

CONTEST WINNER!

# America's Most Interesting Town

BY DAMON BERES



As president of Toby the Clown Foundation, Albin "Big Al" Pelski leads the way in entertaining the sick and elderly.

In the previous three issues of *Reader's Digest*, we reported on the winners of our contest, ten terrific towns across America. Now we unveil the grand-prize winner (drumroll, please!): **Lake Placid, Florida**, for its unique variety of nature, culture, and fun. Take a mini tour and see what the fuss is all about.

The world's largest crop of big fuchsia-colored caladiums blooms in Lake Placid from June to October.



## Toby's Clown School

Thanks to Toby's Clown School, which has trained more than 1,500 professional kooks since 1993, Lake Placid boasts more clowns per capita than anywhere else in the country. But you won't see them under the big top. These clowns goof around for smaller audiences—in hospitals and nursing homes, for instance. For \$100 and 24 credit hours in classes like History of Clowning, aspiring cutups get a makeup kit, a spot in the student clown show, and, if all goes well, a clown certificate.

## A City of Growth

Lake Placid grows 98 percent of all caladium bulbs on 1,500 acres of fertile soil. Hence its nickname: the Caladium Capital of the World.

The abundance of the ornamental green-and-red plant inspired locals to launch the Caladium Festival in 1989. The event, which features arts and crafts and an antique car show, attracts up to 25,000 visitors annually.

## Mural Town U.S.A.

For more than two decades, local and visiting artists have embellished the facades of Lake Placid's businesses with murals honoring central Florida's history and the area's flora and fauna. "Cracker Trail Cattle Drive," by artist Keith Goodson, is the largest of the town's 44 murals, covering the back wall of a grocery store 175 feet long by 30 feet high with a scene of cattlemen driving a herd through Lake Placid. ■



Monica Turner's mural is one of 44 around town that have put Lake Placid on the map.