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# Florida in the Wintertime

**FIRST, A QUICK INTRODUCTION:** I'm the managing editor of the Meetings + Events Media group (in which we have nine regional titles) and am filling in for former editor Nancy DePalma as she moves on to bigger and better endeavors. Nancy helped shape this magazine into what it is today, launching *New Jersey Meetings + Events* and *Pennsylvania Meetings + Events* five years ago with former associate publisher Maureen Hennessey. Today, *Northeast Meetings + Events* covers a larger area than in its original iteration (New York City's five boroughs and Westchester and Rockland counties; Connecticut around Stamford/Greenwich; New Jersey; and now Pennsylvania) and I'm thrilled to be part of it.

In this issue, though, we're going south to the Sunshine State.

Florida might get a bad rap for its strange news stories but dig deeper and you'll discover it's a pretty magical place (and no, not just because of Disney World). Take the rare coastal dune lakes in South Walton for example, or the fact that Miami used to be a mangrove swamp before being developed in the 1920s (not to mention that it's the only place in the U.S. that's bordered by two national parks). St. Petersburg holds the Guinness World Record for logging the most consecutive days of sunshine ever recorded and St. Augustine is the oldest city in the U.S. Tampa is completely overhauling its downtown waterfront area, and downtown Jacksonville is booming with a planned 1,100 hotel rooms. When it comes to meetings and events, there are endless options to accommodate your group's size and interest; flip to page 26 to learn more.

Finally, a note about the artist responsible for my illustrated photo. Elke Reva Sudin founded her company, Drawing Booth, in 2014. Juxtaposing the use of technology and good old-fashioned drawing by hand, she made a business out of her passion for drawing flash-portraits. She captivated everyone who attended the *Northeast Meetings + Events* Best of 2018 event (photos on page 46) with her ability to work a room and sketch her subjects in just a few minutes; with offices in New York, LA, Chicago and London, she and her team of artists are available across the country to digitize hand-drawn portraits on the spot ([drawingbooth.com](http://drawingbooth.com)).

*Morgan Halaska*

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