

Memorandum



Date: August 11, 2020

To: Commissioner Javier D. Souto
Miami-Dade County Commission

From: Adrienne Burke, AICP, Esq., Principal Planner, Office of Historic Preservation
Department of Regulatory and Economic Resources

CC: Sarah Cody, Chief, Office of Historic Preservation
Department of Regulatory and Economic Resources

Subject: History of the Westchester Neighborhood

Per your request, please find the following information related to the history of the Westchester neighborhood. The information is provided in a narrative below, and in a visual format as attached to this memo.

Westchester is a Census Designated Place (CDP) in the United States census. The CDP boundaries of Westchester are: 8th Street/Tamiami Trail (north), SW 40th Street/Bird Road (south), Palmetto Expressway/826 (east), and SW 117th Avenue (west). A map of the CDP boundaries is attached to this memo. However, Google Maps and community/anecdotal boundaries place the western boundary at 87th Avenue.

The early origins of Westchester are like many areas of Miami-Dade County, in which land was not able to be developed in the 19th century. The land was deemed ineligible under the 1862 Homestead Act, as it was subject to seasonal rains and flooding. Canal construction changed this, and by the 1920s, the area was dry land. The 1920s was the quintessential land boom era in South Florida; however, during this time, Westchester only appears to have had one residential subdivision created - Olympic Heights in 1924.

The area was largely rural into the 1930s and 1940s, with two notable developments as the exception. Tropical Park horse racetrack was a popular attraction in the area, and the Tamiami Airport was created in the 1940s. It was not until the 1950s that the Westchester we know today began to boom.

It was a 1955 subdivision called Westchester that appears to have kicked off the post-WWII development boom and served as inspiration for the neighborhood name. Throughout the 1960s, many other subdivisions followed to make up what is largely the residential neighborhood we see today: Miracle Manor, Mirador, Westchester Park, Town Park, Coral Park, etc. The area also experienced a growth in commercial development during the same era. New commercial sites included the Tropicaire Drive-In (1949), Bird Bowl (1956), and Westchester Shopping Center (1959).

Another major addition to the area had its origins in 1965 when Florida Senator Robert M. Haverfield introduced Senate Bill 711, which began planning for the development of a state university in Miami. By the late 1960s, the Tamiami Airport had closed. This site was selected for the new Florida International University (FIU), which in 1972 had the largest opening enrollment in U.S. collegiate history with 5,667 students. Today, FIU has a student body of nearly 54,000, among the top ten largest universities in the nation. The Tower at FIU is the former air traffic control tower for Tamiami Airport, and FIU is home to the National Hurricane Center.

The other portion of the former Tamiami Airport is now Tamiami Park, a Miami-Dade County park facility. Home to the Miami-Dade County Fair, other recreational options include baseball, football, swimming, and tennis. The former Tropical Park racetrack is also now a Miami-Dade County park facility. The park opened in 1979, and sees 1,500,000 visitors annually. Visitors can bike, walk, run, utilize the fitness, boxing, or equestrian centers and attend a farmer's market.

Culturally, Westchester tells a unique story. During the late 1950s and early 1960s as Westchester grew, the area attracted Jewish families. Temple Or Olom was established at SW 16 Street and 87 Avenue in a mid-century modern building now known as the "whale church." Anecdotally, it is said the architecture was inspired by the Biblical tale of Jonah and the whale. Rabbi Samuel April was one of the early leaders at the Temple. Additionally, the Westchester Shopping Center featured a Food Fair Kosher Market.

Around the time of the Westchester development boom post-WWII, another educational institution was in the works. When the Diocese of Miami was created, a requirement was that a seminary be founded within the diocese limits. So, in the late 1950s, construction started on St. John Vianney Seminary in the then-booming neighborhood of Westchester. Mary Louise Maytag (of the Maytag appliance family) was a major donor. Other Catholic educational institutions in the neighborhood include St. Brendan Elementary and High School and Christopher Columbus High School. Catholic churches include St. Brendan and St. Agatha.

After the 1960s, Westchester demographics started including more residents of Hispanic or Latino background. Today, Westchester is 92.4% Hispanic or Latino (2018 American Community Survey Data). A popular community gathering spot is at La Carreta on Bird Road. The neighborhood is known for a variety of Hispanic and Latino cuisine including Cuban, Colombian, Salvadoran, Chilean, and Mexican. Musical artist Pitbull attended Coral Park Senior High School. In celebration of Westchester's Hispanic heritage, the Westchester Cultural Arts Center will provide cultural programming and instruction focusing on Hispanic arts and culture.

Today the area is predominantly residential with a mixture of business and institutional uses. However, several legacy businesses and attractions continue in Westchester including: Frankie's Pizza (1955), Bird Bowl (1956), Arbetter's Hot Dogs (1959, current location 1970), Yesterday and Today Records (1981), and Santa's Enchanted Forest (1982).

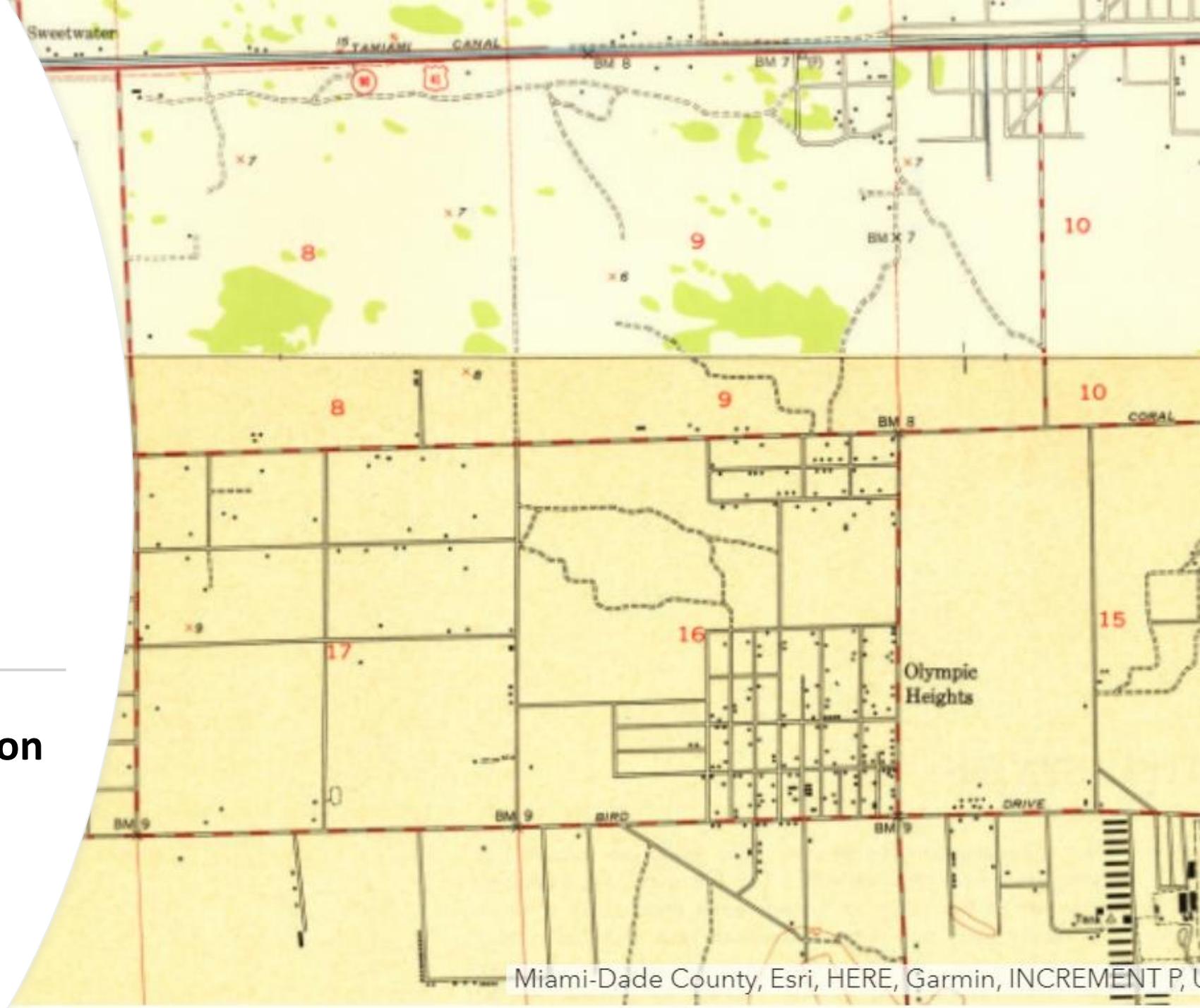
Attachments:

- 1) Map of the Westchester Census Designated Place Boundaries
- 2) Presentation Illustrating Westchester History

**MIAMI-DADE
COUNTY**

History of Westchester

Office of Historic Preservation
August 2020



Orienting Westchester



Census Designated Place Boundaries

- North: 8th Street/Tamiami Trail
- South: SW 40th Street/Bird Road
- East: Palmetto Expressway/826
- West: SW 117th Avenue

Google Maps/Community Boundaries

- West boundary at 87th Avenue

Map: Miami-Dade County Office of Planning Research, 2020;
Image: Miami Herald

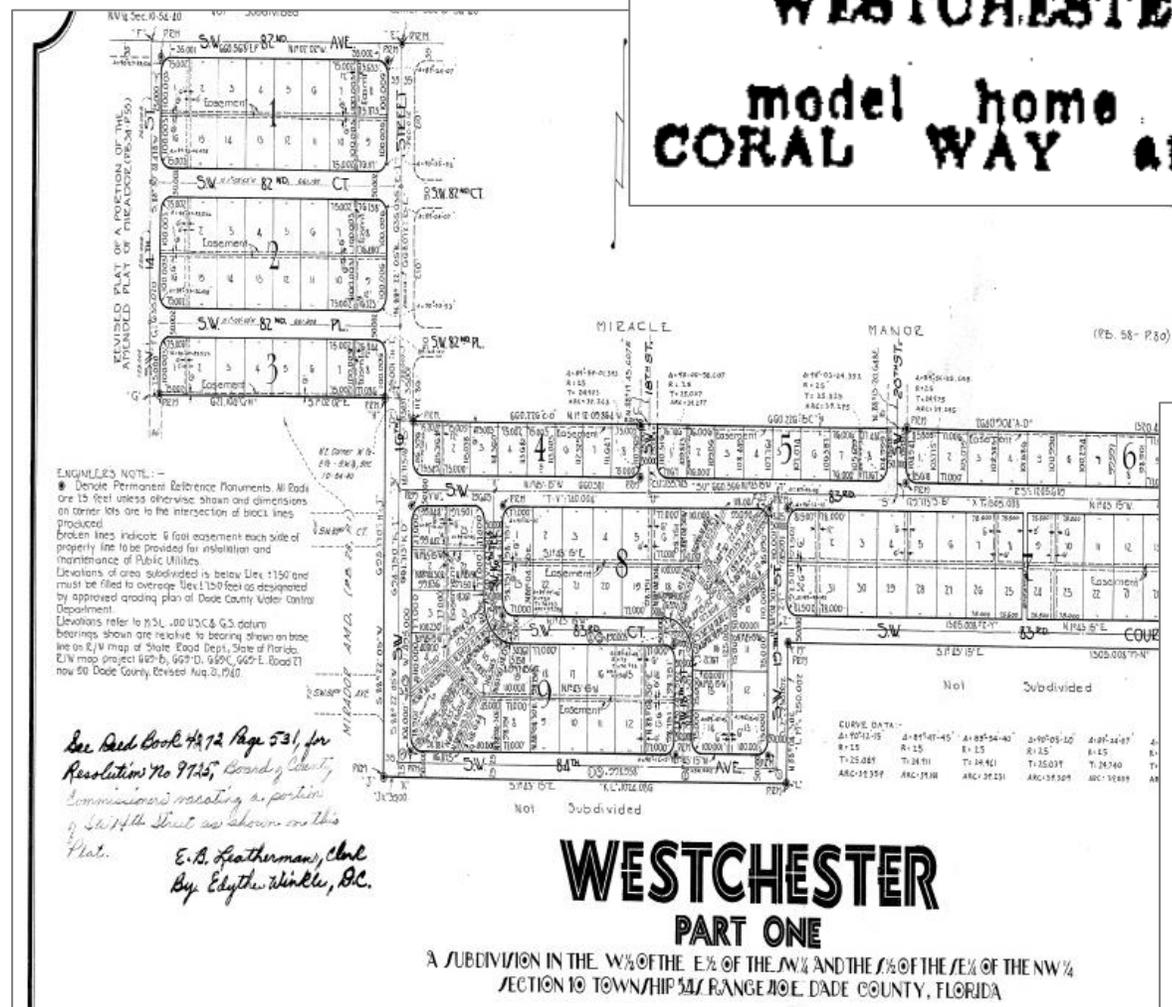
Early Development

- Land deemed ineligible under the Homestead Act of 1862; land was subject to seasonal rains and flooding
- Like other parts of South Florida, canal construction changed this and by the 1920s the area was dry land
- An early subdivision in the area was platted in 1924 – Olympic Heights – but for the most part the area was largely undeveloped as of 1950
- Two notable places included Tropical Park (horse racing) and Tamiami Airport (now FIU and Tamiami Park)
 - Tropical Park is now a Miami-Dade County park facility
 - The Tower at FIU is the former air traffic control tower for Tamiami Airport



MOSS & SON, INC.
 builders of
WESTCHESTER HOMES
 model home open daily
CORAL WAY and 83rd Ave.

1955 subdivision called "Westchester" appears to have kicked off wave of development post-WWII and served as inspiration for the name



YOU'LL BE WAY OUT FRONT WITH

WESTCHESTER

SEE AD IN TODAY'S HOME SECTION

Images: Miami Herald Archives; Plat: Miami-Dade County Clerk Official Records



NOW - AN EXCITING NEW THEATRE
IN THE WESTCHESTER SHOPPING PLAZA

Loew's WESTCHESTER
1700 SEAT
CORAL WAY & GALLOWAY RD - 723-8010

ACRES OF LIGHTED FREE PARKING - ALWAYS ROOM FOR ONE MORE!

BIG

LOEW'S WALL-TO-WALL SCREEN IS R-E-S-L-Y BIG!

EVEN ELEPHANTS WON'T DISTURB YOU. YOU'LL LOVE OUR ROCKER SEATS!

RELAX IN THE SPECIALLY VENTILATED SMOKING LOU!

Easy to reach from all parts of Greater Miami!
Acres of FREE parking!
Rocker Seats!
Smoking Section!
Big screen!
Art gallery!
Stereo sound!

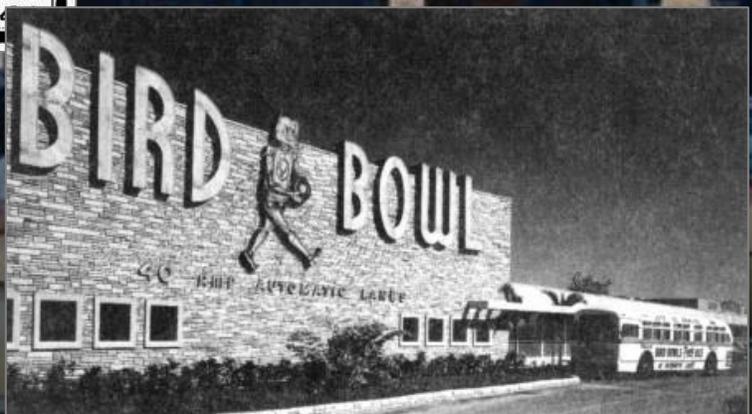
First-Run Showings
FEATURES AT: 2:00-4:30-7:10-9:45 P.M.

THE NIGHT OF THE GENERALS

A continent erupts with violence... and behind it a manhunt explodes!

PETER O'TOOLE-OMAR SHARIF
TOM COURTENAY-DONALD PLEASENCE
JOANNA PETTET-PHILIPPE NOIRET

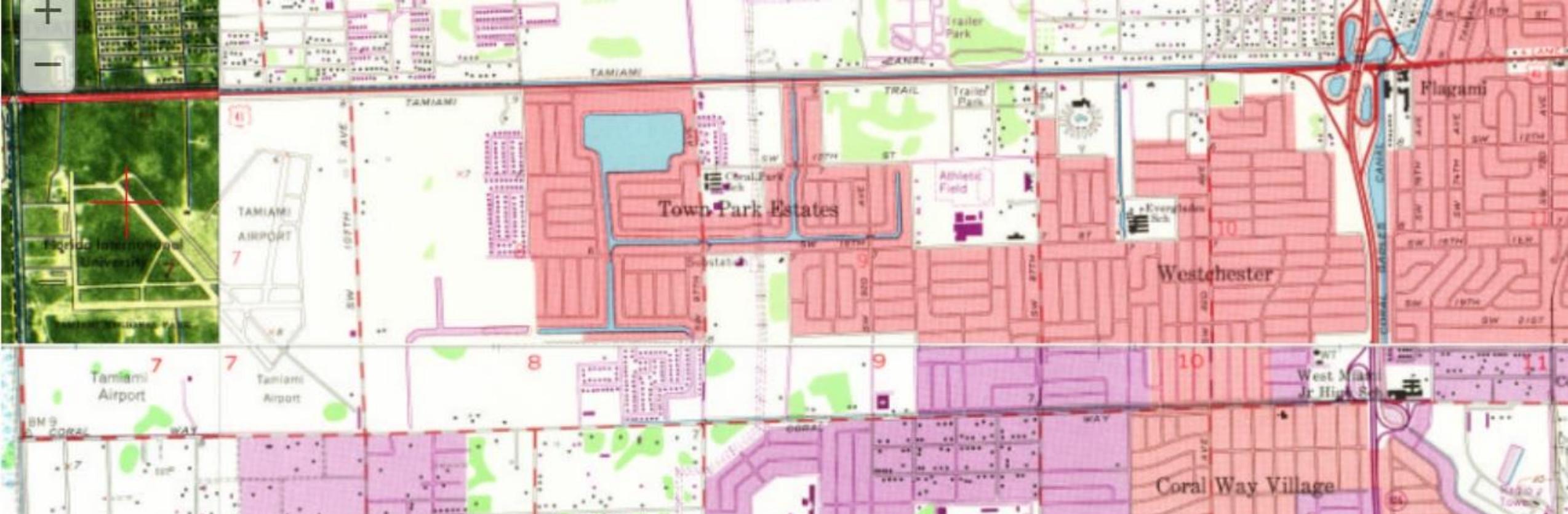
ALSO NOW SHOWING AT Loew's 170th ST Loew's RIVIERA



Westchester Grows

Tropicale Drive-In (1949), Bird Bowl (1956) Westchester Shopping Center (1959)

Theater Ad: Miami Herald Archives; Shopping Center Image: Westchester Miami Fla Facebook page; Tropicale Image: cinematreasures.org; Bird Bowl Image: bowlinghistory.wordpress.com



Westchester Grows

- Throughout the 1960s, many other subdivisions followed to make up what is the largely residential neighborhood you see today: Miracle Manor, Mirador, Westchester Park, Town Park

Map: USGS Historical Map, 1969 via ESRI

Florida International University

- 1965 - Florida Senator Robert M. Haverfield introduced SB711, which would begin planning for the development of a state university in Miami
- Site chosen at former Tamiami Airport, which was established in the 1940s and closed by late 1960s
- 1972 – opening day had 5,667 students - the largest opening enrollment in U.S. collegiate history
- Today - FIU has a student body of nearly 54,000, among the top 10 largest universities in the nation
- Home to the National Hurricane Center



Tropical Park and Tamiami Park

- Tropical Park located on site of former Tropical Park racetrack
 - Opened in 1979
 - 1,500,000 visitors annually
 - Bike, walk, run, fitness center, equestrian stables, boxing center, farmer's market
- Tamiami Park located on site of former Tamiami Airport, south of FIU
 - Tamiami Park is home to the Miami-Dade County Fair
 - Baseball, football, swimming, tennis



Westchester's Jewish Culture

UNDER THE STRICT AND CONSTANT SUPERVISION OF
THE ORTHODOX VAAD HAKASHRUTH OF FLORIDA
RABBI DR. ISAAC HIRSH EYER, DIRECTOR

FOOD FAIR KOSHER MARKETS ARE
BLISSFUL TO GIVE THE BEST QUALITY'S
AT THE LOWEST PRICE ON YOUR MONEY EACH

FOOD FAIR

Strictly ¹²⁷³ Kosher
meat and poultry
Markets

WE SELL
U.S. PRIME
and U.S. CHOICE
MEATS ONLY

OPEN
* Mon. 8 A.M. to 7 P.M.
Tues. 8 A.M. to 6 P.M.
Wed. 8 A.M. to 9 P.M.
Thur. 8 A.M. to 6:30 P.M.

CHANUKAH
feast of the Candles

CLOSED FRIDAY
Quantity
Limits Reserved

Visit our newest Kosher Market . . . now open at
CORAL WAY AND S.W. 87TH AVE.
WESTCHESTER SHOPPING PLAZA

TEMPLE OR OLOM
A CONSERVATIVE CONGREGATION
8755 S.W. 16th STREET
RABBI CANTOR
SAMUEL APRIL GERSHON LEVIN
Register now for Hebrew School, Sunday School,
Youth Groups, Adult Education, Kindergarten
HIGH HOLIDAY TICKETS AVAILABLE
CA 1-9131

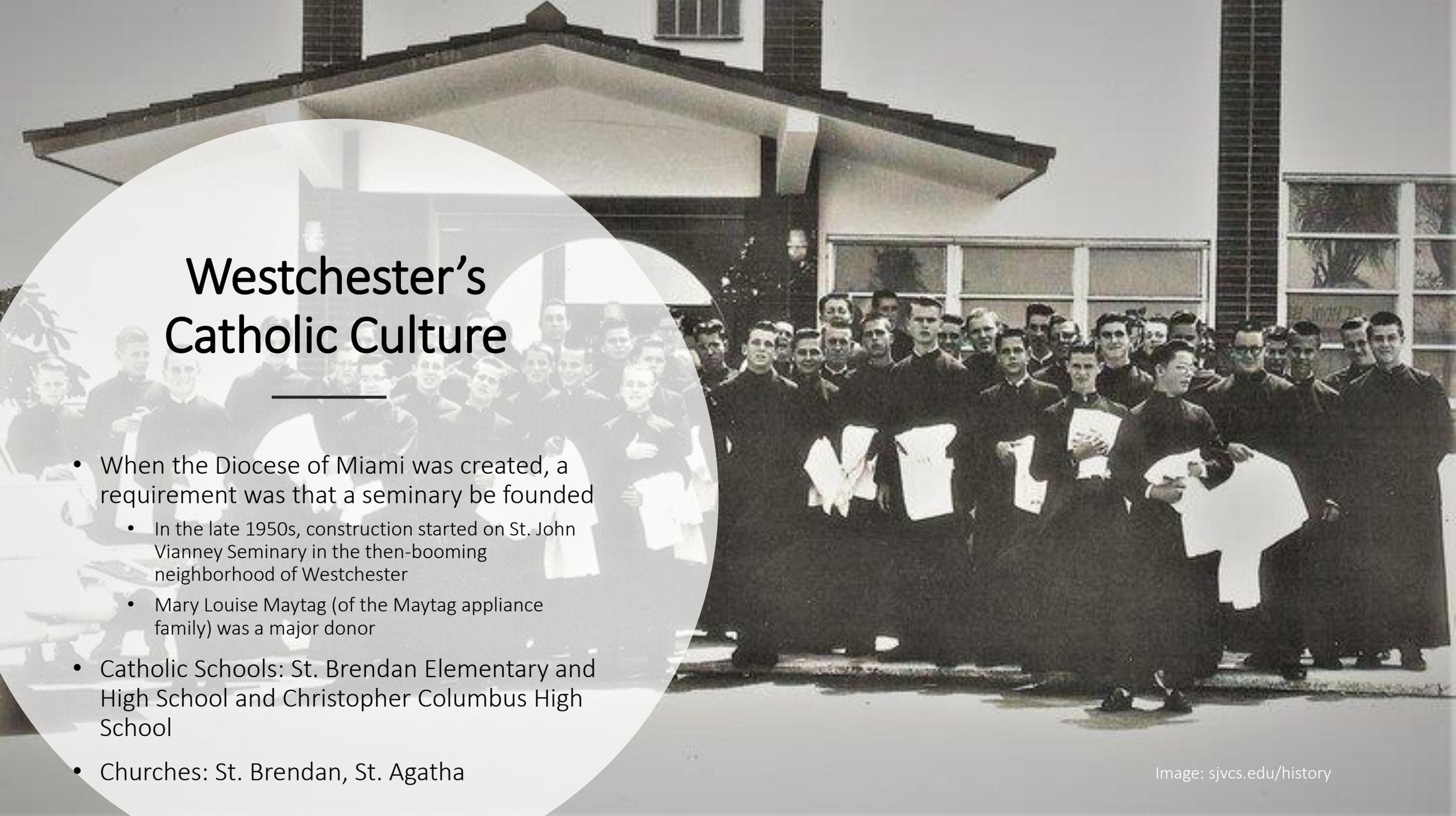
- During the late 1950s and early 1960s as Westchester grew, the area attracted Jewish families
- Temple Or Olom was established at SW 16 Street and 87 Avenue in a mid-century modern building known now as the “whale church”
- Rabbi Samuel April was one of the early leaders at Temple Or Olom
- The Westchester Shopping Plaza featured a Food Fair Kosher Market



Shelvis Stratt Photo by LEWIS McLAIN

Rabbi Samuel April

... 'I am just a struggling rabbi'



Westchester's Catholic Culture

- When the Diocese of Miami was created, a requirement was that a seminary be founded
 - In the late 1950s, construction started on St. John Vianney Seminary in the then-booming neighborhood of Westchester
 - Mary Louise Maytag (of the Maytag appliance family) was a major donor
- Catholic Schools: St. Brendan Elementary and High School and Christopher Columbus High School
- Churches: St. Brendan, St. Agatha

Westchester's Hispanic Culture

- After 1960s, Westchester demographics started including more residents of Hispanic or Latino background. Today, Westchester is 92.4% Hispanic or Latino (2018 American Community Survey Data).
- Popular gathering spot at La Carreta on Bird Road
- Known for variety of Hispanic and Latino cuisine including Cuban, Colombian, Salvadoran, Chilean, Mexican
- Musical artist Pitbull attended Coral Park Senior High School
- Westchester Cultural Arts Center (2020 groundbreaking) will provide cultural programming and instruction focusing on Hispanic arts and culture

Images: Miami Herald (Celebration at La Carreta), Google Maps (Palacio); Miami Dade County website (Cultural Center rendering)



Westchester Legacy Businesses

- Frankie's Pizza (1955)
- Bird Bowl (1956)
- Arbetter's Hot Dogs (1959, current location 1970)
- Yesterday and Today Records (1981)
- Santa's Enchanted Forest (1982)



Office of Historic Preservation

Sarah Cody, Chief

Jeff Ransom, County Archaeologist

Adrienne Burke, Principal Planner

111 NW 1st Street – 12th Floor

Miami, FL 33128

(305) 375-4958

www.miamidade.gov/planning/historic-preservation.asp

Resources:

- Miami-Dade County Clerk
- *Miami Herald* Archives
- *Miami New Times*
- Flashbackmiami.com
- Communitynewspapers.com
- Digitalcommons.fiu.edu/fiu.edu
- As noted in image citations

