



Time Travel, Golden Shovels and a Park Called Depot

BY NATHALIE MCCRATE

Let's pretend you have access to Dr. Who's blue Tardis or Marty McFly's DeLorean time machine for a moment...Now, enter the GPS coordinates latitude 29.65 and longitude 82.32...Okay? Good. Now, hit the accelerator and fast forward to the year 2016.

BOOM! You made it just in time for the grand opening of Depot Park! After years of thoughtful planning, community input, design and engineering, the former brownfield site has been transformed into a lush signature greenspace for the community. The historic train depot building is now filled with the clatter of forks on plates and the chatter of dinner conversation...the restaurant serves up some of the most delicious dishes in Alachua County.

You grab a coffee from the bar and stroll through the football field-sized children's playground next door. Parents (who are also sipping copious amounts of caffeine) are watching their kids play on some of the coolest play equipment you've ever seen. The custom-designed slides, climbing nets and water area are clearly inspired by Gainesville's history as a former railroad town.

The brassy sound of a saxophone captures your interest, and you turn toward the outdoor music amphitheater perched right on the waterfront. You're not the only one...crowds from all over the area have traveled here to

enjoy the lively jazz concert in Depot Park. Families grill burgers and hotdogs by the outdoor pavilions while their children dance to the beat of the music. Not a bad way to spend a Saturday.

You take advantage of the concert intermission to take a closer look at the water from the promenade; it's home to blooming lily pads and flocks of paddling ducks. The ponds' dramatic fountain displays add a soothing backdrop — who knew storm water ponds could be this picturesque?

In the distance, you spy bright yellow school buses pulling into the Cade Museum for Creativity and Invention, located on the west end of the park. The world-class museum offers hands-on S.T.E.A.M. (Science, Technology, Engineering, Art and Math) workshops and shares the stories of pioneer inventors.

You wander past a yoga instructor

demonstrating a perfect downward dog beside the park's iconic sculpture gardens and head toward the nature preserves in the south end of Depot Park. Connected to the Hawthorne Trail, it's a popular area for cyclists and nature enthusiasts. The UF track team jogs past while birdwatchers stare intently at the saw palmettos.

The insistent beeping of your time machine breaks your concentration. Unfortunately, duty calls, and you've got a long to-do list in 2014. You reluctantly step back in — but not before catching a final glimpse of a messy-ponytailed artist painting a striking watercolor of the sun setting on the bustling park. What a ride!

There's a lot riding on that horizon. Led by the Gainesville Community Redevelopment Agency (CRA), Depot Park will tell the story of Gainesville's past while providing a stage for the future. Home to the Cade Museum, a children's playground, restaurants and shops, an outdoor music amphitheater, gardens and winding nature trails, Depot Park will bring together the whole community. The 32-acre park is scheduled to open in 2016. Learn more at www.gainesvillecra.com, or follow the Gainesville CRA on social media for project updates! **H**



ABOVE LEFT: The Depot Park area is positioned to become the "Central Park of Gainesville."

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