

# CORAL GABLES

APRIL 2026

MAGAZINE

## INNOVATION SPECIAL ISSUE

A LOOK AT HOW CORAL GABLES  
IS EMBRACING THE FUTURE



AN AI GENERATED CONCEPT  
OF CORAL GABLES IN THE  
NOT-TOO-DISTANT FUTURE



## Innovative Orthopedic Care Focused on Recovery and Performance

At Baptist Health Orthopedic Care, with its hub located at Baptist Health Doctors Hospital, preserving joints and delaying or avoiding joint replacement is a top priority. Our specialists use cutting-edge joint preservation techniques and biologic therapies to promote healing and restore function, offering patients advanced alternatives before considering surgery. As the official sports medicine provider for professional, collegiate and student athletes, our team of sports medicine physicians, orthopedic surgeons, athletic trainers and physical therapists collaborates to deliver expert care for sports-related injuries. Equipped with the latest technology and minimally invasive techniques, we customize treatments to each patient's needs — whether that means rehabilitation, biologic therapies or, when necessary, the most complex surgical procedures. From hands and shoulders to hips, knees and ankles, our mission is simple: to keep you moving, performing and living without pain.

### Welcome to Innovative Healthcare

Please visit [BaptistHealth.net](https://www.baptisthealth.net) for more information about our Baptist Health services or physicians.



# Elevating the Standard in Brain and Spine Care

Baptist Health Miami Neuroscience Institute continues to advance specialty care in epilepsy, functional neurosurgery and complex neurological disease through multidisciplinary expertise and leading-edge technology. A major milestone was the recruitment of Aviva Abosch, M.D., Ph.D., as deputy director, director of epilepsy surgery and co-director of functional neurosurgery, significantly strengthening

our advanced epilepsy and functional neurosurgical services.

Baptist Health South Miami Hospital also earned The Joint Commission's Advanced Spine Certification, underscoring its commitment to quality.

Academically, Miami Neuroscience Institute successfully launched the Florida International University/Baptist Health Neurology Residency Program in July 2025. Looking ahead, the Institute will break ground on the future home of the Kenneth C. Griffin Center at Baptist Health Miami Neuroscience Institute. Funded by a \$50 million gift from Kenneth C. Griffin, founder and CEO of Citadel and founder of Griffin Catalyst, this state-of-the-art facility will advance neurological care in South Florida and beyond.



## Precision Heart & Vascular Care

At Baptist Health Heart & Vascular Care, your heart care starts with prevention and advanced diagnostics, long before surgery is ever needed. We are partnering with Florida International University to bring artificial intelligence-powered heart-sound analysis into clinical testing, a technology designed to detect subtle signs of heart disease that traditional exams may miss.

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case is reviewed by a coordinated team of cardiologists, imaging specialists and surgeons. Together, they develop one clear, individualized plan.

Because when heart disease is found earlier and treated with precision, you may have more options and a smoother path forward.





# Leaders in Excellence. Across Every Specialty.

Baptist Health is nationally recognized by U.S. News & World Report for high performance in Cancer, Heart & Vascular, Neuroscience and Orthopedics.

When it comes to your health, expertise matters. That's why more people trust Baptist Health, where world-class physicians, breakthrough treatments and nationally ranked outcomes come together in cancer, heart and vascular, neuroscience and orthopedics.

From fighting cancer with precision therapies, to advancing cardiovascular and brain care, to helping you move again with orthopedic innovation, our teams are redefining what's possible, every day. Because high performance isn't just a ranking. It's our promise.



**Baptist  
Health**

[BaptistHealth.net](https://www.BaptistHealth.net)



## Advancing the Future of Cancer Care

Baptist Health Cancer Care is advancing innovation where it matters most: in highly specialized, patient-centered programs. The Young Women's Breast Cancer Program supports women diagnosed at earlier ages with tailored treatment plans, fertility preservation counseling, genetic risk assessment and services that reflect the realities of building careers and families. This commitment will expand with the AI and Jane Nahmad Women's Cancer Center, bringing dedicated experts and services together in one destination designed entirely around women's needs.

This summer, the Eugene M. & Christine E. Lynn Cancer Institute will introduce proton therapy — our second proton location in the Baptist Health system — expanding access to highly precise radiation that better spares healthy tissue while targeting tumors. In prostate cancer care, Murugesan Manoharan, M.D., and Manuel Ozambela, M.D., are advancing robotic HIFU technology and were recently first in the world to fuse PSMA PET imaging with live ultrasound guidance, enhancing precision and enabling highly personalized focal treatment.



We also recognize Michael Chuong, M.D., for advancing pancreatic cancer care. He is the first U.S. physician credentialed to use tumor-treating fields (TTFields) for pancreatic cancer, with our team being the first worldwide to treat a patient. The PANOVA-3 trial showed improved outcomes when TTFields were added to standard chemotherapy.

# 71 VALENCIA

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LUXURY COLLECTION<sup>SM</sup>

# 3149

BRICKELL AVENUE

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Set on 1.61 acres with 170+ feet of Biscayne Bay frontage, this exceptional estate sits on iconic Brickell Avenue in Coconut Grove. Perched on the Silver Bluff ridge along Millionaire's Row, it offers unobstructed bay views and privacy. Minutes from Coconut Grove, Vizcaya, Downtown Miami, Key Biscayne, and Miami Beach, the property features a private dock and rare waterfront living.





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Sales Gallery: 203 University Drive, Coral Gables, FL 33134

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ONE

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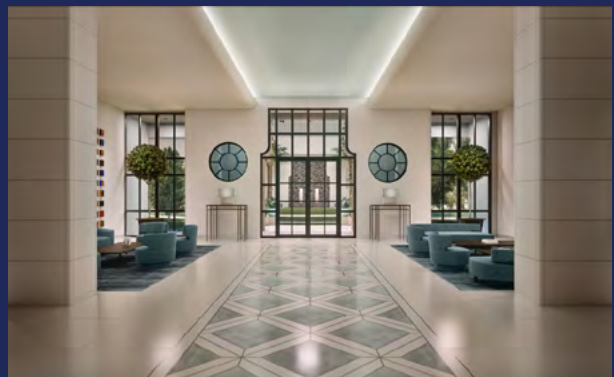
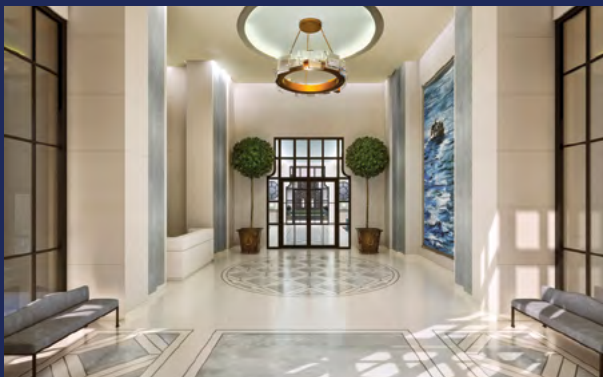
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# 2025 IMPACT REPORT

**\$18,269,320**

TOTAL ASSETS

**\$14,044,131**

TOTAL REVENUE

**\$7,719,969**

TOTAL GRANTS AND SCHOLARSHIPS AWARDED

**694**

NUMBER OF  
GRANTS & SCHOLARSHIPS

**226**

NONPROFIT ORGANIZATIONS  
& SCHOOLS SUPPORTED

The Coral Gables Community Foundation partners with individuals, families, and organizations to create personalized charitable funds that support impactful philanthropy. As a grant making public charity since 1991, we provide leadership and resources to make life better in Coral Gables and beyond. We take pride in assisting our donors in reaching their philanthropic goals through our Donor Advised Funds and other giving vehicles. We invite you for a conversation about how we can help make a bold impact on causes important to you.



**CORAL GABLES**  
COMMUNITY FOUNDATION

**35**

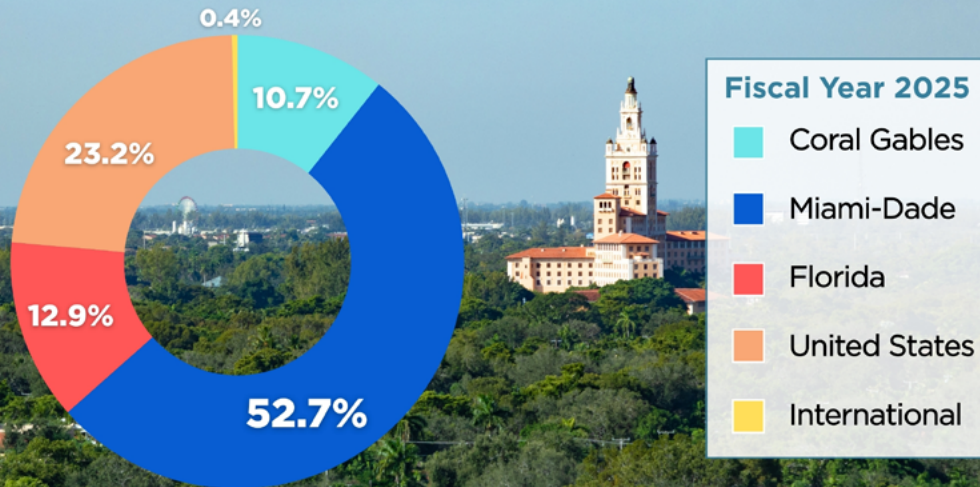
YEARS  
EST. 1991

288 Aragon Ave, Suite D Coral Gables, FL 33134

305-446-9670 | [gablesfoundation.org](http://gablesfoundation.org)

# We Coral Gables

63.4% of our grants in 2025 went to organizations and students in Coral Gables & Miami-Dade County



**Fiscal Year 2025**

-  Coral Gables
-  Miami-Dade
-  Florida
-  United States
-  International

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Special Assistant to the President & CEO

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**“WE’VE BEEN DOING TOWN HALLS FOR 13 YEARS. YOU MAY NOT ALWAYS AGREE WITH US, BUT YOU’RE GOING TO HAVE A SEAT AT THE TABLE.”**

MAYOR VINCE LAGO, AT HIS MARCH TOWN HALL MEETING AT THE PUBLIC SAFETY BUILDING (PAGE 34)

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STUDENT RESEARCHERS AT THE GROWING BEYOND EARTH LAB AT FAIRCHILD TROPICAL BOTANIC GARDEN

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### CIVIC TECHNOLOGY

Coral Gables is known nationally as a leading “smart city” due to advances in tech. The goal: improving the lives of people who live and work in the Gables.

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### EDUCATION

AI is driving innovation in education today, including enhancing student learning based on feedback algorithms.

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### HISTORIC PRESERVATION

One of the more innovative ways to preserve the local history of Coral Gables is by re-inventing the purpose of a historic building, a concept known as re-purposing.



# Bird Key

One of the last private islands capable of development within sight of a major world city!

There are properties. There are legacies. And then, on the rarest of occasions, there are places that transcend both... Bird Key is that place.

Set within the turquoise waters of Biscayne Bay just moments from Miami, yet entirely removed from it, this 37.5+/- acre private island represents one of the most extraordinary opportunities in the world. Only four stewards have held this legacy property since 1700.

Imagine approaching just after sunrise. Your boat glides across the waters of Biscayne Bay as the horizon ignites in amber and rose. Dolphins surface in the distance. Ahead, the island rises gently from the water, its lush canopy sheltering one of the most remarkable settings imaginable.

What you can create here is almost without precedent, A possibly luminous structure of stone, glass, and light, private, monumental, serene, where the world's most discerning visitors arrive by boat or seaplane to something they have never quite experienced before. Or, perhaps a protected nature sanctuary, where mangroves, herons, and manatees are preserved for generations.

Mornings here unfold in stillness, broken only by breezes and seabirds. Afternoons bring the bay alive with shimmering light. Evenings conclude beneath vast tropical skies, where the only lights are the stars above and the glow of the Miami skyline across the waters.

The island does not demand a particular destiny. It simply offers one that very few places on earth still can – the freedom to define it.

Opportunities of this magnitude are not merely purchased. They are entrusted to the next steward capable of shaping their future.

To explore this once-in-a-generation opportunity, contact Audrey Ross: 305.206.4003 | ARoss@MIAMIREALESTATE.COM



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## All That is Old is New Again

One of the reasons we enjoy producing our annual look at innovation in the Gables is the irony of it. The simple fact is that Coral Gables is the most historic city in Miami-Dade County, and one of the most historic in the state. It is a city that relishes its century-old roots, which it strives to preserve via its Mediterranean revival architecture as well as in its elegant lifestyle, clearly a throwback to a less frenetic world.

At the same time, Coral Gables prides itself on being a center for innovation, a city earnestly looking to accommodate the future – in terms of both opportunities and challenges. Our city is routinely lauded for being an award-winning “Smart City,” largely due to an IT infrastructure that is the brainchild of Raimundo Rudolfo, the city’s director of innovation and technology, and its chief innovation officer. Under Rudolfo’s leadership, the city is in the final phase of wiring itself for 5G high-speed communications, which will allow for everything from better business and civic (think police and fire) connectivity to a network of sensors that can monitor – and improve – human and vehicular traffic.

But that is just the surface of the Gables’ spirit of innovation, which permeates the city. While much of it is now AI-driven [like the rest of the country], there are plenty of solutions for the future which come simply from

creative thinking. Sometimes it’s a kind of Back to the Future re-use of the past, like the city’s trolley system or its repurposing of historic properties. Other times its good old-fashioned problem solving with an open mind – like the city’s plan to invest in a smokeless BioChar waste disposal system, which will recycle green matter into fertilizer and asphalt for a lower price that trucking it to a dump. On the purely AI-driven front, we are lucky to have the University of Miami located here; their use of virtual reality for educational purposes is so exceptional that researchers from Disney and Meta have come by to see what they can learn from us.

In the end, says innovation director Rudolfo, it’s all about making daily life better for the residents of, and visitors to, the City Beautiful. Making it easier for them to interact with the city government, making it easier for them travel within the city, keeping the city streets safer, providing better health care solutions, and maintaining a healthy and natural environment.

That is the goal of our innovative city – to embrace the future while protecting the past. While some cities eviscerate their history in favor of modernity, and others are so caught up in their past they cannot move forward, the Gables’ unique ability to synthesize yesterday and tomorrow exemplifies the best in civic innovation.

**JP FABER**  
**EDITOR-IN-CHIEF**  
**CORAL GABLES MAGAZINE**

PS – While the future may be AI-driven, that world is not yet perfected. We asked an AI program to create an image of Coral Gables with a robot getting into a driverless car. We even submitted photos. The cover is the best it could do. Hmmm.... looks like we still need the human touch.



*Cover: An AI rendering of a possible future streetscape in downtown Coral Gables*

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**Needs a little TLC**

The Miami Herald published a letter of mine over 12 years ago, in February 2014. I could write the exact same letter today, word for word. [The letter complained of a lack of maintenance of the Grenada public golf course]. Will your magazine publish it? Probably not - why bother? Nothing has changed. In fact, back in 2014 we still had some rain shelters on the golf course. Remember the rain shelters?

What I find so frustrating is that the Granada Golf Course is the very epitome of George Merrick's vision. One hundred years later, it could and should be the emerald jewel in the crown of the City Beautiful.

It is so much more than a mere golf course; it is more than the village green, more than Central Park, it is the very essence and soul of Coral Gables. The mayor, the City Commissioners and even the Director of Parks & Rec. understand and appreciate its value. But somehow, the suffocating

city bureaucracy ensures that no progress is made and no grass grows. As Keats might have expressed it: *"The Bermuda has withered on the greens / And no birds sing."* Twelve years on and nothing has changed. Sadly.

**Patrick Alexander**

**Issues**

Issues for the magazine to look into: 1) Rampant use of scooters and e-bikes on the sidewalks of Coral Gables. 2) Take a drive around Coral Gables at night and see how many street lights are not working [especially] on Bird Road east of Granada are not working. Granted, some of the lights are serviced by FPL and MDC but months go by and lights are not repaired, creating a dangerous environment for drivers, pedestrians and bikers...

**Aaron Philipson**

**Cemeteries are Sacred**

This is a commentary on The Garden of Our

Lord and its appeal to the City Commission last month: The Garden of Our Lord is a cemetery, and we should save the garden as sacred ground. During the presentation, the appellant included information stating that The Garden of Our Lord is recorded as a cemetery under Florida law. The opposing side objected, denying the assertion.

Well, here is proof that The Garden is indeed a registered cemetery. Sara Ayers-Rigsby with the Florida Public Archaeology Network confirms, "I can see the cemetery mapped. The site file staff in Tallahassee has it listed in the Florida Master Site File as DA19711 Garden of our Lord."

A garden sitting on consecrated ground should not only be respected but revered. It is a memorial garden and also a cemetery - a final resting place for some families. A sacred ground worthy of a miraculous intervention.

**Dr. Karelia Martinez Carbonell**

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As a third-generation Floridian, I bring nearly two decades of experience advising clients across South Florida's most sought-after neighborhoods.

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The 75 for 75 Legacy Challenge was created to honor 75 years of caring for children and to help shape the future of pediatric care. **When you document a future gift to Nicklaus Children's Hospital, a 10% matching donation is activated**, instantly increasing your impact. Once the challenge ends, so does the match. Your legacy has the power to carry children forward through lifesaving care, recovery, and dreams yet to be realized. There has never been a more meaningful moment to make it count.



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Hospital**

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### Ready to learn more?

Contact Megan Brahimi, Executive Director, Major & Planned Gifts

Megan.Brahimi@Nicklaushealth.org | [myimpact.nicklauschildrens.org/legacychallenge](https://myimpact.nicklauschildrens.org/legacychallenge)



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# Streetwise

Talk of the Town

See page 30



PLUS  
CITY HALL  
POLITICS  
TALK OF THE TOWN  
BUSINESS

CLASSIC CARS AND COUTURE:  
MODAMIAMI AT THE BILTMORE HOTEL  
FOR ITS 2026 EDITION



# From City Hall

AT ITS SECOND MEETING IN FEBRUARY, THE CORAL GABLES CITY COMMISSION:

## PERMITTING REFORM

Voted 5-0 to deny building permits to contractors with expired permits within the city. “You should not be able to pull a permit in the City of Coral Gables unless you have addressed open and expired permits,” said Mayor Vince Lago. “This is an accountability measure that will protect the residents and the business community to ensure that... no one is left in the lurch with unfinished or shoddy work...” Voted 5-0 to coordinate with Miami-Dade County to make MeetQ Permit Services kiosks available at the city’s Development Services Department. The kiosks will serve those residents who need county permits in addition to city permits by helping them arrange meetings with the applicable county officials or departments. The kiosks have been tested in other municipalities within the county with success.

## MOBILITY HUB UPDATE

Voted 4-1 to accept the chief procurement officer’s recommendation to negotiate a contract for Mobility Hub preconstruction with Kaufman Lynn Construction, the highest ranked proposer. Mayor Lago, who has a robust background in construction, explained that the parking structure would be very complex due to the limited size of the site and that there would be some necessary disruptions in the downtown while construction is ongoing, though these will be mitigated as much as possible through daily cleanings and a dedicated on-site police officer. Commissioner Melissa Castro, who does not support the project, voted against.

## HUMAN TRAFFICKING TRAINING

Voted 3-2 to defer a resolution sponsored by Commissioner Castro that would require all fire rescue and emergency medical services personnel to complete an assault, human trafficking, and abuse training course within the first six months of their employment. Over several hours, commentary was considered from the public and private experts. Police Chief Ed Hudak and Fire Chief Marcos De La Rosa gave extensive presentations summarizing that their departments already conduct extensive training to recognize and manage cases with vulnerable or exploited victims. Personnel will also be going through extra training on human trafficking cases in the lead-up to the FIFA World Cup, which will be partially hosted in Miami this summer. Commissioner Richard Lara expressed concern over

the resolution’s language, which did not outline specifics in terms of training programs, funding, and operational changes, though he did express his support for the general intent of the item. He offered to work together with Castro on an amendment with more actionable language and moved to defer the item until then, which passed despite Castro and Commissioner Ariel Fernandez’s “no” votes.

## BIKE RENTALS TO COME

Discussed implementing a bicycle rental program. Vice Mayor Rhonda Anderson, an avid cyclist, suggested a pick-up/drop-off point across from the Coral Gables Museum and added that she has seen many people on borrowed bikes at Bike Walk Coral Gables events. Commissioner Fernandez suggested a location near or at the Biltmore as well. A potential sponsorship is in the works with Deco Bike, a Miami-based bikeshare company that operates the Miami and Miami Beach Citi Bike programs, as well as the Brightline’s Bright Bike system in West Palm Beach. City staff is working on a proposal, which will include regular and pedal-assisted bikes, but no fully electric bicycles.

## COMPOSTING FOR ALL

Discussed creating a centralized composting facility for resident use at the Coral Gables Library. City staff met with three companies that operate in the region to get proposals, with the cost estimated around \$6,000 per year for two 45-gallon bins with twice weekly pickups. The city has applied for grants to fund the program.

## PRESERVING CORAL REEFS

Voted 5-0 to add the preservation of coral reefs to the city’s legislative priorities list in support of Florida Senate Bill 1422, which designates coral reefs in certain areas as critical natural infrastructure for mitigating climate-related risks and creates additional penalties for harming them.

## PROTECTING OUR WATERS

Voted 5-0 to urge the Board of County Commissioners to reject a proposed development outside the Urban Development Boundary (UDB), which protects downstream water resources including the Biscayne Aquifer, regional groundwater supplies, the Everglades, and connected coastal waters and agricultural lands. The resolution also urges the Florida State Legislature to oppose any legislation that would weaken the UDB and adds preservation of the UDB to the city’s legislative priorities. In 2017, the county tried to place a new wastewater treatment plant on the same site, which was blocked by a lawsuit. Mayor Lago argued that “the UDB line is not our [the city’s fight],” while Commissioner Fernandez posited that anything that affects the Everglades will eventually affect the city and its constituents. In the end, all voted in favor.

## SOCIAL MEDIA UPDATE

Communications Director Martha Pantin presented the City Commission with a summary of its growth in social media platforms, comparing the numbers from December 2025 to December 2024. The biggest gain was in LinkedIn, which jumped 21.18 percent – from 9,919 followers to 12,020 followers. Next came an 8.93 percent growth in Instagram followers, from 82,691 to 90,076. Facebook followed closely with an 8.63% jump, from 22,075 to 23,980 followers. Pantin compared Coral Gables to Miami, which has 46,000 Facebook and 149,000 Instagram followers for a population of 450,000. In other words, while Miami has nine times the population of Coral Gables, it has only twice the number of Facebook followers and less than twice the number of Instagram followers.

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**AT ITS ONLY MEETING IN MARCH, THE CORAL GABLES CITY COMMISSION MET IN THE PUBLIC SAFETY BUILDING (RIGHT).**

It will continue to do so for the next two years as renovations at City Hall take their course (the City Commission offices will be at 234 Minorca, with other staff at 2020 Ponce de Leon. At the March meeting, the Commission:

**DISABILITY RESOURCES**

Voted 5-0 to review and expand the accessible/disability resources page on the city's website to include community resources, programs, and information regarding inclusive amenities.

**RTZ UPDATE**

Voted 4-1 to adjust some parts of the University Station Rapid Transit District Overlay to allow for a new development in the zone. This included: modifying multi-family zoning density and height to allow for higher intensity; including an additional property (6100 Caballero Rd.) within the overlay; amending the allowable density for certain blocks. Without these adjustments the county can take over and allow much higher and more dense development, and control its appearance and impact fees. Commissioner Melissa Castro was the only dissenter.

**HUMAN TRAFFICKING PREVENTION**

Voted 5-0 to affirm the city's commitment to human trafficking prevention through community outreach, education, and interagency coordination and to conduct public awareness and education programs in anticipation of the FIFA World Cup. Residents can use the SaferWatch app to make reports.

**HERNAN BAS X MOBILITY HUB**

Voted 5-0 to request a proposal for artwork at the Mobility Hub from artist Hernan Bas with a budget of \$1 million. Bas is a world-renowned Cuban contemporary artist, raised in South Florida, where he attended the New World School of the Arts. He uses many tropical and Miami-based motifs in his paintings. The Arts Advisory Panel and Commission will have final approval over any potential artwork, which will likely be cast in bronze.

**NEWSPAPER RACKS CLEANED**

Listened to an update on the *Miami New Times*' newspaper racks, four of which have been removed due to faulty bases or other code enforcement issues. The remaining nine in the City of Coral Gables have been cleaned and repaired where necessary. Mayor Vince Lago has been at the forefront of this push, which has led to several pointed *New Times* articles.

**NEW ART**

Voted 5-0 to have city staff and the Arts Advisory Panel look into acquiring a second Augustin Cardenas sculpture to put beside the Development Services Building, where the first currently stands.

**GRANADA GOLF COURSE UPDATE**

Voted 5-0 to accept city staff's recommendations for enhanced maintenance at the Granada Golf Course, beginning in 2027. The nine-hole course opened in 1923 and was last renovated in 2014. Demand for golf now exceeds the optimal capacity for the course, with 67,000 rounds played annually. City staff recommended a one-year pilot program using an outside professional to maintain the course (rather than city staff) and adjustments to the fees to offset the estimated annual cost of more than \$800,000. Tee times would be stretched to limit the number of annual rounds to 50,000. Costs for a single



round will rise from \$22 to \$30 for residents and from \$28 to \$39 for non-residents (with a 50 percent discount for veterans and active military personnel). A new golf membership for the country club (\$2,100 for residents and \$3,434 for resident couples) would grant access to all the club's amenities, and provide 30 annual rounds of golf, a \$5 discount on additional rounds, and priority tee-time access.

**NEW GARBAGE TRUCKS**

Voted 5-0 to accept a grant from the Florida Department of Environmental Protection to purchase three garbage trucks for just over \$1 million. The city will look at the possibility of hybrid or electric trucks; right now, a pilot program is testing the first electric garbage truck in the city.

**NEW GIRALDA SKY PROJECT**

Voted 5-0 to approve the Giralda Sky Project, which will consist of two overhead installations on Giralda Plaza: Cielo Tejido ("woven sky") and Giralda in Bloom. Since the Umbrella Sky installation went up on Giralda Plaza in 2018, the city has been searching for something similar. That project was uber-successful, with 214 percent increase in daily pedestrians on the plaza and an approximate increase of \$165,000 in parking revenue, which actually paid for the project. The first installation will run May to July, the second in August to October –with the total cost estimated at \$183,000.

**BEAUTIFICATION ASSESSMENT**

Discussed adding an assessment for commercial property owners to address beautification issues, such as pressure cleaning and landscaping of sidewalk planters, as well as potential safety issues, like exposed wires and tripping hazards. Mayor Lago, who sponsored the item, said the plan aims to increase property values and pedestrian traffic, while also beautifying the city and prioritizing environmental stewardship. Property owners already have an existing obligation to maintain their spaces; the measure could potentially reduce those expenses. Jorge L. Arrizurieta, CEO of the Coral Gables Chamber of Commerce, spoke in favor of the idea.

**LITTLE LIBRARY**

Listened to an update from Coral Gables High School student Gi-anna Figueroa on her Mini Libraries initiative. Figueroa started the project in 2025, stocking two mini libraries at her school; she is now adding five more by the end of the school year in parks near schools like Coral Gables Prep. Mayor Lago is sponsoring two by Ponce de Leon Middle and Carver Elementary; Vice Mayor Rhonda Anderson and Commissioners Richard Lara and Ariel Fernandez committed to supporting the project, as well. Figueroa is hoping to build seven more mini libraries, seeking sponsors through the Coral Gables Community Recreation Department at a cost of \$1,000. □

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# What's on The Ballot

THE CITY WILL CONDUCT A SPECIAL MAIL-IN BALLOT ELECTION THIS MONTH

BY KYLIE WANG

Coral Gables residents who have registered to vote by March 23 will be eligible to participate in the city's special election, which will be conducted via mail-in ballot with an April 21 deadline. Residents can only vote by mailing in their ballots or dropping them off at the Office of the Supervisor of Elections in Doral (2700 NW 87<sup>th</sup> Ave.) before 7 pm on April 21. There is no cost associated. All voters **MUST** sign inside the red box on the back of the envelope and **MUST** provide their complete residential address in the indicated area. For questions regarding voting, visit [coralgables.com](http://coralgables.com), call 305.499.8683, or email [votebymail@votemiamidade.gov](mailto:votebymail@votemiamidade.gov).

## THERE WILL BE EIGHT QUESTIONS ON THE BALLOT:

1. Shall the City Charter be amended to change the month and day when the City of Coral Gables holds its general elections from April of each odd year to the date of the national election in November of each even year commencing in 2026, resulting in an approximately four-month reduction of current elected official's terms and adjustment of associated dates with the intention of increasing voter turnout and decreasing the cost of general elections?

2. Shall the City Charter be amended to prohibit changing the City's municipal general election date away from November of even-numbered years through the adoption of an ordinance by the City Commission, in so far as that prohibition is not in conflict with state law?

3. Shall the City Charter be amended to allow the City Commissioner, or appointed official, who appointed a member to a City board or committee, to remove that member from that position prior to the expiration of their term, for any reason, in so far as that removal is not in conflict with state law?

4. Shall the City Charter be amended to require that the City Commission convene a Charter Review Committee every ten (10) years beginning in 2035, to review the Charter and provide recommendations on potential amendments, with the Committee consisting of seven members with the Commissioners and City Manager each appointing a resident of the City and the City Attorney appointing a current or former municipal or county attorney?

5. Shall the City Charter be amended to authorize a contract with Miami-Dade County or a private entity to provide inspector general services, as needed, to the City to investigate, audit, and oversee municipal matters in order to identify efficiencies and investigate and prevent fraud, waste, mismanagement and abuse of power, and who can subpoena witnesses and require production of documents, and whose appointment, term, functions, and powers shall be established by ordinance?

6. Shall the City Charter be amended to require that any change to the compensation of the City's elected officials, beyond the annual adjustment to compensation based on the Consumer



Price Index as set forth in the Code, requires an affirmative vote of the electors prior to adoption by the City Commission?

7. Presently the City Charter requires a runoff between the two candidates with the highest vote totals where no candidate received a majority (50 percent plus 1) in the general municipal election. Should the runoff provision be eliminated so that a mayor or commissioner may be elected with a plurality vote (the most votes) even if this does not constitute a majority, understanding that the runoff would be eliminated regardless of when general elections are held?

8. Shall the City Charter be amended to require that the City maintain a General Fund Reserve at twenty-five percent (25%) of the City's operating budget and that a four-fifths vote of the City Commission is required to otherwise amend the fund reserve policy adopted in Ordinance No. 2025-05 or to expend funds from the General Fund Reserve, except in those emergency situations outlined in the Ordinance?

Coral Gables Magazine's political coverage over the last few years has provided important context to these questions, including where certain members of the Commission stand. Many of these questions are in response to issues raised under the previous Commission, which included then-Commissioner Kirk Menendez. (Menendez was replaced by Commissioner Richard Lara last April.) Together, he joined with current Commissioners Melissa Castro and Ariel Fernandez to push an often-controversial agenda, which included blocking the election date change, making so far unfounded allegations of corruption – though seemingly without supporting the hiring of an inspector general – raising Commission salaries by 101 percent, and accessing reserve funds generally set aside for emergencies to fund capital improvement projects.

Now, a new majority has emerged, with Commissioner Lara voting mostly in conjunction with Mayor Vince Lago and Vice Mayor Rhonda Anderson to support the election changes, hire an inspector general, undo the salary increases, and generally require the Commission to exercise more fiscal responsibility.

*The Commission seeks voters' opinions on these matters, given the vast differences in opinion on the dais. For more information on this and other issues, visit [coralgablesmagazine.com](http://coralgablesmagazine.com) and navigate to the Streetwise page.*

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MODAMIAMI RETURNED TO THE BILTMORE HOTEL



# Talk of the Town

## Classic Cars and Couture

MODAMIAMI AT THE BILTMORE HOTEL FOR ITS 2026 EDITION

Like Brigadoon, each winter the Biltmore's grounds turn into a kind of open-air fantasy garage. ModaMiami returned to Coral Gables for its 2026 edition at the end of February, bringing more than 400 rare and notable automobiles to the hotel. The event has made a name for itself by pairing concours-level cars with the sort of gloss that fits neatly into the Biltmore setting: luxury brands, curated

experiences, evening parties, and plenty of well-dressed spectators strolling the lawns as if this were all perfectly normal.

One of the featured highlights this year was a display marking the 60th anniversary of the Lamborghini Miura, the mid-engine beauty widely regarded as one of the first modern supercars. As for the winners, top honors went to a 1967 Ferrari 275 GTS/4 NART Spider for Best of Show Post-War; a 1995 McLaren F1 for Best of Show Modern, and a 1934 Alfa Romeo 8C 2300 Lungo Spider for Best of Show Classic. There was also a hometown note: Coral Gables residents Dirk and Alexandria de Groen took the Collection Winner title in the Post-War Sports Open class with a 1957 BMW 507 Roadster Series II. – *Yusra Benkirane*



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COMPASS

## And the Winner Is...

### THE ANNUAL LOWE MUSEUM EVENING OF ART AWARDS

Each year the Lowe Art Museum holds its annual Evening of Art, bringing together artists, collectors, philanthropists, and art lovers to raise funds in support of the Lowe's longstanding mission of "accessibility, education, and cultural engagement." This year's after-hours event included the first view of the new installation "Dustin Yellin: Psychogeographies." This year's event also included their signature Palette Project auction, in which nationally acclaimed artists, along with emerging artists, rise to the challenge of transforming simple wooden palettes into works of art. In addition to guests bidding on these artworks, three of the artists were awarded a Community Choice Award \$1,000 cash prize, presented by The Mosaic Art Fund. The palettes were on view for the last week of February, when museum visitors could cast their votes. The winners were Pipe Yanguas, for Stardust Creatures; Ania Toledo, for Primavera; and Tim Tate, for Lenticular Palette. —*J.P. Faber*

## Rotary's 80th

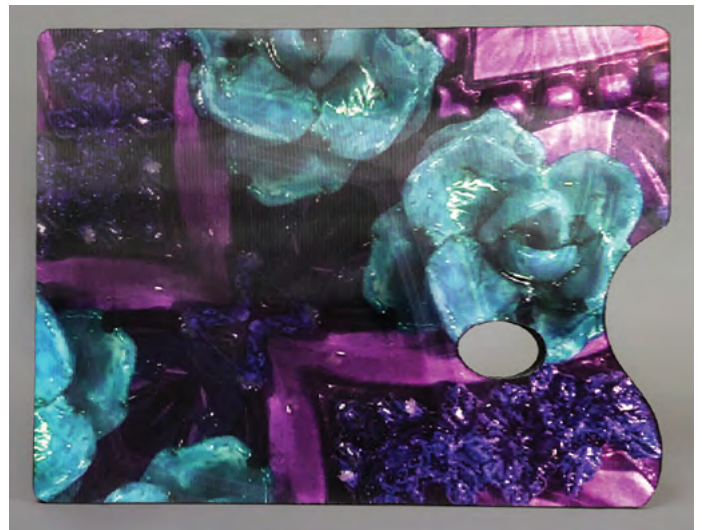
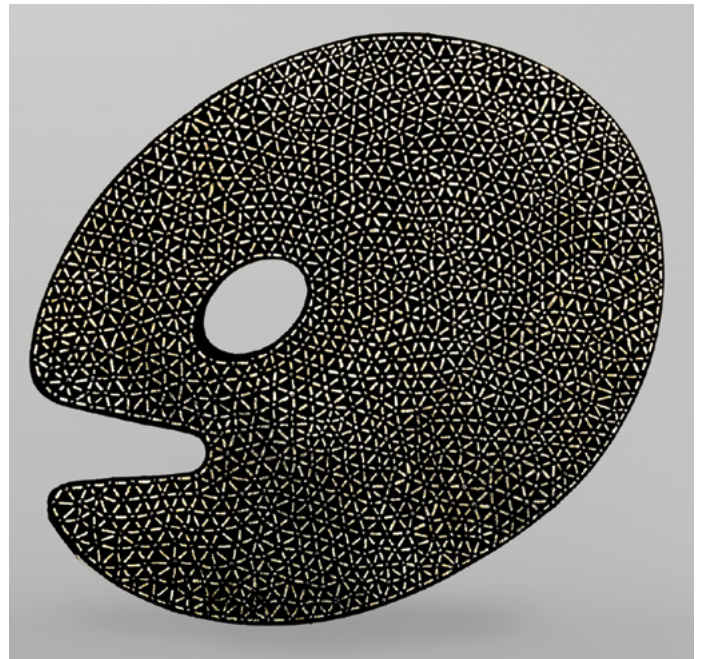
### THE CORAL GABLES ROTARY CLUB CELEBRATES AN ANNIVERSARY

Rotary is a global organization founded in 1905 in Chicago, with a mission of bringing business and professional leaders together to provide humanitarian services in their (and other) communities, along with friendship and fellowship. There are some 45,000 Rotary clubs worldwide, including here in the Gables, where the local branch was launched on March 4, 1946. Since then, the Gables Rotary has supported scores of local organizations, ranging from Easter Seals, Camillus House and the VA Hospital, to Habitat for Humanity, Lighthouse for the Blind, and the YMCA – not to mention projects in nine nations to bring water and literacy to underdeveloped communities. They also founded Rotary Centennial Park on Ponce at Avila Court in 2005.



FORMER MAYOR DON SLESNICK, PRESIDENT IN THE EARLY '90S;

Our hometown Rotary Club celebrated their 80th Anniversary last month with a cocktail reception for current and former members. Present was former mayor Don Slesnick, president in the early '90s; over the years its membership included other mayors, police chiefs, and fire chiefs, and civic leaders like Chip Withers, Bill Kerdyk and Ralph Cabrera. Today membership has dwindled from its peak of 175 in the '90s, but its new president Sally Baumgartner, who also served 2010-2011, is determined to bring the club back to its former glory. If anyone can do it, it's Baumgartner, the civic powerhouse behind the annual Merrick Festival Caroling Competition. —*J.P. Faber*



FROM THE TOP: THE WINNERS AT THE LOWE ART MUSEUM PALETTE PROJECT AUCTION, WERE PIPE YANGUAS, FOR STARDUST CREATURES; ANIA TOLEDO, FOR PRIMAVERA; AND TIM TATE, FOR LENTICULAR PALETTE

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## Flamingo Gardens Elegance

16721 SW 86 Court

4 BR | 3 BA | 3,190SF

**OFFERED FOR \$1,725,000**



## Spacious Pool Home

15401 SW 81 Avenue

5 BR | 4 BA | 2,713 SF

**OFFERED FOR \$1,575,000**



## Exceptional 2004-Built Townhome

10530 SW 77 Avenue #1

3 BR | 2 BA | 1,654 SF

**OFFERED FOR \$1,495,000**



## Fantastic Home in Palmetto Bay

7950 SW 161 Street

3 BR | 2 BA | 2,358 SF

**OFFERED FOR \$1,325,000**



## Remodeled in Palmetto Bay

7860 SW 158 Terrace

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## Updated Palmetto Bay Home

15815 SW 85 Avenue

3 BR | 2 BA | 1,859 SF

**OFFERED FOR \$1,100,000**



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## Gables-opoly Debuts

THE GABLES VERSION OF MONOPOLY TAKES A SPIN

At the Giralda Live event last month, Gables-opoly – the localized version of Monopoly – was brought out for a test drive. Initiated by the late Mark A. Trowbridge, former president and CEO of the Coral Gables Chamber of Commerce, the game follows the same pattern as the original Monopoly, building real estate on select properties while avoiding various calamities around the board. The final two most expensive properties – in Monopoly they are Park Place and Boardwalk – are now Alhambra Circle and Riviera Drive in Gables-opoly; the four Railroad squares (Reading Railroad, Shortline, etc.) are replaced with Gables Trolley stops. The former Community Chest and Chance squares are now City Beautiful and Best of Gables issues of Coral Gables Magazine.

At the debut on Giralda Plaza, passersby were encouraged to play the game with Eddy Martinez, the owner of the Bliss Prints shop on Miracle Mile, which produced the local version. Martinez, adorned with a top hat in the guise of Mr. Monopoly, oversaw a large scale version of the game. Players careened around the board to the finish line. Even current Chamber President and CEO Jorge Arrizurieta took a turn. Get your own game at blissprints.com – *Gail Scott*



EDDY MARTINEZ, WHO PRODUCED THIS LOCAL MONOPOLY GAME, WITH CHAMBER PRESIDENT AND CEO JORGE L. ARRIZURIETA

## The Dog Park Brouhaha

A GROUP OF NEIGHBORS FILE SUIT TO BLOCK A NEW DOG PARK

The debate over the proposed dog park at 520 University Drive continues, now with a lawsuit against the City of Coral Gables. The suit was filed by University Green Neighbors Association (UGNA), a group of nearby residents that dislike the idea of a dog park near their homes.



ACROSS FROM THE YOUTH CENTER: LANDSCAPED DOG RUN OR PARKING LOT?

The complaint attempts to raise questions over the project's legality, including whether the city followed the proper approval process, whether the property is zoned correctly for a park, and whether county regulations governing dogs in public parks apply. As of now, the park project is still in the early stages, gathering community input with no finalized plans or permits.

The UGNA suit also expressed concerns about preserving the area's green space, though initial renderings by city staff actually show additional trees and landscaping around the area, which could otherwise be used as an overflow parking lot. Currently, the project is zoned for this intention, with parking for the Coral Gables Library and War Memorial Youth Center. Changing the zoning requires a three-fifths vote by the Commission.

The park was first proposed in November by Vice Mayor Rhonda Anderson, a well-known dog lover who presented 225 petition signatures from area residents in support of the idea. Her main opposition in the UGNA suit seems to be Lynn Guarch-Pardo, spouse of Felix Pardo, who ran against and lost to Anderson in the April 2025 election. Questions over Guarch-Pardo's potential biases have been raised, especially considering the vice mayor is personally referenced 33 times in the lawsuit, highly unusual in civic legal filings of this type.

It seems likely the lawsuit will fail, considering how easily the City Commission and its staff can navigate the raised issues, mostly by simply voting to change the zoning and gathering sufficient public input, as it plans to do. If the aim is simply to delay the project, however, it appears to be working. – *Amanda Martell and Kylie Wang*

## At the Town Hall

MAYOR LAGO HOLDS HIS ANNUAL Q&A WITH RESIDENTS

On a Monday evening in the second week of March, about 70 residents gathered at the Public Safety Building for a Town Hall meeting with Mayor Vince Lago, Vice Mayor Rhonda Anderson, City Attorney Cristina Suarez, and Miami-Dade County Commissioner Natalie Milian Orbis. The main topic of discussion was the eight ballot questions that will appear in the April referendum (see pg 26). Two informational videos from Miami-Dade Supervisor of Elections Alina Garcia Garcia explained the mechanics of the vote-by-mail election, a first for the Gables, after which the mayor opened the floor for questions and comments.

The first speaker was Tom Wells, a frequent critic of the city, who questioned the wisdom of changing elections from April to November and eliminating runoffs, key items on the referendum. Wells argued that shifting the city's election cycle and eliminating runoffs could reduce voter participation; most studies show that a November election would more than double voter participation. Vice Mayor Anderson raised concerns about the low turnout typically seen in runoff elections, an expensive exercise where a tiny percentage of voters determine the result. Supporters of the ballot questions also pointed to cost savings and alignment with elec-



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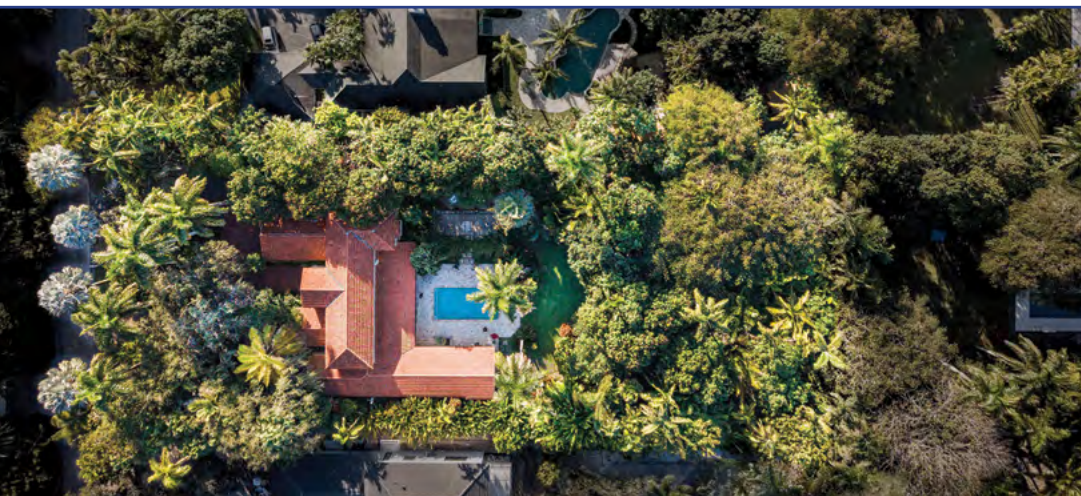
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**North Gables**  
**1901 Country Club Prado**

**\$3,498,000**  
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**3,602 ASF | 18,200 SF Lot**



**Ponce Davis**  
**4867 SW 82nd St**

**\$8,498,000**  
**6 BDR | 6.5 BA**  
**5,653 ASF | 40,946 SF Lot**

*Rare collectors garden, summer kitchen, salt water pool, top of the line appliances, ground floor primary suite, generator & 1K gallon tank*



**South Gables**  
**Waterway**  
**5343 Orduna Dr**

**\$7,298,000**  
**6 BDR | 4.5 BA**  
**4,712 ASF | 18,153 SF Lot**

*40' boathouse, 132.5' water frontage, short boat ride to Biscayne Bay, heated salt water pool, oversized patio & wet bar, open concept kitchen*



VICE MAYOR RHONDA ANDERSON, MAYOR VINCE LAGO, MIAMI-DADE COUNTY COMMISSIONER NATALIE MILIAN ORBIS, AND CITY ATTORNEY CRISTINA SUAREZ

tion practices in other municipalities. “Well over 25 cities do this already,” said resident Claudia Miro, who encouraged other residents to review the proposals closely.

Lago later shifted the discussion to criticizing local anti-city blogs and media outlets, describing some as engaging in “pay-to-play” practices. On a more positive note, the mayor focused on his and the vice mayor’s transparency and availability. “We’ve been doing town halls for 13 years,” Lago said. “You may not always agree with us, but you’re going to have a seat at the table.” Lago and Anderson also noted their fiscal conservatism and the strength of the city’s general fund reserves. The referendum includes an item that would require voters to approve changes to the fund balance and reserve policy, except during certain emergencies. —*J.P. Faber*



CORAL GABLES CITY MANAGER PETER J. IGLESIAS

## Kudos for the City Manager

PETER IGLESIAS LAUDED AS A CIVIC ENGINEER

Coral Gables City Manager Peter J. Iglesias was named last month as the Government Engineer of the Year by the Florida Engineering Society’s Miami Chapter. He was recognized for a career that melded structural engineering with municipal leadership. In his tenure as City Manager, Iglesias has overseen major infrastructure projects in the city, including the new Public Safety Building, the sidewalk projects on Miracle Mile and Giralda Plaza, and the city’s new fire station on Sunset Drive. He also manages an annual operating budget of \$246 million and a team of 1,200 employees. Among his new projects is a biochar plant that will process green waste without pollution and save the city millions each year (see pg. 75). —*J.P. Faber*



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Photo by Rodolfo Benitez

# Turning Connections into Opportunity

HOW ZERI ZAPATA'S GABLES-BASED 1-800-NO-FAULT GREW FROM A STARTUP TO A NATIONAL REFERRAL NETWORK

BY YOUSRA BENKIRANE

When Zeri Zapata arrived in Miami from Havana at age 10, he had no idea he would build a nationwide business. Years later, while studying political science at Florida International University, he took a job at a law firm investigating personal injury cases – a role that unexpectedly revealed the foundation for his future company.

Working inside the firm's personal injury department, Zapata saw firsthand how confusing the legal process could be for people after a car accident. Clients often didn't know where to start or how to navigate the paperwork and appointments that followed. "I was seeing the same questions asked over and over again," Zapata recalls. "People just needed someone to guide them

through the process."

That realization led to the creation of what would become 1-800-No-Fault, a referral service that connects accident victims with attorneys and medical providers while helping them navigate the early stages of a case.

Zapata first wanted to build the brand around the memorable phone number "1-800-No-Fault," but the number was owned by a lawyer in New York who wasn't interested in selling. Instead, Zapata leaned into Miami's identity and launched 305-No-Fault, embracing the city's area code.

Rather than routing callers to distant call centers, Zapata wanted a team that understood Miami's neighborhoods and communities. "We knew the difference between

**"PEOPLE JUST NEEDED SOMEONE TO GUIDE THEM THROUGH THE PROCESS..."**

ZERI ZAPATA, LEFT, FOUNDER OF 1-800-NO-FAULT, A NATIONAL REFERRAL SERVICE

Kendall and Little Havana and Hialeah," he says. Early marketing included radio promotions featuring DJ Khaled during his time as a host on 99 Jamz. But Zapata's biggest breakthrough came with social media.

Long before influencer marketing became a staple of digital advertising, Zapata began recruiting people with strong social media networks to help promote the company. He hired individuals already active online – often nightlife promoters or well-connected locals. "They were basically acting as in-house influencers before that term even existed," Zapata says.

Today, those marketers remain central to the company's strategy, using their personal social media accounts to share content and connect people involved in accidents to the referral service. Over the past decade, that people-driven marketing model has fueled expansion. The company now operates offices in Miami, Orlando, Tampa, Jacksonville, Atlanta, Houston, Chicago, and Manhattan, while generating referrals in more than two dozen states.

When someone calls, the intake team gathers details about the accident and connects the caller with nearby doctors and vetted attorneys who specialize in that type of case. "Our job is to match the right client with the right lawyer," Zapata says. The service is free for callers, while attorneys and medical providers pay a marketing fee to participate. Zapata says revenue has increased every year for the past decade as the company expands into new markets.

In 2024, the company moved its headquarters from Doral to a 28,000-square-foot office in Coral Gables across the street from The Plaza Coral Gables on Ponce de Leon Boulevard. The space now houses about 150 employees.

Even with steady growth, Zapata says the goal remains ambitious: building the largest personal injury referral service in the United States. "We want to plant our flag in every major city in the country," he says. ■



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# The Coral Gables Community Foundation is Proud to Honor its 2025-26 Merrick Society

The Merrick Society is an exclusive community of individuals and families committed to local philanthropy and strengthening Coral Gables and Miami-Dade county through strategic giving. Their generosity and annual gifts directly support over \$7 million in scholarships to students and grants to local nonprofit organizations, improving tens of thousands of lives.

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# Living

**An Up-Close  
Stellar Performance**

**See page 42**



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# April Best Bets

A NEW PLAY, CHOPIN, AND DANCE, DANCE, DANCE



## EASTER CELEBRATIONS

Celebrate Easter at the Hotel Colonnade with a day of crafts, treats, and a visit from the Easter Bunny on Sun., April 5 from 12 to 2 pm. \$15 per child, tickets on Eventbrite. 180 Aragon Ave. Or, hop over to Fairchild Tropical Botanic Garden for the Bunny Hopping from 10 am to 5 pm, including music, games, train rides, and a meeting with Mr. Bunny. Egg hunt tickets (\$17.95) sold separately, and mimosas and cocktails are available for the parents! Tickets start at \$25 for adults with add-ons available. 10901 Old Cutler Rd. fairchildgarden.org



## "PRAYER FOR THE FRENCH REPUBLIC"

At GableStage, "Prayer for the French Republic" runs March 20 through April 19, bringing Joshua Harmon's award-winning play to Coral Gables. The story centers on a Jewish family in Paris whose sense of security is shaken after a violent incident forces them to confront questions of identity, history, and what it means to truly belong. Directed by Bari Newport, the production moves between past and present, blending sharp humor with reflection across generations. Tues. and Thurs.-Sat. 7 pm; matinees Wed. and Sun. at 2 pm, Sat. 1 pm. Tickets \$60-\$80. 1200 Anastasia Ave. (The Biltmore Hotel) gablestage.org

## CHOPIN, BY THE NEXT GENERATION

The Chopin Foundation of the United States presents "CHOPIN for ALL" featuring young local pianists under 18. Free concert on Sun., April 12, from 3 to 5 pm at Granada Church. Part of the



2025–2026 Chopin for All season, the recital showcases outstanding Miami-Dade piano students selected through an audition process, each performing works by Frédéric Chopin. The event highlights the next generation of classical talent in an afternoon dedicated entirely to the composer's music. 950 University Dr. chopin.org



## "YOUNG FRANKENSTEIN"

The Jerry Herman Ring Theatre presents "Young Frankenstein" Fri., April 17 through Thurs., April 23. (Wed.-Sat. 8 pm, Sat. 1 pm). Based on the Mel Brooks classic, the musical follows Frederick Frankenstein as he inherits his family's Transylvanian estate and attempts to continue his grandfather's infamous experiments – with predictably chaotic results. Expect big laughs, memorable songs, and mad scientist mayhem. Tickets \$15 - \$30. 1312 Miller Dr. theatre.as.miami.edu



## A NIGHT OF "NOCHE LATINA"

Dimensions Dance Theatre of Miami presents "Noche Latina" on Sat., April 18 at 7:30 pm as part of its Sanctuary Series. The contem-

porary ballet program brings Latin-inspired rhythm and high-energy choreography to the intimate stage setting at Sanctuary of the Arts at 410 Andalusia Ave. Tickets are \$33. [sanctuaryofthearts.org](http://sanctuaryofthearts.org)



**PALMS & POETRY OPEN MIC**

Take the mic on Mon., April 20 from 8 to 10 pm during Palms & Poetry, hosted by the Miami Poetry Club in the courtyard of Books & Books. The monthly open mic welcomes poets and listeners alike for an evening of spoken word in a relaxed, outdoor setting. Sign-up opens in person at 7:20 pm, with 25 spots available. The event is free and open to the public. 265 Aragon Ave. [booksandbooks.com](http://booksandbooks.com)



**LATIN JAZZ WITH DAFNIS PRIETO**

GRAMMY-winning drummer and composer Dafnis Prieto joins the Frost Latin Jazz Orchestra on Thurs., April 23 at 7:30 pm at the Gusman Concert Hall. Known for blending his Cuban roots with contemporary jazz, Prieto brings selections from his GRAMMY-winning album “Back to the Sunset,” along with new works and special guest appearances to be announced. Tickets \$15 to \$40. 1314 Miller Dr. [frost-music-live.miami.edu](http://frost-music-live.miami.edu)

**FASHION AND FLORALS**

The Coral Gables Garden Club hosts the fourth annual Fashions and Florals fundraiser, “Nightfall in the Garden,” on Fri., April 24 at 7 pm at the historic Coral Gables Country Club. The evening features an avant-garde fashion show by designer Julian Chang, floral installations, cocktails, dinner, live music, dancing and a silent auction. Tickets are \$175 per person. Proceeds support a new micro-forest initiative in partnership with the City of Coral Gables, continued habitat restoration at Camp Mahachie, and the club’s



ongoing education and beautification programs. 990 Alhambra Cir. [coralgablesgardenclub.org](http://coralgablesgardenclub.org)



**DANCE NOW! MARKS FOUR YEARS AT SANCTUARY**

Dance NOW! Miami celebrates Sanctuary of the Arts’ fourth anniversary on Fri., April 24 from 8 to 9:30 pm with a preview of “Love-less, last dance of the Moho braccatus,” followed by a post-performance talk-back with composer Federico Bonacossa and Co-Artistic Director Hannah Baumgarten. The program also features repertory highlights from the company’s 26th season, offering a look at its contemporary, collaborative approach to dance. Tickets \$15 to \$30. 410 Andalusia Ave. [sanctuaryofthearts.org](http://sanctuaryofthearts.org)



**RECYCLE, SHRED & GIVE BACK**

Keep Coral Gables Beautiful will host a Recycling Drive-Thru on Sat., April 25 from 9 am to noon in the parking lot behind Coral Gables City Hall. Residents can drop off electronics, household hazardous waste such as paint, pool chemicals; large cardboard boxes; plastic bags; film, and paper for shredding (limit five boxes or one 13-gallon bag per vehicle). Lightly used clothing will be collected for Camillus House, with men’s shirts, pants, and shorts needed. Proof of Coral Gables residency is required. Participants must enter through the Coral Way entrance; 405 Biltmore Way. [coralgables.com](http://coralgables.com)

# An Up-Close Stellar Performance

THE SANCTUARY GOES ALL OUT, BRINGING THE MIAMI BALLET ORCHESTRA TO DOWNTOWN CORAL GABLES

BY J.P. FABER

Over the past four years, the Sanctuary of the Arts has staged more than 100 elegant dance and musical performances in downtown Coral Gables, directly across the street from City Hall. It has become one of the city's key cultural destinations, on par with the Miracle Theatre and the Art Cinema. By bringing classical music and modern dance to the intimate 365-seat theater, founder Mike Eidson has fulfilled his vision of making culture – including music from Cuba and Latin America – more accessible for the residents of his city.

Now Eidson is putting on what he considers his most important event ever – a 34-piece orchestra that will play some of the most memorable ballet music ever composed in a program entitled “Ballet Classics Under the Stars.” The music will be performed by the Miami Ballet Orchestra, which plays for every Miami Ballet performance in South Florida. It is no slacker of an orchestra, performing alongside what is considered one of the top ballet companies in the nation. “But it’s always played in the shadows, in the pits,” says Eidson.

“What is extra exciting about this performance is that the Miami City Ballet Orchestra will be performing on-stage for the first time ever,” says Maestro Gary Sheldon. “For the past 15 years, we’ve had at least a couple hundred performances with them [the



**“IT WILL BE LIKE AN IMMERSIVE EXPERIENCE. YOU WILL FEEL LIKE YOU’RE PART OF THE ORCHESTRA.”**

MIKE EIDSON (LEFT), FOUNDER OF THE SANCTUARY OF THE ARTS, ON THE AUDIENCE BEING SO CLOSE TO THE ORCHESTRA

ABOVE: AN AI RENDERING OF THE MAY CONCERT



ballet company], but the orchestra is so deserving of the opportunity to present this program in their own right.”

Included in the night's lineup will be some of ballet's greatest hits, musically speaking, though “they all have a strong ballet underpinning,” says conductor Sheldon. These will include the polonaise from Tchaikovsky's “Sleeping Beauty,” Bizet's “Carmen Fantasy,” the balcony scene from Prokofiev's “Romeo and Juliet,” and Baber's “Adagio for Strings.”

Of particular note will be Brazilian pianist Francisco Renno's performance of Tchaikovsky's “Piano Concerto No. 3” and violinist (and concert master) Mei Mei Luo's performance of “Carmen Fantasy.” Two of the pieces will be accompanied by ballet dancers, including one co-choreographed by the Sanctuary's Principal Managing Director (and dance master), Rafi Maldonado.

When the orchestra does take the stage at the end of May, they will dominate it, barely fitting in the space. They will be right on top of the audience; because the Sanctuary is a former church, there is no distance separating the stage from the first row. In places like UM's Gusman Hall or Downtown Miami's Arsht Center, the musi-



Photo by Kyle Froman

**"I THINK THAT IS RIGHT FOR THAT SPACE AND RIGHT FOR THAT STAGE. IT WILL BE A GLORIOUS SOUND..."**

CONDUCTOR GARY SHELDON (ABOVE) ON DROPPING TO A 34-MEMBER ORCHESTRA TO FIT THE SANCTUARY STAGE

LEFT: VIOLINIST AND CONCERT MASTER MEI MEI LUO



Photo by Alexander Iziliayev

cians are 20 to 30-feet away from the first row, and seats in the back are fairly distant. Here, the audience is right up next to the stage and the back row isn't far away. "It will be like an immersive experience," says Eidson. "You will feel like you're part of the orchestra."

As it is, Maestro Sheldon had to cut his 50-member orchestra to 34 to fit the stage. "I think that is right for that space. It will be a glorious sound, for sure." As for the up-close nature of the performance, "It's just one of the unique possibilities one has in this hall. It involves and integrates the audience in a very visceral manner."

The program will take place May 29, 30, and 31, and is called "Ballet Classics Under the Stars," with the idea that the Sanctuary's dome be festooned with stars. Eidson is also inviting 300 students who will come to hear one of the rehearsals.

Sheldon says that he and Eidson have discussed the idea of putting the orchestra on-stage ever since they met in 2010, when Eidson was chair of the Ballet Orchestra, an idea that has finally come to pass. "Mike is someone who can make almost anything happen. His passion for the arts and ballet is palpable." ■

# The Wolfe of Miracle Mile

BY J.P. FABER

Jeffrey Wolfe did not set out to become a neighborhood wine merchant. His path to owning a beloved Coral Gables wine shop began in kitchens, classrooms, and – ultimately – on a bicycle ride past an empty storefront.

Wolfe arrived in South Florida as a culinary student, earning a bachelor's degree at Florida International University. He began his career with acclaimed chef Norman Van Aken, working at Norman's in Coral Gables. The restaurant gave him a deep appreciation for food, hospitality, and, naturally, wine. It also revealed how relentless the restaurant industry can be. "At a certain point, I was like, the restaurant business is for young people," Wolfe says.

He had another idea in mind. He dreamed of opening a wine shop – something more intimate than a restaurant, a place centered around conversation, discovery, and community. He envisioned a hybrid wine bar and shop, but the city's rules did not allow exactly what he had in mind. He spent months pushing City Hall to reconsider.

Then, chance intervened. After another frustrating meeting with city officials, Wolfe hopped on his bike and rode down Miracle Mile. That's when he noticed an elderly man putting a "For Rent" sign in the window of a small storefront. The space had previously been a shoe shop – hardly the glamorous setting for a wine merchant. But Wolfe saw potential. "I gave him a blank check that day," he says, asking the landlord to hold the space while he spoke with his wife and finalized plans.

That impulsive moment turned into a long commitment for a wine shop, albeit without the bar. Wolfe signed a 10-year lease with options to extend. Today, he has been in the same location for 25 years, watching the neighborhood evolve around him.

Wolfe's expertise with wine has developed less through formal schooling than through curiosity and experience. While studying culinary arts, he attended a wine class taught by noted wine expert Michael Weiss, but the real education came afterward, "just from tasting and reading and meeting growers," he says.

In the early years, he traveled to wine regions and attended trade fairs, even taking his children along on trips to Argentina and Chile, where they experienced harvesting and winemaking firsthand. These days, however, many of the producers come to him. Representatives and winemakers frequently stop by the shop, sharing bottles and stories that Wolfe then passes on to customers.

Inside the store, the inventory is intentionally manageable: roughly 3,000 to 4,000 bottles representing several hundred labels. For Wolfe, the shop is less about sheer quantity than about curation. When customers walk in asking for a familiar bottle – say a California cabernet – he often gently nudges them toward something unexpected, perhaps a syrah from France's northern Rhône or a lesser-known European producer that offers similar character at a better value.

That guidance is part of what keeps customers returning. Over the years, Wolfe has built a loyal base of regulars who trust his recommendations and enjoy the personal experience a neighborhood shop provides. "I have a lot of regulars... that have been with me for a long time," he says.



**" I HAVE A LOT OF REGULARS... THAT HAVE BEEN WITH ME FOR A LONG TIME. "**

JEFFREY WOLFE HAS SPENT 25 YEARS IN THE SAME LOCATION ON MIRACLE MILE, DISPENSING WINE AND EXPERTISE

The relationships extend beyond the counter. Wolfe hosts tastings, typically on Friday evenings, where \$20 lets you sample wines of a particular variety or locale. He also holds charity events; in a recent anniversary celebration for the shop, he organized a fundraiser for ALS research, inspired by a friend battling the disease.

Moments like that illustrate how the shop has grown into something more than a retail business. Over decades, Wolfe has become a familiar face in Coral Gables – part merchant, part guide, part host. Customers stop in not just for a bottle but for conversation, advice, and the pleasure of discovering something new.



# VOTE

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## RETURN YOUR BALLOTS FOR THE MAIL-IN-ONLY ELECTION.

All registered voters should have received a mail-in ballot. For your vote to count, **your ballot must be received by 7 p.m. on April 21, 2026.**

Voters should return their ballot by mail using the provided envelope; no postage is required. Voters who prefer not to mail their ballot may personally drop it off only at the Office of the Supervisor of Elections, 2700 NW 87th Ave., Doral, FL 33172.

For more information, visit [CoralGables.com/Referendum](https://CoralGables.com/Referendum) or call 305-722-VOTE (8683).



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# Heavenly Day Spa

Amidst a proliferation of wellness offerings in Coral Gables, the new Heavenly Day Spa distinguishes itself by offering a signature head spa experience, rarely found in local spas, combining traditional facials with add-on enhancements. The menu includes massages, facials, and hair spa treatments.

The check-in area offers a neat display of cleansers, oils, and masks available for purchase, and clients are led to a waiting room which is a relaxation oasis. Slow, calming music drifted through the space as I was offered a curated menu of teas, coffee, wine, and champagne. A table in front of a comfortable curved couch offered a selection of honey, lemon, and rose oils.

After a calming cup of tea, my esthetician, Angie, recommended the Doctor Babor Professional Face Mask treatment (\$60), designed to hydrate the skin and give it a natural glow. She began with a gentle massage from neck to chin to face. She then applied a cleanser with a warm towel and used a steam machine to open my pores. Then, we got to the good part.

Before applying the mask, Angie sprayed my face with highly concentrated, pressurized oxygen – along with vitamins, minerals, and antioxidants. This is what the celebs use to create that red carpet glow before events. The sensation was cool and refreshing. Finally, she applied the Doctor Babor mask, which helped hydrate my usually dry skin.

Angie explained that the goal at Heavenly Day Spa is for every guest to walk out feeling refreshed and renewed, a best version of themselves. Memberships start at \$200, a great value for regular spa-goers seeking some extra pampering. – Amanda Martell



STEAM OPENS UP THE PORES PRIOR TO THE "DOCTOR BABOR MASK"



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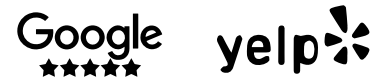
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# Bites

**Fine Dining: Mottai**  
**See page 56**

**Plus Quick Bites, New Places and Happy Hour**



Photo by Rodolfo Benitez

MASTER SUSHI CHEF HIROSHI SHINTAKU  
AT MOTTAI IN THE PLAZA CORAL GABLES

# French Fries

The origin of the term French Fries remains up for debate. Some say the term comes from WWI, when American GIs stationed in Belgium ate the fried potato snacks and gave them their name because the Belgian soldiers spoke French. Others say the term comes from the culinary verb “to French,” meaning to slice into long strips. Regardless, their popularity is global. Here are some Gables variations.

## JOHN MARTIN'S

John Martin's Pub Fry Trio (\$10) keeps things classic – and does it well. Their seasoned fries are long and thick, piled high in a metal cup and served piping hot. They're perfectly crisp on the outside with a fluffy center, and the portion is generous enough to share. A trio of dips includes truffle aioli, Irish BBQ and Irish whiskey sauces, offering savory, sweet and smoky options for dipping. 253 Miracle Mile. [johnmartins.com](http://johnmartins.com)

## TAP 42

Tap 42's Basket of Crispy Fries (\$8.50) is exactly what it sounds like, a hefty serving of no-frills fries. You can upgrade them with Cajun spice for an extra \$1.50, which we recommend. The fries themselves are nothing out of the ordinary, but the Cajun seasoning brings a well-balanced kick. They're generously portioned and perfectly fine for the table, but don't quite rise above standard bar fare. 301 Giralda Ave. [tap42.com](http://tap42.com)

## YARD HOUSE

Known for large portions, Yard House offers Truffle Parm Fries (\$7.49) as an appetizer. They are not the shaved truffle variety, but the effect is comparable with white truffle oil, applied lightly enough to avoid a synthetic aftertaste. The parmesan is evenly distributed, folded into thyme and parsley. Most notably, the fries remain crisp to the end, with none of the usual soggy remnants at the bottom. 320 San Lorenzo Ave. #1320. [yardhouse.com](http://yardhouse.com)

## BAY 13 BREWERY + KITCHEN

If you like beer as much as they do at Bay 13 Brewery, you'll love their Loaded Fries (\$19), served with a healthy lather of beer cheese – that's right, cheese made with beer! Extra helpings of crispy bacon bits, scallions, parmesan, and truffle oil, make these closer to a meal than an appetizer, easily shared. We like them with a pint of Brown Note – a perfect pairing! 65 Alhambra Plaza. [bay13brewery.com](http://bay13brewery.com)

## SHAKE SHACK

The new limited-edition K-Shack menu at Shake Shack features Korean BBQ-inspired burgers, sandwiches, and sides, including the Spicy BBQ Fries (\$5.49, bacon added for \$1.50). We've always loved the cheese fries here, with their crinkle-cut edges, but the new ones take it up a notch with spicy kimchi seasoning and a side of Korean BBQ sauce. We appreciate that the sauce comes on the side, since we like our fries undressed. 1450 S Dixie Hwy. [shakeshack.com](http://shakeshack.com)



### FROM THE TOP:

- JOHN MARTIN'S: PUB FRY TRIO WITH THREE DIPS
- TAP 42: BASKET OF CRISPY FRIES (CAJUN STYLE EXTRA)
- YARD HOUSE: TRUFFLE PARM FRIES AND PARMESAN
- BAY 13 BREWERY: LOADED FRIES WITH BEER CHEESE
- SHAKE SHACK: SPICY BBQ FRIES, KOREAN STYLE

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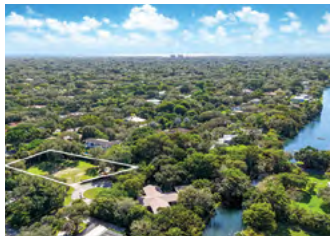


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# New Places

## Frankie and Wally's

Franklin and Wally, the owners of Frankie and Wally's, met in New York in 2015 at a bread-making class. During COVID, the male/female duo began making lasagna at a Miami pop-up and afterwards launched a local food truck, delivering from Allapattah to Coral Gables.

Now, with the first location in Coral Gables across from The Plaza, Frankie and Wally's is somewhere between a grocery store, restaurant, and to-go sandwich shop. The open-concept space features a gourmet market with shelves stocked with olive oils, hot sauces, pastas, and pickled vegetables. If you're in need of local produce, it also carries red beets, oranges, starfruit, lettuce, and more. Besides the market, there's seating and an open kitchen, where you can watch your sandwich being prepared.

Inside, the space feels like a Pinterest board brought to life. Sage and white tones run through the tiled floors with wooden accents. Seating is available inside, though it fills quickly, and there is also a patio if you prefer to sit outside.

At their soft opening, the menu was still limited, so we chose "The Frankie" (\$20), opting for something traditional. The sandwich came on a soft Italian hero roll, and Frankie and Wally (they go by first name only, like Cher or Madonna) didn't skimp on the ham and salami. Every ingredient tasted fresh and cool, something you might order after a hot summer day by the pool or the beach. We also ordered the strawberry lemon matcha spritz (\$9) – if you're into earthy flavors, it's worth trying. – *Amanda Martell*

216 PALERMO AVE.  
FRANKIEANDWALLYS.COM

TOP RIGHT: 'THE FRANKIE' ITALIAN HERO



## Oakberry Acai

A global acai bowl chain has made its way to Miracle Mile! You may have heard of Oakberry; it operates in 50 locations across the United States and in roughly 700 locations in 40 other countries. Founded in Brazil by Georgios Frangulis in 2016, the brand is primarily known for its organic açai bowls and smoothies, made with 100 percent natural, organic, vegan, and gluten-free ingredients.

Purple walls extend throughout the Coral Gables store, interrupted by a grab-and-go refrigerator stocked with cold-pressed juices, wellness shots, and packaged organic açai for home consumption. A curved display niche holds branded merchandise, including a macaw mascot plushie, mugs, and hoodies. Seating is limited to a built-in banquette along one wall with three white pedestal tables, reinforcing the mostly to-go concept.

Before 11 am, customers can order breakfast options in nine-ounce portions, including chia pudding, overnight oats, and the signature açai bowl, each customizable with up to three toppings. Smoothies and protein shakes round out the menu. We opted for the 16-ounce Crunchy Bowl, priced at \$13.95, for a combination of sweetness and crunch (hence the name). The bowl layers açai with coconut chia pudding and granola, then finishes with strawberries, blueberries, and cacao nibs. Sweetness is present, although it's not overpowering. And for those seeking a post-workout option, the High Protein Collection includes the Founder's Bowl, which contains more than 65 grams of protein! – *Amanda Martell*

269 MIRACLE MILE  
786.989.8020  
OAKBERRY.COM

LEFT: THE 16-OUNCE CRUNCHY BOWL AT OAKBERRY

## El Ñaño

On the western end of Miracle Mile, El Ñaño feels expansive the moment you step inside. The dining room stretches wide, with high ceilings and a crisp, modern look that leans toward minimalist without feeling stark. The space has an airy, composed atmosphere that's surprisingly calming.

Though El Ñaño originated in Barcelona, the heart of the menu is Ecuadorian with plenty of range. There are ceviches layered with citrus and spice, traditional rice dishes, and generous meat and seafood plates fresh off the *brasa* grill. A sushi bar runs alongside the Latin offerings, adding rolls and fusion combinations to the mix.

We started with the Tempura Roll (\$22). The salmon inside was cooked rather than raw, which gave the roll a richer, almost buttery texture, especially contrasted with the crisp tempura shell. We found it more satisfying than a typical raw roll, though not quite as light.

The Picaña a la Brasa, a 12-ounce cut (\$45), was a simpler dish. A pronounced char on the outside gave way to a tender, juicy center, with just enough seasoning to highlight the beef's natural flavor. Alongside, it was balanced with a side of crisp, golden *tostones* and an avocado salad that added a bright, clean finish.

The strength of El Ñaño is also its weakness: a huge menu that is all over the place, with Spanish, Chinese, Ecuadorian, and Peruvian dishes. It leaves plenty to explore, from seafood dishes to traditional Ecuadorian comfort plates, but it's not the place for you unless you're feeling eclectic. Also, there is no English spoken here, so bring a translator if you are not Hispanic. — *Yusra Benkirane*

339 MIRACLE MILE  
786.558.5466  
ELNANORESTAURANT.COM



TOP: PICAÑA A LA BRASA & BOTTOM: TEMPURA ROLL



## Fogare

You'd be forgiven for not having heard of Fogare, which recently moved into the Aloft Hotel on Lejeune Rd., taking over the space formerly occupied by Mistico. Even if you've been to Aloft recently, you could've missed it, with its unassuming door off the lobby and only a small sign. Inside is a hidden gem, with an industrial interior that lets the food take center stage, and an international menu that's as broad as it is delicious.

At Fogare, you can pick from soups, salads, caviar service, escargot, octopus tentacles, pastas, American and Australian Wagyu steaks, and key lime pie, amongst a litany of other offerings. We can only speak to a few dishes, but what we had was superb.

We started with the lomo saltado empanadas (\$15), well-made with a crispy outer shell neither thick enough to be doughy nor thin enough to fall apart as we ate. Served with tangy *acevichada* mayo (a blend of mayonnaise and *leche de tigre* sauce) it was topped with pickled onions and cilantro. The short rib baklava (\$25), meanwhile, was packed with the flavor of rosemary, orange zest, and micro-greens spread over a bed of tzatziki sauce.

The star of the night was the rigatoni (\$26), swimming in creamy alfredo sauce with crispy sprinkles of pancetta and toasted pistachio to add flavor and texture. We thought we were too full to finish, but kept going back for more bites: the mark of a truly great dish. Next time we'll try the duck canelloni and the Manila clams with 'Ndjua. — *Kylie Wang*

2524 S. LEJEUNE RD.  
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OAKBERRY.COM

ABOVE LEFT: LOMO SALTADO EMPANADAS & BOTTOM: RIGATONI

# Rarified Japanese

MOTTAI ELEVATES THE DISHES OF JAPAN TO NEW HEIGHTS OF FLAVOR

BY ANDREW GAYLE / PHOTOS BY RODOLFO BENITEZ



First there was Fogo de Chão, then CVI.CHE 105, then Mika. Now, The Plaza Coral Gables has added another sensational restaurant to the mix of cuisine surrounding its acre-sized plaza: Mottai. The interior – inspired by French Japonisme, a blend of European architectural elements and Japanese symbolism – is worth a visit by itself. The cerulean blue and ivory white color palette makes the high ceilings feel airier, helping float a central canopy over an open sushi station in the center of the space.

A bas-relief wall sculpture of a white crane in flight provides a backdrop for the central seating area, with a dedicated bar to one side and four semi-private dining alcoves in each corner, framing the room. The couches lining the walls are blue velvet, and the high ceilings and copious use of drapery absorb sound so that talking is easy and not strained.

The interior design is an appropriate platform for the exquisitely light fare, which tweaks traditional Japanese cuisine into something brighter. The *sashimi* and *nigiri* are world class, deftly prepared by sushi chef Hiroshi Shintaku, who is frighteningly serious in the execution of his craft. We indulged in his nine-piece nigiri selection, pricey at \$78, but easily the best sushi you will ever eat. Our selection included toro belly (bluefin tuna), *akami* (yellowfin tuna), *shima aji* (striped jack), *kinmedai* (golden eye snapper), *hamachi* (yellowtail), and *kanpachi* (amberjack).

The rest of the menu is more reasonably priced, especially considering the stunning quality and creativity of the dishes. We tried several of the hot small plates (\$13-\$30) and loved the grilled Japanese eggplant with miso mustard and sweet tentsuyu sauce, and the shishito peppers with chive aioli and chili lime salt. The deep-fried rock shrimp were positively addictive.

Among the signature dishes, the black garlic chicken (\$30),



TOP: MASTER SUSHI CHEF HIROSHI SHINTAKU  
TOP LEFT: INTERIOR OF IVORY WHITE AND BLUE  
ABOVE: EXTERIOR AT THE PLAZA CORAL GABLES

OPPOSITE PAGE  
TOP LEFT: KINOKO HOT POT IN A STONE BOWL  
EXPERTLY MIXED BY WAITRESS VALENTINA  
TOP RIGHT: GRILLED JAPANESE EGGPLANT  
BOTTOM LEFT: THE NINE-PIECE NIGIRI SELECTION  
MIDDLE RIGHT: BLACK GARLIC CHICKEN & CARROT PUREE  
BOTTOM RIGHT: OKINAWAN ESPRESSO ICE CREAM

MOTTAI  
2881 PONCE DE LEON BLVD.  
305.454.2488  
MOTTAIMIAMI.COM



U.S. entry of Brazil's Attivo hospitality group, which owns 13 restaurants in its home country. This is not as random as it sounds, since Brazil has the largest Japanese population in South America. The menu was conceptualized by Chef Brian Nasajon in collaboration with Chef Shintaku and Executive Chef Moritz, in a deliberate effort to creatively blend traditional Japanese cuisine with a local perspective.

"Japanese cuisine is built on discipline and respect for ingredients, and that foundation guided every decision we made," says Nasajon. "The goal wasn't to reinvent anything but to understand why these techniques work and apply them in a way that feels honest to where we are. Being from Miami, I understand that people want lighter, more shareable, and more ingredient-driven options – so the menu reflects that balance between tradition and a contemporary perspective."



paired with carrot puree and charred scallion, was moist and superbly flavorful, but for us the star of the night was the kinoko hot pot (\$36), the Japanese version of Korea's *bibimbap*, where mushrooms and *furikake* rice are mixed tableside in a hot stone bowl with egg yolk, yuzu soy butter, and chili crunch. The bowl remains hot and continues to cook the rice, giving it a textured edge.

Our bowl was mixed by waitress Valentina, who, besides being efficient and convivial, was also quite knowledgeable about Japanese cuisine. She recommended we try their chocolate fondant cake with a crunchy black sesame cocoa nib tuile and Okinawan espresso ice cream, which uses Okinawan brown sugar for a unique tangy taste. She also recommended that we sample one of their signature cocktails, a citrus mezcal that went down with refreshing ease – and another reflection of the Miami influence on Mottai.

Surprisingly, Mottai is not a Japanese transplant, but the first



# Benihana Bargains

Well-known for its engaging hibachi performances, Benihana recently surprised us with its robust happy hour, with items starting as low as \$3. We'd grabbed a spot at the bar, where happy hour runs from 3 to 6 pm (as well as in the lounge area). Suffused with lurid red lighting, the bar is small and intimate, with room for about a dozen seats. We started with a range of small plates and a couple of \$9 cocktails: a Mai Tai and a Cucumber Collins. Both are part of Benihana's signature cocktails menu and exactly as advertised: refreshing and well-paired with the restaurant's Japanese-style dishes.

Our favorite happy hour menu item was the \$6 pan-fried gyoza dumplings. We went with spicy chicken over pork and were pleasantly surprised to find there was, indeed, a slight kick to them. With six dumplings per plate, it's only a dollar per dumpling, making this a steal. Of course, there's also a full burger and fries for only \$9 (Benihana knows its American audience!) and four-piece "snack rolls" for only \$3 – so, there's a lot of good deals here. We were also impressed by the vegetable spring rolls (\$6), which came out piping hot, and the \$12 black pepper teriyaki wings.

We rounded out the evening with a \$6 Sapporo beer, which arrived in quite possibly the largest beer can we've ever seen. It was the perfect addendum to a happy hour happily spent. – *Kylie Wang*

242 MIRACLE MILE  
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TOP: A REFRESHING MAI TAI SIGNATURE COCKTAIL PAIRED WITH THE SPICY CHICKEN PAN-FRIED GYOZA DUMPLINGS



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CARLOS IAFIGLIOLA,  
INTERIM CEO OF AMERANT BANK

# Patricia Sánchez Abril

DEAN, UNIVERSITY OF MIAMI SCHOOL OF LAW

Miami native Patricia Sánchez Abril may have never attended University of Miami (UM), but she did spend much of her education studying there. The first-generation Cuban American can recall visiting the U's law library to study for her LSATs and the bar while visiting her mother, a double alumna of the school. After attending Duke and then Harvard Law School, Abril began practicing corporate law, working for Univisión before she joined UM as a faculty member in 2005, teaching business law and ethics at the Herbert Business School. She was the interim dean of the law school for the last two years and has held positions such as chair of the Business Law Department, vice dean of the Business School, and interim dean of the Graduate School. Beyond these roles, she is also known as a distinguished researcher who has authored several articles in prestigious law reviews on topics like privacy, technology, and AI; she has also co-authored a leading series of textbooks on business law.

**“THIS LAW SCHOOL HAS A POWERFUL FOUNDATION AND AN EXTRAORDINARY COMMUNITY...”**



## LATEST ACCOMPLISHMENT

In February, Abril was officially named dean of UM's School of Law, after serving as interim dean for the last two years. Under her leadership, the school secured a transformative gift that will go toward building a state-of-the-art, on-campus facility designed to simulate a real courtroom. “The courtroom is a powerful signal of not only investment in the School of Law, but investment in teaching innovation, helping us train practice-ready lawyers,” says Abril. She also helped the law school launch its new Miami Law and AI Lab, which helps students address the challenges AI presents within the legal field. With this in mind, National Jurist recently named UM's School of Law one of the top 10 most innovative law schools in the country.

## WHAT SHE SAYS

“This law school has a powerful foundation and an extraordinary community,” Abril says. “I'm excited to work together to expand its influence, deepen its impact, and prepare lawyers who are exceptionally trained, intellectually agile, and prepared to succeed in an ever-changing legal environment. The icing on the cake is doing this at the U and in my hometown.” She adds, “Law is among the noblest of professions, and those of us drawn to it tend to be extraordinarily mission driven with a passion for solving problems and seeking justice. Whether in the classroom, in the courtroom, or in research, our impact is creating knowledge and educating people to address society's thorniest problems.” – *Kylie Wang*

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# Carlos Iafigliola

INTERIM CEO OF AMERANT BANK

Carlos Iafigliola's path to leading Amerant Bank began more than two decades ago with a technical role in finance. A native of Venezuela, he started his banking career at Banco Mercantil, which he joined as an intern after college. He later transferred to the United States in 2004 when Mercantil's parent organization moved talent from its large South American operation to support the smaller Miami-based bank that would later become Amerant.

At the time, the Venezuelan institution operated hundreds of branches and served millions of customers, giving Iafigliola exposure to a sophisticated banking environment early in his career. At Amerant, Iafigliola initially worked as a financial analyst in the treasury department, conducting liquidity analysis, interest-rate sensitivity studies, and asset-liability management. Over the years, he expanded into securities trading and liquidity management roles before rising through senior leadership ranks.

**“MY OBJECTIVE IS THAT EVERY AREA ACROSS THE BANK GETS UPLIFT AND BETTER MOMENTUM...”**



Photo by Rodolfo Benitez

## RECENT ACCOMPLISHMENT

After more than 20 years with the organization, Iafigliola was appointed interim CEO following his tenure as chief operating officer. His appointment marks a major milestone in a career built almost entirely within Amerant's organization. As COO, overseeing operations and a workforce of more than 160 employees in that division alone (the bank has 700 employees in all), he focused on strengthening collaboration, culture, and communication across teams – efforts that contributed to the bank's growing reputation as a positive workplace. Under his stewardship, Amerant Bank earned national recognition as one of America's Top 100 Most Loved Workplaces for 2025, ranking No. 29 on the list. The recognition highlights companies that excel in employee satisfaction, engagement, retention, and productivity.

## WHAT HE SAYS

Iafigliola believes that leadership should make individual employees and their teams feel connected and supported, a philosophy he seeks to expand across the entire organization. “I believe there is a component of compensation [for motivation],” he says, “but creating a great environment will go a long way with team members.” He emphasizes open communication with employees, noting that uncertainty grows when leaders disappear from view. “The worst thing you can have is silence at the top of the house,” he says. As interim CEO, Iafigliola says his goal is to extend the positive culture he built in operations. “My objective is that every area across the bank gets uplift and better momentum,” he says. Looking ahead, he wants to grow the Gables-based bank, especially in Florida. “The future is to grow north of \$10 billion in assets and consolidate the Tampa market – making our new branches profitable... and keep developing the international market as well.” – *J.P. Faber*



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# Deborah Pagani

FOUNDER, DEBORAH PAGANI BEAUTY; JEWELRY AND HAIRCARE DESIGNER

Deborah Pagani has built a career by following instinct, even when it meant changing course. In the late 1990s, she began in New York's hair world, working at celebrated salons like John Sahag and Oribe, becoming a sought-after colorist with a celebrity clientele. But her creative life soon expanded. Inspired in part by her Cuban heritage, Pagani began designing fine jewelry, eventually launching her own line and earning recognition, including by the Ecco Domani Fashion Fund. Later, she introduced luxury hair accessories, including a polished hairpin that helped put her brand on the map and won a loyal following. Pagani moved to Coral Gables in 2024, relocating from New York with her husband and three children. She says she found in Coral Gables exactly the kind of setting she craved: history, beauty, and soul. She and her family settled into a 1942 home along Coral Way, drawn in by the trees, the architecture, and the neighborhood's sense of character.

**"I THINK IT'S IMPORTANT THAT WOMEN FIND THEIR OWN PATH, AND IT DOESN'T MATTER THE AGE..."**



## LATEST ACCOMPLISHMENT

Pagani's latest accomplishment is the launch of Deborah Pagani Beauty, which debuted last year with two "hero" hair products (which protect hair from heat) designed to hydrate, protect, and simplify haircare routines. The line has already earned industry praise: the mist won Best Hair Scent from Marie Claire in 2025 and Best Heat Protector from Shape in 2025. Her earlier accessories line also made waves, with her signature hairpin winning Allure's Best Luxury Hair Accessory in 2023. Pagani says the brand is growing carefully and intentionally, with possible future launches including body products or even a fragrance inspired by the scent of her haircare line.

## WHAT SHE SAYS

"I think it's important that women find their own path, and it doesn't matter the age," says Pagani, who talks often about "aging intelligently" and rejects the notion that ambition has an expiration date. "[In] my mom's generation, it was like, 'Okay, you gotta figure out what you're doing by 40 or you're done,' which is not the case whatsoever." For Pagani, experience is part of the advantage. "I feel like I'm so lucky. I've lived so many lives," she says. Her advice to women with an idea, especially those waiting for the "right" time, is simple: "You have to just start... We can literally do whatever we want and film it, and it doesn't have to be perfection." — *Yusra Benkirane*

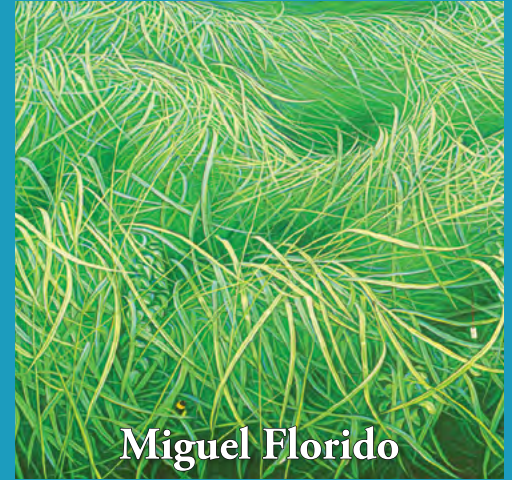
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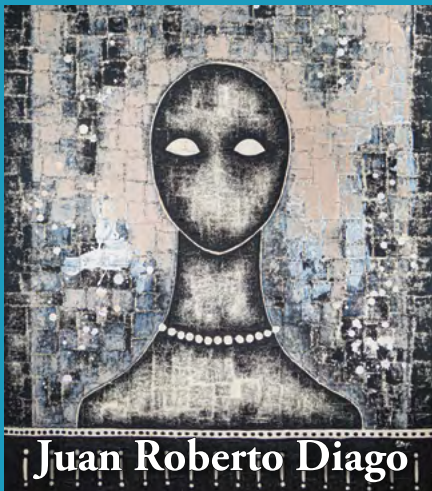
Enrique Casas



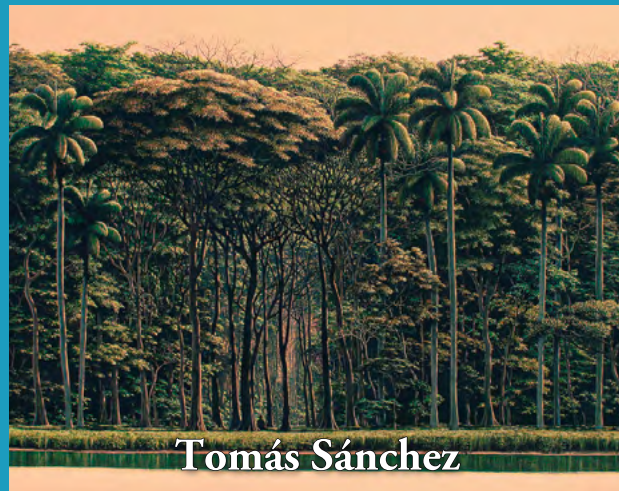
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These works and more are currently on view at *Cernuda Arte*.

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# Nothing' But Blue Skies...

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There is something wonderfully fitting about a wealth management team that carries the spirit of South Florida in everything they do — the warmth, the optimism, the deep sense of community, and the unshakable belief that brighter days are always ahead. In a world of global uncertainty and chaotic financial markets, that belief is not simply inspiring - it is essential. And it is precisely the energy that Susan Rutrough and Raymond “Ray” Sardiña bring to their Gables office as the proud founding advisors of Integrity Wealth Advisory at Janney Montgomery Scott LLC.

When headlines are unsettling and markets feel unpredictable, South Florida deserves a trusted partner with the expertise, integrity, and steady hand to find the silver lining in every storm. At Janney Montgomery Scott - long-established national wealth management firm with their roots dating back to 1832 — that is exactly what Integrity Wealth Advisory delivers every single day.

### Susan Rutrough - Thirty Years of Trust, One Brilliant Vision.

Susan and Ray lead the practice with grace, expertise, and an unwavering commitment to their clients. Susan Rutrough, First Vice President and Financial Advisor, whose 30-year legacy in South Florida's financial community is as impressive as it is inspiring.

Susan Rutrough, First Vice President and Financial Advisor, brings more than 30 years of experience serving clients in South Florida's financial community. She also completed a certificate program through the University of Miami, further strengthening her commitment to professional development and continuing education. Susan made a deliberate and strategic move to Janney Montgomery Scott for one reason above all others — to give her clients access to a superior platform combining the intimacy of a boutique practice with the reach and resources of a premier national institution.

“We didn't just change firms- we leveled up for our clients,” says Rutrough. “South Florida deserves expertise experienced financial guidance supported by the resources of Janney Montgomery Scott, and that's exactly what we're delivering.”

Her credentials are extraordinary - Series 7, 63 and 65 licensed, Life, Health and Variable Annuities licensed, and more than 30 years of financial planning experience across every market cycle imaginable. What truly sets Susan apart is the depth of



her community roots. As a Women's Committee Leader for Big Brothers Big Sisters of Miami, a Miracle Society Member, and a proud Vizcaya Ball Supporter, she has invested her heart into the city she calls home just as surely as she has invested her expertise into her clients' futures. Coral Gables is her home.

*“We are not just managing wealth in South Florida - we are part of this community. Oursuccess is only meaningful when the community around us thrives too.”*

At Janney Montgomery Scott, that philosophy finds its perfect institutional match - a firm built on transparency, ethical practice, and an uncompromising commitment to always placing the client first. In turbulent times, that foundation is not simply reassuring — it is transformative.

### Ray Sardiña -Counsel, Character, and Community

Alongside Susan stands Raymond “Ray” Sardiña, Senior Vice President and Financial Advisor at Janney Montgomery Scott - a professional whose remarkable credentials, deep community roots, and genuine warmth make him one of South Florida's most distinctive and trusted wealth management voices.

Ray brings approximately 18 years of experience in the financial services industry, paired with an academic foundation that is truly exceptional. A Miami native and Florida International University graduate, Ray holds a Bachelor's of Business Administration, a Juris Doctorate (J.D.), and is also a graduate of the University of Miami where he attained his Master's of Business Administration (MBA) - a combination that delivers a uniquely powerful perspective on wealth management, estate and tax planning consideration, and the complex financial landscape his clients navigate. His legal training sharpens every strategy and ensures his clients benefit from a level of analytical depth that is genuinely rare in the industry.

His professional licenses reflect the full breadth of his expertise - Series 7 and Series 66 licensed, as well as fully licensed for life, health, and variable annuity products - providing clients with comprehensive, sophisticated guidance across every dimension of their financial lives at Janney Montgomery Scott.

Ray's approach is rooted in transparency, long-term thinking, and genuine devotion to the people he serves. His clients gain a trusted advocate who listens deeply, communicates with clarity, and acts always in their very best interest - a quality of partnership that, in uncertain global times, is truly invaluable.

It is beyond the office walls, however, where Ray's character shines most brilliantly. A devoted servant leader and deeply active member of St. Brendan's Catholic Parish, Ray has given years of meaningful service to his faith community - including serving as Vice President of St. Brendan's Athletic Foundation and as a team leader for the Emmaus Ministry men's retreats, guiding fellow parishioners toward deeper connection, spiritual growth, and renewed purpose. The integrity and genuine care he brings to his ministry are the very same values he brings to every client relationship at Janney Montgomery Scott.

Ray's philanthropic reach across South Florida is nothing short of extraordinary. As Head of the Kiwanis Little Havana Foundation and Chairman of the Back to School Project - conducted in partnership with the Archdiocese of Miami - Ray has led one of the region's most impactful charitable initiatives, delivering essential school supplies, resources, and renewed confidence to more than 10,000 underprivileged youth across the community. Ten thousand children given a brighter start. Ten thousand families lifted by one man's tireless and heartfelt commitment to his neighbors. Ray's community spirit extends further still as the proud Founder of the Cutler Bay Yankees Association - bringing the joy of baseball, teamwork, and youth development to the next generation of South Florida dreamers. And as a past president of the Energy chapter of Business Networking International (BNI), his collaborative leadership has strengthened professional communities and built lasting bridges across the region.

*"Real wealth begins with investing in the people around you. When children in our community have what they need to succeed, all of South Florida shines a little brighter."*

### The Silver Lining - In Every Market, In Every Season

In turbulent times, the difference between financial anxiety and financial confidence comes down to one thing - the quality of the partner standing beside you. Integrity Wealth Advisory at Janney Montgomery Scott is that partner. When global headlines are uncertain and markets feel uneasy, Susan and Ray bring the steady expertise, calm clarity, and unwavering integrity that helps clients navigate changing market conditions and worry into confidence. Think of them as South Florida's silver lining - always present,



**Susan Rutrough & Ray Sardiñas**

always principled, always looking forward to the blue skies just beyond the clouds. Together, they deliver the full spectrum of wealth management excellence - retirement transition planning, sophisticated strategies for executives and high-net-worth professionals, and multi generational legacy planning that honors a family's values for generations to come. Every strategy is custom-designed. Every relationship is a lifelong partnership built on trust - powered by the strength and independence of Janney Montgomery Scott.

### Your Brighter Financial Future Starts Here.

The doors are open. The team is extraordinary. And at Integrity Wealth Advisory at Janney Montgomery Scott LLC, the sun is always shining.

*"We help clients pursue their financial goals and plan for future generations. And we do it with a smile - because this work matters, and so do the people we do it for."*

-Susan Rutrough, First Vice President & Financial Advisor

Integrity Wealth Advisory at Janney Montgomery Scott LLC  
Susan Rutrough, First Vice President & Financial Advisor  
Raymond "Ray" Sardiña, Senior Vice President & Financial Advisor  
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Securities and investment advisory services are offered through Janney Montgomery Scott LLC. Member NYSE, FINRA, SIPC. For more information about Janney and our services (including important disclosures), see Janney's Relationship Summary (Form CRS) at [www.janney.com/crs](http://www.janney.com/crs).



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# INNOVATION IN CORAL GABLES

A LOOK AT WHAT'S NEW IN:  
TRANSPORTATION  
HEALTHCARE  
CIVIC TECHNOLOGY  
SUSTAINABILITY  
YOUNG INNOVATORS  
EDUCATION  
PRESERVATION

# TRANSPORTATION

Innovation in transportation is mostly about micro-transit, with short-distance mobility options that free users from using their cars. In the Gables, there are also innovations in traffic calming – and a futuristic mobility hub now in the early stages of development.

## FREEBEE

This free downtown service started as electric golf carts carrying advertising, but has since upgraded to Tesla EVs that are funded by the city. Freebees are available to anyone who downloads the RideFreeBee app and typically arrive within 10 minutes. They are used by everyone from CEOs going to meetings to elderly residents who use them to help carry their groceries home. Currently, there are five Freebee cars operating in the city, which last year provided 80,000 rides in the Gables. They also promote economic development, with local retailers promoting their locations and wares on the app and sometimes even on the cars.



## THE MOBILITY HUB

On the drawing board for years, controversial due to its initially futuristic design, the Mobility Hub is now slated to replace the old parking garage behind the Miracle Theatre (245 Andalusia Ave.) with a “Carved by Nature” design. The roughly \$60 million multi-modal facility is intended to be a forward-looking hub that will integrate and interconnect all elements of transportation in the city, from scooters and bicycles to cars, trolleys, and Freebees, with electric vehicle charging stations and even drone-delivery infrastructure.

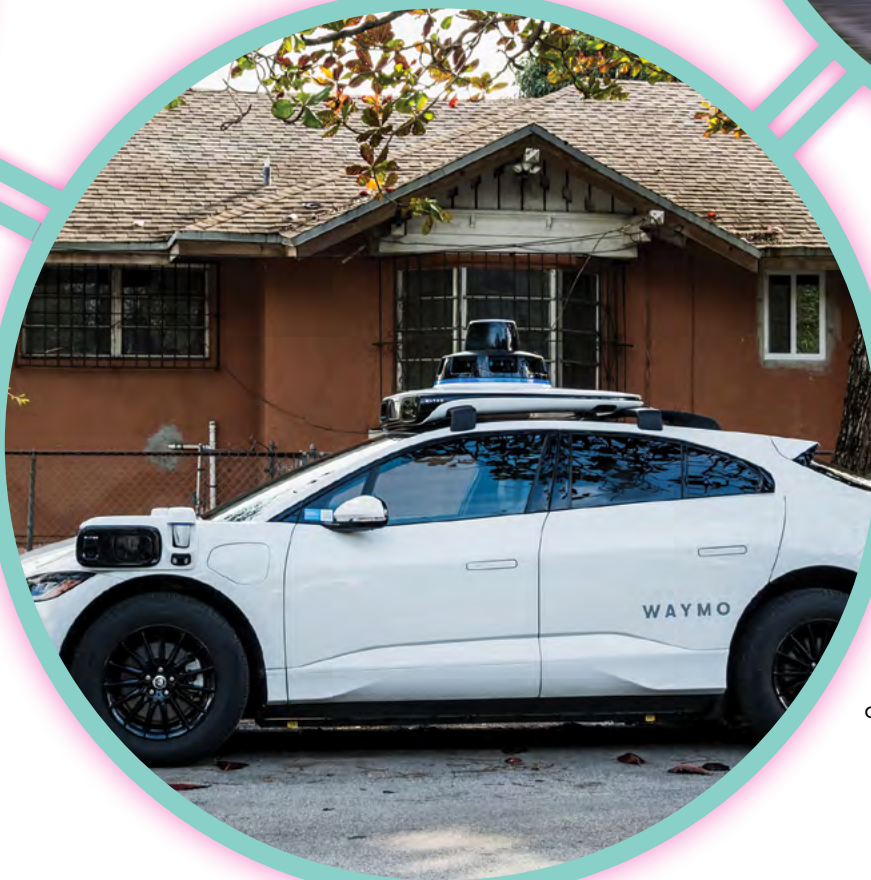


## TROLLEYS

You might think of trolleys as a throwback to the early 1900s, when they dominated public transit in places like San Francisco and New Orleans. Well, all that is old is new again, with those in the Gables powered by electric motors. They run the length of Ponce de Leon, including the east-west route of Ponce that parallels U.S.-1 on the way to UM. Hours are 6:30 am to 10 pm Monday through Saturday, stopping at each trolley sign every 10 to 15 minutes. Real-time tracking is available on the trolley tracker website or via the city's trolley app.

## SCOOTERS

Electric scooters are available at random locations around the downtown and the Merrick Park district. Two companies, Spin and Bird, provide some 200 of these micromobility devices, typically charging \$1 to unlock plus about 15 to 39 cents per minute to ride. The speed is capped at 15 mph, and they are not allowed on Miracle Mile or Ponce de Leon Blvd., but they can be dropped anywhere (at night they are collected and recharged). Last year, there were 180,000 scooter trips in the Gables.



## WAYMO

Yes, driverless cars have arrived in the City Beautiful. Self-driving cars in the form of Waymo's driverless rideshare vehicles can now be used throughout Miami, including in Coral Gables, often for reduced fares compared to other rideshare apps with human drivers. Waymo claims its AI-powered vehicles are safer by ten-fold than human-driven cars, but only time will tell. It currently operates within a 60-square-mile radius in Miami, so you can travel anywhere from the Design District to Brickell, but not yet to Miami International Airport. New riders can download the app and apply to join.

# HEALTHCARE

The pace of progress in healthcare has become breathless. Part of that progress comes from a better understanding of how nutrition and exercise enhance wellness. But when it comes to real medical innovation, technology is leading the way



## NICKLAUS CHILDREN'S HOSPITAL

Located just six blocks from the western edge of Coral Gables, Nicklaus Children's Hospital is a world leader in innovative ways of reducing anxiety in children. Their virtual reality BEAR program is now five years old, reducing anxiety, fear, and perceived pain with immersive VR technology (i.e. headsets that create pleasant natural worlds). Now, Nicklaus is innovating with an Immersive Therapies program that uses lighting, sound, and projection mapping to offer audio-visual distractions for patients at point of care. One, shown here, uses pleasant, colorful floating lights to promote restorative sleep.



## UHEALTH

UM's Sylvester Comprehensive Cancer Center decided to embrace innovation by creating Sylvester Innovates, a fund with an initial \$1 million to invest in promising new ideas in oncology, experimental therapeutical, med tech, AI wearables, and diagnostics. In its first round, it has narrowed 40 proposals to 14 pitches for expert panels in science, tech transfer, and industry applications, resulting in five awards. The biggest (\$500,000) went to a new technology that allows surgeons to create 360-degree models of brain tumors, which can then be eliminated with targeted lasers through a small opening in the skull.

## BAPTIST HEALTH SOUTH FLORIDA

Coral Gables-headquartered Baptist is already renowned for its Miami Cancer Institute, with advanced robotic surgical capabilities and South Florida's first proton therapy center. Now, Baptist has become a global leader in the use of accurate radiation therapy via the MRIdian Linac, a state-of-the-art system that pairs advanced MRI imaging with radiation treatment. The new tool allows doctors to attack cancer that develops in hard-to-reach spots, especially near vital organs, by giving radiation oncologists clear views of tumors. Baptist has also become a leader in research on best treatment techniques for the MRIdian Linac.



## CORA

One trend in new condominium buildings in Coral Gables is wellness, where healthy elements are part of the construction. Leading the charge is CORA, a boutique condo development adjacent to Shops at Merrick Park. Among its many innovations (including air & water filtering and circadian lighting in public spaces) is special metallic layering within the walls of the units to shield residents from electromagnetic frequencies, which permeate human organs via everything from radio and television waves to cell phone and bluetooth transmissions. Even the emissions from the electric cords in the walls are shielded.

## HIGH-TECH SPAS

Coral Gables is now home to several health spas with high-tech devices designed to rejuvenate and restore clients, using everything from a Tesla coil "bio-charger" at Let Go Stress (for energy and relaxation), to compression therapy at Pause Studio (for sore muscles), to hyperbaric chambers at Hydrology (for increased oxygen levels and wound healing). Cryotherapy (Hydrology's device pictured here) is also offered at several spas. The idea is to suddenly lower the temperature in a controlled space to between minus 150- and 290-degrees Fahrenheit for two to three minutes. Blood rushes toward the internal organs, triggering anti-inflammatory and pain-relief responses.



# YOUNG INNOVATORS

Looking to the future also means looking at the next generation, and what they will contribute. Here in the Gables, there is special attention paid to nurturing the next great innovators through various programs. Here are two.

## THE SMART CITY LAB

Inside the Coral Gables Public Works compound on SW 72<sup>nd</sup> Avenue, a small room filled with wires, sensors, laptops, and whiteboards is busy shaping the future of the city. This is the Coral Gables Smart City Lab, a workshop where students, engineers, and city staff experiment with technology to solve real problems for residents. The lab's mission is simple: come up with practical tools that make city services faster, cheaper, and smarter. Instead of relying solely on outside vendors, the city's technology team works with student interns to build solutions in-house, testing prototypes for use across the Gables.

"We built this over a number of years," says lab director Mark Hebert. "And now they [city staff] come to us. It's like, if you build it, they will come." According to Hebert, the city's experimentation with student interns began decades ago, almost by accident. A Miami-Dade County School Board program introduced Coral Gables to high school interns who worked in city departments for short periods during the school year.

"Kathy Swanson was city manager. She was contacted by the Miami-Dade County School Board, and they had a program called an honors and executive internship for high schoolers," Hebert explains. "That's how we got introduced to the possibility of interns. They were such bright people that we got hooked," he says. "We wanted to keep doing this."

The city established the innovation lab roughly five years ago; its momentum has accelerated recently as more students from local colleges have joined the program. "Last year, we suddenly started getting lots of interns from FIU and MDC in particular, and that has really changed the way we work," says Hebert.



The lab typically has a dozen projects underway at once, many inspired by issues discussed at City Commission meetings. Staff members and interns watch the meetings carefully, looking for opportunities where technology might help. "We hear whatever the residents or commissioners are talking about and try to make something," says staffer Javier Fernandez.

One intern, Alejandro Ferrer, is developing a digital hurricane preparedness dashboard for the city's emergency management team. The system allows city officials to log in and update information themselves. "It'll show the [predicted] hurricane zones," he says. "They don't have to call IT."

Another project focuses on improving pedestrian safety in the age of electric scooters. Interns Samantha Simmons and Annalise Martinez are building a prototype speed-detection system using sensors and a small computer board. "We're working on this breadboard that has two sensors," Simmons explains. "One sensor triggers and we wait for the next one to calculate the speed." The technology could eventually monitor sidewalks and warn when scooters or bikes are moving too quickly.

Other projects are more administrative. One team built a system that creates mailing labels for public notices, allowing individual city departments to send notifications to residents without waiting for another department to generate the labels. The lab has also developed digital business cards for city employees, allowing people to tap a card against their phone and instantly open a city webpage.

For Hebert, the real value of the Smart City Lab isn't just the technology. It's the environment, a place where students learn by experimenting – prepping them for future IT careers – while the city gains fresh ideas. "Whatever you want to work on, you're in," he says. "Your skin is in the game – you invest in yourself."



MARK HEBERT, LAB DIRECTOR

## GROWING BEYOND EARTH

The location of the Innovation Studio is appropriate, inside a pair of renovated buildings beneath rainforest foliage at Fairchild Tropical Botanic Garden. There, high school students are helping answer one of humanity's most ambitious questions: how to grow food beyond Earth.

The project began as a collaboration with NASA more than a decade ago, according to Amy Padolf, Fairchild's director of education. Padolf has overseen the initiative as it expanded from a local experiment to a global student-research network, aiming to tackle the technological challenges behind growing plants in orbiting space stations or on the moon.

"We proposed to NASA that we build this Innovation Studio where we address those technology-of-food-production issues," says Padolf. NASA ultimately funded the equipment, while local philanthropist Kendall Kennedy paid for renovating the facilities.

The result is a two-part research hub. On one side is a design lab filled with tools such as 3D printers and laser cutters used to develop new technology. On the other is the wet lab – the heart of the research – where students test edible plants under simulated space conditions.

The work feeds into a larger initiative called Growing Beyond Earth, a project coordinated with scientists at NASA's Kennedy Space Center. Student researchers design growth chambers and sensor systems that collect environmental data such as temperature, humidity, carbon dioxide levels, and barometric pressure. "We're developing all of the technology that helps automatically collect environmental data," says Padolf. "And we're building the equipment that we send out to schools."

Today, more than 500 schools in 12 countries – including 47 states in the U.S. – participate in the program, testing which crops might sustain astronauts during long-duration missions. "The students are the researchers," says Padolf. "They do all of the replication of the experiments."



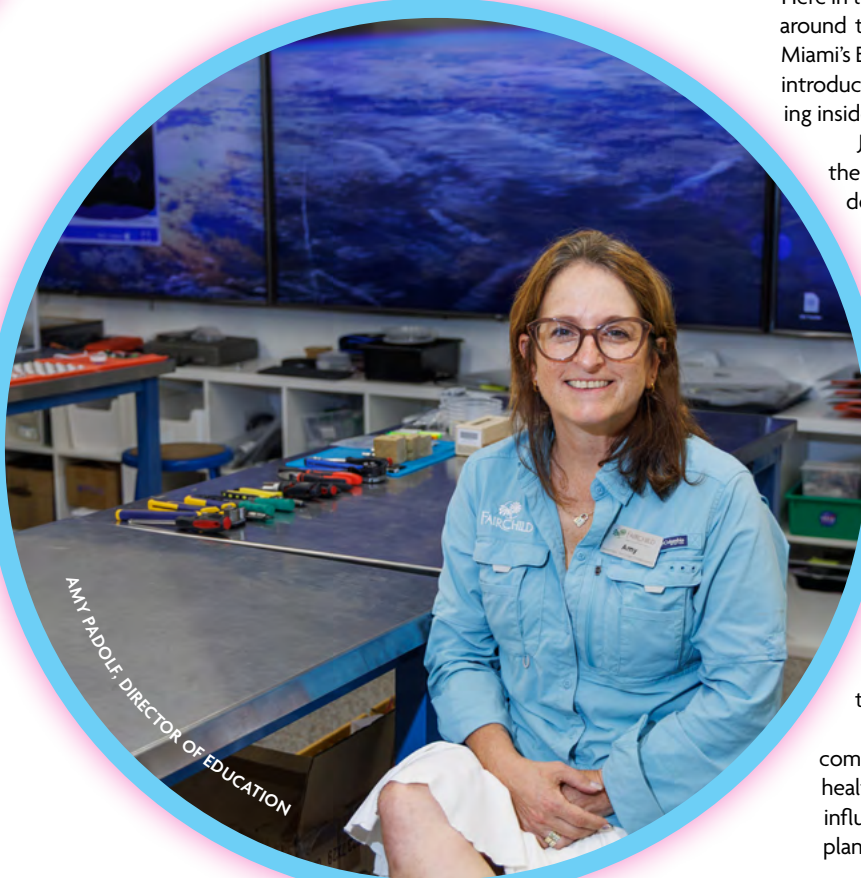
Here in the Gables, they also beta test equipment, which is sent to schools around the world. Most of the researchers at Fairchild are seniors from Miami's Biotech High School, which partners with the Garden. After taking introductory botany courses, students can spend hours each week working inside the Innovation Studio as part of their curriculum.

Joshua Rodriguez, one of the student researchers, explains that the lab replicates conditions on the International Space Station. One device attempts to simulate microgravity through constant motion, allowing students to observe how plants behave when the normal pull of gravity is reduced. Other variables such as lighting and fertilizer are tested to see how different species respond. "From this lab we've had five plants go into the ISS," says Rodriguez, listing tomatoes, peppers, bok choy and mizuna among the successful crops.

Another student, Annarella D'Ambrosio, is testing plants in a lunar soil simulant, a substance designed to mimic the composition of moon dust. The goal is to determine whether crops might someday grow on the Moon or even support missions to Mars.

For the students, the experience is transformative. Rodriguez says the program inspired his decision to pursue biotechnology, because it allowed him to see research translated into real-world applications. "It's not just for a ribbon like a science fair," he says. "Seeing your research actually be used — that's what makes it meaningful."

Student Deivy Rodriguez plans to study psychology after becoming fascinated with how plants might improve astronauts' mental health during long missions. Even astronauts themselves occasionally influence the research at Fairchild – including a request to grow tea plants aboard the station.



AMY PADOLF, DIRECTOR OF EDUCATION

# SUSTAINABILITY

How can we meet our present needs for food, energy, etc., without compromising the future? One major answer is innovative recycling.

## FOOD WASTE RECLAMATION

Any farmer knows that one of the best ways to create soil is through a compost pile, where organic waste – read that as food scraps – are piled up and mixed with carbon “browns” such as dry leaves, twigs, straw, or even shredded cardboard. The result is the creation of nitrogen-rich soil. Environmentally-minded Gables residents have been asking for an urban community compost location, and one is now coming to the Coral Gables Library, where two 45-gallon bins will be installed for residents to dump their food waste. The bins will be locked with a combination for residents who want to participate.



## MORE RECYCLING

Coral Gables has been a leader in the recycling of various toxic and non-biodegradable wastes, with biannual, drive-thru recycling events at City Hall that have diverted over 651,500 pounds of waste from landfills over the last nine years. Collected items have include electronics, household hazardous waste (paint, chemicals), clothing, and confidential documents. Now, the city intends to expand the items collected to include plastic bags, film, and batteries. They will also use the Sunset fire station as a collection spot for medical wastes (prescription drugs, syringes, etc.)



## THE BIOCHAR SOLUTION

Coral Gables generates large volumes of green waste every year from tree trimming, landscaping, and storm cleanups. With more than 42,000 trees in public right-of-ways alone – not counting thousands more on private property – the city must regularly dispose of tons of branches, leaves, and other organic debris. Traditionally, that material has had to be hauled away for disposal, an expensive process that can cost around \$80 per ton.

The innovative solution: a biochar production facility on city-owned property near SW 72nd Avenue. After reviewing alternative technologies, the office of City Manager Peter Iglesias is moving forward with a system that converts organic material into biochar – a carbon-rich product created by heating plant matter in a controlled, low-oxygen environment. The process resembles burning, but with a critical difference: specialized airflow systems prevent smoke from escaping while capturing energy from the heat.

The proposed facility will sit on roughly six acres of city-controlled land near 72nd Avenue, where Public Works now operates, including an adjacent parcel that already requires environmental remediation. The size of the site will allow the city to process all of its green waste locally instead of shipping it elsewhere.

The heat produced during the process will also drive a generator capable of producing electricity, which would then charge battery systems used to power equipment at the facility. The resulting biochar can be used as fertilizer or be processed into a lightweight aggregate similar to low-strength concrete or asphalt used in applications such as sidewalks and parking lots.

Processing green waste locally could reduce the city's disposal costs to roughly \$20 per ton, and Coral Gables could accept green waste from neighboring municipalities or commercial landscaping companies, charging \$40 a ton for disposal. The site sits next to a railroad line, which would allow the city to ship biochar products to outside markets if demand develops. Construction of the facility will likely take one to two years once approvals and site arrangements are finalized.

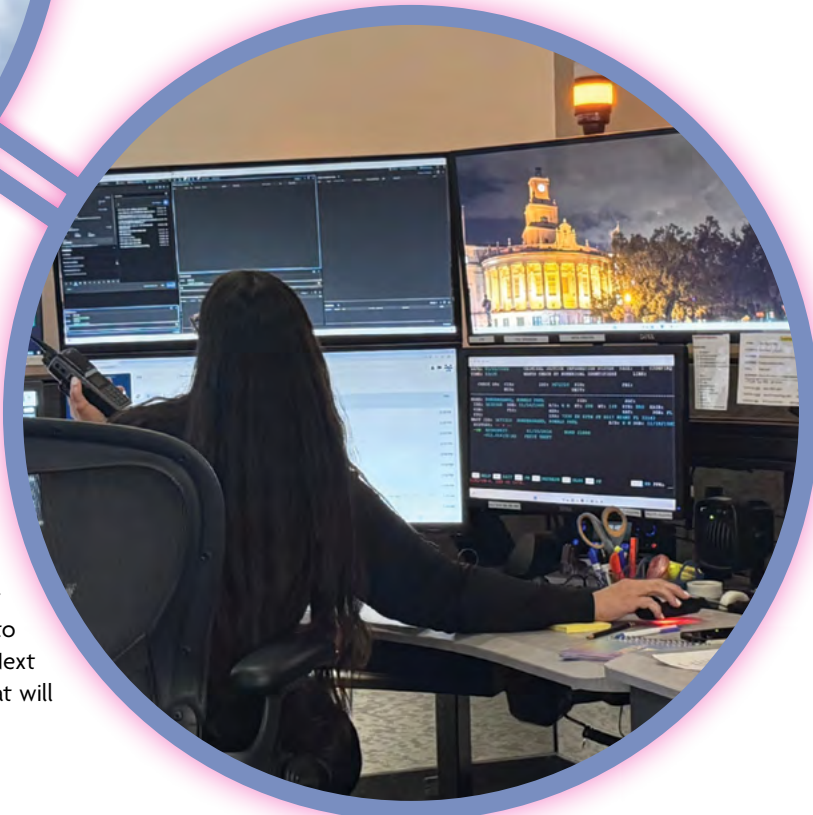


# CIVIC TECHNOLOGY

Coral Gables is known nationally as a leading “smart city” due to advances in IT. But in the end, all of these innovations are designed for the sake of one goal: improving the lives of people who live and work in the Gables.

## SMART DISTRICT BROADBAND

One of the reasons Coral Gables wins so many awards as a “Smart City” is its deployment of miles of fiber optic cables throughout the downtown, municipal infrastructure that connects city buildings, provides secure high-speed data transmission, and supports public Wi-Fi, sensors, and smart city technologies. Phases one through four already connect key corridors such as Miracle Mile, Alhambra Circle, and Ponce de Leon Boulevard. Phase five will now extend the network further south to U.S.-1 and into the city’s emerging innovation district. The fiber network provides the foundation for technologies like traffic sensors and advanced public safety systems.



## 911

Coral Gables has always been proud of its response times, going so far as to build new fire stations near areas where response time was lagging. A key to the information chain that allows first responders to get to the scene is the 911 link. Operators in the city’s Public Safety Building are vital links for dispatching help. Making that communication ever easier, the city now allows 911 calls to come in as texts, for cases where victims cannot speak. Next on the development list is instant language translators that will allow operators to understand calls in any language.



## DELIVERY BOTS

A fleet of friendly-looking wheeled robots are now traversing the city, particularly in the downtown. The delivery robots are deployed mostly for food deliveries through UberEats. Serve Robotics, which owns the 'bots, gives each their own name – from Leah to Googoosh – powering them with artificial intelligence and monitoring them with humans. According to Serve Robotics, the aim is to cut down on traffic. “Why deliver two-pound burritos in two-ton cars?” its website asks.

## CORAL

As AI drives change in the Gables, one of the most visible innovations is Coral, the city's artificial intelligence assistant. Available through the Coral Gables website, Coral functions like an advanced chatbot trained on city information and services. Residents can ask questions about permits, city events, departments, and procedures in plain language. Instead of navigating dozens of webpages, users can simply ask: How do I apply for a permit? Where can I pay a fee? What events are happening this weekend? Coral pulls answers directly from city websites, procedures, and data, using generative AI technology similar to ChatGPT.

Smart City Hub - CORAL AI

(AN AIDA FRAMEWORK AGENT)

## Bot for City of Coral Gables

CORAL, I am an artificial Intelligence Digital Assistant (AIDA) bot designed to help you navigate City of Coral Gables' Smart City Hub public platform, find useful e-government tools and information -- such as digital city services, mobile apps, citizen engagement tools, open data, interactive maps, traffic and environmental sensor dashboards, transparency portals, and other useful resources. How Aida helps, without relying on maps.



## SKY EYES

The Coral Gables Police Department has been experimenting with its drone team for more than a year now. Careful consideration and restraint have been the watchwords, avoiding the optics of becoming invasive with hovering Big Brother drones observing citizens from the sky. In the case of active crime scenes or other emergencies requiring police presence, however, the department is now developing early response drones which can get to the scene before officers can by car or on foot. Information from early arrival drones would be conveyed back to officers, better preparing them for arrival.

# EDUCATION

AI is driving innovation in education today, including enhancing student learning based on feedback algorithms. AI-driven virtual reality opens whole new vistas for interactive learning – as does remote campus access.

## UMVERSE

The use of AI-mediated virtual reality has become so entrenched as an innovative approach to education that all students now must take an introductory course in VR. These headset systems are now used in 50 different classes at UM, for everything from history and architecture to anatomy and fine art. In such classes, students can explore virtual three-dimensional spaces – from moving through the interiors of ancient buildings, to rotating 3D constructs of molecules for organic chemistry classes. UM is so advanced in its VR capacities that it has received visits from researchers at META and Disney’s Imagineers. Students can also develop their own projects at UM’s Virtual Experiences Simulation Lab (VESL).



## BELMONT VILLAGE

As the saying goes, if you can’t bring Muhammad to the mountain, bring the mountain to Muhammad. That is the idea behind a new program at Belmont Village, a pilot being tested in partnership with Rice University’ Glasscock School of Continuing Studies. It’s called the Lifelong University, a custom-designed program that brings college-level learning opportunities directly to retirement community residents. Research has shown that continual learning stimulates the neural cortex, creating new brain cells – and, in the process, forestalling cognitive decline and helping keep memory intact. Classes, which are projected via Zoom with live Rice scholars, offer late-in-life learners a variety of courses on everything from evolutionary biology and the Mayan civilization to lunar science and medieval art history.

# HISTORIC PRESERVATION

One of the more innovative ways to preserve the local history of Coral Gables is by re-inventing the purpose of a historic building. Known as re-purposing, sometimes the building is slightly altered – but it is also saved and protected for future generations. Here in the Gables, there are several prime examples.

## ST. MARY FIRST MISSIONARY BAPTIST CHURCH


St. Mary's Baptist Church was built in 1924, and for much of the past century served as a house of worship for the black community of Coral Gables' McFarland District. It was condemned as unsafe and nearly demolished before Gables attorney Mike Eidson purchased and restored the church, turning it into a performance and cultural arts center. Today the renovated church operates as a 100-125 seat multi-purpose theater for performances, including by local dance groups and musicians. It also serves as a space for arts education, workshops, and special events, such as the annual Martin Luther King Jr. reenactment.



## THE MERCEDES-BENZ BUILDING

Located at the intersection of Salzedo and Sevilla, the former Public Safety Building for the Coral Gables Police and Fire Departments was on its way to demolition. A prime example of what is known as Brutalist architecture, the building was saved by Bill Ussery Motors, which operated the Mercedes-Benz dealership across the street. The building had been bought by developer Armando Codina, but he swapped it with Mercedes for a nearby property where he could build his Regency Parc luxury apartment building. Mercedes then converted it to offices and a parking garage for their inventory, painting the tawny concrete structure white as part of its transformation.





# Top Doctors of Coral Gables

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South Florida has world class medical care and none finer than in the City Beautiful.

In our continuing series of “Top Doctors” in Coral Gables we will highlight doctors that are at the pinnacle of their specialities.

We invite you to find and connect with the finest healthcare professionals in the area.



*In addition, you can look to our website where we will house a directory of doctors who serve the City Beautiful.*

# Sollis Health

## Dr. Vikas Goswamy

ASSISTANT MEDICAL DIRECTOR  
SOLLIS HEALTH OF CORAL GABLES

acute situations with both the urgency of an ER physician and the broader perspective of an internist. But credentials alone aren't enough. What truly distinguishes my practice is a commitment to understanding patients as whole people recognizing that a health scare affects not just the body, but families, careers, and peace of mind.

### 3. CAN YOU SHARE AN EXPERIENCE THAT REFLECTS YOUR PRACTICE PHILOSOPHY?

Years working within traditional hospital systems showed me how broken the patient experience can be not because of the people, but because of the pressures placed on them. Joining Sollis Health felt like finally practicing medicine the way it was meant to be practiced. Here, I can sit with a member, listen closely, understand the full context of what they're experiencing, and build a care plan without bureaucratic barriers. That freedom to truly connect and care is, to me, the heart of medicine.

Sollis Health is redefining immediate care, offering members unlimited urgent and emergency care visits with top emergency-trained physicians. Be seen immediately, by leading E.R. clinicians, in a private, relaxing setting.

### 1. HOW HAS YOUR BACKGROUND SHAPED YOUR APPROACH TO PATIENT CARE?

My training and board certifications in emergency medicine and internal medicine have given me a uniquely broad clinical foundation. Over 12 years practicing in New York's most demanding environments - including high-volume emergency departments, level-one trauma centers, and tertiary care hospitals - I encountered virtually every type of medical complaint imaginable. That breadth of experience, combined with my faculty role at the University of Miami, has sharpened my ability to think quickly, treat comprehensively, and never overlook complexity. I've learned that great medicine requires not just technical expertise, but genuine curiosity about the whole person in front of you. That philosophy guides every patient encounter at Sollis.

### 2. WHAT DISTINGUISHES YOUR PRACTICE FROM OTHERS?

Being double board-certified in emergency medicine and internal medicine is relatively rare, allowing me to approach

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# Dr. Stephan Baker

PLASTIC SURGEON

## 1. WHAT MAKES DR. BAKER'S PRACTICE EXCEPTIONAL IN MIAMI?

Our practice is based on integrity and honesty. We evaluate patients' concerns and provide realistic information and aesthetic judgment from decades of experience in Cosmetic Plastic Surgery. If a procedure is not truly beneficial for a patient, Dr. Baker will say so. He will only recommend surgery that will actually make a positive difference, and which is safe. Our practice endorses a philosophy of 'less is more' to arrive at a natural looking result, not one that looks 'plastic' or 'done'. We believe it is more important to perform one or two procedures optimally than too many sub-optimally.

## 2. HOW HAS DR. BAKER'S BACKGROUND SHAPED HIS APPROACH TO PATIENT CARE?

His growing up in Germany has taught him to value and take pride in solid craftsmanship and attention to detail when performing surgery, all the while guided by European artistry to create natural looking results. By nature, he is a caregiver and enjoys caring for his patients, as manifested by his thorough after-surgery care. Always being a physician first, and a plastic surgeon second, it is natural to him to dedicate himself to the safety and wellbeing of his patients. To that end, he only recommends surgery which is low risk and truly beneficial to a patient, despite the entrepreneurial temptations in today's cosmetic surgery industry.

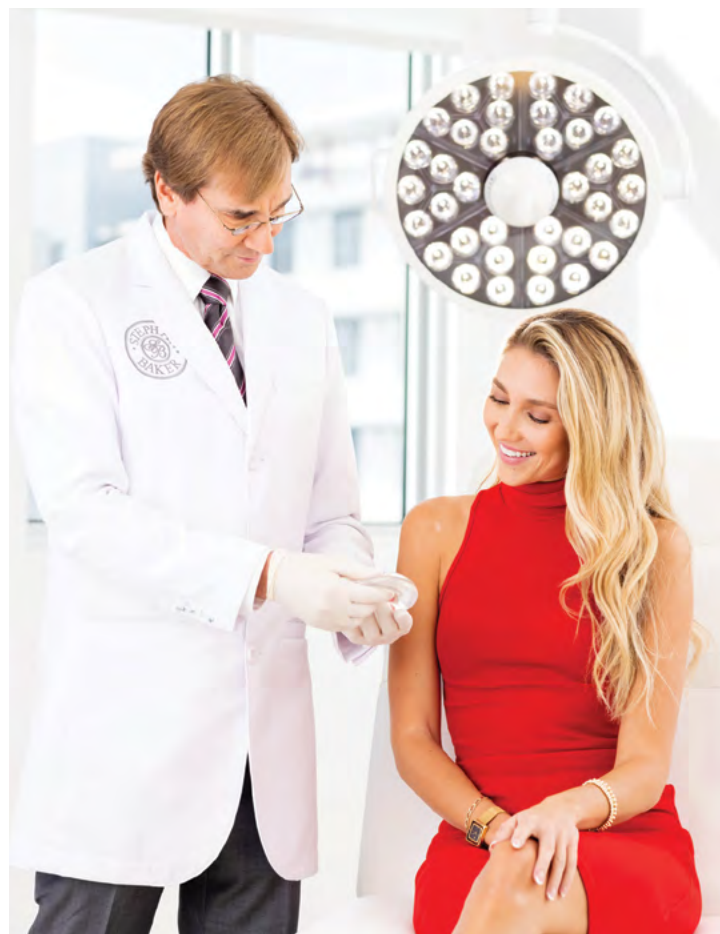
## 3. WHAT DISTINGUISHES DR. BAKER'S PRACTICE?

We are a cosmetic boutique practice focusing on one patient at a time. Before proceeding with surgery, Dr. Baker, along with his highly dedicated team, typically meets with a patient three times to be

sure that indications are appropriate, and the patient understands exactly what to expect from the surgery and its targeted outcome. The after-surgery care is provided by Dr. Baker himself and rather intensely so, especially in the first two weeks, to be sure that all is healing as expected. Results matter most to patients, along with safety. To that end, the patient will benefit from his decades of actual cosmetic surgery experience plus the best prior training in Plastic Surgery. To optimize safety, all surgery takes place at the Baptist Health Surgery Center at Miami Beach or South Miami Hospital.

### **AN EXPERIENCE THAT REFLECTS DR. BAKER'S PRACTICE PHILOSOPHY:**

Often patients hear about a procedure or technique online, or have seen other surgeons. Lacking real "inside" plastic surgery knowledge, they often are understandably confused or unclear about the actual indications, realities, and risks of a procedure, and thus can be easily swayed or misguided into something not really in their best interest. Instead, such a patient deserves to be honestly educated and dissuaded from having any procedure(s) for which they are not truly a suitable and safe candidate. Dr. Baker advises them so and may invite them to re-consult in the future, as faces and bodies do change over time.



### **BEST ADVICE FOR PATIENTS:**

Take all the time you need to research the surgery you are contemplating, and of course the surgeon. The more you know the better. Plastic surgery is very real, requires real recovery and should be planned carefully. Don't be overly impressed by trends, "latest and greatest" talk on social media, from surgeons or consultants. 'New' is often not new but newly marketed to unsuspecting patients in search of anything 'new'. Ask probing questions and listen for realistic answers that make sense. There are no magic tricks. Techniques don't create your result, only the plastic surgeon does, using their skill, expertise and experience (hopefully) accumulated over many years. The happiest patients understand this and have realistic expectations.



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### **STEPHAN BAKER, MD, FACS**

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Certified by the American Board of Plastic Surgery

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# Dr. Jose Rodríguez-Feliz

PLASTIC SURGEON  
FACELIFT & EYELID SURGERY SPECIALIST

**Dr. Rodríguez-Feliz** is a New York-trained plastic surgeon specializing in deep plane facelift and eyelid surgery. He completed fellowship training in aesthetic facial surgery with world-renowned plastic surgeon Dr. Mark Codner in Atlanta, Georgia. For over a decade, he has cared for a discerning clientele that includes high-net-worth individuals, executives, professional athletes, celebrities, and public figures. His Coral Gables boutique practice is centered on personalized care, operational excellence, and delivering high-quality outcomes with reduced risk.

*“Sometimes the best care I can provide is to tell a patient -Plastic surgery is not the answer-”*

## WHAT MAKES YOUR MEDICAL PRACTICE EXCEPTIONAL IN THIS COMMUNITY?

Excellence is the principle that guides everything we do. Our team is composed of highly trained professionals dedicated to mastering their craft. Through continuous improvement of our systems and processes, we reduce risk and deliver a consistently high standard of care to our patients.

## WHAT DISTINGUISHES YOUR PRACTICE FROM OTHERS?

I value being a doctor first, and that has not changed in the 12 years I have practiced in Coral Gables. I take seriously the judgment and responsibility that come with caring for patients. Our on-site surgical suite allows us to treat patients in a highly controlled and safe environment, while our boutique practice prioritizes privacy and personalized care in a discreet, calm setting.

## CAN YOU SHARE AN EXPERIENCE THAT REFLECTS YOUR PRACTICE PHILOSOPHY?

One philosophy that guides my practice is that our services are not for everyone—and that is intentional. Putting patients first means being honest about what will truly benefit them. My role is not simply to perform surgery, but to exercise judgment and ensure patients pursue the right procedure, for the right condition, and for the right reasons. Sometimes, the best care I can provide is telling a patient that plastic surgery is not the answer.

### Jose Rodríguez-Feliz, MD

📍 6705 Red Road, Suite 500  
Coral Gables FL 33143

📞 305-563-3030

🏠 [rodriguezfelizmd.com](http://rodriguezfelizmd.com)

📷 @joserodriguezfelizmd



# Dr. Juan Carlos Portuondo

## DOCTOR OF DENTAL SURGERY

They also provide IV sedation and general anesthesia for surgical procedures. Our practice stands apart through unmatched training and experience. Dr. Portuondo is board certified and completed a five year surgical residency and anesthesia rotation at Johns Hopkins Hospital. He brings more than 40 years of private practice experience, delivering trusted, expert care to our community. Dr. Portuondo believes it is important to have a relationship with his patients and personally calls every patient post surgery to check in and answer any questions.

### 3. WHAT EXCITES YOU MOST ABOUT RECENT DEVELOPMENTS IN HEALTH CARE?

We have had an incredible and significant amount of progress and innovations in oral surgery in the last years, especially in the field of implant dentistry. A few significant advancements include new techniques and materials available for the regeneration of bone in the upper and lower jaws, as well as advances in the type of implants we use to replace missing teeth. For these complex cases we work with a restorative dentist who assists with the final crowns, dentures, etc., when the implants are healed. Another exciting advancement that we specialize in is orthognathic surgery. This involves cosmetic and functional correction of the bite in conjunction with movement of the upper and lower jaws, as well as the chin for the treatment of dental-facial deformities. We work with the patient's orthodontist who moves the teeth alignment in preparation and/or after the surgical procedure.


### 1. HOW HAS YOUR BACKGROUND SHAPED YOUR APPROACH TO PATIENT CARE?

My residency at Johns Hopkins Hospital provided great training in all aspects of oral and maxillo facial surgery. My training included rotations through all dental specialties, as well as medical specialties including, general anesthesia, general surgery, plastic surgery, ENT, head and neck surgery, pathology and emergency medicine at one of the nation's best trauma units. Along with that extensive training, I also trained on simpler oral surgery procedures including extractions, wisdom teeth removal, implants, bone grafts, oral pathology, TMJ disease and surgical correction of dento-facial deformities and more. I also learned early on the importance of compassion and kindness to help patients feel at ease.


### 2. WHAT DISTINGUISHES YOUR PRACTICE FROM OTHERS?

Choosing Dr. Portuondo or an oral surgeon for wisdom teeth removal or dental implants ensures the highest level of surgical expertise, advanced anesthesia training, and comprehensive management of complex cases. These specialists are uniquely trained to prioritize safety, precision, and optimal outcomes.

## Dr. Juan Carlos Portuondo, DDS

 6200 Sunset Drive, Suite 402  
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 [mosaoralsurgery.com](http://mosaoralsurgery.com)



# A HOME WITH A VIEW

Adriana Hoyos' transformation of this home in Deering Estates opened its inherent connection to spectacular verdant vistas, while grounding it with neutral, natural elements.

## ADRIANA HOYOS

Ecuadorian designer Adriana Hoyos began her career as a furniture designer in 1994, with her eponymous Adriana Hoyos Furnishings brand. That same design sensibility evolved into Adriana Hoyos Design Studio, which relocated to Coral Gables in 2023. Her work has ranged from the reimagined airport in Punta Cana, Dominican Republic, to the complete renovation of the clubhouse and restaurant on Miami's Fisher Island, to numerous private homes stretching from New York to Central and South America and even the Middle East. For residential projects, her philosophy has remained the same: to design livable spaces that reflect the lifestyles – and preferred color palettes – of her clients, and to do so with timeless style.



### THE LIVING ROOM (OPPOSITE)

The main living area uses neutral tones for the main pieces of furniture, creating a warm, inviting space enlivened by the mustard color of the two swivel chairs and the over-sized wall art, “which creates drama,” says Hoyos. “The art is what ties everything together, while the mirror reflects the amazing view.” All the furniture was designed by Hoyos, with the seats and sofa from her Gem collection, and the coffee table from the Lua collection (it consists of two halfmoons). The wool rug is by Feysi, the chandelier from Visual Comfort, and the linen wallpaper from Arte.



### THE POWDER ROOM (ABOVE)

“This room is pretty special, because it contrasts the traditional molding with the ultra-modern steel sink,” says Hoyos. The mirror is from Arterio, while the lighting fixture is from Visual Comfort, which has a showroom in Coral Gables. The two tables are from Interlude, made from brass and marble.



### THE FAMILY ROOM (LEFT TOP)

This room had been separated by a wall from the rest of the home. Hoyos removed it, installing two wooden partitions to mark the separation while opening the home’s space “from east to west,” she says. The room itself is “a very comfortable space,” she adds, with a sofa made by Natuzzi, an end table from her Lua collection, and a plaid carpet “that anchors the room.” The cocktail table, with natural stone on top, has two levels, so you can put books and other objects on the lower level. The art is “very organic,” with human silhouettes in abstract form.

### THE MASTER BEDROOM (LEFT MIDDLE)

The oversized headboard, low and white, extends past the bed in both directions. “I love to do this because it stretches the room,” says Hoyos. The textured wallpaper is from Arte, and the end tables are from her Lua collection. The wool rug adds to the comfort, while the neutral tone painting, done in watercolor on linen, “makes the room feel modern.”

### THE DINING ROOM (LEFT)

The dining room is done simply, once again using oversized decorative art (watercolor on linen) to add drama and expand the sense of space. The chandelier is from Visual Comfort, which Hoyos says she loves “because it looks like birds” and reflects the natural world of Deering Bay. The table, made from natural wood, comes from a Brazilian designer, while the chairs are vintage Hoyos, with caramel-colored leather braces.



## THE SEEN

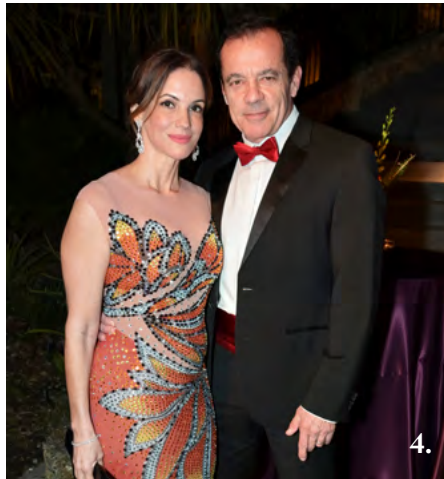
### Gala in the Garden

**Gala in the Garden** once again stood as one of the philanthropic season's most coveted and impeccably attended events. Presented by **Fairchild Tropical Botanic Garden** in collaboration with **Le Basque Catering**, the evening unfolded as a Vanity Fair-worthy affair set along a shimmering lake, surrounded by lush foliage and night-blooming flowers, which opened just in time for a multi-sensory experience beneath the stars, heightened by a spectacular drone show.

Proceeds from the Gala support Fairchild's world-class research, conservation, and education initiatives, including Growing Beyond Earth in partnership with NASA, the Million Orchid Project, and the newly announced Million Butterfly Project. The evening of the last day in February was led by Gala Co-Chairs **Sissy DeMaria-Koehne** and **Barbara Tria**, with **Joyce Burns** serving as Philanthropic Chair and **Swanee DiMare** as Honorary Chair.



1. Susannah Shubin, Sissy Koehne, Swanee DiMare, Barbara Tria
2. Mary Jean Risi, Lou Risi, Swanee DiMare
3. Joyce and Tony Burns
4. Lissett and Dr. Pascal Goldschmidt
5. Laurie Jennings and Josh Salman
6. Paul George, Mayor Danielle Levine Cava, Kenny O'Keefe
7. Bruce and Evelyn Greer
8. Bronwyn Miller, Ricky Elias and Ivonne Elrich





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# Meandering Around Town # 32: The Carnival

AN ADVENTURE IN WHICH A FORMER MAYOR CONTINUES TO SEEK THE “SOUL” OF HIS HOMETOWN

BY DON SLESNICK

A couple of months ago my readers accompanied me on the seemingly never-ending search for our community’s “soul” as we ventured outside our city’s boundaries to appreciate the ties-that-bind the Orange Bowl Committee to Coral Gables. That column brought forth suggestions for a similar article regarding another organization that has, for years, annually provided glitz, glamour, and a Latin demeanor to our downtown – the Kiwanis Club of Little Havana.

Most of our residents do not realize that despite the club’s name, it has close ties with the City Beautiful through its membership, its leadership, and one of its principal projects: “Carnaval on the Mile” which is celebrated annually in March.

Almost thirty percent of the more than 150 Kiwanis are proud City Beautiful residents including a long lineage of the club’s leadership: Leslie Pantin, Willy Bermello, Frank Paredes, Carlos Font, Pedro Menendez, Angel Veliz, and Thomas Falcon.

Twenty-five years ago, a former Chair of the Coral Gables Community Foundation, Carlos Garcia (now deceased), led the club to bring the exciting “Carnaval” to Miracle Mile. This past November, the City Commission issued a proclamation recognizing the importance of this event as “one of the City’s most vibrant and long-running art and music festivals... featuring artists and performers from



ABOVE AND LEFT: SCENES FROM THE CARNAVAL MILE

TOP: CURRENT PRESIDENT THOMAS FALCON AND FOUNDING PRESIDENT LESLIE PANTIN

around the world... boosting local economy by drawing over 150,000 attendees who support our restaurants, shops, and hotels.”

The current Kiwanis President, Thomas Falcon, offered this observation: “As a proud resident of Coral Gables for over two decades, I am honored to have contributed to the inception of Carnaval on the Mile. Leading the Kiwanis Club is a privilege that allows me to uplift our community by fostering unity among local residents in the celebration of our diverse cultural heritages.”

An interesting note is that one of the former Carnaval Queens, Karent Sierra, is now a dentist with her office and “Medspa” located on Ponce de Leon Boulevard.

The organization’s Founding President (1975) and Gables resident, Leslie Pantin, recently observed: “We are so happy to be celebrating the 50th anniversary of the Kiwanis of Little Havana – an organization that prides itself on the creation and conduct of many good works particularly embracing the youthful members of our community. It is especially meaningful to me that so many of my fellow members are citizens of the ‘City Beautiful’.”

My 30+ adventures in creating this series of “meandering” reflections have been enlightening as to the width and depth of our hometown’s soul – convincing me that our collective “soul” extends well beyond our municipal boundaries.

*This column appears monthly by Don Slesnick, who served as mayor of Coral Gables from 2001 to 2011. If you have suggestions on where he should next meander in search of the city’s soul, email donslesnick@scllp.com.*



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# Best Fine Dining Restaurants

## April 2026

### THE DINING GUIDE

Each month we publish a select list of restaurants that we recommend for our readers. We cannot, of course, include the Top 100 each month, so this month we are featuring 48 of the best in the categories of Asian, Italian, Steak Houses, and French. Next month we will look at the best of Latin American, Mediterranean, Seafood, and Spanish restaurants, as well as Pubs & Cafes – along with some of our other perennial favorites.



EATING HOUSE

\$ .....	Under \$25
\$\$ .....	\$25-\$40
\$\$\$ .....	\$35-\$75
\$\$\$\$ .....	\$70-\$100+

Prices are per person for appetizer and entrée, without tax, tip, or drinks. Prices are approximations.

### ASIAN

#### Anaba

This small, cozy sushi bar and restaurant just east of Galiano serves Japanese fare such as gyoza, ramen, and teriyaki bowls in a casual setting with a couple of outdoor tables. Good, fresh sushi and rolls; our favorite is the poke bowl (\$20), comprised of tuna, salmon, Kani salad, ikura (red caviar), seaweed, and edamame – the Japanese mayonnaise and caviar add a salty, creamy edge. 70 Aragon Ave. 305.476.0655 \$\$

#### Benihana

There's nowhere else in Coral Gables where you can see an onion volcano made at your table, and that kind of showmanship is why we can't help but love Benihana. Great place for a kid's birthday – or just to have some fun – with hibachi steak and teriyaki chicken. 242 Miracle Mile. 305.567.2000. \$\$-\$\$\$

#### Dōjō

When Chef Pablo Zitzmann first opened Zitz Sum on Alhambra, it was a pop-up. That now-permanent spot is joined by his latest creation Dojo, an izakaya restaurant that encourages patrons to start with some chilled sake. From there it's mochiko fried chicken oysters, Okonomiyaki cabbage pancake, and a 14-ounce teak cooked on a Teppanyaki grill. Too bad is open only for dinner. 148 Giralda Ave. 305.849.3456. \$\$-\$\$\$

#### Ichimi

This off-Mile eatery has developed a cult following, with diners often content to stand in line for the op-

portunity to eat Ichimi's huge ramen and rice bowls. And the wait is worth it. Delicious and rich, with faraway flavors you can't find just anywhere, in a raw, cool space. Pro tip: try the scallion pancakes. 2330 Salzedo St. 305.960.7016 \$-\$\$

#### Kae Sushi by Chef Landa

Kae Sushi prides itself on fusing Japanese with Latin flavors, adding coconut, jalapeno, and mango to the mix. At Kae Sushi you can build your own poke bowl from a smorgasbord of ingredients, order individual sushi or sashimi pieces, or take advantage of rolls and lunch specials for \$16 to \$20. 143 Giralda Ave. 786.257.0511 \$\$

#### KAO Sushi & Grill

Not sure of the vibe here – the décor inside feels oddly like you're in Las Vegas – but the outside seating on the Mile is quite nice. Menu-wise, there are specialty rolls with an interesting Peruvian spin that includes a wide selection of ceviche, along with empanadas and chorizo. 127 Miracle Mile. 786.864.1212 \$\$

#### Miss Crispy Rice

Miss Crispy Rice brings its playful, affordable omakase to Coral Gables, offering multi-course menus (7 for \$35, up to 16 for \$127) and creative twists like crispy rice nigiri. Dishes include otoro with watermelon and latke with caviar. With sake, wine, and a fun vibe ("Kill Bill" bathroom included), it's a fresh, casual take on Japanese dining. 808 Ponce de Leon Blvd. 239.980.2912. misscrispyrice.com

#### Khaosan Road

Formerly Bangkok, Bangkok, this Giralda Plaza mainstay – with plenty of outdoor tables – has reinvented itself as the new home for Thai street food. Think you know Thai food? Be prepared for new and delicious tastes, from curry street sausage to chili paste fish to the best crispy duck. 157 Giralda Plaza. 305.444.2397 \$\$

#### Kojin 2.0

There must be something in the air

at 804 Ponce de Leon, the spot which formerly hosted Chef Giorgio Rapi-cavoli's Eating House and then Chef Michael Bolen's Lion & The Rambler. Today, the address belongs to Kojin 2.0, taking up the mantle for creative cuisine, like their twice-cooked chicken, scallops with white bean sauce and pork, and a Japanese take on the traditional chicken sandwich. Tasting menus from \$85-plus with constantly changing ingredients. 804 Ponce de Leon. 786.747.1404 \$\$\$

#### Su Shin Izakaya

Located across the street from the Colonnade building, this tiny, bustling Japanese restaurant serves a great bento box – along with an impressive array of daily specials that are posted on the wall in chalk. Super popular lunch spot, for good reason – a much deeper take on Japanese food than just sushi and rolls. 159 Aragon Ave. 305.445.2584 \$\$

#### Mai Sushi Tapas & Bar

A large portion of the menu here is on sticks, a variety of skewers and sushi pintxos inspired by the Spanish bar snacks but reinvented to spotlight sea ingredients like freshwater eel, sea urchin, and octopus. And as the name suggests, there's sashimi – both traditional and elevated – and beverages made with shochu, the distilled Japanese spirit. 98 Miracle Mile. 206.696.0674 \$\$-\$\$\$

#### Malakor Thai Isaan

This eatery on Miracle Mile prides itself on delivering true, tasty Thai food. That means pork skewers with sticky rice, grilled fatty pork neck sliced and tossed with lime juice, or the Gang Aom, a Thai curry with fish sauce, dill, and herb paste. And they can really spice it up. 90 Miracle Mile 786.558.4862 \$\$

#### Moon Thai & Japanese

Can't decide between Japanese or Thai food? No problem. Here, you can have a Japanese house salad or miso soup as an appetizer and Pad Thai as an entrée. Truly the best of both worlds. Comfy booths inside and umbrella-covered

outdoor tables. Great duck dishes. Across the street from UM. 1118 S. Dixie Hwy. 305.668.9890 \$\$

#### Namaste

Hidden on a side street off Ponce, the last standing Indian restaurant in the Gables is small and humble ("namaste" means "I bow to you") yet superb in its rendering of classic Indian dishes, from tandoori to biryanis. Our favorite is the mango curry chicken, followed by the chef's special black pepper shrimp. 221 Navarre Ave. 786.534.2161 \$\$

#### Sakura Japanese

A vast menu for rolls, along with selections of noodles, yakitori, katsu, tempura, teriyaki, etc. But they serve some of the best sushi and sashimi in town, if raw fish is your thing. We also love their seating – a half dozen curved alcoves that line the walls and provide a sense of private space. 440 S Dixie Hwy. 305.665.7020 \$\$

#### Sawa

Delicious take on Japanese flavors served in parallel with Lebanese Mediterranean, Sawa offers seating inside or outside at the Shops at Merrick Park. A vast selection of sushi rolls and tapas that range from chicken yakitori to octopus ceviche, along with super fresh Middle Eastern comfort food. Belly dancers on weekend nights, plus a doggy menu and late-night happy hour. 360 San Lorenzo Ave. (Shops at Merrick Park) 305.447.6555 \$\$\$

#### SHINGO

If you're looking for a luxurious experience, consider the omakase menu at Coral Gables' first Michelin-starred restaurant. Located in the historic La Palma building, the restaurant is the brainchild of now twice-starred Chef Shingo Akikuni, previously of Hidden in Wynwood. Every element of the restaurant is carefully curated, from the pristine 14-seat table to how each course is served. 112 Alhambra Circle. shingomiami.com. \$\$\$\$

#### Sushi Maki

Flagship of the Ng family food

empire, Sushi Maki has some of the best quality sushi anywhere, albeit in an unsophisticated space. No matter. Good prices, fresh fish, and some over the top desserts to balance all that protein – like deep fried Oreos. 2335 Ponce de Leon Blvd. 305.443.1884. \$\$

### Zitz Sum

Brought to you by Chef Pablo Zitzmann of No Name Chinese fame, this “pop up” dinner restaurant off the huge lobby of the 396 Building is here to stay. The result of a year-long pandemic dive into dim sum by Zitzmann, the dumplings, hand-rolled daily, are superb. Other menu items are highly inventive and flavorful. 396 Alhambra Circle. 786.409.6920 \$\$-\$\$\$

## ITALIAN

### 450Gradi

With so many Italian restaurants in Coral Gables, it's incredible how hard it is to find a good slice of pizza. But 450 Gradi's pizzas are wonderfully inventive and deliciously layered, featuring ingredients like Italian buffalo cheese, basil pesto, pork cheek, and truffle cream. Under the direction of Chef Antonio, dishes like the branzino, veal, and salmon filet are equally full of panache. 130 Miracle Mile #101. 786.391.1276 \$\$\$

### Basilico

Basilico Ristorante has joined Coral Gables' crowded Italian scene, taking over the former Il Duomo dei Sapori spot on Ponce. Backed by the team behind its Doral and Miami Springs locations, Basilico impresses with standout dishes like the crab ravioli in lobster sauce. Rich flavors, warm service, and a refined touch make it worth the visit. 2312 Ponce de Leon Blvd. 305.381.5604. basilicomiami.com

### Bugatti

Bugatti prides itself on its pasta – and for good reason, since the restaurant started as a pasta factory. The décor is simple and contemporary, with lots of booths, and the service is crisp and superb, with most of the staff having worked here for over a decade. The dinner menu has reliable pasta dishes under \$20, entrees under \$30, and as many dessert listings (12) as pasta pick. Pro tip: The only vichyssoise in the Gables, made fresh daily. 2504 Ponce de Leon Blvd. 305.441.2545 \$\$

### Caffe Abbracci

A Gables icon, Nino Pernetti's Italian restaurant is both a power lunch favorite for the business elite and a cozy evening gathering place for families and couples. Abbracci is quiet and elegant, and the food is so consistently good that the late Pernetti had to publish his own cookbook. Now run by his daughters, its unique sound dampers mean you can always be heard. 318 Aragon Ave. 305.441.0700 \$\$\$

### Fontana

The ambiance is as elegant as it comes: the Biltmore's famed fountain courtyard with its Venetian fountain. You can sit out under the stars, or in a covered archway, or inside to enjoy classic Italian dishes. Fresh ingredients, from the salads to the homemade pasta. Excellent seafood. One of the most romantic restaurants in the Gables. 1200 Anastasia Ave. (Biltmore Hotel) 305.913.3200 \$\$\$

### Fugato

They will tell you they serve “continental” fusion

cuisine, and yes, there is a touch of French and Spanish cooking here. But the chicken Florentine, ravioli aragosta, ravioli zucca, golden calamari, and veal osobuco say otherwise. Well-prepared dishes in an intimate setting, off the beaten path with a loyal clientele. 325 Alcazar Ave. 786.420.2910 \$\$\$-\$\$\$\$

### Fratellino

Small, family-run, with a fanatical fan base and brilliant southern Italian comfort food. The long narrow set up with tile floors, wooden chairs, and tablecloths makes it feel like New York's Little Italy. Their calamari, in any variation, is superb, as is the fettuccine with prosciutto, mushrooms, and green peas. 264 Miracle Mile. 786.452.0068 \$\$\$

### Luca Osteria

An Italian fine dining spot by local celebrity Chef Giorgio Rapicavoli (Eating House), Luca Osteria is a reservation-only hit for dinner on Giralda Plaza. Rapicavoli's inventive take on classic Italian food is fresh and new; the pasta al limone and mortadella toast with fig balsamic are just the beginning. Great Italian cocktails. 116 Giralda Ave. 305.381.5097 \$\$\$-\$\$\$\$

### Piccola

Piccola brings star-shaped, ricotta-stuffed “pixette” pizzas to Coral Gables. A standout is the Piccante Pixette, loaded with spicy salami and fresh mozzarella, best finished with their spicy olive oil. With white and red sauce options and rich cheese blends, this Doral favorite is now a Gables go-to for creative, crave-worthy pizza. 2305 Ponce de Leon. 786.615.5980. piccolapizzeria.us

### Portosole

When they bring the pecorino cheese wheel to the table to toss your pasta, you're in heaven. Short of that, they do a fine job with the fritto misto, a mixture of calamari, shrimp, filet of sole, tiny artichokes, and zucchini, all lightly fried. Equally appetizing is the fresh burrata with heirloom tomatoes, a deceptively simple salad of tomato and burrata cheese. 2530 Ponce de Leon Blvd. 786.359.4275 \$\$\$

### Salumeria 104

This trattoria-style Salumeria is now two years old, with a loyal clientele, especially at lunchtime. Partly, that is because the food and ambience is authentically Northern Italian and rustic. It may also be thanks to their inventive pastas, and sandwiches of artisan cured meats, always fresh and flavorful. Those sliced salumi meats are buono! Pro tip: The Monday night pasta specials. 117 Miracle Mile. 305.640.5547 \$\$

### Terre Del Sapore

Terre started out as primarily a pizza place, and their Neapolitan style pizza – cooked in a massive wood-burning oven – won the Best Pizza in the Gables from Coral Gables Magazine. Now they have expanded to include a signature osso Bucco, along with an array of pasta dishes. Limited but nice seating outside as well. 246 Giralda Ave. 786.870.5955 \$\$

### Tullio

The brainchild of Lucio Zanon and his son Sebastiano — who previously launched Portosole — Tullio is Italian cuisine with a northern Venetian sensibility, a focus on seafood, and some very inventive pasta dishes. The fish is exceptionally fresh, the branzino flown from the waters of Italy, the shrimp from the waters of Argentina, and the lobster from

the waters of Maine. Winner of Coral Gables Best Fine Dining 2024 & 2025 award, always a table-side show of impeccable hospitality. 2525 Ponce de Leon. 305.926.4208 \$\$\$-\$\$\$\$

## Zucca

Located at the elegant St. Michel hotel, this is a star in the galaxy of Italian eateries in the Gables. Distinctly northern Italian, with recipes that Chef Manuel Garcia developed in a career that included the legendary Casa Tua on Miami Beach. Modern Italian design, sophisticated, with great service. Moving to the Regency Parc development in 2026, but for now still in the old hotel – and the hands down top power lunch place in town. 162 Alcazar Ave. 786.580.3731 \$\$\$-\$\$\$\$

## STEAK HOUSES

### Christy's

Coral Gables' oldest steakhouse, Christy's was long the power lunch go-to – until it stopped serving lunch. But its aged steaks are still consistently superb, as are the seafood entrees. Their Caesar salad is absolutely the best in town, matched by classic oysters Rockefeller, garlicky escargot, and a jumbo shrimp cocktail that's a house specialty. Feels like you are in an episode of Mad Men, with the dark red walls – and the only prime rib in the Gables. Great bar, top cocktails. 3101 Ponce de Leon Blvd. 305.446.1400 \$\$\$-\$\$\$\$

### Daniel's

The new kid in town, replacing the previous super-haute Fiola, but with the same crew at the helm. First opening in Fort Lauderdale last year – and quickly earning a spot in the 2025 Michelin Guide – Daniel's offers cuts of (you guessed it) wagyu beef and prime rib. They've also kept a couple of the Fiola favorites, like rigatoni vodka, while adding a lobster mac and cheese and oysters Rockefeller that uses watercress instead of spinach. 1500 San Ignacio Ave. 305.912.2639. \$\$\$

### Fleming's Prime Steakhouse

Fantastic aged steaks, a seafood tower that won't quit, and a wine cellar that appears to have no end of depth. A place for special celebrations. Recently redecorated, but the open kitchen with its copper “sash” across the top still gives the main dining room a warm glow. Good menu at the bar – and now open for lunch! 2525 Ponce de Leon Blvd. 305.569.7995 \$\$\$-\$\$\$\$

### Fogo de Chão

At Fogo de Chão, meat reigns supreme. Try the “churrasco experience” (\$61) and let expert gaucha chefs keep the finely cut slabs coming, from beef ribeye to flank steak to lamb picanha. If you're a Wagyu fan, this is the place to be. The interior is as grand as the experience, which is a show in itself, Brazilian-style. Great cocktails in the upstairs lounge for before or after. 2801 Ponce de Leon Blvd. 786.297.8788 \$\$\$-\$\$\$\$

### Morton's The Steakhouse

Morton's in the Gables is not just another Morton's. Its setting in the Colonnades gives it a unique elegance, with outdoor seating under the arches. Dependable quality, prime-aged beef, excellent salads, and warm fresh loaves of bread for the table. Good place to take that important client. Great bar food with filet mignon sandwiches or short rib tacos. 2333 Ponce de Leon Blvd. 305.442.1662 \$\$\$

**Perry's Steakhouse & Grille**

Perry's is a Texas chain that gets its beef from the heart of the Lone Star State. Great outdoor space with a fire pit and a huge interior with its own piano bar. The entrees are all carefully concocted, including excellent reduction sauces for the finer cuts and their famous five-finger giant pork chop that is carved at the table and can feed two. Pro tip: The Friday pork chop special. 4251 Salzedo St. (Shops at Merrick Park) 786.703.9094 \$\$\$\$

**Rò Steakhouse**

Located inside Alhambra Towers, Rò is not your typical steakhouse. It is an immersive encounter with inventive cuisine, a windowless space that creates the atmosphere of a futuristic cavern. Rò is the first American entry of the ViCa Hospitality Group, which has developed some 40 themed restaurants throughout Mexico. Creative dishes like grilled artichoke hearts with roasted sweet pepper sauce and spicy rock shrimp add to the most affordable steak in town, a one pound rib eye for \$48. 121 Alhambra Plaza. 786.778.4158. \$\$\$-\$\$\$\$

**Ruth's Chris Steak House**

Some of the most expensive steaks in the Gables, but also some of the best. A chain with a surprisingly sweet backstory in Ruth Fertel, who bought the original steakhouse in New Orleans in 1965, their Gables location is both spacious and business-like. Almost all the beef is USDA Prime and the menu ranges far beyond steak, including menus for those on specialty diets (keto, gluten-friendly, vegetarian). 2320 Salzedo St. 305.461.8360 \$\$\$-\$\$\$\$

FRENCH

**Babette**

One thing we all appreciate is a dinner that isn't noisy, without having to overhear the table next to us. Babette has that figured out. Chef Dani Chávez-Bello, who cooked at El Bulli and in top kitchens across Europe and New York, brings a Mediterranean-French menu with dishes like beets tartare with truffle, crab truffle flan, seared scallops, and Colorado lamb with gastrique. 271 Alcazar Ave. babettecoralgables.com \$\$\$-\$\$\$\$

**Bouchon Bistro**

Michelin-starred Chef Thomas Keller is considered one of the top masters of French cuisine in the country, which he proves with aplomb at his latest venture into traditional French fare. With romantic courtyard seating outside at the restored La Palma Hotel and an elegant interior, to sup in Bouchon is to dine in late 19th century Paris. Try the Poulet Roti and the rainbow trout. 2101 Galiano St. 305.990.1360 \$\$\$-\$\$\$\$

**Chocolate Fashion**

Known primarily for its baked goods – in particular anything made with chocolate, including the best chocolate cakes anywhere in the Gables – it also serves up good basic French fare, with a couple of cute tables streetside. Good coffee as well, and an excellent place to break croissant for breakfast. 248 Andalusia Ave. 305.461.3200 \$\$

**Frenchie's Diner**

A little on the pricey side, but really good bistro

style dishes served from a new blackboard selection daily. Among our favorites here is the roast chicken, the sauteed trout and the bucket of mussels served with French fries. Sacre bleu! 2618 Galiano St. 305.442.4554 \$\$-\$\$\$

**Pascal's on Ponce**

Chef Pascal Oudin has been at his craft for several decades, and no one does better with haute French cuisine. His food is the stuff of legend, done old school style in a way that would make Julia Child jealous. His chocolate souffles are beyond compare and the good news is that they are now open for lunch. Great place for a special date. 2611 Ponce de Leon 305.444.2024 \$\$\$-\$\$\$\$

**Stephanie's Crepes**

It is a small, humble place off the mile, though nicely done with lots of woodwork. Their specialty is, of course, crepes, but done as a roll, sort of like a French ice cream cone but with sweet or savory fillings. Our favorite: Brie cheese with apple and walnut. The dulce de leche pistachio isn't bad either. 2423 Galiano St. 786.402.1732 \$

**Sweet Paris**

The new home for that quintessentially French phenomenon: the crepe. And they have all the varieties here, from the savory chicken, ham, turkey, and salmon – even a Philly cheesesteak – to the sweet dessert crepes such as Nutella, dulce de leche, and our favorite: lemon with whipped butter and a dusting of vanilla bean sugar. You can also get salads (goat cheese!) and paninis, all in a bright, open setting on the Plaza Coral Gables courtyard. 3005 Ponce de Leon Blvd. 786.360-3519 \$\$



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# Mother's Day

## at the Biltmore



### Mother's Day Brunch

Sunday, May 10<sup>th</sup>  
10am, 12pm, 2pm seatings

All of your Sunday Brunch favorites plus special creations just for Mom that include: Lemon ricotta pancakes, French toast bakes with assorted seasonal fruit, honey-citrus glazed ham, mini quiche with asparagus and gruyere cheese.

Scan the QR code  
to reserve your table.



### Mother's Day Tea

Sunday, May 10<sup>th</sup>  
1pm - 4pm (Last Seating at 3pm)

Treat the remarkable women in your life to a refined Mother's Day Afternoon Tea. An afternoon of delicate flavors, elegant presentation, and meaningful celebration awaits.

Scan the QR Code  
to make your reservation



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# Gables in Focus

Congratulations to Maria Gabriela Rodriguez for winning this month's Gables in Focus photography contest with this image from Carnival on the Mile. To enter for next month, submit your favorite snaps of Coral Gables to [amartel@coralgables-magazine.com](mailto:amartel@coralgables-magazine.com) by April 10. The *Coral Gables Magazine* staff will judge the photos and choose one winner based on creativ-

ity, composition, and relevance to Coral Gables. The winner will have their picture printed in the magazine and receive two tickets to the Actors' Playhouse or GableStage production of their choice. All submissions will be posted on our Instagram (@thecoralgablesmagazine) at the beginning of the month. Both amateur and professional photographers are welcome!



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