



Who Are The Villagers?

Photos and text by

50 Years of Saving Places



Dozens of awards and accolades have been presented, but The Villagers are largely unknown to the general public, gratified by their success and ability to work effectively behind the scenes.

It all began 50 years ago, as a very focused, singular effort to help save the iconic Douglas Entrance from a fate of becoming a developer's grocery store parking lot. A group of women, many, wives of local architects, had banded together in support of the project. They were successful in helping save the building, and then helped restore it through community awareness, fundraising and sheer elbow grease.

Fresh off their success, they decided to stay together and turn their incredible energy and acumen to other needed projects in the area, starting with the Biltmore and moving on to Vizcaya. The group has been extremely successful in working to have sites placed on the National Register of Historic Places, including locations like Anderson's Corner, the Alamo and the Doc Thomas (Audubon) House. Villagers worked with the Florida Division of Archaeology, History and Records Management, funding and working, on the first effort to survey historic and architecturally interesting sites in Miami-Dade.

With a clear-cut mission, "*dedicated to the restoration and preservation of historic sites,*" special events and publications were launched to serve as fundraisers. The Villagers have now contributed in excess of \$1 million to more than 60 local projects including: The Lightkeeper's Cottage at Cape Florida Lighthouse, The Housekeepers Club (now the Women's Club of Coconut Grove), Hampton House, The Kampong, The Barnacle, Dade County Courthouse, Merrick House, Seminole Theater, Pinecrest Gardens, Montgomery Botanical Center, and Marjorie S. Douglas Cottage.

Educational efforts supporting the historic preservation mission have also been an important part of The Villager legacy. Community tours have been conducted, workshops and lectures have been sponsored, and historically-related educational materials have been provided to local teachers. Through the years, more than \$400,000 in scholarships have been awarded to students at Florida universities who are pursuing degrees in architecture, with a focus on preservation, as well as students graduating from DASH, Miami-Dade County's magnet school for architecture and design.

Members also enjoy learning more about local history with special programs, meetings that rotate among Miami-Dade's historic locations, and field trips to key sites throughout South Florida.

Popular events such as the much-anticipated annual Holiday House Tour, Garden Tour and Historic Hunt have become significant fundraising events. The latest publication, *The Gardens of Miami*, is now available for purchase. The beautifully photographed four-color, coffee-table book celebrating unique private gardens has been completely underwritten, so that, as is Villager tradition, all proceeds support the historic preservation mission.

Still an all-volunteer group, now numbering 220 men and women, The Villagers has a variety of membership categories to fit all lifestyles. **For more information about The Villagers' history, projects, events, *The Gardens of Miami* and membership opportunities, visit: www.thevillagersinc.org.**



aren Buchsbaum

(Feature) Marjorie Stoneman Douglas Cottage,
(Inset photo top) Douglas Entrance, (Inside
photo right) LightKeeper's Cottage, Cape Florida