

# MEET ME ON THE CORNER OF WOODLAND AND NEW YORK!

## DeLand a wondrous destination for visitors with a big appetite for history and dining

story by **LEIGH CORT**  
photos provided by **LEIGH CORT**



LEIGH CORT

If DeLand, Florida, was the winter home of famed hat maker John B. Stetson, honored with the title of ‘First Snowbird’ (1886 to 1906), you, too, can plan to run away for a few glorious days of American history while you “Savor a taste of Old Florida, a sprinkling of Real Florida and a spoonful of Vibrant

Florida” — all in one small town with a big appetite!

As you drive slowly into town, you’ll be amazed at the turn-of-the-century architecture, sprawling campus of Stetson University, towering live oak trees shading the main avenue of Woodland Boulevard and then the bustling little town with restaurants, shops and businesses taking up residency in charming buildings, homes and historic landmarks.

At every street’s turn, notice the amazing murals that demand your attention.



An Old Florida mural in DeLand

Begun in 1996, the West Volusia Tourism Authority created the ‘DeLand Mural Tour’ as a way of sharing the history of their community, and it’s one of the most fascinating self-guided travelogues of 15 historic murals. You can also arrange for a guide to walk you through the storytelling, which will open the doors to the most charming walk through downtown and history!

You don’t have to experience the entire collection at once. Visible on approximately 12 square blocks, each cleverly designed depiction takes you back in time to Wild West Volusia and the St. Johns River in the 19th Century, bicycling on the boulevard set in the 1920s, riverboat landing in the 1870s, DeLand at the turn of the century ... even the 1942 Naval Air Station that describes DeLand’s large role during World War II

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when it donated its airport to the war effort.

Once you've arrived, there is little doubt why DeLand was the first community in Florida to receive the Main Street designation and recognized as a "Great American Main Street" winner in 1997 by the National Trust for Historic Preservation Main Street Center.

This isn't the only award; in 2017, Main Street DeLand won the "America's Main Streets" contest presented by IndependentWeStand.org.

From beginning to end, this little hamlet is an authentic, thriving and great American downtown! It's so walkable. It's so discoverable. It's so adoptable (meaning that you'll fall in love with it within your first few hours).



Melissa Reed, proprietor of The Table

**A TASTE OF DINING**

Whether you're staying over for a Sunday or arriving on a Sunday, DeLand's "The Table" has created a globally inspired, boundary-pushing brunch that you might not find anywhere else.

Owner Melissa Reed is influential in shaping the local dining scene with her unique concept of inviting guests to order everything on the menu for one very modest price. Although you might think they are more "tasting" size, start with six dishes, and then if you're

still hungry, order six others to explore the full bottomless plate experience. With at least 15 dishes, you might select Southern fried chicken with three-pepper jelly, smoked salmon crostini, apple cinnamon French toast, custom omelets, shrimp and grits, and onward.

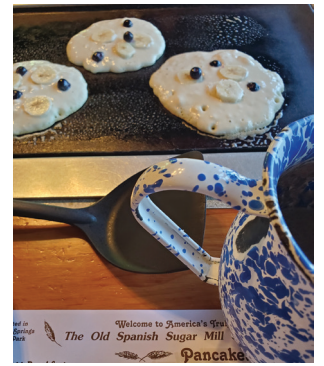
It's also a marvelous shopping boutique, too — upstairs from the stylish brunch garden. Her in-house bakery, Downtown Dough Co., is surrounded by culinary gifts from charcuterie boards and candles to local curated artisan treasures.

In a small city where many different types of people bring their expertise and traditions, it's not a surprise that the restaurant scene feels uniquely ever-evolving. Discerning visitors find it easy to seek out something delicious at every meal — especially when something as outrageously fun for breakfast or lunch is right around the corner. A short 10-minute drive from downtown is the DeLeon Springs State Park, a "real" Florida spring where visitors can swim in the tranquil waters, rent a kayak or canoe, fish for bass and bream or hike the half-mile paved nature trail. The spring provides access to the Lake Woodruff National Wildlife Refuge with 18,000 acres of lakes, creeks and marshes.

Bring a picnic or get prepared for one of the most entertaining meals that delights every age. The Old Spanish Sugar Mill Grill & Griddle House invites guests to be creative; make your own pancakes at a comfy table with a "griddle in the middle." Eat them plain or fancy with fresh fruits, pecans, chocolate chips — even peanut butter. Of course, you can indulge in a normal menu of sandwiches and salads but the reason why this

unforgettable restaurant has been around since 1961 are the pancakes!

With more than 20 places to enjoy a cornucopia of delicious menus, a stop-in for a late afternoon cappuccino at The Boston Coffeehouse is more than just picturesque. Step into the cozy brick-walled café where you don't have to snag a table. Enter into this intimate Colonial Boston-designed hip eatery that could be anywhere. There is a vibrant scene of patrons from Stetson University students and shopkeepers to visitors and dedicated locals.



Make-them-yourself pancakes



Shrimp and Grits at Cress

For the discerning diner, Cress is at the top of locals' and visitors' cuisine list. Winning the 22nd Annual Orlando Sentinel Foodie Award in 2020 is no small feat — and this tiny restaurant always has a long reservation list for dining indoors or at one of their streetside outdoor tables. Their menu, a wonderful easy-to-pilot one page, represents their commitment to sourcing and

supporting local farmers while drawing inspiration from global favorites. If you read the ingredients, you'll be enchanted with short rib stroganoff, Indian-inspired curries, local fish creations, braised leg of lamb — even shrimp and grits. The preparations are distinctive, and you'll leave with a feeling of gastronomic satisfaction.

A short scenic drive from downtown DeLand on the original train route is another popular eatery, The DeLand Stockyard. If you're a train lover, there are stories galore about one of the "Great American Stations" in DeLand.

Built in 1918 in Craftsman style for the Atlantic Coast Line Railroad, it has been restored over the years and is currently an Amtrak and CSX stop. In its early days, circa 1884, DeLand had six depots coming to the city. And was originally built as passenger and freight depots for wealthy northerners shipping their automobiles via baggage car. Subsequently John B. Stetson was easily able to ship oranges... and the present facility is the only surviving depot in the area.

The restaurant, dating to the 1920s, was originally a lodge along that era's bustling main thoroughfare used by merchants to transport goods to the docks on the nearby St. Johns River. Enjoying its pedigree for nearly 100 years, its (changing names) and story is dotted with moonshine, prohibition, romance and subsequently great food.

Today, the Stockyard is open nightly for dinner in the original building or you can choose seating outdoors on a fabulous deck



Onion loaf

with a long view of the train tracks with daily scheduled trains that really add to the ambience. It's a perfectly balanced menu of steaks, seafood, casual contemporary fare, burgers and the best "sweet onion ring loaf" this side of the tracks!



Cabin on the Lake, Lake Helen

serene Lake Helen is your style, consider Cabin on the Lake for its privacy, lakefront boating, fishing and chilling.

Olga and hubby Hugo offer a surprising blend of English country cottage and romance that only takes a 15-minute

**WHERE TO STAY**

If you have chosen to secure accommodations in the historic district at the Courtyard by Marriott or a mainstream chain hotel throughout the business district, you can count on enjoying a pedestrian adventure that takes you through delightful narrow back streets and an easy-to-navigate network of boutique shopping, dining, galleries and museums.

But if a personalized and intimate bed-and-breakfast on

rural drive to enjoy the vibe of DeLand. Welcoming you upon arrival, with only three themed rooms, you might choose to unwind immediately on the private dock and take a country stroll in the sleepy neighborhood nicknamed "The Gem of Florida." Then upon your return any evening, you'll realize this little piece of heaven is a superb balance to the hustle and bustle of downtown DeLand.

With two acres of land and a grassy lawn, guests love the screened porch and picnic tables, plus their pet-friendly invitation to feel at home throughout the entire property. Imagine this "best kept secret" for now — only a short drive to New Smyrna Beach, Daytona Beach, Deltona, Wekiva Springs, Port Orange, Winter Springs and a wealth of surrounding towns.

**THINGS TO DO**

Without question, DeLand is a cultural melting pot where the "rich and famous" played a starring role in shaping the town's warmth and vigor more than 150 years ago. There are so many things to do in a small town setting that visitors find irresistible.

- The Athens Theater — celebrating its 100th birthday. One of the few existing examples of true American theater that has a rich season of dramatic, musical productions in every season.
- The Stetson Mansion — winning TripAdvisor's "Top 10 Rated Attractions in the USA" — a do-not-miss 1886 Gilded Age mansion, the grandest most innovative home ever built in Florida prior to 1900.

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