

# SIMPLY THE BEST

From an overachieving Pomeranian to a game-changing CEO, from Cinderella's Castle to Tiffany's mansion, we've got it all in our annual salute to the coolest people and places in Orlando.





## THINK TANK

### Winter Park Institute

If only the Winter Park Institute would recruit NBA stars. Alas: All it has done since its inception four years ago has been to recruit brilliant authors, intellectuals and scientists to Rollins College for free lectures and other events. The list of luminaries includes Paul Simon, Gloria Steinem, Robert F. Kennedy, Julian Bond, David McCullough, Jean-Michel Cousteau, Jane Goodall and Billy Collins. Collins, a two-time U.S. poet laureate described by *The New York Times* as “the most popular poet in America,” was the institute’s inaugural scholar. He recently purchased a home in Winter Park and is now a full-time resident and the Institute’s Senior Distinguished Fellow. [rollins.edu/wpi](http://rollins.edu/wpi)

## REMODELERS

### Victor Farina and Jonathan McGrath

When the homebuilding market collapsed several years ago, a number of builders decided to become remodelers. But there are a handful of longtime remodeling pros in Central Florida who understand that rehabbing an old house is a very different challenge from building a new one. Farina & Sons, family owned for 61 years, likely leads the pack in terms of industry awards, and president Victor Farina has become the go-to remodeler in such elegant but aging neighborhoods as Rose Isle. Jonathan McGrath and his wife, Marion, have operated Jonathan McGrath Construction for more than 28 years, and have earned high marks for their industry involve-

ment; Marion is immediate past president of the Home Builders Association of Metro Orlando – the first remodeler ever to hold that post. [farinaandsons.com](http://farinaandsons.com); [jonathanmcgrathconstruction.com](http://jonathanmcgrathconstruction.com)

## HIGH-END REALTORS

### Mick Knight and Fannie Hillman

When you see homes being bought and sold locally in the seven-figure stratosphere, chances are good that either Mick Knight or Fannie Hillman have been involved in the transaction. Knight, son of legendary realtor Pat Wetnight, is affiliated with Coldwell Banker’s Winter Park office and ranks among the top one-half of one percent of all Coldwell Banker agents in the world. Hillman, founder of Fannie Hillman & Associates, was

a teacher when she got into real estate nearly 40 years ago. Today Hillman’s office boasts some 50 associates, and her ubiquitous red signs can be seen all over Winter Park’s and Orlando’s finest old neighborhoods. The firm’s philanthropic work is also admirable. [floridamoves.com](http://floridamoves.com); [fanniehillman.com](http://fanniehillman.com)

## STAINED-GLASS GENIUS

### Louis Comfort Tiffany

Take a short walk down one of the Morse Museum’s sunlit corridors and suddenly it’s as though you’ve stepped inside one of Louis Comfort Tiffany’s fabulous, century-old stained-glass windows. Such is the effect of the galleries devoted to Tiffany’s lost Long Island mansion, Laurelton Hall, which he decorated with massive, multicolored windows, bizarrely beautiful chandeliers and other over-the-top elements crafted by his artisans. Simply put: the Winter Park exhibit is a national treasure. [morsemuseum.org](http://morsemuseum.org)

## GALAS

### Neanderthal Ball

Call it Social Darwinism in action. The Neanderthal Ball goes all the way back to the Stone Age, at least in spirit. Supporters of the Orlando Science Center invade the DinoDigs exhibit wearing such cavemen couture as faux fur and animal prints. Funds raised help kids from financially disadvantaged families enjoy the center’s educational programs. [osc.org](http://osc.org)

### Headdress Ball

The flashiest and most outrageous of Orlando’s galas dates back to 1987, when interior designer Sam Ewing lost a dear friend, Patrick Bryan, to AIDS. In Bryan’s memory, Ewing and fellow designer Hattie Wolfe concocted a fundraiser that features flamboyant, Carmen Miranda-style headdresses and Las Vegas-style entertainment. Proceeds benefit The Hope and Help Center of Central Florida,

PHOTOS: (LEFT) COURTESY DISNEY; (TOP RIGHT) COURTESY FLORIDA ZOO AND BOTANICAL GARDENS; (BOTTOM RIGHT) COURTESY UCF OF CENTRAL FLORIDA



## ROLE-MODELING INSECT

### The Australian Walking Stick

A bug exhibit sponsored by a bug exterminator: Sounds like the darkly ironic premise of a horror movie. But it's real, all right. It's the Massey Services Insect Zoo, a part of the Central Florida Zoo and Botanical Gardens in Sanford. One of the strangest of the exotic creepy-crawlies on display is the Australian Walking Stick. This bug from down under not only looks like the leafy stem of a plant but instinctively sways as if it's a branch in the breeze. It's also a role model for safe-sex practices: If it's averse to dating around, a female can reproduce asexually. [centralfloridazoo.org](http://centralfloridazoo.org)

whose mission is to prevent the spread of HIV/AIDS. [beaddressball.org](http://beaddressball.org)

### Black and White Gala

This ultra-formal affair grew from hotelier Henri Landwirth's heart-tugging crusade to give sick children and their families dream vacations. In 1989 Landwirth's charity, Give Kids the

World, debuted Give Kids the World Village, now a 70-acre resort with 96 two-bedroom villas. Thanks to funds raised through the gala and other sources, the facility has been able to welcome more than 115,000 children with life-threatening illnesses, along with their families, for free, weeklong getaways. [gktw.org](http://gktw.org)

### One Night

Both a benefit for and celebration of Orlando Regional Medical Center's Level One Trauma Center, One Night is sponsored by the Orlando Health Foundation. Now in its sixth year, the event features a champagne reception, silent auction, dinner and a lavish multimedia program depicting real-life, near-miraculous medical rescues. Last year, by the way, the center treated more than 4,000 trauma patients. [onenightsaveslives.com](http://onenightsaveslives.com)

### Heart Ball

Sometimes speakers at the Heart Ball ask everyone who's had a loved one affected by heart disease to stand up. It's rare to see anyone left sitting. The event, a tribute to donors, patients, health-care staffers and volunteers, is part of a nationwide campaign that raised \$51 million for programs sponsored by the American Heart Association. [americanheart.org](http://americanheart.org) ●

*Laura Bluhm, Rona Gindin, Sophia Graniela, Marianne Ilunga, Meghan Lindner, Michael McLeod, Randy Noles, Elizabeth Prats, Chelsea St. John and Harry Wessel contributed to this story.*

## GALAS

### UCP of Central Florida Gala

The United Cerebral Palsy of Central Florida Gala, which benefits children with developmental disabilities, is traditionally hosted by former University of Central Florida drama major Cheryl Hines, of *Curb Your Enthusiasm* and *Suburgatory* fame. The homegrown TV star has been a nationwide crusader for children with disabilities ever since her nephew, Michael, was diagnosed with cerebral palsy seven years ago. [ucpcf.org](http://ucpcf.org)

