THE JOURNAL

ARCHITECTURE / HISTORY / PLACES / PERSPECTIVES



Image: Middleton Tampa Bay archive

The Places That Recharge Us

Travel, local discoveries and the places that help us recharge.

MARK MIDDLETON

AUGUST 2026

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FROM THE EDITOR

The Places That Recharge Us



Portrait: Jeremiah Khokhar Photography LLC

Every once in a while, it's important to step away from our daily routines and spend time somewhere that reminds us to slow down.

For me, that place this month was Estes Park, Colorado. Nestled at the doorstep of Rocky Mountain National Park, it's a place where towering peaks, alpine lakes, and winding trails have a way of putting life into perspective. I traveled there to run the Rocky Mountain Half Marathon, but like so many meaningful trips, I am coming home with much more than a race medal.

One of the unexpected gifts of travel is that it often helps us appreciate home even more. As much as I love exploring new places, every trip reminds me why I'm grateful to live in Tampa Bay. Our sunsets over the Gulf, vibrant downtowns, beautiful parks, waterfront communities, and year-round outdoor lifestyle offer a quality of life that is truly special. Home isn't simply where we live, it's where we build relationships, create memories, and find the places that help us recharge.

This month's edition celebrates exactly that. From local experiences happening throughout Hillsborough, Pinellas, and Pasco counties to reflections from Estes Park, a look at our evolving real estate market, and a few of my favorite places to explore, I hope you'll find inspiration to get out, experience something new, and enjoy everything our own community has to offer.

Thank you, as always, for joining me on the journey.

AROUND TAMPA BAY

Explore Tampa Bay This August

HILLSBOROUGH

813 Day at Sparkman Wharf

813 Day at Sparkman Wharf , August 13

Tampa celebrates its identity on 8/13 with an evening devoted to everything local. Sparkman Wharf is hosting the celebration from 5:00 to 8:13 p.m., with neighborhood specials and $8.13 offers available across Water Street during the surrounding week.

It is a fun way to experience Tampa's food, waterfront setting, and growing downtown energy while supporting local businesses.

PINELLAS

Mega Night Market

Mega Night Market Asian Food & Music Festival , August 21–23

Coachman Park in Clearwater will host a three-day waterfront celebration featuring international street food, live music and performances, craft vendors, and a children's activity area.

Admission is free, and the mix of food, culture, entertainment, and waterfront atmosphere makes this one of the most engaging community events of the month.

PASCO

Bay Scallop Season

Pasco County Bay Scallop Season , Through August 18

This is less a traditional festival and more a distinctly Florida experience. Residents and visitors can head into the Gulf to snorkel for bay scallops in the waters off Pasco County and the Anclote River.

The county describes it as one of the Sports Coast's signature family adventures, and the recreational season remains open through August 18. Participants should review licensing, equipment, boating-safety, and harvest-limit requirements before going.

Archived August 2026 calendar. Dates and conditions reflect the original issue.

TRAVELS & PERSPECTIVES

Rocky Mountain National Park: Above the Tree Line



Image: Middleton Tampa Bay archive



Photograph: Mark Middleton

There are places that impress you with their beauty, and then there are places that quietly change the way you see the world. For me, Rocky Mountain National Park is one of those places.

I traveled to Estes Park to run the Rocky Mountain Half Marathon and spent two days exploring one of America's most spectacular national parks. While the race was certainly memorable, it was the time spent hiking among towering peaks, alpine lakes, and quiet forests that became the highlight of my trip.

One of my first stops was Bear Lake, arguably one of the most photographed destinations in the park. Nestled beneath towering mountain peaks, the crystal-clear lake reflects the surrounding forest like a mirror. Although it's one of the park's most popular locations, it's easy to understand why. Standing along the shoreline, surrounded by fresh mountain air and complete stillness, you immediately feel connected to nature in a way that's becoming increasingly rare.

From Bear Lake, I continued along the trail to Alberta Falls, one of the park's most accessible and rewarding hikes. The trail winds through towering pines, across granite outcroppings, and alongside rushing mountain streams before arriving at the falls themselves. The sound of cascading water echoing through the canyon creates one of those moments where you naturally stop talking, put your phone away, and simply take it all in.

What surprised me most wasn't just the scenery, it was the wildlife. Throughout the park, elk grazed peacefully in open meadows, seemingly unfazed by the visitors around them. Chipmunks darted between the rocks and trees, adding a bit of playful energy to every trail. These simple encounters became some of my favorite

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Rocky Mountain National Park: Above the Tree Line

memories, reminding me that we were visitors in their home.

One of the things I appreciate most about our national parks is their ability to slow us down. In our everyday lives, we're constantly moving from one meeting to the next, checking notifications, and thinking about what's coming tomorrow. Rocky Mountain National Park gently encourages you to do the opposite. Walk a little slower. Look a little farther. Listen a little longer.

As someone who calls Tampa Bay home, I couldn't help but compare the mountains to our own natural beauty. While Florida doesn't have fourteen-thousand-foot peaks or alpine lakes, we are incredibly fortunate to have our own remarkable landscapes, from Gulf sunsets and coastal preserves to winding rivers, maritime forests, and miles of waterfront that define our way of life. Travel has a wonderful way of reminding us not only to appreciate the places we visit, but also to return home with a renewed appreciation for where we live.

Rocky Mountain National Park isn't just a destination for hikers or outdoor enthusiasts. It's a place for anyone seeking perspective, inspiration, and a reminder that some of life's greatest experiences are found simply by stepping outside and exploring.

If you ever find yourself in Estes Park, don't rush through RMNP in a single afternoon. Spend a couple of days. Hike the trails. Watch the wildlife. Sit beside an alpine lake. Let the mountains do what they've been doing for millions of years...they'll quietly remind you how beautiful this world really is.

MARKET PERSPECTIVE

Understanding Florida's Condo Market

One of the biggest questions I'm hearing right now is, "What's going on with the Florida condo market?" The answer is that it's evolving...and in many ways, that's a good thing.

Following new state safety requirements, many condominium associations are completing structural inspections, strengthening reserve funds, and addressing long-deferred maintenance. For some owners, that has meant higher monthly fees or special assessments, leading to more condos coming onto the market.

For buyers, this creates both opportunity and responsibility. A lower purchase price doesn't always tell the whole story. Understanding a building's financial health, reserve funding, insurance, and upcoming repairs is just as important as the location or the view.

While these changes have created challenges for some communities, I believe they will ultimately lead to safer buildings, stronger associations, and a healthier condominium market across Florida. As always, knowledge is one of the best investments a buyer can make.

Considering Selling Your Home?

If you, or someone you know, are thinking about selling a home, I'd welcome the opportunity to have a conversation. Every successful sale starts with clarity, and understanding the market is the first step in deciding whether now is the right time to move.

Click the button below to learn more about our proven process and marketing system. It would be my honor to provide insight, guidance, and an honest assessment to help you make the best decision for your situation.

From Listed to SOLD

Historical editorial perspective from August 2026; not current legal or financial advice.

Explore current market reports

WORTH EXPLORING | A LOCAL FAVORITE

Salt Shack on the Bay

5415 W Tyson Avenue, Tampa, FL 33611 | (813) 444-4569



Image: Middleton Tampa Bay archive



Image: Middleton Tampa Bay archive

One of my favorite discoveries over the past year has been Salt Shack on the Bay. Perched right on the waterfront, it's the kind of place that reminds you why living in Tampa Bay is so special.

Whether you're stopping in for a relaxed lunch, enjoying fresh seafood over dinner, or simply grabbing a cold drink while watching the boats drift by, the atmosphere is hard to beat.

There's something uniquely relaxing about sitting outside with the breeze coming off the bay, listening to the gentle sound of the water, and taking in one of Tampa's best waterfront views. It's casual, welcoming, and a place I find myself recommending often to friends, clients, and visitors looking to experience the Tampa Bay lifestyle.

If you haven't been yet, I highly recommend adding it to your list.

DISCOVER THE COMMUNITY

Discover Dunedin's Craft Beer Trail



Photograph: Mark Middleton

Dunedin has earned a reputation as one of Florida's premier craft beer destinations, with a collection of locally owned breweries that are as unique as the community itself. Over the past several months, I've been exploring the stories behind each brewery, from their history and atmosphere to the people who make them special, and sharing those experiences through my Discover Delightful Dunedin website.

Whether you're planning a weekend visit, looking for your next favorite local brewery, or simply want to learn more about one of Tampa Bay's most walkable and welcoming towns, I invite you to explore the Dunedin Beer Trail and discover everything this remarkable community has to offer. The site also features local restaurants, parks, history, neighborhoods, events, and the Delightful Dunedin documentary, all created to help visitors and future residents experience Dunedin through the eyes of a local.

The original issue predates the website consolidation. Links now lead to the Middleton Tampa Bay Dunedin hub.

Explore Discover Dunedin

COMMUNITY CONNECTION

A New Rotary Year Begins



Image: Middleton Tampa Bay archive

One month into my year as District Governor for Rotary International District 6950, I have been reminded every day why Rotary's motto, "Service Above Self," continues to inspire millions of people around the world.

This past month has been both humbling and impactful. Following the devastating earthquakes in Venezuela, our district quickly came together to support relief efforts by raising funds for both ShelterBox and Rotary Districts 4370 and 4380 in Caracas. Seeing the photographs and hearing firsthand accounts of the destruction has been heartbreaking, but it has also reinforced what can happen when people unite to help those in need.

Closer to home, I've had the privilege of visiting Rotary clubs throughout our district and connecting with dedicated Rotarians who are quietly making a difference in their communities every day. Their generosity, leadership, and commitment remind me that meaningful change almost always begins at the local level.

The work is just beginning. Next week, I'll travel to Nairobi, Kenya, to participate in the installation of a clean water project made possible through the generosity of the Rotary Club of Dunedin North and our international partners. Later this year, many members of our district will join together in Honduras for another international water project, continuing Rotary's mission of creating sustainable change through access to clean water.

I'm also incredibly excited to represent Rotary on Friday, August 14, when I'll have the honor of throwing out the ceremonial first pitch before the Tampa Bay Rays game during our annual Rotary Night at the Rays. It's a wonderful opportunity to celebrate the incredible work being done by Rotarians throughout our community while sharing Rotary's message of service with thousands of fans.

As I begin this year of service, I'm grateful for every opportunity to connect with people who believe that when we work together, we truly can create lasting impact.

CLOSING THOUGHT

Sometimes the best way to appreciate home is to spend a little time away from it.

Thank you for spending a few minutes with me each month. My hope is that this newsletter becomes more than just another email in your inbox, that it serves as a reminder to explore a new place, support a local business, enjoy the outdoors, or simply appreciate the incredible lifestyle we're fortunate to have here in Tampa Bay.

Whether this month's journey took us through the mountains of Colorado, along the waterfront of Tampa Bay, or into one of our vibrant local communities, I hope it encouraged you to slow down, discover something new, and see familiar places with fresh eyes.

As always, I'm here for you and the people who matter most to you. Whether you're thinking about buying or selling a home, looking for a trusted local recommendation, or simply want to connect over a cup of coffee, I'd love to hear from you.

Until next month, I hope you find time to get outside, explore somewhere new, and continue making memories in the place we're fortunate to call home.

Upward, Mark Middleton

Photographs & Credits

Cover

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