

**STEP 3: Three team members answered the questions for Micanopy
(Steps 1 & 2 are outlined on pp 5–10)**

Would you go to Micanopy

If NO, why not?

If YES, what would you do? How long would you stay?

Tyler—Probably

“Micanopy looks interesting. I like the option of poking around on side streets and would hope to find some historic walking tour information.”

Betsy—Overnight

“Overall, I think this little community is beautiful. I would plan an overnight trip here for sure. I liked the history of the community and the abundance of nooks and crannies to explore.”

Carol—Day trip

“I would stop there on a day trip when I was driving through the area and would probably walk through the historic areas.”

Search Terms Used

Things to do Micanopy Florida

History Micanopy Florida

Shopping Micanopy Florida

Places to stay Micanopy Florida

Websites Visited

www.destinationmainstreets.com/florida/micanopy.php

<http://preservation.myfloridahistory.org/micanopy-fl/>

<http://welcometomicanopy.com>

www.tripadvisor.com/Attractions-g344444-Activities-Micanopy_Florida.html

<http://micanopyhistoricalsociety.com>

www.visitflorida.com/en-us/cities/micanopy.html

<http://www.visitgainesville.com/nearby-towns/micanopy/>



Onsite Assessment

A team of six conducted the on-site assessment of Alachua County on October 4-13, 2014 and November 8-12, 2014. The purpose of this phase was to experience the community the same way a first-time visitor might. No one knew who we were (not even the *Visit Gainesville* staff).

Team members visited Micanopy multiple times to understand what visitors experience. These visits took place on various days and at different times of day. We took pictures, explored, visited attractions, made purchases, ate in restaurants and talked to business owners, residents and other visitors.

Finding Micanopy

Finding their destination is the first task for most visitors and finding the city of Micanopy is easy. The turns are well marked from all three entrances—two off of US 441 and another off CR 234—and lead visitors down streets that take them directly into downtown.

FIRST IMPRESSIONS



Your entry corridors are a perfect complement to the overall experience. The entry sign on US 441 gets lost a bit in the shadows and sign clutter makes it important that you continue to keep the letters white and crisp like you're doing now.

Gateways are a community's welcome mat. A way to say, "We're glad you're here. Come in and let us show you around." With monument signs at both ends of town, the city has set out its welcome mat in a way that reflects the charm awaiting visitors.

Passersby who have never heard of Micanopy may turn off the highway just because the sign is intriguing and suggests an experience different from that offered by the other communities they have driven through.



FIRST IMPRESSIONS

Once people turn off of US 441, the inviting setting beckons them to continue, to see what is up the road. Visitors feel like they're discovering a "hidden" remnant of Old Florida as they ease along the entrance roads.



Well refurbished advertising signs send a message that this is a community that cherishes its heritage and integrates it throughout town.

The location of this one is perfect and it creates a natural gateway into the downtown area.

Micanopy's architecture, setting and landscaping all combine to create a dynamic, appealing downtown. One that would be hard for any visitor to resist.



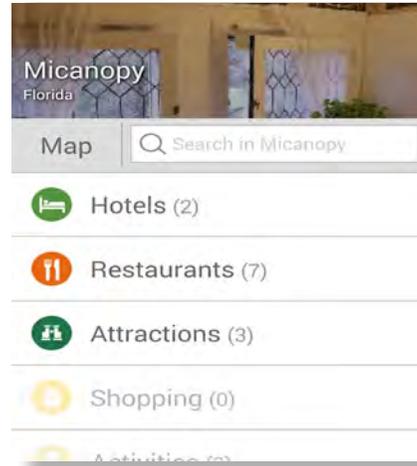
WHERE CAN I GET INFORMATION?

Information about Micanopy is not easy to find. The few brochures that we came across were found in other communities and provided limited assistance. Even TripAdvisor was of little help since it indicated there was no place to shop. This is easy to fix. Claiming your listing and submitting information on individual businesses can quickly improve the situation.

Local web presence provided by the Chamber is effective for residents and business owners but currently doesn't meet the needs of visitors.

The Visit Micanopy page on Facebook is administered by a local artist and has not been updated for a few years.

Fixing both of these isn't difficult and recommendations are including in the Next Steps section.



WHERE CAN I GET INFORMATION?

Most attendees at the community presentation were unaware of the Micanopy section on the *Visit Gainesville* website.

Updating the inaccurate information on these pages is easy and should be done as soon as possible. For example, a decision should be made as to whether the current age of the city should be included in the description. If so, someone will need to update it annually to avoid errors.

Individual listings should be proofread, updated and/or deleted as necessary.

Until the Chamber has a visitor-specific page, it might be a good idea to simply link to the Micanopy page on the *Visit Gainesville* site.

Our favorite resource is always asking others. In Micanopy we encountered friendly people who appeared genuinely interested in providing directions, making suggestions, and sharing both their life stories and their opinions. Every conversation taught us something new.



Hollywood has filmed two major motion pictures in Micanopy, Cross Creek (1983) and Doc Hollywood (1991).

That is to say the town is intensely full of charm and picturesque with streets lined by historic buildings housing unique shops and cafes. The 187-year old city is the oldest inland city in Florida, the age quite possibly explaining Micanopy's reputation as Florida's best city for antique shopping, something you'd be wise to experience. Along with the finding treasure among the shelves, visitors have other great choices on how to fill a day. For gator enthusiasts and general nature lovers Paynes Prairie State Reserve is directly north of town, and in nearby Cross Creek, MARJORIE KINNAN RAWLINGS HISTORIC STATE PARK

offers gardens, citrus groves and a newly restored tenant house along with rangers in 1930's period attire who share the author's stories. She wrote *The Yearling* and *Cross Creek*, among others. A famous town's most famous resident.

WHAT IS THERE FOR ME TO DO?

Remember, to draw visitors, you must offer something worth the trip and it has to be something people can't get closer to home.

What did we find in Micanopy?

A great local history museum! This is one of the best we've encountered anywhere in the country. The fact that it's open seven days a week adds to its appeal.

Since it doesn't look like a museum from the road and it's a bit difficult to find the entrance or parking, adding an arch over the fence and signs for handicapped access might help.

Everyone suggests the museum as their very first answer to the question, "What should we absolutely not miss in Micanopy?" That's the best advertising you can have — well done!

Another delight for some team members were the benches throughout town. They were well-positioned for people-watching and just relaxing. Make sure that the nearby garbage cans are emptied on a regular basis. Overflowing trash detracts from the charm.



WHAT IS THERE FOR ME TO DO?

Shopping for gifts and antiques is clearly the draw for Micanopy. This is a perfect fit with the setting and creates a solid connection with the community's sense of place.

The product mix is strong and most owners made recommendations about other places to try when they didn't have what we were looking for. This type of collaboration and cross-promotion is vital in small towns and makes the shopping experience a positive one for visitors.

At some shops, it was difficult to tell if they were open. Adding banners or pulling displays outside will signal that shops are indeed ready for business and will encourage visitors to walk to the edges of the district.



WHAT IS THERE FOR ME TO DO?

Getting something to eat for a late breakfast or lunch was no problem with three great options to choose from right in downtown. Dinner was a different story.

The streets in Micanopy are rolled up by 6:00 pm and visitors who linger will find themselves with nothing to do and nowhere to eat.

Based upon recommendations by shopowners and assistance from Yelp and UrbanSpoon, some of us tried the divine BBQ at the Pearl Country Store and a few others tested and loved the pizza at Blue Highway.



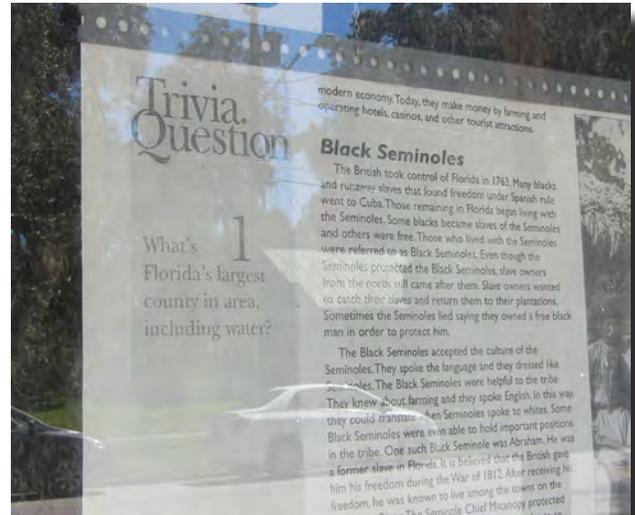
This was the most anticipated experience for the marketing assessment team—wandering along the lanes and exploring the nook and crannies. The onsite team was fortunate to experience it and one team member even described the setting as “intoxicating.”

We did agree that it probably wouldn’t have been quite as pleasant during the summer, but it’s definitely a great Fall and Winter activity.

WHAT'S YOUR STORY?

What a great way to fill empty windows, however, the current displays are sunfaded and worn and should be replaced. Incorporating more snippets of trivia throughout town would make a great scavenger hunt.

The cell phone tour is also an asset. It does a great job of telling stories in the beginning and then shifts to names, dates, architectural styles and details. Your story is multi-faceted and exceedingly rich: *use it*. People love stories, they remember stories long after they've forgotten dry facts.



An archive for a community of this size is rare. To have an entire facility is something we've never encountered. What a treasure for the community and the state.

Find ways to use this abundance of resources to add interpretation throughout town, including more information on the cell phone tour.

What a great opportunity to tell a part of Micanopy's story! The anchor seemed odd at first, but the interpretive sign told us a story we hadn't heard and enticed us to find out more when we went to the museum.

The anchor also led us to visit Paynes Prairie, where we learned more about the region's story and how the communities were connected.



HOW WERE WE TREATED?

In nearly every situation—asking for directions, eating in restaurants, walking down the street, visiting shops and the museum—we were treated with kindness, respect and sincere friendliness.

We also encountered signs—many, many signs. Signs telling/asking us in different ways to keep our food and drinks outside. Signs blocking our view into stores. Signs explaining that the price you see is not necessarily the price you pay if you choose to use credit or debit cards. So much information about what not to do detracts from the charming ambiance.

People who are walking into your businesses are not ignoring your signs; they probably didn't see them in the first place. If you must have a sign, think about a shift in perspective that will grab their attention. For example:

- Please enjoy your food and drinks in one of our delightful rocking chairs.
- Discounts available for cash purchases



WAS OUR #1 NEED MET?

Clean, accessible restrooms are the #1 need for visitors. Some businesses were accommodating even if we were not paying customers, while others apologized and said they had no public facilities.

Signs that tell us you have no restroom don't help us as visitors. Instead of telling us no, tell us where they are available.

Discussion during the community presentation identified Coffee 'n Cream (the location where this photo was taken) as a viable option.

Consider taking down the No Restroom signs and allowing visitors to come into shops and ask about restrooms, it could be good for business. Every time someone walks through the door to ask, there's the opportunity for an impulse purchase.



MICANOPY AS A VISITOR DESTINATION TODAY

Strengths & Opportunities

- Historic buildings
- Outstanding museum
- Charming, clean and safe
- Variety of complementary retail
- Trees and foliage
- Relaxing

Challenges & Threats

- Aging shop owners
- Maintaining buildings, especially empty ones
- Accessibility for those with mobility issues
- Public restrooms
- Overflow parking
- Finding information when museum is closed

THINGS TO REMEMBER

1. *Visitors are on vacation.*

They want things to be easy, they want to enjoy themselves. They're looking for experiences and opportunities that they can't get closer to home.

2. *Not everyone uses a smartphone.*

Even if your visitors have smartphones, they're not necessarily using them for anything other than phone calls, texting, taking pictures and checking email. Don't assume they'll be looking online for information, be sure to provide alternatives that are available beyond business hours on weekdays.

3. *You love your town but visitors don't know your town like you do.*

It can be difficult to see your community through fresh eyes. Can visitors navigate easily? Do they feel welcome? Are your "hidden gems" too well hidden?

Shop and restaurant owners should stand across the street from their businesses at least once a week and look at the impression their business makes. Are the windows clean? Are displays (including menus) fresh, attractive and inviting? Can people tell you're open?

4. *Your visitors have interesting places and cool shops and restaurants in their towns too.*

People travel—whether for the afternoon or the week—to see and experience something different. Every community has its own sense of place, its own personality. Help visitors experience and appreciate what makes your community different, what makes it worth their time and money. Don't try to be everything to everyone and don't create experiential expectations that you can't meet. Not every town will appeal to everyone and that's okay.

5. *A number of your visitors may have disabilities related to vision, hearing or mobility.*

There are little things you can do to provide accessibility. Making sure the videos are closed-captioned and that written materials can be accessed in auditory format goes a long way toward providing a rich experience.

Historic buildings and communities often have uneven surfaces and awkward transitions. Do what you can to mitigate these or provide alternatives.



NEXT STEPS

RECOMMENDATIONS CONTAINED WITHIN THE REPORT

- Update *Visit Gainesville* page
- Claim TripAdvisor listings
- Add arch over museum entrance and signs for handicap access
- Add banners or outside displays to show shops are open
- Refresh Trivia window displays
- Add more stories to cell phone tour
- Rethink the signs telling visitors “no”
- Keep garbage cans emptied

ADDITIONAL RECOMMENDATIONS

Digital Presence

STEP 1—Update the Chamber of Commerce website with visitor information. This could be as simple as linking the page to the *Visit Gainesville* page for Micanopy.

STEP 2—Businesses should start collecting e-mail addresses from their customers today. This makes it easy to communicate about sales, new merchandise or special events with a targeted audience.

STEP 3—Helping businesses and restaurants create websites, claim local listings, verify their accounts on review sites and set up e-mail communications is the first step.

Follow this up with small, hands-on sessions. Owners don't need more sessions about why they need to be on-line, they need help with HOW to be on-line.

For example, you provide monthly workshops where owners walk through:

- Website basics
- Setting up/updating the website
- Claiming local and review site listings
- Creating a dedicated email address
- Email marketing basics

This model helps small businesses who don't know where to start while helping them to pace themselves so they don't get overwhelmed.

Aging Owners

In communities like Micanopy, where the focus is on tourism, the health of each business is dependant upon the existence and health of all the other businesses. You have a strong destination based upon ambiance and small business owners. Most shops are owner-operated and a few may have one part-time employee to help during busy periods or to give the owner a day off.

Eventually, most owners decide to retire, or simply do something else. Businesses close and the fabric of the community changes. Buildings become vacant and new owners come in. What if their business is a disconnect with the current mix? Is it better to have a space filled, even if it doesn't complement the existing businesses? Who decides?

Working together to preserve the quality of life for residents and maintain the business core in a way that remains appealing to visitors isn't always easy, but it is key to Micanopy's future.

Change is inevitable. Communities that develop a framework to facilitate and adapt to change are far more resilient and successful over the long term than those who let fate lead the way.

