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## THE MIAMI RIVER REHABILITATION

Many steps are being taken to rehabilitate the Miami River and its surrounding neighborhoods. Officer Reyes a **Neighborhood Resource Officer** and a member of the **East Little Havana Problem Solving Team** and Bill Borges from the **Neighborhood Enhancement Team** are taking the first step in this rehabilitation process.

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## EAST LITTLE HAVANA RIVERSIDE GARDEN

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With the approval of **the Florida Department of Transportation**, Officer Reyes and Inspector Borges have turned an empty unsightly F.D.O.T. lot into a \$73,000.00 community garden. The lot, which sits on the west bank of the Miami River, under the West Flagler Bridge was converted into *The East Little Havana Riverside Garden*; a place where citizens will enjoy nature, art and the Miami River.

The project was funded with a grant issued to us by the East Little Havana Empowerment Zone and funding provided by The Miami River Commission and the Trust for Public Land. Several other organizations, such as The Miami River Neighborhood Restoration Corp., contributed and assisted us in realizing this project.

The garden depicts The Miami River as its theme. Plant life is indigenous to the area and with the help of a landscape architect the garden was designed as a zero-scape project. The artwork, by Miami Artist Xavier Cortada, encompasses wildlife in the river.

The garden, we are hoping, is going to give life back to this area that many people refer to as dilapidated. Many of the area residents and in particular the elderly who reside at the Hunter River Walk Apartment Complex, now have a place they can visit and enjoy a relaxing stroll or simply a place where they can escape the hustle of every day life.

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## COMMUNITY POLICING

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The site for the Riverside Garden was once plagued with drug dealers, drunks, thieves and many other undesirable residents of East Little Havana. After an extensive campaign, which included narcotics surveillance, bar checks, homeless placement, theft details and constant police presence, we were able to eradicate crime in this area. But, in order to maintain this area clean, we had to change the environment that nurtured and attracted the undesirable residents.

The idea behind introducing a community garden is simple; we have provided the citizens of East Little Havana with a beautiful, clean and safe environment for them to visit. In return the criminals who were there before, now feel uncomfortable and fear the repercussions for their behaviors. Most just opted to leave the area.

## East Little Havana Riverside Garden

### SCANNING

#### *HOW WAS THE PROBLEM IDENTIFIED?*

CITIZENS, COMMUNITY LEADERS AND MERCHANTS BEGAN TO COMPLAIN ON THE INCREASE OF CRIME AND THE DECREASE IN THE QUALITY OF LIFE IN THE AREA OF WEST FLAGLER STREET AND SOUTH RIVER DRIVE. THE NEIGHBORHOOD RESOURCE OFFICERS WITH THE ASSISTANCE OF THE EAST LITTLE HAVANA PROBLEM SOLVING TEAM AND B.E.A.T. OFFICERS BEGAN A ZERO TOLERANCE OPERATION IN THE AREA.

NUMEROUS ARRESTS WERE MADE FOR NARCOTICS SALES, DRINKING IN PUBLIC, URINATING IN PUBLIC AND OTHER QUALITY OF LIFE VIOLATIONS, BUT THE PROBLEM PERSISTED. WE DID A CRIME ANALYSIS OF THE AFFECTED NEIGHBORHOOD AND LEARNED THAT CITIZENS HAD GIVEN UP ON THE AREA. VERY FEW CALLS WERE DISPATCHED; EVEN THOUGH THE NUMBER OF ARRESTS DOUBLED, MOST ARRESTS WERE SELF INITIATED BY THE OFFICERS WORKING IN THIS AREA.

WE CONTACTED THE OWNERS OF THE FEW BUSINESSES REMAINING IN THIS AREA AND THE CITIZENS WHO LIVED IN THE NEIGHBORHOOD. THEY ALL HAD THE SAME COMPLAINTS:

- PEOPLE DRINKING BEER
- PEOPLE LOITERING ALL DAY
- DRUG SALES
- ILLEGAL DUMPING
- NOT ENOUGH POLICE PRESENCE

A PLAN OF ACTION WAS ALREADY BEING EXECUTED IN *THE* AREA BUT WE FELT A DRASTIC CHANGE IN THE MAKEUP OF THE NEIGHBORHOOD WAS NEEDED. NEIGHBORHOOD RESOURCE OFFICER MISAEL REYES AND CODE ENFORCEMENT BILL BORGES DRAFTED A PROPOSAL FOR CONVERTING THE UNDERNEATH OF THE FLAGLER BRIDGE, THE HEART OF THE AFFECTED AREA, INTO A COMMUNITY GARDEN.

#### *WHO IDENTIFIED THE PROBLEM?*

THE EAST LITTLE HAVANA NEIGHBORHOOD RESOURCE OFFICERS, THE NEIGHBORHOOD ENHANCEMENT TEAM AND THE EAST LITTLE HAVANA

PROBLEM SOLVING TEAM IDENTIFIED THE CAUSE OF THE PROBLEM AFTER INTENSIVE RESEARCH WHICH INCLUDED CRIME ANALYSIS, COMMUNITY MEETINGS, AND A STUDY OF ARREST PATTERNS.

***HOW AND WHY WAS THIS PROBLEM SELECTED FROM OTHER PROBLEMS?***

THIS WAS THE MOST URGENT AND VISUAL PROBLEM AFFECTING EAST LITTLE HAVANA AND THE RE-DEVELOPMENT OF THE MIAMI RIVER. ORGANIZATIONS SUCH AS THE MIAMI RIVER COMMISSION, TRUST FOR PUBLIC LAND, AND THE MIAMI RIVER NEIGHBORHOOD RESTORATION CORP. WERE ALL WORKING HARD TO REHABILITATE THIS AREA. PART OF OUR PLAN OF ACTION WAS TO JOIN FORCES WITH THESE ORGANIZATIONS AND ATTACK THE PROBLEM AS ONE ENTITY.

## **ANALYSIS**

***WHAT METHOD OF ANALYSIS WAS USED?***

WE HAD A CRIME ANALYSIS DONE OF THE AREA DATING FROM JANUARY 1, 1999 TILL JANUARY 1, 2001. FROM THIS ANALYSIS WE STUDIED THE PATTERNS OF CALLS DISPATCHED TO THE AFFECTED AREA. WE CONCENTRATED ON THE TIME OF DAY, LOCATION, AND TYPE OF CALLS. WE ALSO STUDIED THE TYPES OF ARREST BEING MADE. THIS HELPED US REALIZE THAT MOST OF THE POLICE PRESENCE IN THE AREA REVOLVED AROUND QUALITY OF LIFE ISSUES.

***WHAT INFORMATION HELPED TO BETTER UNDERSTAND THE NATURE AND EX'T'ENT OF THE PROBLEM? WHAT WERE THE CONSEQUENCES OF THE PROBLEM?***

ALTHOUGH THE RESEARCH WE HAD DONE GAVE US AN UNDERSTANDING OF THE PROBLEM, IT DID NOT TELL US WHAT WAS CAUSING THE PROBLEM. IT WASN'T UNTIL WE MET WITH THE MERCHANTS OF THE AREA THAT WE GOT AN UNDERSTANDING OF WHY THESE PROBLEMS WERE OCCURING.

WE FOUND THAT THE AREA WAS NOT CONDUCTIVE TO ANYTHING BUT CRIME. THERE WERE SEVERAL ABANDONED BUILDINGS IN THE AREA, UNUSED EMPTY LOTS, AND THE BIGGEST EYE SORE WAS THE EMPTY AREA UNDERNEATH THE FLAGLER BRIDGE THAT PEOPLE USED FOR CRIMINAL ACTIVITY ANT) ILLEGAL DUMPING.

***HOW OFTEN DID THE PROBLEM OCCUR?***

THE PROBLEMS AFFECTING THIS NEIGHBORHOOD WERE CONSTANT, NIGHT AND DAY, WEEKDAYS AND WEEKENDS.

***WHAT HARMS RESULTED FROM THE PROBLEM?***

THE AFFECTED AREA HAS A STRETCH OF WATER FRONT PROPERTIES. INSTEAD OF FLOURISHING BUSINESS AND LUXURY RESIDENTIAL COMPLEXES WE HAD EMPTY, OVERGROWN LOTS, ABANDONED BUILDINGS AND STRUGGLING BUSINESSES. WHERE MOST MAJOR CITIES DEVELOP THEIR WATER FRONT PROPERTIES, THIS PARTICULAR SECTION OF THE MIAMI RIVER HAD BEING IGNORE AND FORGOTTEN.

***EXISTING PROCEDURES: WHAT PROCEDURES OR LEGISLATION EXISTED TO HELP ADDRESS THESE PROBLEMS?***

THE MIAMI DADE EMPOWERMENT TRUST HAD INTRODUCED THE EAST LITTLE HAVANA EMPOWERMENT ZONE IN THIS AREA AND THEIR MISSION WAS TO PROVIDE FUNDING FOR THE BEAUTIFICATION AND REHABILITATION OF EAST LITTLE HAVANA NEIGHBORHOODS. THE MIAMI RIVER COMMISSION WAS IN THE PLANNING STAGES OF DEVELOPING A GREENWAY PATH ALONG THE MIAMI RIVER AND HAD RECENTLY SECURED FUNDING FOR THE STRETCH OF RIVER WITHIN THE BOUNDARIES OF EAST LITTLE HAVANA. FINALLY, THE TRUST FOR PUBLIC LAND WAS INTERESTED IN TURNING SOME OF THE EMPTY WATERFRONT PROPERTIES INTO PUBLIC PLACES. WITH THESE THREE SOURCES FOR FUNDING AND SUPPORT WE DEVELOPED A PROPOSAL TO ADDRESS THE PROBLEM.

***IN WHAT WAYS WERE CITIZENS INVOLVED IN YOUR ANALYSIS?***

WE TAILORED OUR RESPONSE PLAN AROUND THE FEEDBACK THAT WE RECEIVED FROM THE CITIZENS, MERCHANTS AND ORGANIZATIONS IN THE AREA. DURING OUR ANALYSIS, EACH PERSON WAS INTERVIEWED AND ASKED WHAT THEY FELT WAS THE PROBLEMS AFFECTING THE AREA? WHAT WAS CAUSING THE PROBLEMS? AND HOW THEY THOUGHT THE PROBLEMS COULD BE FIXED?

AFTER GATHERING THE INFORMATION A PROPOSAL PLAN WAS DESIGNED AND EXECUTED. THIS ALLOWED THE AFFECTED PEOPLE IN THE AREA THE CHANCE TO HAVE A SAY ON HOW THE POLICE SHOULD ADDRESS THEIR PROBLEMS. IN RETURN IT BUILD A STRONGER AND POSITIVE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN POLICE AND *THE* PUBLIC.

## RESPONSE

### *WHAT RESPONSES DID YOU USE TO ADDRESS THE PROBLEM?*

THE PROPOSED PLAN WAS TO BUILD A COMMUNITY GARDEN UNDERNEATH THE FLAGLER BRIDGE WHERE RESIDENTS AND VISITORS TO THE AREA COULD ENJOY NATURE, ART AND THE MIAMI RIVER. THE GARDEN'S MISSION WAS TO EDUCATE THE PUBLIC OF THE UNIQUE ENVIRONMENT THE MIAMI RIVER REPRESENTS AND TO CREATE AN ATMOSPHERE NON CONDUCTIVE TO CRIMINAL ACTIVITY.

### *WHAT WERE YOU INTENDING TO ACCOMPLISH WITH YOUR RESPONSE?*

THE GOAL OF THE RESPONSE PLAN WAS TO CHANGE THE ENVIRONMENT THAT HAD BEEN CREATED IN THIS AREA. IT ENCOURAGED AND ATTRACTED THE BEHAVIORS CAUSING THE PROBLEMS. THIS CHANGE, ALONG WITH POLICE ENFORCEMENT WOULD DETER PEOPLE FROM FURTHER COMMITTING VIOLATIONS. WE ALSO HOPED THAT THE CHANGE IN ENVIRONMENT WOULD MAKE THOSE CAUSING THE PROBLEMS FEEL UNCOMFORTABLE ENOUGH SO THEY WOULD NOT RETURN TO THE AREA.

## ASSESSING

### *WHAT METHODS DID YOU USE TO ASSESS/EVALUATE YOUR RESPONSE?*

WE HAVE CONTINUED TO MEET WITH ORGANIZATIONS IN THE AREA ON A MONTHLY BASIS. AT EACH MEETING WE GET FEEDBACK FROM THEM AND ALONG WITH CRIME ANALYSIS REPORTS WE MODIFIED THE RESPONSE PLAN AS NEEDED AND ARE IN THE PROCESS OF DEVELOPING A SECOND PHASE TO THE PROJECT.

AS A RESULT OF THE EFFORTS PUT FORTH BY ALL THE ORGANIZATIONS INVOLVED IN THIS PROJECT THE AREA HAS EXPERIENCED AN INCREASE IN RE-DEVELOPMENT AND HAS ATTRACTED SEVERAL MAJOR EVENTS. ON APRIL 2002 THE RIVER DAY/ EARTH DAY FESTIVAL WILL BE HELD AT JOSE MARTI PARK, WHICH IS IN THE AFFECTED AREA. THE FESTIVAL'S CHANGE IN VENUE HAS ATTRACTED NUMEROUS SPONSORS AND IT IS ANTICIPATED THAT THE AFFENDANCE WILL DOUBLE FROM PREVIOUS YEARS.

SEVERAL DEVELOPERS IN THE AREA HAVE GIVEN US POSITIVE FEEDBACK AND HAVE EXPRESSED THE POSITIVE CHANGE THIS PROJECT HAS MADE

IN THE AREA. A NEW PUBLIX IS BEING BUILT IN THE AFFECTED AREA AND A LUXURY APARTMENT BUILDING IS BEING ERECTED DIRECTLY IN FRONT OF THE GARDEN. IN NO WAY ARE WE TAKING CREDIT FOR THIS RE-DEVELOPMENT OF THE AREA. MOST OF THESE PLANS WERE IN THE PLANNING BEFORE WE TACKLED OUR PROJECT, BUT IT WAS THE FIRST STEP TAKEN IN THE REHABILITATION OF THIS NEIGHBORHOOD AND HAS PROVIDED A WINDOW TO THE FUTURE OF THIS AREA. DEVELOPERS AND RESIDENTS NOW FEEL THAT THE POLICE SHARES IN THEIR VISION AND IS TAKING STEPS TO REALIZE THEM.

*AGENCY AND OFFICER INFORMATION:*

OFFICER MISAEL REYES AND INSPECTOR BILL BORGES DEVELOPED THIS PROBLEM-ORIENTED INITIATIVE. THEY ARE BOTH CITY OF MIAMI EMPLOYEES, BUT THEY SELF-INITIATED THIS PROJECT FROM A DESIRE TO IMPROVE THE AREA. THEIR DUTIES INVOLVE OTHER TASKS WITHIN THE COMMUNITY, SO MOST OF THEIR TIME SPENT IN DEVELOPING THE PROJECT AND SEEKING FUNDING WAS DONE ON PERSONAL TIME. IN ORDER TO ACCOMPLISH WHAT THEY HAD ENVISIONED AND WITH THE LIMITED FUNDING THAT WAS AVAILABLE, THE PROJECT COULD ONLY BE ACCOMPLISHED WITH DONATIONS AND VOLUNTEERS. OFFICER REYES AND INSPECTOR BORGES SET AN EXAMPLE BY VOLUNTEERING THEIR TIME AND AS A RESULT OTHERS FOLLOWED.

OFFICER MISAEL REYES AND INSPECTOR BILL BORGES BOTH WORK OUT OF THE EAST LITTLE HAVANA N.E.T. OFFICE LOCATED AT 111 S.W. 5<sup>TH</sup> AVENUE IN MIAMI FLORIDA (PHONE# 305-859-2713).

*MEDIA COVERAGE AND RECOGNITIONS:*

THE MIAMI HERALD PUBLISHED AN ARTICLE IN THEIR NEIGHBORS SECTION, WHICH COVERED THE EFFORTS BEING TAKEN TO REHABILITATE THE AREA. HERE IS A COPY OF THAT ARTICLE:



***PHOTO DOCUMENTATION:***

THE FOLLOWING PAGES DOCUMENT THE TRANSFORMATION OF AN EMPTY LOT, TO A BEAUTIFUL GARDEN; COMPLETE WITH WALKAYS, MURALS, AND NATIVE PLANTS. THE PROJECT TOOK NINE MONTHS TO COMPLETE. THE GARDEN IS NOW BEING MAINTAIN BY OFFICER REYES AND INSPECTOE BORGES AND WITH THE HELP SEVERAL VOLUNTEERS THAT INCLUDE A BOYSCOUT TROOP.