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A decade of change

By **DAVE SCHEIBER**

Published Nov. 21, 1997

Nov. 20, 1987: The day wasn't a particularly remarkable one in the news.

Five Democratic presidential candidates with the surnames Dukakis, Simon, Jackson, Gephardt and Babbitt were crowding the campaign trail in Des Moines. U.S. Customs agents were busy busting a major cocaine smuggling ring out of Honduras. Amid much media hoopla, Mr. Rogers moved his neighborhood for a day to the Soviet Embassy in Washington to do a show with Tatiana, his communist TV counterpart.

And, locally, rookie Tampa Bay Bucs quarterback Vinny Testaverde still hadn't started a game under first-year head coach Ray Perkins. For the record, the NFL's ballyhooed top draft pick was getting set to ride the bench once again as the 4-5 Bucs prepared to host the 7-2 San Francisco 49ers – a game in which (oh, the pain of it) recently traded Tampa Bay quarterback Steve Young would receive the team MVP award for 1986 at halftime; and fans would endure a 24-10 loss by exhorting Perkins to play Testaverde with thunderous chants of "Vinny! Vinny!" (Yes, you children out there, there really was a time when Testaverde didn't get booed in Tampa Bay.)

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But sandwiched in between all that and more, there was one noteworthy development for readers of the St. Petersburg Times. A new section of the paper made its debut on the Tampa Bay arts and entertainment scene: Weekend magazine was born.

A product of many months of brainstorming and planning, Weekend arrived on front lawns and street corners that Friday morning with a splashy new way of packaging entertainment for the paper. The old Evening Independent, owned by the Times Publishing Co. and shut down in 1986, had boasted a weekly entertainment tabloid called Weekender. But Weekend marked the first "tab" approach to entertainment coverage by the Times, which had previously weaved its stories on music, movies, TV and the arts throughout daily Floridian sections.

The first cover story, written by Janis D. Froelich, featured rising stand-up star Jay Leno, who was in town for a gig at the swanky new Tampa Bay Performing Arts Center. There was an interview with emerging pop diva Gloria Estefan of the Miami Sound Machine by Eric Snider; a four-star review of Nuts, pairing up Barbra Streisand and Richard Dreyfuss, by Hal Lipper; a TV preview of Don Johnson's Sonny Crockett marrying a character played by singer Sheena Easton on Miami Vice to boost ratings (the show had plummeted from No. 5 to No. 49); a full-page ad trumpeting the grand opening that day of the Crossroads 8 Theaters, across from Tyrone Square Mall; and countless entertainment tips and tidbits for the weekend.

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I was the editor of that inaugural issue. Ten years and some 520 issues later, I'm still here, coordinating coverage for Weekend and entertainment in other sections as well. It has been a fun ride, and along the way, there have been many talented people to lend their hands to Weekend and help make it a success over the years. Too many to mention here.

A few, however, have been around for most or all of the run: art critic Mary Ann Marger was expertly assessing area art and artists even before Weekend's start in '87, and aside from a brief stint at The National sports newspaper in New York in 1990, Roger Fischer played a vital role in the weekly production of the magazine until becoming the Times' online director just last week.

To mark the occasion of Weekend's 10th, I decided to go back to Issue No. 1 and try to enlist the help of our first guest star, Jay Leno. The Tonight Show host graciously agreed to pose for today's cover shot with a copy of the first issue, and also talked to me recently about how the past 10 years have treated him. You can read that story on the next page.

In addition, our critics have taken a look at their respective areas of coverage to evaluate the changes a decade has brought about, with John Fleming on the performing arts, Marger on art, Eric Deggans on television, Steve Persall on movies, Chris Sherman on dining and Logan Neill on pop music. You'll also get a blast-from-the-past look through the years at selected Weekend covers and various lists that will jog your memory banks.

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Reviewing a 10-year period like this one underscores just how much life can change, one way or the other. In the case of Tampa Bay, the change truly seems to be positive. There are more venues of all sizes, more distinctive entertainment hubs on both sides of the bay, more performers and artists producing noteworthy work. And though we're all getting a little older, well, hopefully that change is for the better, too.

So take a few minutes to check out these past 10 years.

And have a good weekend.

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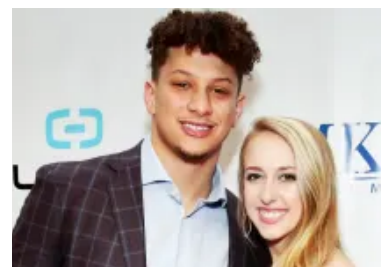
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