

Celebration, Florida

28°32′N 81°54′W﻿ / ﻿28.533°N 81.9°W﻿ / 28.533; -81.9 (http://tools.wikimedia.de/~magnus/geo/geohack.php?params=28.320059_N_-81.540149_E_type:city_region:US)
From Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia

Celebration, Florida is a census-designated place and an unincorporated master-planned community in Osceola County in the U.S. state of Florida, near Walt Disney World Resort. It was developed by The Walt Disney Company.



Celebration is connected directly to the Walt Disney World parks and resorts by World Drive; the north end of World Drive begins near the Magic Kingdom and its south end connects to Celebration Boulevard, allowing Celebration residents and guests to drive to Disney property without having to use any busy thoroughfares. However, Celebration residents are not treated any differently than other Disney guests and do not receive free park passes, discounts, or any sort of preferential treatment. In fact Disney Cast Members receive dining and shopping discounts throughout the area, including downtown Celebration, while Celebration residents do not. With the rising population, Disney has divested most of its control over Celebration in the years since it founded the town, although several Disney business units occupy many of the town's office buildings.

Recently, some residents have petitioned that the town incorporate; a ballot measure could go before voters in 2007.

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History

Celebration was founded in 1994 on Disney-owned land that had previously been undeveloped (and used for relocating alligators which had been caught near Disney guest areas). Celebration was de-annexed from the Reedy Creek Improvement District. Another version is that Celebration was intended to fulfill Walt Disney's original vision for EPCOT as an experimental location where people could live. Interestingly, the original 1967 borders of the City of Reedy Creek covered much of the land that is now Celebration, before being moved northeast in 1969 and soon being renamed to the City of Lake Buena Vista. At that time, this city (along with the City of Bay Lake) covered only portions of the Reedy Creek Improvement District, presumably the portions that were being considered for communities.



Market Street, downtown Celebration

The philosophy behind the town is that it is to be a friendly,



Town Hall and Post Office, downtown

neighborly place, drawing its design and its sensibility from such places as Savannah, Georgia; Nantucket, Massachusetts; and Charleston, South Carolina. The master plan was developed by Robert A. M. Stern Architects and Cooper Robertson & Partners, both of New York City. Instead of using Disney's vision for EPCOT which was based on modernism and futurism, the town uses the concept of "New Urbanism" to emphasize parks, sidewalks, and a mix of residential and commercial space. The bank, the post office, the town hall, the movie theater, and other downtown buildings were designed by renowned architects. The majority of homes are within one mile of the downtown area. Segway scooters and small electric cars called "NEVs" ("Neighborhood Electric Vehicle") are common.

Community events are held downtown throughout the year; for example, during the Christmas season it "snows" on Market Street (bubbly foam blown from machines on the lampposts). The first church to inhabit Celebration was a Presbyterian Christian church. There are currently 7 different denominations including a Jewish congregation. There is also a hospital (Celebration Health) and a fire station in Celebration. An eighteen-hole golf course winds through the town. Celebration is not a gated community; because gates are not part of a new urbanist vision, and the downtown area depends on revenue from tourists.

As in most new golf-course subdivisions in Florida, Celebration residents are governed by a homeowners' association which uses "covenants" to protect the 'feel' of the community: residents must keep lawns mowed, are not allowed to park boats or RVs in streets or drives, and must keep the street appearance of the house (everything including "for sale" signs, house numbers, lawn furniture like birdbaths, and exterior paint colors) within prescribed bounds.



Canal on Water Street

As a result of its neotraditional design and its rules, Celebration tends to evoke

strong reactions in people: some fall in love with the architecture, saying they prefer its neotraditional looks to standard, modern "cookie cutter" style subdivisions; others cynically compare it to an artificial movie set with oppressive rules. Some compare Celebration's appearance to that of the town of Seaside, Florida (which was used in the filming of the movie *The Truman Show*). Other visitors find such comparisons to be blown out of proportion, viewing its appearance and

homeowners' association rules as typical of those of numerous subdivisions in other parts of the United States that have generated much less negative attention, including several similar New Urban communities such as Harbor Town.

In 1995, all that existed of the town were a few roads under construction and one trailer with the facade of a stately home to advertise future plans. A lottery was held for the opportunity to buy a home in this new "Disney town," and all 351 home lots in the town's first development were quickly sold through the lottery, leaving a six-



Typical park scene in Celebration, FL

month waiting list. But the builders were unprepared for the demand and therefore the quality of the initial construction was sometimes sub-par, helping to earn Celebration ridicule in the press. Another point of contention was the Celebration School (K-12), which attempted to incorporate many progressive ideas in ways that turned out to be more confusing than successful. People purchasing homes there early on had the general impression that Disney's connection to the project meant that nothing could go wrong, but that misconception was short-lived.

Residents first moved into homes in Celebration on June 18, 1996. Through the first years of the town, many townspeople persevered and banded together even more tightly as a community to make sure that the town lived up to its commitments and its promise. As a result the town of Celebration, Florida, can be said to have fulfilled most of its original intentions.

One peculiarity of the town early on was that it was run by The Celebration Company, a fully owned subsidiary of the Disney Company, rather than by elected officials. The result of this has been that some decisions made on behalf of the residents of the community were made with Disney's profits in mind rather than the townspeople's desires – for example, the downtown area contains several shops selling collectibles, but no gas station or video rental store. This problem is going away as residents have gained elected positions on the board of the Celebration Residential Owners' Association, and as Disney diminishes its role in the town. Disney recently sold the downtown area to Lexin Capital, a private real estate investment firm. Recently, a another commerical development outside of downtown, Water Tower Place was built with Chick-fil-A, Mobil, dry cleaners, a video rental store, and the West Osceola Branch of the Osceola library system among its tenants.



Bank of America branch, downtown

Developments

There are eight developments in Celebration: North Village, South Village, East Village, West Village, Celebration Village, Lake Evalyn, Roseville Corner, and Artisan Park. Homes are built in various pre-approved styles including Victorian, Mediterranean, French, Coastal, and Colonial Revival, and there are seven general 'sizes' of homes ranging from cozy Bungalows to huge Estates. The styles and sizes of homes are mixed through the town; there are streets of large homes right next to streets of small homes. Most homes have alleys behind them to hide driveways and trashcans. Most homes have front porches, and all homes are fairly close to the street and to their neighbors to encourage a closer sense of community. Celebration homes do not have large yards. Pricing for homes new begins around \$390,000 for non resale condominiums up to \$700,000-\$1,000,000 for houses, estates run in the millions. Apartments typically rent for \$900/month and up or roughly a dollar per square foot, and several apartments are available above the downtown businesses and garages (garage apartments).

Transportation

Contrary to its design as a quintessential American town, Celebration does not have any road named Main Street, because that name is already used elsewhere in Osceola County. The two main roads going through the center of the downtown area are named Market Street and Front Street. Some streets include:

■ Celebration Boulevard

An avenue parallel to I-4 that includes many commercial businesses and the Celebration High School. The architecture on the street is the Celebration Modern style. The entire street is lined with two rows of Washington Palms.

■ Celebration Place

An area with a Plinth area that includes commercial buildings with a Campo Santo image, and a landmark section, an area that stands by itself on the edge of a natural conservation area with its own identity. The Plinth area has three sections:

- Plinth Section
- Building Section
- Parking Section

Each section has defined design elements.

Pop culture

The band Chumbawamba included a song called "Celebration, Florida" on their album *WYSIWYG*. It satirises the (perceived) excesses of American consumerism and "nostalgia for a time they can't remember" which the town supposedly embodies. The character Brian in the Broadway musical *Avenue Q*, makes a wry reference to the city before the song "Special" is performed at The Around the Clock by a curvaceous puppet. Also, an animated cartoon episode of *The Simpsons* about the "Globex Corporation" portrays a similar town which appears to be like Celebration, Florida.

Geography

Celebration is located at 28°19′12″N, 81°32′25″W﻿ (http://tools.wikimedia.de/~magnus/geo/geohack.php?params=28_19_12_N_81_32_25_W_city) (28.320059, -81.540149)^{GR1}.

According to the United States Census Bureau, the community has a total area of 27.7 km² (10.7 mi²). 27.6 km² (10.7 mi²) of it is land and 0.1 km² (0.04 mi²) of it (0.28%) is water.

Demographics

As of the census^{GR2} of 2000, there were 2,736 people, 952 households, and 716 families residing in the community. The population density was 99.0/km² (256.4/mi²). There were 1,093 housing units at an average density of 39.6/km² (102.4/mi²). The racial makeup of the census-designated place (CDP) is 93.57% White, 1.72% Black or African American, 0.26% Native American, 2.41% Asian, 1.02% from other races, and 1.02% from two or more races. 7.60% of the population were Hispanic or Latino of any race.



There were 952 households out of which 45.1% had children under the age of 18 living with them, 66.5% were married couples living together, 6.3% had a female householder with no husband present, and 24.7% were non-families. 20.2% of all households were made up of individuals and 3.6% had someone living alone who was 65 years of age or older. The average household size was 2.82 and the average family size was 3.30.

In the community the population was spread out with 30.8% under the age of 18, 5.1% from 18 to 24, 30.8% from 25 to 44, 26.4% from 45 to 64, and 6.9% who were 65 years of age or older. The median age was 37 years. For every 100 females there were 94.7 males. For every 100 females age 18 and over, there were 93.5 males.

The median income for a household in the community was \$74,231, and the median income for a family was \$92,334. Males had a median income of \$51,250 versus \$46,650 for females. The per capita income for the CDP was \$39,521. 6.2% of the population and 4.3% of families were below the poverty line. 8.5% are under the age of 18.

As of 2004, there are 9,500 residents in 3,745 households (including apartments).

Books

There are three books that tell some of the history of Celebration. The first two were written by residents who did their research in 1997; they focus on the early problems with construction and the misconceptions involving the town. Both books were published in 2000.

- *Celebration, U.S.A.: Living in Disney's Brave New Town* by Douglas Frantz and Catherine Collins (ISBN 0-8050-5561-4)
- *The Celebration Chronicles: Life, Liberty, and the Pursuit of Property Value in Disney's New Town* by Andrew Ross (ISBN 0-345-41752-6)

The third book was published in 2004.

- *Celebration: The Story of a Town* by Michael Lassell (ISBN 0-7868-5405-7)

Additional images



Downtown Celebration



Downtown Celebration



Downtown Celebration,
with art deco-style movie
theater



Celebration Independent,
the local newspaper

Orlando Sentinel

<http://www.orlandosentinel.com/news/local/osceola/orl-celebration1006nov10,0,7378317.story?coll=orl-home-promo>

10-year Celebration

Pioneering planned community marks first decade

Daphne Sashin
Sentinel Staff Writer

November 10, 2006

CELEBRATION -- In another time or another place, Emma and Tara Stephens' small-town childhood might not have seemed quite so extraordinary.

The twin sisters learned to fish at the lake in the center of town and walked to the annual Fourth of July parade. When they were younger, they lived so close to school that their dad could stand on the front porch and wave goodbye as they walked into class.

Now 16, Emma and Tara can ride their bikes to their after-school jobs at a local ice-cream shop, where they recognize most of the customers.

"It's a really cool place to grow up," Tara said. "There's a close-knit, family feeling."

Ten years ago, Walt Disney Co. welcomed its first families into a town built around families, foot traffic and community. To the rest of the country, Celebration was a precedent-setting experiment in suburban planning -- and a test of whether a company that specialized in theme parks could engineer a true community.

Today, interviews with 40 current and former homeowners suggest that Celebration has lived up to its promise as a different kind of suburb.

The town that celebrates its 10th Founders Day this weekend is home to nearly 10,000 people. There are doctors' offices, dry cleaners, salons, a day-care center and at least 11 religious congregations. There are groups for retirees, divorces, artists and Brazilians; a Montessori school, a Little League, Special Olympics and a memorial garden honoring members of the community who have died -- all initiated by residents.

Celebration also has its share of real-life problems. Among residents' gripes: a shortage of downtown parking; the lack of a supermarket; a high school that gives some parents heartburn; numerous complaints of shoddy home construction; and second-home owners who are rarely there. The high home prices and lack of diversity -- nearly 84 percent of Celebration voters are white -- feeds the town's

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reputation as an elitist enclave.

"It does have its ups and downs, but that's what makes it even more special," said Rosario Michelle Ramirez Matabuena, 22, whose family moved from Falls Church, Va., in 1996. "Celebration is what it is because of me, because of people like me that came to live here . . . to start something new and start something great."

Return to New Urbanism

Disney's decision to build a pedestrian-oriented community with front porches, a mix of housing types and shops was significant at a time when suburban developers were building sprawling compounds of houses whose owners had to get in their cars to do anything. Celebration gave instant credibility to the planners advocating a return to the design principles of the 1920s and '30s, known as New Urbanism, said planner Victor Dover of Dover, Kohl & Partners in Coral Gables.

"Celebration wasn't the first New Urbanist community, but it was the first one on such a scale and the first one to be undertaken by such a large, bottom-line corporation," said Dover, who created the master plan for Winter Park's Park Avenue makeover. "It sent a message to the investment community that this idea of building a town rather than just sprawl was an idea that could make you money."

Since then, hundreds of developments have copied or improved on Celebration's features, including Baldwin Park in Orlando and Winter Springs Town Center.

Buyers showed they were willing to pay a premium to know their neighbors and spend less time in their cars, even if it meant sacrificing big backyards and living by a thick book of rules regarding the design and upkeep of their properties.

As a testament to its staying power, Celebration was the second-top-selling community in Metro Orlando last year, with 1,067 closings, including 122 condominium conversions. Prices now start at just less than \$200,000 for a one-bedroom condo.

That should change as traditional neighborhoods become more common, Dover said.

"There's little about a connected community that's inherently more expensive to build," Dover said. "When it becomes more common to have neighborhoods with these design conventions . . . the prices will be more normal."

Celebration's design continues to foster social connections even as the town grows. Front porches and side alleys make it easy for neighbors to interact. Parks and coffee shops just a bike ride away create natural meeting places.

"That creates a sort of general trust among people that we're sharing the same place -- that we are in this place together," said Kevin Leyden, an associate professor of political science at West Virginia University who studies how the design of a community affects people physically, socially and mentally.

The residential owners association's Town Hall and the Celebration Foundation, also funded by homeowners, created a newspaper and intranet where people could make connections. Town Hall began home-spun traditions such as the annual Easter egg hunt and the July Fourth parade.

Celebration is not immune from crime. But families feel a sense of security because they know so many neighbors, said Terri Florio, whose family moved to Celebration in 1996. Her youngest child, Grace, is

now 15.

"If Gracie's downtown on Friday night with her friends . . . there's probably 20 sets of parents that know her that are going to report on her if anything is not kosher," Florio said.

Some leave disappointed

It wasn't for everyone. Some people bought in as a real-estate investment and moved on. Others were disappointed by the Osceola County School Board's decision to build a large, regional high school in Celebration after residents were promised a progressive school that would take students from kindergarten through 12th grade.

Jessica Carrion, a mother of two, said she loves Celebration but worries what she'll do when it's time to send her oldest to high school.

"We're very torn," said Carrion, 30, whose parents moved to Celebration in 1997. She and her husband followed two years later.

School Board member Jay Wheeler said he understands parents' worries -- in three years, Celebration High School has never earned higher than a C grade -- but says a child can still get a good education there.

In 1998, Beth Moriarty thought she'd spend the rest of her life in Celebration. But five years later, she and her husband moved to Baldwin Park, which echoes Celebration's style but has the amenities that go with being in the middle of Orlando.

"It's not billing itself as the great New Urbanism experiment that you're going to have a different life simply by moving there," Moriarty said of Baldwin Park. Unlike in Celebration, she said, she doesn't have to get in her car to buy a light bulb.

In Celebration, residents must leave the neighborhood to pick up groceries or school supplies. But the other day, Risa Wight's three children had orthodontist appointments, soccer, speech therapy, tutoring, religion classes and flag football -- all in Celebration.

"With three children going in different directions, it's still manageable, because everything is so close," Wight said. "Now virtually everything we're involved with is right here in town."

Daphne Sashin can be reached at 407-931-5944 or dsashin@orlandosentinel.com.

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Celebration's groups

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- Helen Keller

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Entries



[dshimizu](#)

Windermere

[A review of this place: it's really kinda wierd](#) — 4 months ago

Not worth it!

I live about 20 minutes away and I go to Celebration when my visitors from out of town request to see it specifically or if I know they like wierd things. It is like Pleasantville. But in a modern way... lots of preppy pre-teens with expensive designer handbags and J Crew outfits driving around in electric cars in a town with picturesque stores that sell nothing useful. Adults seem to come out only at night except on the golfcourse which is busy at any time of day. The houses are all somewhat the same as are the streets, cars, dining options and the people. It's creepy but in a non-threatening way. It's ok for dinner and a quick stroll around but not a destination. I'd classify it as upscale idiotic. I can't understand a town that wealthy and built up without a bookstore...

Jul 06, 12:10PM PDT [2 cheers](#) | [1 comment](#)



[ivioo](#)

Deland

[Stepford i tell ya and creepy i say](#) — 9 months ago

Worth visiting!

well its a neet little place and its nice to see but i could never live here . . . it reminds me of House of Wax for some reason, weird I know.

Feb 21, 07:56PM PST | [0 comments](#)



[BensMom](#)

Celebration

[Untitled](#) — 9 months ago

Worth visiting!

I live here. I moved from hellish South Florida. I have a kid. It's a great place to raise a kid. It's idyllic. Peaceful. As my landscaper says, "People who call Celebration creepy are jealous because they don't live here." I can agree with that. It's the most beautiful town I have ever seen. I am lucky to live here. The next move will be to the nursing home! It's not Stepford, there are REAL people here and I love it. The restaurants are outstanding. All varied and very good at what they each do. Every season brings something special. It's like living in New England again, and I am JUST FINE with that! (without the snow-how cool is that?)

Feb 07, 05:23PM PST | [0 comments](#)



[Melissa Axel](#)

Denver

[Untitled](#) — 11 months ago

Worth visiting!

Only drove through briefly, took a look at the house models with my parents who were checking it out, and I think had an ice cream. It was not very developed back then, this had to be over 5 years ago... would like to go back and see how it turned out. If you're nostalgic, a Disney nut, or just really curious about it, go check it out... but remember, there is no utopia on earth! ;-)

Dec 01, 12:49PM PST | [0 comments](#)



[Bill Turner](#)
Pittsburgh

[Untitled](#) — 1 year ago

Worth visiting!

Was only there for a couple of hours, but it was a nice little town. There was even a baby alligator in the pond right off the town square.

Nov 13, 08:43PM PST | [0 comments](#)



[superkatsplat](#)
North Carolina

[Untitled](#) — 1 year ago

Not worth it!

one of the creepiest places on earth. STAY AWAY.

Nov 06, 01:09AM PST | [1 cheer](#) | [2 comments](#)