THE JOURNAL

ARCHITECTURE / HISTORY / PLACES / PERSPECTIVES



Photograph: Mark Middleton

The Season to Get Outside

History, local discoveries and the places that give Tampa Bay its identity.

MARK MIDDLETON

OCTOBER 2026

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FROM THE EDITOR

The Season to Get Outside



Portrait: Jeremiah Khokhar Photography LLC

October has always felt a little different in Tampa Bay. We may not have changing leaves or the crisp fall mornings found farther north, but eventually there comes that first evening when the humidity breaks, the breeze feels a little cooler, and you remember just how wonderful it is to be outside in Florida.

For me, that's what this month is about, getting out, exploring, and appreciating the places around us.

September gave me a chance to do some of that from a different perspective. I spent a couple of days in Atlanta, a city I've visited many times but continue to discover in new ways. Like Tampa Bay, it's a place where growth and history constantly intersect, and I'll share a few of my favorite discoveries from the trip in this month's Field Notes.

Closer to home, we're spending some time in Safety Harbor, one of those Tampa Bay communities that proves bigger isn't always better. Its walkable downtown, waterfront, local businesses, history, and unmistakable small-town character have made it a place I've loved for years, and a wonderful example of how a strong sense of place can endure even as the region around it grows.

That's really the thread running through this month's Journal...

As Tampa Bay continues to change at an extraordinary pace, I find myself increasingly interested not only in what's new, but in the places, traditions, businesses, and experiences that give our communities their identity in the first place.

This month, I hope you'll discover somewhere you haven't been, learn something you didn't know, and perhaps find an excuse to get outside and experience a little more of the place we're fortunate to call home.

Welcome to October.

THIS MONTH IN TAMPA BAY

Experience Tampa Bay This October

PINELLAS

Stone Crab Season

OCTOBER 23–24 / CLEARWATER BEACH + DUNEDIN

Frenchy's 42nd Annual Stone Crab Festival is October 23–24, with celebrations at Clearwater Beach and Dunedin.

It began in 1984 as a celebration of the opening of Florida stone crab season and has grown into a local tradition with fresh claws, music and that laid-back Gulf Coast atmosphere. Visit St Petersburg Clearwater Florida

HILLSBOROUGH

Oktoberfest on the River

OCTOBER 9–11 / CURTIS HIXON WATERFRONT PARK

Oktoberfest Tampa returns to Curtis Hixon Waterfront Park October 9–11. The setting is what makes this worthwhile: Downtown Tampa, the Hillsborough River and Riverwalk, German food and beer, music and traditional Oktoberfest games.

This isn't just another festival recommendation. It's an excuse to experience downtown Tampa outdoors at precisely the time of year when that becomes enjoyable again!

PASCO

Old Florida Fall

OCTOBER 10 / DADE CITY

The Scarecrow Festival at the Pioneer Florida Museum in Dade City takes place October 10.

Visitors can build scarecrows, visit the pumpkin patch, watch blacksmith and traditional craft demonstrations, see historic buildings and exhibits, and enjoy the kind of small-town fall festival that feels completely different from Tampa or St. Petersburg.

Archived October 2026 calendar. Dates reflect the original issue.

CLOSER THAN YOU THINK

Atlanta, Georgia

Field Notes | September 2026



Image: Middleton Tampa Bay archive



Image: Middleton Tampa Bay archive

Atlanta has always been a city I enjoy, but this most recent trip reminded me just how easy it is to turn it into a great long weekend from Tampa Bay.

I traveled up to pick up a new car and stayed at the St. Regis in Buckhead, which immediately puts you in the middle of one of the city's most polished neighborhoods. Buckhead Village is incredibly walkable, with great restaurants, beautiful streets, and some of the best shopping in the Southeast.

Before heading home, we decided to do something completely touristy and visited the World of Coca-Cola downtown. It ended up being one of the highlights of the trip, fun, interactive, and surprisingly interesting.

What I like most about Atlanta is its range. I've been there for concerts, enjoyed the Atlanta Symphony Orchestra, explored different neighborhoods, and now spent time experiencing Buckhead and downtown in a completely different way. It feels distinctly Southern, but also modern, international, and constantly evolving.

And perhaps the best part is how accessible it is from Tampa Bay. It's a short flight or an easy drive, with simple transportation once you arrive. Add in cooler fall mornings, great food, shopping, culture, and plenty to explore, and Atlanta makes for one of the easiest city getaways in the Southeast.

THE ROAD AHEAD

Service, Photography and Life Along the Way

Some of the most meaningful moments in my life happen far beyond real estate. Through Rotary, photography, travel, running, and the communities I encounter along the way, I've been fortunate to experience people and places that continually change the way I see the world.

Next month, that journey takes me to Honduras for another Rotary clean-water project, and I'll be sharing pieces of that experience on my personal Instagram as it happens.

But this isn't really about one trip. Instagram has become a place where I share more of the journey...my photography, Rotary service, travels, adventures, and some of the everyday moments in between.

If you'd like to come along, I'd be honored to have you follow the journey.

Visit My Instagram

THE BIGGER PICTURE

Growing Up Without Losing Who We Are

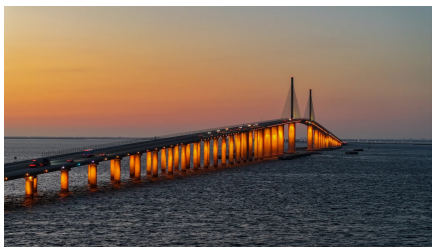

Image: Middleton Tampa Bay archive

Tampa Bay has changed more in the past several years than at almost any point during the decades I've lived here.

New towers are reshaping our skylines, once-overlooked neighborhoods are attracting investment, and redevelopment is transforming everything from aging shopping centers to former industrial properties.

But growth is entering a different chapter.

As desirable land becomes harder to find, the future increasingly means building up instead of simply building out, more density, redevelopment, adaptive reuse, and finding new purposes for places that already exist.

I believe that's an exciting opportunity, but it also raises an important question: How do we continue growing without losing the things that made people want to live here in the first place?

Growth shouldn't have to mean erasing history, neighborhood character, mature trees, waterfront access, local businesses, or the distinctive personalities of communities like Safety Harbor, Dunedin, Ybor City, Hyde Park, and St. Petersburg. Some of the best development doesn't replace a community's identity, it strengthens it.

As someone who works in real estate and has watched Tampa Bay evolve for most of my life, I'm fascinated by what comes next. The decisions being made today about development, transportation, preservation, housing, and public spaces will shape how this region feels for decades.

The question isn't whether Tampa Bay will continue to grow. It will. The bigger question is what kind of Tampa Bay we choose to build.

Explore Tampa Bay’s historic homes

THE WORLD OF REAL ESTATE

Why Doesn't Florida Have Basements?

For anyone who grew up farther north, one thing about Florida homes can seem a little strange: Where are all the basements?

The answer is mostly beneath our feet.

Much of Florida has a relatively high water table, and in many areas groundwater can sit surprisingly close to the surface, especially during the rainy season. Digging a traditional basement below grade can therefore mean building directly into conditions where groundwater, drainage and moisture become significant engineering challenges.

Florida's geology adds another wrinkle. Much of the state sits on porous limestone, the same underlying geology associated with our springs, aquifer system and sinkholes. Add our heavy summer rainfall and flood exposure, and building downward often becomes considerably more complicated and expensive than building above ground.

That doesn't mean basements are impossible in Florida. They exist, particularly where elevation and site conditions allow them. They're simply uncommon because, for most Florida homes, there's little economic reason to fight the ground when it's easier to build above it.

It's also one reason Florida architecture evolved differently from housing farther north. Instead of basements, we rely on garages, attics, sheds and increasingly creative storage solutions inside the home.

So the next time someone asks why their Florida house doesn't have a basement, the simplest answer may be: In Florida, we learned a long time ago that it's usually better to build up than dig down.

Read the existing complete basements guide

A CONSIDERED NEXT STEP

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

WORTH EXPLORING | A LOCAL FAVORITE

The James Museum of Western & Wildlife Art

150 Central Avenue St. Petersburg, FL 33701 | (727) 892-4200

One of my favorite cultural experiences in Tampa Bay is The James Museum in downtown St. Petersburg.

From the moment you walk inside, the building itself feels like part of the experience, leading into an extraordinary collection of more than 400 works celebrating the landscapes, people, history, and wildlife of the American West. I especially enjoy the wildlife art and photography, but there is something interesting around nearly every corner...from contemporary Native American art and jewelry to sculpture and sweeping Western landscapes.

It's also a wonderful reminder of just how rich St. Petersburg's arts and cultural scene has become. If you've driven past The James but never taken the time to go inside, put it on your list. It's one of those Tampa Bay places that may surprise you, and you'll probably want more time there than you expected.

NEIGHBORHOOD NO. 02

Safety Harbor

Small Town. Big Sense of Place.



Image: Middleton Tampa Bay archive

Explore the Neighborhood

COMMUNITY CONNECTION

Give a Little. Get So Much More.



Image: Middleton Tampa Bay archive

One of the things I've learned over the years is that giving your time to others has an interesting way of giving something back to you.

Volunteering connects us to people we might never otherwise meet, gives us a greater appreciation for our own lives, and reminds us that each of us has the ability to make our community a little better.

Not long ago, I had the opportunity to spend some time with my friend Adam at Feeding Tampa Bay and tour their remarkable facility. I left incredibly impressed...not only by the scale of the work being done, but by how many opportunities there are for ordinary people to get involved and make a difference.

And that's certainly not limited to one organization. Throughout Tampa Bay, there are nonprofits, schools, food banks, animal shelters, museums, environmental organizations, civic groups, and neighborhood projects that need people willing to give a few hours of their time.

You don't need a title, a committee, or a major commitment to serve your community. Sometimes you simply have to show up.

I've found that the more we give of ourselves, the fuller our own lives become. If you haven't volunteered somewhere recently, I encourage you to find something you care about and give it a try.

You may be surprised by how much you receive in return.

ONE LAST THING

Thank You

Thank you for spending a little time with me again this month. I genuinely appreciate having the opportunity to share some of the places, experiences, ideas, and stories that make Tampa Bay, and life beyond it, so interesting to me.

My hope is that each edition of the Middleton Tampa Bay Journal gives you something worth your time: perhaps a place you hadn't considered visiting, something you didn't know about where we live, or simply a reason to look at a familiar part of our community a little differently.

As life continues to move quickly, I'm becoming more intentional about making time for the people, places, and experiences that matter. I hope you'll do the same this month...get outside, try somewhere new, support something local, and make a few memories along the way.

And as always, if there's ever anything I can do for you or someone important to you, whether it's real estate, a local recommendation, or simply a conversation, I'm never more than a phone call away.

Until next month, thank you for being part of the journey.

Upward, Mark Middleton

Photographs & Credits

Cover

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