

# UCF to EA pipeline stronger after headquarters move

BY S.T. CARDINAL

When Zach Karlins was a sophomore in college, he took a tour of the Electronic Arts offices in Maitland, which cemented his decision to pursue video game development.

"I was set on EA before, but the tour solidified in my brain that this is where I want to be," Karlins said.

Karlins is now a development director at EA, and he can walk to his alma mater from work. In 2021, EA moved its East Coast headquarters from Maitland to Creative Village in downtown Orlando, and that move has strengthened the partnership between EA and UCF's Florida Interactive Entertainment Academy program, which has been in downtown Orlando since 2005.

EA had been hiring FIEA graduates since before Creative Village broke ground, but with Creative Village now approaching its second phase of development and with EA's relocation across from the UCF downtown campus, the partnership has become amplified.

Ben Noel, executive director of FIEA at UCF, said EA has well over 100 FIEA alumni working at the Creative Village EA offices. Noel made a switch from EA to UCF — formerly working at EA as vice president for the EA Tiburon studios — and was a chair of the original Creative Village Task Force.

The area has come a long way, and EA's move to Creative Village has made an impact on the community even apart from UCF students. Noel said he often visits the OCPS Academic Center for Excellence to speak to elementary students. Before EA moved downtown, he would ask the students if they knew where the Madden video game was made, and they didn't know.

"Last year, I went there and asked the same question. They all raised their hands and pointed at the building and said, 'Right across the street.' Years before, they didn't even know Madden was built in Florida," Noel said.

One way EA and UCF collaborate is with "EA Day," when students visit the EA headquarters, hear from EA



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Zach Karlins works at the Electronic Arts offices that recently opened in Creative Village, a move which has strengthened the partnership between UCF and EA.

leaders and participate in Q&A sessions where students are paired by their disciplines with EA employees. At the end of the day, EA employees test the games the students have developed as part of their capstone projects at FIEA and provide feedback.

"Typically, EA will open up internship positions after EA Day and suggest to students that they apply," Karlins said.

Karlins worked with UCF's FIEA program last year as a faculty advisor to the capstone project. He said one of

the programmers from that capstone project now works in his department at EA.

EA isn't the only video game developer downtown. Iron Galaxy Studios recently opened offices downtown, and Microsoft Games and Undead Labs also have offices downtown. Noel said the next step to elevate Creative Village is to bring even more developers to the area.

"We need more," Noel said. "We need 15 prominent, high-wage game companies, and we'll get there. It helps the whole industry." ©

## Downtown Arts District lease extended; fundraising for courtyard continues

BY S.T. CARDINAL

The Downtown Arts District is in the process of activating the alleyway adjacent to its building in downtown Orlando.

CityArts, an art gallery run by DAD, is located in the historical (circa 1886) Rogers Kiene Building at 37 and 39 S. Magnolia Ave. The building now houses six art galleries and a recently opened cafe space.

DAD will construct the CityArts Courtyard directly to the alley bordering the building to the north.

"This space will be used for diverse, inclusive, and creative arts engagement, as well as private gallery-related and specialty events," the DAD website states about the courtyard.

DAD has received a \$319,000 grant from Orange County Arts & Cultural Affairs. One of the requirements of the grant regards the lease of the building where improvements are planned; the lease must be good through a certain time period. The City of Orlando leases the historic property to DAD, and City Council approved an amendment to the lease, which extends it by three years through 2031 and includes the option for a third renewal term through 2038.



CITY OF ORLANDO

This rendering shows a conceptual idea of what the CityArts Courtyard could look like.

The total estimated price for the courtyard renovation is \$637,000 according to City Council documents. DAD has launched a fundraising campaign, which has more than 50 "individual brick donors"

to raise the money. Donations are being accepted online at [DowntownArtsDistrict.com/cityartscourtyard](https://DowntownArtsDistrict.com/cityartscourtyard). The design of the courtyard is being completed by Interstruct Inc. ©

## Rental scooters to remain downtown

BY S.T. CARDINAL

The rental scooters in downtown Orlando will stay for the foreseeable future.

Originally launched as a pilot program, a new permitting program has been established, and three two-year permits will be issued to the Lime, Bird and Veo scooter rental companies. The ordinance to extend the pilot program in 2021 prompted a lot of discussion among commissioners who were hearing complaints from constituents about scooters being left in inconvenient places and not being picked up and repositioned in a timely manner.

"I know the transportation staff is going to faint, but I am going to voting yes on the scooters today because I have seen a tremendous improvement on picking them up and making sure they're not blocking sidewalks and blocking wheelchairs and blocking seniors being able to get around downtown," District 4 Commissioner Patty Sheehan said. "So I'm delighted to say that I'm very happy to see the improvement, so I will not be voting no today, but I want it to continue to have the good response [from the scooter companies]."

Commissioner Bakari Burns voted against the ordinance because Veo, one of the three companies picked to operate as part of the newly launched program, was not a part of the pilot program. ©

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