

Columbia County

Tourism News

Special Events

Sept. 18, 2011
Old Time Dance
O'Leno State Park
386-454-1853.

Sept 21, 12:00 Noon
**Columbia County
Tourist Development
Council Meeting,**
West Branch Public Library,
Hall of Fame Drive.

Sept. 22-24, 2011
Blackwater Music Festival
Spirit of the
Suwannee Music Park
386-364-1683

Oct. 13-20, 2011
**Fourth Annual
Paddle Florida**
123 mile canoeing/kayaking
trip on the Suwannee River,
starts at Spirit of the
Suwannee Music Park.
Info at www.paddleflorida.org

Oct. 15-16, 2011
**10th Annual
Suwannee River
Challenge.**
Three different length
canoe/kayak distances.
407-227-5606.

Oct. 20-23 2011
**15th Annual
Magnolia Fest.**
Spirit of the
Suwannee Music Park
386-364-1683

Gateway to Florida

September 2011

Mark Your Calendar—You Are Invited

Wednesday, October 5, 2011

11:00 am—3:00 pm

Media Event

We are inviting all businesses in the tri-county area to come to the Spirit of the Suwannee Music Park to meet advertising representatives from print media, radio and internet. This is a great opportunity to meet the media all at one time. Complete information on the event will be coming in the next week.

U.S. Travelers are pressed for time

According to a recent article in the *Chicago Tribune*, a recent snapshot of U.S. travelers shows them to be a stressed-out bunch, who remain sensitive to price and continue to suffer from a syndrome known as “time poverty.”

When it comes to finances, travelers say they most concerned about almost everything: the cost of gas, cost of airline tickets and the economy in general. More than a third say they are using coupons more often, and 31 percent say they're waiting for sales more frequently. However, despite the nervousness about the economy there is good news for the tourism industry. The number of travelers who said they are planning to take a leisure trip in the near future is rising with 61% of those surveyed saying they plan to take a vacation by October, up from 56% at this time last year.

The reluctance to pay high prices has been extremely noticeable in the Orlando market with rates up only five percent in the first half of 2011. Meanwhile, Columbia County has seen room rates rise 8.3% While vacation sales and discounts are growing in popularity, the “long-form vacation” is losing ground as travelers are abandoning the week-long escape and looking instead for close, quick getaways. According to data from VISIT FLORIDA, Orlando drew more than half of its 38.3 million domestic visitors from within the Sunshine State.

Tourism numbers still strong in Columbia County

According to the Florida Department of Revenue, Local Option Tourist Development Tax (bed tax) collections were \$52,497 for June of 2011. That compares to collections of \$50,715 for the same month in 2010. Collections have been up each month during the first half of the year. According to Smith Travel, occupancy in Columbia County was up 5.9% for July with Average Daily Rate up 8.3% to \$68.43 and total room revenues increasing 17.7%.

Football Fridays scheduled for Florida

Welcome Center

The Columbia County Tourist Development Council will be operating a booth inside the Florida Welcome Center on I-75 at the state line to promote Lake City and the Suwannee River Valley. The booth will be manned on the Friday prior to every University of Florida home football game and will target Gator fans and those of the visiting school to stay in our area both for the game and for future visits to the area. In addition, the Lake City Holiday Inn Suites will be promoting its "Journey to the Swamp" promotion which packages a two-night hotel stay, round-trip motor coach transportation to Florida Field and a full breakfast on both days of their stay. Bus transportation is available for all of the Florida home games and reservation for the bus can be made by calling 1-877-463-2285, ext. 1150. The motor coach transportation cost is \$25.00 per person.

Additionally, the Suwannee River Valley will be featured in all five of the Florida Welcome Centers during the months of September and October with a three-day vacation package.

State park hosts Civil War Expo

The Olustee Battlefield Historic State Park will host the annual Civil War Expo on Saturday, Sept. 24. The Expo is a day of authentic military drills, music and storytelling, exhibits, period artisans and the war's traveling merchants. The event features re-enactors portraying both military and civilian life during the Civil War. The Expo will be open to the public from 10:00 a.m. until 3:00 p.m. A donation of \$5.00 per car is requested. Call 386-397-7009 for additional information.

The Stephen Foster Folk Culture Center will be hosting Florida Frontier Day on Saturday, Oct. 1 in Craft Square. The event features the early days of farming, pottery, blacksmithing, twin making, game playing, along with arts and crafts. For additional information call the park Gift Shop at 386-397-1920

O'Leno State Park to host Alligator Fest

During the weekend of Oct. 14-16, O'Leno State Park will again play host to the annual Alligator Fest. The event is held in memory of the years before 1859 when Lake City was called Alligator. There is also a re-enactment of the 1836 Battle of San Felasco Hammock. In addition, the event features a Native American festival with music and dancing, living history camps, demonstrations of historic skills, traders, craftspeople and food vendors. There is free admission for school groups, the fee is \$5 per vehicle holding 2-8 people, \$4 for a single occupant vehicle and \$2 for pedestrians and bicyclists. Additional information can be obtained by calling 386-454-1853.

BBQ Competition coming to the fairgrounds

The Columbia County Fairgrounds will be hosting the 3rd Annual Smokin' Pig B-B-Q Fest during the weekend of Sept. 16-17. Competition cook teams from across the Southeast will be participating in the event. In addition, the music group China Grove, which is a tribute band of the Doobie Brothers, will be performing on Friday evening. A special guest will be Myron Mixon of the The Learning Channel (TLC) Pitmasters television show. For additional information contact 386-752-8822.

Schedule of events for our area

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Oct. 15-16, 10th Annual Suwannee River Challenge. Three different length canoe/kayak distances. Information by calling 407-227-5606.

Sports council is formed for Southside Complex

A new sports council has been formed to establish priorities and goals for upgrading the impressive Southside Sports Complex. The council, chaired by County Commissioner Jody DuPree, includes Jack Muenchen of baseball, Greg Kennon of girls softball, Scott Everett of soccer, Columbia County Landscaping and Parks Director Clint Pittman, Columbia County Recreation Director Mario Coppock and tournament promoter Randall Plyn. During 2011, we have scheduled a total of 60 sports tournaments in the Suwannee River Valley. Of that total, two events were hosted in Fort White, one was held in Live Oak, eight of the tournaments were cancelled and 38 of the tournaments have already been hosted in Lake City at the Southside Complex with 11 additional tournaments scheduled during the upcoming four months.
