

Par for the Course No More

Miami Shores Country Club faces a tough shot from the rough

By **Erik Bojnansky**
BT Senior Writer

For 30 years, Professional Course Management has leased a 130-acre swath of land from the Village of Miami Shores. Known as the Miami Shores Country Club, the property includes an 18-hole golf course, seven tennis courts, and a clubhouse with a restaurant, a horseshoe-shaped lounge, and a banquet hall. Under PCM's management, the Village of Miami Shores usually received money every year, thanks to a complicated contract that not only includes profit sharing but also places the burden of capital improvements and maintenance on the company.

That era is coming to an end.

On May 12, PCM's president, Johnny LaPonzia, notified Miami Shores that PCM won't renew its contract, allowing its lease to expire on September 30.

No reason was given in LaPonzia's letter as to why it no longer wants to be the operator of the Miami Shores-owned



BT photos by Armando Collis

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Miami Shores Country Club has suffered financially because of COVID-19.

Sunk by Inertia

Plans for Legion Park boat ramp stall...again

By **Erik Bojnansky**
BT Senior Writer

Former and current residents of Miami's Upper Eastside unleashed an e-mail storm last month. The object of their fury is a fenced-off section at Legion Park's waterfront that's been closed to the public for more than 11 years. (Legion Park stretches from Biscayne Boulevard to Biscayne Bay, between 64th and 66th streets.)

Miami officials have promised to repair the hurricane-damaged boat ramp



BT photo by Armando Collis

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Broad view of Legion Park, with boat ramp at left and MiMo Bay Apartments under construction in back.

Portraits in the Era of COVID-19

What did you do during the pandemic?

Soon after the corona virus forced a domestic lockdown affecting all but essential workers, photographer Tracey Hagen hit upon an idea while walking her dogs through her Belle Meade community, in Miami's Upper Eastside: Photograph her neighbors at their doorsteps or through their windows from a safe distance, and ask them to describe their challenges, inspirations, and wishes for the future after experiencing the pandemic.

"I learned about this from photographers around the country, and I was inspired to do this in my community," Hagen says.

She offered her subjects high-resolution digital images in exchange for donations to Feeding South Florida, the nonprofit food bank that last year delivered 51.5 million meals from Palm Beach to Monroe County.

Over three months starting in mid-March, her project grew to more than 100 families and business owners along the Biscayne Corridor and Miami Beach. Her work was featured in the *Wall Street Journal*, the *Miami Herald*, and WTVJ (NBC-Channel 6). After the May 25 murder of George Floyd, she pivoted toward Black-owned businesses working to survive in this critical time.

Replies to her three questions about the pandemic have been edited for brevity.

Hagen intends to turn the project into a book and perhaps an exhibit at her Upper Eastside studio. Until then, you can see more photos at www.traceyhagenphotography.com and full responses to the three questions at her Instagram page: [#traceyhagenphotography](https://www.instagram.com/traceyhagenphotography).

— Mark Sell



Franklyn Oliver, Crystal Ivory, and Franklyn Jr., 20 months
Belle Meade

What is the most challenging part of this COVID-19 pandemic you're experiencing? Balancing work and childcare. And we really miss dining out, too.

What is the most positive thing you've experienced during this time? We're getting a chance to spend a lot of time with our son during this pivotal time of his growth and development. He does something new every day. He never ceases to amaze us.

What do you want your children/family to remember most about this time? The importance of maintaining our faith in God during difficult times.



Danilo de la Torre (stage name Adora), David Rohn, with Ralphie and Reggie Little River

What is the most challenging part of this COVID-19 pandemic you're experiencing? Danilo: Not knowing what's going on for real, and the uncertain future of the country. David: Fear!

What is the most positive thing you've experienced during this time? Danilo: Staying home, working in the garden, having the dogs around and the traffic absent. David: People feeling more connected to each other.

What do you want your children/family to remember most about this time? Danilo: We wasted months of our lives and destroyed the economy. A very dark, unfriendly, and vicious period. David: I'm not sure.

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After being shut down by county decree, the golf course is open again, with restrictions.

Country Club

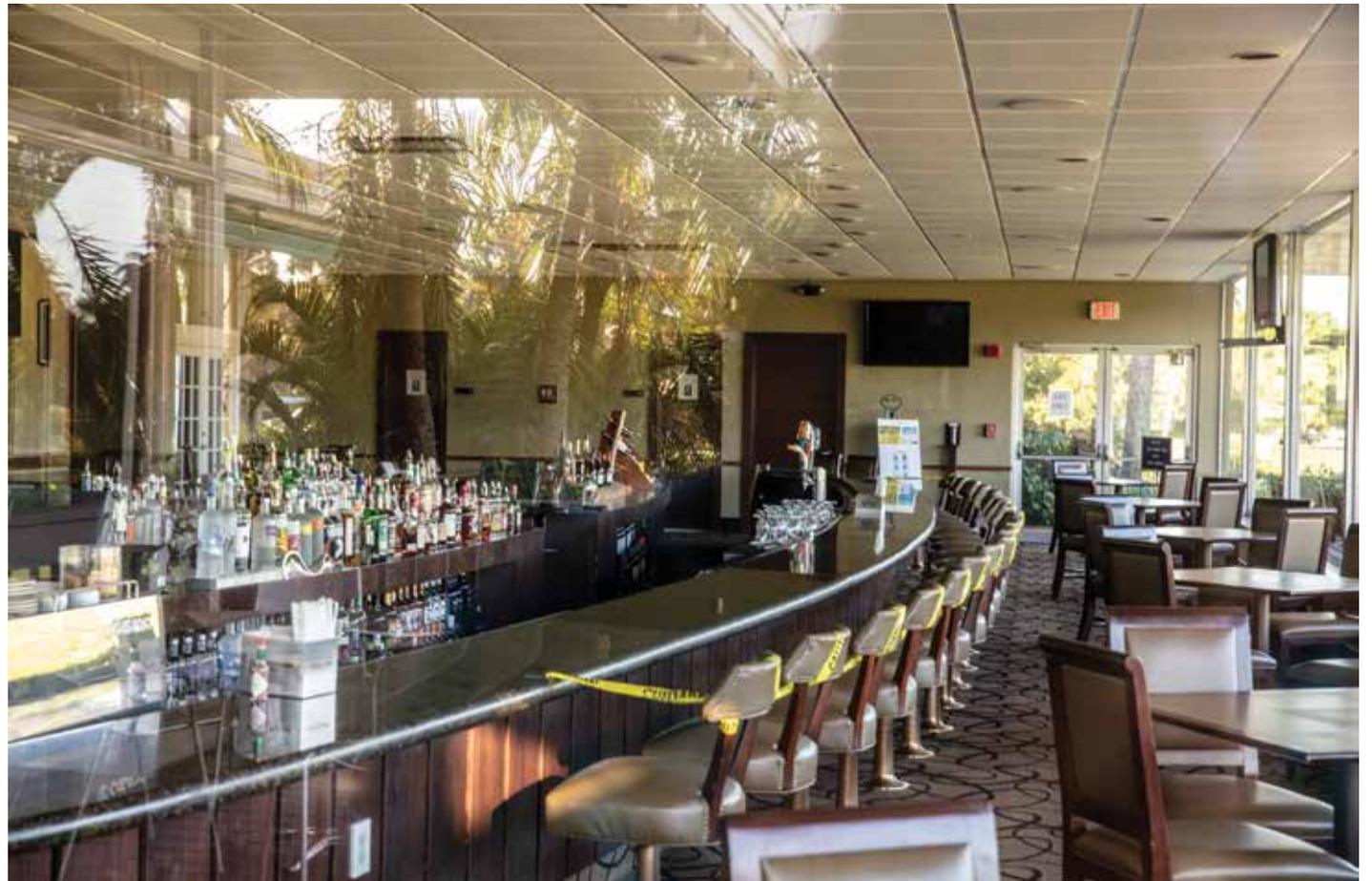
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property. However, in recent public meetings, the COVID-19 pandemic was named as the primary cause. Thanks to the highly contagious disease, weddings, birthdays, and other special events have been canceled, golf games were stopped for just over a month, onsite dining is curtailed and limited to mask-wearing guests (though takeout is offered), and the bar remains shuttered, with caution tape woven through the bar stools.

However, PCM's time at the Miami Shores Country Club might not be over just yet. A consultant has advised against village officials looking for new club managers while the coronavirus is still a major health issue in South Florida and the rest of the nation. Instead, the village's consultant has urged the village to work out a short-term deal with PCM.

"We cannot imagine a worse possible time to go out for a lease bid due to the current circumstances, most notably the uncertainty caused by the coronavirus pandemic that has at

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The bar and restaurant remain closed, with caution tape woven through the bar stools.



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Boat Ramp

Continued from page 16

and dock, and the City of Miami has a construction company on hand that's ready to fix the boat ramp area. However, some Upper Eastside activists noted that a kayak launch near the boat ramp, requested by parkgoers three years ago, has been left out of the design.

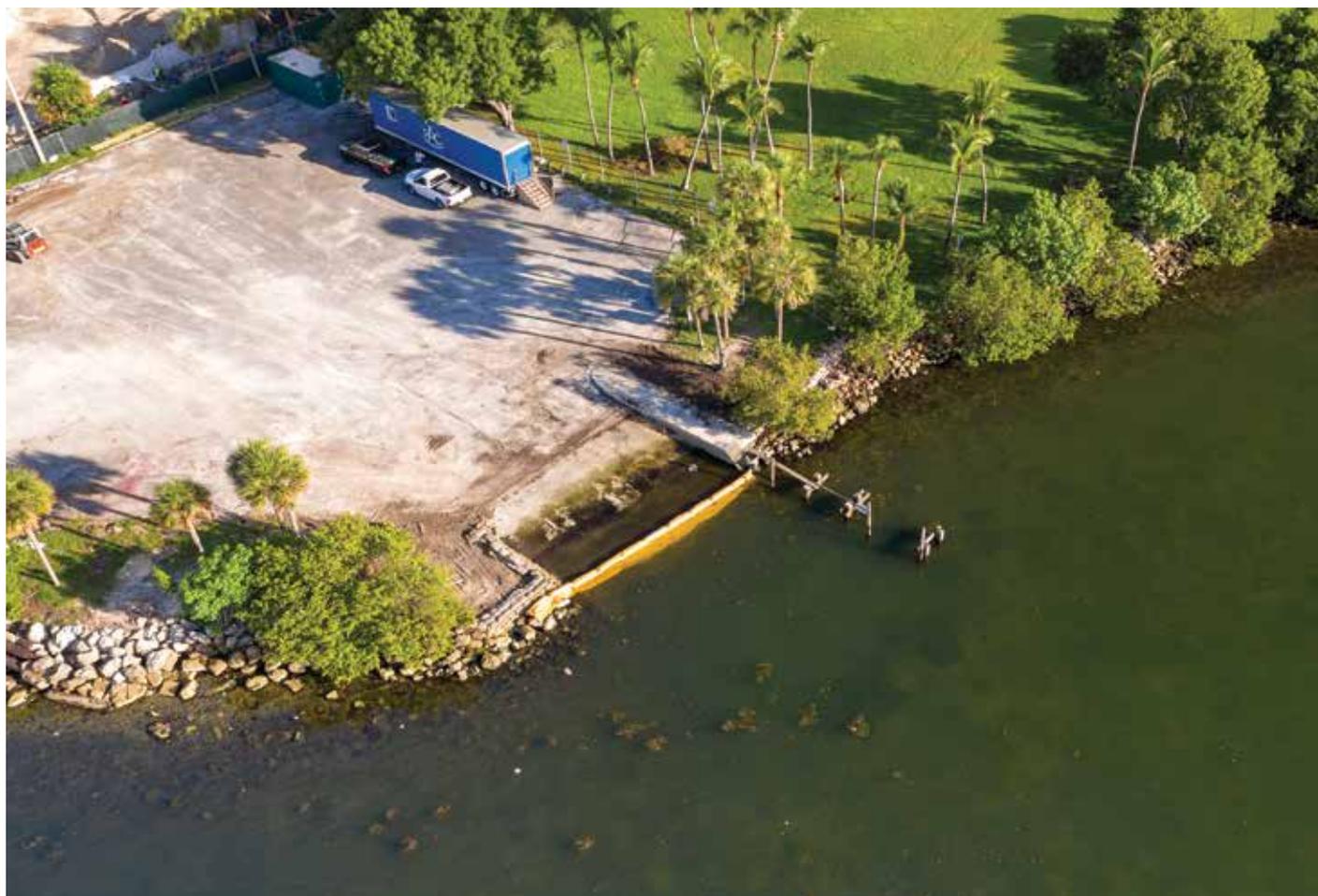
In addition, it may be too late for the City of Miami to tap into a \$740,139 state grant for construction-related expenses. That grant, which the Florida Inland Navigation District (FIND) allocated two years ago, is set to expire in September. Hector Badia, director of Miami's Office of Capital Improvements, confirms he'll be seeking a one-year extension at FIND's next meeting, scheduled to be held July 17 and 18.

"The project was more complicated than typical, as raising the elevation of the seawall and parking area were required," Badia explained in an e-mail to Upper Eastside residents. "Aside from permits from the State of Florida and the federal government, Miami-Dade County requires formal approval by the Board of County Commissioners, thus requiring a lengthier than usual review process."

Kevin Crowley, an attorney and downtown Miami resident, serves as Miami-Dade's representative for FIND, a state entity that provides grants to local governments on Florida's east coast to enhance waterway access.

Crowley says he'll push for a one-year extension. Still, he says, the city has trouble following through with FIND's grant requirements. For example, the City of Miami lost a \$50,000 grant from FIND that was awarded five years ago to pay design and permitting costs for Legion Park's boat ramp because the city failed to meet deadlines. The city nearly lost the \$740,139 grant as well, when it failed to submit timely quarterly reports to FIND. Upon being informed of this discrepancy, the city recently submitted reports. "For some reason, it's difficult for the city to keep up with and manage the different parts of these grants," Crowley tells the *BT*.

Legion Park's boat ramp was active for more than 40 years when storm surge generated from 2005's Hurricane Wilma caused significant damage to the ramp's 12-foot-long floating dock. Four years later, the boat ramp was shut down after an local resident fell through a hole in the dock. That resident was later



BT photo by Armando Collis

The blocked boat ramp with proposed kayak launch area between palm trees at far left.



BT photo by Armando Collis

On June 19, city officials met with local residents at the boat ramp.

awarded a \$54,000 judgment from the city (see "That Sinking Feeling," March 2019).

Thereafter, the boat ramp languished, serving only trespassers who managed to slip past the fences to fish, launch kayaks, or run jet skis.

During a meeting with city officials at the Legion Park boat ramp on June 19, Morningside resident Elvis Cruz fumed that the city never tried to fix the boat dock, even though the city could have used funds from FEMA to do it. "It burns me to no end to say this, but we got screwed," Cruz

declared, adding that residents made the mistake of "trusting the city."

The three Upper Eastside activists present at the meeting — Cruz, Eileen Bottari of North Palm Grove, and Deborah Stander of Belle Meade — also complained that the city ignored design suggestions given by parkgoers three years ago. Those suggestions included lowering the eight-foot-high perimeter fence on NE 64th Street, and placing a kayak launch at a clearing just south of the main boat ramp. Cruz insisted that a kayak launch would be perfect at that spot. "One of the reasons you hear me so enthusiastic about that location is that it is directly into the prevailing wind," Cruz said.

But Jorge Mora, assistant director of the Office of Capital Improvements, was worried that having a kayak launch so close to an area where motorized boats are launched might create traffic tie-ups on NE 64th Street, the narrow road leading to the ramp area from Biscayne Boulevard. Safety, he added, was also a concern.

"If you have a kayak launch here and you have a boat ramp there, you are

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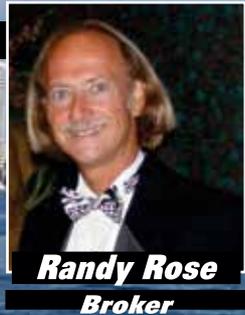
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Portraits

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Jan Mapou
Little Haiti

What is the most challenging part of this COVID-19 pandemic you're experiencing? My business, Libreri Mapou, closed the first week of March. I am home, waiting for the sun to shine over my head and kill the devil known as COVID-19. I love seeing artists of all creations and miss people coming to my store to discuss literature.

What is the most positive thing you've experienced during this time? Staying at home makes us creative, so we decided to have the Little Haiti Book Festival online Saturdays and Sundays at 2:00 p.m. We have 20,000 viewers.

What do you want your children/family to remember most about this time? All this is a new experience to them. However, even though they play less with their friends, they do enjoy the new form of graduation and grow more familiar with parental discipline.



Gillian Love-Smith and Dr. Edward Smith with Jack Belle Meade

What is the most challenging part of this COVID-19 pandemic you're experiencing? I'm nine months pregnant with our first baby girl. It's a delicate dance building her nursery together with the uncertainty of what my husband faces every day as an ER doctor.

What is the most positive thing you've experienced during this time? From the darkness we see love, unity, humanity, and the simplicity return to life all around us that somehow got lost. That is the kind of world I would like our daughter to know.

What do you want your children/family to remember most about this time? I would want our newborn daughter to know that her dad is one of the heroes in this COVID story. [Lenni Love-Smith was born May 4.]



Carmen Mise with Victoria Fuentes, one month, Oscar Fuentes, and Marcos Fuentes with Hamlet

Biscayne Park

What is the most challenging part of this pandemic? The loneliness, not being able to see our family and friends. The joy of our newborn Victoria and the worry of keeping her safe.

What is the most positive thing? Time spent together at home. Discovering how people around the world have found ways to uplift each other.

What do you want your children/family to remember? That we were strong during this time, that we were productive, creative, and loving.

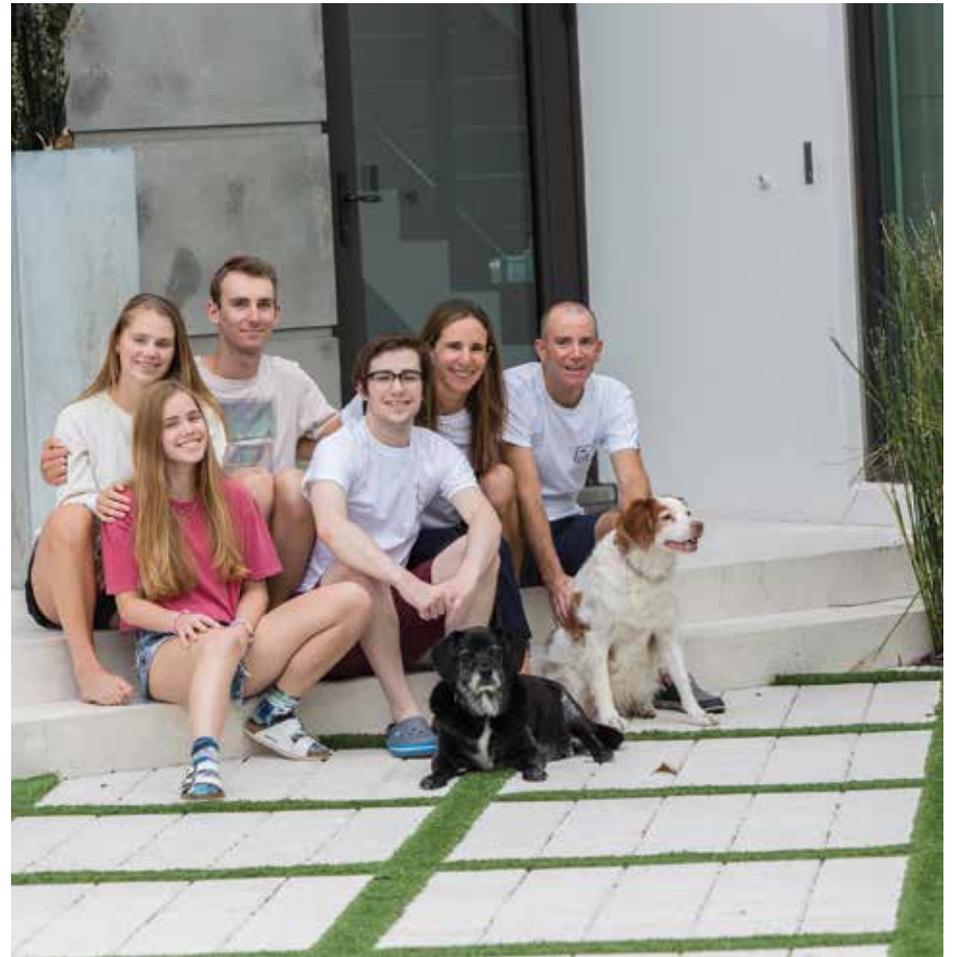


**Nicole Gates and Chef Karim Bryant, Lil Greenhouse Grill
Overtown**

What is the most challenging part of this pandemic? Adapting to business without my core base — my diners — and remaining mentally balanced.

What is the most positive thing? Finding the power of positivity within.

What do you want your children/family to remember? That we never left each other's side.



**Brooke, Spencer, Kelli, Zachary, Jana, and Roger Miller, with Boo and Ginger
Miami Beach**

What is the most challenging part of this pandemic? Not being able to comfort and be comforted during this emotional period. [Roger lost his father at the beginning of the pandemic.]

What is the most positive thing? Having three months with our family back together, reconnecting through difficult times.

What do you want your children/family to remember? The special moments we shared. The value of family. I pray these memories will overshadow the fear and uncertainty.



**Frank and Fran Rollason, with Skippy and Bandit
Belle Meade**

What is the most challenging part of this pandemic? As director of Miami-Dade County's Office of Emergency Management, feeding seniors and obtaining PPE for our first responders and nurses caring for COVID-19 patients.

What is the most positive thing? How first responders and doctors have met all challenges at the risk of exposing themselves and their families.

What do you want your children/family to remember? It was a bad time for kids, and their mommies and daddies kept them safe. Families must remember this moment in the context of the political arena in which it was played.

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Portraits

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Evans St. Fort
North Miami Beach

What is the most challenging part of this pandemic? Keeping clients and staff safe, while dealing with grieving families who have lost someone from the virus.

What is the most positive thing? Getting an opportunity to spend time with family.

What do you want your children/family to remember? How much family matters, because that is all we really have in the end.



James T. Nicholson and John Lyons, with Baxter
Belle Meade

What is the most challenging part of this pandemic? Accepting the restrictions, knowing that abiding by them and changing “life as we once knew it” is essential to human survival.

What is the most positive thing? Reading books for pleasure and listening to music. Enjoying our neighborhood more than ever.

What do you want your children/family to remember? We are one human race. Our health is our most important asset.



Margaret R. Tynan
Belle Meade

What is the most challenging part of this pandemic? The unknown. As a rule, there was always a solution in my life. But not now.

What is the most positive thing? Calls from neighbors and friends in Belle Meade: “Do you need anything? Can I help?” Gives you a good feeling.

What do you want your children/family to remember? That you were there for them. While I’m restricted from some activities due to my age [85], I call on my fellow Belle Meadeans to see how they are doing. The only family and home I have is Belle Meade.



Arshan, Javed, and father Roderick King with Scherzade
Miami Beach

What is the most challenging part of this pandemic? The lack of spontaneity and freedom. I miss seeing friends and going to the gym. I also miss touching.

What is the most positive thing? The space and time it has given us to reset ourselves as individuals and as families. This uncertainty is a very powerful place for us and for humanity. All possibilities are still open.

What do you want your children/family to remember? How good it felt to all be together doing our individual and collective work. A grounded, local, close-to-home, commute-free, simple way of life. After dinner, dishes, showers, and homework, coming back together again for connection, cuddles, and bedtime kisses.



Chef Amina Ly
Miami Shores

What is the most challenging part of this pandemic? Doing 20 percent of normal routine while paying rent. Seeing young people without a job. Putting beautiful gourmet food in a box. Seeing friends and customers without a hug or kiss.

What is the most positive thing? Staying with family.

What do you want your children/family to remember? Our *magnifique* moments spent together at the pool. We never spent so much time all together at home!



Chef Calvin Smith
Aventura

What is the most challenging part of this pandemic? Going into busy grocery stores not knowing who might have COVID 19. I say a prayer each time before going in.

What is the most positive thing? Families forced together want to try the “Chef Cal experience” in their homes.

What do you want your children/family to remember? It took a deadly virus to bring people and families together to put the phones down, play board games, hold backyard picnics, and create memories.



Suzanne McPherson
Midtown

What is the most challenging part of this pandemic? Trying to keep my family, employees, and our customers safe as we reopened our store, Midtown Creamery.

What is the most positive thing? Time off to rest and spending more quality time with my family.

What do you want your children/family to remember? Never take life for granted. Live every day with kindness and love for each other. Know that God will protect us, because out of every storm there is a rainbow.



Cary Aronovitz, Stella Lozano, Marcela Lozano, with Gabriel, 16 months
Belle Meade

What is the most challenging part of this pandemic? Marcela: My mother is visiting from Colombia and does not know when she can go back home, where my dad and 94-year-old grandmother are self-isolating.

What is the most positive thing? The support and love flowing around us, within our little family, our neighborhood, our world. For every sad story there is one of kindness and bravery.

What do you want your children/family to remember? How much we love each other. How strong we can be when we are together. All the love and kindness in the world.

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Portraits

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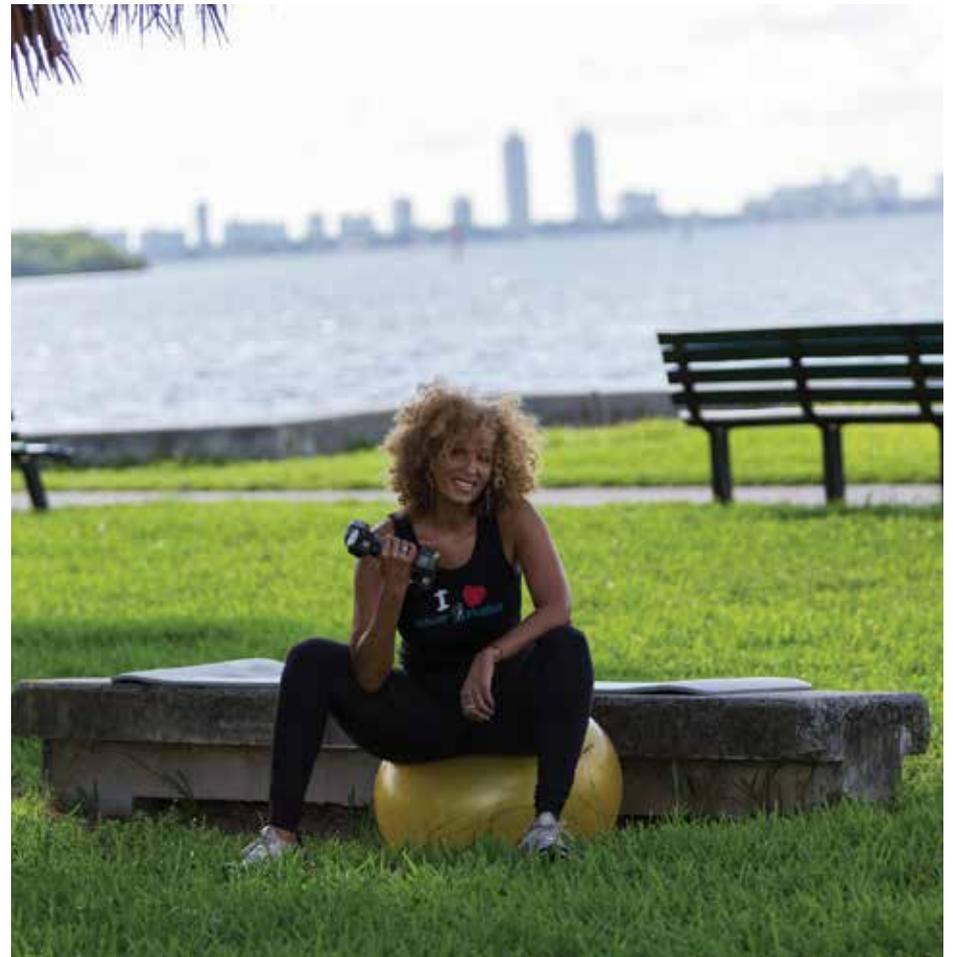


**Laura and Adrian Gonzalez, sons Dylan and Theo, with Bailey
Miami Beach**

What is the most challenging part of this pandemic? Keeping my family safe at all times and trying to make a living to feed them every day. [Adrian owns David's Café Cafecito.]

What is the most positive thing? I'm spending time with the family and able to experience little firsts like a tooth coming out, and family bonding activities that would normally not happen because I work so much all the time.

What do you want your children/family to remember? We are all vulnerable at any given moment, so it's so very important to always be kind and be grateful for everything we have and not harp on what we don't have.



**Shirlee Fernandez
Upper Eastside**

What is the most challenging part of this pandemic? When my Power Fit Studio and vacation rental business shut down. It took a month to convert to tele-fitness. Meditation and physical activity helped immensely to overcome the anxiety.

What is the most positive thing? Adjusting to the slower pace and really connecting more with my children. Ours had been the house of busy, running in and out and only connecting two to three times a week over meals.

What do you want your children/family to remember? We live in a community and must look out for each other. We are stronger together.



**Andrea Battista, Noa Battista, and Lilaj Segal with Cece
and River
Belle Meade**

What is the most challenging part of this pandemic? The unknown, the distance from our parents/grandparents. They are well but could use a good hug.

What is the most positive thing? The great appreciation for each other, our home, our neighborhood, our Miami sun.

What do you want your children/family to remember? That all you need is love, family, health, and each other. The power of connection, and the digital tools we have to remain connected, inspired, and updated.



Deborah Spiegelman
Sans Souci

What is the most challenging part of this pandemic? The unknown and unpredictability of what may happen next. Our world is hurting. There are no gatherings or opportunities just to comfort one another. There are no hugs or shoulders to cry on.

What is the most positive thing? Our community has come together in many ways with gratitude and creativity. Our museum team has expanded its reach through Museum at Home digital programming. [Deborah is CEO of Miami Children’s Museum.] We’re reaching out of comfort zones that will help us survive and ultimately thrive.

What do you want your children/family to remember? Cooking and baking together. Laughter, tears, caring, and sharing. The beauty of our surroundings, the chirps of birds. I hope my daughters realize how strong, successful, and incredible they are.



Charles Castro and Steven Haas with Roger
Miami Beach

What is the most challenging part of this pandemic? Converting a beautiful new convention center into a COVID-19 hospital and waiting, not knowing if you will receive patients while feeding 10,000 people [Steven is executive director of Centerplate at the Miami Beach Convention Center.] Concern about the stigma.

What is the most positive thing? Working side by side with restaurateurs and city offices so we can come together, compromise, and set the tone for the future.

What do you want your children/family to remember? Never forget. Learn from this experience. Shutting down the world economy is not the answer. All nations must prepare for the future and have this event as a budget line item.

Sean Latterner
Belle Meade

What is the most challenging part of this pandemic? Fear of exposure as a paramedic firefighter. Alertness to any and all symptoms. The fear of spreading it to others.

What is the most positive thing? The slowing down of the modern pace of life. The time to just relax.

What do you want your children/family to remember? I want my son Sean to remember the frailty of the human condition. Appreciating the time we have here to enjoy nature, life, and people.



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Portraits

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Mark Weiser
Little River

What is the most challenging part of this pandemic? Zero income. [Mark has been a prominent music and cultural promoter for 50 years.]

What is the most positive thing? No deadlines. Nice pace of life. Few responsibilities. Learning new skills.

What do you want your children/family to remember? People helping people.



Yvette Harris
MiMo District

What is the most challenging part of this pandemic? Not being able to see friends and family. Daughter, age 11, missing her friends.

What is the most positive thing? People checking on other people, sharing, encouraging, and being present.

What do you want your children/family to remember? Operate in gratitude at all times.



Tracey Hagen
Belle Meade

What is the most challenging part of this pandemic? Staying positive with all the suffering happening around the world on so many levels.

What is the most positive thing? Documenting this time by taking pictures of neighbors for this project, "Portraits in the Era of COVID-19." Making new friends and gifting them with memories to share and pass on to future generations while giving back to Feeding South Florida.

What do you want your children/family to remember? Quality time spent together enjoying bike rides, home-cooked meals, and not rushing around. We as a family, a nation, and global community can conquer any challenge no matter how fierce by doing our part and staying positive, creative, determined, and kind.

Feedback: letters@biscaynetimes.com



The club's management company is ready to bolt, and the timing to find a replacement couldn't be worse.

Country Club

Continued from page 18

least temporarily shuttered businesses, instilled fear and uneasiness in consumers, and resulted in record high levels of unemployment,” stated Ed Getherall, director of consulting services for the National Golf Foundation, in a June 2 letter to village manager Tom Benton.

A PCM employee confirms that LaPonzia is now negotiating with the village, which is why he won't comment to the *BT*. “He is in negotiations at this point and has no comment,” says the employee, who requested anonymity.

A report on those negotiations will be presented to the village this month, perhaps as early as July 7. Should

negotiations with PCM stall, village officials are preparing to create a request-for-proposals process for a new facility manager as well, in spite of the consultant's warning.

“We're 100 percent focused on keeping it a country club and a golf course, whether that's setting up bids or trying to keep the [current management] company. Whatever is best for the residents,” Councilman Jonathan Meltz tells the *BT*.

What the village won't do, at least for now, is turn part or all of the country club into something else, like a park or a residential development. The idea was considered during the May 19 Miami Shores council meeting, when Mayor Crystal Wagar suggested that the village explore the “highest and best use” for

the country club while looking for other companies to manage it.

“I'm a member of the country club and I enjoy using it,” Wagar told the council. But, she added, the village should strive to get the big picture by holding workshops and hiring a consultant.

“I would like to know what the other options could be — if there are residents using the golf course, if there could be a development opportunity there, is there an opportunity to have a sorely needed community center. I'm not married to one thing or another,” Wagar said at the meeting, later adding: “I'm curious if there can be some sort of mixed-use, incorporating government offices and parks. There's a myriad of things to look at if we do it.”

During that same May 19 meeting, the village manager stated that Miami Shores made \$231,638 in rent and revenue sharing from the country club last fiscal year. But that figure pales in comparison to what could be made in tax revenue alone if “some sort of development” took place on at least part of the country club grounds, Benton added.

Councilman Stephen Loffredo advised against bringing more development to Miami Shores. “If we develop half of the country club to mid-rise...you will add 4000 or 5000 more people,” he told his colleagues. (Miami Shores has a population of 10,600, according to recent

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Country Club

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census estimates.) That extra population will increase traffic, Llofredo continued, and it'll be necessary to put in a new sewer system.

"I think that green space is at a premium," Llofredo explains to the *BT*. "As more and more places [in South Florida] go to high-rises, the last thing we need, especially with coronavirus, is more dense population and more traffic."

Vice Mayor Alice Burch went a step further. She introduced a resolution at the subsequent council meeting, held on June 2, to delay hiring a land-use consultant until the village exhausted any chance of negotiating a new deal with PCM or finding another company. That resolution inspired about 300 people to send messages to village hall. Around a dozen of the messages favored exploring other options for the country club, including development or turning it into a park, but more than 290 residents insisted that the country club and golf course should remain unchanged.

"It's the largest feedback for a public meeting we ever received," Burch says.

During the June 2 meeting, council members agreed by acclamation that the village should focus entirely on the club's management. Meltz, though, insists that the Shores never seriously considered redeveloping the country club or turning it into a park that would cost the village millions of dollars to maintain.

"Somehow, some way, through social media or a lack of communication, a large number of residents thought the council would be considering closing the club," Meltz says. "Nothing could be further from the truth."

Wagar insisted she preferred that the property remain a club as well. "We did not go seeking this," Wagar said at the June 2 meeting. "This landed in our lap at the most inopportune time."

The Miami Shores Country Club is nearly as old as the village itself. The 3.7-square-mile village incorporated as Miami Shores in January 1932. Five years later, workers employed by the Public Works Administrations cleared a forest and developed a country club with a golf course designed by renowned course designers Robert Lawrence and Louis Wilson. Completed in the fall of 1939, the golf course was purchased by the village in 1945. In 1956 the village

restricted access to members, village residents, and their guests. Blacks and Jews were barred during much of the 1950s. Even in the early 1980s, there were no African-American members and few Jewish members, recalls Seth Bramson, a local historian who managed the club during the late 1980s.

For decades, the club was managed directly by the village itself, a prospect that today's village council members want to avoid due to popular lore that the municipality did a horrible job. Says Meltz: "I heard the stories. I heard how

and 77th Street, retrained the staff and hired new chefs and managers. Bramson says he also encouraged locals of all backgrounds, including African Americans and Jews, to join. During the three years he managed the club, Bramson says, membership grew from 615 to 1518 people, and the club also became profitable for the first time.

Then Forney left the Shores for a new job. His replacement was Elly Johnson, a man Bramson denounces as "a racist, a bigot, and an anti-Semite." Johnson interfered so much with the club's

In more recent years, golf courses around the nation have closed and been converted into parks or housing developments. But Vice Mayor Burch says Miami Shores Country Club, which now allows non-members to play golf for a fee, has actually seen an uptick in golfing activity. Burch notes that 40 people braved torrential downpours to play golf at the club over the Memorial Day weekend.

"I feel that we have a highly desirable facility in a market that is changing," Burch tells the *BT*. By changing, Burch means that several golf courses in South Florida have closed while the Shores golf course has remained open. "Melreese may not be a golf course in the future," she points out, referring to the 131-acre City of Miami-owned golf course now being considered as the site for a mega-development that would include a major league soccer stadium.

But Meltz says a large part of the club's revenue comes from restaurant meals, bar tabs, and banquet hall rentals, which are now near zero, thanks to COVID-19. In response to the business disruption, the village agreed to pay 50 percent of the maintenance bill for April, which totaled \$38,444. Meltz predicts that PCM, or future operators, will insist that the village share in the cost of maintenance and capital improvements. "Just generally, we are not going to have the sweetheart deal we used to have," Meltz cautioned at the June 2 meeting. "It will cost us real money."

In spite of that prospect, Meltz says he's determined to get the best deal he can for the village. Besides profit sharing, rent, and discounts for Miami Shores residents, Meltz says he also wants a clause in the contract that will allow residents to bike through the golf course pathways at least once a month when it isn't being used. Usually, residents who aren't playing golf or are not members are forbidden from entering and wandering the golf course's grounds even when it is closed, except during the June 4 holiday. But in March and April, when the county ordered golf courses shut down, residents were free to bike through the country club grounds.

"I would like to see some time weekly or monthly allowed for people to ride their bikes there, like they did during the heavier quarantine phase," Meltz says.

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the country club turned into a disaster, and I heard many times over how a municipality, especially one of our size and strength, shouldn't run a golf course."

Bramson agrees that the country club was horribly run when he first moved to Miami Shores in 1981. "The food and service were beyond terrible," he recalls.

In 1985, then village manager Leslie Forney recruited Bramson to oversee the club. Bramson, whose hospitality career included managing the Playboy Club that once stood at Biscayne Boulevard

operations, Bramson claims, that he quit in 1988. Membership also plummeted.

In 1989, the same year Johnson became manager of Edgewater in Volusia County, the village had to loan the club \$700,000. In March 1990, the village opted to lease the club to PCM. By 2011, PCM had invested \$3 million upgrading the golf course and clubhouse. (Workplace controversy followed Johnson in several later administrative positions in Florida, Tennessee, and North Carolina, where he died in 2006 at the age of 67.)

Boat Ramp

Continued from page 20

going to have cars with trailers [backed up]," Mora told Cruz. "You are going to have individuals parking, taking their kayaks here. It could present a safety hazard." Mora felt that a kayak launch should be located farther north among the mangroves, encouraging kayakers to use Legion Park's main parking lot.

Cruz doubted that kayakers would want to walk some 250 yards from the parking lot to the bay while carrying their vessels. "Chances are, they'll park here and figure it out," Cruz said. But he did like the idea of multiple kayak launches in Legion Park, emphasizing that they're used not only by people who kayak or canoe, but also by people to swim or simply enjoy the view of the bay from a shoreline that isn't filled with mangroves. "Put in as many as you can," he urged.

Lara de Souza-Hamwey, director of the city's Parks and Recreation Department, emphasized that the city wants to add kayak launches to Legion Park, it's just a question of when and where. "That's the baseline," she said. "We agree we want a kayak launch. We're trying to establish what is the safest and most reasonable place to put a kayak launch."

By the end of the meeting, city officials said they would see if it was possible to reinsert the kayak launch in the designs. De Souza-Hamwey also acquiesced to Eileen Bottari's pleas to remove the fencing between the boat launch and the main area of the park, and to shorten the swing gate across NE 64th Street to just five or six feet.

Cruz emphasized that the fence was not necessary for security, telling the parks director that there will be plenty of security near the boat ramp. He pointed at the nearly complete 236-unit apartment complex, MiMo Bay Apartments, immediately west of the boat ramp area being built by developer Brian Pearl.

"You now have four floors looking down on this, and you know those condo commandos are going to be calling if they see anything they don't like," Cruz said.

"True, true, true," replied de Souza-Hamwey.

But William Mathisen, a resident of the nearby Palm Bay Club condominium, tells the *BT* that the city had problems policing the boat ramp when it was operational over a decade ago. Back then, operators of personal watercraft hogged the ramp area and

conducted illegal activity, Mathisen says. "It was an unlicensed jet-ski rental," he says.

Mathisen doesn't even like the idea of the ramp being used for any type of motorized vessel. He'd rather see the spot become a green boat ramp used for non-motorized vessels like sailboats, canoes, and kayaks. "It can even be called the City of Miami Green Ramp," he suggests. The two-way street leading to the boat ramp and the shallow bay bottom make it less than ideal for motorized vessels anyway, he argues.

Cruz disagrees: "It's very easy to suggest taking away a personal freedom, as long as it's someone else's personal freedom. Motor boating is a legal, licensed, taxpaying recreation that many of our families, friends, and neighbors enjoy. We need more boat ramps for waterfront access, not less."

Tom Domack, a Morningside resident and boater, has also advocated for more boat ramps in the Miami area. Nevertheless, Domack says he wouldn't be opposed to Legion Park's boat ramp being used solely for non-motorized vessels, noting its shallow depth and the limited parking for boat trailers.

What Domack *would* like to see is the city actually opening up the boat ramps that already exist. He argues that the boat ramp at Morningside Park is almost always closed under lock and chain.

"It's closed [almost] seven days a week," he says. Domack, who uses the county-operated boat ramp at Pelican Harbor near North Bay Village, has no idea why the gate in front of the Morningside ramp is padlocked. "It's mainly up to the park manager to keep it closed," Domack sighs. "You know, it's just a matter of indifference. That's what it is."

John Heffernan, deputy director of communications for the City of Miami, insists that the Morningside Park boat ramp, at least prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, was in fact open to the public. The ramp, he says, keeps the same hours as the city's other boat ramps: 7:00 a.m. to 7:00 p.m.

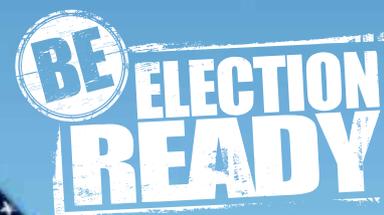
But Cruz, who often advocates for Morningside Park improvements, says he often sees the boat ramp in that park closed as well: "The city was not good about keeping the gates open during the week, even when there wasn't COVID, or good about having staff on hand to man the gates on weekends."

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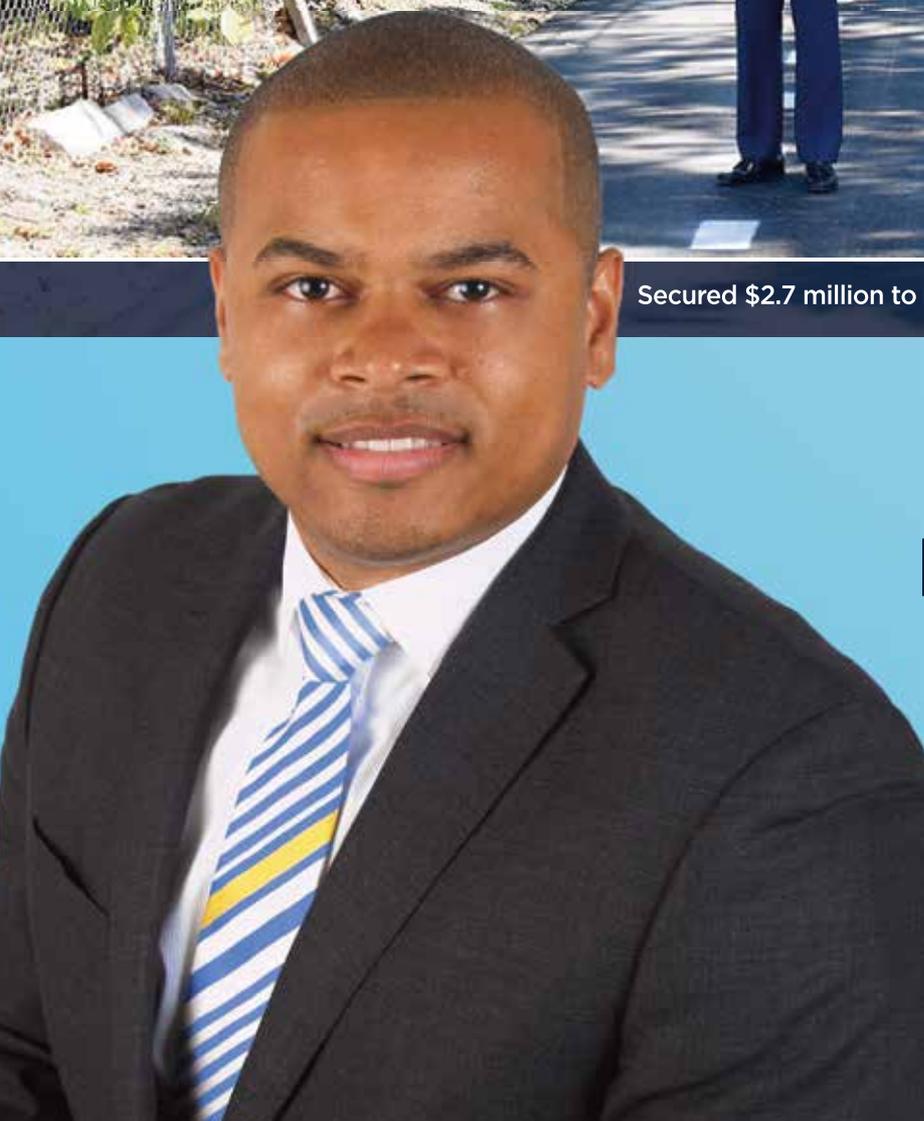
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