

# NEIGHBORS

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The Miami Herald



## the muse was mail

The Voices for Children Foundation auctioned off mailboxes decorated by local artists at an event in **South Miami** on Thursday. The foundation's Carolina Schwarz shows off a few creations. **PAGE 12**

NURI VALLBONA / MIAMI HERALD STAFF

### MIAMI-DADE

A philanthropist donates more than \$1 million to the Miami Lighthouse for the Blind to help expand its services, **3**

### KEY BISCAIYNE

Early voting starts Monday in the Key Biscayne town council race in which redevelopment and the zoning code are dominating issues, **6**

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## SOAPBOX

## Release choke hold on candidates' views

We don't understand why the attorneys working for the Village of Key Biscayne — whose salary is paid by us, the homeowners, and not the administration or a select group of proponents or opponents of the Sonesta redevelopment project — would request that candidates running for council not address this issue. Don't we have the right to know where exactly our government representatives stand on issues before we vote for them?

At present, the Sonesta redevelopment project is the village's biggest issue of contention. It will make a major impact on our tax base as well as our fellow residents in the neighboring Holiday Colony. It will impact our merchants just as it will impact our ocean breezes.

It is against the spirit of this great country and the political history of the village to choke council members' opinions over a zoning issue. When the size of the community center

was proposed, it was clear where council candidates stood. Why should it be any different now? It is time to release the choke hold and return freedom of speech to our future representatives. We want and deserve to know where they stand on this issue and how far they will go with a compromise now and in the future.

**DR. MATHIAS  
LICHTENHELD  
KEY BISCAIYNE**

### SOUTH MIAMI ELECTED OFFICIALS PERPETUATE DECEPTION

A month ago, the county commission extended South Miami's Community Redevelopment Agency, or CRA, with little scrutiny. A new line of credit of \$2.7 million was also approved. The CRA will purchase properties and build a development which is to include affordable businesses and housing.

The properties were "flipped" to the CRA for 75 percent more than their cost two years ago, and the city agreed to pay legal fees to clear the titles. At the Oct. 17 commission meeting, it was announced that the price of some of the properties "just went up." There is no pro forma, and it is not known how many more tax dollars are needed to complete the project.

Local people who are serious about owning a business or home in a charming, historic, mostly black community cannot make any plans as the ultimate cost is unavailable. The CRA also purchased 13 single home properties.

The majority of these stand vacant and are bogged down with "dirty" titles. Two other properties were transferred to a local housing agency to build affordable homes. Seven years after the initial contract was signed, partially built construction on the lots have become eyesores. Many families in the CRA district were evicted to make room for CRA projects. To date, there is no public, transparent registry for people to sign up and qualify for any benefits the agency offers. That system

appears based on favoritism.

Over \$5 million was spent already. Recently the CRA gave \$15,000 to Lee Park Condos for a sprinkler system and flower beds. The owners were not asked for proof of need. Lee Park has several absentee landlords.

South Miami does not go after other state and federal programs but takes money from local taxpayers to run the CRA. From its inception, CRA projects were to be plan-certain, time-certain and cost-certain. None of these rules is adhered to. By their endorsements, many local elected officials perpetuate deception of taxpayers.

To date, the CRA has been nothing but a veiled way to gentrify a neighborhood. The residents of the CRA district are already fortunate to pay low taxes because of Save Our Home rules.

I wish they would take charge of their own destiny and keep their gem of a neighborhood for themselves and keep counterproductive government programs out.

**YVONNE BECKMAN  
SOUTH MIAMI**

### COCONUT GROVE HOME DEPOT FAILED TO FOLLOW THE LAW

This will serve as a response to the fears that Home Depot will retrofit into the former Kmart and we will lose Walgreens and Milams.

First and foremost, Walgreens purchased the Oil Can Change on the corner of Bird and U.S. 1, so there is no concern for the drugstore — it will be 150 feet away. Walgreens has always wanted a drive-through pharmacy, and Home Depot never allowed sufficient space for that.

Home Depot will not be retrofitting into the Kmart space because of its failure to comply with the law passed well in advance of the filing of the retrofit plans with the city. The law is plain and clear on this. There is no argument for grandfathering the Kmart Certificate of Use, because the Kmart Certificate of Use lapsed more than six months ago and Home Depot did not attempt to maintain the use.

The Max Strang plan, which "few" have chosen to call the community plan is the

only pending permit Home Depot has arguable rights to for utilization of this site, and it must overcome the zoning board's denial of the city administration's granting of the permit. The Max Strang plan may become the community plan when Home Depot does away with the use of contractors and their day laborers and when they respect the trees intended to be destroyed that were appealed by the Treeman Trust. There are other necessary accommodations that must be made, including the proper storage of inflammable liquids as well as the storage of pesticides and other toxic material next to Bridgeport Avenue. The fire last Sunday morning at Grove Gate, which received little publicity, clearly illustrates the need to protect the neighborhood from the storage of the explosive materials as well as the potentially lethal toxic materials.

What if Home Depot were operating and these inflammables caused a cascade effect and brought toxic materials over the wall of Home Depot? There are moms and dads on Bridgeport with infants and toddlers who deserve a heck of a lot better of this so-called community plan, a plan that fails to address the storage of significant quantities of the toxic substances.

You may remember reading of the fire at a Home Depot in Boston that brought a cloud of toxic material to the neighbors for days. We do not want to risk that in the Grove.

There is still work to be done, but, all of you out there, please take stock that Home Depot failed to follow the law. Why? Those reasons could be anyone's guess.

Keep in mind the Oct. 12 fundraiser for Linda Haskins, which Home Depot lawyers hosted where they raised more than \$250,000.

When they began to retrofit, the city failed to make them follow the law. A judge will easily find they failed to follow the law and they will lose their permit to retrofit.

**MARC SARNOFF  
COCONUT GROVE**

*Editor's note: Marc Sarnoff is a candidate for the District 2 Miami City Commission seat.*

## ART FOR A CAUSE



ALLISON BEZOLD/FOR THE MIAMI HERALD

Close to 120 pieces of art were auctioned off Thursday night in South Miami to benefit the Voices for Children Foundation, the fundraising arm of the court's Guardian Ad Litem program. Among them were 25 mailboxes decorated by participating artists.