicities, and backgrounds, working together. My St. Augustine is the crucible of Florida’s multicultural soul.

It is also key to Florida’s story. Many times the coastal city fell to its knees under the burden of destructive forces, only to rise again. Spanish settlers founded St. Augustine in 1565 in an unfamiliar Indian village—in the face of an impending hurricane and precariously close to a French fort at the mouth of the St. Johns River. They suffered a century of catastrophic fires, hurricanes, and pirate and enemy raids that destroyed their starter buildings of wood and thatch. But year after year, the colonists of St. Augustine rebuilt their town in that wood and thatch.

Finally though, in 1672, they built a fortress that no one could destroy. They constructed a castle of coquina-shell rock to defend their ocean inlet and protect them from the dangers that rode in on wind and tide to attack the city’s heart. In 1702, some 1,500
citizens and their livestock piled into el castillo while the English and Indians set fire to the wooden city outside the ramparts. For two months the residents of the castle drank little water, ate little food, and persevered. Their fort stood firm.

The enemy retreated, and the little town was reborn beside its castle. But this time its buildings rose defiantly, with the coquina and oyster-shell materials of their undefeated fort—materials the sea provided.

I frequently walk St. Augustine's quiet narrow streets, laid out in a gridiron pattern in the 16th and 17th centuries, and touch the 18th-century coquina walls and remnants of shell plaster. On these walks, I try to understand what inspired men and women to design their own shell castles behind walls built flush to narrow streets. I look up at cantilevered, roofed balconies purposefully built to hang over the street, peek through side entrances to the courtyard gardens, sit in the cool loggia of the Seguí-Kirby Smith House, and wonder why such outside-in construction characterizes St. Augustine.

This type of construction had been centuries in the making in Mesopotamia, Rome, Spain, Africa, and the West Indies; it allowed house owners to sit outdoors in the shade; and the walled, narrow streets shaded pedestrians and made defending the city easier. But what motivated people from different latitudes and attitudes, cultures and customs, traditions and tastes, to focus on similar construction practices? Why did they create architecture of local character instead of recreating the diverse styles of the places from which they came?

Many architectural beginnings and truths lie buried in the labyrinth of centuries of history and myth under the streets and buildings of this ancient, but lively, 21st-century city.

Why look into St. Augustine’s architecture to discover the city’s soul? What can a building tell us? A building is worth a thousand words. Its foundation, floor plan, materials, size, costs, and ornamentation tell chapters about its relationship with people, history, culture, and environment. I trust form, drawings with measurements, and receipts from craftsmen for materials delivered and work performed.

I use the work of archaeologists to determine building site, floor plans, and materials. Excavations by city archaeologist Carl Halbrit, for example, reveal oyster-shell footings. And when archaeologist Kathleen Deagan, of the University of Florida, found burials strangely reversed where the Spanish parish church Nuestra Senora de La Soledad had once stood, I knew the Anglicans had moved in and reversed the altar from the west to...
the east, in Anglican tradition. Buildings are trustworthy history books. Historic documents, letters, and government reports, on the other hand, can be complicated by choices of words, biases, exaggerations, politics, egos, conflicting stories, and second-hand information.

Why is there a cohesive St. Augustine style? I think it is because there was a chemistry there that became a foundation of life. It valued pragmatism, expediency, and directness, and was conservative and consistent about safety and well-being. What was built fit the place, its climate, the available local materials, and the job to be done. Buildings in St. Augustine had little reason to change.

Today the best of St. Augustine’s humble architectural features—the loggias, courtyards, balconies, side-yard entrances, and flush-to-the-street walls with rear domestic spaces—are reappearing with adaptations in 21st-century Florida communities like Seaside and Rosemary Beach in the Panhandle and Windsor in Vero Beach. New Urbanism has an Old St. Augustine flavor. Why not? It has great regional strengths.

My St. Augustine is a great architectural story. It is a story about buildings in their cultural context; it is about local expression and connections with real people who came before us. It is this sense of connection and continuity that makes St. Augustine so comforting, so beguiling, and so worth studying.

ELSBETH GORDON is a research associate of the Historic St. Augustine Research Institute and author of Florida’s Colonial Architectural Heritage. This article is excerpted from the Spring 2005 FORUM.
"The Columbia Cafe, on the corner of 22nd and 7th Avenue, was the meeting place of all Ybor City. In those days it never closed and so attracted the early-morning hunters, fishermen, produce dealers, dairymen, and farmers and then throughout the day the businessmen and workers of Ybor City. At night the players, lovers, crooks, and sports people came in and stayed until the wee hours... Coffee was served solo (alone), which meant black; cortadito (cut a little bit), which meant a small demitasse of much coffee with a dash of milk, very dark; and café con leche, coffee with boiling milk."

_Ybor City Chronicles_, Ferdie Pacheco, 1994
“I do not understand how one can live without some small place of enchantment to turn to. In the lakeside hammock there is a constant stirring in the tree tops, as though on the stilllest days the breathing of the earth is yet audible. The Spanish moss sways a little always.”

_Cross Creek_, Marjorie Kinnan Rawlings, 1942

“History is nearer the surface here than in most of our paved-over state, visible in 200-year-old oaks, churchyards full of the Confederate dead, still other churchyards in hidden corners where slaves from the cotton plantations were buried. It is in the foundations of a Spanish mission high above the Apalachicola, and it is in antebellum mansions that, like princesses fallen on hard times, retain their dignity despite peeling paint and sagging porches...Gentle hills, green as England in summer, rise and fall like waves all the way to Chipley and beyond...In this Florida, still empty and silent, punctuated by cypress ponds and poplar trees, the Florida of concrete and noise, malls and “progress,” falls away as if only a dream. Here, the old roads tell their own story.”

“Highway into History,” _St. Petersburg Times_, Diane Roberts, 2002
“We talked past midnight, sat in the deck chairs of *The Busted Flush*, with the starry April sky overhead, talked quietly, and listened to the night creak and sigh of hulls, slap of small waves against pilings, muted motor noises of fans and generators and pumps aboard the work boats and play toys.”

*Free Fall in Crimson*, John D. MacDonald, 1981

“Presently we rounded the raft, abandoned the broad and garish highway of the St. Johns, and turned off to the right into the narrow lane of the Ocklawaha, the sweetest water-lane in the world, a lane which runs for more than a hundred and fifty miles of pure delight betwixt hedgerows of oaks and cypress and palms and bays and magnolias and mosses and manifold vine-growths, a lane clean to travel along for there is never a speck of dust in it save the blue dust and the gold dust which the wind blows out of the flags and lilies, a lane which is as if a typical woodland-stroll had taken shape and as if God had turned into water and trees the recollection of some meditative ramble through the lonely seclusion of His own soul.”

*Florida: In Scenery, Climate and History*, Sidney Lanier, 1876

A Florida marina at sunset. Photo: Visit Florida

A view in 1974 of the Ocklawaha River near Ocala. Photo: Florida State Archives
"A certain liquidity suffused everything about the place. Causeways and bridges and even Brickell Avenue did not stay put but rose and fell, allowing the masts of ships to glide among the marble and glass facades of the unleased office buildings. The buildings themselves seemed to swim free against the sky: There had grown up in Miami during the recent money years an architecture which appeared to have slipped its moorings, a not inappropriate style for a terrain with only a provisional claim on being land at all. Surfaces were reflective, opalescent. Angles were oblique, intersecting to disorienting effect."

*Miami*, Joan Didion, 1987

"What he saw from the window was timeless, a Florida post card, The strip of park across the street. The palm trees in place, the sea grape. The low wall you could sit on made of coral rock and gray cement. And the beach. What a beach. A desert full of people resting. People out there with blankets and umbrellas. People in the green part of the ocean, before it turned deep blue."

*LaBraqua*, Elmore Leonard, 2003

"…Conch town, where all was starched, well-shuttered, virtue, failure, grits and boiled grunts, under-nourishment, prejudice, righteousness, interbreeding, and the comforts of religion; the open-doored lighted Cuban *bolita* houses, shack whose only romance was their names…"

*To Have and Have Not*, Ernest Hemingway, 1937

"Florida’s beauty creates the illusion of civilization. It is a thin but functional veneer, like fake-wood contact paper stuck to flimsy particleboard. Glistening condos, palm trees down the median, corkscrew water slides and waiting lines of retirees spilling onto restaurant sidewalks at four p.m., hoping for a shot at an early-bird $3.95 Sterno tray of Swedish meatballs. Spring training, mermaids, trained whales…"

*Hammerhead Ranch Motel*, Tim Dorsey, 2000

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*Hammerhead Ranch Motel*, Tim Dorsey, 2000
ACCLAIMED FLORIDA NOVELIST AND FOLKLORIST ZORA NEALE HURSTON reached heights during the first half of the 20th century that were virtually unheard of for an African-American woman. “Zora was a trailblazer who blew open the doors for black women writers like me,” says Valerie Boyd, author of the 2003 Hurston biography *Wrapped in Rainbows*. Hurston’s indomitable spirit was forged in Eatonville, the oldest incorporated black town in the United States. Founded in 1887, 10 miles north of Orlando, this community nurtured the young Zora by giving her imagination room to roam, exposing her to books and storytelling, and providing her with strong black role models—and with much material for her books. Following is an excerpt from *Wrapped in Rainbows*:

Eatonville was—and is—an all-black town. Not “the black back-side of an average town,” Zora Hurston once wrote, but “a pure Negro town-charter, mayor, council, town marshal and all.”

Eatonville was the kind of place where a man like her father could stretch out his limbs without the irritation of some plantation boss’ foot on his neck. Booker T. Washington, perhaps the era’s greatest advocate of black enterprise, observed that in black-governed towns like Eatonville, “Negroes are made to feel the responsibilities of citizenship in ways they cannot be made to feel them elsewhere. If they make mistakes, they, at least, have an opportunity to profit by them. In such a town individuals who have executive ability and initiative have an opportunity to discover themselves and find out what they can do.”

In an all-black town like Eatonville, racism was no excuse for failure. Here, individuals could sink or swim on their own merits. If you were cream, you’d rise to the top. If you were a bottom-dweller, you’d find your place. If you were a skunk, you’d stink up the place—and be rapidly run out of town, as all lawbreakers were.

As Zora Hurston once described it, Eatonville was “the city of five lakes, three croquet courts, three hundred brown skins, three hundred good swimmers, plenty guavas, two schools, and no jail-house.”

For her, Eatonville was always home. Throughout her life, she would claim Eatonville as her birthplace and refer to it as her “native village.” Essentially everything that Zora Hurston would grow up to write, and to believe, had its genesis in Eatonville. The setting of her earliest childhood mem-
ories and the site of her coming of age, Eatonville was where Hurston received her first lessons in individualism and her first immersion in community.

Here, she saw black folks in all their folly and all their glory. She witnessed silly fights between neighbors that left them mute with one another for months. Then, too, she once watched her father load his rifle and stalk off into the dark woods, along with the other men of the village, prepared to defend a neighbor against racist violence, or die in the attempt.

Anywhere Zora looked, she could see the evidence of black achievement. She could look toward town hall and see black men, including her father, formulating the laws that governed Eatonville. She could look to the Sunday schools of both the town’s churches and see black women, including her mother, directing the Christian curricula. She could look to the porch of the store owned by Eatonville founder Joe Clarke and see black men and women passing worlds through their mouths in the form of colorful, engaging stories.

Yet Zora Hurston quickly came to reject the idea of “race achievement.” “Races have never done anything,” she would write well into her adulthood. “What seems race achievement is the work of individuals.” And, as her Eatonville experience taught her, “all clumps of people turn out to be individuals on close inspection.”

She recalled her mother’s encouragement to achieve. “Jump at de sun,” Lucy Hurston dared her children. “We might not land on the sun,” Zora remembered her mother saying, “but at least we would get off the ground.”

Her father John was less optimistic. Though he shared Lucy’s commitment to educating the children, he objected to filling their heads with lofty, unattainable dreams. “It did not do for Negroes to have too much spirit,” he believed.

Given this criterion, Zora continued to disappoint her father. Having inherited her mother’s spunky temperament, Zora was too spirited and too mouthy for her own good, John felt. He predicted a dire future for her, as Zora recalled: “The white folks were not going to stand for it. I was going to be hung before I got grown. Somebody was going to blow me down for my sassy tongue. Mama was going to suck sorrow for not

JULES ANDRÉ SMITH
(American, 1880-1959)

American artist and architect Jules André Smith painted these scenes of Eatonville in about 1940. Smith founded an art colony, The Research Studio, in the town of Maitland, adjacent to Eatonville. From 1937 until his death in 1959, he designed, helped construct, and oversaw the complex of 23 studios and living quarters for a number of painters, sculptors, and printmakers. Today this historic complex, linked by gardens and courtyards, is the Maitland Art Center.

Images courtesy of the Maitland Art Center
beating my temper out of me before it was too late."

Lucy acknowledged that Zora was "impudent and given to talking back," but she refused to "squinch" her daughter's spirit, as Zora wrote, "for fear that I would turn out to be a mealy-mouthed rag doll by the time I got grown."

Zora was a fast learner and became an avid reader at a young age. Her early exposure to literature made her chafe at the confines of her own limited life. "In a way this early reading gave me great anguish through all my childhood and adolescence," she later acknowledged. "My soul was with the gods and my body in the village."

The village, however, also had its instructions to impart. While Zora nurtured her longing for adventure through her reading and through her geography lessons at Eatonville's Hungerford School, she received an equally important education on the porch of Joe Clarke's store—"the heart and spring of the town," as she called it.

Children, of course, were not allowed to sit around the porch and listen to grown folks talk. But whenever Zora was sent to the store, just down the road from her house, she managed to drag her feet enough to catch an earful of the "adult double talk" she gradually came to understand.

She would hear, for instance, veiled references to young women who'd been "ruined"; flirtatious banter between the sexes; brags about male potency; and plentiful gossip about supposedly clandestine love affairs. "There were no discreet nuances of life on Joe Clarke's porch," Hurston would recall. "There was open kindnesses, anger, hate, love, envy and its kinfolks, but all emotions were naked, and nakedly arrived at."

As Zora ambled toward adolescence, the occasional risqué porch story piqued her curiosity. Yet what she really loved to hear were the folktales. When Eatonville's men—and, sometimes, women—held their "lying sessions," Zora recalled, "God, Devil, Brer Rabbit, Brer Fox, Sis Cat, Brer Bear, Lion, Tiger, Buzzard, and all the wood folk walked and talked like natural men."

On the porch presided over by Joe Clarke—who had become Eatonville's second mayor, in 1900—Zora was first exposed to the story-telling genius of the people of her community. There, she heard tales about how black folks got their color, learned why there were Methodists and Baptists, and heard poetic theories on why God gave men and women different strengths. There, Zora absorbed phrases that would later find their way into her own stories—triumphant phrases, such as "I got a rainbow wrapped and tied around my shoulder," as well as those expressing defeat: "My heart was beneath my knees, and my knees in some lonesome valley."

There, on the store porch, Zora learned what would become the primary language of her own literature, the vital force of her life as a storyteller. She learned this language—these phrases and stories and nuances—by heart. Which is to say she learned them irrevocably—not as memorized information to be recounted by rote, but as an essential part of who she was, and who she was to become.

As much as she could, Zora lingered near the porch and listened, sheexplained years later, "while Mama waited on me for sugar or coffee to finish off dinner, until she lifted her voice over the tree tops in a way to let me know that her patience was gone: 'You Zora-a-a! If you don't come here, you better!' That had a promise of peach hickories in it, and I would have to leave.'

The stories followed Zora home. In 1902, when she was 11 years old, her father became pastor of Macedonia Baptist in Eatonville, while still maintaining his ministry at Zion Hope in Sanford. John Hurston also was moderator of the South Florida Baptist Association, and scores of preachers would visit the Hurston home just before the association's periodic meetings. After they'd conducted their business, Zora recalled, the ministers would hold a big storytelling session on the Hurston's front porch, poking good-natured fun at preachers, congregations, and sinners alike.

Eatonville's air was refreshed by these stories, and Zora inhaled deeply, imbibing this living text until it became no different from who she was.

To many of Eatonville's children, this proliferation of stories—or "lies," as some folks called them—might have seemed ordinary, or even tiring. But these tales of God, the Devil, the animals, and the elements fueled Zora's own inventiveness. "Life took on a bigger perimeter by expanding on these things," she recalled. "I picked up glints and gleams out of what I heard and stored it away to turn it to my own uses."

And use them, she did, in her fiction, in her work as an anthropologist, and in her life story, as presented in Dust Tracks on a Road—the enchanting tale of how one extraordinary black woman rose from Eatonville dreamer to Gotham achiever.

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VALERIE BOYD is the Charlayne Hunter-Gault Distinguished Writer in Residence at the University of Georgia's Grady College of Journalism and Mass Communication.
Whether your taste runs to mysteries or histories, you will find something to create the chemistry to keep a dream alive. Whether your taste runs to mysteries or histories, you will find something to create the chemistry to keep a dream alive.

Several out-of-state license plates passing me on the highway, it brought to my mind the prediction that maybe the housing crisis, hurricanes, and escalating insurance rates and property taxes had finally put the Florida dream to rest. I can’t help but think that this prediction might be a bit premature. As I drove to work this morning in bumper-to-bumper traffic, I saw several giant cranes hoisting over my city, and counting the number of out-of-state license plates passing me on the highway, I brought to mind one of Orlando’s six biker lines: “That place is so popular no one goes there any more.”

While Florida may not be over, many think we are at a pretty crucial crossroads that begs some critical questions. Is the Florida dream sustainable? What are the human and environmental costs of growth? How does a state become a community? How do we create a sense of place and define our statewide identity?

In this issue of FORUM we asked some top scholars and writers to share their ideas on these questions. We wanted them to contemplate how people in this sprawling, constantly changing state of growth can connect with each other, carry on a sense of community, create more livable space.

“Community depends upon a diversity of people regularly associating with one another beyond the portals of home and work,” sociologist Ray Oldenburg writes in this issue. Oldenburg’s concept of a “third place,” where people regularly gather for conviviality, mutual support, and conversation, inspired a number of our state’s thoughtful residents to contribute their ideas about the magic they find in special locations.

We asked Charles Bohl, director of the Knight Program in Community Building at the University of Miami’s School of Architecture, to discuss ongoing efforts across the state to transform our crossroads that begs some critical questions. Is the Florida dream sustainable? What are the human and environmental costs of growth? While Florida may not be over, many think we are at a pretty crucial crossroads that begs some critical questions. Is the Florida dream sustainable? What are the human and environmental costs of growth? While Florida may not be over, many think we are at a pretty crucial crossroads that begs some critical questions.

We also looked at the work of an eclectic collection of writers, from Sidney Lanier to Joan Didion, to redirect their takes on Florida. Lanier’s Ocklawaha River, the “sweetest water-lane in the world,” and Didion’s Miami buildings that “seemed to swim free against the sky” reflect the diversity of places in Florida. This issue includes many different voices, but they all express a common yearning for physical places at once alluring and comforting. Surely in its way, a familiar skyline can be as soothing as a languid waterway.

Florida offers many havens for body and spirit. That is why so many seek their refuges in a land they might not always recognize, but which may create the chemistry to keep a dream alive.

Upcoming Gatherings:

APALACHICOLA — October 17–19, 2008
Let the Florida Humanities Council introduce you to the town of Apalachicola on the state’s Forgotten Coast. During our weekend together, we will visit marsh-loving wildlife and browse the picturesque streets of downtown Apalach (as the locals call it.) We’ll discover colorful history when we visit the historic Oystermen’s Museum and the renowned Deford’s Oyster Bar. We’ll also dine at the renowned十三 Mile Oyster Company, operated by the same family for more than 70 years. We’ll get to know the town through a guided historic walking tour and a visit to the Gordon & Reese Gift Shop. If you want to get away from the crowds, take a boat tour near Apalachicola, or visit the historic St. Marks Lighthouse. Join us at our Gathering in Apalachicola and absorb the flavor of the Florida town recently named one of America’s Most Interesting Towns by the National Trust for Historic Preservation.

THE EVERGLADES — November 7–9, 2008
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