

SUMMER FUN - with or without sun

These summer activities are a great way to beat the heat.

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During the school year, kids usually count down the days until summer vacation. They can't wait to go to summer camp, play outside and have a few homework-free months filled with nothing but fun.

For most adults, the work does not stop when the summer months roll around, but don't worry, you can still have plenty of summer fun with your families. Spending time together in the summer doesn't have to mean going off on a week-long vacation. North Central Florida is full of fun summer activities that are perfect for the whole family. Whether you're looking to get out on the water, spend an evening under the stars or just get out of the house for a fun day of exploring, you can find everything you need within a few hours of home.

Here are some of our suggestions for summer activities that are fun for the whole family:

Paddleboard yoga

If you're looking to get out on the water and try something new, standup paddleboard yoga is a great way to get outside and put some fun activity in your day.

The SUP Yoga Center in St. Augustine offers standup paddleboard yoga classes throughout the summer. Located less than two hours from Columbia County, it's the perfect place to try out this fun water activity.

Participants will get up on paddle boards and float out to SUP Yoga Center's floating studio. Most of the classes are done in Salt Run, St. Augustine. On some special occasions, weather dependent, they will take classes to other locations. Children younger than 16 must be accompanied by a parent or guardian.

Although paddleboard yoga is a very physical activity, it's something fun to do as a family.

"Our classes are family friendly, as long as you can swim!" SUP Yoga Center owner Jess Amendola wrote in an email.

Even if you're a yoga newbie or have never been paddleboarding before, spending time in the ocean with your family is a sweet summer memory, and by doing something new and different it will ensure that it's an experience none of you will ever forget.

Free Fridays Concert Series

They say the best things in life are free. Well, during the summer in downtown Gainesville, you can enjoy some of the best musicians and bands in the area without having to spend a dime. The Free Fridays Concert Series in Gainesville is a great way to get out and do something fun with the family without breaking the bank.

Nearly every Friday night from May through October, Gainesville's Downtown Cultural Series hosts a band or artist as part of the Free Fridays Concert Series. These concerts under the stars showcase diverse musical acts, ranging from classic rock to reggae to blues and more. Each Friday from 8 to 10 p.m. features a new band that brings their original and cover turns to the concert stage.

According to City of Gainesville Events Coordinator David Ballard, the Free Fridays Concert Series is a great family-friendly event.

"A lot of people bring their kids," Ballard said. "They usually bring the whole family."

The concerts take place at the Bo Diddley Plaza, located at 111 E. University Ave. in Gainesville. People can bring lawn chairs, blankets, snacks and drinks and set up camp to watch a rockin' musical performance. While alcohol is prohibited, there are several cafes

SUMMER continued on 4D



COURTESY

Students practice their warrior pose during a paddleboard yoga class at the SUP Yoga Center in St. Augustine.



KATRINA POGGIO/Lake City Reporter

North Central Florida is surrounded by some of the most beautiful and unique state parks. Flowers like these bloom throughout the flower gardens at Alfred B. Maclay Gardens State Park in Tallahassee.

Shrimp — 'the fruit of the sea' — cooked 4 different ways

Forrest Gump, one of my favorite movies, had many memorable lines — "... Life was like a box of chocolates. You never know what you're gonna get" and, probably most famous of all, "Run, Forrest! Run!" Some of you might have missed this one by Pvt. Benjamin Buford "Bubba" Blue, "Anyway, like I was sayin', shrimp is the fruit of the sea. You can barbecue it, boil it, broil it, bake it, sauté it. Dey's uh, shrimp-kabobs, shrimp creole, shrimp gumbo. Pan fried, deep fried, stir-fried."

Living in North Florida, we have access to some of the freshest shrimp around. If you are on coast or in the panhandle, there are seafood houses in many coastal towns that

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offer some of the best. And our local Publix typically has fresh Mayport shrimp available. I just implore you NOT to purchase shrimp that's farm raised from other parts of the world or frozen. They all are treated with preservatives that leave a yucky after taste and honestly, why bother when you can get the good

stuff anyway.

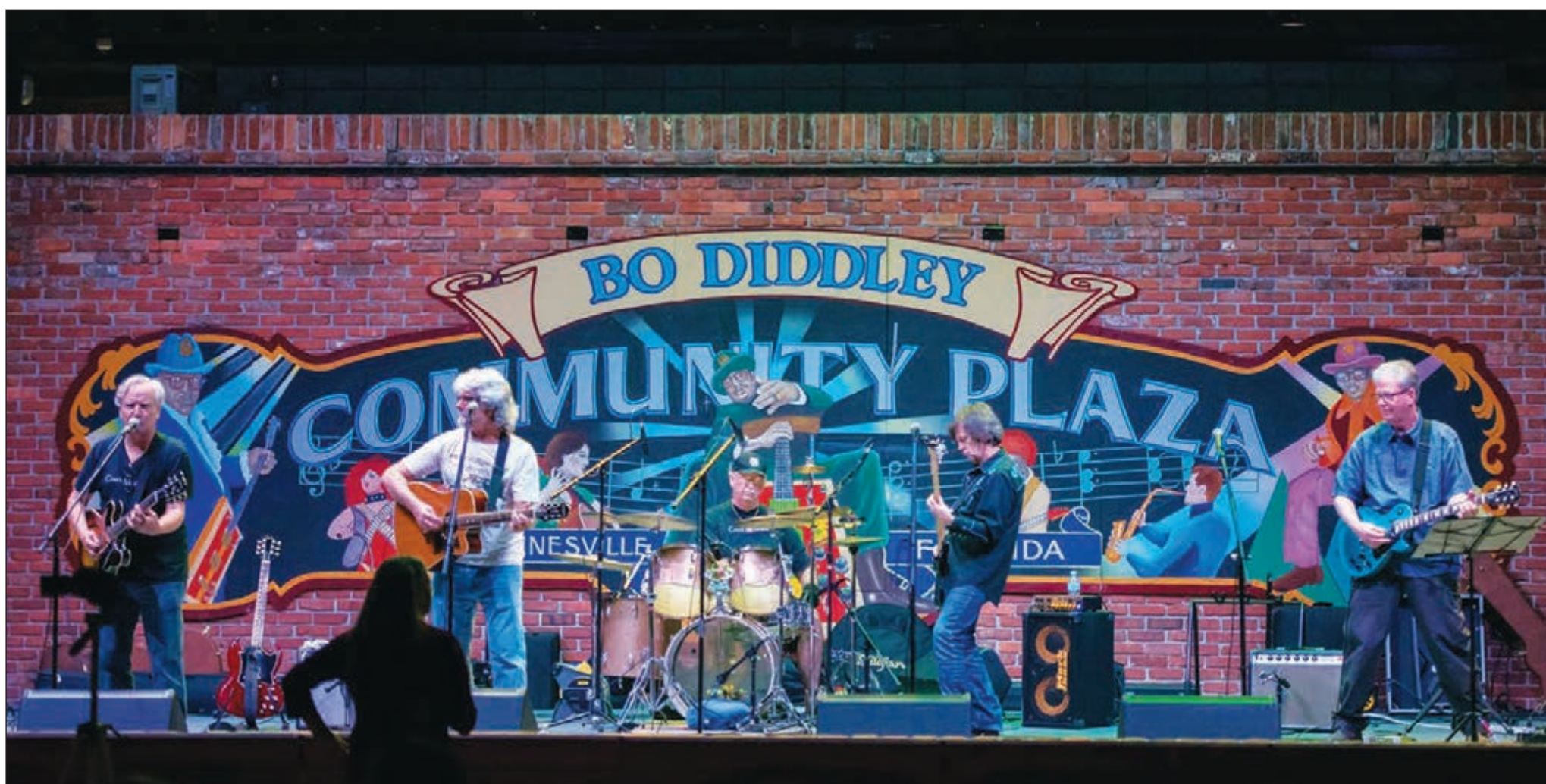
In addition to the well-known pink, brown and tiger shrimp, if you're lucky you can find royal reds at your local seafood house. These little crustaceans are one of the most delicate native shrimp species in our area with a soft texture and sweet flavor, similar to lobster. These vibrant red shrimp never see the light of day, preferring the cold dark depths out at the edge where the gently sloping bottom of the Gulf drops abruptly off the continental shelf to depths of over a half mile down. Because these shrimp are caught far out at sea, they are immediately flash frozen, guaranteeing they are fresh when they arrive at the seafood house. Steamed,



STOCK PHOTO

SHRIMP continued on 4D

Shrimp scampi can be served by itself, in butter or over pasta for a heartier entrée.



SUMMER

Continued From 1D

surrounding the plaza that serve alcohol for the adults.

The Free Fridays Concert Series is fun for the whole family and a great way to spend an evening together under the stars.

Explore Florida State Parks

North Central Florida is surrounded by some of the most beautiful and unique state parks. In fact, there are 31 state parks in North Central Florida, not to mention the others located just a couple hours away in Jacksonville, Panama City and other parts of Northeast and Northwest Florida. That means there's plenty of exploring to do right in our own backyards.

There are so many state parks surrounding Columbia County that you could visit a new one every week of summer and still have some leftover. You can explore different terrains of Florida, from tree-filled forests to gardens to beaches.

You and your family can make a list of all your favorite state parks and have a "State Park Summer Bucket List." Whether you want to search for seashells and go fishing at St. George Island State Park in the Panhandle, walk through the beautiful flower gardens at

Alfred B. Maclay Gardens State Park in Tallahassee or learn lessons in Florida history at Stephen Foster Folk Culture Center State Park, there's something for everybody.

If you're having trouble finding a place to start, visit www.floridastateparks.org. The website has information on every state park, as well as a list of activities you can do at each one.

Florida is full of beautiful places and it's time to take advantage of it.

Go on a nighttime adventure

There are several places around North Florida that have special events going on at night, which is a perfect way to get out of the house and spend time together without having to deal with the, at times, unbearable Florida heat.

The Jacksonville Zoo has a "Night At The Zoo" event during the summer months. These evening extravaganzas feature live music, animal encounters, keeper talks, food trucks and a bounce house. Each night has a different theme, including a back-to-school bash featuring the Navy Southeast Jazz Band on Aug. 11.

If you're looking for something closer to home, the Spirit of the Suwannee Music Park has concerts and performances nearly every weekend throughout the summer. These are great for spending time with your parents, siblings or family friends. Spend the night listening to great bands at the Music Hall while relaxing out of the Florida sun.



COURTESY PHOTOS

TOP: A band performs at the Bo Diddley Community Plaza in Gainesville during the Free Fridays Concert Series. As a part of Gainesville's Downtown Cultural Series, the city hosts free concerts in the Bo Diddley Plaza nearly every Friday night now through October. **ABOVE:** A lion roams his cage at the Jacksonville Zoo. You can see lions and all sorts of other animals at the Jacksonville Zoo's "Night At The Zoo" events.

SHRIMP

Continued From 1D

grilled or sautéed, these sweet shrimp are delicious. Due to their more delicate texture, cook times for these shrimp must be cut almost in half.

Here's a very simple recipe for royal reds that only needs a side salad and steaming hot bread to make a meal fit for a king or queen.

Royal red shrimp scampi

1 pound of royal red shrimp, peeled and deveined
 ½ stick of butter (or more if you like)
 Juice of one lemon
 2 cloves of garlic, minced
 2 tablespoons of chopped fresh parsley

In medium skillet over medium heat, melt butter. Add garlic and lemon juice, cooking a minute or two. Add peeled and deveined shrimp and cook over medium heat for 2-3 minutes or until shrimp just begins to curl and becomes opaque. Remove from heat and sprinkle with chopped fresh parsley. You can also serve over cooked angel hair pasta for a heartier entrée.

Here are a few other shrimp recipes that are easy to make and are sure to please your family or guests any night of the week. The New Orleans BBQ shrimp recipe is a rendition of the famous recipe created by Pascal's Manale. While not the exact same, it's still pretty darn tasty. It's one of those dishes that you sop all the juices up with fresh French bread and then probably



STOCK PHOTO

Mary Kay's pickled shrimp recipe is a mish-mash of the best from each of the recipes that she has tried.

ask for more bread.

Mary Kay's Fabulous New Orleans BBQ Shrimp

2 pounds of shrimp (tails on)
 2 sticks of butter (not margarine)
 ½ cup of Canola/vegetable oil
 3 teaspoons of chopped fresh garlic
 4 bay leaves, crushed
 2 teaspoons of rosemary, crushed
 ½ teaspoon of basil
 ½ teaspoon of oregano
 ½ teaspoon of salt
 ½ teaspoon of cayenne pepper
 1 tablespoon of Paprika
 1 teaspoon of fresh

ground black pepper
 2 tablespoons of fresh lemon juice
 ¼ cup of Worcestershire sauce
 ¼ cup of hot sauce (Tabasco is preferable)
 Melt butter, add oil. Add all other ingredients except shrimp. Cook over medium heat until it begins to boil. Reduce heat. Stirring frequently, cook for 7-10 minutes. Remove from heat and allow to sit for 30 minutes. Add shrimp, mixing well. Cook over medium heat until shrimp are pink — about 6-8 minutes. Put pan in 450 degree oven for 10 minutes. Serve in bowls with sauce and crusty

bread for dipping. Serves four.

One of my lifelong friends made this next shrimp dish during one of our girls' weekends. It is delicious!

Greek feta shrimp

1 cup of chopped fresh tomatoes
 ¼ cup of olive oil
 4 teaspoons of chopped garlic
 1 pound of shrimp
 1 can of artichokes, drained and chopped
 1½ cups of feta cheese
 3 tablespoons of lemon juice
 3 tablespoons of fresh

parsley, chopped
 1½ tablespoon of oregano
 Angel hair pasta, cooked according to package directions
 Sauté garlic in olive oil. Add all other ingredients except shrimp and feta cheese and cook over medium heat about five minutes. Add shrimp and cook five minutes. Add feta cheese and stir briefly. Serve over cooked pasta. Serves four.

Pickled shrimp is a true southern recipe and there are versions that come from Cajun Country, Low Country and even from our friends above the Mason-

Dixon line. The one below has been adjusted over the years and is a mish-mash of the best from each that I've tried.

Pickled shrimp

3 pounds of shelled and deveined shrimp, boiled or steamed just until pink — do not overcook
 2 medium onions, quartered and thinly sliced
 1 teaspoon of celery seeds
 1 cup of extra virgin olive oil
 6 garlic cloves, thinly sliced
 4 lemons, preferably organic, thinly sliced
 14 bay leaves
 1 teaspoon of fennel seeds (optional)
 1 teaspoon of mustard seeds
 1 jar of capers, drained
 4 dried hot chili peppers or 1 tablespoon of red pepper flakes
 1 teaspoon of freshly ground black pepper
 1 teaspoon of coriander seeds
 ¼ cup of white wine vinegar
 ½ cup of freshly squeezed lemon juice.
 Combine all ingredients in a large bowl and toss thoroughly. Transfer to a serving bowl or glass crock with lid (you can get one at your local big box store and it makes for a really pretty presentation). Cover and refrigerate for at least six hours or overnight. Remove from refrigerator one hour before serving. Remove bay leaves. Serve with toothpicks. Fifteen to 20 servings.

■ Mary Kay Rutan is a Columbia County resident who loves good food and fun. Her column on favorite recipes and restaurants appears twice a month.