



# CITY OF MIAMI GARDENS

*20th Anniversary*  
**THEN, NOW AND TOMORROW**







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MIAMI GARDENS**

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**City of Miami Gardens**  
**18605 N.W. 27th Ave., Miami Gardens, FL 33056**  
**[miamigardens-fl.gov](http://miamigardens-fl.gov)**

Find us on



For the founders

The elders

The people who fought  
for Miami Gardens to exist

Our community

Our future





Photo: David I. Muir (Island Syndicate)

# 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.

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***“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.”***

# 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!

**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.

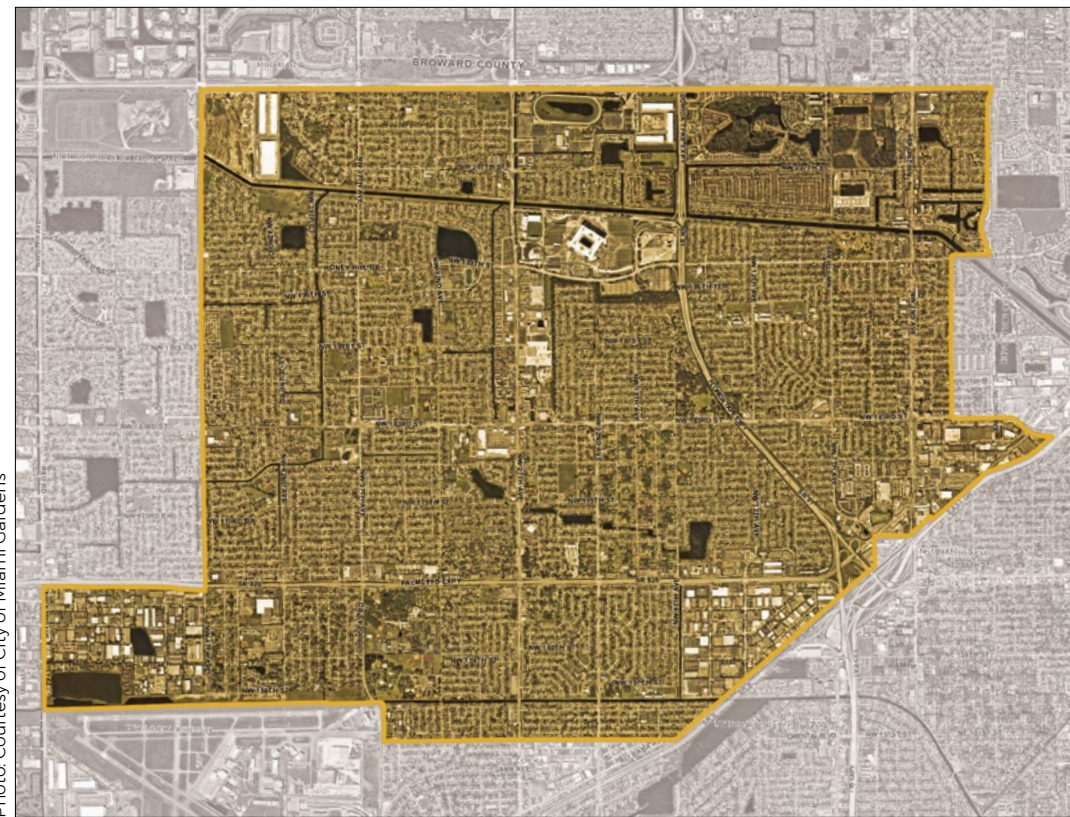


Photo: Courtesy of City of Miami Gardens

## 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 Blenaine 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.



Photo: Courtesy of Miami Dolphins

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



# 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.

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

MAY 13, 2003

Residents vote "yes" to the Municipal Charter establishing the City of Miami Gardens on County Commissioner Betty T. Ferguson's birthday.



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.



DECEMBER 16, 2007

Miami Gardens establishes its own Police Department.

JULY 23, 2003

The City's first Mayor, Shirley Gibson, and Council are officially sworn in.

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.



Photo: Courtesy of Calder Casino

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.

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.

NOVEMBER 16, 2018

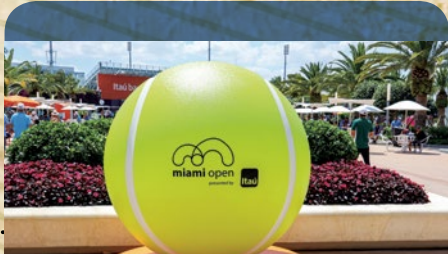
Ribbon cutting celebrates the new Gardens Promenade Shopping Center.

MARCH 18, 2019

The Miami Open debuts at Hard Rock Stadium.

AUGUST 19, 2020

Miami Gardens is awarded the All-America City Award.



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.

AUGUST 18, 2020

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

MAY 6, 2022

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



Photo: Courtesy of Miami Dolphins



# Then

## Before Incorporation

1930s - 1995



### 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.

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":  
**"A POWERFUL BLOW TO SLUMS"**

The Miami Times said of "Bunche Park":  
**"Bunche Park has completely solved the problem of housing shortage and is making the home better for more and more of our citizens. It is a real apartment town built, not built of old ones. It is a real home for the people who need it."**

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

**STOP THOSE HIGH RENT RECEIPTS!**

**LIFE IS GOING ON HAPPILY IN "BUNCHE PARK"**  
 Over 600 contented families now live in comfort and blessed sunshine in this beautiful, modern, new community.

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

Listen to Barry Kane Show on WKAT, 1360 on Your Dial Every Morning at 7 a.m. and Every Sunday at 8:30 a.m.

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

**NO DOWN PAYMENT Necessary!**

**\$40 PER MONTH only 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.

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.

Early 1920s

Liberty City emerges as a center for Black settlement.



## 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.

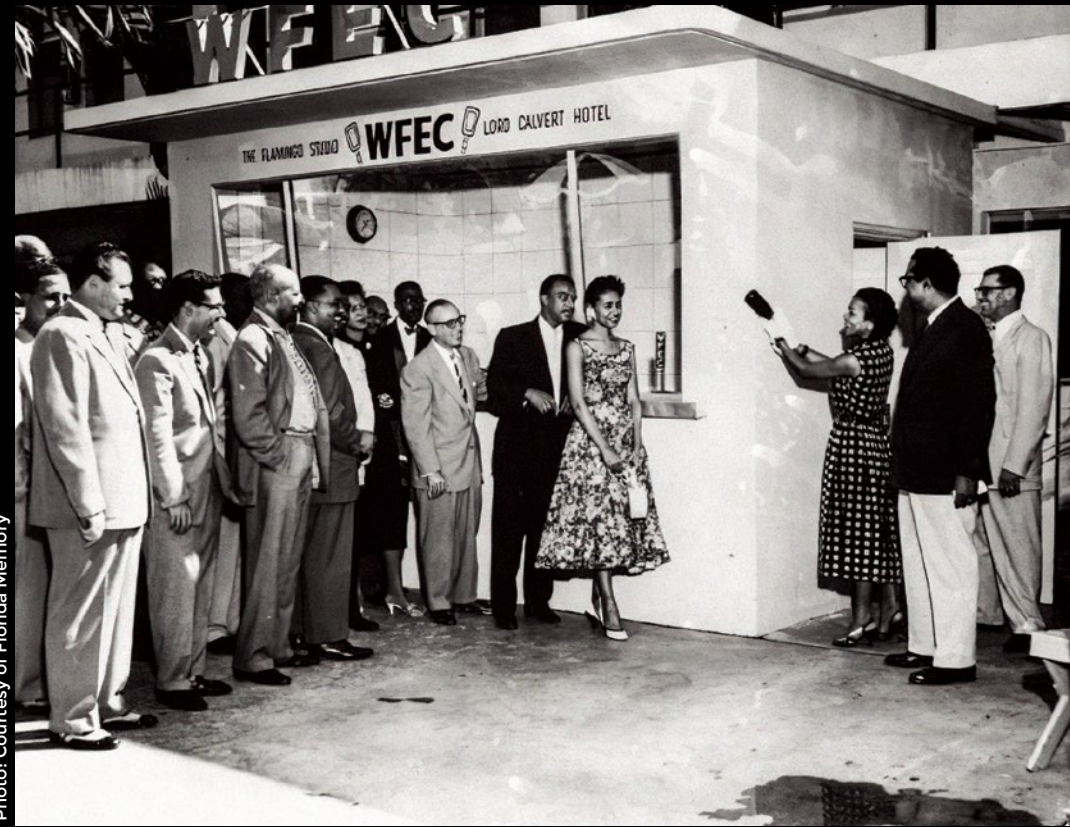


Photo: Courtesy of Florida Memory

▲ 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.



Photo: Courtesy of St. Thomas University, Miami Gardens, FL

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



Photo: Courtesy of Florida Memory



Photo: Courtesy of Florida Memory

◀ 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.

**"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**



Photo: Courtesy of City of Miami Gardens

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

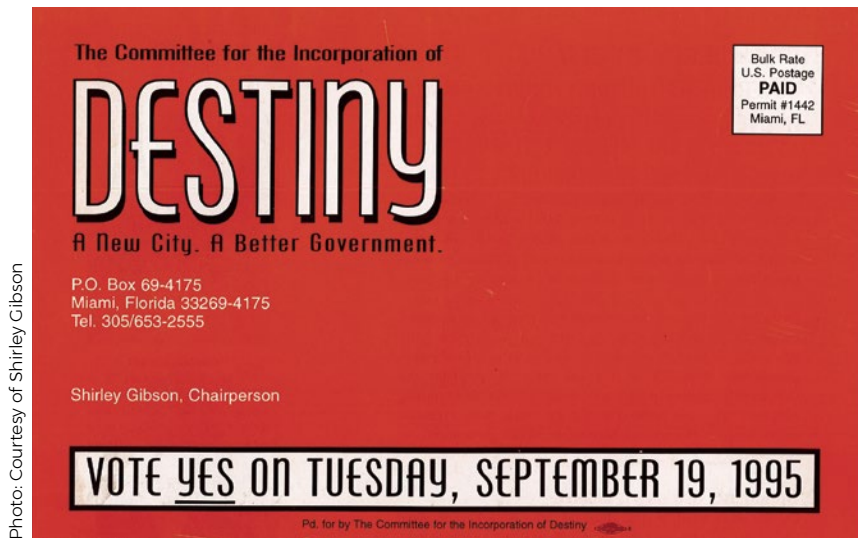


Photo: Courtesy of Shirley Gibson

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.

Late 1980s

Communities throughout Metro-Dade County begin to incorporate.



**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."

Photo: Courtesy of Shirley Gibson

**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**

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

The influx of lower-income Black residents that had started in the 60s had a lasting impact. Residents felt the area was receiving fewer services than other incorporated cities were receiving. The tax base was limited, infrastructure was crumbling — streets were marred by potholes, project housing was left dilapidated and under-maintained for years, roads were dark because of the large gaps between street lamps, and even Bunche Park pool was dry and unusable.

2A THE MIAMI TIMES  
Thursday, July 20, 1995

## Referendum OKd 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

Gibson is critical of the changes. Even though the Destiny group can proceed with its referendum, she sees the policy change, especially the boundary commission, as aimed at blocking her group.

"I think it was totally unfair. I don't think think we should have been subjected to that," she said. "This is just another means that they (the commissioners) will use to deny the citizens the right to forming their own city."

"Every time we go back to the commission, somebody makes another motion or wants to make changes or additions that we have

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 happy 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.

Photo: Courtesy of The Miami Times

▲ 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.

**"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**



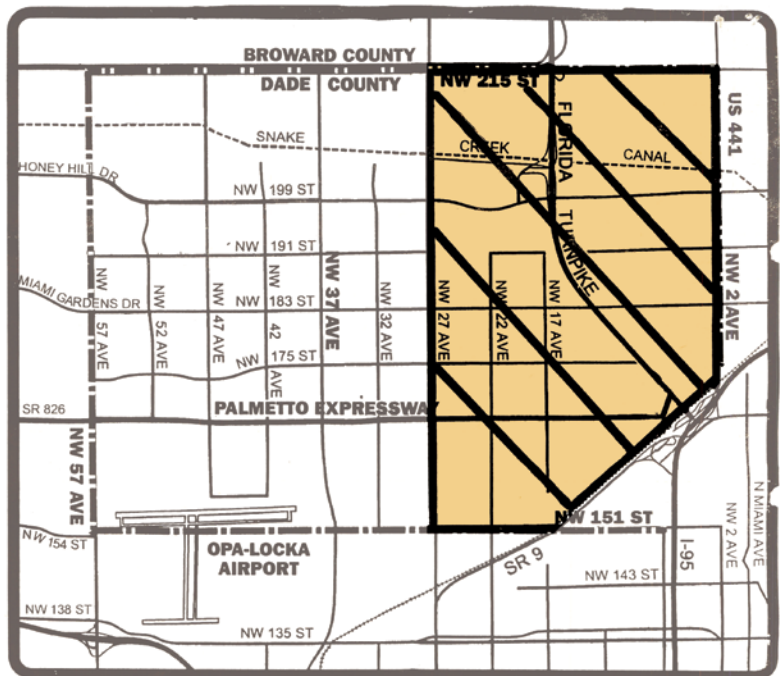
Photo: Courtesy of City of Miami Gardens

1993

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



Photo: Courtesy of Shirley Gibson



▲ Proposed boundaries of the City of Destiny.

## THE DESTINY COMMITTEE

Ferguson became an advisor to a committee of 19 volunteer members, with Dr. Benjamin Cowins as its chairperson. The group held initial meetings in a member's office, then later at Norwood and Bunche Park Elementary schools. They decided the City they envisioned would be named "Destiny" — the thing they wanted to take into their own hands. Cowins invited Shirley Gibson, a recently retired police officer, to participate. Gibson, who eventually became committee chairperson, recruited her friend Lillie Q. Odom.

A feasibility study conducted by the group in 1995 included the area from N.W. 27th Avenue in the west to N.W. 2nd Avenue in the east, and 151st Street in the south to 215th Street in the north. Ferguson presented the study to the Board of County Commissioners, who approved a resolution for her constituents to vote on incorporating the City of Destiny.

► "Vote Yes"  
City of Destiny ad  
in the Miami Times.

Photo: Courtesy of The Miami Times

10A THE MIAMI TIMES  
Thursday, September 14, 1995

# VOTE YES!

## To Believe In Destiny Is To Believe In Yourself.

### Why vote YES for Destiny? Because creating a new city will assure:

- Just, Unbiased, Accountable POLICE SERVICE.
- Uniformed Code Enforcement.
- Better Parks & Recreational Programs for Children.
- Controlled Zoning.
- Employment Opportunities.
- Power to Hold Down Property Taxes.
- Better Services for Senior Citizens, Youth, Families and Businesses.
- NO NEW LAYER OF TAXES.

For too long, the county has neglected us. I can remember when we had to fight to control abandoned cars, overgrown lots, mile high trash piles in our neighborhoods... County government has been very untruthful to us. They don't keep their promises... They are taking our money and doing what they want... We have highly educated people in our community. WE ARE THE VOTERS. We know how to watch City Hall. We know what is best for us, for the people where we live.

*Shirley Gibson (works)*  
Ed & Mary Liddell, Scott Lake Residents

### THESE SUPPORTERS BELIEVE THAT IT'S TIME TO CREATE A VILLAGE TO RAISE OUR CHILDREN

Barbara Edwards, Anthony Brinson, Rose Moorman, Juana Minery, Willie F. Monery, Clarence Edwards, Shirley Gibson, Willie Burnett, Maggie Chiswell, Janice Smith, Walter White, Dr. Emmanuel Olanrewaju, Catherine Leventz, Elizabeth Williams, Patricia Stymon, Oscar Brayson, Mr. & Mrs. Ricky Cox, Roosevelt Bradley, C.F. Cogoli, A.J. Pittman, Newell J. Daughtry, Arlington Shands, Jr., Craig Collins, Wilene Tang, Lillie O. Odom, Thelma H. Williams, Elizabeth Judd, Rayner A. Paschal III, Charles George, David Williams, Precious Soule, Annette Bredelove, W. Brinson, Ronald Holden, Troy C. Brown, Larry Conway, Mary Daniels, Angela Sater, Eddie W. Gervin, Timothy Harris, Ronald Holden, Sylvia Holman, Helen S. Mack, Jacqueline Morant, Esther Hall, Alden Sawyer, Ruby Shire, Tracy Carr, Irene Handford, Debra Robinson, Betty Rolle, Tommy Wilson, Annette Simmons, Jennifer Garcia, A. McDaniel, Esther Carter, Cara Jenkins, Enoch Cunningham, David Fanson, Jr., Linda Cook-Taylor, Rev. Willie Kelley, Rev. Daniel Lavan, Shaun Pump, Rosetta Davis, John Douglas, Roy Samuel, Joe Allen, Lorne Ricketts, Aaron Johnson, Minnie Johnson, Alfred Johnson, Mr. Barkley, Guinetha Brinson, Angela Ragon, May Stapleton, Claudio Brenin, Stephanie Williams, Maxine Storer, David Cockroft, Christopher Cockroft, David Smith III, Alexander Williams, David Brown, Edm Drake, Harry Clark, Willie Harris, Raymond Jack-Quinn, Deborah Thomas, Sonia Montague, Helen Allen Blake, Salema Smith, Charitable Chervin, Carrie Priestler, Geraldine Rodgers, Sharlene V. Lightbourne, Maria Ortiz, Carmen Luna, Karen A. Taylor, Lachandra Whitaker, Kathy Phillips, Joanne Hall, Linda Burth, Monica Virgin, Samuel Victor, Silvia Hearing, Joseph L. Cook, Sara Cook, Lyle Roberts, P. Hicks, Vivian L. Dunn, Dewey Edwards, Onia Hill, Kacie Amos, Sharon White, Brenda Johnson, Luis Smith, Joyce McCain, Phyllis Ross, Juanita Ryles, Rothell Russell, Willie Innes, Asia Montero, Dorina Smith, Fayne Frisley, Vanick Dayon, Melba Toussaint, Dr. Evelyn Bestman, Retta Boone, Gracie Chandler, Anthony Gregory, Joe Sims, Brenda McGowan, Georgia Jones Ayers, Larry R. Handfield, Gladys Kosi, Garth C. Reeves, Marie F. Brown, Sonny Wright, John Moore, Dorrie Rolle, Herman K. Williams, Amy, Gary Siglin, Jackie Bell, Maurice J. Wallace, Dr. Clyde Pettaway, Howard Gary, Daniel File-Alme, R. Paul Young, Ed O., Denise Easton Abia, Sonny Abia, Cynthia Redinger, Lawrence Ryans, James Ryans, Representative Benny Roberto-Burke, Bishop Victor T. Curry, Ricky Thomas, Commissioner Lawrence "L.D." Kennedy, Jr., Representative Lancia Bullard, Councilwoman Anna E. Ward, Mayor Ora Wallace, Commissioner Miller J. Dawkins, Cynthia Perry, Betty B. Young, Rev. Haskell Young, Victoria Cox, Bernice Moore, Marty Pinson, Kim McGray, Valina C. Screen, W. Ricketts, Gary Siglin, Antonio Augusto, Frank T. Martin, Kelvin Alweis, Ed Liddell, Barbara Dent, Billy Haley, Janice Isley, EMHC, Jacques Kanneht Holmes, Sheryl Peterson, David Peterson, W. Ayobola Balogun, Raymond Dunn, P. Bartlett, Ben Cowins, Sr., Beatrice Loussaint, Jennifer Dobson, Willie Dyer, Kendrick B. Mack, Joyce Postell, Tom Carlos, Johnnie Jefferson, Alus Welsh, Alex Dubque, Commissioner Willie Dawkins, Thaddeus Wilcox.

The taxpayers of the area defined as "Destiny" each year contribute over \$15 million in city taxes to Metro-Dade.

## YOU ARE PAYING THE COST IT'S TIME TO BE THE BOSS

### VOTE "YES" • PUNCH 198 • TUES., SEPT. 19

► "Vote Yes"  
City of Destiny ad  
in the Miami Times.

► Following the September 19 vote, residents decided against incorporating the City of Destiny, and the dream of cityhood was put on pause.

Volume 73 Number 2

# Voters say no to creating Destiny

By BARRINGTON SALMON  
Times Staff Writer

Northwest Dade residents opted Tuesday to stay with Metro-Dade County and not form a new city and govern themselves.

Pro-Destiny supporters lost by a 699-vote margin, with the final count being 2,362 for and 3,061 against.

At Destiny headquarters in a ballroom at Calder Holiday Inn, what should have been a celebration took on more subdued tones. Disappointment, disillusionment and disgust hung heavy in the air.

"It's been a long day, a long week," said an obviously dejected Shirley Gibson, head of the incorporation committee.

one has to win and someone has to lose but that doesn't make it any easier.

"To lose this particular campaign because of what it's about... it meant so much for Black folks to have self-determination, control and show the children that this could be done.

"To toss it away because other people told them that if they dared to do this it would fail is disheartening. We want it without struggle. They want no fight, no problems, no struggle; it's hard for me to take that in 1995."

Gibson, chairwoman of the Committee for the Incorporation of the City of Destiny, said it's time to pause and, after more than six

Photo: Courtesy of The Miami Times

# Car dealers spend big bucks in bid to defeat vote for new city

By BARRINGTON SALMON  
Times Staff Writer

A coalition of White businesses, led by several auto dealerships, has contributed \$20,000 to help defeat creation of a proposed majority Black city.

Illinois-based businessman Wayne Huizenga is the person most often associated with opposition to the City of Destiny but a campaign treasurer's report shows that other White businesses are also big financial contributors.

In a campaign disclosure form dated Aug. 22, 10 contributors donated almost \$28,000 to the Citizens Against Higher Taxes political action committee.

Heading the list are six North Dade auto dealerships which chipped in a combined \$20,000. Potomac Toyota Inc., Warren Henry Infiniti Inc. and Martin Mazda Inc., each gave \$5,000, while William Lehman Buick Inc., William Lehman Isuzu Inc. and William Lehman Mitsubishi Inc., each donated \$1,666.66.

Industrial Communications and Electronics, of Kingston, Mass., donated \$4,000 and Peterson H-D Realty plunked down \$3,000.

Meanwhile, campaign consultants from Alexandria, Va., and Washington, D.C., cost the PAC almost \$22,000.

Shirley Gibson, chairman of the Committee to Incorporate Destiny isn't surprised.

"There is such a division or lack of understanding and sensitivity by a large segment of the business community," she said. "There's so much of concern or partnership. Where before they were quiet, now they have converged as a center of mass around Huizenga. It's coming across as very negative to the majority of the community. We should be bridge-building as a matter of course."

Gibson said there has been a concerted effort to cast the Sept. 19 vote.

Continued on Page 2A

Photo: Courtesy of The Miami Times

**"People either object or agree based on how much they know, and what we found is that, when we did the City of Destiny, we did not educate our people enough."**

Former Councilwoman Lillie Q. Odom

## A LOSING BATTLE

Lacking strong enough commitment, the Destiny committee experienced a falloff in participation. Even more challenging, some locals, particularly in the Bunche Park neighborhood, believed that Black community members would do a worse job governing themselves than the County was doing. Political forces at the County level as well as influential businesses actively challenged the incorporation effort. In fact, Odom recalls an incident where she intercepted buses of university students the committee had recruited to solicit support. She observed the students at the end of day wearing unsanctioned yellow t-shirts marked "Vote NO." They admitted they had been paid more than they could refuse to damage the effort. Committee members saw other kinds of organized opposition. A number of business owners in the area spent thousands on professional phone bankers to dissuade the local population from supporting the Destiny project.

With wealthy external forces at play, limited understanding of how incorporation would benefit them, a fear of higher taxes and an overwhelming distaste for the proposed City name, "Destiny," on Tuesday, September 19, 1995 constituents did, in fact, vote "no." The effort failed.

Gibson cried all night of a broken heart, stunned, believing that her neighbors had chosen not to vote for themselves.

Exhausted and disappointed, the committee disbanded, and the vision for a City of Destiny was no more. Some, like Gibson, continued their work in local politics and community activism with the hopes of one day using their growing knowledge to benefit the community for which they'd fought so hard.

◀ According to the Miami Times, while Shirley Gibson and the incorporation committee were looking ahead, a number of influential businessmen worked to undermine their efforts.



Photo: Courtesy of City of Miami Gardens

◀ Lillie Q. Odom in 2006 at the first Jazz in the Gardens sponsor reception.

### Early 1995

The Destiny Commission is formed and Shirley Gibson encourages Lillie Q. Odom to join.

### 1995

A study is conducted by the committee to present the proposed City of Destiny to the Board of County Commissioners.

### September 19, 1995

Northwest Dade's move for incorporation fails and is not attempted again for another seven years.



# Becoming Miami Gardens

2002-2003



Photo: Courtesy of City of Miami Gardens

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

**P**olitical energy crashed to a low point after northwest Dade County residents rejected the Destiny incorporation effort in 1995. The failure disheartened many involved in the first push to form a City government.

But Shirley Gibson had a fire lit in her that would not be doused.

## THE SELF-EDUCATION OF SHIRLEY GIBSON

Ten-year-old Shirley Gibson had moved with her family from Georgia to the Florida Keys in the early '50s. The family later settled in Liberty City, then New Liberty City in northwest Dade. Many others in the area had also migrated from Georgia or the Carolinas, bringing their southern hospitality with them. White people lived east of the train tracks while Blacks lived to the west.

In 1968, Gibson and her late husband purchased one of the foreclosed homes vacated by airline workers. By 1995, after more than 30 years here, she was completely invested in bringing northwest Dade to its full potential.

Gibson spent the years following the Destiny vote visiting Commission and Council meetings in surrounding Cities as well as observing the strategies of other neighborhoods moving toward incorporation. She learned that until her community took control of its own governance from the County, they would literally not even have the power to fix a broken street lamp. She educated herself about using Census and other government data to acquire funding, about the intricacies of tax revenues — Miami Garden's most valuable resource — and, importantly, how to build allies for the next attempt.

Although some white residents in neighboring communities and City government had fought the idea of northwest Dade's incorporation, it was the relationships Gibson built with white counterparts during her seven-year self-education that would yield financial support to help spread the message crafted by the Miami Gardens team.

## 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.

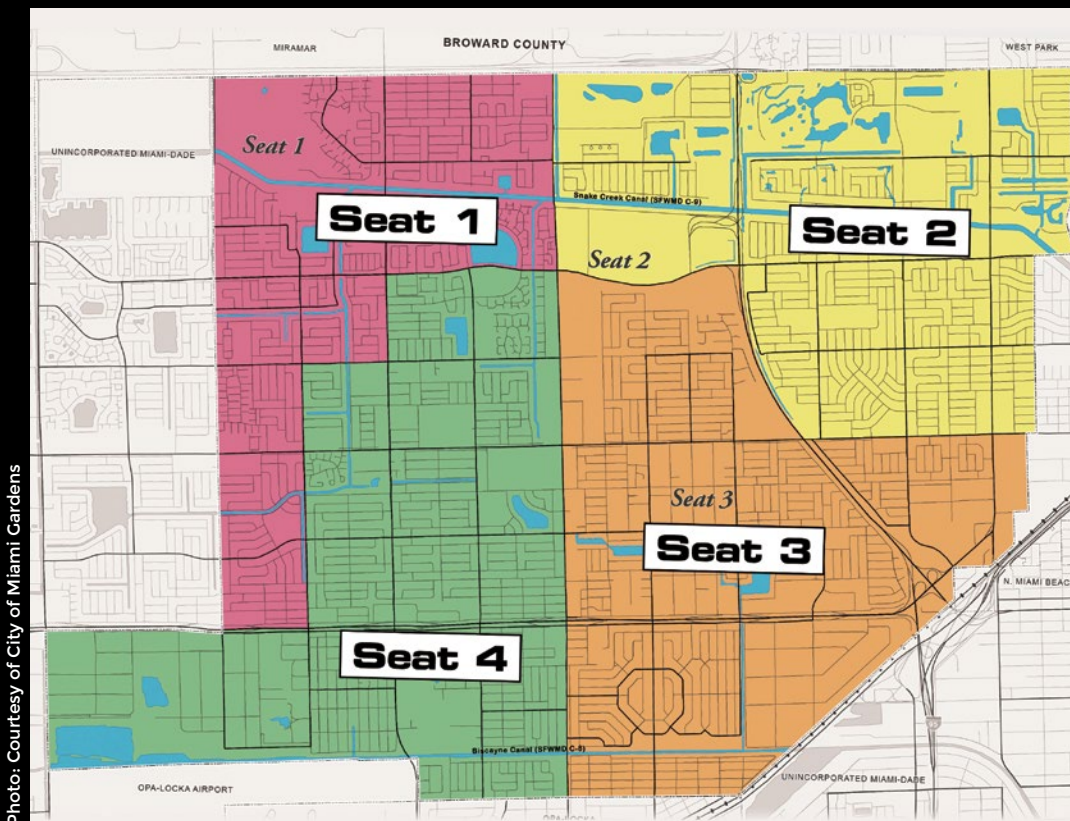


Photo: Courtesy of City of Miami Gardens

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

► Supporters of incorporation, circa 2003.



Photo: Courtesy of The Saturday

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.

### 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.

### January 22, 2003

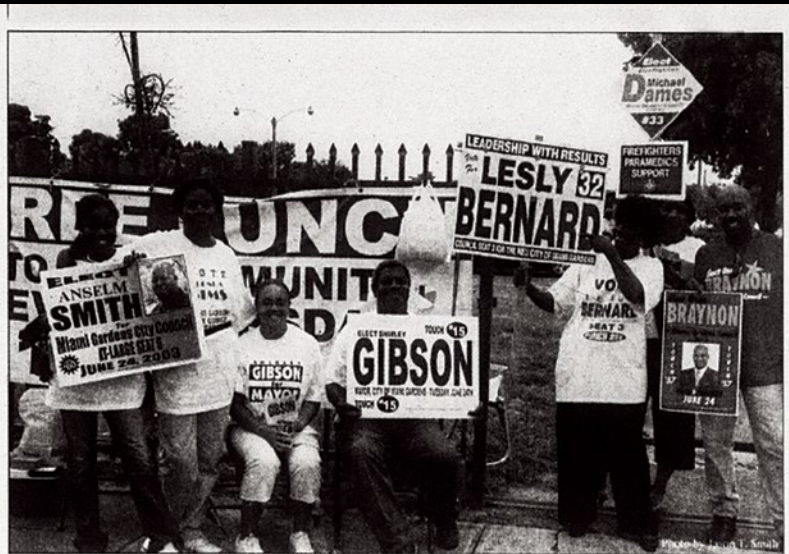
Residents meet to discuss the proposed City and special election, with more than 500 people present.

### January 28, 2003

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



Photo: Courtesy of The Miami Times



Campaigners hold up signs advertising various candidates Tuesday at the Miami Gardens Church of Christ.

## 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 Culmer and Mayda Muela 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 Miami Gardens. 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.

## City of Miami Gardens Swears In Its First Elected Officials



"I now pledge to you, constancy, commitment, integrity and honesty" said newly elected Mayor Shirley Gibson. "The business is now the business of the people. The agenda is the agenda of the 100,000-plus residents who live here. I am committed to building a first class city."

So the official leadership of the new City of Miami Gardens begins. Mayor Shirley Gibson and the six council members: Aaron Campbell, Jr. (District Seat 1), Barbara Watson (District Seat 2), Audrey J. King (District Seat 3), Melvin L. Bratton (District Seat 4), Sharon Pritchett (District Seat 5), and Oscar Braynon II (District Seat 6) were officially sworn into office at the city's first installation ceremony on Wednesday night, July 23rd, at Miami-Norland Senior High School. Miami Gardens was incorporated on May 13, 2003.

Administering the oath of office was the Honorable Michael L. Chavira, Circuit Court Judge, Eleventh Judicial Circuit of Florida. Mayor Gibson, in her remarks to the outdoor-crowded audience of nearly 1,000 well-

Applause by supporters in the audience for each council member grew each time their name was announced. And they each lived up to the overwhelming support in their remarks, each expressing their heartfelt thanks to the voters and all of their supporters, plus more.

Referring to his Dolly Ward, Councilman Aaron Campbell, Jr. declared his comments to the residents and his colleagues, to be "in agreement of the same mind and with the same purpose. We've got to do this to make this city work."

Councilwoman Barbara Watson thanked the citizens for their support and commitment. "Though it has been a hard road, we go forth in victory, with God's grace, we will all thrive together," Watson said.

Councilwoman Audrey J. King pledged to the citizens that, "You have a council who is ready, able and willing to do everything that needs to be done. We are going to do it, and we are going to do it right—the very first time. So, together we can," King said.

From left to right: Miami-Dade Commissioner Betty T. Ferguson (at podium) and Miami Gardens Councilmembers (seated) Councilman Aaron Campbell, Jr., 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.

Barnes, Holahan Councilman Steve Bova; Ruby Morton representing State Rep. Wilbert T. Holloway; M. Athole Bange, Miami's first Black Commissioner; former Miami-Dade County Commissioner Miguel de la Piedad; Sue McIntire, League of Cities executive director; and Terry Cason, North Dade Chamber of Commerce president.

Commissioner Ferguson noted the evening as a celebration and a swearing in, and a celebration it was, beginning with the presentation of colors by the Miami-Dade Honor Guard and the Florida State Guard.

Mayor Gibson's pastor, Bishop Billy Bailey, of New Vine Fellowship Praise and Worship Center, inspired the audience in his emotional invocation: "Be grateful to us, and be grateful to our mayor and council members. Grant them wisdom to serve the citizens of this city. Let us be blessed with righteous leaders." Bishop Bailey was joined by his wife, Pastor Catherine Bailey.

Mr. Willie Q. Odom, rendered a special reading on "How it feels to be colored," outlined



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, Jr., Seat 1, Councilwoman Barbara Watson, Seat 2, Councilwoman Audrey King, Seat 3, Mayor Shirley Gibson, Councilman Melvin L. Bratton, Sr., 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.**

## 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.



► The City's first Charter Officers: City Manager, Dr. Danny O. Crew (2004 - 2013), City Attorney Sonja K. Dickens (2004 - present), City Clerk Ronetta Taylor (2003 - 2018).

Photos: 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.**



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.

# May 13, 2003

The City of Miami Gardens is officially incorporated



## July 23, 2003

Shirley Gibson and the elected first Council of Aaron Campbell, Jr., Sharon Pritchett, Barbara Watson, Audrey King, Melvin L. Bratton, Sr. and Oscar Braynon, II are officially sworn in.

## October 2003 - February 2004

Miami Gardens appoints its first Charter Officers: City Manager, Danny O. Crew, Attorney, Sonja K. Dickens, and Clerk, Ronetta Taylor.

## 2004

Designed by Walter C. Harry in 1964, the historical Sunshine State Arch is incorporated into the City's new seal.



# 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**



Photo: Courtesy of City of Miami Gardens

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.

The City Council took a practical approach to addressing these core areas. Melvin L. Bratton, Sr. recalls 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.

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 in 2007.



Photo: Courtesy of City of Miami Gardens

◀ 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.



Photo: Courtesy of Shirley Gibson

◀ 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.

**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 XLII takes place at Dolphin Stadium.

**December 16, 2007**

Miami Gardens Police Department is established.



## 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.

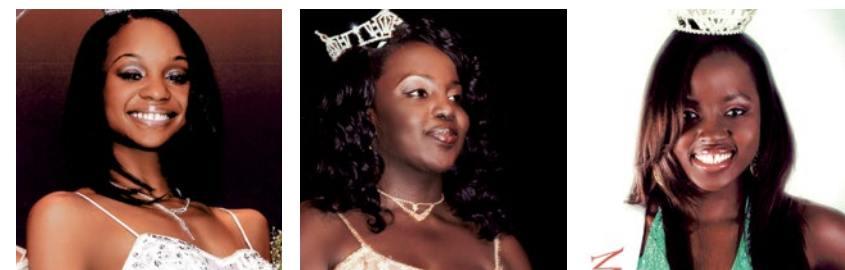
Miami Gardens was propelled onto the world stage on February 4, 2007, when Dolphin Stadium hosted Super Bowl XLI, its first Super Bowl Championship since the creation of Miami Gardens. Florida's largest Black-majority City was the perfect locale as, for the first time in NFL history, two teams led by 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.



Photo: Courtesy of City of Miami Gardens

◀ Promotional material for the first Jazz in the Gardens event in 2006.

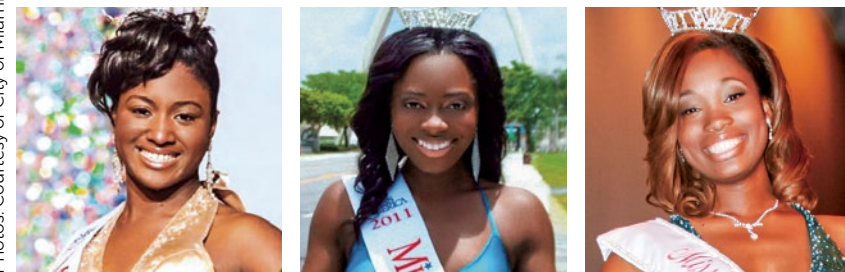
### MISS MIAMI GARDENS CONTEST WINNERS



▲ Chinna Abel

▲ Ingrid Louis

▲ Rosie Justilien



▲ Abigail Williams

▲ Janey Tate

▲ Shantel Chester

Photos: Courtesy of City of Miami Gardens



Photo: REUTERS / Alamy Stock Photo

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

## 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.

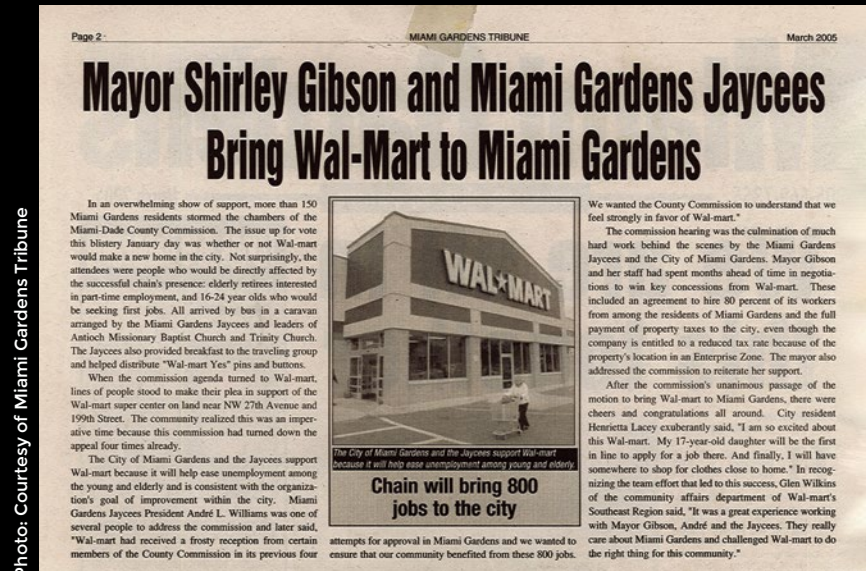


Photo: Courtesy of Miami Gardens Tribune

◀ 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.



Photo: Courtesy of Community Newspapers, Miami Gardens

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

## 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.



◀ Former Councilmembers Ulysses Harvard and Andre Williams.

## 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.

### 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.

### 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.



# 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)

When the time came for a new Mayor to be elected, the City of Miami Gardens was at a crossroads. The first Council, led by Mayor Shirley Gibson, had laid a strong foundation and launched some of the City's flagship programs. But some still expected Miami Gardens to fail, and the next set of leaders had work to do to prove them wrong. Fortunately, the new Council had an irrepresible, pragmatic leader and members who were ready to take up the challenge.

## A NEW LEADER AND A NEW COUNCIL

Born and raised in Miami Gardens, Oliver G. Gilbert, III had long been involved in the community at a personal level. The people in his neighborhood, he reflected, always seemed to enjoy each other's company.

The tenacious lawyer and prosecutor specialized in business, municipal affairs and economic development, preparing him with business acumen, leadership and passion for the role that lay ahead. Gilbert was appointed to the City Council in 2008, stepping in for Oscar Braynon, II when he became a State Representative. He was then elected in 2008 by popular vote and again in 2010 before winning the mayoral race in 2012.

The Council he led included Rodney Harris, David Williams, Jr., Lisa Davis, Erhabor Ighodaro, Ph.D. (appointed to replace Andre Williams when he resigned to run for state office), Felicia Robinson and Lillie Q. Odom.

While building on the work of its predecessor, this second Council charted its own ambitious path. Gilbert, City Manager Cameron D. Benson and the City's new leadership believed creating a strong economic infrastructure, promoting community development and increasing public safety would lead to thriving businesses, resources, public spaces and quality of life. Together, they would create a grand vision and strategy for Miami Gardens' growth and evolution.

► 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.

## 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



Photo: Courtesy of City of Miami Gardens

▲ City Manager  
Cameron D. Benson



Photos: 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*

**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.

**February 21, 2014**

The Jessie Trice Community Health Center opens.

**June 3, 2014**

The new Miami Gardens Municipal Complex opens.

**June 1, 2015**

The Miami Gardens Express, a free trolley system, is established.



## 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 L. 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 Ighodaro, 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-



▲ Mayor Rodney Harris at Rolling Oaks Park groundbreaking ceremony.

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



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

◀ Former Mayors Shirley Gibson (left) and Oliver C. 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 Ighodaro, 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

► Jessie Trice Community Health Systems named their Miami Gardens location in honor of former District 1 County Commissioner Barbara J. Jordan.



Photo: David I. Muir (Island Syndicate)

► Mayor Harris and Councilmembers at the launch of the On Track Program where Formula One committed \$500,000 to help support local small businesses in Miami Gardens.



Photo: Courtesy of City of Miami Gardens

#### 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 Ighodaro 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.





► 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.

► 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.



► 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.



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



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



► 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.



Photo: Courtesy of Blenaine 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 Blenaine Studio



Photo: Courtesy of Blenaine Studio

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

Lorna's Caribbean & American Grill is just one of many local ethnic dining options based in the City.



Photo: Courtesy of Blenaine Studio

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 Miami Dolphins



Photo: Courtesy of Blenaine 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.



# Where You Want to Be People • Resources • Community

A cornerstone priority for Miami Gardens is to improve its residents' quality of life by enhancing their physical environment and by creating venues for engagement and interaction.

The City has committed to upgrading all nineteen of its recreational facilities and parks, ensuring they are clean and accessible. To connect potential shoppers with small and micro businesses without brick-and-mortar locations, Vice Mayor Katrina Wilson created the Miami Gardens Street Fair and Marketplace.

Health initiatives are also important to the community. The Live Healthy Miami Gardens program advocates for increased access to mental health resources, nutritious food, physical activity, healthcare for all and awareness



▲ A police vehicle wrapped for Breast Cancer Awareness Month.



▲ 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.



▲ 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 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.

## 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

**M**iami 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



Photo: Courtesy of Miami Dolphins

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

achievements. As part of Formula One's partnership with the City, the FI 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 FI 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.



Photo: Courtesy of Florida Memorial University

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



Photo: David I. Muir (Island Syndicate)

▲ St Thomas University serves a diverse student population.

## Entertainment Destination



Photo: David I. Muir (Island Syndicate)

▲ Salsa dancing at Yarumba Restaurant & Lounge.

**T**he 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.



Photo: David I. Muir (Island Syndicate)

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



Photo: David I. Muir (Island Syndicate)

▲ 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 FI 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



Photo: David I. Muir (Island Syndicate)

▲ Event goers enjoying another amazing event, 2015.

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

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

# Entertainment Destination Rolling Loud

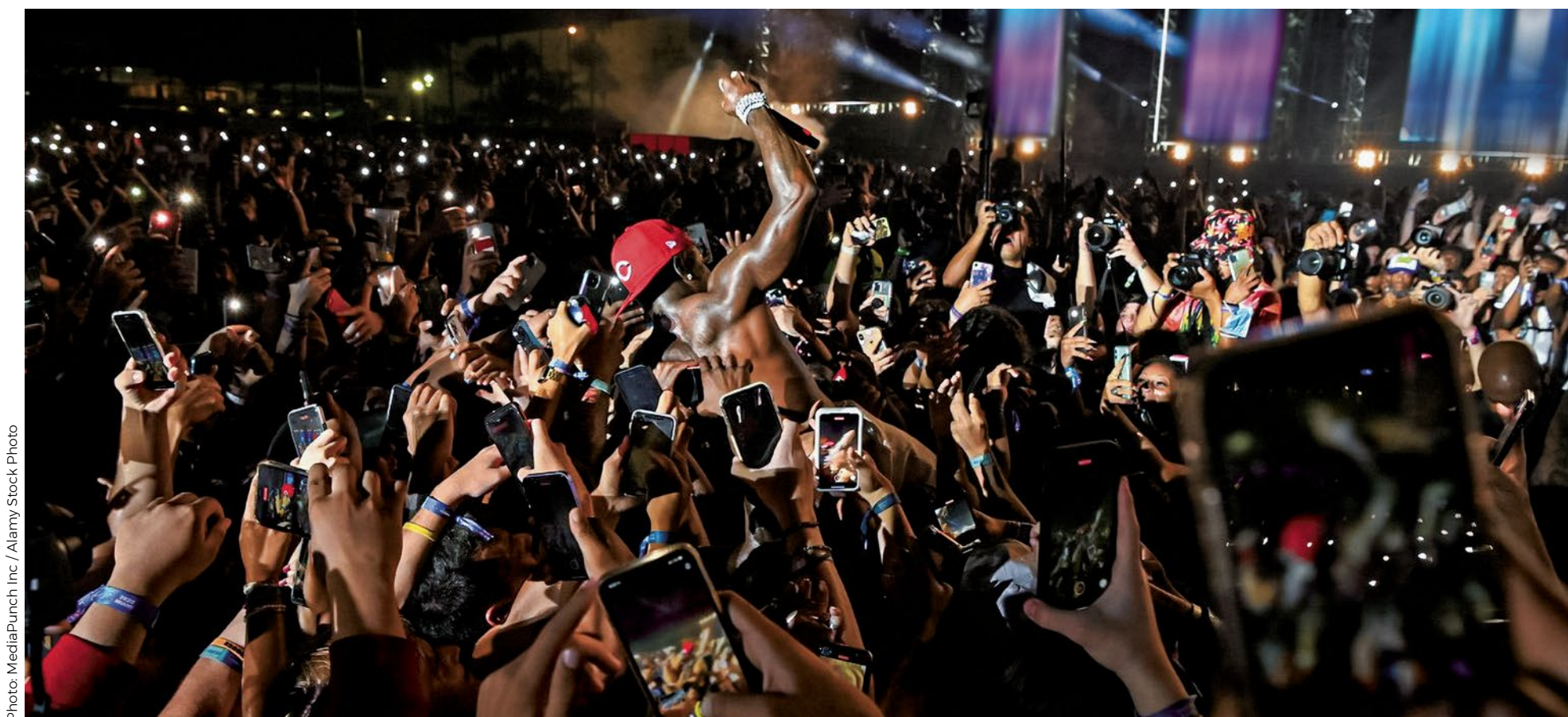


Photo: MediaPunch Inc. / Alamy Stock Photo

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

Three 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 SoundCloud 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.

**March 25, 2006**

Jazz is 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.

**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

**J**oe 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 SuperBowl 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.



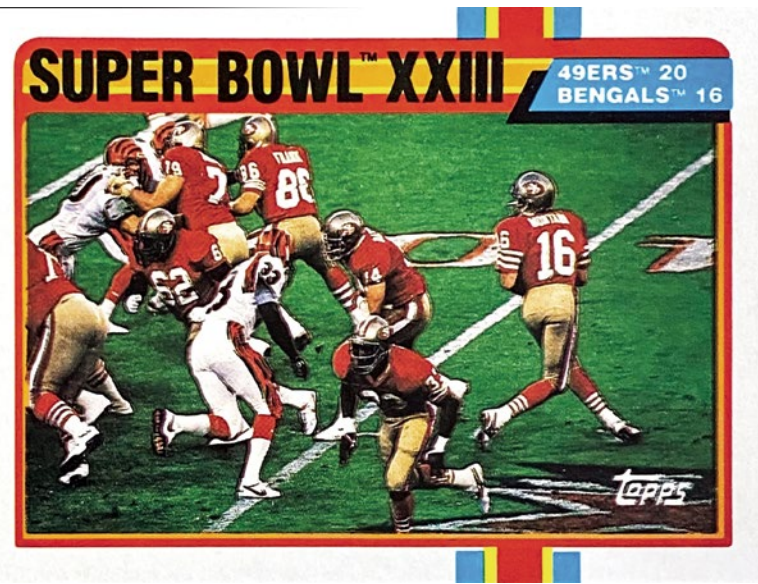
▲ Dan Marino plays with the Miami Dolphins.

Photo: Rich Kane Photography / Alamy Stock Photo



Photo: REUTERS / Alamy Stock Photo

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



◀ This 1989 postcard promoted the area's first Super Bowl at the former Joe Robbie Stadium.

**1987**

Joe Robbie Stadium is built for the Miami Dolphins.

**February 4, 2007**

Prince performs at Super Bowl XLI.

# Entertainment Destination College Football

► The Michigan Wolverines prepare to take the field at the start of the Capital One Orange Bowl NCAA 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.

**F**ootball 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.



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.



Photos: Courtesy of Bienaime Studio

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

**December 31, 1996**

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

**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



▲ Rwandan driver Naomi Schiff (second left) and Mercedes-AMG Petronas team driver Lewis Hamilton (right) are presented with a Miami Dolphins jersey by the late executive Jason Jenkins (left) and CEO Tom Garfinkel.

Photo: Independent Photo Agency / Alamy Stock Photo



▲ Ferrari's racer, Charles Leclerc, lines up at the inaugural Miami Grand Prix, 2022.

Photo: Courtesy of Miami Dolphins



▲ Miami Gardens kids enjoying the F1 in Schools program.

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 Dionne "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.

### 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.

### 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 Moffy / 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.



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

▲ City Councilmembers at the 2022 Veterans Day Celebration.

# 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,

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.

► 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 Buccaneer Park.



Photo: Courtesy of Councilwoman Shannon Campbell

**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.

### ▼ **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)



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.

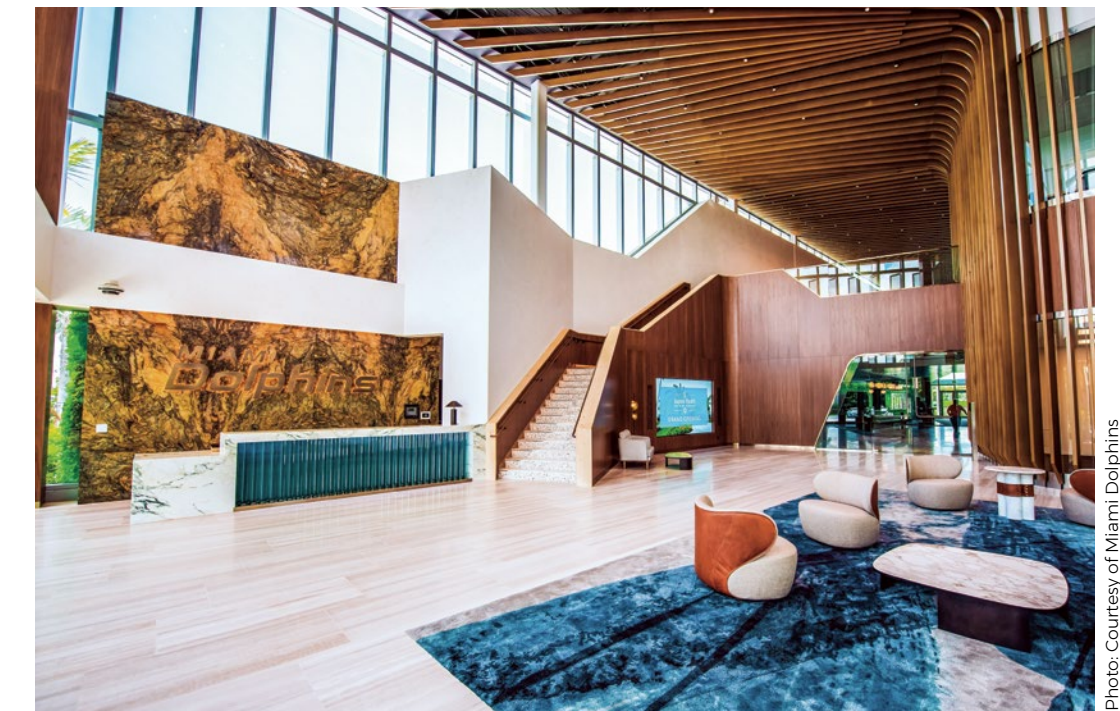


Photo: Courtesy of Miami Dolphins

### ▲ **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.







Photo: Courtesy of City of Miami Gardens

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



Photo: Courtesy of Blenaine Studio

▲ 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,



Photos: 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 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.



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Commissioners Chairman Oliver G. Gilbert, III

Former Mayor Shirley Gibson

Former Commissioner Betty Ferguson

Former Councilwoman Lillie Q. Odom

Former Councilman Melvin L. Bratton, Sr.

Former Councilman Aaron Campbell, Jr.

Former Councilman David Williams, Jr.

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Our dedicated City staff

The Miami Gardens business community

The people of Miami Gardens

The publishing team at 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.

# Credits

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# Miami Gardens Councilmembers

## 2003 - 2023

### 2003

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

### 2005

<b>Oscar Braynon, II</b>	Vice Mayor, Citywide Seat 6
<b>Ulysses Harvard</b>	Seat 3 (appointed)

### 2006

<b>André Williams</b>	Seat 3
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### 2007

<b>Barbara Watson</b>	Vice Mayor, Seat 2
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### 2008

<b>Oliver G. Gilbert, III</b>	Citywide Seat 6 (appointed)
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### 2009

<b>Oliver G. Gilbert, III</b>	Vice Mayor, Citywide Seat 6
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### 2010

<b>Aaron Campbell, Jr.</b>	Vice Mayor, Seat 1
<b>Lisa Davis</b>	Seat 2
<b>Felicia Robinson</b>	Seat 4

### 2012

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

### 2014

<b>Felicia Robinson</b>	Vice Mayor, Seat 4
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### 2016

<b>Erhabor Ighodaro, Ph. D.</b>	Vice Mayor, Citywide Seat 6
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### 2018

<b>Rodney Harris</b>	Vice Mayor, Seat 3
<b>Reggie Leon</b>	Seat 2
<b>Katrina Wilson</b>	Seat 4

### 2020

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

### 2022

<b>Katrina Wilson</b>	Vice Mayor, Seat 4
<b>Reggie Leon</b>	Seat 2
<b>Robert Stephens, III</b>	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.

