

# GABLES

## *Living*



# Meet the Villagers!



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BRINGING PEOPLE TOGETHER

Photo provided by Karen Buchsbaum



# Meet the Villagers!

**W**HO ARE THE VILLAGERS? Anyone who's ever opened their eyes in our community immediately understands Miami is one of the most special places in the world for a

variety of reasons. Even though most recognize its special charm, the architecture found here often takes a backseat to our beaches and weather. But that doesn't mean it should be ignored - Coral Gables is home to some of unique and fascinating architecture! Unfortunately, as Miami continues to attract people from all over the globe, some of

our neighborhoods and communities are feeling pressure to develop, effectively destroying some of the historical architecture in the Coral Gables community. Luckily, The Villagers are here to help preserve our past for generations to come! The current president of The Villagers is Susan Medina, and she was so kind in helping me understand just who The Villagers are.

Founded in 1966, The Villagers is the oldest non-profit organization dedicated to historical preservation in Miami-Dade. They were birthed out of necessity, as the famously historical Douglas Entrance in Coral Gables was in jeopardy of being destroyed. In 1972, after a successful restoration



It's always a full house at The Villagers' monthly meetings

projects, and enjoy speakers on a variety of preservation topics. These meetings are appreciated by everyone involved, as these historic venues absolutely adore having The Villagers on their premises, and always welcome the group with big smiles and open arms.

The members of The Villagers don't take historic preservation lightly, or even recreationally - they are serious about it. When speaking with Susan, she mentioned multiple times that members often plan personal vacations around preservation efforts, talk about dedication!

Although their monthly meetings are a cherished highlight, the events which The Villagers really get excited about are the Historic House tours and the Garden Tours. These tours allow the public to purchase tickets in order to visit and experience various venues throughout the community. The tours are their biggest revenue-generating activity, and truly allow them to perform all the work they set out to do. At these tours, members also feature vintage jewelry for sale, and sell some of their famous baked goods.

Considering that the pandemic has essentially shut the world down for the past 2 years, The Villagers are ecstatic to begin the Historic House Tours. They just held a House Tour on December 10th, and are scheduled to host a Garden Tour on March 4th, make sure to not miss it!

One of the more popular events put on by The Villagers, is their "Historic Hunt" - a scavenger hunt open to the public that takes place all around Miami. Susan was a brand new member when she did her very first Historic Hunt, and was unaware how serious and competitive it was - she was zipping around Miami with two other (at the time) strangers and actually was part of the winning team! Definitely an event we all need to check out.

#### MAKING A DIFFERENCE

The Villagers have funded many projects

campaign on the Douglas Entrance, The Villagers expanded their role to saving many other local sites and eventually played a major role in the creation of a new historic preservation organization in Dade County - The Dade Heritage Trust.

The Villagers are still running strong, with over 200 members who participate in monthly meetings, and are focused on historic preservation Coral Gables and the rest of Dade County. The work they do is wholesome, empowering, and keeps our city gorgeous for generations to come.

**PRESERVATION IS IMPORTANT - AND FUN!**

Monthly meetings for The Villagers are held at historic sites, where members plan new preservation

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throughout Coral Gables. From restoration of artifacts at the Merrick House and Coral Gables Library, historic artwork at City Hall, to restoration of the Alhambra Water Tower and work at the Biltmore. They have funded restoration of facilities for scouts, including for Boy Scout Troop 7 and Camp Mahachie for the Girl Scouts of Tropical Florida. Others include Coco Plum Woman's Club, Coral Gables Congregational Church, Coral Gables Museum, University of Miami, Venetian Pool, and, of course, the Douglas Entrance where it all began. The Villagers currently award around \$60,000 per year to these venues in need

**Villagers Assist Actors' Playhouse with Historic Renovation**

The Villagers recently presented a check for \$7,867 to representatives of Coral Gables' Actors' Playhouse. The funds were used to replace the building's 15-year-old outdated carpet in the lobby and theater aisles and was designed to complement the theater's historic terrazzo floors.



Julie Dow & Beverly Loftus present a check to David Arisco, Artistic Director, Actors' Playhouse. Julie Dow & Beverly Loftus present a check to David Arisco, Artistic Director, Actors' Playhouse.

**A Decade of Support for Montgomery Botanical Center**

During the last 10 years, The Villagers have funded various restoration projects at Montgomery Botanical Center ranging from new A/C installation, to greenhouse preservation, to emergency repair work from damage caused by Hurricane Irma.

**Villagers Assist Coral Gables Garden Club with Historic Renovation**



Villager Beverly Loftus with Dr. Patrick Griffith, Executive Director, Montgomery Botanical Center, delivers a check to fund restoration work in the greenhouse.

The Villagers recently presented a check for \$3,000 to representatives of the Coral Gables Garden Club. The project is part of an overall renovation of the Garden Club's headquarters, housed in the original 1920s Guard House of the Biltmore Hotel. Previously The Villagers contributed to replacing the original entry door. The door's unique silhouette required it to be custom-made as well as fabricated to meet the current Miami-Dade hurricane impact code.



Villagers Julie Dow and Beverly Loftus present a check to Susan Rodriguez and Sandy Milledge from the Coral Gables Garden Club.

In closing, this is a special organization with a special purpose. Check them out to see how you can get involved! As Susan put it to me: "If you have a passion, really find a group - it is eye-opening what you can do together, so much more than you can do as an individual. And it keeps you young, healthy, energetic, and happy!"

Check them out here! [www.thevillagersinc.org](http://www.thevillagersinc.org)

**BY** Christopher Miyares

**PHOTOS** provided by Karen Buchsbaum