

History of the Villagers



In the beginning:

It all began in 1966 when a group of like-minded women (men are now members) banded together to save Coral Gables' iconic, grand Douglas Entrance, slated to be demolished for a grocery store. In the early days, much of the cleanup and restoration work was literally hands-on. Capitalizing on their early success, The Villagers worked to save other endangered Miami-area sites such as Vizcaya's Casino on the Mound and the deteriorating Biltmore Hotel.

Brain-power has always been an equally significant part of the group's work, and members provided expertise to identify locally significant historic properties and helped many be recognized by the National Register of Historic Places.

Funding philosophy:

Funds raised support preservation, including projects for restoration, documentation, education, and maintenance, as well as college scholarships for Florida university students studying historic preservation. The organization's annual grant budget ranges from \$60,000 - \$100,000.

Allocations may seem small in comparison to larger organizations but are significant when the depth of The Villagers' service and support is examined. The focus is to fill missing gaps, providing the 'glue' that often holds a site together through the infrastructure needed to protect crumbling property.

Grants awarded have allowed organizations the ability to qualify for major funding sources; A/C systems to preserve valuable historic documents from tropical climate; skilled artisans to restore historic paintings, furniture, and fixtures; lightning prevention systems to protect culturally significant sites; curated signage to increase awareness; educational books and videos to showcase hidden sites to the public; and restoration of structural components such as roofs, floors, windows, and doors.

Taking the long view to support training of future skilled preservationists, the organization has been a leader in funding Florida-based university scholarships. The annual grants are awarded to architectural students and university students with a focus on historic preservation. More than 200 scholarships have been awarded.

As catalysts in the community, members have visibly advocated on behalf of historic preservation. Significantly, in 1972, The Villagers were responsible for the creation of the Dade Heritage Trust (DHT), to complement the Villagers' work by expanding the reach and scope of preservation, often dealing with governmental agencies. The Villagers funded the DHT's first project of surveying area historic resources, donating time and funds to the project, identifying 875+ sites of historic significance. That initial study has been the backbone for saving many places that would have otherwise been lost.

Grant examples include:

The first seed money to study the viability of the Miami Marine Stadium (unfortunately, still a work in progress) came from the Villagers as did the initial grant to the Historic Hampton House, one of the last surviving Green Book Hotels (just named to the National Trust for Historic Places). Funding was provided to a unique land trust with the

state to preserve the Marjorie Stoneman Douglas home and, when it was uncovered, to document the Miami Circle a sacred Native American site belonging to the Tequesta Indians, where recent discoveries indicate civilization going back 7,000 years.

Responding to the emergency needs of the community has also been a hallmark of The Villagers. After major destruction by Hurricane Irma, budgeted emergency funds were immediately released to help clean up, secure, and stabilize a number of sites so they would not incur further damage. In 1992, after the devastating Hurricane Andrew, the group not only supported the community (despite personal losses for many members) but just three months later managed to organize and host a Candlelight House Tour for the National Trust annual conference.

Educational priorities:

Educational efforts have included special exhibits, tours, lectures, workshops, and webinars as well as programs on historic preservation for local teachers, city administrators, preservationists, students, and community leaders. Both traditional and social media are routinely utilized to spread the word about preservation activities as well as information. Significantly, the first of several planned self-guided historic tours, such as "*Miami-Dade County's 7 Heritage Parks*" have been researched and put together on the free educational site <https://theclio.com/tour/2141>

Fundraising with a Purpose:

During the recent pandemic, The Villagers did not miss a beat, drawing on their solid financial reserves to continue funding grants, hosting creative fundraisers, and launching an extremely well-received series of lunchtime webinars. The webinar series had hundreds of participants zooming in to join expert guest speakers discuss a wide variety of preservation topics such as climate change and the impact of rising water, resources for owners of historic properties, and local preservation challenges.

Fundraising efforts are combined with educational goals, showcasing historic properties, gardens, and neighborhoods, or featuring educationally significant information and programming. Recent examples include a House Tour that featured the storybook thematic homes George Merrick built in Coral Gables; a Garden Tour in far south Miami-Dade focused on the preservation of a native hardwood hammock, sustainability, and reclamation of natural plantings; and Historic Hunters explored Miami Springs following clues in search of the areas' fascinating aviation history.

Grant awards are funded through the tours, events, and projects as well as proceeds from publications including the award-winning *Gardens of Miami*, *Cook it Like a Native*, *Biscayne Bites and Breezes*, and *Outstanding Homes of Miami*.

In Conclusion:

The Villagers' good work has been recognized with 45+ awards and honors, including from the State of Florida, Friends of Florida State Parks, Florida Trust for Historic Preservation, Dade Heritage Trust, University of Florida, Pinewood Cemetery, Women's History Coalition, Tropical Audubon Society, Deering Estate Foundation, University of Miami, Miami-Dade County, City of Coral Gables, Barnacle Historic State Park, and more.

Visit our website: thevillagersinc.org

City Code

Sec. 70-84. - Preservation of historic property.

(a) Consistent with F.S. § 337.401(7)(k), this article preserves the city's full authority to enforce historic preservation regulations adopted by ordinance in effect on April 1, 2017, consistent with the preservation of local zoning authority under 47 U.S.C. § 332(c)(7), the requirements for facility modifications under 47 U.S.C. § 1455(a), or the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966, as amended, and the regulations adopted to implement such laws. The city hereby confirms its intention to enforce its local codes, administrative rules, and regulations, including the city Historic Preservation Ordinance, pursuant to article 3, division 11 of the city's Zoning Code, as amended, which applies to historic designation by the city and the review by the city, as a certified local government, of national register nominations.

(b) Pursuant to section 3-1106 of the City Zoning Code, as amended, no building, structure, improvement, landscape feature, or archaeological site within the city, which has been designated an historic landmark or historic landmark district, shall be erected, altered, restored, rehabilitated, excavated, move, reconstructed or demolished until an application for a certificate of appropriateness regarding any architectural features, landscape features, or site improvements has been submitted and approved by the city pursuant to the procedures in article 3, division 11 of the Zoning Code, as amended. Unless otherwise specified, exterior alterations, additions, demolitions to noncontributing structures or properties within historical landmark districts shall be reviewed and approved by the city historic preservation board and/or city historical resources department. Whenever a registrant seeks a permit to locate a communications facility in public rights-of-way that would impact an historic landmark or historic landmark district, the registrant shall either simultaneously or prior to filing the application or request with the public works department, provide a copy to the city's historical resources department and confirm receipt of such copy. A registrant shall apply for such certificate of appropriateness concurrently with or prior to submitting an application or request for a permit. The registrant shall be responsible for all fees of general applicability for such approval or certificate of appropriateness. The city manager shall deny a permit application or request filed pursuant to this article if the required certificate of appropriateness is denied or is not obtained by the deadline for the city to process the request or application. If a permit is not required for such communications facility pursuant to this article, the registrant shall apply for and obtain a certificate of appropriateness if required, prior to the placement or maintenance of such facility in the public rights-of-way that would impact an historic landmark or historic district. By way of example, placement of aerial utility lines that would not require a permit may require a certificate of appropriateness if it would impact historic property.

(c) Any proposed material amendments to the city Plan, including, but not limited to, the closing of streets and any developments that would affect such city plan, shall be in accordance with the procedures set forth in article 3, division 11, section 3-1104 of the Zoning Code, as amended, notwithstanding any provisions in article 3 to the contrary. Whenever a registrant seeks a permit to locate a communications facility in public rights-of-way that is within the city Plan, the registrant shall either simultaneously or before filing the application or request with the public works department, provide a copy of the application to the city's historical resources department and confirm receipt of such application copy.