



Since 1947, actual tribe members of the Seminole nation have presented a handmade headdress and cloth turban to the chief and princess during Florida State University's homecoming celebration.

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No Place Like Homecoming

A Look at Traditions Unique to Florida Colleges

By Teresa Beard, assistant editor

Homecoming isn't just bonfires, painted faces, and a sweet relief from mid-terms. It's a time to celebrate the rich history and traditions of your school with former and fellow students.

A time to climb

Years ago, University of Tampa students sneaked across campus to scale the 10-story-tall silver minarets atop Plant Hall for a bird's eye view of the city. Today, the once off-limits landmark is part of an annual custom: the climbing of the minarets.

On homecoming weekends, one of the 13 historic structures is opened for the UT family. "There's a little bit of history. Often, when alumni take their kids up, they'll say, 'This is the first time I've ever done this legally,'" says Stacy Bruels, director of alumni and parent relations. "From up there, you can see how the campus has changed." About 200 students and alums climb the towers each year before heading over to The Rathskeller or The Chatterbox, a local bar owned by an alum. "The Box seems to be a common meeting place," Bruels says. "Whatever else is happening, people just know to go there to bump into each other."

My parents did what?

Back in the 60's and 70's, Rollins College students found another use for Florida's

orange groves. "They served as excellent places to have parties, because you couldn't really have them on campus," says Bill Bieberbach, a 1970 grad. Bieberbach and a former classmate revived the Grove Party five years ago as a pre-reunion social for alums. While the groves where students used to gather no longer exist, about a dozen potted orange trees are scattered on the shores of Lake Virginia. More than 500 former and current students showed up at last year's three-hour bash.

Jubilee

For 10 years, Tampa residents have seen the running of the bulls without flying to Spain. During homecoming, the University of South Florida Bulls corral into the soccer stadium for a carnival with nearly two dozen rides such as the Gravitron, a kids roller coaster, and funhouses, as well as game vendors, local bands, and free drinks, says Debbie Lum, marketing director for USF's Marshall Center.

Last year's Bull Bash featured Sister Hazel and drew more than 10,000 fans and fair-goers to celebrate "Finally Football," an allusion to the school's inaugural football season. Other USF traditions include a parade, a pep rally with a comedian, and a car-decorating party and caravan. In 1997,

where student hosts wear cutaway tailcoats and shorts, and Game Day, featuring a climbing wall and pugil sticks.

The Vikings at St. Johns River Community College's St. Augustine campus celebrate Ragnarok with skits and videos that parody campus life and TV shows and a traditional Viking funeral for the opponent.

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students got a double dose of homecoming in spring and again in the fall to begin a new tradition centered around football. Fans are reportedly thrilled with the mooove.

All dolphined up

Long before the Miami Dolphins or the demand for dolphin-safe tuna, Jacksonville University students identified themselves as Flipper's friends. Because the college is located near the Atlantic coast, the dolphin was a natural choice for a mascot, says Bob Price, JU's director of alumni and parent relations. More than 50 Dolphins of all ages celebrate JU's kinship to watersports with the annual alumni crew race. This year, JU athletes will continue to row, row, row their boats even though homecoming will make a splash in a new season. The Dolphins will try to dominate the surf and astro turf as they stretch their sea legs in football this fall.

Coming home to help

Each fall, University of Miami students, staff, and alums team up for Hurricanes Help the Hometown—UM's largest one-day community-outreach program. As many as 1,000 volunteers are dispatched to one of 45 agencies. The Hurricanes play with children, paint, organize closets, or pull up weeds. While some participants earn points for homecoming competitions, about half help just for the fun of it. "We just want to expose them to the different agencies in hopes that a longer-lasting relationship will come out of it," says Mickey Rubenstein, director of volunteer services. "The university receives such support from the community—this is our way of giving back."

Rest in peace

The Bethune-Cookman College Wildcats bury their opponents each year at homecoming—literally. A staged funeral service for B-CC's opponent begins with a procession of mourning actors. The sorrowful students roll a donated casket from the school chapel to a courtyard where headstones mark the final resting places of past vanquished teams. A minister



USF's carnival attracts thousands of Bulls for slide rides and more.

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comforts the weepy Wildcats, while a pallbearer guards the gravesite. B-CC students have been putting their rivals six feet under for nearly 50 years, says Charles Williams, SGA vice president.

Seminole pride

Homecoming half-times are a pastime at Florida State. With Coach Bowden, the Noles haven't lost a homecoming game yet, a theme that carries through the Marching Chiefs' show. After the 420-member college band performs, actual Seminole tribe members in authentic garb approach center stage to present a handbeaded headdress and cloth turban to the homecoming princess and chief. Homecoming is a rare chance for FSU not only to pay tribute to Seminoles but to reunite with alums. "By bringing back and emphasizing those grads, you tie your past and future together," says Jim Melton, president of FSU's Alumni Association.

Florida's Homecoming Hall of Fame

More than 65,000 fans attend the University of Florida's Gator Growl—widely known as the largest student-run pep rally. The annual event features comedians, skits, videos, fireworks, dancers, and a salute to Gator football.

After only 10 homecomings, the University of West Florida already has traditions such as the Tailgate Party,