

## At long last, a happy landing

Anxious moments played right up to the face-to-face reunion of an Iranian family.

BY DIVYA KUMAR  
Times Staff Writer

TAMPA — Javad Akbarpour wanted to remember the moment, so he took his cell-phone out of his pocket and started filming.

“Damineh, how are you feeling?” he asked his wife.

“I can’t wait anymore,” 39-year-old Damineh Oveisi replied, beaming. “I can hear my heart beating.”

It was 5:45 p.m. on a Saturday in October, and they had just arrived at Tampa International Airport. They stood together outside of Terminal F with a bouquet of pink and red roses and two balloons. The couple’s 10-year-old daughter, Leyana, was there, too, with a sign she had made for the occasion.

“Welcome to the U.S.A., Mamani and Babi!” it said.

In August, the *Tampa Bay Times* chronicled Oveisi’s months-long fight to get travel visas for her parents, Maryam Rastkhiz and Lotfollah Oveisi.

Oveisi, a U.S. citizen born in Iran, wanted her parents to see the life she had built for herself in Florida, where she worked as a lab technician, owned a home and was raising an Iranian-American daughter. But when the Trump administration banned immigrants from seven countries, including Iran, her hopes were crushed.

Oveisi was even more devastated when she learned her mother had leukemia and needed a treatment that wasn’t available in Iran.

Oveisi made a last-ditch effort to bring her parents to the United States in March, arguing that her mom’s medical emergency qualified for a waiver to the travel ban. She spent the next



LUIS SANTANA | Times  
**Damineh Oveisi greets her mother, Maryam Rastkhiz, at Tampa International Airport.**

### LOCAL Nasty Nestor

On its way to the Panhandle, the tropical storm delivered wind, rain and two tornadoes to the Tampa Bay region. **1B**

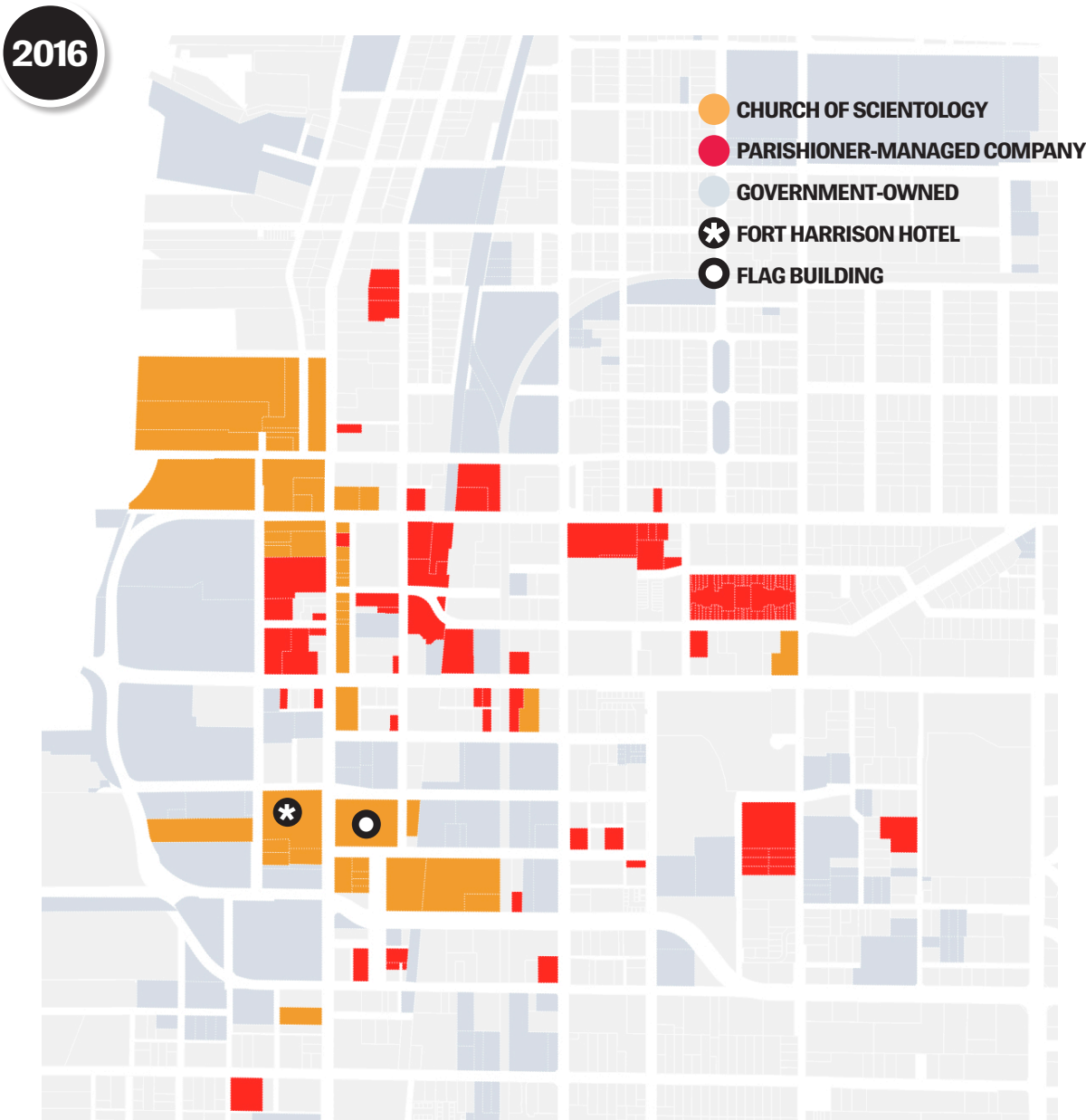
**FLORIDIAN**  
**A passion for art**  
Stanton Storer’s treasures shine in “Unbound” at the University of Tampa Scarfone/Hartley Gallery. **1E**

**SPORTS**  
**Top 100 all-time Bucs**  
Our ranking of the franchise’s best players ranges from the first draft pick in 1976 to Super Bowl winners and current stars. **1C**

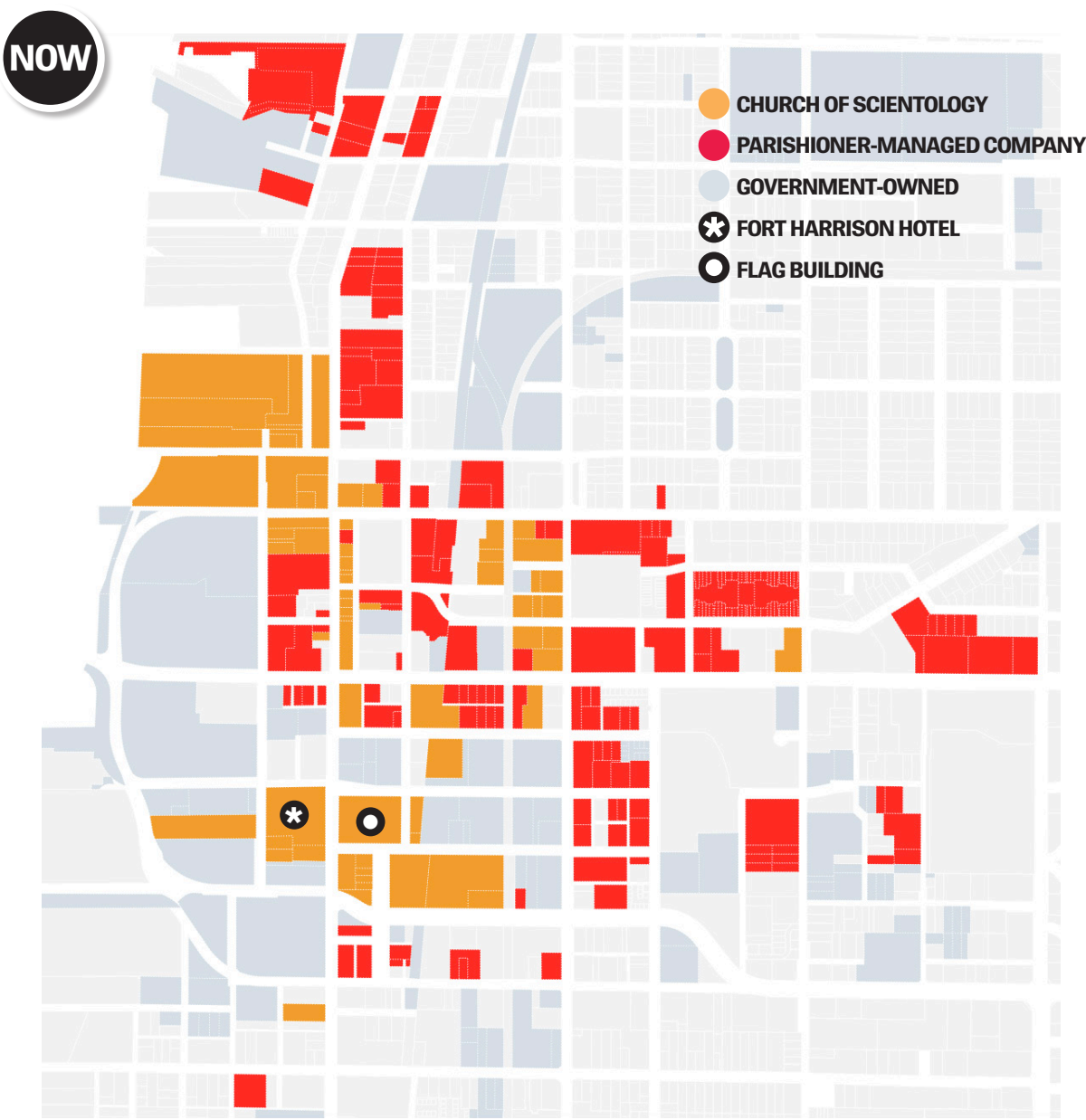
**Today’s weather**  
**Shower or t-storm**  
8 a.m. Noon 4 p.m. 8 p.m.  
77° 84° 85° 78°  
40% chance of rain  
**More, back page of Sports**

### A TAMPA BAY TIMES INVESTIGATION

**Scientology came to downtown Clearwater in 1975 with plans to take over the city. Its campus slowly grew, with members buying property around it.**



**Three years ago, the church and its followers began acquiring retail property at an unprecedented rate. Their footprint doubled.**



# CLEAR TAKEOVER

**Times staff writer Tracey McManus reveals the mysterious deals that have the potential to reshape downtown Clearwater. Our map shows every transaction.**

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CHRIS URSO | Times  
**Two photos show Igor Fruman hugging Florida Gov.-elect Ron DeSantis, right, at an election night watch party in 2018.**

## Closer, upon further review

Indicted Giuliani associates were known to DeSantis, he now concedes.

BY STEVE CONTORNO  
Times Political Editor

The photographs show Ron DeSantis leaning in to hug a heavyset, middle-aged man amid a sea of onlookers.

DeSantis then turns to another man, who wraps his arms around the newly elected governor at his victory celebration in Orlando.

The two men embraced by DeSantis in these previously unpublished pictures? Igor Fruman and Lev Parnas, the Soviet-born businessmen and Rudy Giuliani associates indicted on charges of interfering in U.S. elections. Obscure until this month, Fruman and Parnas have become major figures in the drama behind the drive to impeach President Donald Trump.

When it was first learned the duo had contributed \$50,000 to DeSantis’ campaign last year, the governor’s spokeswoman described Fruman and Parnas as donors whom DeSantis didn’t know well — or at all.

The saga may have faded without a word from DeSantis, just like other times that questions about his fundraising threatened his political ascent.

His spokeswoman, Helen Aguirre Ferré, first asserted Oct. 10 that Fruman and Parnas “may” have attended GOP events during the 2018 elections, but that DeSantis “does not have a relationship with these individuals.”

Four days later, videos and photos of the men huddled together during DeSantis’ victory party emerged.

Even then, Ferré minimized the presence of Parnas and Fruman. When asked about the men, who helped Trump’s personal attorney, Giuliani, push for investigations in Ukraine of the president’s political opponents, Ferré said that the event was “open to the public.” Yet the pictures show Parnas wearing a badge stating “official guest” and the two standing next to DeSantis’ teacher from his Dune-din grade school days, a fixture at Tampa Bay area campaign events. Ferré later said “donors were likely invited” by his campaign to the party.

After a social media firestorm over the images, DeSantis finally acknowledged Wednesday that he

» See DESANTIS, 12A

