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Scenic Watch is a free bi-monthly publication of Citizens for a Scenic Florida, Inc., dedicated to the preservation, protection and enhancement of Florida's scenic heritage. Individuals, organizations and government agencies are welcome as members. [Join Scenic Florida now](#) to protect our scenic qualities.

**Florida is blessed with opportunities to enjoy its scenic heritage. Here are links to websites that have a full calendar coming up for the month of April. Get out and enjoy the weather and the scenery - and then vow to work to protect what we have:**

[North Florida & the Panhandle Travel Calendar for April](#)

[Central Florida Travel Calendar for April](#)

[South Florida Travel Calendar for April](#)

This issue of Scenic Watch is devoted to just a few of the scenic opportunities in Florida. Before we can protect what we have, we have to know - and enjoy - what we have. We are not promoting any single development or site but do want to recognize endeavors that are in keeping with Florida's historic and scenic heritage.

Unless our youth understand our scenic values, when they are decision makers they will not preserve them.

## Scenic Tourism

### Winter Park retains old-Florida elegance

By Jack Horan

Contributor

Sunday, March 15, 2009

Winter Park, Fla. — Quietly and with anticipation, we entered the small, narrow waterway bordered by a profusion of subtropical palms, trees and shrubs, gliding into a hidden world.

The 14 passengers in the pontoon boat craned their necks, looking side to side. But this wasn't the famous Jungle Cruise at Walt Disney World. No robotic animals sprang into action.

Instead, our luxuriant waterway was the real thing, far from the madding crowds at the theme park. We were taking a guided tour of three Winter Park lakes linked by two canals, and our boat had just entered the Venetian Canal. The slightly zigzagging canal was so narrow — 9 1/2 to 12 feet — that the boat frequently bumped the wooden bulkhead as we slipped under moss-draped live oaks, sabal palms and thickets of bamboo and banana trees.

Wedge in higgledy-piggledy beside the canal were small boathouses. We peered into neatly groomed backyards, wistfully wondering who lived there. An arched bridge over the canal could be called the Bridge of Sighs from our companions' exclamations about the lush scenery.

An upscale city of 30,000 next to Orlando, Winter Park is a relaxed, stroll-about destination that's a counterpoint to Orlando's glitzy attractions. Shops, boutiques and restaurants line the undulating brick streets. Patrons can dine at sidewalk tables. Baskets of ferns and coral-hued impatiens hang from second-story balconies.

The Tiffany name adds luster to the city. The Charles Hosmer Morse Museum of American Art displays the world's most comprehensive collection of works by Louis Comfort Tiffany (1848-1933). The collection includes stained-glass windows, lamps, jewelry and paintings. It's one of six museums within walking distance from the six blocks of stores and restaurants.

The canals, opulent homes and museums lend the city a European aura. And, as in European cities, the train stops in the middle of town, not on the seedy outskirts. The Amtrak station is a block from Park Avenue, the main drag, and the Park Plaza Hotel, the lone downtown hotel.

Winter Park developed in the 1880s as a citrus-growing center. It became a wintering retreat for wealthy Northerners, an inland Palm Beach. In 1885, the Congregational Church established Florida's first institute of higher learning, Rollins College. Among its students was actor Anthony Perkins, who played Norman Bates in the 1960 film "Psycho." And Rollins grad Donald Cram won a 1987 Nobel Prize for chemistry.

Skippers operating the pontoon boats for the Scenic Boat Tour, which began in 1938, narrate historic highlights of Winter Park.

As we left the dock on Lake Osceola, our skipper, Frazier Vail, a Winter Park resident since 1952, told us the three lakes still hold otters and alligators. We saw neither, but cormorants and sea gulls wheeled overhead on occasion.

We went by the Albin Polasek Museum & Sculpture Gardens, which showcases dozens of classical sculptures by the late Czech-American sculptor, and the former home of Harry Sinclair, founder of Sinclair Oil (whose logo is the green dinosaur). As we left Lake Osceola and plied the Fern Canal, we passed close enough to a man fishing from the bank to shake his hand.

Next, on Lake Virginia, we turned our attention to more elegant houses and a 200-foot-long canal that goes to Lake Mizell. Vail said loggers dug the canals in the 1880s to float timber from one lake to another. We circled the lake as Vail pointed to the steeple of Knowles Memorial Chapel, the tallest feature on the Rollins campus, striking for its Spanish-Mediterranean architecture and red-tile roofs.

Back through the Fern Canal to Lake Osceola. Florida boathouse design may have reached its pinnacle here. One boathouse has a fireplace and chimney. Another, built in 1898, is crowned with a white balustrade with boat garages on both sides. That

boathouse and an accompanying three-story mansion were listed for sale on the Internet at \$8.5 million.

At the opposite shore of Osceola, the verdant, 0.7-mile-long Venetian canal connects the lake with Lake Maitland. Maitland's shoreline reveals more stately manors, a private bridge to the Isle of Sicily and its multimillion-dollar homes and the 11-acre Kraft Azalea Gardens.

Lake Maitland has hosted various celebrities. Vail pointed out the former Alabama Hotel, where Margaret Mitchell stayed after writing "Gone With the Wind." The hotel, built in 1922, went condo in 1979. In that colonial-style house, Vail said, nodding to the lakeshore, another Georgia author, World War II ace Robert Scott, wrote "God Is My Co-Pilot." The largest house on the lake, 22,000 square feet, was once owned by retired NBA star Horace Grant, who played for the Orlando Magic.

For those who would like to combine scenic boat tours with sidewalk art displays, next weekend would be the time to visit. The 50th annual Winter Park Sidewalk Art Festival ([www.wpsaf.org](http://www.wpsaf.org)) will be Friday through Sunday in Central Park along Park Avenue. An estimated 350,000 patrons are expected to view the work of 1,200 artists. The event is one of the nation's oldest and largest juried art festivals in categories that include clay, drawing and graphics, glass, jewelry, painting, photography, sculpture and watercolor.

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## **Scenic Development**

### **Seagrove Villas to maintain 'old Florida' look**

The 58-year-old Seagrove Villas Motel will reopen this spring after \$200,000 worth of renovations, Jason Sprenkle of the vacation-rental company 360 Blue says.

"Our goal is to update and modernize the hotel with a fresh look, new paint, new furniture and a more luxurious presentation for the guests," Sprenkle said. "We certainly plan to maintain its cherished 'Old Florida' look in keeping with its historic setting along Scenic Highway 30-A."

With 32 Gulf-front guest rooms and signature cottages, Seagrove Villas Motel has been part of the C.R. 30-A vacation destination since the first cottage went up in 1952, at the end of a dirt path leading to the Gulf. The motel's architecture has been described as "kitschy" or "Old Florida" depending on the speaker.

"We are extremely excited about bringing this unique property back to the marketplace," said Sprenkle. "The motel has a long and rich history in Seagrove, and we are excited to make it available again to those who have enjoyed it for so many years in the past, and to reintroduce it to a whole new generation of families visiting our area."

The property is also listed for sale with The Beach Group for \$12.5 million.

In 2007, the developers of NatureWalk at Seagrove, a 155-acre subdivision a mile and a half north on C.R. 395, proposed razing the motel and cottages to create a NatureWalk BeachClub. Seagrove Villas would have been replaced by 18 condominiums, a restaurant, underground parking and the private beach club itself.

Several Seagrove Beach residents filed a lawsuit against the NatureWalk expansion, saying it was too large, incompatible with the neighborhood and didn't meet the county codes. Last month, the residents won in circuit court when the judge said the land was zoned only for residential purposes, and that the county hadn't followed its own rules.

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## Scenic Farmland

### Simplicity is the business plan for the Florida Strawberry Festival

The Florida Strawberry Festival has been a popular event in Plant City since the 1930's. The only thing able to stop it was World War II, and only for a few years! Many have spent a whole day, or evening, enjoying the sights and smells of our hometown treasure. But behind the Midway lies a good dose of business sense. Grab hold of your hat and let's see why it has made the Festival one of the top 30 such events in North America.

One thing that makes the Festival so special is its ties to the community. That is shown in the support of many longtime vendors. A good example of one is Colleen Parke of Parkesdale Greenhouses. Along with her parents, namesakes of the Roy & Helen Parke Building, they have over a 35 year history with the Festival. Her company operates four greenhouses and over 200 acres of farmland. They sell everything from Gerber Daisies to their popular hanging strawberry baskets. She gets repeat customers every year. They love to chat about last year's purchase, such as how tall their strawberry bush has grown, and how many berries have bloomed.

The Florida Strawberry Festival made a decision not to increase its ticket price this year. This was to keep the value of the ticket strong for the community, says Festival President Gary Boothe. This goal was met by challenging all staff to submit fresh ideas. "You wouldn't send an electrician to fix a plumbing problem", Boothe quipped. "You've got to listen to your employees, not just tell them what to do. That's what makes them shine". Their goal was met by rearranging their current facilities, and not incurring many new costs. "Business is so simple," Boothe observed. "People try to make it complex, but it is really simple."

One way they reduced costs is through volunteerism. The Festival makes use of volunteers in every facet of the operation. Over the run of the event they use the equivalent of 2,200 volunteers, which saves them approximately \$2 million in wages.

Sponsorships are a major part of any festival. The loss of a major partner had the Festival reeling. They made up for it by selling the naming rights to their sound stage and the general admission bleachers that surround it.

Rearranging the physical grounds garnered many advantages. A new entrance was added, gate 14. A circular design was introduced so that patrons would not hit a dead end while walking on the grounds. The livestock area was moved to another location in order to keep it away from the food. This freed up the northeast portion enough to add 55 new vendors, and recoup 50% of the cost. Both the agriculture and grandstand areas were increased by one third.

A partnership with Sweetbay Supermarkets is a sweetheart of a deal. While grocery shopping, Sweetbay customers can purchase tickets and save 20% off the gate price. Sweetbay is sure to see an increase in customers. The Festival was helped because they got sponsorship money, did not have to hire as many ticket sellers, reduced lines at the gate, and their guests had an extra 20% to spend once they got into the park. It is a win-win for all parties.

Morale is high and optimism abounds at the Festival. Cost reductions have allowed them to book 15 free acts for guests' enjoyment. A wedding was held on site this past Saturday. The first two days of the Festival drew the largest crowds in seven years. A piece in the New Yorker magazine last year has drawn guests from around the country. A special on the Festival will air on Good Morning America sometime this year. These all tie into this year's theme of "A Hometown Salute to America." "We have always prided ourselves in holding up East Hillsborough in the eyes of Florida," Boothe

remarked. "Now with our national exposure, we hope to hold up East Hillsborough in the eyes of America!"

**For more info:** Visit <http://www.flstrawberryfestival.com/> or call (813) 752-9194

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## Scenic Biking

### Governor Crist Declares "Bicycle Month"

03/09/09 - 10:04 AM



#### Tallahassee, Fla:

In recognition of March being Florida Bicycle month, Governor Charlie Crist and the Florida Department of Environmental Protection (DEP) are reminding residents and tourists to enjoy some of the best biking weather the state has to offer.

In proclaiming Florida Bicycle Month, Governor Charlie Crist signed a proclamation recognizing how the bicycle plays an important role in the lives of millions of Floridians by providing a means to travel to work, school and parks, and as a popular form of recreation, helping to motivate eco-tourism. The proclamation highlights that increased bicycle usage can help reduce motor vehicle emissions and thereby reduce global climate change impacts.

"Florida has many great places to ride a bike, enjoy the fresh spring air and get some exercise," said Jena Brooks, Director of DEP's Greenways and Trails. "In addition to the many great paved trails, you might want to experience Florida's nationally recognized mountain bike trails and March is the perfect time to take on a new adventure."

American Trails recently named Florida as the "Best Trails State in America," recognizing DEP's Office of Greenways and Trails for its vision and leadership. Of the eight state trails, six are rail-trails, which are railroad corridors converted to recreational trails for hiking, biking, skating, equestrian activities and alternative transportation.

Florida, known for coastal beauty not only provides bike enthusiasts with a chance to ride on the hard sandy surfaces of the east coast beaches such as those found at Amelia Island State Park, but also some mountainous trails most people don't necessarily associate with the Sunshine State. Carved out of former quarries Florida bike enthusiasts can enjoy riding on a mountainous terrain offered at the Santos Bike Trail East and Alafia River State Park south of Tampa. Two state parks in South Florida also offer exciting bike trails, Oleta River State Park in North Miami and Jonathan Dickinson State Park in Hobe Sound.

- Cross Florida Greenway - Santos Bike Trails East- Stretching from the Gulf of Mexico to the St. Johns River, the Marjorie Harris Carr Cross Florida Greenway occupies much of the land formerly known as the Cross Florida Barge Canal. The Santos Bike Trails East portion of the greenway is best known for mountain bike trails. More than 30 miles of trails with three levels of difficulty are available to accommodate beginners to experts. The Santos trailhead draws riders from all over the state and country to experience an Epic Ride, an elite list of 43 trails throughout the country described by the International Mountain Bicycling Association (IMBA) as "the best in mountain biking."
- Alafia River State Park offers many challenging off-road mountain bicycle trails, Florida's other claim to the famed Epic Ride designation, and horseback riding trails. Bikers can also go for a hike to one of the many

lakes and enjoy a day of fishing, relaxation or bird-watching.

- Oleta River State Park has approximately 15 miles of mountain-bike trails ranging in skill level from novice to advanced. The park is home to many activities that you would not expect in the center of Miami. In addition to biking, park visitors can also rent kayaks and canoes.
- Jonathan Dickinson State Park is located just south of Stuart, bikers can enjoy paved and off road trails that run near Florida's first federally designated Wild and Scenic River, the Loxahatchee River.

DEP recently launched Rediscover Florida: 100 Ways in 100 Days — a campaign highlighting 100 different ways to experience Florida in 100 days. The campaign aims to increase awareness of all the activities Florida's public lands offer – from the traditional (hiking, biking, camping) to the unique (festivals, historic reenactments and museums). Opportunities extend beyond the state's 160 state parks – there are also eight state trails, three National Estuarine Research Reserves, plus many aquatic preserves and education centers. With all of these options, opportunities for fun and educational recreation are vast, affordable and close to home. Visitors to the Rediscover Florida Web site can explore an interactive list of 100 activities and track how many of the activities they can complete.

To view the Rediscover Florida: 100 Ways in 100 Days web site visit [www.dep.state.fl.us](http://www.dep.state.fl.us) and click on Rediscover Florida.

For more information on Florida's greenways and trails, visit [www.floridagreenwaysandtrails.com](http://www.floridagreenwaysandtrails.com)

To view Governor Charlie Crist's, "March is Florida Bicycle Month Proclamation," visit <http://www.dep.state.fl.us/secretary/news/2009/03/files/fbm.pdf>

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## **Scenic Highways**

### **Gulf Islands Scenic Drive Reopens in Navarre Beach, Florida**

#### ***Navarre Beach Offers Free Gateway to National Seashore***

NAVARRE BEACH, Fla., March 6 /PRNewswire/ -- The scenic seven-mile stretch of road that connects Navarre Beach and Pensacola Beach through the Gulf Islands National Seashore has reopened after being closed for nearly five years.

State Road 399 - also known as J. Earle Bowden Way - is regarded as one of the most beautiful beach drives in the country. There is no toll charged to access the Gulf Islands National Seashore using the Navarre Beach bridge.

"The opening of this road is monumental for tourism on Navarre Beach. Visitors who like to travel the "scenic routes" use it and discover our beautiful beach. Visitors to Navarre Beach and Pensacola Beach love to access other areas using this amazing stretch of road instead of Highway 98," said Kate Wilkes, executive director of the Santa Rosa County Tourist Development Council. "I could not even guess how many people have called or e-mailed to ask the question 'Is the road open yet?' It is a tourist attraction itself!"

Navarre Beach is preparing for the spring and summer high season. Bookings are looking strong so far this year and the reopening of the seashore road is expected to bring even more visitors back to Navarre Beach, Wilkes said.

Nina Kelson, deputy superintendent for the Gulf Islands National Seashore said the stretch of national seashore has largely been closed since Hurricanes Ivan (2004) and Dennis (2005).

"We are very excited. This has been a long time coming," Kelson said. "This will allow people back into the park and provide a connection to the community."

Because of the road's design, the speed limit has been lowered to 35 mph and it will be enforced, Kelson said. Parking is at satellite parking lots and the service area with restrooms and picnic tables at Opal Beach are still under construction. Patrons should be prepared to use Portalets available in designated areas.

For Navarre Beach Visitor Information check [www.floridabeachstorivers.com](http://www.floridabeachstorivers.com).

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Wilton Rooks

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