

8 REASONS TO LOVE DOWNTOWN

Ocala

BY JANIE POPE · PHOTO BY MARCI SANDLER

PHOTO: SOUTH MAGNOLIA AVE.

1 THE HISTORY

Downtown Ocala is alive with the whispers of its past. Recently reinstated as a Florida Main Street community, the city's central core boasts buildings and architecture almost as old as Ocala itself. Take a stroll around the historic square; shop local at Shannon Roth Collection, the former home of the silent Dixie Theater; grab coffee inside the old Marion Hotel; or meet your friends for breakfast at Dee Dee's Diner in the historic train station. You may even want to see a first-run movie at the Marion Theatre, which was established in 1941 and is one of the few active historic theaters left in the state. Why move to a place that strives to replicate such a rich history when Ocala has the real thing?



ARTIST MEL FIORENTINO

Photo: Lisa Origer



'The Soul Of The City'



“Having been born and raised in Ocala, it's easy to take things for granted. Like the fact that my kindergarten handprints rest in the concrete off of Broadway Street or that my grandfather was the postmaster downtown. I was raised around good, true Ocala people who taught me to love this

place, but it wasn't until I returned from college and began my professional career with the city that I truly understood what a novelty Ocala's downtown is and what a coveted setting it is for those who seek what I was raised with: community.

People search to move their families and their businesses to places exactly like this. Developers build communities to mimic authenticity such as ours, all for the sake of creating that sense of belonging one gets right here in downtown Ocala, the soul of the city.”

—JANIE POPE, CENTRAL BUSINESS DISTRICT PROGRAM MANAGER, CITY OF OCALA

2 THE ART

So often, historic cities get stuck in the past, failing to embrace culture and art that their architecture begs to complement. Not in Downtown Ocala. From window art and live art to sculpture art and galleries, the downtown has you covered. Just a block or two off of the square sits Artist-Alley and Brick City Center for the Arts, both actively showing and selling a variety of local work. Additionally, you'll find hip, indie art in local food and nightlife establishments like Pi on Broadway and the Courtyard on Broadway. Even the governmental buildings get in on the act, showcasing local artwork that's open to the public. Care for a sculpture stroll by the water? Check out the national art installment at Tusawilla Park. Downtown Ocala is certainly smart about art.

3 THE FOOD

Where do I even begin? Delicious. That's where. Whether you're craving a French meal at La Cuisine, Japanese from Sushi Bistro, Greek food from Feta Mediterranean Cuisine, or maybe a plate from an upscale steakhouse like Mark's Prime, downtown Ocala is your dinner destination. With over 15 places to please your palette, you won't want for anything. And don't forget to grab some coffee while you shop or some ice cream after your big meal. The most enticing thing about downtown Ocala's edible options is the variety. Breakfast, lunch, and dinner are within walking distance of any business establishment in the downtown district—and meals start as low as \$5!

4 THE NIGHTLIFE

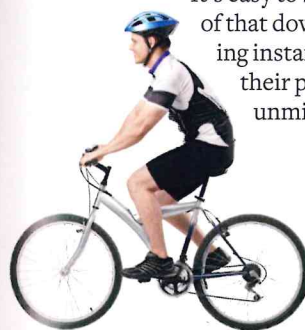
Alas, here's my favorite. There is no other place to be with friends than downtown Ocala. Need to meet a co-worker after five for a drink? Find exceptional happy hour specials at places like Mark's Prime and Harry's Seafood, Bar & Grille. Looking for the best live music in town? Head upstairs to the rooftop at Pi on Broadway on any Friday or Saturday night where you shouldn't be disappointed by the music—or the view. Want to grab a beer with your buddy? You'll have the choice of 30-plus craft beers at downtown Ocala's newest local brewery, Infinite Ale Works. Maybe you're looking for something a little more chill. Sing karaoke at the Courtyard on Broadway or enjoy the back patio at O'Malley's Alley. If it's something more upscale you desire, then BG Downtown has regular martini specials and ladies night events. There is literally something for everyone.



THE SPLASH PAD AT CITY HALL

5 THE PEOPLE

If downtown Ocala is the soul of the city, then its people are the heart. They are the lifeblood, the passion, the sweat, and the joy. Downtown's stakeholders are community leaders and invested patrons of the local business owners. Their devotion to downtown's success goes hand-in-hand with their own personal and professional development. Some have been in business for decades, while others are just moving in.



It's easy to become a part of that downtown feeling instantly because their passion is unmistakable.

6 THE NOVELTIES

One of the things I enjoy most is finding people that haven't been downtown in a while and updating them on what's new. When I tell them we've got The Corkscrew Winery, where you can bottle your own wine, or fencing lessons at En Garde Fencing Club (yes, that Olympic sport with swords), people don't believe me. I try to encourage folks to visit Ocala's Chocolate & Confections, where the owners make the chocolate, by hand, right before your eyes. I tell people it's possible to eat fondue at The Melting Pot, play pool at Downtown Billiards, or even get new kitchen counters at Homespace, all without walking more than 10 paces. Get a fitted men's suit at Greiner's, a piano at Parramore Music, a new road bike at Brick City Bicycles, or a corset at Jezebel's... the list goes on.



EN GARDE FENCING CLUB



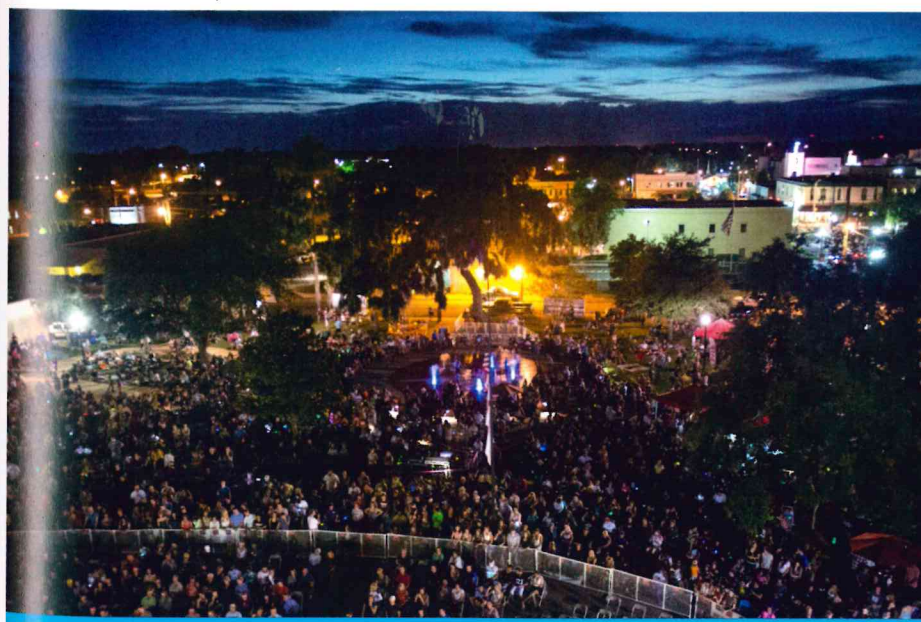
SISTER HAZEL PERFORMING LIVE

7 THE EVENTS

Talk about the icing on the cake, downtown Ocala is slammed with things to do. Almost every weekend holds family fun. Consider these: the Feel Downtown LIVE concert series featuring artists such as Sister Hazel, Needtobreathe, and Brett Eldredge; the First Friday Art Walks that span more than 10 blocks each month; the weekly farmers market with over 50 vendors; Harvestfest Music & Food Truck Festival; and Marion County's biggest holiday celebration, Light Up Ocala. Community organizations also jump on board by bringing their events downtown. Crowd favorites like Fine Arts for Ocala's annual three-day arts show and the St. Patrick's Day downtown pub crawl are just a couple that have proven to be huge hits. Not only do the downtown events create an enhanced quality of life for our citizens, but they also provide a direct, positive economic impact on our downtown businesses.

8 THE FEELING

There's a reason why the area's major branding campaign is dubbed "Feel Downtown." No one tangible thing makes downtown so delightful. There are multiple things, attitudes, and energies combined together that make it irresistible. Downtown Ocala isn't just a place—it's a feeling. Won't you join us? ☺



THE PRE-CONCERT VIEW FROM THE ROOF OF CITY HALL