

CORAL GABLES' GRANADA GOLF COURSE RAIN SHELTERS

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The accompanying pages describe the current deplorable state of the rain shelters on the city owned Granada Golf Course and include excerpts from two recent magazine articles calling for their restoration.

As the city prepares for its Centennial celebrations, it would be appropriate if the city commissioners could unite in voting to restore the rain shelters in time for the April anniversary festivities.

If public funding is a problem, the city could perhaps encourage private donations to complete the project in return for naming rights.

To commemorate City Father, George Merrick's, achievement in constructing the Biltmore Hotel in ten months, exactly 100 years ago (March 1925 – January 1926), the city should ensure that the permitting process for this project be speeded-up to guarantee completion in time for the Centennial anniversary in April 2025.

Patrick Alexander: author, *'Coral Gables: The First Hundred Years'*

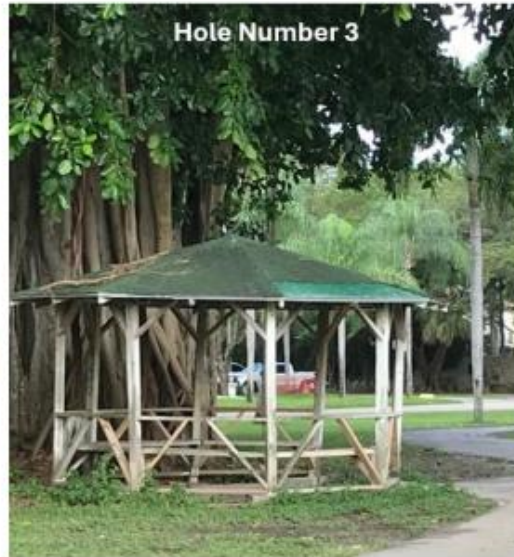
Dr. Karelia Martinez Carbonell: President Historic Preservation Association

GRANADA GOLF COURSE RAIN SHELTERS

Operating continuously as a golf course since January 1923, Granada is more than just a golf course – it is the Village Green and the very soul of Coral Gables.

Rain or shine, Summer or Winter, there are always Gables residents out on the greens playing golf. Not only is it the oldest operating golf course in Florida, it is also one of the most accessible and most popular.

It is popular not just with golfers; it is popular with the residents whose beautifully maintained houses face the greenways, it is



popular with Lycra-clad cyclists who drive around it along North and South Greenway, with young mothers with baby-strollers, with bare-chested joggers and with elderly couple out walking the dog.

For the past 80 years, golfers and joggers have been able to shelter from the rain in the simple but beautifully designed wooden rain-shelters. Not only did the

shelters keep residents dry during a downpour but it also kept them safe during a thunderstorm. Each shelter was equipped with a lightning conductor on the roof.

But a few years ago, the City decided to demolish four of them and allow the remaining five to deteriorate beyond repair. Now when it rains, there is nowhere to shelter and during a thunderstorm, nowhere to hide except beneath a tree.



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Not only are there no longer any shelters to protect the golfers and residents, but now there are just ugly holes and stubs where they once stood. As the City approaches its Centennial, these serve as a harsh rebuke to the civic indifference which has allowed these reminders of Merrick's vision to visibly and shamefully decay.

These shelters would not be difficult or expensive to restore. Starting from scratch the wood involved would cost no more than \$750 per shelter and perhaps

three days of labor.

The shelter at hole number 6 is in fairly good condition – possibly because this is where Parks & Rec workers often eat their lunch. Why can all the other shelters not also be restored and maintained like this?

With the re-opening of "Burger Bob's"; with the upcoming Centennial next April, and with the Coral Gables having been recently described by Bloomberg as being the nation's most expensive and sought-after city – surely the City Commissioners could for once agree to restore the shelters in time for the celebration.



What would it take? There would be no shortage of golfers, joggers and neighbors willing to sign a petition requesting the City spend the relatively small amount of money needed to restore or rebuild these shelters. We do not need a new design; we do not need anything 'modern'. The existing designs are beautiful in their unpretentious simplicity and their efficiency.

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Article in *Gables Living Magazine*, October 2024 by Dr. Karelia Martinez Carbonell
President Historic Preservation Association.

COMMUNITY INTEREST

HANGING ON TO LIFE ON THE GREENWAYS IS NOT JUST ABOUT NOSTALGIA; IT HAS ECONOMIC VALUE TOO

By Dr. Karelia Martinez Carbonell, President of the Historic Preservation Association of Coral Gables
Photos provided by KM Carbonell and Carlos Barbon

According to a study commissioned by the U.S. Chamber of Commerce, American towns that make historic preservation a priority enjoy an economic dividend to the local economy. Additionally, heritage tourism has a greater impact on a local economy with heritage tourists spending 15% more than non-heritage tourists. Small and local businesses often show a preference for locating in historic commercial areas. In study after study, the rate of value increase in historic districts outperforms the market as a whole. The U.S. Chamber study adds, "in cities large and small, consumers prefer living, shopping, visiting, and locating their businesses in historic neighborhoods. That built history in your community is not nostalgia - it is an economic asset."

Hanging on to the nostalgia on the Coral Gables greenways has not only emotional value but economic value to boot.

The Club

It all started with the Coral Gables Golf and Country Club and the Granada Golf Course. The land was once the Merrick family's vegetable field and part of the original 1921 city plan by George Merrick and landscape architect, Frank Button. The golf course, designed by the nationally known team of Langford

and Moreau, opened in January of 1923. Three months later, the clubhouse, designed by Hampton and Reimert, became Coral Gables' first public building. The six original coral rock arches still stand today and reflect the Coral Gables Mediterranean style that helped set the tone for the City's architecture.

The Coral Gables Golf and Country Club quickly became the epicenter of the new community and played an important role in its development. Salesmen, including Merrick himself, entertained prospective buyers there and showed them home sites from its distinctive tower. The Country Club of Coral Gables, as it is known today, received its charter on October 9, 1935. A historical marker was erected in 2005 by the Florida Department of State.

The Course

The Granada Golf Course is located across from the Country Club. George Merrick's vision was to create a planned community he called "The City Beautiful" - and golf was part of the plan. Coral Gables began construction of its 9-hole golf course in 1922. The course was initially built for the residents of Coral Gables and designed under the personal supervision of William Langford of the golf architectural firm of Langford

and Moreau. Golf was so popular in Coral Gables that the golf professional at Granada, Charlie Thum, was giving lessons on part of the course before it was finished. It opened in 1923 with great fanfare and media attention. Granada is the oldest operating nine-hole course in Florida.

The Shelter

For 80 years, golfers on the Granada Golf Course have taken refuge in the several 1940s wooden rain shelters scattered along the historic greens. Today, these rain shelters are being replaced and may eventually be lost to history. However, in August 2020, the Historic Preservation Board unanimously passed a motion to recommend that the City of Coral Gables consider preserving

one of the existing c.1940 wooden rain shelters and to renovate, rehabilitate, or reconstruct as necessary in order to move it to an appropriate location on the Granada Golf Course." Although a good gesture, the City should consider restoring and repurposing all the shelters, not just "one of the existing" rain shelters. Instead plans suggest replacement of the historical shelters with modern ones. Neighbors oppose the change and cling to the nostalgia. As the Chamber study supports, not only



Granada Golf Course" with "Granada Golf Course courtesy of KM CARBONELL



Vintage Postcard courtesy of KM CARBONELL

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Excerpt from **The Village Green** in the *Coral Gables Magazine*, January 2025

A Brief History of Golf in Coral Gables by Patrick Alexander from the *Coral Gables Magazine*: January 2025



urban greenery. It's where neighbors become friends and where friends meet up and exchange news.

For several decades, Burger Bob's Diner on the Granada course was where all real Gables residents gathered to gossip and eat the "Best Chili in Town." Sadly, following COVID and Bob's subsequent retirement, the diner remained closed for two years until its recent grand re-opening under the name of The Birdie Bistro and the management of the much-loved Rita Tennyson and her beautiful family.

It is also a place where people play golf. From sunrise till sunset, seven days a week, even during the hot humid days of mid-summer, they are out there in pursuit of that elusive little white ball. Although there is a preponderance of retirees able to

TOP: LIKE A VILLAGE GREEN, GRANADA GOLF COURSE LIES AT THE HEART OF THE CITY
ABOVE: THE AUTHOR PATRICK ALEXANDER, WALKING AMONG GRANADA'S BANYAN TREES

play golf during the working day, Granada's regulars represent a typical cross section of Gables' residents, male and female, young and old, including many city employees.

Unfortunately, young and old, residents and city employees alike are all exposed to sudden Florida downpours, with nowhere to shelter except beneath the trees, which is not a good idea in a thunderstorm. The beautiful 1940s rain shelters, complete with lightning rods, which once offered protection from the elements at each of the nine holes, were torn down a few years ago amidst vague talk of "modernizing." The Historic Preservation Board, to say nothing of Granada's neigh-

ors as well as rain-soaked golfers, have been demanding restoration of the original wooden shelters, but so far without success.

There is one group of elderly Cuban retirees who, following the end of their morning game, gather under a Banyan tree to savor fine coffee and French cheese. When not grumbling about the missing rain shelters, exchanging news about their latest medical ailments, or embellishing their golf scores, they complain about *los banditos*, the Castro brothers, who stole all their cattle and horse ranches and expropriated all their haciendas and sugar plantations. They call themselves "the Titans of Granada."

During the summer months, the course is alive with the excited shouts and voices of school children receiving golf lessons, and during the winter months, we hear obscure French obscenities as the "snowbirds" from Quebec slice their shots into the trees.

It is the trees that truly make Granada unique. While the whole course is encircled by some of the oldest and most splendid homes that Merrick's team ever assembled, flanked by lush landscaping, swaying palm trees, and manicured lawns, it is the trees down the middle of the course itself that are so unforgettably magnificent. The first four holes of the course are dominated by giant Poincianas that glow with a fierce scarlet light when in bloom, but the back five holes are dominated by a line of giant Banyan trees which, over the decades, have grown together to form a living arboreal cathedral, the size of two city blocks, within which a sacred stillness reigns.

Not only is this the final home of the errant golf ball, it is also the home of Virginia's red foxes, descendants of the ones that Merrick released as part of the Biltmore fox hunts in the 1920s. More importantly, this is also the home of the endangered Florida Bonneted Bat. Although its body is only three inches in length, its wingspan exceeds two feet. Sadly, Granada Golf Course is the only place on the planet, other than Zoo Miami, where these elusive creatures are known to still exist.

Granada is more than just a golf course; with its natural beauty, its forgiving greens, and its delightfully charming and professional staff, it is more than the village green, more even than the heart of the city. Granada Golf Course represents the very soul of Coral Gables. »

This story is excerpted from the newly published *Coral Gables: The First Hundred Years* by Patrick Alexander.

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e Coral Gables Magazine: January 2025

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