



BEST COMEBACK

The River District

The River District in downtown Fort Myers saw some of its darkest days in the last few years. Even as the city spent millions to remake itself into a new-urban paradise, business owners decried a dubious mix of impassable streets (torn up for a beautification and utility replacement project) and the sinking economy. High-rise towers in downtown inspired comparisons to Stanley Kubrick's deserted hotel in "The Shining," and the ghostly streets often resembled scenes from George Romero's zombie movie (filmed in downtown in 1983), "Day of the Dead."

But "momentum is everything," as Mayor Jim Humphrey said last year when he spoke in favor of financing a Halloween party that drew thousands to The River District. Now most of the main streets are reopened and a handful of new shops, art galleries and eateries have cropped up. There's even a boutique hotel, and regular events like ArtWalk and Friday Night Live flood downtown with foot traffic.

Though the high-rises still aren't filling up, Councilman Mike Flanders urges patience and says there's more to come, like a planned multi-use development on the river. The buzz among people who haven't seen The River District recently is one of surprise and delight.



FLORIDA WEEKLY FILE PHOTO

The monthly Art Walk brings thousands to downtown Fort Myers on the first Friday of every month.

BEST COUNTY DEPARTMENT

Lee County Parks and Recreation

Forget budgetary priorities of "core services" such as police and fire. We all need places to throw a baseball to our kids and walk a trail among the cypress trees. Lee County Parks and Rec-

reation oversees the tiniest neighborhood parks to the longest linear ones, with Lakes Regional Park as its Central Park equivalent. Beach access and Conservation 20/20 preserves showcase the county's green side at a minimal fee for visitors. The stadiums in which the Minnesota Twins and Boston Red Sox play bring America's favorite pastime here each spring. Kids splash in four year-round pools and attend dozens of summer camps with affordable fees. All play-

grounds are ADA accessible. Little extras — fragrance gardens, train villages, fitness centers and canoe and kayak trails — dot Lee County. No matter what the economy does to us, we all have a peaceful place to reflect and recreate, thanks to this department.

Details: 533-7275 or www.LeeParks.org

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