Cultural Daily

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Tampa Heights' Funky Culture

Mish (Eileen) Murphy · Wednesday, September 27th, 2017

A mural of The Cowardly Lion, Dorothy, The Scarecrow, and The Tin Man from The Wizard of Oz stands at the entrance to Tampa Heights on North Franklin Street. At first glance, this lower rent neighborhood seems far from the Emerald City, although it's located just north of downtown Tampa. But the Tampa Heights section of Tampa, Florida, is the next cultural center of Tampa. On a sunny Friday morning, I arrive to celebrate its birth.

Oubliette beer at Hidden Springs Aleworks-Photo by Justin Grant

Art gallery and beer

The Funky As A Monkey Art Studio has located one of its galleries here in the Phoenix Room (how apropos), part of Hidden Springs Ale Works. Exhibits of works of regional artists run practically continuously. The gallery curators are looking to grow their Tampa Heights gallery as the neighborhood continues to attract more people interested in culture.

The neighborhood is already popular as a night spot for beer connoisseurs. Hidden Springs Ale Works just received an award for its ale. Its impressive beer-making vats, tubes, and machines are located on-site; they're visible out back, and people can get a tour if it's not busy.

Wi-fi, weddings, and websites

Silver lap-tops glow in the cyber-café/wi-fi section of the Foundation Coffee Shop. Readers relax in fat leather sofas in a separate area. Snackers munch on pastries in the long, modernistic covered patio. A barista explains to me that a bookstore will be moving to Franklin Street the first of the year, and "then we'll be cookin'."

The nearby blue-doored Rialto specializes in performance theater, which is so popular, parking can be a problem. People also book the Rialto for weddings.

The new kid on the block is The Hall, a collection of eight shiny restaurants under one roof. The coffee shop, called Kóf?, is open-air on the side facing the sidewalk. The front door is still boarded up, a remnant of Hurricane Irma, who came through two weeks ago. At night, I'm told the place sizzles with locals who have made this a trendy bar-hopping spot.

At The Hall restaurants, the front door is still boarded up from the

A school of woodwork, an architecture/interior design firm, and a digital website consulting company also live on Franklin Street. The website consultant tells me he's seen the foot traffic on the street increase a lot this past year. He enjoys being part of a cultural revival, but, "Don't gentrify and push people out who call this home." He says he's referring to a big housing/business/commercial development going up nearby.

hurricane

Jazz in the neighborhood

It isn't funky to be unfit. Luckily, Tampa Heights boasts a dance studio and a martial arts academy. People can also rent a bicycle. I stroll the mostly tree-lined streets.

Well-kept up, painted old buildings add jazz to the neighborhood. What the street needs next is a park. But we are urban here, and parks are still in the future.

Well-kept up, painted buildings add jazz to the street.

Nearby blocks also contain welcome attractions. Tampa's Waterfront Park is relatively close. And the gourmet restaurant Uleles, which is located on the site of a natural spring and specializes in native-inspired food, is nearby (reservations a must).

At the opposite end of North Franklin Street, the Stetson Tampa Law Center sits, a visible and invisible anchor of the whole area. The Center attracts attorneys and law students who need to drink coffee, eat food, perhaps be amused by art or theater—they provide the bread and butter for Tampa Heights.

Graffiti and wizard mural stretches half a block.

A second mural in Tampa Heights sprawls a half block long (the Law Center buildings can be seen peeking over the wall). All its words are graffiti, except at the end of the writing, a smiling wizard in sunglasses holds a magic wand. Its cheerful impact relies on pop art, Disney, graffiti, and urban chic. It shimmers in the sun.

It's Tampa Heights' turn to see cultural changes, new people and businesses mixed with its existing neighborhood, creating interesting blends. I think I'm here at the perfect moment: Tampa Heights' moment of perfect funkiness.

Funky As A Monkey Art Studio, Contact: www.funkyasamonkey.com/

Ulele Restaurant, Contact: www.ulele.com

Oubliette Beer photo by Justin Grant, correspondent for Tampa Bay Times, Contact: jg@saintbeat.com

Other photos by Mish (Eileen) Murphy, Contact: Mishmurphy.com

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