# THE JOURNAL

ARCHITECTURE / HISTORY / PLACES / PERSPECTIVES



Image: Middleton Tampa Bay archive

# Rooted Here. Connected Everywhere.

Local discoveries, global connections and a region in motion.

MARK MIDDLETON

SEPTEMBER 2026

# In This Issue

01 Rooted Here. Connected Everywhere.

02 Experience Tampa Bay This September

03 385 Children. Clean Water. 20 Years.

04 Kenya, Through a "Different Lens"

05 Tampa Bay Is Changing

06 The Invention That Changed Florida

07 Considering Selling Your Home?

08 Ulele | Tampa Heights

09 Crescent Lake

10 First Pitch

11 Thank You

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FROM THE EDITOR

# Rooted Here. Connected Everywhere.



Portrait: Jeremiah Khokhar Photography LLC

Tampa Bay is home. But the experiences, ideas, and people we encounter beyond it can change the way we see the place we live.

August was one of those months that reminded me just how much life can hold when we make room for the things that matter.

I began the month halfway around the world in Kenya, where I had the extraordinary opportunity to travel on behalf of members of my Rotary Club of Dunedin North in bringing clean water to a school in Maasai country. I returned home with photographs, memories and a much deeper appreciation for something most of us rarely have to think about, the simple privilege of turning on a faucet and knowing clean water will come out.

Not long afterward, I found myself in Orlando for the Florida Realtors meetings, exchanging ideas with colleagues from across the state about the future of our profession, housing, public policy and the communities we serve. In between have been Rotary club visits throughout our district, time with clients, a few wonderful closings, early mornings running and riding my bicycle, and the everyday moments that somehow keep everything grounded.

It has made me think about how much our experiences away from home can change the way we see home.

The more of the world I experience, the more interested I become in what makes certain places work. Why do some neighborhoods feel immediately welcoming? Why do we fight to preserve certain buildings? Why does a great public space become the heart of a community? Why do people choose one city over another, and why do they stay?

Those questions are increasingly what I want the Middleton Tampa Bay Journal to explore.

This month, we're going deeper into Tampa Bay: the neighborhoods, history, businesses, architecture, market changes and experiences that make this region remarkable. I'll also take you with me to Kenya, introduce you to a Tampa Bay neighborhood I know particularly well, and share a few discoveries I think are worth your time.

Because real estate has never really been just about houses.

It's about understanding what makes a place worth calling home.

I hope you enjoy this month's edition!

THIS MONTH IN TAMPA BAY

# Experience Tampa Bay This September

PINELLAS

## Free Museum Day

**September 19 | St. Petersburg | A Day to Explore St. Pete's Arts & Culture**

One of the things I love most about St. Petersburg is just how much art, history and culture is packed into the city.

On September 19, Free Museum Day gives residents and visitors an opportunity to experience many of St. Pete's museums at no charge. Make a day of it...visit a museum you've never explored, walk downtown, grab lunch somewhere local and rediscover one of Tampa Bay's most interesting cities.

HILLSBOROUGH

## Art Without Rules

**Through September 27 | Straz Center, Tampa | See Tampa Through a Different Lens**

One of the world's most recognizable, and mysterious, artists has taken over part of Tampa's cultural landscape.

The Art of Banksy brings more than 160 works to the Straz Center, offering a fascinating look at an artist whose work has appeared unexpectedly on buildings and streets around the world.

Whether or not street art is normally your thing, this is one of those unusual exhibitions worth experiencing while it's here.

PASCO

## Summer's Last Hurrah

**September 5 | Sims Park, New Port Richey | An Evening Along the Cotee River**

If you haven't spent much time in downtown New Port Richey lately, September offers a good reason to make the trip north. The city's End of Summer Spectacular takes over beautiful Sims Park along the Cotee River on September 5, with an evening of family activities followed by a movie under the stars.

Come for the event, but take some time to walk downtown and explore a part of Pasco County that continues to develop its own distinct personality.

Archived September 2026 calendar. Dates reflect the original issue.

FIELD NOTES: KENYA

# 385 Children. Clean Water. 20 Years.




Image: Middleton Tampa Bay archive



Image: Middleton Tampa Bay archive

At the foot of Kenya's Ngong Hills, surrounded by miles of dry, open land, sits a small walled school serving 385 children...from first grade through high school.

It's difficult to compare it to a school back home. The kitchen is essentially four posts supporting a tin roof with a campfire underneath. The students grow vegetables on the property. And until we arrived, 385 children shared a single spigot for their water.

The bigger problem was what was coming out of it.

Water is pumped into a holding tank about 40 feet above the ground, where contamination from birds and bats could make its way into the students' drinking water, and ultimately make them sick.

My Rotary Club of Dunedin North raised $10,000 to change that.

We installed a solar-powered filtration system capable of producing 5,000 liters of clean water every day for the next 20 years , along with five spigots so students no longer have to depend on a single water source.

I had the privilege of helping with the installation, spending time with the school's principal and, when everything was finished, turning on the water and drinking it myself.

That was the moment I'll remember...

Something that began with a Rotary club in Dunedin, Florida, now means children nearly 8,000 miles away can spend their school day learning instead of worrying about whether the water they drink will make them sick.

Sometimes changing the world doesn't have to be complicated.

Sometimes it starts with clean, SAFE water .

FIELD NOTES Ngong Hills, Kenya / August 2026

THE ROAD AHEAD

# Kenya, Through a "Different Lens"

Photography has always given me a reason to slow down and pay closer attention to the places I visit. Returning to Kenya more than a decade after my first trip gave me plenty of reasons to pick up my camera, from the extraordinary landscapes and wildlife to the people and everyday moments that made the journey so memorable.

I often share my photography on Instagram, and Kenya has been no different. This month, rather than sending you to my photography website, I thought I'd invite you to follow along there, where I regularly share images from my travels, Tampa Bay, and the places that catch my eye along the way.

I'd be honored to have you follow along.

Visit My Instagram

THE BIGGER PICTURE

# Tampa Bay Is Changing

I've lived in Tampa Bay for more than 40 years, and I don't think I've ever seen our region change as quickly, or as dramatically, as it is changing right now.

The latest chapter is the Tampa Bay Rays. After decades of debate about where this team would ultimately call home, plans are moving forward for a new ballpark on the Hillsborough College campus along Dale Mabry Highway, with an opening targeted for 2029.

But I think the more interesting story is bigger than baseball.

Look around Tampa Bay. Downtown Tampa has been transformed by Water Street. The Riverwalk has changed the way we experience the city. St. Petersburg has evolved into one of Florida's most interesting urban communities. Neighborhoods once overlooked are being rediscovered. New restaurants, hotels, cultural institutions and residential towers continue to reshape our skyline and our expectations of what Tampa Bay can be.

And now we're preparing for another major piece of that evolution.

The proposed Rays development isn't simply a place to watch baseball. The vision includes a new ballpark, a reinvented Hillsborough College campus and a surrounding mixed-use district, another significant investment in how people will live, work, learn and spend their time here.

There will, and should, continue to be conversations about growth, infrastructure, affordability, public investment and what we want Tampa Bay to become. Growth always comes with tradeoffs.

But after living here most of my life, one thing seems undeniable:

The Tampa Bay we're going to know five years from now will look remarkably different from the Tampa Bay we knew five years ago.

For those of us who live, work and own property here, that's the story worth watching.

Because a ballpark is ultimately just a building.

What's happening around it is the story of a region growing into its next chapter.

Development plans and targets describe the September 2026 issue context.

Explore current market reports

THE WORLD OF REAL ESTATE

# The Invention That Changed Florida

It's hard to imagine Florida without air conditioning. But it wasn't simply a modern convenience, it helped make the Florida we know today possible.

In 1950, Florida had just 2.8 million residents. As residential air conditioning became increasingly accessible during the decades that followed, year-round life in Florida's heat and humidity became dramatically more comfortable. By 1970, Florida's population had grown to nearly 6.8 million.

The 1950s were particularly remarkable. As air conditioning became more common across the South, Florida's population grew an average of 6.1% per year, far faster than the country as a whole.

Air conditioning wasn't the only reason, of course. Postwar prosperity, highways, automobiles, tourism, military investment and inexpensive land all played important roles. But cooling technology removed one of the biggest obstacles to living and working in Florida year-round.

The result went far beyond more comfortable houses. Air conditioning helped make possible the office buildings, hotels, shopping centers, restaurants, hospitals and entire suburban communities that followed.

Today, more than 23 million people call Florida home.

So the next time you step inside from a 95-degree Florida afternoon, consider this:

The machine cooling the room didn't just change the temperature. It helped change the map of America.

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

# Ulele | Tampa Heights

1810 N. Highland Avenue, Tampa, FL 33602 | (813) 999-4952




Image: Middleton Tampa Bay archive

Some of my favorite places around Tampa Bay are the ones that tell you something about where we live, and Ulele is a great example.

Set inside Tampa's beautifully restored historic Water Works building along the Hillsborough River, Ulele combines great food, local history, public art and one of my favorite stretches of the Tampa Riverwalk. It's the kind of place I enjoy taking someone from out of town because dinner can easily become an evening exploring Tampa Heights and the waterfront.

More than anything, Ulele represents something I love seeing throughout Tampa Bay: a city that continues to grow without forgetting the places and stories that came before it.

NEIGHBORHOOD NO. 01

# Crescent Lake

## One of St. Petersburg's neighborhoods that still feels like a neighborhood.



Image: Middleton Tampa Bay archive

Explore the Neighborhood

COMMUNITY CONNECTION

# First Pitch

**A lifelong dream. A great night for Rotary. Thousands raised for the Rotary Foundation.**




Photograph: Davida Franklin / Tampa Bay Rays. © 2026 Tampa Bay Rays Baseball Ltd.

Some experiences stay on your bucket list for a very long time. On August 14, I got to check off one of mine.

Our annual Rotary Day with the Tampa Bay Rays brought Rotarians, families and friends from across District 6950 together for a fantastic evening of baseball,  and helped raise thousands of dollars for the Rotary Foundation.

But I have to admit, there was one moment I'll never forget.

I had the incredible privilege of throwing out the ceremonial first pitch. Running onto a Major League Baseball field, walking out to the mound and throwing a baseball to a Major League catcher was something I had dreamed about for years. It was absolutely awesome.

What made the evening even better was knowing that while we were having fun together, we were also raising money that will ultimately go back into doing good in communities here at home and around the world.

Baseball, Rotary, friendship and service all came together for one really special Tampa Bay evening.

August 14, 2026 | Tampa Bay Rays Rotary Day

ONE LAST THING

# Thank You

Thank you for spending a little time with me this month. The more I travel, the more people I meet, and the more of Tampa Bay I experience, the more convinced I become that a meaningful life is built around the places we love and the people we share them with.

This month took us from a small school at the foot of Kenya's Ngong Hills back home to a Tampa Bay that is changing before our eyes. Along the way, I hope you discovered something new, learned a little more about the place we call home, or simply found a reason to look at something familiar differently.

As always, I'm here for you and the people you care about. Whether it's a conversation about real estate, a recommendation around Tampa Bay, or simply catching up over a cup of coffee, I'd always love to hear from you.

Until next month, stay curious, take care of yourself, explore somewhere new, and make time for the people and experiences that make life meaningful.

Upward, Mark Middleton

# Photographs & Credits

### Cover

Image: Middleton Tampa Bay archive

### Rooted Here. Connected Everywhere.

Portrait: Jeremiah Khokhar Photography LLC

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