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SUNDAY, SEPTEMBER 14, 2025

Brevard Cultural Alliance to expand

NEWS, 5A

sunday

FLORIDATODAY.COM

‘People should visit, not fear’

Why humans present bigger threat to wildlife in Alligator Alcatraz region

Antonio Fins Palm Beach Post | USA TODAY NETWORK

OCHOPEE – There is mud and there are mosquitoes, plenty of both, along this stretch of The Florida Trail. Mostly, though, it is stunning scenery punctuated by Florida’s natural treasures – species of flora and fauna found only here, from ghost orchids to the treasured panther. ● Along this path in the Big Cypress National Preserve, however, coming across the iconic American Alligator is not guaranteed, and it’s lottery-like odds to cross paths with the invasive Burmese python. So say the park rangers, hikers, campers, indigenous people, sportsmen, environmental advocates who work, live, trek, hunt and defend the region. ● Nonetheless, the hammocks and prairies of the Big Cypress have become synonymous with the feared reptiles thanks to political rhetoric. Gov. Ron DeSantis, state Attorney General James Uthmeier, state GOP officials and President Donald Trump have claimed this part of the Big Cypress is inhospitable and dangerous terrain in explaining why they located their Alligator Alcatraz immigration detention center just a few miles to the east.

See **WILDLIFE**, Page 13A



Open for now

Florida’s detention site to stay open for now, court rules. Scan to read more.

ERIN CRABB USA TODAY NETWORK
ILLUSTRATIONS; AND GETTY IMAGES

“The people who described it that way haven’t spent much time in it, they are out of touch with what the Everglades are and the real value of Big Cypress National Preserve. Sounds like they need to get outside and go for a hike.”

Eve Samples
Executive director of the Friends of the Everglades



Charlie Kirk, wearing a “Gulf of America” T-shirt, spoke in February at the Plaza of the Americas on the University of Florida campus in Gainesville.
ELLIOT TRITTO/THE GAINESVILLE SUN

University officials reaffirm discourse

Statements underscore civility after Kirk death

Stephany Matat
USA TODAY NETWORK – Florida

The fatal shooting of conservative activist Charlie Kirk has prompted discussions about controversial speakers and free speech on Florida’s college campuses, which have previously hosted Kirk and other politically volatile thought leaders.

Kirk was a prominent ally of President Donald Trump, who founded conservative youth organization Turning Point USA with more than 800 college chapters. He toured university campuses across the country in “Prove Me Wrong” debates, by engaging with students in discussions about topics including abortion rights, gun violence and immigration.

After Kirk, 31, was fatally shot at Utah Valley University Sept. 10 in Orem, Utah, university officials in Florida acted quickly to affirm free speech rights on campus and embrace civil discourse.

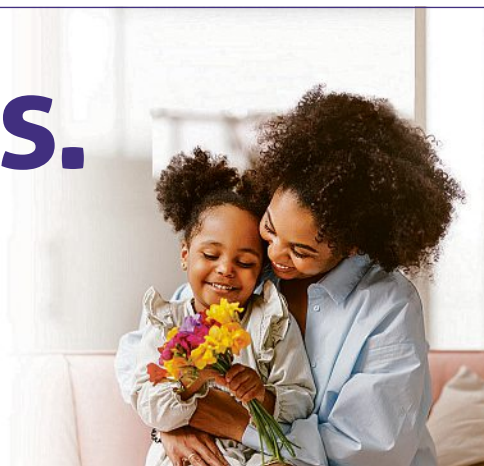
This comes as Republican officials across the country, including Gov. Ron DeSantis, recall Kirk as someone who

See **FREE SPEECH**, Page 9A



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Volume 60 | No. 153
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