



**2016 Annual Report**  
**Making Newcomers Neighbors**

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## **Our Mission**

Welcoming Gainesville & Alachua County (WG&AC) is a 501(c)(3) Florida non-profit organization (see p. 16 for legally required declaration) dedicated to making Gainesville and Alachua County, Florida an inclusive community that welcomes immigrants, international students, and refugees, and celebrates diversity as a source of strength and innovation. WG&AC is a dues-paying member of the Welcoming America network.

We accomplish our mission by creating and promoting immigrant- and newcomer-friendly policies and activities, communicating welcoming principles, highlighting the benefits of inclusion among residents, and organizing a variety of programs, events, and services that unite individuals from various backgrounds.

## **Our Vision**

The vision for WG&AC's work is to support and partner with individual residents, local government representatives and offices, businesses, nonprofits, faith communities, institutions of higher learning, and other organizations that are working to create and maintain a climate that welcomes immigrants and supports their long-term integration into the community.

This vision is rooted in:

1. Overcoming prejudice;
2. Celebrating diversity; and
3. Assisting newcomers in becoming established in our community.

## History

The roots for WG&AC were established in September, 2014, when local residents, faith communities, and advocacy groups established a movement to both embrace and welcome immigrants, refugees, and visitors to the Gainesville, Florida, region. WG&AC was incorporated as a nonprofit organization in December, 2015. In its first year, WG&AC grew quickly to include a variety of programs and activities that promote inclusivity and understanding among individuals of diverse backgrounds.

Several months of advocacy with city commissioners and working with the Recreation, Cultural Affairs and Public Works Committee culminated in March, 2016 with a unanimous Gainesville City Commission vote to make Gainesville the first “Welcoming City” in Florida. This linked Gainesville to 70 other U.S. cities and counties working to counteract prejudice and integrate newcomers socially and economically. In June, 2016, the Alachua County Commission took similar action, establishing Alachua County as a “Welcoming County” and authorizing WG&AC to develop programs and events for achieving this goal.

## Programs & Activities

In 2016, in addition to hosting speakers, film screenings, and other educational and community-building events, WG&AC established or partnered alongside the following programs in Alachua County:

**English Conversation Partners:** WG&AC began working with the University of Florida’s English Language Institute and the Alachua

County Library System to host an English language exchange program. The program now includes nearly 50 participants who spend one or more hours each week in conversation, typically in a local coffee shop or library, with the goal of improving English-language skills among non-native speakers. On average, 2-3 new volunteers sign up to participate each week.



**Video Guides:** WG&AC began the creation and distribution of free online video guides, complete with subtitles and visual aids, for those new to Gainesville and Alachua County. Once complete, these guides will inform immigrants, international students, and other newcomers on important day-to-day activities and information related to public transportation, finding suitable housing, family-friendly events, and recommended local businesses.

**Naturalization Ceremonies:** Each month, representatives from WG&AC attend naturalization ceremonies in federal court. Our presence demonstrates support for new citizens. We share information regarding essential services and programs that may facilitate their transition to their new country.

**Rural Women's Health Project:** WG&AC has partnered with the Rural Women's Health Project to create a guide of social and medical

services and immigrant-friendly businesses (including those that offer legal and tax services) within the Alachua County region.

## Other Major 2016 Achievements

In addition to the programs just summarized, WG&AC had multiple achievements in 2016. These events, programs, and partnerships served to further our mission in creating a more welcoming and inclusive community for all.

### 1. Interfaith Donation Drive for Refugees in Florida, September



**2016:** 15 faith communities collected donations of domestic goods and school supplies for refugee resettlement, in cooperation with Catholic Charities, Jacksonville. (Catholic Charities is the

nearest federally authorized refugee resettlement agency.)

2. **Traveling Exhibit, “People on the Move”, September/October 2016:** WG&AC organized a display of a traveling exhibit provided by the Mennonite Central Committee about challenges and misconceptions regarding immigrants and immigration at Oak Hall School, Santa Fe College, and the University of Florida.
3. **Welcoming Week Proclamation, September 13, 2016:** A declaration was made by Gainesville Mayor Poe, County Commission Chair Hutchinson, and Welcoming America regional representative Daniel Valdez at City Hall. See more about Welcoming Week on p. 11.
4. **6th Conference on Immigration to the U.S. South, October 13 -15, 2016:** 2016 Executive Director Paula Roetscher was an invited panelist for “University Towns as Welcoming Cities” at this conference at the University of South Carolina.

5. **Interfaith Bridge Builders, November 10, 2016:** An event co-sponsored at Parkview Baptist Church focused on practical ways to connect across faiths and reduce and counteract Islamophobia.
6. **Individual Presentations:** Paula Roetscher presented at eight other events, and she and Board President Richard MacMaster organized a “life-of-immigrants” series at Oak Hammock (Institute for Learning in Retirement).
7. **Playback Theater Program:** Two workshops based in the playback theater medium connected long-time residents with newcomers to invite them to share their stories in an interactive format.
8. **Essential Resources Guide:** Together with the Rural Women’s Health Project, WG&AC began producing a bilingual (English and Spanish) resources guide that will identify immigrant-friendly businesses, service providers, attorneys, social service agencies, etc. We intend to distribute 1,000 copies upon completion.
9. **Light in Darkness** December 6, 5 – 6:30 PM in support of immigrants and the Muslim community. A brief interfaith service in the



the courtyard at Holy Trinity Episcopal Church was held followed by a candlelight rally at City Hall, including a statement by the Mayor reaffirming Gainesville as a Welcoming City whereineveryone of what-

ever race, religion, or national origin can be secure and achieve their full potential.

10. **Movie Screening and Discussion, December 7, 2016, Pugh Hall (UF Campus):** A discussion of causes and effects of the international refugee crisis was coupled with screening of “Le Havre,” a movie about African immigrants in France

**11. Museum Night at the Harn Museum of Art, December 8, 2016:** WG&AC participated in an evening highlighting migration, diversity, displacement, and shared global humanity, which included a discussion about how to assist refugees in Florida. A map showing national origins of a few participants was a powerful symbol of our work.



## Internships

WG&AC was fortunate to have the support of University of Florida interns during both spring and fall semesters in 2016. We are very appreciative of the efforts described below by Catherine and Tate to help improve access to services for newcomers in Gainesville.

- **Tate Quiñones:** Tate ran our English Partner Program throughout 2016 and helped to expand it from just a few volunteers to more than 50 English partners. As coordinator of this program, Tate managed schedules, volunteer applications, and the matching of English speakers with non-native speakers. Tate laid the groundwork for one of our most successful programs to date.
- **Catherine Merkley:** In fall 2016, Kate assisted WG&AC in establishing our video guides program. She helped to create our videos for newcomers related to purchasing a bicycle and/or

car, finding housing, and identifying affordable shopping locations around the City of Gainesville.

## Community Partnerships

In addition to our partners listed above (Rural Women's Health Project, Alachua County Library System, University of Florida's English Language Institute), WG&AC also partnered with the following community businesses and organizations during 2016:

**Cobbler's Corner:** Provided by the Florida Community Design Center (FCDC), we utilized this shared meeting and workspace for Board meetings and staff and intern work between August and December 2016. FCDC Executive Director Randy Wells also serves on the board of WG&AC.

**Emmanuel Mennonite Meeting House:** We have used the Emmanuel Mennonite Meeting House for Board meetings and special events since our first months in operation. We are particularly grateful to Eve MacMaster, Meeting House pastor, for allowing us to use the space. Eve is married to WG&AC Board President Richard MacMaster.

## Paula Roetscher: A Note of Appreciation

As WG&AC's Executive Director from 2015-2016, Paula Roetscher was integral in making Gainesville the first "Welcoming City" in Florida. Paula had a major role in presenting this project to the Gainesville City Commission and the people of Gainesville and in shaping the vision of Welcoming Gainesville, Inc.

Paula interned with Gainesville Interfaith Alliance for Immigrant Justice in Spring 2015 and planned an immigration conference that September. It brought together various groups working with farmworkers to

improve their situation. She demonstrated a high degree of competency and commitment, impressing many members of what would become the WG&AC Board of Directors.

During the summer of 2015, Paula returned home to Buttstadt, Thuringia, Germany, where she worked with Syrian, Somali, and Eritrean refugees. Her plan had been to study in Amman, Jordan for her final University of Florida semester, concentrating on her Arabic minor. Instead, she returned to Gainesville that fall for her senior year. Then, rather than enroll in graduate school in Germany, she decided take up the challenge of guiding WG&AC through its first year. Her focus was on creation of programs that could be turned over to volunteers.

As Executive Director, Paula began speaking to civic and church groups in October 2015 and made her first presentation to a City Commission committee in November. She worked with an interfaith clergy group on a public event in December and dedicated countless hours to planning and organizing a community forum on Islamophobia and diversity in January 2016. She made the case for Welcoming City at the meeting of the City Commission on February 18, 2016.

Paula brought fresh ideas for a diverse array of programs and projects, shaping the vision of what a welcoming city can be and do, and enlisting new groups and volunteers to help make it a reality. She laid a firm foundation for WG&AC to continue growing and providing services to both Gainesville and Alachua County.

In the face of fiscal exigency, the Board accepted her resignation in December 2016, but we remain inspired by her commitment and passion for advocacy and outreach work.

## Welcoming Week: Sept. 16-25, 2016



From September 16-25, 2016, WG&AC held several events in the Gainesville community in conjunction with national Welcoming Week. It is sponsored by Welcoming America, WG&AC's parent national organization. One of our largest annual events, Welcoming Week offers the opportunity to celebrate the contributions that immigrants, refugees, new Americans, and foreign-born residents make each day to our community. It provides the opportunity to celebrate our diverse community, raise awareness about the challenges foreign-born residents face, and cultivate greater compassion and understanding for those who need our support. Last year's week included the following events:

**Traveling Exhibit "People on the Move," Sept. 14 – Oct. 10:** Comprised of 12 panels that inform about worldwide migration, including economic migration, displaced peoples, refugees, and the challenges they face, the exhibit provided guests with a better understanding of this highly charged topic and provided ideas for ways to become involved with and advocate on behalf of immigrants and refugees.

**Welcoming Week Celebration, Sept. 22, City Hall Plaza:** On September 22, Mayor Lauren Poe proclaimed the period of September

16–25 Welcoming Week in Gainesville. We celebrated our membership in the Welcoming America network and our work to set an example for all of Florida and other communities around the United States.

**Interfaith Donation Drive for Refugees in Florida, Sept. 25:** Different faith communities in Gainesville collected basic needs items in high demand by refugees who are new to Florida.

For 2017, Welcoming Week will be 15 – 24 Sept.

## Summary Financial Report

### Income

Individual donations	\$ 5,043.96
Organizational donations	\$ 9,600.00
Misc. other	\$ 100.00
Grant	\$ 900.00
Loans	<u>\$ 2,824.00</u>
	\$18,467.96

### Expenditure

Fees (Bank, Federal, State)	\$ 1,143.32
Salary	\$11,766.00
Fringes & benefits	\$ 1,828.84
Events	\$ 513.94
Miscellaneous	\$ 228.07
Postage	\$ 61.10
Supplies	\$ 54.56
Travel	\$ 2,437.01
Web Presence	\$ 71.88
Welcoming America	<u>\$ 50.00</u>
	\$18,154.72

<u>End-of-Year Balance</u>	\$ 313.24
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## Major Supporters

We thank the following organizations for their support in 2016:

Altrusa Club

Covenant Presbyterian Church

Gainesville Area Chamber of Commerce

Gainesville Rotary Club

Catholic Charities Refugee Resettlement

Emmanuel Mennonite Church

Jean Chalmers Real Estate

Khadija Foundation

Miller Real Estate

Pamphalon Foundation

St. Elizabeth's Guild of Holy Trinity Episcopal Church

Sister City Program of Gainesville

Unitarian Universalist Fellowship of Gainesville

United Church of Gainesville

Westminster Presbyterian Church

We also are grateful to the many individuals who contributed.

## In the News

We are grateful to the following Gainesville-area news outlets for highlighting our work during 2016:

### **TV-20 piece about WG&AC Open House on August 7, 2016:**

*<http://www.wcjb.com/local-news/2016/08/welcoming-gainesville-helps-foreigners>*

### **Gainesville Sun article about WG&AC's Open House on August 7, 2016:**

*"City, county join Welcoming America to foster inclusion for new residents" (<http://www.gainesville.com/news/20160807/city-county-join-welcoming-america-to-foster-inclusion-for-new-residents>)*

**Independent Florida Alligator** article regarding our English Partner Program:

*“Welcoming Gainesville to offer English classes for international students”* ([http://www.alligator.org/news/local/article\\_5577fd5c-68e2-11e6-878f-d3060805ef3c.html](http://www.alligator.org/news/local/article_5577fd5c-68e2-11e6-878f-d3060805ef3c.html))

**Gainesville Sun editorial from August 2016:**

*“A shifting tone on immigration”* (<http://www.gainesville.com/opinion/20160828/editorial-shifting-tone-on-immigration>)

**Gainesville Sun editorial September 2016:**

*“Immigrants are indispensable in Gainesville”* (<http://www.gainesville.com/opinion/20160911/richard-macmaster-and-paula-roetscher-immigrants-are-indispensable-in-gainesville>)

**CBS 4 and WUFT coverage of Welcoming Week Proclamation on September 22, 2016:**

*“Gainesville celebrates first ‘Welcoming Week’”*  
(<http://www.wuft.org/news/2016/09/23/welcoming-week-in-gainesville-highlights-citys-effort-to-help-immigrants/>)

*“Welcoming Week in Gainesville Highlights City’s Effort to Help Immigrants”* (<http://mycbs4.com/news/local/gainesville-celebrates-first-welcoming-week>)

**Gainesville Sun article about WG&AC’s Interfaith Service called “Light in Darkness” on December 6, 2016:**

*“Candle-lighting proclaims Gainesville a Welcoming City”* (<http://www.gainesville.com/news/20161206/candle-lighting-proclaims-gainesville-welcoming-city>)

## **Looking to the Future: Plans for 2017**

The size and scope of WG&AC's startup year illustrate our biggest challenge for 2017: fundraising. In 2016, we realized that the need for WG&AC's work was far greater than our current revenue. We took on various projects to do everything that came our way – and largely succeeded. But doing so had a cost. Now, more than ever, we face the need for sustainable fundraising plans to continue long-term, high-impact operations. Due to funding issues, we were unable to support a full-time Executive Director for the 2017 year. However, while we need staff support, it is clear that the highest priority is a part-time program coordinator who could provide the support needed for our volunteer programs and activities to continue functioning successfully, while remaining financially sound.

## **Report Authors & Contributors**

Paula Roetscher, Executive Director (2015-2016)

Richard MacMaster, Board President

Randy Wells, Board Member

Sam Trickey, Board Member

Liz Getman, Volunteer

## **Board of Directors & Staff**

Paula Roetscher, Executive Director (2015-2016)

Richard MacMaster, President

Sam Trickey, Secretary

Randy Wells, Treasurer

Andy Bachman

Milford Griner

Dan Johnson

David Kaiman

Steve Kalishman  
Aqueela Khuddus  
Paul Parker  
Marihelen Wheeler  
Diana Moreno  
Liz Getman

## Thank You

The volunteers and Board of Welcoming Gainesville & Alachua County thank the community for helping make 2016 a successful first year of operation. We are excited to see how we can grow and what we can accomplish together over the coming years.

**REQUIRED DECLARATION:**

Welcoming Gainesville, Inc., d/b/a Welcoming Gainesville and Alachua County, is a Florida non-profit 501(c)(3) corporation, Florida registration number CH47514. A copy of the official registration and financial information may be obtained from the Division of Consumer Services by calling toll-free within the state. Registration does not imply endorsement, approval, or recommendation by the State.



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