

Tropical Life

PEOPLE

BOY GEORGE
WILL PERFORM
WITH HIS 11-
PIECE BAND AT A
VIP PARTY IN MIAMI, 4C



JOSÉ A. IGLESÍAS jgilesias@elnuevoherald.com

MIAMI

Adapting to an ever-changing

BY ANA VECIANA-SUAREZ
aveciana@MiamiHerald.com

Dolly McIntyre's memories of Miami's earliest preservation efforts are less about art and architecture and more about old-

fashioned elbow grease. After a group of volunteer women saved the historic Douglas Entrance in Coral Gables from being torn down, they moved on to help other landmarks, including Vizcaya.

"There I was on top of a ladder scrubbing the kitchen ceiling [at Vizcaya]," McIntyre

recalled. "I could smell the Spic and Span, and it was just running down my arms. At that time we did what we had to do. We cleaned pigeon poop, we cleaned bathrooms, we cleaned whatever needed cleaning — basically grunt work."

McIntyre is a charter member of The Villagers, Miami-

Dade's oldest preservation organization and one of the most influential. Founded in October 1966, it is celebrating its 50th anniversary this year, and a quick rundown of its work underscores how its influence has extended past those first clean-and-scrub moments.

The Villagers' efforts have

touched pretty much almost every local historical landmark, but beyond that the group has been instrumental in providing money to help other like-minded groups and, perhaps more importantly, to foster preservation in the community. The

SEE THE VILLAGERS, 2C

Dolly McIntyre, left, and Mary Burke are members of The Villagers, Miami-Dade's oldest preservation group. McIntyre is a charter member; Burke is the current president.

FROM PAGE 1C

THE VILLAGERS

Villagers were instrumental in starting the Dade Heritage Trust in 1972 — McIntyre was its chair for the trust's first three years — and in helping launch the Florida Heritage Trust four years later.

"We realized that the need was greater than what 100 women could handle," McIntyre said. "We needed an advocacy group that was more political."

Consider some of The Villagers' efforts:

- Fought to save Anderson's Corner, doing some of the research and documentation to get it listed on the National Register of Historic Places.

- Participated in the renovation and restoration effort of the Merrick House in Coral Gables as well as the center courtyard of El Jardin in Coconut Grove (now part of Carrollton School of the Sacred Heart).

- Helped restore the Old Larkin Schoolhouse on the grounds of Sunset Elementary School.

- Contributed to the restoration of the Lighthouse Keeper's Cottage at Bill Baggs Cape Florida State Recreation Area, including installing museum displays, transforming the kitchen into an art theater, providing signage along the historic gardens and creating an archaeological dig display in the cistern.

- Spruced up David Fairchild's study at The Kampong.

- Restored the fountain at the Coral Gables Women's Club.

- Raised tens of thousands of dollars for scholarships.

- Donated \$25,000 to help restore the Marjory Stoneman Douglas home in Coconut Grove.

- Hosted, sponsored or funded walking tours, historic hunts, lectures on local history and tours of historic homes and gardens. It also has published

several books.

Over the past decades, the group also has evolved. Though it has maintained some of its signature events — the ever-popular annual home tour, for example — it no longer is as involved in hands-on, elbow-grease restoration projects. Instead it focuses on partnering with other groups by handing out grants and funds.

"It's our way of spreading our preservation efforts and expanding our reach," said current president Mary Burke. "We've discovered we're good at raising money and helping others by giving it away."

To wit: This year, the group provided a grant of \$20,000 each to five projects, some of which have already been completed. These include the installation of a sprinkler system for Coconut Grove's The Barnacle; restoration of antique metal light fixtures at Vizcaya; restoration of the floor of a historic log cabin for the Village of Biscayne Park; repair of seats at the Shepard and Ruth K. Broad Center at Barry University; and financing a mobile teaching unit and portable interpretive unit for the South Florida Pioneer Museum to be housed at the Redland Farm Life School.

The group has also adapted and redefined what preservation means in Miami-Dade. Members look not just for a preservation project but one that will maintain a community's history and culture within the confines of current demands.

"The preservation aspect is still crucial," Burke added, "but how we transform that into functional, livable communities is our challenge. We're not just about preserving old history but also about integrating history into the requirements of a new Miami."

The group now includes men, and the various levels



KAREN BUCHSBAUM

The Villagers helped with the restoration of the Lighthouse Keeper's Cottage at the Bill Baggs Cape Florida State Recreation Area in Key Biscayne.



The Villagers donated money to help restore the Marjory Stoneman Douglas cottage in Coconut Grove.

of membership enable those who are employed full time to participate on a sliding-scale system of requirements.

Brett Gillis is one of the newer members of The Villagers. The hospice pharmacist moved here in 2012 and has spent the past two years renovating a George Fink home. That effort, and a long-abiding interest in historic structures, led him to The Vil-

lagers. Now he is co-chair of the Holiday House Tour, which this year focuses on, yes, Fink architecture.

"What I liked most [about The Villagers] was that it wasn't a fly-by-night group," Gillis said. "They have a serious commitment and a serious budget, and they've made some significant contributions to the community."

He also likes the fact that it isn't a large, unwieldy

group but "a smaller group of like-minded people who are passionate" about preserving history.

Gillis and other members insist that The Villagers, though half a century old, is just getting started in its efforts to protect the area's history. The group's most daunting challenge may be to create a preservation ethos like other cities — namely, Charleston, Savannah and Bos-

Events and Info

THE VILLAGERS 2016 HOUSE TOUR

"Finding Fink," featuring the architecture of George Fink, Coral Gables' most decorated architect

10 a.m. to 3 p.m. Dec. 3 in Coral Gables (ticket holders are advised of start locations prior to event). \$35, advance purchase by Nov. 22 (no will call/no on-site ticket sales). For information and tickets, visit thevillagersinc.org. Or send check payable to "The Villagers, Inc." with a self-addressed, stamped envelope to: The Villagers, Inc., PO Box 141843 Coral Gables, FL 33114-1843. Please include address and phone numbers on check.

"The Gardens of Miami"

The Villagers' hardcover 264-page "coffee table" style book showcasing Miami's gardens is now available for purchase and shipment. It contains almost 400 photographs by master photographer Steven Brooke, an introduction by Joanna Lombard and text by Elaine Mills and Julie Petrella Arch. There are also sections that highlight Miami's public gardens and garden organizations. \$60 plus state sales tax (no tax on out-of-state orders) and a shipping and handling fee of \$5 per book. To order visit thevillagersinc.org.

ton — that treasure and protect their worthy buildings.

"Miami does have a culture, it does have a history," Burke said. "But informing people and educating them is something we need to do again and again. Not everything should be preserved, but a lot should be protected and there are ways of repurposing a building to do this. If something is functional and beautiful, let's keep it."