



CITY OF MIAMI GARDENS

20th Anniversary

THEN, NOW AND TOMORROW





**CITY OF
MIAMI GARDENS**
20th Anniversary
THEN, NOW AND TOMORROW

The information in this book was understood to be correct at the time of publication, but the author does not assume any liability for loss or damage caused by errors or omissions.

Copyright © 2023 City of Miami Gardens and Island Syndicate Holdings LLC

All rights reserved. No part of this book may be reproduced or used in any manner without the prior written permission of the copyright owner, except for the use of brief quotations in a book review.

To request permissions, contact the City of Miami Gardens Office of Public Affairs at publicaffairs1@miamigardens-fl.gov.

ISBN: 979-8-9861509-1-8

Library of Congress Control Number: 2023904697

First hardcover edition May 2023.

Front and back cover photos at City of Miami Gardens Municipal Complex



City of Miami Gardens
18605 N.W. 27th Ave., Miami Gardens, FL 33056
miamigardens-fl.gov

Find us on



For the founders

The elders

**The people who fought
for Miami Gardens to exist**

Our community

Our future

City of Miami Gardens Mission Statement

The mission of the City of Miami Gardens is to enhance the quality of life through the efficient and professional delivery of public services.



Photo: David I. Muir (Island Syndicate)

Contents

Welcome	6
20th Anniversary Reflections	7
Introduction	8
Historical Timeline	10
 THEN	
Before Incorporation	12
The City of Destiny	16
Becoming Miami Gardens	20
The First Generation	24
The Second Council	28
 NOW	
Building A Grand Vision	32
Where You Want to Be	36
Entertainment Destination	41
Photo Journal	50
 TOMORROW	
And Into the Future	54
Bibliography	58
Acknowledgements and Publisher's Note	59
Councilmembers Past to Present	60



Welcome

The City of Miami Gardens used to be wide open space and little else. In just 20 years of incorporation, we've taken a dirt field and transformed it into a world-class entertainment destination with a thriving economy and a community with a lot of heart.

We've published this book commemorating our 20th year as a City because it's important that we tell our story, so we'll always remember where we came from. We are the largest predominantly Black City in Miami-Dade County, and we are on the threshold of becoming an international destination.

From the Super Bowl to the Miami Tennis Open to Formula One, every world-class sporting event takes place right here in Miami Gardens. Some of the largest businesses relocating to South Florida are coming here. We have music festivals, like Jazz in the Gardens and Rolling Loud, that reach international audiences and bring in top-tier artists.

The City is also in great shape financially. We have a credit rating of Aa3 with Moody's and AA- with Fitch, which puts us in a good economic position to be self-sustainable.

We're preparing our kids in STEM and robotics so that when we bring technical services to the community, companies can look within Miami Gardens to fulfill those positions.

Above all, the hospitality of our people is unmatched. Everyone is welcome here in Miami Gardens. It's a place of love where you can live, work, play, innovate, worship and network with people from around the world.

From the oldest area of Bunche Park to the newest developments on the way, people can see how we've grown from a small community in northern Miami-Dade County into the rising City we are today.

Miami Gardens is not just a dream anymore. Now you can discover a vibrant Miami Gardens in the digital Metaverse.

It's been great working with this Council. They're young, vibrant, energetic and ready to go. I'm very proud of our staff, who work diligently to ensure that our residents are taken care of. They are the ones who are the real champions.

Mayor Shirley Gibson got our City up and running. Mayor Oliver Gilbert had a vision to make it world-class. Now, I've enjoyed the great responsibility of being Mayor and guiding the City's progress. My job is to ensure we leave a strong foundation for the next generations.

We eagerly look forward to another 20 years, 30 years and 100 years, because we know we're not going anywhere. Miami Gardens is, and always will be, where you want to be!

"When I think about this City, the first word that comes to mind is progress. We have progressed through adversity, trials and tribulations to become leaders in municipal innovation, technology and fiscal responsibility. My biggest wish for these next 20 years is that we continue to move forward holding dear those ideals by which the City was forged - work, rise, progress."

Mayor Rodney Harris

20th Anniversary Reflections

Vice Mayor Katrina Wilson



"Robert Frost wrote: "Freedom lies in being Bold" ... The three most important elements of history are time, place and people. This piece of work documents the time, place and people who were bold enough to fight for the opportunity to create and shape their own destiny. This fight gave "Birth to a City"...the City of Miami Gardens, the largest Black City in the State of Florida."

Councilwoman Shannon Campbell



"Key leaders in our community had a vision 20 years ago. Their dream has come to pass. I recall where I grew up, "The Bahas," where there was open land, where we rode horses. Now, that area has mini-mansions. Also, the flea market on 183rd Street was the hub for shopping, but now we have the Promenade, an upscale plaza with restaurants. Twenty years from now, I'm looking for even more evolution in the City."

Councilman Reggie Leon



"The greatest glory in living is accepting the challenge and accomplishing! The City of Miami Gardens has done just that by standing on the shoulders of those before us who set the foundation for exceptional development of its people and community over the past 20 years. The City of Miami Gardens will continue to strive and flourish in excellence to create a legacy of greatness for years to come!"

Councilwoman Shannan "Lady" Ighodaro



"Miami Gardens is a progressive City. The ultimate measure of our success has been the strength of our residents and the resilience of our leadership. We work together to ensure that we remain a thriving and world class City. The greatest predictor of our future as a City is what we have done in the past. We started on the belief that we are stronger together. It is that dedication and commitment that will take us to another 20 years and beyond."

Councilwoman Linda Julien



"For two decades our City has grown in population, popularity and has attracted thousands of people to attend world class events in Miami Gardens. The best is yet to come for our wonderful community and I'm proud to be in the fabric of its history."

Councilman Robert Stephens, III



"I was nine years old when the City was incorporated. When the City Hall building was opened up, that's when it became a big deal for me. We were no longer just Carol City, the Bahas, Norland, Crestview and Rolling Oaks. We were actually Miami Gardens now.

We're still standing stronger than ever 20 years later! As a young man who grew up here, to see all of the development does my heart well.

We've accomplished a lot in these 20 years and with the continuous support from our great residents, I know there is no doubt that MIAMI GARDENS will always be the PLACE YOU WANT TO BE! Happy Birthday, Miami Gardens, and cheers to 20 more phenomenal years!"

City Manager Cameron D. Benson



City Attorney Sonja K. Dickens



City Clerk Mario Bataille



Photo: Courtesy of City of Miami Gardens

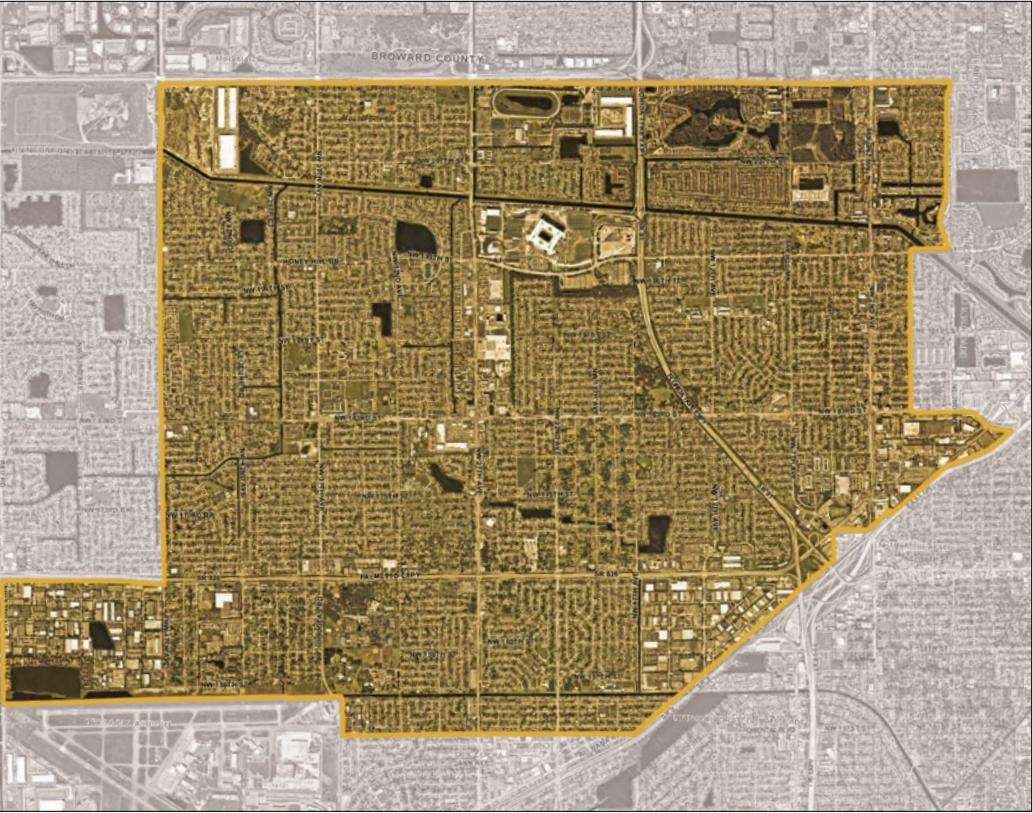


Introduction

Thousands file out of a sprawling, opulent stadium complex as throngs of vehicles and exhausted fans return home. The clamor begins to die down, and the iconic landmark, with a capacity of more than 60,000, grows quiet. In some ways, the still atmosphere harkens back to years past when this area was little more than farmland. Now, it is Miami Gardens, a thriving destination City and the largest Black-majority municipality in Florida. Yet, just a couple of decades ago, much of what visitors experience today was nothing more than a dream.

Originally unincorporated Metro-Dade County land just north of Opa-locka, Miami Gardens evolved from a quiet farming area to a vibrant Black community with a distinct cultural identity. After years of activism and one stalled attempt at cityhood, Miami Gardens successfully incorporated on May 13, 2003. Now, 20 years later and with more than 113,000 residents, the City is better than ever, even being named "All-America City" in 2020.

Photo: Courtesy of City of Miami Gardens



SO MUCH TO DO

Miami Gardens is the location of Hard Rock Stadium, home of the Miami Dolphins professional football team, as well as various cultural and historical institutions. Global events like Rolling Loud and the flagship music festival Jazz in the Gardens are based here, and in 2022 the City became the new location of the Formula One Miami Grand Prix. Miami Gardens is the birthplace and stomping ground of prominent individuals in the sports and entertainment industries, including rappers Flo Rida, Denzel Curry and Rick Ross, athletes Andre Johnson and Peter O'Brien, and actress and singer Jo Marie Payton. It was also home to the late Trayvon Martin, whose memory was an inciting factor that contributed to the eventual formation of the Black Lives Matter movement in 2013.

Since its inception, Miami Gardens has grown to become an entertainment destination. Those looking for fun can visit Calder Casino for slots, Topgolf to swing irons or Top Notch to enjoy bourbon and a cigar. They can also get some shopping done at the Gardens Promenade shopping center with national brands like Burlington, Ross and Marshalls among local food joints lining the plaza.

Miami Gardens is also home to nationally-recognized monuments and buildings, including the Sunshine State Arch that the City adopted into its seal in 2004. St. Thomas University became the only Catholic Archdiocese-sponsored university in the state of Florida in 1988, and Florida Memorial University remains the only historically Black college and university in South Florida.

COMMUNITY FIRST

Miami Gardens offers many free youth, adult and senior programs, such as the Women's Empowerment Conference and the "Keep Miami Gardens Beautiful" initiative, as well as frequent book, food and toy drives.

The City is home to an expansive park system that showcases the area's natural beauty. Visitors can relax in many green spaces, including Bunche Park, Rolling Oaks Park, Buccaneer Park and Carol City Park (now the Walt Frazier Park at Carol City). In 2014, a General Obligation Bond provided funding for parks and facilities renovations. By 2023, most of those bond projects were started and approximately 55% had already been completed.

Above all, the City aims to always stay community-focused, an approach instilled by the first Council and carried on by each group thereafter. Inspiring activists started this City, and driven leaders continue to foster a place where the local government genuinely cares about residents' quality of life and success.

For Miami Gardens, the past and present are worth reflecting on and celebrating. And, oh! What an exciting future lies ahead.

Photo: Courtesy of Miami Dolphins



▲ A few lucky residents had early access to the stadium for a community watch party.



Photo: Courtesy of Blenheim Studio



▲ The visiting Jackson State Tigers cheer team takes in the view of Hard Rock Stadium in their mount formation at the 2022 Orange Blossom Classic.

Historical Timeline

1994

The Committee to Incorporate the City of Destiny assembles.

2004

The Sunshine State Arch is adopted into Miami Gardens' City seal.

NOVEMBER 12, 2002

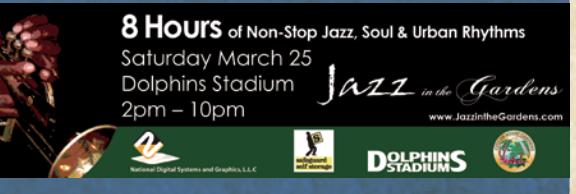
Commissioner Betty T. Ferguson appoints members to the northwest Dade Municipal Advisory Committee (NDMAC) for second incorporation effort.

FEBRUARY 4, 2007

Super Bowl XLI becomes the first Super Bowl in the newly incorporated City of Miami Gardens.

MARCH 25, 2006

Jazz in the Gardens launches at Dolphins Stadium.



FEBRUARY 21, 2014

State-of-the-art Jessie Trice Community Health Center opens.

JANUARY 22, 2010

Calder Casino opens ahead of the 2010 Super Bowl.



2008

2009

2010

2011

2012

2013

2014

2015

2016

2017

2018

2019

2020

2021

2022

MAY 19, 2014

The Sunshine State Arch becomes a national historic site.

JUNE 3, 2014

Ribbon is cut at Miami Gardens Municipal Complex grand opening.



MARCH 18, 2019

The Miami Open debuts at Hard Rock Stadium.

AUGUST 19, 2020

Miami Gardens is awarded the All-America City Award.

NOVEMBER 16, 2018

Ribbon cutting celebrates the new Gardens Promenade Shopping Center.

AUGUST 17, 2012

The City's Second Mayor, Oliver G. Gilbert, III, and Council majority are elected.

AUGUST 17, 2016

Hard Rock gets 18-year naming rights to the stadium.

AUGUST 18, 2020

Miami Gardens' third Mayor, Rodney Harris, and Council majority are voted in.

SEPTEMBER 1, 2021

Ribbon is cut for Barbara J. Jordan Health & Wellness Center.

DECEMBER 1, 2021

Miami-Dade County Commission approves the annexing plan for a 150-acre boundary expansion.



MAY 6, 2022

Formula One makes Miami Gardens its home, hosting the first Miami Grand Prix.

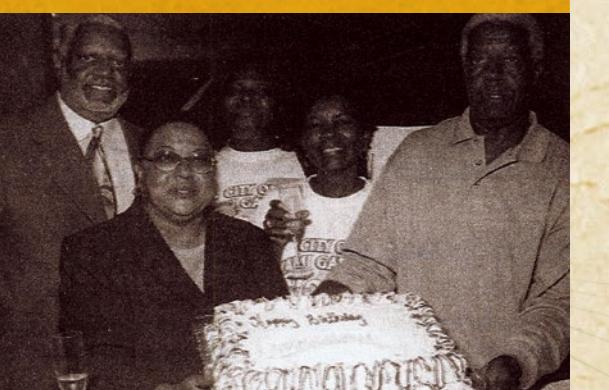
SEPTEMBER 19, 1995

Northwest Dade's first vote for incorporation is unsuccessful.

JANUARY 28, 2003

Residents vote to approve the incorporation process.

Photo: Courtesy of City of Miami Gardens



Then Before Incorporation

1930s - 1995



Early 1920s

Liberty City emerges as a center for Black settlement.

THE EARLY DAYS

Picture this: Cows grazing in green pastures alongside miles and miles of oak groves in a rural place with little to do. In the 1930s, long before incorporation, this was the area of northwest Metro-Dade County that would become Miami Gardens. As the number of dairy farmers dwindled, a residential neighborhood emerged called Carol City, just north of Opa-Locka and populated by white airline crew members in single-family homes.

By the late '40s at the end of World War II, demographics began to shift. Black veterans were returning to rising population numbers in the older urban areas of Overtown and Liberty City. During that time, the Gaines Construction Company lobbied the government for authorizations to build housing specifically for Black homebuyers in a sprawling new development called Bunche Park.

BUNCHE PARK

While well-to-do Black families from across the United States and the Caribbean moved to Bunche Park, blue-collar workers settled in neighborhoods like New Liberty City, now known as the Bahas.

By the early 1950s, the Bunche Park community was developing its personality. Residents painted their houses vibrant colors like lime green, flamingo pink and soft yellow. Historian Dr. Marvin Dunn remembers large mango trees planted by his island neighbors, and former Councilwoman Lillie Q. Odom enjoyed the brightly colored periwinkles in the yards near her family's home. Other areas like Rainbow Park and Magnolia Park began to develop just south of there.

Segregation was still the way, but the civil rights movement was in its early days. Odom recalls a wall on the north side of the Palmetto Expressway that Black Floridians knew not to cross. Although the population of Black

◀ Aerial view of Bunche Park and Opa Locka, 1951.



▲ All American Girls Professional Baseball League game in Opa-Locka, Florida, 1948.

Photo Courtesy of Florida Memory

PAGE SIXTEEN MIAMI TIMES, MIAMI, FLORIDA SATURDAY, JUNE 17, 1950

LAST CALL FOR VETERANS!

900 Homes Sold in 'Bunche Park' - Only 100 Homes Left

You Must Hurry If You Want To Secure A Home In "Bunche Park"
THERE IS NO PLACE LIKE HOME AND THERE IS NO PLACE LIKE "BUNCHE PARK"

The Miami Herald said of "Bunche Park": "The Miami Times said of "Bunche Park": "Bunche Park is a great place to live, offering the normal living conditions and making her become leading in every field of residential development. BUNCHE PARK IS TRULY MIAMI'S GREATEST RELAY TO HOME."

STOP WORRYING ABOUT SLUMS! **STOP THOSE HIGH RENT RECEIPTS!**
Be A Proud Owner Of Your Home In "BUNCHE PARK"

LIFE IS GOING ON HAPPILY IN "BUNCHE PARK"

Over 600 families now live in comfort and blends smoothly in this beautiful, modern, new community.

Model Home Open Daily, including Sundays, From 9 a.m. to 5 p.m.

Later in Barry Karp Show on WKAT, 1340 on Your Dial Every Morning at 7 a.m. and Every Sunday at 8:30 a.m.

\$37 PER MONTH
only \$37
For 2 Bedroom House

NO DOWN PAYMENT Necessary!

\$40 PER MONTH
only \$40
For 3 Bedroom House

GAINES CONSTRUCTION CO.
BUILDERS & DEVELOPERS OF "BUNCHE PARK"

SAL RAMAGLI
SALES DIRECTOR

N.W.27th Av. at 160th St.

Photo Courtesy of The Miami Times



▲ Miami Gardens Drive used to be surrounded by farm fields and dirt roads, 1955.

Photo Courtesy of Florida Memory

people grew, there were no schools for them to attend. Civil rights leader Mary McLeod Bethune made several visits to the area to promote community organizing and more equitable conditions for Black students and the community at large. Until the opening of Bunche Park Elementary School in the early 1950s, these students had to be bussed 12 to 15 miles from home to attend classes in areas like Liberty City.

Later that decade, a new shopping center at Bunche Park Plaza was built that included a movie theater, bowling alley, barber shop, and grocery, drug and liquor stores. Now community members could do their shopping and errands close to home instead of traveling to southern Black neighborhoods for their needs. Odom remembers seeing boxer and activist Muhammad Ali, then still Cassius Clay, frequent the movie theater in his pink Cadillac. Then came the North Dade Health Center, a reprieve from the long trek to Jackson Hospital for healthcare. While amenities were slowly increasing, a main thoroughfare – 27th Avenue – was still a two-lane road, curiously with white sand on its banks, and with little commercial development beyond a small plaza with a Woolworths and a JCPenney.

◀ Bunche Park was a hot spot in the 1950s for veterans returning from war. With no down payment and low pricing, families could secure a two or three bedroom home for only \$37-\$40 a month.

EVOLUTION AND DEVELOPMENT

In the '60s, access to education boomed. Carol City High School near Bunche Park became integrated. Ground was broken on Biscayne College in 1961, with the campus later being renamed St. Thomas University after the Archdiocese of Miami sponsored the project in 1988. Florida Memorial College, now Florida Memorial University, relocated to northwest Dade from St. Augustine, opening its doors in 1968. This decade would also see the formation of the Riverdale community, along with neighborhoods like Rolling Oaks, Leslie Estate, Vista Verde and Riverview.

There was a migration of Black people from the inner city to communities in the northwest Dade area at the start of the '60s. There was also an intentional strategy to clear out historically Black communities for development projects and urban renewal programs, including the I-95 expansion through the heart of the present-day Overtown. Around this time, in 1965, a young Air Force veteran named Aaron Campbell, Jr made a \$200 down payment on a new home built in an area called New Liberty City near the Dade-Broward County line.

During the '70s, developers began offering incentives to Black teachers and professionals to move to the area with their families, citing its relative affordability and the possibility of homeownership as benefits. Around the same time, Eastern and National Airlines began to experience financial hardship due to strikes and closures. Many of the white airline workers left the area, creating vacancies for diverse new residents. Melvin L. Bratton, Sr., another retired military man who went on to own a consulting firm, took advantage of the foreclosure market and secured a single family home for a "nice price." On the development side, the cow pasture just north of 199th Street became the site of the new Calder Race Course. Nearby, a towering Joe Robbie Stadium was built in the '80s.

In the early '90s, Pan Am Airlines collapsed, heralding the departure of many remaining white residents. The area had already grown into a bustling Black residential community with increasing political power. Black activists saw the neglected potential of their home and began the journey that would take their destiny into their own hands.



▲ Before urban renewal swept through Overtown displacing many residents, the area thrived, even being called the "Harlem of the South." During segregation, Lord Calvert Hotel was a popular haven for Black entertainers, including Ella Fitzgerald, Billie Holiday and Nat King Cole.



▲ Calder Race Course was the starting place for the careers of many jockeys, like José A. Santos who has been recognized by the National Museum of Racing and Hall of Fame, circa 1960.



▲ Aerial view of Joe Robbie Stadium in Miami Gardens, circa 1987.



▲ (Left to right) Fr. James Donnellon and Fr. Edward McCarthy at the ground-breaking of Biscayne College (St. Thomas University) in December 1961.

"The more affluent white population in Miami-Dade County started targeting the local government in reference to its policies and practices. Subsequently, the Village of Key Biscayne incorporated in 1991. This started the development of Cities in Dade County. Northwest Dade began focusing on incorporating our own City."

Former Mayor Shirley Gibson



1960s
The construction of Interstate-95 forces Black families in Overtown to seek new homes in northwest Metro-Dade.

1961
Biscayne College (St. Thomas University) breaks ground.

1968
Florida Memorial College moves to the area from St. Augustine.

1971
The Calder Race Course is established.

1987
Joe Robbie Stadium is built.

January 22, 1989
The first Super Bowl is held in northwest Metro-Dade.

The City of Destiny

1995

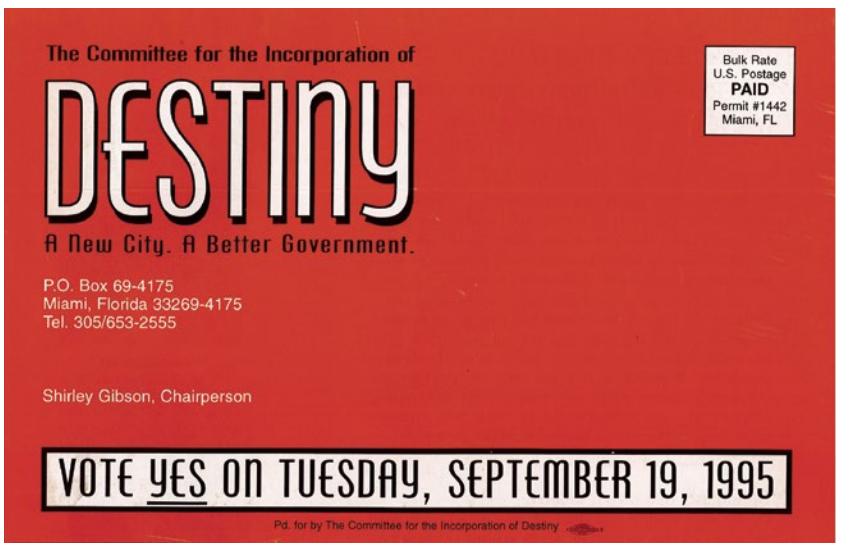


Photo: Courtesy of Shirley Gibson

By the 1990s, the northwest section of unincorporated Miami-Dade County had become home to a large Black population, one with growing political, economic and social influence. Still, the area was sorely under-resourced and underdeveloped. In time, this led a small group of residents to desire more control over their community. They believed the best way to achieve this was to incorporate and become their own City.

THE INCEPTION STORY

Although there was now a growing community of working professionals and homeowners in northwest Dade, and though community Councilmembers had been appointed to represent the area at the County level, citizens still had limited control when it came to local politics, public works and community projects.



Senator

William (Bill) Turner
"Our children need to see us stand up and take control of our own community. Vote yes."



Representative

Willie Logan
"I killed an 11th hour amendment that H. Wayne Huizenga's representatives tried to slip through the Legislature that would have kept Joe Robbie Stadium out of the city of Destiny."



Representative

Kendrick Meek
"There are many people who are ready, willing and able to work day and night for our community."

VOTING YES FOR A NEW CITY WILL MEAN NO INCREASE IN PROPERTY TAXES, BETTER LOCAL SERVICES AND A STATEMENT THAT WE DO CARE ABOUT OUR COMMUNITY.

If we don't incorporate, we will pay.

It's no secret. Property taxes in the unincorporated area of Dade County are going up - way up. At the same time, the quality of municipal service (local, police, local parks and public area maintenance) being provided by Metro Dade in the unincorporated area - bad already - is going down. Way down.

The reasons are simple.

Wealthy communities in unincorporated Dade County are leaving Metro Dade for municipal services, setting up their own city governments and taking with them the city taxes they used to pay to Metro. This is nothing new. Coral Gables, Indian Creek, Bal Harbour and other wealthy communities incorporated years ago.

According to the Metro Dade Budget Office, for Metro to make ends meet in the years to come, it will be necessary to double municipal service property taxes in the unincorporated areas. They admit that this doubling in municipal property taxes will not result in any better services.

We are paying for city services now.

Metro Dade is the most inefficient government in all of Dade County for police, public area maintenance and local parks, the three basic local services. We are now paying for these services in an unincorporated area tax. See your latest tax notice ... ("Uninc area"). By creating a new city, we will keep those taxes to operate the new city. THERE WILL BE NO NEW CITY TAX.

What this means to us in Destiny is that if we stay part of unincorporated Dade County, we'll be paying higher property taxes for still worse service.

VOTE YES

Photo: Courtesy of Shirley Gibson

▲ Cover and content from a mailer promoting the incorporation of the City of Destiny featuring the endorsements of Black leaders.

Late 1980s

Communities throughout Metro-Dade County begin to incorporate.

2A THE MIAMI TIMES
Thursday, July 20, 1995

Referendum OK'd for Destiny but new rules could stand in the way

By ALISON HIBBERT
Times Staff Writer

The Metro-Dade Commission at its regular meeting last Thursday, decided to slow down a rush for incorporation in the county but agreed to allow a non-binding referendum to proceed on the incorporation of a section of North Dade into the City of Destiny.

But the commission voted to adopt new rules on incorporation that, Destiny advocates say, provide two more opportunities for their proposed municipality to be scuttled.

The commission a week earlier

big business interests in their area are behind the move.

The chairperson of the Committee to Incorporate the City of Destiny, Shirley Gibson, and adviser attorney Gene Stearns argued the case for the new city.

The policy change calls for a boundary commission appointed by Metro commissioners to consider requests for incorporation based on certain criteria.

Property value of the homes in the proposed municipality must fall between a certain range. This will force wealthy communities to

though commissioners did not cancel the non-binding vote set for Sept. 19, they still can reject the proposed city's charter.

The vote will say what the citizens want and I think that should be the end of the issue — but it won't be, Gibson said. This is a never-ending saga. They are always trying to find some type of way to knock us down.

The 6-5 vote commission for the policy change is not final. Commissioners have to vote on the details, which are being drafted by the county attorney.

three areas already in the process of forming their cities.

Ferguson said opponents of Destiny, such as Joe Robbie Stadium, will now have two chances of killing the move for a city.

"It appears to me that the stage is being set to discriminate against Destiny. If Destiny receives more than it gives, then they should be held to let Destiny incorporate," she said. "I don't understand why there seems to be a problem with the community incorporating if its going to save the county money, since we have been designated a recipient community. There is

needs to stop," she said. "Since we are recipients, we cannot make a decision nor will we be able to have a government that is responsive, efficient and provide services. We would like to go forward and we don't want to be held at any more crossroads."

The boundary commission idea came up after a plan outlined by County Manager Armando Vidal last week that suggested that the tax loss could hit poor unincorporated areas. He wanted to delay incorporation moves until a study was done to protect such neighborhoods.

THE CITY OF DESTINY

▲ Although the Destiny Commission moved ahead, Metro-Dade County adopted new rules, seeming to move the goal post on the likelihood of the City's successful incorporation.

MEET BETTY T. FERGUSON

Betty Tucker Ferguson was a student in the first class of first graders at Bunche Park Elementary in 1951. As an adult, she became an educator, teaching at Howard University, then Florida Memorial College and Miami Dade Community College. The Tucker and Ferguson families were among those who moved to the area after being displaced from Overtown by the construction of I-95. Major developments disrupting the Black community in this way was something Ferguson never forgot, and that would motivate her to massive action multiple times in her life.

When news began to circulate that Joe Robbie Stadium would be built in their community, Ferguson was not the only one to take notice. Once again, a large-scale development was coming into a Black community with no input from or communication with its residents. The area's representative, District 1 County Commissioner Barry Schreiber, had practically no relationship with his predominantly Black northwest Dade constituents, and did not present their concerns at the County level. Recognizing that no one else seemed willing, Ferguson decided that she would step up to challenge him.

Believing there was no chance of winning — her, with no name recognition and no big donors — she was surprised when that first election in 1986 ended in a runoff. Her loss to a similarly unknown white woman in 1990 led her to challenge the "at large" voting protocol. It had allowed the entire County to vote for the District 1 Commission seat, making it possible for her to lose even with 90% of the vote from the area residents she represented. She took the fight all the way to federal court. And won. In 1993, after three runs and a change that finally allowed local residents to choose their representative, Ferguson was overwhelmingly voted County Commissioner representing northwest Miami-Dade, and she retained that seat for 11 years.

Following in the footsteps of Commissioner Gwen Margolis, who at the time was making moves to incorporate the nearby City of Aventura, Ferguson made it an early priority to pass a resolution forming an exploratory committee, whose members would begin working to incorporate her community.



Photo: Courtesy of City of Miami Gardens

"We have to be at the table even if we don't like what we see, so our voices can be heard. Our contribution, however small, can turn out to be instrumental."

Former Miami-Dade County Commissioner Betty T. Ferguson

1993

Betty T. Ferguson becomes County Commissioner representing northwest Miami-Dade.

Becoming Miami Gardens

2002-2003



Photo: Courtesy of City of Miami Gardens

▲ Shirley Gibson at a Police Department swearing in in 2006.



November 12, 2002

The North Dade Municipal Advisory Committee reconvenes for a second attempt at incorporation.



Late 2002

The Committee proposes the City name "Miami Gardens" reflecting main thoroughfare Florida State Road 860, also known as Miami Gardens Drive.

ROUND TWO

By 2002, Commissioner Betty Ferguson, then in her second term, had learned how the County allocated tax revenues, grant funds and other resources. This time, she knew better how to play the game. Ferguson appointed a second committee, now called The North Dade Municipal Advisory Committee (NDMAC), to explore the incorporation of a City. Shirley Gibson led members Marlene Arribas, Aaron Campbell, Jr. Bill Isley, Lilly Q. Odom, Barbara Watson and Paulette Wimberly. The NDMAC held its first meeting in November 2002. They decided on a City name inherited from the major roadway that ran through the area from east to west: Florida State Road 860, also known as Miami Gardens Drive.

William Green, a legislative aide who worked in Ferguson's office and later in the newly incorporated City, provided the committee with much of the feasibility research they needed using County resources. The proposed City footprint would be larger than that of Destiny, encompassing several more neighborhoods. That increased the tax base and voter population proposed in the previous effort. With only a few months between their formation and the incorporation vote, the committee got to work.

The seven-member NDMAC comprised Miami-Dade Community Councilmembers representing northwest Dade and other community leaders, so they already had some influence and knew where homeowners associations and citizens groups would meet. Addressing these well-attended gatherings, their messaging became more targeted. Odom recalls presenting area residents with very clear information that their taxes, along with grant monies received for their benefit, were paying for the maintenance of other Miami-Dade Cities, not their own neighborhood. Ferguson ensured the committee knew they needed their own phone bankers to counteract potential opposition. Campbell recalls the nickname the group gave the local nay-sayers: "The CAVE People," or Citizens Against Virtually Everything!

More than 500 area residents attended the NDMAC's final special meeting in January 2003. The group found itself moving toward the finish line with a strong wave of support.

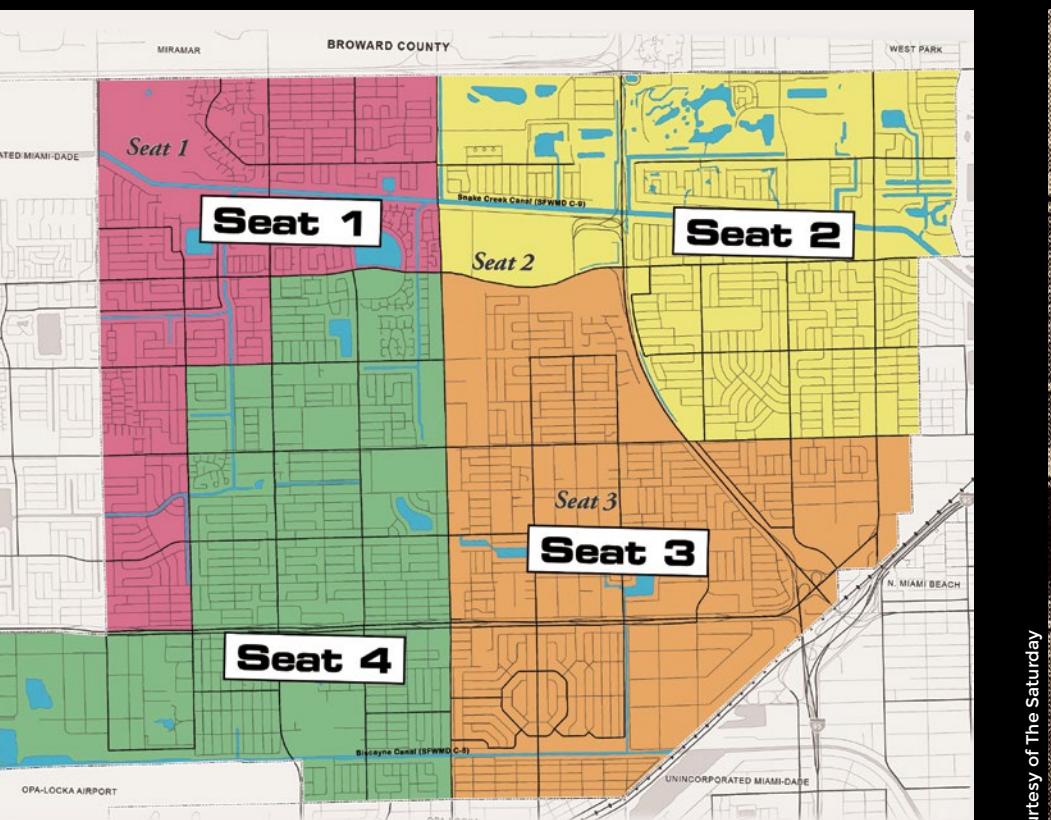


Photo: Courtesy of City of Miami Gardens

▲ The footprint of the new City of Miami Gardens, 2003.



Photo: Courtesy of The Saturday Evening Post

► Supporters of incorporation, circa 2003.



January 22, 2003

Residents meet to discuss the proposed City and special election, with more than 500 people present.



January 28, 2003

With 70% of the vote, residents say "yes" to incorporating the City of Miami Gardens.

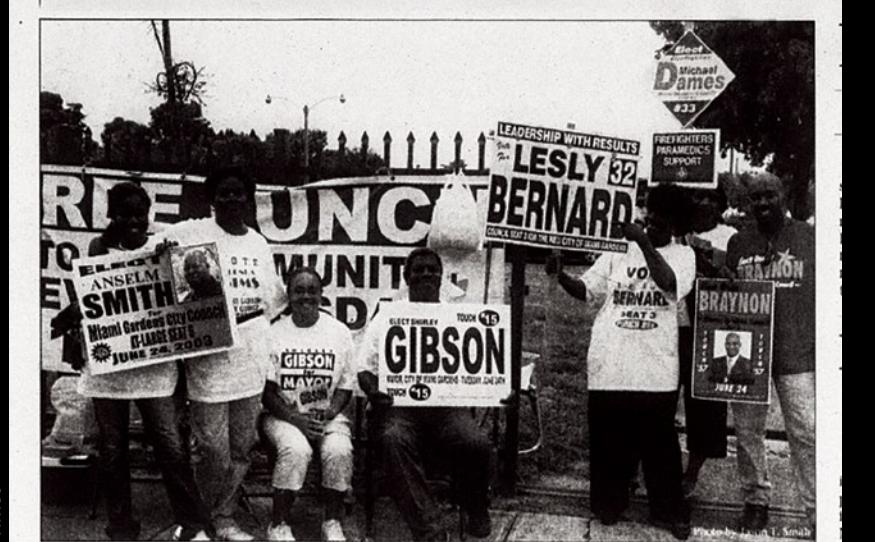


Photo: Courtesy of The Miami Times

Gibson elected mayor of Miami Gardens

By Jason T. Smith
jsmith@miamitimesonline.com

Residents in the newly created city of Miami Gardens tapped Shirley Gibson to become the city's mayor Tuesday in the city's first mayoral and city council elections since being officially incorporated earlier this year.

Gibson, who chaired the committee to incorporate the city, easily trounced opponents Willie B. Kelly, Anthony Culver and Mayda Muella in the contest for the city's top post.

For Gibson, Tuesday's vote was the culmination of a "long, hard fight" to create a municipality in

Please turn to **GIBSON 3A**

▲ Shirley Gibson, a leader of both the Destiny Commission and the second push for incorporation, was elected as the new City's first Mayor, June 25, 2003.



Photo: Courtesy of The Saturday



Photo: Courtesy of The Saturday

▲ (Left to right, front row) State Rep. Wilbert T. Holloway, NDMAC member Lillie Q. Odom, Miami-Dade County Commissioner Betty T. Ferguson, Chairperson of LINC (Let's Incorporate Now Committee) Beverly Gerald, City of Pinecrest Mayor Evelyn Greer, NDMAC Chairperson Shirley Gibson and Miami-Dade County Commissioner Jimmy Morales. (Left to right, back row) residents David Williams, Jr. and Melvin L. Bratton Sr. February 2003.

VICTORY, AT LAST!

On January 28th, 2003, with 70% of the vote, residents overwhelmingly said "yes" to incorporating the City of Miami Gardens. Odom cried — perhaps from exhaustion, perhaps from relief. Gibson, usually calm and unwavering, screamed with a joy she could not contain. After nine years of painstaking research, planning, strategy and hard, hard work, her vision had been realized. But the journey had only just begun.

Over the next three months, sometimes working out of Gibson's home, an appointed charter committee led by attorneys Reginald Clyne and Cynthia Everett developed the document that became the City's northstar, outlining the parameters by which the municipal systems and governing body would be guided.

On May 13th, a second election was held to approve the municipal charter and the City's official name. Both passed by a two-to-one vote. With a footprint of about 20 square miles, Miami Gardens, the 33rd City in Miami-Dade, became the third largest in the County behind Miami and Hialeah. It also became the largest majority-Black City in the State of Florida, with more than 70% of residents being Black or of African descent. The ballot was won. Now, the new City needed to create a Council.

▲ From left to right: Miami-Dade Commissioner Betty T. Ferguson (at podium) and Miami Gardens Councilmembers (seated) Councilman Aaron Campbell, Seat 1, Councilwoman Barbara Watson, Seat 2, Councilwoman Audrey King, Seat 3, Mayor Shirley Gibson, Councilman Melvin L. Bratton, Seat 4, Councilwoman Sharon Pritchett, Seat 5, and Councilman Oscar Braynon, II, Seat 6. July 26 - August 8, 2003

"The individuals who were involved in the incorporation movement got the word out. We had open discussions about the need for the north Dade communities to be able to better govern ourselves."

Former Councilman Aaron Campbell, Jr.

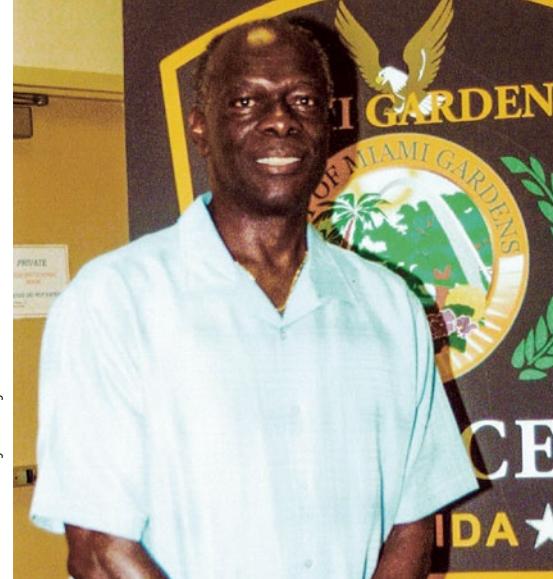


Photo: Courtesy of City of Miami Gardens

▲ Veteran and former Councilman Aaron Campbell, Jr. at the Miami Gardens Police Department he helped establish in 2006.



Photo: Courtesy of City of Miami Gardens

▲ Veteran and former Councilman Melvin L. Bratton, Sr. stands by the American flag at the new Miami Gardens Police Department in 2006.

PEOPLE-POWERED

More than 40 candidates, including NDMAC leaders Gibson, Campbell and Watson, ran in the June elections for Mayor and Council Seats. Though she had given tremendous consideration to the incorporation effort, Gibson admits she hadn't thought much about a mayoral run. When the time came though, she was confident no one was better prepared than herself to lead.

At a swearing-in ceremony on July 23, 2003, Shirley Gibson became the first Mayor of Miami Gardens. Campbell and Watson handily won their elections for Seats 1 and 2, respectively. Seats 3 through 6 were filled by Audrey J. King, Melvin L. Bratton, Sr., Sharon Pritchett and Oscar Braynon, II.

The Council held its first meeting the next day. They soon appointed Ronetta Taylor as the City Clerk, Sonja K. Dickens as the City Attorney and Dr. Danny Crew as City Manager. Before the new City could recruit its own employees, some municipal neighbors rooting for Miami Gardens' success allowed their employees to help out with administrative tasks in the evenings. It was the hard, diligent work of Councilmembers, constituents and friends made along the way that bolstered the foundation laid in the early days of the City's existence.

After years of fighting, failures and struggles, the effort for incorporation had succeeded. The City of Miami Gardens was born.



Photo: Courtesy of City of Miami Gardens

"When you become your own City, you set your policies. You have your own roadmap of what you want to accomplish. That's what we did. We set some high goals and a lot of it came to fruition."

Former Councilman Melvin L. Bratton, Sr.

May 13, 2003
The City of Miami Gardens is officially incorporated



The First Generation

2003 - 2012

"I think about how we had to struggle to make change, because systemically, things had never happened. Change happened under my leadership."

Former Mayor Shirley Gibson

Time and again, the leaders of northwest Miami-Dade, now Miami Gardens, were challenged and underestimated, but they kept proving the doubters wrong. Mayor Shirley Gibson, with a newly-elected Council in place, set about laying a strong foundation for the future of the new City.

LAYING THE GROUNDWORK

One of the first things the Council needed to establish was a base of operations. In the early days, they worked out of one large room on the top floor of Trinity Church, then located off US-441. Lillie Q. Odom was hired on a contract as the first City employee, and she set about creating a basic work environment. They hired core staff and began to conceptualize their Five-Year Plan, focusing on improving public works, beautification, education, parks, housing, security and code enforcement.



Photo: Courtesy of City of Miami Gardens

The City Council took a practical approach to addressing these core areas. Melvin L. Bratton, Sr. recollects adopting Gibson's learning strategy. Councilmembers studied and visited local, state and national League of Cities events, among others, to get ideas for successful programs, initiatives and structures. These lessons paid off in various ways.

For example, he recalls visiting an event in Washington, D.C., along with Councilwoman Barbara Watson, and realizing that Miami Gardens' population had been undercounted in a Census report, putting them below the threshold for certain monetary government benefits. Bratton's keen observation and knowledge of the potential consequences meant the Council remained on the alert, ensuring they'd receive an accurate count and appropriate benefits when the next Census rolled around.

At City Hall, Odom took the lead in developing a Community Outreach Department, which would relay important information about programs and incentives as well as solicit input on policies from residents.

In September 2003, the Council created another avenue for resident engagement when it approved the founding of the Miami Gardens Gazette, the City's first dedicated newspaper.

May 13, 2004

Mayor Shirley Gibson delivers the "State of the City" address at Florida Memorial University.

October 26, 2005

Councilman Ulysses Harvard is appointed to replace Audrey King upon her passing.

2006

Councilman Andre Williams is elected to replace Ulysses Harvard.

March 25, 2006

Miami Gardens hosts the first Jazz in the Gardens music festival.

February 4, 2007

Super Bowl XLI takes place at Dolphin Stadium.

December 16, 2007

Miami Gardens Police Department is established.

By learning how to communicate effectively with her constituents, Gibson secured their blessing to raise taxes for the improvement of services and infrastructure.

Exactly one year after the incorporation of Miami Gardens, Mayor Gibson delivered the first State of the City address at Florida Memorial College, laying out the Council's hopes for the future.

BEAUTIFICATION EFFORTS

Realizing that image would be a key factor in changing perceptions about the area, Councilmembers, early on, chose to prioritize beautification efforts. These improvements gave constituents a new sense of pride.

Miami Gardens' first Annual Community Day was hosted at Miami Carol City Park (Now the Walt Frazier Park at Carol City), in March 2004. The Council and residents cleaned up garbage and filled potholes. Over subsequent years, through a successful program called Keep Miami Gardens Beautiful, awards were given to citizens who maintained attractive curb appeal for their homes.

HOUSING AND SAFETY

Beyond aesthetics, the Council wanted to uplift the area's profile. To do that, they needed to confront an issue created by the County. Low-income housing was being developed in the Miami Gardens area disproportionately more than it was in whiter, less diverse Cities.

While some locals felt it was their responsibility to accept families of any economic stature, Gibson strongly advocated that other Miami-Dade Cities should share that responsibility, believing a concentration of residents with limited means could lead to increased crime and social safety net expenses while limiting future tax revenues. With lines drawn, Miami Gardens took a firm stance in determining its neighborhood profile and how the City would potentially evolve.

Public safety was another early concern for the Council. Aaron Campbell, Jr., formerly a Police Major in the Miami-Dade Police Department, led the charge on the issue of law enforcement in the new City.

At Miami Gardens' inception, contractual services were provided by the Miami-Dade Police Department. Dissatisfied with the County's system, the Council conducted a 2006 feasibility study on creating their own police department and decided to push forward. Mayor Gibson realized marginal tax increases would help offset the cost of this venture as well as other public service projects. The community wanted a force that would better serve the City. It was a challenge, but a Miami Gardens Police Department was established and assumed jurisdiction in December 2007.



Photo: Courtesy of City of Miami Gardens



Photo: Courtesy of Shirley Gibson

From left to right, Vice-Mayor Aaron Campbell, Jr., Councilwoman Audrey King, Councilwoman Barbara Watson, Councilman Melvin L. Bratton, Sr., Mayor Shirley Gibson, Councilman Oscar Braynon, II, Councilwoman Sharon Pritchett.

The Keep Miami Gardens Beautiful program worked with volunteers on small beautification projects throughout the City, like the entrance signage.



Photo: Courtesy of City of Miami Gardens

Councilmembers Melvin L. Bratton, Sr., Aaron Campbell, Jr., Audrey King and Mayor Shirley Gibson with police officers at the 2006 Police Department swearing in.

EVENTS AND ACTIVITIES

Another priority of the Council was improving general quality of life. They presented new events and programs, and planned to provide more public spaces for recreational activities.

Local events included community-building efforts and featured world-class speakers. In 2006, the Council launched the Department of Community Development, whose mission was to produce public programs using federal, state and local funding. While some events like Miss Miami Gardens were discontinued after a few years, others, like those celebrating Memorial Day and Veterans Day, have been successful and long-running.

Inspired by a desire to create a signature destination event for the City, Mayor Gibson suggested the idea of a jazz music festival. The first annual Jazz in the Gardens, held in the parking lot at Dolphin Stadium in 2006, drew 2,500 people. Attendees brought their own folding lawn chairs and were thrilled to enjoy a lineup featuring the music of Nicole Henry, among others.

Miami Gardens was propelled onto the world stage on February 4, 2007, when Dolphin Stadium hosted Super Bowl XLI, its first Super Bowl Championship since the creation of Miami Gardens. Florida's largest Black-majority City was the perfect locale as, for the first time in NFL history, two teams led by Black coaches would compete for the title. The first Council hosted another Super Bowl in 2010, this time between the New Orleans Saints and the Indianapolis Colts under the banner of Sun Life Stadium.



▲ The Indianapolis Colts carry coach Tony Dungy off the field to celebrate after defeating the Chicago Bears at the 2007 Super Bowl.



Photo: Courtesy of City of Miami Gardens

ATTRACTING BUSINESS

With an eye on self-sufficiency, the first Council knew they would need to attract more businesses to the area to increase their tax revenue base. The 27th Avenue corridor had been zoned for commercial activity, but the rules were not enforced. They changed that. Wal-Mart, built in 2006 on the corner of 27th Avenue and 199th Street, became the City of Miami Gardens' first new major retail store. In 2008, DZD Holdings announced plans for the 108,000-square-foot Palmetto Gardens Plaza along the nearby Palmetto Expressway. In 2010, The Calder Race Course added its casino. Gradually, more businesses followed.

Photo: Courtesy of Miami Gardens Tribune

Mayor Shirley Gibson and Miami Gardens Jaycees Bring Wal-Mart to Miami Gardens

In an overwhelming show of support, more than 150 Miami Gardens residents stormed the chambers of the Miami-Dade County Commission. The vote on whether or not Wal-Mart would make a new home in the city. Not surprisingly, the attendees were people who would be directly affected by the new store's opening. The City of Miami Gardens has 16,000 in part-time employment, and 16-21 year olds who would be seeking first jobs. All arrived by bus, a caravan arranged by the Miami Gardens Jaycees and the City of Miami Gardens Jaycees. The Jaycees also provided breakfast to the traveling group and a brief discussion, "Wal-Mart Yes" passed.

Wal-Mart's community support didn't stop there. Wal-Mart lines of people stood to show their support of the Wal-Mart super center on land near NW 27th Avenue and 199th Street. The community realized this was an important step in the right direction. Wal-Mart's Vice President of the community affairs department of Wal-Mart's Southeast Region said, "It was a great experience working with Mayor Gibson and the Jaycees. They really care about Miami Gardens and challenged Wal-Mart to do the right thing for this community."

Residents supported the vote for Wal-Mart to come to Miami Gardens, bringing employment opportunities for the elderly and first time jobs for young people. March 2006.



The City of Miami Gardens and the Jaycees support Wal-Mart's move to Miami Gardens. And finally, I want to thank the people to come to the store to support the organization's goal of improvement within the city. Miami Gardens Jaycees President Andre L. Williams was one of several people to address the commission and later said, "Wal-Mart had received a frosty reception from certain members of the County Commission in its previous four attempts for approval in Miami Gardens and we wanted to ensure that our community benefited from these 800 jobs."

After the commission's unanimous passage of the motion to bring Wal-Mart to Miami Gardens, there were cheers and applause all around. Councilwoman Heretica Lacey exuberantly said, "I am so excited about this Wal-Mart. My 17-year-old daughter will be the first in line to work for Wal-Mart."

And finally, I want to thank the people to come to the store to support the organization's goal of improvement within the city. Miami Gardens Jaycees President Andre L. Williams was one of several people to address the commission and later said, "Wal-Mart had received a frosty reception from certain members of the County Commission in its previous four attempts for approval in Miami Gardens and we wanted to ensure that our community benefited from these 800 jobs."

THE FIRST GENERATIONS

PUBLIC SPACES

In January 2005, Miami Gardens inherited Brentwood Pool, which featured basketball courts, tennis courts, an exercise trail, a playground and a pool, from Miami-Dade County.

In 2010, named for the woman who fought for both the incorporation effort and the development of a multi-purpose facility, Betty T. Ferguson Recreational Complex opened. The world-class 55,000-square-foot sporting complex featured an aquatic center, football field, gymnasium and outdoor track.

After moving from their temporary home at Trinity Church, the Council had leased space at 1515 N.W. 167th Street. By the end of Shirley Gibson's time as Mayor in 2012, the City had achieved an "A" bond rating from Standard and Poor's, allowing them to comfortably secure a low-interest government loan to buy the site of an old Wells Fargo building. This would become the location of the City's next home. Although conceived by the first leadership cohort, Miami Gardens Municipal Complex became real under the second Council.



▲ Miami Gardens is recognized for fiscal responsibility. February 2010.

CHANGES IN THE COUNCIL

On September 30, 2005, founding Councilwoman Audrey J. King passed away. The Council appointed Ulysses Harvard to fill Seat 3 in her place. After the 2006 election, Andre Williams replaced Harvard. In 2007, Oscar Braynon, II resigned to become a State Representative and Oliver G. Gilbert, III assumed Seat 6. Between 2010 and 2011, the Council also added Lisa Davis, Felicia Robinson and David Williams, Jr.



◀ Former Councilmembers Ulysses Harvard and Andre Williams.

Photo: REUTERS / Alamy Stock Photo

MISS MIAMI GARDENS CONTEST WINNERS



▲ Chinna Abel ▲ Ingrid Louis ▲ Rosie Justilien
▲ Abigail Williams ▲ Janey Tate ▲ Shantel Chester

Photo: Courtesy of City of Miami Gardens

March 26, 2008

Councilman Oliver G. Gilbert, III is appointed to replace Oscar Braynon, II, who resigned to run for State Office.

January 22, 2010

Calder Casino opens.

February 7, 2010

Super Bowl XLIV takes place at Sun Life Stadium.

August 24, 2010

Councilwomen Lisa Davis and Felicia Robinson are elected.

May 27, 2011

Councilman David Williams, Jr. is appointed to replace Sharon Pritchett, who resigned to run for State Office.

August 17, 2011

The 'Arch of Industry' becomes a local historic structure.

September 23, 2011

The Betty T. Ferguson Recreational Complex opens.

The Second Council

2012 - 2020



Photo: Courtesy of City of Miami Gardens

▲ Former Miami Gardens Mayor Oliver G. Gilbert, III. (Current Chairman, Miami-Dade Board of County Commissioners)

August 17, 2012

Oliver G. Gilbert, III becomes the City's second Mayor with Erhabor Ighodaro, Ph. D. appointed to his Seat. Rodney Harris and Lillie Q. Odom are elected to the Council.

October 2013

Cameron D. Benson becomes the second City Manager.

► The second Miami Gardens Council – (left to right) Erhabor Ighodaro, Ph. D., Felicia Robinson, Lisa Davis, Oliver G. Gilbert, III, Lillie Q. Odom, David Williams, Jr. and Aaron Campbell, Jr. – presents first Mayor Shirley Gibson (center) with a plaque on the day of the City Hall naming ceremony.



Photo: Courtesy of City of Miami Gardens

FACILITIES AND INFRASTRUCTURE

To lower the barrier of entry for businesses looking to invest in the City, Miami Gardens quickened the speed of governmental processes, reducing fees and red tape.

The City of Miami Gardens Municipal Complex, conceptualized under the first Council, opened in 2014. The new 70,948-square-foot City Hall was a far cry from the Council's humble first home on the second floor of Trinity Church.

Within City limits, Jessie Trice Community Health Center expanded access to healthcare when it opened in 2014, and the free trolley system introduced in 2015 improved accessibility.

The General Obligation Bond Gilbert proposed would change the trajectory of the City's development for the better. In 2014, through the bond, residents enthusiastically voted to create a \$60 million pool of tax revenue that would be used to upgrade and construct parks and advance public safety through technological enhancements. The results can be seen in the ongoing improvement of the City's public spaces and the consistent private investment it attracts.



Photo: Courtesy of City of Miami Gardens

▲ City Manager Cameron D. Benson



Photo: Courtesy of City of Miami Gardens

▲ The City of Miami Gardens Municipal Complex upon completion.

"We figured that we could create a place that was welcoming to businesses. We got proof of concept when we got Topgolf to invest here. What people saw was that businesses you might not think would do well, would come and do very well in Miami Gardens. And if they could do it, then everyone else could too."

Chairman, Miami-Dade Board of County Commissioners Oliver G. Gilbert, III

A WORLD-CLASS HOME FOR BUSINESS

Gilbert and the Council focused on creating desirable destinations *within* the "destination City" they wanted to become. In 2017, the City struck a deal with multinational sports entertainment company Topgolf to become the home of their fourth Florida location. The success of this endeavor presented the proof of concept they needed: Miami Gardens could attract and host multi-million dollar facilities beyond the stadium and the Calder complex.

The demolition of Carol City Flea Market in 2017 made way for the popular Gardens Promenade strip mall the next year.

Gilbert also made efforts to improve the City's relationship with the stadium and the Miami Dolphins. He endeavored to create links between Hard Rock Stadium and the community, ensuring that local businesses and residents benefited from the facility's activities. So improved were these relations that, in 2018, the Miami Dolphins began taking steps to move their training facilities to Miami Gardens.

This focus on attracting business was coupled with meticulous fiscal responsibility. The City's books remained balanced, inspiring investor confidence. Homeowners were encouraged to invest in their own properties, leading to increased values.

Overall, Gilbert said, the Council he led saw an exponential increase in business investment year after year.



Photo: Courtesy of Miami Gardens Voice

While many were sad to hear that the Carol City Flea Market was closing in 2017, plans for the impressive Gardens Promenade were already underway.



Photo: David I. Muir (Island Syndicate)

▲ Topgolf has become one of the City's major entertainment options, with South Floridians traveling from all over to try their hand at the 9-iron.



Photo: Courtesy of Miami Dolphins

▲ The Dolphins are right at home in Miami Gardens with a 125,000 square-foot training facility that includes a swimming pool and 92,200 square-foot indoor field for practice.

PUBLIC SAFETY

Law enforcement and public safety continued to be top priorities. A new 67,227-square-foot police building was built at the municipal complex and named in honor of Aaron Campbell, Jr., whose efforts helped the City establish its own department.

The Council created pathways for local young people to join the force, and community outreach began to endear the police to the people they served. The Real Time Crime Center was developed in partnership with the business community, giving police access to facility cameras, or "safe cams," for more immediate responses.



Photo: Courtesy of City of Miami Gardens

▲ The second City Council with former Commissioner Betty T. Ferguson, former Miami-Dade Mayor Carlos Giménez, first Mayor Shirley Gibson and former Commissioner Barbara J. Jordan at the newly opened City Hall building and Aaron Campbell Jr. Public Safety Building dedication event, 2014. Former Councilman Aaron Campbell, Jr. stands immediately to the right of the newly unveiled sign.

SOCIAL ADVANCEMENT

Members of the Council brought their expertise into play by advancing social issues they thought were valuable. David Williams, Jr. encouraged the expansion of local STEM programs and spearheaded the Miami Gardens Science and Engineering Fair, the only municipal science fair in the County. He also pioneered the community gardens effort eventually named in honor of him, which serves as a tool for beautification as well as a source of fresh produce for community members.

Felicia Robinson hosted monthly meetings called "Meet Me Mondays," an event carried on by Vice Mayor Katrina Wilson, to address residents' concerns face-to-face. Robinson also started a girls' mentoring group called LOV (Ladies of Virtue) to inspire, motivate and support local young women.

Councilwoman Odom, a founding member in the fight for incorporation, was a staunch advocate for seniors. She developed senior programming and helped enact legislation that protected their rights. The Senior Family Center opened in 2021 and funded by the 2014 bond came to fruition partly because of her work.

By 2020, when it was time to pass the baton to new leadership, Miami Gardens had made significant strides. The City earned designation as an All-America City that year, a testament to the hard work of the Council and staff. Gilbert said he learned from Gibson's Council that no one else will do the work for you. As her cohort had taken charge of their destiny, so did he and the second Council. The next would also build on the foundation of their predecessors, taking Miami Gardens to a whole new level.



Photo: A.J. Shorter (City of Miami Gardens)

▲ The David Williams, Jr. Botanical Garden provides respite, fruit and room for residents to roam on the grounds of the Senior Family Center.

January 26, 2017

Carol Mart Plaza is demolished.

May 1, 2017

Delma K. Noel-Pratt is named Miami Gardens' first African-American woman police chief.

February 14, 2018

Mario Bataille becomes the second City Clerk.

November 6, 2018

Katrina Wilson and Reggie Leon are voted onto the City Council.

November 16, 2018

The Gardens Promenade shopping center opens.

March 18, 2019

The Miami Open debuts at the Hard Rock Stadium.

Now

Building a Grand Vision

2020 - Present

The third Council, led by Mayor Rodney Harris, became a body in 2020, and includes Katrina Wilson (appointed Vice Mayor in 2022) and Councilmembers Shannon Campbell, Reggie Leon (Vice Mayor from 2020 to 2022), Shannan Igahodaro, Linda Julien and Robert Stephens, III.

Harris, born and raised in Miami-Dade County, moved to the area years before it was incorporated as Miami Gardens. His degree in hospitality and institutional management coupled with a career as a juvenile probation officer prepared him for service as Councilman for Seat 3 when he ran in 2012. Harris was appointed Vice Mayor six years later, and became the City's third Mayor on November 16, 2020.

CONTINUED GROWTH

Under Mayor Harris' leadership, the City Council outlined a number of improved public works and public service projects. From the annual Martin Luther King Jr. commemoration to launching an annual Juneteenth celebration, investing in youth and education, and speaking up about racial injustice in the community, these Councilmembers continue to create an enriching environment for the residents they serve.

In September 2021, the City welcomed the Barbara J. Jordan Health & Wellness Center, a holistic medical facility which provides services for family care, behavioral health, pediatrics, men's and women's health, oral health, nutrition and substance use. That same year, the Council approved the annexation of a 150-acre parcel to the east, expanding City limits and provid-

Photo: A.J. Shorter (City of Miami Gardens)



▲ Mayor Rodney Harris at Rolling Oaks Park groundbreaking ceremony.

August 2020

Shannon Campbell is elected to the City Council, and Robert Stephens, III is appointed to his first term.

November 2020

Rodney Harris is elected Mayor, Shannan Igahodaro is voted Councilwoman for Seat 3 and Linda Julien is elected to serve Seat 5.

July 15, 2021

The Senior Family Center opens.

September 1, 2021

The Barbara J. Jordan Health & Wellness Center opens.

December 1, 2021

Miami-Dade County Commission approves Miami Gardens' annexation plan.



Photo: A.J. Shorter (City of Miami Gardens)

◀ Former Mayors Shirley Gibson (left) and Oliver G. Gilbert, III (fourth from left) join the third Miami Gardens Council with Shannon Campbell, Reggie Leon, Katrina Wilson, Rodney Harris, Robert Stephens, III and Linda Julien at their 2022 swearing in (Shannan Igahodaro, absent).

ing additional tax revenues. While Miami Gardens grew its industrial capacity with this move, the annexed area benefited from much-needed public repairs.

Harris and the Council hosted the first Miami Grand Prix in May 2022. Since Formula One made Miami Gardens its home, the City has been steadfast in ensuring community benefits.

More than 230 new businesses were registered in the City that year, ranging from international chains like Chipotle to small local outfits. Major tech companies like Amazon and Peloton have also made homes in Miami Gardens.

A number of redevelopment projects, including the revamp of Andover and Cloverleaf Parks, were completed in 2022.

The City continues to improve its financial situation, now maintaining a robust reserve. Miami Gardens boasts an Aa3 credit rating with Moody's and AA- with Fitch. City Manager Cameron D. Benson notes that for every \$1 million the City has invested in the community, it has realized a return of \$17 million. This shrewd financial strategizing equipped Miami Gardens with a large surplus as well as emergency funds. During the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, the City was able to bolster many struggling small businesses as well as create an incubator for local entrepreneurs. The result has been increased entrepreneurial growth and a diversified talent pool.

When voters went to the polls in 2022, all Councilmembers who ran were reelected. Expanding on the work of their predecessors with more experience and a focused vision, Harris and the third Council hope to continue creating a bright future so the City of Miami Gardens thrives.



Photo: David I. Muir (Island Syndicate)



Photo: Courtesy of City of Miami Gardens

Photo: A.J. Shorter (City of Miami Gardens)



► Mayor Rodney Harris with Coach Billy Rolle and the players from the Florida A&M University football team at Bunche Park ahead of the Orange Blossom Classic.



Photo: Courtesy of Councilwoman Shannan Ighodaro

► Councilwoman Shannan 'Lady' Ighodaro's Junkanoo Fest at Bunche Park celebrates Bahamian culture while distributing more than 500 donated toys to Miami Gardens children, December 2022.



Photo: A.J. Shorter (City of Miami Gardens)



Photo: Courtesy of Bielnaime Studio

► Councilman Reggie Leon (far left) with constituents in his district at the Lake Lucerne Community entrance. On this day, the City broke ground on the Bennett M. Lifter Park renovation project.



► Councilman Robert Stephens, III hosts the monthly Table Talk Tuesdays at Starbucks to communicate with residents face to face about their hopes for Miami Gardens.

Photo: Courtesy of Vice Mayor Katrina Wilson



► Vice Mayor Katrina Wilson with Coach Walt Frazier at the renaming ceremony for Carol City Park (now Walt Frazier Park at Carol City).

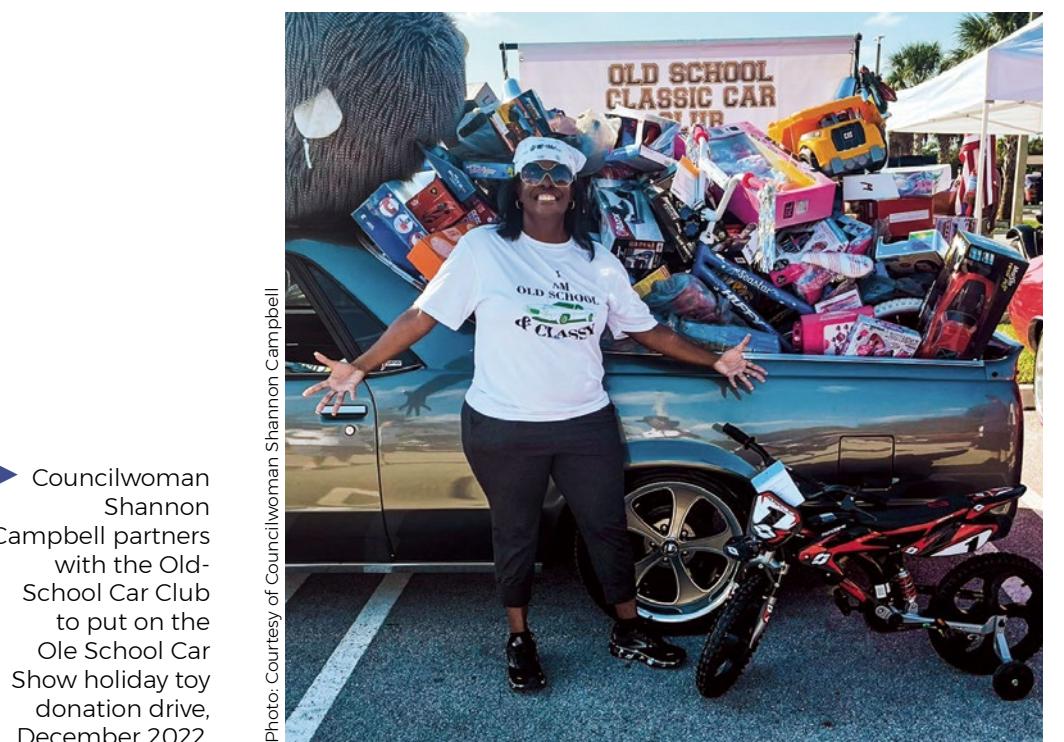


Photo: Courtesy of Councilwoman Shannon Campbell

► Councilwoman Shannon Campbell partners with the Old-School Car Club to put on the Ole School Car Show holiday toy donation drive, December 2022.



Photo: Courtesy of Councilwoman Linda Julien

► Councilwoman Linda Julien now leads the two day annual Science and Engineering Fair at St. Thomas University, a fun and important introduction to STEM for young students.



March 23, 2022

Ground breaks on renovations to Bennett M. Lifter Park.



May 6, 2022

The first Formula One Miami Grand Prix takes place.



August 23, 2022

Councilmembers Katrina Wilson, Reggie Leon and Robert Stephens, III are reelected.



October 27, 2022

The Miami Gardens "Virtual City" Metaverse Experience is officially launched.

Where You Want to Be

Business

Since its inception, Miami Gardens has been deliberate about creating an environment and initiatives welcoming to large and small businesses as well as local entrepreneurs. Through policies started under the second Council, businesses can get situated in the City in a matter of days and, depending on investment level, have access to concierge-level service in figuring out their steps to development. With clear industrial and commercial zones established, the City added more than 230 new businesses in 2022 alone.

Major stadium events have brought more traffic to the area, resulting in more activity for local vendors. In fact, in its tradition of supporting small-scale proprietors, the City negotiated an allotment for them to sell at some stadium events cost-free.



► Starbucks is supporting the City with new jobs, youth hiring and a commitment to engaging women and minority vendors at their Miami Gardens location.

► Minority restaurant Nola Bites got a golden ticket to participate as a vendor at Formula One in 2022.

Photo: Courtesy of Bieniaime Studio



Photo: Courtesy of Miami Dolphins

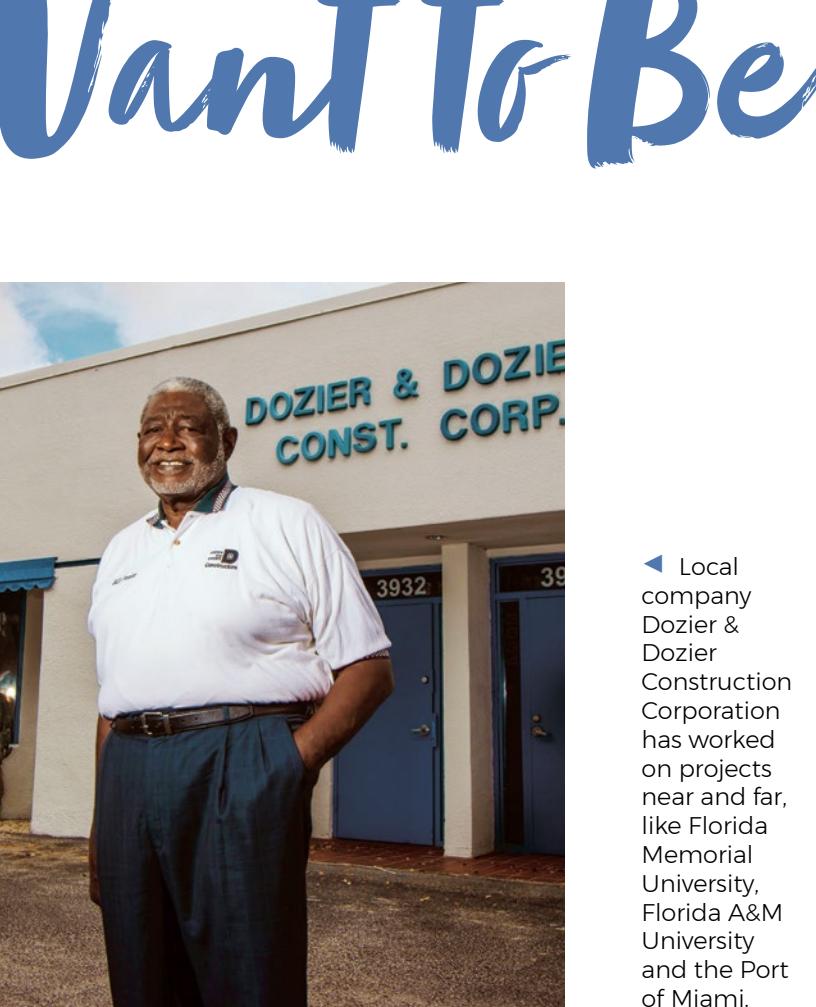


Photo: Courtesy of Bieniaime Studio

► Local company Dozier & Dozier Construction Corporation has worked on projects near and far, like Florida Memorial University, Florida A&M University and the Port of Miami.



Photo: Courtesy of Bieniaime Studio



Photo: Courtesy of Bieniaime Studio

► Chief Cuttah barber shop has been operating in Miami Gardens since 2014.



Photo: Courtesy of Bieniaime Studio

Miami Gardens also sources and provides grants to aid small and minority-owned operations within City limits. And officials host workshops on grant writing, entrepreneurship and small business as well as events for women and youth.

In 2017, the Carol City Flea Market was demolished to make way for the more modern Gardens Promenade strip mall, filled with nationally recognized brands and larger regional businesses. The subsequent establishment of a weekend popup marketplace has created a space for micro-businesses to sell their wares.

Today, there are national chains anchoring major intersections, new building developments going up and top-selling auto dealers operating in the City. Miami Gardens' focus on fostering business generates revenue the City reinvests in public works projects as well as development and expansion that benefits both commercial entities and the residents they serve.

► Local vendors, like specialty bakery K'Luvly's Sweet Treats, set up shop at the Street Fair and Marketplace.

October 16, 2017

Starbucks opens a store in the City and implements its local revitalization and youth hire program.

February 19, 2022

The Miami Gardens Street Fair & Marketplace is created for local vendors to sell their wares.

July 2022

Formula One offers \$500,000 in support of Miami Gardens' small businesses alongside a \$5 million community benefits package.

A

Where You Want to Be

People • Resources • Community



▲ The Miami Gardens Street Fair and Marketplace takes place each month to give every resident the opportunity to come out for local food, wares and information.



▲ Residents participating in a Live Healthy Miami Gardens yoga class.



▲ Live Healthy Miami Gardens at the Street Fair and Marketplace.



▲ A police vehicle wrapped for Breast Cancer Awareness Month.



Photo: A.J. Shorter (City of Miami Gardens)



▲ A senior resident enjoying a fun night of bingo at the Senior Family Center.



▲ (Left to right) Councilman Robert Stephens, III with a guest, Councilman Reggie Leon and Mayor Rodney Harris at the 2022 Shades of Pink brunch.

◀ The Senior Family Center opened July 15, 2021.

about the effects of drugs, alcohol and tobacco. Showing care for the powerful women that drive the community, the City supports breast cancer awareness at events like the Shades of Pink Brunch and by wrapping police vehicles in pink in October.

To enjoy a fun workout for all ages, residents can participate in a variety of programs offered through the Parks and Recreation Department, including line dancing classes. And they can take home free, fresh fruits and vegetables from the David Williams, Jr. Botanical Garden to support their healthier lifestyle. Miami Gardens partners with Farm Share Inc. which distributes free, healthy food to residents in need, promoting improved eating habits.

Senior residents can enjoy an extensive roster of programming and benefits. The Senior Family Center, which opened in July 2021, hosts various activities including Seniors Gone Fishing and the Senior Prom, to name a few. The City also offers a Senior Beautification Grant designed to provide assistance to elderly residents in need based on eligibility.

In 2022, Miami Gardens hosted a historic HBCU football camp and combine, which brought out more than 300 registrants and had several college football coaches scouting for talent. A few athletes received scholarships, and others learned invaluable information about college and post-college success.

Miami Gardens also regularly engages in outreach events to help those in need, including food, toy, gas, backpack and school drives.

As it grows, the City maintains its care and appreciation for all its residents.



February 2014

The City of Miami Gardens partners with the Health Foundation of South Florida to start the Live Healthy Miami Gardens initiative.



April 14, 2018

Bunche Park Pool officially opens.



May 11, 2021

Bunche Park reopens after a major renovation.

Where You Want to Be Education

Miami Gardens prioritizes cultivating young minds. The City is home to Florida Memorial University (FMU), the only historically Black university in South Florida. The institution sits on the site of a 48-acre air strip that was converted after its purchase by Dr. Royal W. Puryear, a former campus president, in 1965. FMU has had many names and many homes over the years – including in Live Oak and Jacksonville – but after student protests connected to the civil rights movement forced relocation from St. Augustine, it finally settled in Miami Gardens, opening its current campus in 1968.

The private St. Thomas University, formerly Biscayne College, was founded in northwest Dade in 1961 after Augustinian friars expelled by the Castro government from Cuba settled in Miami. With clergy at the helm, and upon adding a law school and various master's degree programs, Biscayne College improved its status and changed its name to reflect its new Catholic support.

An overarching City initiative works to expand student engagement in science, technology, engineering and mathematics, which are referred to as STEM careers. Miami Gardens partners with hometown campuses as well as Florida International University to host an annual Science and Engineering Fair, with prize money for student



▲ In partnership with Formula One, Miami Gardens launched the "F1 in Schools" STEM program.

achievements. As part of Formula One's partnership with the City, the F1 in Schools STEM program was created to give students interactive experience in engineering and project-based learning. Experts teach students about researching, designing, building and even racing an F1 race car.

The Young Brilliant Minds initiative, spearheaded by Councilwoman Shannon Campbell, provides young people with mentorship, workshops on entrepreneurship, scholarships and service opportunities. And the Higher Education Initiative, led by Councilman Robert Stephens, III, offers scholarships to aspiring high school students pursuing college or university as their next step.



▲ Florida Memorial University (formerly College) relocated from St. Augustine to its current home in Miami Gardens in 1968.



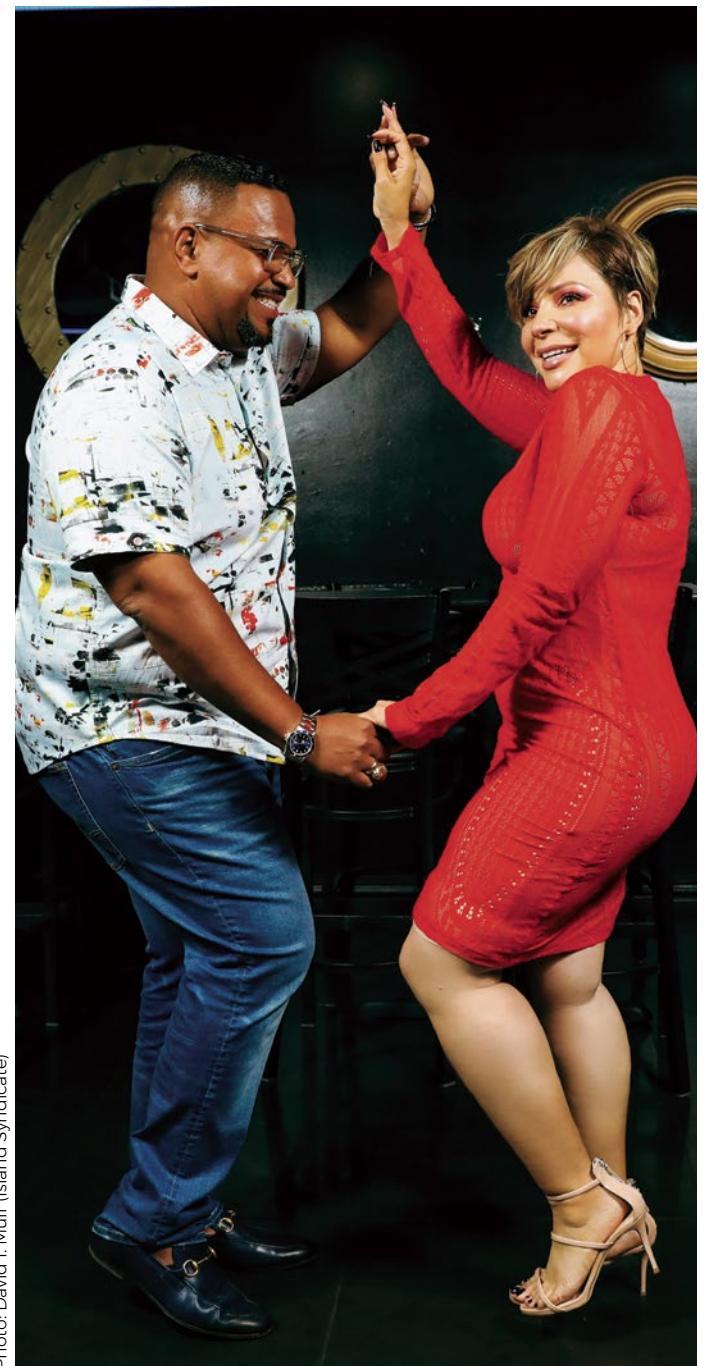
▲ St. Thomas University serves a diverse student population.

Entertainment Destination

The City of Miami Gardens has a decades-long history as a destination for exciting and diverse entertainment. Residents of the late '80s will recall the jam-packed sporting events after the opening of Joe Robbie Stadium while today's community is more familiar with the range of sports, music and festival events at the ever-evolving Hard Rock Stadium.

With so many high-profile activities, residents' quality of life stays top of mind for the leadership of Miami Gardens. They factor traffic patterns, economic benefits and noise levels into decision-making in addition to often requiring incentives for residents in project plans. Formula One, for example, committed to support local vendors as part of their 10-year partnership with the City.

Miami Gardens also offers local dining and entertainment options: Yarumba Restaurant & Lounge serves Dominican fusion cuisine and Latin dancing, Top Notch Cigar Bar sells premium smokes, and Topgolf offers a restaurant, bar and driving range. Foodies can revel in the City's wide array of ethnic dining options, like Arline's Restaurant & Seafood, Lovely's On The Go and Lass Cuban Cafe.



▲ Salsa dancing at Yarumba Restaurant & Lounge.



▲ Top Notch Cigar Bar boasts premium cigars in a swanky lounge setting.



▲ Calder Casino offers slots, cards and a full gaming floor.

1951
Bunche Park Elementary is built as the first school educating Black students in northwest Metro-Dade.

December 12, 2011
Miami Gardens starts the annual Science and Engineering Fair.

January 2022
Formula One launches the F1 in Schools STEM program in Miami Gardens.

January 22, 2010
Calder Casino officially opens.

April 2013
Yarumba Restaurant & Lounge opens.

April 2017
Top Notch Cigars & Whiskey Lounge opens in Miami Gardens.

December 29, 2017
Topgolf opens in Miami Gardens.

Entertainment Destination

Jazz in the Gardens

Photo: Courtesy of Community Newspapers Miami Gardens



▲ Music fans from near and far came out for the 5th annual Jazz in the Gardens.

Photo: Courtesy of Live Nation Urban



M

iami Gardens' flagship Jazz in the Gardens (JITG) music festival is a two-night, star-studded affair that has become one of the City's most anticipated annual events. Launched as a humble parking lot gathering, it has grown to consistently draw crowds of up to 40,000 attendees and sponsorships from major corporations like the Greater Miami Convention & Visitors Bureau and Volkswagen.

Since its inception in 2006 at what was then Dolphin Stadium, JITG has hosted an array of jazz, hip-hop, R&B, soul and reggae performers, including Mary J. Blige, Lionel Richie, Smokey Robinson, Sean Paul, Robin Thicke, and Usher. The event also spotlights lesser-known talent on the verge of stardom.

Notable sons and daughters of Miami Gardens – including Norland Middle School graduates Alex Hibbert and Jaden Piner from the Academy Award-winning film *Moonlight* – have received keys to the City here. Delicious local fare and vendor booths dot the festival. With around \$12.3 million in direct spending within the South Florida community on festival weekend in 2019, the economic infusion has even kept some businesses afloat.

For many, the event has become an exemplary representation of the area's majority-Black population, celebrating the rich culture and diversity of its residents through music.

▲ Sean Paul performing his hits at JITG 2023.

Photo: David I. Muir (Island Syndicate)



▲ Event goers enjoying another amazing event, 2015.



March 25, 2006

Jazz in the Gardens is launched in the parking lot of the Dolphins Stadium.



March 22, 2016

Usher performs at Jazz in the Gardens.



March 13, 2022

A son of the City, Rick Ross is honored at Jazz in the Gardens and, in front of more than 17,000 attendees, March 13 is officially named "Rick Ross 'The Biggest Boss' Day" in Miami Gardens.



▲ Mary J. Blige was the headline performer for JITG 2022.

Entertainment Destination

Rolling Loud

Photo: MediaPunch Inc / Alamy Stock Photo



▲ Rappers crowd surf during Rolling Loud Music Festival held at Hard Rock Stadium on July 25, 2021

T

hree days of crowds chanting along with the biggest names in hip hop, R&B and rap: This is Rolling Loud, the largest hip hop music festival in the world, and it has called Miami Gardens home since 2018.

Attracting local and international fans to the City, Rolling Loud features top names like A\$AP Rocky, Megan Thee Stallion and Cardi B, as well as emerging musicians and acts with cult followings. With five giant stages and continuous sets, fans can catch more than 100 performances throughout the weekend. The event's official mix master, DJ Five Venoms, keeps the music going between sets.

The festival has grown enormously since its inception in 2015 at Soho Studios in Wynwood. What was once a one-day concert of indie Sound-Cloud rappers has evolved into an international brand and one of Miami Gardens' often sold out affairs.



Photo: MediaPunch Inc / Alamy Stock Photo

▲ Jack Harlow performs during Rolling Loud Music Festival held at Hard Rock Stadium on July 25, 2021.



May 11 to 13, 2019

Rolling Loud is moved from Bayfront Park to the Hard Rock Stadium.



July 22 to 24, 2022

Kid Cudi, Future and Kendrick Lamar headline Rolling Loud 2022.

Entertainment Destination Football Legacy

Joe Robbie Stadium opened to the public in 1987. It was built to host the region's Miami Dolphins, who played their first game there on August 16 that year. Today, the team works out at the Baptist Health Training Complex, built in 2021, just a stone's throw from the stadium.

Six Super Bowls have been hosted on local turf, and Miami Gardens is familiar with the fanfare that comes along with such an iconic event.

The area's history with the NFL dates back to its first year as host for Super Bowl XXIII in 1989. That initial championship football game drew thousands to watch the San Francisco 49ers win the Vince Lombardi Trophy. The 49ers won again in 1995, then the Denver Broncos in 1999, Indianapolis Colts in 2007 and the New Orleans Saints in 2010. The venue's name changed eight times before settling as the Hard Rock Stadium before the 2020 Super Bowl that saw Kansas City victorious. Music icons like Prince, Shakira and Jennifer Lopez have all graced the halftime performance stages through the years.

The Super Bowl also invites local vendors to shine. More than 40 Miami Gardens artisans and restaurants sold products at the 2020 game.



► Kansas City's quarterback Patrick Mahomes took home the win and the MVP trophy at Super Bowl LIV in 2020.



Photo: Rich Kane Photography / Alamy Stock Photo

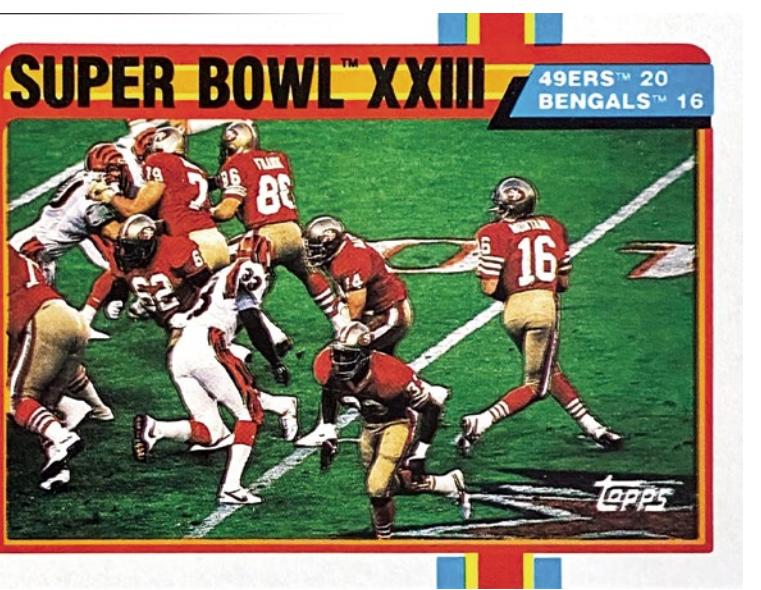


Photo: REUTERS / Alamy Stock Photo

1987

Joe Robbie Stadium is built for the Miami Dolphins.

February 4, 2007

Prince performs at Super Bowl XLI.

December 31, 1996

The Orange Bowl moves from a stadium near Little Havana to Pro Player Stadium in northwest Metro-Dade.



► The Michigan Wolverines prepare to take the field at the start of the Capital One Orange Bowl NCAAF College Football Playoff game on Friday December 31, 2021.

Photo: Cal Sport Media / Alamy Stock Photo



Photo: Zuma Press, Inc. / Alamy Stock Photo

► Miami Hurricanes fans celebrate at the game against the Florida State Seminoles, October 2016.

Entertainment Destination College Football



Photo Courtesy of Florida Memory

► U.S. Senator Bob Graham during his workday as a member of the Orange Bowl chain crew at Pro-Player stadium.



Photo: Courtesy of Bieniaime Studio

► The community came out for the Orange Blossom Classic's second game in Miami Gardens in 2022.

Football fans eagerly anticipate the Orange Bowl, a premier postseason game for college teams with the best league records. It has been played annually since the 1930s, making it the second-oldest bowl game in the United States.

It drew its name from the Miami Orange Bowl Stadium near Little Havana, where it was played until 1996. Today, tens of thousands of fans fill Hard Rock Stadium in Miami Gardens to watch the live action. For decades, the field has hosted some of the biggest games in college football, like the 2009 championship that featured Heisman Trophy-winning quarterbacks Tim Tebow and Sam Bradford. The stadium is also the University of Miami (UM) Hurricanes' official home field.

In 2021, Miami Gardens became the new home of the Orange Blossom Classic, the most highly-anticipated game for historically Black colleges and universities (HBCUs). From 1933 to 1978, other Florida Cities hosted the game, which was revived at Hard Rock Stadium after a 43-year hiatus.

September 5, 2021

The Orange Blossom Classic returns to the Hard Rock Stadium after a 43-year hiatus.

Photo: Courtesy of Miami Dolphins



▲ The impressive tropical track for the Formula One Miami Grand Prix at Hard Rock stadium.

Entertainment Destination Formula One

In 2022, for the first time, checkered flags waved over the Miami International Autodrome in the City of Miami Gardens as racing entity Formula One (F1) officially established its home for the Miami Grand Prix.

F1 was founded in 1950 and has become the world's most prestigious racing competition, with open-wheel, single-seat cars that, similar to NASCAR, can touch thrilling speeds of 200 mph or more. On May 8, 2022, fans from all over the world flocked to the inaugural event.

The organizers promised packed crowds, economic opportunities and business development, and though residents were initially concerned about the impact on their quality of life, the Grand Prix was a huge success, with an economic boost of \$350 million and minimal noise levels.

Race aside, F1 committed to a \$5 million community benefits package over their 10-year stay in the City that includes the sponsorship of some City initiatives and \$500,000 set aside to support small business owners. The company also brought its "F1 in Schools" program — a youth STEM program that involves hands-on, interactive engineering experiences — to Miami Gardens.



Photo: Courtesy of Miami Dolphins



Photo: Independent Photo Agency / Alamy Stock Photo



Photo: Courtesy of Miami Dolphins

▲ Miami Gardens kids enjoying the F1 in Schools program.

April 2022

Formula One surprises F1 in Schools students with free tickets to the races.

May 6, 2022

Around 85,000 fans attended the first Miami Grand Prix race day with a weekend attendance of almost 300,000.



Photo: zhukovsky

▲ Grandstand stadium during the 2022 Miami Open tennis tournament.

Entertainment Destination The Miami Open

It was game, set, match when the Miami Tennis Open moved to Hard Rock Stadium in 2019, leaving Crandon Park Tennis Center in Key Biscayne after 32 years. The move saw a 25% increase in ticket sales as fans geared up to watch the likes of Serena Williams, Naomi Osaka and Novak Djokovic.

For two weeks each spring, a who's who of celebrities, politicians and sporting elites converge in Miami Gardens for this high-end event. And while fans come for the iconic names, they've also seen up-and-coming stars, like South Florida resident Cori Dione "Coco" Gauff, shine on these courts.

Over the years, an increase in the event's popularity propelled the stadium to make major renovations to the south parking lot, including adding a spacious shaded plaza with a big screen broadcasting the main matches, an art tent, boutique shops and world-class culinary spots.

The corporation and players also give back through Miami Open Unites, a day of service to the community with events held at Hard Rock Stadium and other Miami Gardens locations.



Photo: zhukovsky

▲ Professional tennis player Jessica Pegula in action during the 2022 Miami Open.

March 19, 2019

The Miami Open tennis tournament officially moves to Miami Gardens.

March 22, 2019

Serena Williams defeats Rebecca Peterson in her opening match.

Entertainment Destination Hard Rock Stadium Events



► Coldplay's "A Head Full of Dreams" energized fans in Miami Gardens, 2021.

Photo: David Moll / Alamy Stock Photo

The image of Hard Rock Stadium conjures thoughts of major sporting events, but the arena also transforms into a global destination for A-list concerts and alluring artistic entertainment that deserves its own limelight. With more than 65,000 seats, luxurious private club rooms and dozens of dining options, visitors have a lot to discover.

One of the biggest venues in Florida, the stadium has an impressive history of headlining artists: from The Rolling Stones and Coldplay to Metallica and The Weeknd. More than 103,000 people – its largest audience to date – came out to see Billy Joel and Elton John in 1995 while the venue was still called the Joe Robbie Stadium. Cirque du Soleil also pitched their big top on the grounds for their Volta and Alegria tours.

Today, the 160-acre site offers an open-air gondola ride with a bird's eye view of the stadium and surrounding Miami Gardens skyline. Fans can enjoy world-class tennis, auto racing, football and entertainment that brings hundreds of millions in revenue to South Florida each year and true local reinvestment in the City of Miami Gardens.

► The Weeknd's 2022 "After Hours Til Dawn" tour featured a sold-out house at Hard Rock Stadium.



Photo: MediaPunch Inc / Alamy Stock Photo

August 17, 2016

Hard Rock Cafe, Inc. signs an 18-year deal for naming rights to the Stadium.

August 30, 2019

The Rolling Stones end their "No Filter" Tour at Hard Rock Stadium.



Photo: Courtesy of Vice Mayor Katrina Wilson

▲ Vice Mayor Katrina Wilson (third from right) and fellow Councilmembers Robert Stephens, III, Reggie Leon, Linda Julien and Mayor Rodney Harris celebrate African American journalists in South Florida at the annual Juneteenth Park-In & Party event in 2022.

Entertainment Destination Community Events

There is a deep-rooted reverence for the community in Miami Gardens that Councilmembers, past and present, small businesses and larger corporations work to uphold.

The Memorial Day celebration established by Melvin L. Bratton, Sr., the Community Garden created by Councilman David Williams, Jr. and the Senior Prom started by former Councilman Erhabor Ighodaro,



Photo: Courtesy of Councilwoman Shannon Campbell

► Councilwoman Shannon Campbell spearheads the Bahas Reunion, a fun annual picnic that gets residents of the Bahas community back together with food, games and a splash pad for the kids at Buccanneer Park.



Photo: A.J. Shorter (City of Miami Gardens)

▲ City Councilmembers at the 2022 Veterans Day Celebration.

Ph. D. then continued by his wife, current Councilwoman Shannan Ighodaro still thrive today under the stewardship of subsequent Councils. Current elected leaders have their own initiatives.

The Juneteenth Park-In & Party – presented by Vice Mayor Katrina Wilson, Councilman Reggie Leon and Councilman Robert Stephens, III – is so well-received that in 2021, the cars-only concert event was recognized by Essence Magazine as one of the country's top celebrations.

Miami Gardens also advocates for good health, hosting Stephens' January Fitness Challenge, Leon's Shades of Pink Breast Cancer Brunch at Bunche Park, the Miami Gardens Alzheimer's Walk at the Senior Family Center and Councilwoman Linda Julien's Mango Festival at the David Williams, Jr. Botanical Garden. Mayor Rodney Harris invites multiple generations to his Fall Festival and Easter Family Fun Day, as Councilwoman Shannon Campbell does at her annual Bahas Reunion. Among a number of initiatives Councilwoman Shannan Ighodaro hosts her annual Women's Empowerment Conference.

And while the above-mentioned to-dos give a taste of how the City engages with its residents, they also can enjoy many other locally-produced events and activities.

May 11, 2017

The City hosts its first Senior Prom for older residents.

June 19, 2021

Miami Gardens hosts the first Bahas Reunion and Juneteenth Park-In & Party celebration.

Photo Journal

Landmarks, Parks and Arcs



Photo: David I. Muir (Island Syndicate)

◀ City of Miami Gardens City Hall

The centerpiece of the City's new state-of-the-art Municipal Complex, the 70,948 square-foot City Hall building, is the heart of Miami Gardens.



Photo: David I. Muir (Island Syndicate)

▼ Sunshine State Arch

Adopted into Miami Gardens' City seal in 2003, the Sunshine State Arch is even worked into the landscape at the City's Municipal Complex. An aerial view of the complex will reveal the center walkway is shaped as the famous Arch.

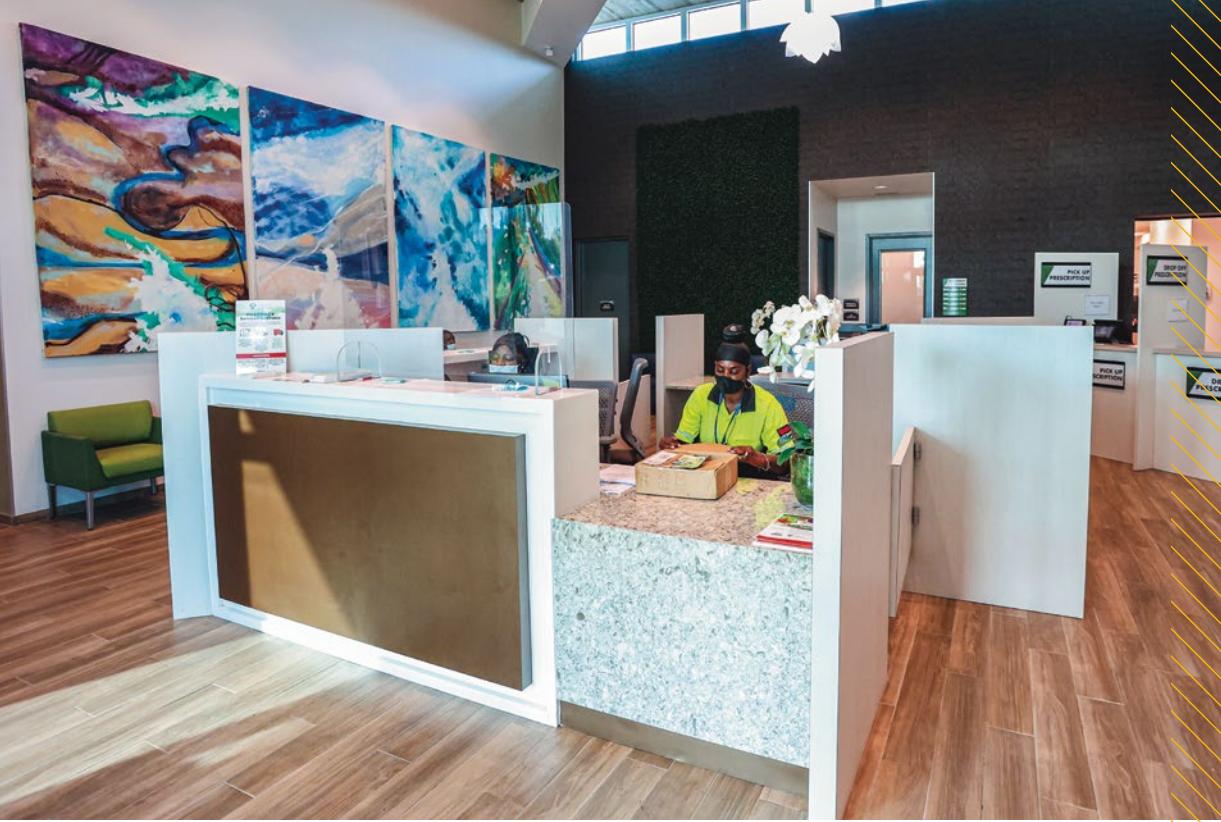


Photo: David I. Muir (Island Syndicate)

▲ Jessie Trice Community Health Center

The not-for-profit Jessie Trice Community Health Center delivers healthcare to Miami Gardens residents in need. The organization often partners with the City for community health-related initiatives, like the Live Healthy Miami Gardens program.

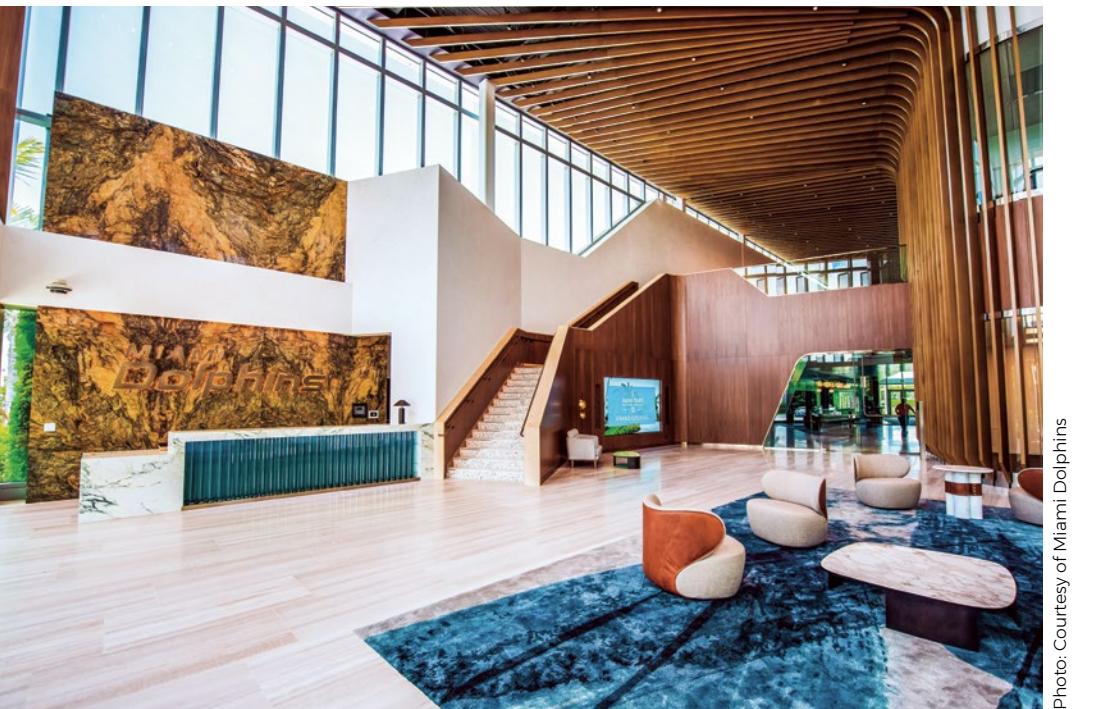


Photo: Courtesy of Miami Dolphins

▲ The Miami Dolphins' Baptist Health Training Complex

South Florida's home team practices in style with two natural grass fields, a full indoor field, an impressive two-story weight room, rehabilitation space, cryotherapy and more.



▲ Florida Memorial University

Florida Memorial University (FMU) is a private, historically Black university. It is a world-class institution with a growing student body, advanced technology, competitive athletics and a family-like environment.



► St Thomas University

Modern architecture, lush greenery and sweeping hallways are filled with students of business, law, technology and more. Formerly Biscayne College, St. Thomas University is a nationally-respected, private Catholic institution that has offered diversity, tradition and opportunity to its students for more than 60 years.



▲ Rolling Oaks Park

Soak in the expansive green space when you enter Rolling Oaks Park. Add outdoor fitness to your day with walking trails and open tennis and basketball courts, or simply enjoy a peaceful afternoon stroll under the majestic oak trees.



▲ Buccaneer Park

Buccaneer Park offers shaded pavilions, a pool and peaceful walking trails. For children, there's a canopy-covered playground and Spray 'N Play splash pad.



▲ Bunche Park

With 7.2 acres of recreational space, Bunche Park is one of the City's prime activity destinations, offering soccer and football fields, basketball courts and a large playground. The park also has an indoor volleyball court, walking track and meeting rooms monitored by the Parks and Recreation Department.



▲ Miami Gardens released the "Virtual City" Metaverse Experience in 2022.



▲ Residents got to test out the Miami Gardens Metaverse at the 2022 Orange Blossom Classic.

Tomorrow and Into the Future

Exploring the Miami Gardens Metaverse through the lens of a high-tech virtual reality headset, it's clear to see that new construction and social engagement are leading the City into a brighter future.

Spearheaded by City Manager Cameron D. Benson, the City's annexation and zoning efforts have facilitated development opportunities for the future, such as multi-use buildings with condos above and retail or office space below. Three million square feet of new industrial space will be completed in west Miami Gardens in the coming years.

New shops and restaurants will soon call the 27th Ave-

nue entertainment corridor home. Also in the works: 35-acres across from Hard Rock Stadium will be developed into a City Center featuring two hotels, eateries and music venues. The 3.68 acres adjacent to the municipal complex will become home to a performing arts center with a culinary arts program and, tentatively, a boutique hotel. The addition of multiple hotels will finally allow visitors to stay in Miami Gardens rather than in neighboring communities, realizing hopes held by many past Councilmembers.

Calder Casino is doing a large renovation, apartment complexes are being built near Lake Lucerne, and national brands like Amazon and Peloton have created workspaces in the City.

On its 20th anniversary, almost every project from the \$60 million General Obligation Bond started in 2014 has broken ground or been completed,



Photo: Courtesy of City of Miami Gardens

▲ Miami Gardens Town Center renderings, 2022.

"We're excited about where the future may lead and want everyone to look at Miami Gardens as a place they can call home."
Mayor Rodney Harris



Photo Courtesy of City of Miami Gardens

▲ Bennett M. Lifter Park rendering

fulfilling the City's promises. Community enhancements like beautifying curbs and gutters, housing improvements and new street lights will also come to fruition.

Miami Gardens is purposefully moving toward becoming a "smart," futuristic City within 10 years, while maintaining its urban appeal, resident quality of life and Black leadership.

As the City grows, so does everything else around it.

That's why Miami Gardens is building partnerships with surrounding cities, so the entire region of north Miami-Dade can grow together.

The City will host the College Football Playoff National Championship game as well as the FIFA World Cup in 2026.

In the past 20 years, Miami Gardens has transformed from wide open spaces to a thriving entertainment destination and the place to be. In just a few more, Miami Gardens will be the City of the future.



Photo: Cal Sport Media / Alamy Stock Photo

▲ The College Football Playoff National Championship game is coming to Hard Rock Stadium January 5, 2026.



▲ FIFA World Cup is coming to Miami Gardens in 2026.



Photo Courtesy of City of Miami Gardens

The stunning Oliver G. Gilbert, III Bridge spans the eight lanes of traffic between the Hard Rock Stadium campus and the nearby parking lots.

Works Cited

5 Years of Progress (2003-2008), 5th Anniversary Booklet, *The City of Miami Gardens*, 2008.

"About Fl." formula1.corp.formula1.com/about-fl/.

Biagiotti, James. "The Rapid Rise of Rolling Loud, the Nation's Predominant Hip-Hop Festival." *Miami New Times*, 2 May 2019. <https://www.miaminewtimes.com/music/the-rapid-rise-of-miamis-hip-hop-music-festival-rolling-loud-11161737>

Bitsky, Leah. "Formula 1's First Miami Grand Prix Boosted Local Economy by \$350M." *Page Six*, 27 Jul. 2022, pagesix.com/2022/07/27/formula-1s-first-miami-grand-prix-boosted-local-economy-by-350m/

"Boy Meets Boy." *Miami Herald*, 6 Sept. 1970.

"Calendar of Events." *City of Miami Gardens Chamber of Commerce*, <https://www.miamigardenschamber.org/news/>

"Carol Mart Closed." *Miami Gardens Voice*, Jan - Feb. 2017

"Cirque Du Soleil Under the Big Top at Hard Rock Stadium." *NBC 6 Miami*, uploaded by NBC 6 in the Mix, 8 Jan. 2020, www.nbciami.com/entertainment/6-in-the-mix/cirque-du-soleil-under-the-big-top-at-hard-rock-stadium/2174673/

"City Council." *City of Miami Gardens*, <https://www.miamigardens-fl.gov/269/City-Council>

"City Documents." *City of Miami Gardens*, <https://www.miamigardens-fl.gov/265/City-Documents>

"City of Miami Gardens 2021-2025 Consolidated Plan." *City of Miami Gardens*, 30 Sept. 2021, www.miamigardens-fl.gov/DocumentCenter/View/5887/Miami-Gardens-2021-2025-ConPlan-PDF

"City of Miami Gardens 2022 State of the City Address." *Youtube*, uploaded by City of Miami Gardens, 15 Nov. 2022, www.youtube.com/watch?v=rBYGukCMoxs

"City of Miami Gardens City Charter." *City of Miami Gardens*, <https://www.miamigardens-fl.gov/DocumentCenter/View/396/City-Charter-PDF>

"City of Miami Gardens Gets an 'A' Rating from Standard & Poor's." *Community Newspapers - Miami Gardens*, Feb. 2010.

"City of Miami Gardens Swears in Its First Elected Officials." *(Unknown)*, 26 July - 8 Aug. 2003, p. 5A.

"Discover Miami Gardens Innovate Page." *Discover Miami Gardens*, <https://discovermiamigardens.com/innovate/>

"Fl in Schools STEM Programme Launches in Miami Gardens Ahead of Inaugural Grand Prix." *Formula 1*, 19 Jan. 2022, [corp.formula1.com/fl-in-schools-stem-programme-launches-in-miami-gardens-ahead-of-inaugural-grand-prix/](https://corporate.formula1.com/fl-in-schools-stem-programme-launches-in-miami-gardens-ahead-of-inaugural-grand-prix/)

"Fl to Hold Miami Grand Prix from 2022 onwards." *ESPN*, 18 Apr. 2021, https://www.espn.com/fl/story/_/id/3128107/fl-hold-miami-grand-prix-2022-onwards%3fplatform=amp

"Face to Face 1995." *Wikipedia*, Wikimedia Foundation, 30 Aug. 2022, en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Face_to_Face_1995

"Facilities." *City of Miami Gardens*, <https://www.miamigardens-fl.gov/facilities/facility>

"Fiscal Year 2022 Proposed Annual Budget." *City of Miami Gardens*, <https://www.miamigardens-fl.gov/DocumentCenter/View/6179/FY-2022-Proposed-Budget-PDF>

"GO Bond History." *City of Miami Gardens*, <https://www.miamigardens-fl.gov/470/GO-Bond-History>

"Hard Rock Stadium, Notable Events NFL." *Wikipedia*, Wikimedia Foundation, 1 Feb. 2023, en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hard_Rock_Stadium

Hibbert, Alison. "Referendum OKd for Destiny but New Rules Could Stand in the Way." *The Miami Times*, 20 July. 1995, p. 2A.

"History: Orange Bowl." *NCAA*, 1 Jan. 2019, www.ncaa.com/news/football/article/2013-12-13/history-orange-bowl

"Housing Rehabilitation Program." *City of Miami Gardens*, <https://www.miamigardens-fl.gov/174/Housing-Rehabilitation-Program>

"Keep Miami Gardens Beautiful." *City of Miami Gardens*, <https://www.miamigardens-fl.gov/229/Keep-Miami-Gardens-Beautiful-KMGB>

"Last Call for Veterans!" *Miami Times*, 17 Jun. 1950, p. 16.

"Live Healthy Miami Gardens." *Live Healthy Miami Gardens*, <http://livehealthymiamigardens.com/>

"Mayor Shirley Gibson and Miami Gardens Jaycees Bring Wal-Mart to Miami Gardens." *Miami Gardens Tribune*, Mar. 2005.

"Miami Gardens City, Florida." *United States Census Bureau*, <https://www.census.gov/quickfacts/fact/table/miamigardenscityflorida/POP0602010>

"Miami Open." *Greater Miami Convention & Visitors Bureau*, www.miamibeaches.com/event/miami-open/9285

Nicholas, Alwyn. *History and Development of the City of Miami Gardens*. 2nd ed. Royalty Approach to Education (RATE), 2012.

"Orange Bowl." *Wikipedia*, Wikimedia Foundation, 19 Feb. 2023, en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Orange_Bowl

"Park Programs." *City of Miami Gardens*, <https://www.miamigardens-fl.gov/211/Park-Programs>

"Parks & Recreation." *City of Miami Gardens Police Department*, <https://www.miamigardenspolice.org/208/Parks-Recreation>

Porter, Jodi. "Election Special: Spirit High At Last Public Meeting Before Election." *(Unknown)*, 18 - 31 Jan. 2003.

"Public Safety." *City of Miami Gardens*, <https://www.miamigardens-fl.gov/340/Public-Safety>

"Residents & Small Business Programs." *City of Miami Gardens*, <https://www.miamigardens-fl.gov/225/Residents-Small-Business-Programs>

Salmon, Barrington. "Voters Say No to Creating Destiny." *The Miami Times*, 21 Sept. 1995, Volume73 Number2.

Salmon, Barrington. "Car Dealers Spend Big Bucks in Bid to Defeat Vote for New City." *The Miami Times*, 14 Sept. 1995, Volume73 Number1.

"Senior Beautification Grant." *City of Miami Gardens*, www.miamigardens-fl.gov/920/Senior-Beautification-Grant

Smith, Jason T. "Gibson Elected Mayor of Miami Gardens." *The Miami Times*, 25 Jun. 2003.

Stallworth, Mark. "\$5 Million Pledge Brings Fl Racing to Miami Gardens." *The Miami Times*, 21 Apr. 2021, https://www.miamitimesonline.com/business/5-million-pledge-brings-fl-racing-to-miami-gardens/article_b78b6cd-a2b8-11eb-ae3c-3b7c8d6d8534.html

"The City of Miami Gardens Held Its First HBCU Combine..." *Facebook*, uploaded by Miami Gardens Now, 1 Jul. 2022, www.facebook.com/watch/?v=50667536459008

Van Dyke, Teresa. *Miami's Second Ghetto*. 1994. Florida Atlantic University. Master's Thesis and Dissertation. The Digital Library, *Electronic Thesis and Dissertation Collection* [Http://Purl.Flcv.Org/Fclc/Dt/15047](http://Purl.Flcv.Org/Fclc/Dt/15047)

Verdi, Tucker. "Miami Open Unites Connects Players and Communities Who Share Similar Journeys." *Miami Open Unites*, [www.miamipen.com/about/miami-open-unites/](http://miamipen.com/about/miami-open-unites/)

Vote YES on Tuesday, September 19, 1995. The Committee for the Incorporation of Destiny. Pamphlet.

"Vote Yes! To Believe in Destiny Is To Believe in Yourself." *The Miami Times*, 14 Sept. 1995, p. 10A.

"YOUNG STARS OF OSCAR-WINNING "MOONLIGHT" TO RECEIVE KEYS TO THE CITY OF MIAMI GARDENS." *Jazz in the Gardens*, 16 Mar. 2017, jazzinthegardens.com/2017/young-stars-of-oscar-winning-moonlight-to-receive-keys-to-the-city-of-miami-gardens/

"Miami Gardens City, Florida." *United States Census Bureau*, <https://www.census.gov/quickfacts/fact/table/miamigardenscityflorida/POP0602010>

"Fl to hold Miami Grand Prix from 2022 onwards." *ESPN*, 18 Apr. 2021, https://www.espn.com/fl/story/_/id/3128107/fl-hold-miami-grand-prix-2022-onwards%3fplatform=amp

"Park Programs." *City of Miami Gardens*, <https://www.miamigardens-fl.gov/211/Park-Programs>

"Keep Miami Gardens Beautiful." *City of Miami Gardens*, <https://www.miamigardens-fl.gov/229/Keep-Miami-Gardens-Beautiful-KMGB>

"Public Safety." *City of Miami Gardens*, <https://www.miamigardens-fl.gov/340/Public-Safety>

"Parks & Recreation." *City of Miami Gardens Police Department*, <https://www.miamigardenspolice.org/208/Parks-Recreation>

"Fiscal Year 2022 Proposed Annual Budget." *City of Miami Gardens*, <https://www.miamigardens-fl.gov/DocumentCenter/View/6179/FY-2022-Proposed-Budget-PDF>

"Senior Beautification Grant." *City of Miami Gardens*, www.miamigardens-fl.gov/920/Senior-Beautification-Grant

"Housing Rehabilitation Program." *City of Miami Gardens*, <https://www.miamigardens-fl.gov/174/Housing-Rehabilitation-Program>

"Live Healthy Miami Gardens." *Live Healthy Miami Gardens*, <http://livehealthymiamigardens.com/>

"Facilities." *City of Miami Gardens*, <https://www.miamigardens-fl.gov/facilities/facility>

"The City of Miami Gardens Held Its First HBCU Combine..." *Facebook*, uploaded by Miami Gardens Now, 1 Jul. 2022, www.facebook.com/watch/?v=50667536459008

"Residents & Small Business Programs." *City of Miami Gardens*, <https://www.miamigardens-fl.gov/225/Residents-Small-Business-Programs>

"GO Bond History." *City of Miami Gardens*, <https://www.miamigardens-fl.gov/470/GO-Bond-History>

"Discover Miami Gardens Innovate Page." *Discover Miami Gardens*, <https://discovermiamigardens.com/innovate/>

Acknowledgements

The City of Miami Gardens would like to thank the following people for their support and involvement in the publishing of this book Celebrating 20 Years of Miami Gardens:

Mayor Rodney Harris
Vice Mayor Katrina Wilson
Councilman Reggie Leon
Councilwoman Shannon Campbell
Councilwoman Shannan Igahedor
Councilwoman Linda Julien
Councilman Robert Stephens, III
City Manager Cameron D. Benson
Dr. Marvin Dunn
Our dedicated City staff
The Miami Gardens business community
The people of Miami Gardens
The publishing team at Island Syndicate

Credits

Published by

Island Syndicate
Holdings LLC for the
City of Miami Gardens

Creative Direction by

Calibe Thompson

Words by

Hannah Gulics,
Lyndon Nicholas,
Calibe Thompson

Edited by

Jayme Fraser

Layout by

Vladan Dojcinovic

Photography edited by

Daniil Denchik

Cover Photography by

AJ Shorter
for the City of Miami Gardens

Back Cover Photography by

David I. Muir
(Island Syndicate)

Publisher's Note

Assembling this commemorative book on Miami Gardens 20th anniversary, we spent hours speaking with the founders of the City, the people who raised it from infancy and those who continue to move it forward. The collective efforts of Shirley Gibson, Betty Ferguson and the activists they led toward the City's inception laid the groundwork to make Miami Gardens a true exemplar of Black excellence. We hope we sufficiently brought their stories to life in these pages. As a Black-, woman-owned company, Island Syndicate honors your leaders. May their lessons and words of wisdom enrich your life, too.

Miami Gardens Councilmembers

2003 - 2023

2003

Shirley Gibson	Mayor
Aaron Campbell, Jr.	Vice Mayor, Seat 1
Barbara Watson	Seat 2
Audrey King	Seat 3 (died 2005)
Melvin L. Bratton, Sr.	Seat 4
Sharon Pritchett	Citywide Seat 5
Oscar Braynon, II	Citywide Seat 6

2005

Oscar Braynon, II	Vice Mayor, Citywide Seat 6
Ulysses Harvard	Seat 3 (appointed)

2006

André Williams	Seat 3
-----------------------	--------

2007

Barbara Watson	Vice Mayor, Seat 2
-----------------------	--------------------

2008

Oliver G. Gilbert, III	Citywide Seat 6 (appointed)
-------------------------------	-----------------------------

2009

Oliver G. Gilbert, III	Vice Mayor, Citywide Seat 6
-------------------------------	-----------------------------

2010

Aaron Campbell, Jr.	Vice Mayor, Seat 1
Lisa Davis	Seat 2
Felicia Robinson	Seat 4

2012

Oliver G. Gilbert, III	Mayor
Lisa Davis	Vice Mayor, Seat 2
Lillie Q. Odom	Seat 1
Rodney Harris	Seat 3
Felicia Robinson	Seat 4
David Williams, Jr.	Citywide Seat 5
Erhabor Ighodaro, Ph. D.	Citywide Seat 6 (appointed)

2014

Felicia Robinson	Vice Mayor, Seat 4
-------------------------	--------------------

2016

Erhabor Ighodaro, Ph. D.	Vice Mayor, Citywide Seat 6
---------------------------------	-----------------------------

2018

Rodney Harris	Vice Mayor, Seat 3
Reggie Leon	Seat 2
Katrina Wilson	Seat 4

2020

Rodney Harris	Mayor
Reggie Leon	Vice Mayor, Seat 2
Shannon Campbell	Seat 1
Shannan Ighodaro	Seat 3
Katrina Wilson	Seat 4
Linda Julien	Citywide Seat 5
Robert Stephens, III	Citywide Seat 6 (appointed)

2022

Katrina Wilson	Vice Mayor, Seat 4
Reggie Leon	Seat 2
Robert Stephens, III	Citywide Seat 6

On May 13th, 2003, Miami Gardens became the 33rd City in Miami-Dade County, Florida. The journey to incorporation was a challenging one, but cityhood became a reality through the efforts of a small group of determined citizens along with the friends and neighbors who supported them.

Today, 20 years after its founding, Miami Gardens stands proudly as an internationally recognized destination City, the largest Black-majority City in the state of Florida, an All-America City, and a place of which its leaders and residents can all be proud.

