



On The Fast Track (*Continuation*)

NORTHERN EXPOSURE

Still, high housing prices are pushing residents northward in the city. One restaurant banking on a South Beach exodus is North Beach's Scrap Bar and Smokehouse on 71st Street, the center of a district many know as Little Buenos Aires. Owner John Osterlind, who relocated to North Beach from Boston to open the bar last year, wanted to be a part of what he sees as a growing neighborhood.

"We opened our doors and we had a crowd," Osterlind says.

He was following Miami Beach's development in a gradual progression from south to north, EWM realtor Tomlinson says.

"When I first moved here in 1992 we wouldn't go south of Fifth Street. Now it's the most expensive condo living in Miami Beach," he says. **"Since everything is so expensive down there, the natural direction of things is pushing north." With South Beach and Mid-beach almost fully developed, Tomlinson says North Beach is "a neighborhood in transition."**

The Scrap Bar, for instance, is filled with local businesspeople during the afternoons and local residents at night. It brings live music to the area and caters high-profile events at North Beach developments such as Canyon Ranch, a job borne of Canyon Ranch management and employees' frequent visits to the restaurant.

That community support is what many say is driving a revitalization of the once-neglected area. Daniel Veitia, incoming president of the North Beach Development Corp. (NBDC), a non-profit community development organization, says the neighborhood vibe and community spirit is key to North Beach's success.

The Scrap Bar is one of many local shops doing bustling business these days, but it was not always that way. North Beach was once seen as a run-down and sometimes dangerous part of Miami Beach.

"There were high drug sales, there was gang activity. ... You didn't go to the gas station in North Beach," Veitia says. "You went from your home, you drove through North Beach and as soon as you crossed 63rd Street, okay, you unlock your doors, you roll down your windows."

While crime levels have dropped during the last eight to 10 years, North Beach's property values have risen dramatically in just the past two or three years. An influx of multi-million-dollar real estate developments includes Canyon Ranch Living — a multi-building condo- hotel on Collins Avenue and 68th Street with prices starting at \$700,000, Aqua Island Homes on Allison Island and Privata Townhomes in the exclusive Normandy Shores neighborhood.

In fact, for the first time in decades residential property values in North Beach are equaling or surpassing those of the once more widely accepted neighborhood of mid-beach. "That's been a major milestone," says Veitia, who is also a realtor with EWM and specializes in North Beach.

Randall Robinson, executive director of the NBDC, agrees that the upward flow of property values is furthering the push for revitalization as more families settle in the neighborhood and embrace its diversity, rather than putting up gates to separate themselves from the rest of the community.

Veitia says the lag time between the development of other parts of Miami Beach and that of the northern region may have actually given North Beach a leg up, allowing for a development plan. According to both Veitia and Robinson, the city of Miami Beach already had a long-term plan for the revitalization of 71st Street as a main retail drag when WSG Development Company proposed Canyon Ranch Living just a block away.

"We knew [the interest] would be coming and that's why North Beach is so well planned," says Veitia, who calls Canyon Ranch "the catalyst" for the revitalization.

Another benefit of the slow and steady plan is a more focused approach to preserving the historic landmarks that dot Collins Avenue in that area, which is nationally recognized as a center for MiMo (Miami Modern) style. Robinson, who is credited with coining the term MiMo and has authored books on the style, says he hopes to see a combination of modern and historic as the community builds up over the next decade.

While they are confident about the neighborhood's architectural future, both Robinson and Veitia are worried about its retail future. As property values rise and development springs up, both feel it is only a matter of time before mass-market retail replaces mom-and-pop storefronts. They are quick to say, however, that some mass-market retail is a positive, bringing a high-end price point and more sophisticated buyer to the area.

"I see one of my goals as president of the NBDC to ensure that diversity remains ... without blocking the natural evolution of the area," Veitia says.

Robinson agrees that there are ways of maintaining that balance, and cites the original master plans for Lincoln Road as inspiration. "The main part of Lincoln Road is where the big names would go, but you would still have opportunity on the lower-rent side streets for that kind of local business," he says. "There are ways of working at it."

That said, they do admit that they are not striving to turn North Beach into another South Beach, preferring instead to cater to the local community rather than a stream of seasonal buyers and tourists. The eventual North Beach commercial corridor, on and around 71st Street, will be planned with an eye toward just that.

"It's so exciting to be able to be a part of a community where ... Randall and I will walk down the street and we'll know everybody," Veitia says. "That can't happen on South Beach."

Change, though is inevitable.

"In 2007 you're going to see a marked change in North Beach," says Tomlinson of the high-end developments and family-oriented town homes that should rise during the next year.

And as the community grows and others take notice, Veitia remains cautiously optimistic about his neighborhood's evolution.

"Although the city wants to revitalize it, it takes a relationship between the government and the private sector to make it happen," he says.

That partnership would do well, according to most, to look closely at what evolves on Miami Beach as a whole. Developers and business owners agree that the urbanization of the city is a work in progress.

Go-Go owner De Stefano points to cities such as Boston and Buenos Aires (where she has lived) as areas where "there's a really good mix of residential and commercial and that interchange is much more fluid." In Miami Beach, she says, "They haven't achieved the right blend yet."

<http://www.southfloridaceo.com/insight150.html>