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From the Tampa Bay Business Journal:

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Winter Haven's historic Americana music venue has big plans to boost 'cultural tourism' downtown

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Winter Haven's downtown holds a key piece of rock 'n' roll history.

Widely recognized for founding the country-rock and alt-country genres, Gram Parsons was born in Winter Haven. His stepfather Bob Parsons opened the Derry Down in December 1964. The building originally served as a performance venue for Gram Parsons and his band, The Shilos. It would become an integral part of the popular Central Florida youth music circuit in the 1960s and early '70s.



ALEXIS MUELLNER

Parsons Derry Down in Winter Haven

In June 2014, the building was in bad shape and being used as a warehouse, so nonprofit Main Street Winter Haven Inc. launched the Derry Down Project to restore it. In November 2015, Florida

gave the building a historic marker, and the venue opened in late 2016, dedicated to music and the education of music.

After the venue built a following, Covid-19 shut things down.

The Gram Parsons' Derry Down in Winter Haven is back open and booking shows. Between 42% and 45% of its ticket sales are from out of Polk County, and 7 % come from out of state. Pre-Covid, that percentage was closer to 46%, said Anita Strang, president and CEO at Main Street Winter Haven Inc.

"We're building back that momentum," she said.

The building lends itself to Americana music, she said, one of the fastest-growing segments of the music industry.

"Americana music has been around for a very long time and has been named different things — folk, Americana or country rock."

A new Staybridge Hotel is going up next door and a second new downtown hotel is in play. That downtown hotel capacity is a pathway to growth goals, Strang said.

"We've been planning a music festival for a couple of years and struggled a little bit with, 'OK, in that plan, where does hotel capacity fall?'"

She doesn't want to stage the festival until the new downtown hotel rooms are ready.

"I want those people staying in Winter Haven, supporting our local businesses," she said. "That growth is going to help us be able to really expand what we've been wanting to do for a while."

Parsons, who died in 1973 at age 26, is ranked No. 87 on the "100 Greatest Artists of All Time" list compiled by Rolling Stone.

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