

## this weekend

**TODAY**  
**Classic Skate Weekend, Semoran Skateway**  
*Midnight to 4 a.m.*  
 Two nights charity skating workshops with live DJ, \$12-\$14

**Social Ghost, The Social**  
*9 p.m.*  
 with Fall of Envy, Transmit Now CD release show, \$8

**In Focus, Orange County Regional History Center**  
*Opens today*  
 A traveling exhibit of National Geographic history through Jan. 18, \$9

**SATURDAY**  
**Copland, The Social**  
*7 p.m.*  
 with Lovedrug, Lydia and Lights, \$15 also on Sunday at 6 p.m.

**Dragonforce, House of Blues**  
*7 p.m.*  
 \$23.50-\$33.50

**LightUp UCF, UCF Arena**  
 \$10

# Here comes Santa Claus

The Santas are everywhere. This mall Santa sits at Fashion Square Mall waiting for toy inquiries.

SARAH ROGERS / CENTRAL FLORIDA FUTURE



## Behind the mystique of the mall Santa

JT LANGLEY  
 Contributing Writer

Each year, from mid-November to Christmas Eve, malls across the U.S. transform into gaudy winter wonderlands. The mall Santa mania infects shoppers with a holiday fever, and Friday's "Hollyville" celebration at the Mall of Millennia was nothing short of the trend.

The mall Santa, the fat man with the white beard, shrouded in mystery in the open, is now a mask unveiled.

There he sat, dressed for the role: Red suspenders and tacky white shirt with green trim and sleigh-bells, in hand in all of his glory, hunkered down in a fold-up chair, the man only known as "Santa Larry" nursed a soda, hidden behind a long, dark corridor and a waiting room with a lock code door.

"It all started when I decided to grow my beard out," Santa Larry said. "Children started asking me if I was the real Santa, and I couldn't say no. That was 12 years ago, and I haven't shaved since."

I studied his habits, testing the limits of my invasion and for a few quiet moments I was alone with Father Christmas. He was everything promised — flowing white beard and bulging gut — the perfect image of the man who supposedly squeezes his way down chimneys.

The mall Santa, fixated to his throne drew in the crowds for a glimpse of the legend.

Fake snow speckled the ground, inflatable snow globes blocked causeways and pine-scented floor wax lingered in the air.

Stilt-walking reindeer paraded Mrs. Claus throughout the stores while Bing Crosby Christmas carols lulled through the airways, bringing to life the depiction of what the North Pole might be like. Not a barren ice sheet, but a cozy village where gingerbread houses are real, and candy canes grow as high as the trees.

Children, told never to approach a stranger, were cautious at first. But for the promise of gifts, Kris Kringle turned from stranger to friend, initiating another child into the holiday hysteria.

Gregg Dobbs, owner of Theme Street Pictures and the ringleader of the event, revealed the origin of the mysterious man.

Dobbs employs his naturally-bearded Santa Clauses from Santa for Hire, an Internet-based booking agency with a surplus of Santa Claus actors. Its Web site,

www.santaforhire.com, states, "Taking the next step in providing quality Santas."

It began to seem that these false St. Nicks were merely captives purchased from an underground holiday black market to be displayed in shopping malls and business parties all over America.

"I do it for the children," Santa Larry said. "The way they light up as they run over to see me is the special thing that keeps me coming back. If people want to believe that I'm Santa, I'll be Santa for them."

The role of mall Santa seems easily created — find a man with a white beard and near-obese proportions, slap on the red pants and coat, and stick that North-Star twinkle in his eye. With a few elf-dressed flunkies and a cardboard toyshop set, the spirit of Christmas comes to life.

"I've always wanted to bring Santa Claus to life," Dobbs said. "There's no cheap refrigerator photos here and that's the difference we make. We give customers that

PLEASE SEE HOLLY ON A10

## Dance the folk dance of Spain

MATTHEW BEATON  
 Staff Writer

As ornately clad flamenco dancers mounted the stage at Ceviche Tapas Restaurant and Bar, the heart-pounding sound of Spanish folk music filled the room.

The dancers twirled in their bright red, floor-length dresses — full of ruffles and frills — as they kept time with their castanets.

They lithely moved about the stage, emphasizing the music's rhythm and tempo. Each stomp and twirl showed the skill and artistry that flamenco dancing demands.

The dancers were accompanied by two guitarists and a percussionist who produced elaborate beats created by rapping his steel-tipped fingers against a large wooden box.

A soloist also joined, providing the lyrics for the classic Spanish songs.

The festive bar area was filled with nearly 100 excited patrons eager to view this traditional Spanish

For fantastic flamenco photos: www.UCFNews.com

any of the action.

"Fridays and Saturdays are zooish in nature, and it's a lot of fun," said Brian Mulay, the restaurant's general manager. "The energy is unbelievable, and the [venue] is absolutely gorgeous."

This venue possessed all of the trappings of an old-time Spanish cantina. Its lavish cherry-stained, wooden interior, brick floor and low lighting gave off the aura of Spanish elegance.

"[Flamenco] brings a lot of energy; it brings a lot of enthusiasm," said Omar Miguel, Ceviche's lead guitarist and band director. "A lot of people get hyped up, especially when they hear the fast strumming of the guitar, [and] the dancers stomping really fast during their dancing."

The room's 40-foot high ceilings provided plenty

dance. As the music began, patrons crowded around the stage to ensure they did not miss



RAMI ROTLEWICZ / CENTRAL FLORIDA FUTURE

Rhythm and movement resonates at Ceviche Tapas Restaurant and Bar every Thursday, Friday and Saturday on Church Street, downtown O-town.

PLEASE SEE LIVELY ON A10



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 SATURDAY, DEC 6 - MISFITS  
 SATURDAY, DEC 13 - DJ EDDIE BAEZ  
 SATURDAY, DEC 20 - SUPERVILLAINS



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