

## Huntsville's allure

### There's plenty to do for the young and young at heart

Huntsville has a highly eclectic social atmosphere for young professionals and their families.

There is a plethora of visual and performance arts, diverse dining and nighttime entertainment, professional and networking organizations, sports, historic attractions, outdoor adventure and water sports and public events where you can easily get engaged in your community by just showing up.

#### Visual Arts

From its inception in 1957, the Huntsville Art League (HAL) focused on the cultivation of local artists, providing them with studio space to work, and arranging exhibitions for them to show and sell their work. As a pioneer for most of the visual arts in Huntsville, HAL was instrumental in formulating their sister institution, the Huntsville Museum of Art (HMA). HAL still maintains a versatile

gallery where it sells handmade jewelry, paintings, glasswork, metalwork, pottery, sculptures and all types of works by Tennessee Valley artists.

"If you are a fan of the visual arts, the Huntsville Museum of Art would definitely be at the top of your things-to-do," says Jim Zielinski, communications director for the Arts Council.

Jim Hudson, Huntsville's founder of Research Genetics and the HudsonAlpha Institute for Biotechnology, is the perfect example of scientific brilliance merging with artistic vision. According to Grace Billiter, general manager of Lowe Mill Arts & Entertainment, Hudson got the idea of converting the dilapidated Lowe Mill facility into a "not-for-profit community arts collective" after visiting Alexandria, Va.'s famous Torpedo Factory.

Once home, Hudson bought the crumbling Lowe textile mill, originally built in 1900, and began renovating the second floor in 2001. "We maintained as much of the original brick and mortar facility as possible for artistic effect," says Billiter. "Artists are inspired by each other, and the atmosphere created by reviving this old building into something very much alive is motivating to artists of all types."

By KIMBERLY BALLARD

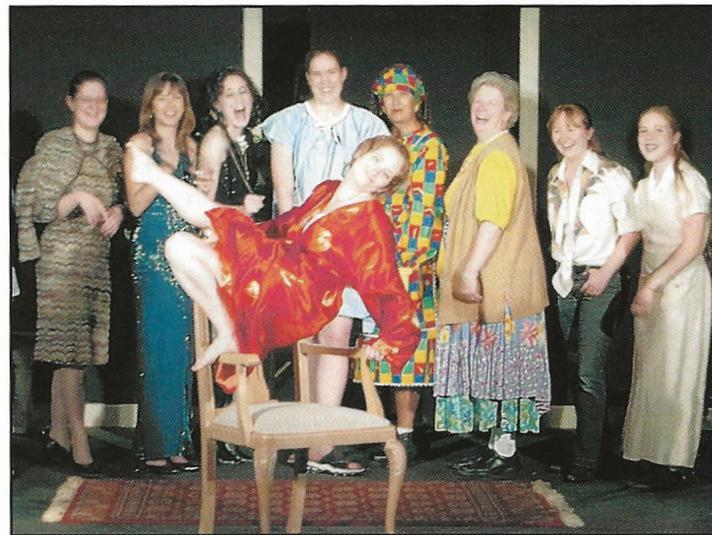
Long corridors of open artists' studios, galleries, retail outlets, and the Flying Monkey Arts Center with its black box Crash, Boom, Bang Theatre offer a Bohemian shopping experience, community inspired creativity and anything-goes live theatrical entertainment, much of which is experimental original works.

"Anyone can write a piece and produce it," says Crash, Boom, Bang director Scott Bakula. "They take complete ownership of it: script, sound, costumes, props and performance." The Film Co-Op specializes in independent and avant-garde films.

Low Mill's third floor is under renovation and expected to open with more workshops and studios. The facility hours vary according to ongoing events, but it is generally open Wednesday through Sunday, with the Artist Market open every Saturday from noon-4.

## Theater

For a city its size, Huntsville has been rich in theater for many years. The community non-profit groups include Fantasy Playhouse Children's Theatre, now in its 48th season, and Theatre Huntsville, which tends toward well-known but beloved shows like "The Miracle Worker," "You Can't Take it With You," and at least one Shakespearean show per year. This year's Season Extra is "The Merry Wives of Windsor" for Shakespeare on the Mountain in June. Participation through local auditions and technical support is



Eric Schultz

**Members of the cast of "Talking With, including Nina Soden, who plays Mira, rehearse the play at Renaissance Theatre.**

welcome, as well as paying theater-going audiences.

Bob Baker, owner of Renaissance Theatre on Meridian Street in Five Points, worked with every theatrical troupe in town before opening his own for-profit venue 11 years ago. With a larger Main Stage upstairs and smaller Alpha Stage downstairs, Baker says he tries to offer something for everybody. "We do children's shows, musicals, family shows, and classics like "Steel Magnolias." Some shows have adult themes and language, and we also do original works." Local

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**The Huntsville Symphony Orchestra and Community Chorus perform at the Von Braun Center.**

actor and writer Chuck Puckett has written and performed a couple of children's shows, one based on 1950s comic book heroes.

"We do intelligent and compelling shows, with great local talent," says Zielinski, who directed "Doubt," the March show at Renaissance Theatre. "Doubt" won the 2005 Pulitzer Prize, Tony, Outer Critics' Circle Award, Obie and numerous other honors. "We are not afraid to take on these highly acclaimed shows, and we do them very well," he says.

Huntsville's Broadway Theatre League also has been successful in bringing top off-Broadway plays to Huntsville. "The Pajama Game," "Sweeney Todd," "James and the Giant Peach," and most recently, 1980s mini-series dynamo Richard Chamberlain led a cast in Monty Python's "Spamalot."

## Music and dance

Huntsville has musical theater, dance and choral for all ages. The Community Ballet travels throughout North Alabama and performs two shows per year locally. The Huntsville Community Chorus has been performing for 63 years and collaborates with the Huntsville Symphony and Youth Orchestras to perform classical, coun-

try, jazz and Broadway favorites. The HSO arrived in Huntsville about the same time Wernher von Braun brought rockets, and it has been Alabama's oldest continuously operating orchestra.

"Choral music brings people together," says Bill Orton, Community Chorus music director and conductor. "It helps to create community when it moves beyond itself and brings music



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to others. Choral music brings out the best in us.”

Along with the chamber ensemble Master Chorale, the Huntsville BoyChoir, The Huntsville Concert Band, the Brass Band of Huntsville and the Rocket City Barbershop Chorus, there is no shortage of music if you wish to participate, or attend concerts.

“We have free concerts in Big Spring Park, every Monday night from June 1 through Labor Day weekend,” Zielinski says. “Bring blankets and lawn chairs and have a picnic.”

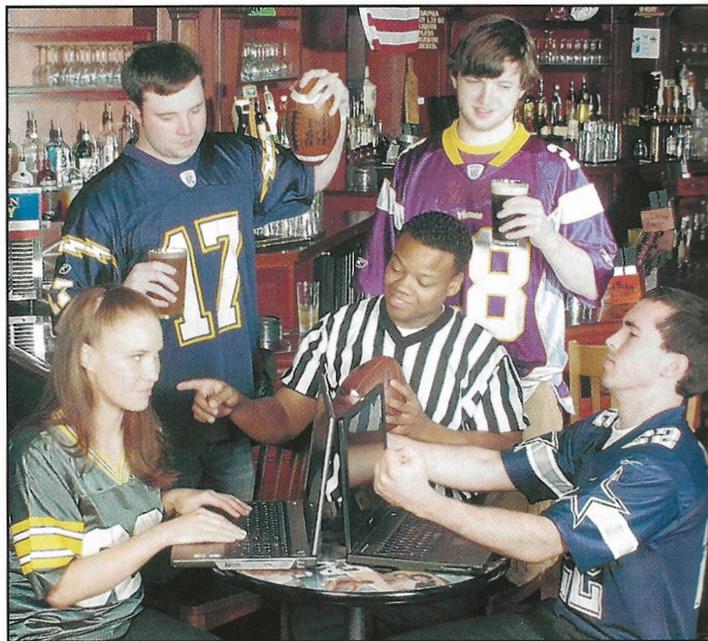
### Restaurants and night life

Huntsville offers plenty of nightlife. Washington Square has a number of diverse dining and social options. “All are very different and within a short distance from each other,” says Jay Poff, programs planning manager and Arts in Education manager for The Arts Council.

For upscale dining, 801 Franklin and Grille 29 are nice for a romantic dinner-for-two or a venue for entertaining guests.

Nestled in North Side Square in a section of the original Courthouse square built in the early 1800s, Sam & Greg’s Pizzeria and Gelateria feature local musicians Blake Nix and Martin Hill Harmonic who play there on a regular basis. Ice cream, coffee and pizza are the fare.

It would be remiss to have such a highly diverse culture and not have a wide variety of international restaurants. Huntsville has its share of good home-cooked meals like the Blue Plate Cafe, but also authentic Vietnamese, Korean,



Eric Schultz

**Fantasy football players enjoy a little competition at a local nightspot in downtown Huntsville.**

German, Indian, Caribbean, Greek, Italian and Tai. “All owned by their representative culture and all very good,” says Zielinski. For the steak connoisseur, there is a Ruth’s Chris Steak House in the Embassy Suites Hotel near the Von Braun Center.

No discussion of Huntsville’s nightlife is complete without



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Bridge Street Town Centre. This shoppers' extravaganza located in the heart of Cummings Research Park is replete with a luxurious 14-screen Monaco Pictures Cinema and restaurants including Ketchup, Dolce, Connor's Steak and Seafood, Tommy's Pizza and more. The property features a 10-acre lake with gondola boat and watercraft rentals.

## Networking

"I was discussing with a colleague how Huntsville needs a cultural society where all these diverse cultures can come together in one place to get to know each other," says Don Palmer, founder and president of the new International Cultural Society of Huntsville. "A couple of years ago, a friend suggested, 'Why don't you start one?'" says Palmer, who is past president of the North Alabama International Trade Association (NAITA). The group is slowly gaining a hold. Its first meeting of 2009 took place in January, and Palmer hopes to bring the group together again in May.

Professional networking and social opportunities for young professionals can be had with Huntsville's Young Professionals organization. HYP exists in order to create a more vibrant and connected community.

The organization plans periodic events at hot spots across the city in hopes of getting as many people connected and networked together as possible. Some people prefer smaller, specialized groups, also interested in networking, but with more focus on their particular facet of an industry. HYP also



Bob Gathary

**Monaco Pictures at Bridge Street Town Centre features 14 luxury screens for the movie lover.**

attempts to connect young professionals with community groups and civic organizations where they can volunteer. Many young working people feel the need for outside seminars and training classes, and HYP connects people in that way. The group also stays on the alert for new venues and opportunities around Huntsville in which to bring people together. Visit the Web site at <http://www.gethyp.net>.

## Sports

The Huntsville Stars are the minor league team for the Milwaukee Brewers. The team plays its games in Joe Davis Stadium. The season begins in April and the Stars offer fun

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promotions to draw loyal fans to their games, such as Desperate Househusband's Night, Military Mondays and Baseball Card Giveaways.

There are many public golf courses as well as country clubs. Many parks offer indoor and outdoor swimming pools, tennis courts, and baseball/softball/soccer fields for the children.

Huntsville has a professional ice hockey team, the Huntsville Havoc, which plays at the Von Braun Center; and an arena2 football team, the Tennessee Valley Vipers.

### Outdoor fun

The Tennessee River offers boating, waterskiing, fishing and even scuba diving. Ditto Landing has a huge camping, picnicking, fishing and event facility, as well as boat docks, dry docks, repairs and gasoline.

Huntsville offers miles of hiking and nature trails, as well as bicycling and skateboarding along the Greenways. The Land Trust of Huntsville Madison County provides wildlife refuges, nature reserves and educational programs for children and adults.

Huntsville's two main annual events are the Panoply Arts Festival and Big Spring Jam, both of which draw crowds of visitors and vendors from all over southern Tennessee and north Alabama. Famous bands, unending food, arts and crafts, competitions and live performances are just a small part of Huntsville's citywide celebrations.

### Historic attractions

The Burritt Museum, The Early Works Museum, Constitution Village and the Historic Huntsville Depot all provide a taste of Huntsville before, during and after the Civil War – in fact, you can step back in time with live re-enactments from the early days of Huntsville's existence. And of course one can't forget the U.S. Space & Rocket Center. There is something for everyone in Huntsville.