

# Pinecrest



ONE OF MIAMI'S COMMUNITY NEWSPAPERS

DECEMBER 19, 2011 - JANUARY 2, 2012

## 2012 State of the Village: It's all good

BY CINDY LERNER

Mayor, Village of Pinecrest



This is my fourth State of the Village address, and it is hard to believe that I am entering the last year of my first term as Mayor. I must tell you, I recently participated on a panel on local government at a conference in Orlando with four other Florida mayors and proudly proclaimed to the crowd of almost 2,000 people that I am the luckiest mayor in the entire country. I claim the title! Where else can you find the beauty, tranquility and peace of the natural environment, yet the vibrant highly educated and involved community of business and residents? And with each year I am ever more appreciative that we have so much to be thankful for in Pinecrest. We have a proud tradition of excellence, our schools and our neighborhood were an amazing place to live and raise a family, going back more than three-quarters of a century, in fact to our roots in the 1930s when the Parrott jungle first opened as a tourist attraction, and the beauty of this area attracted our pioneers to settle here. So we have had this tradition of excellence to uphold and to improve upon.

My family moved here in 1960 and as a new fourth grader at Palmetto Elementary, I

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## Dirk Jacobs is 50!



Not many people want to be reminded that they are 50 years old, least of all longtime Pinecrest resident Dirk Jacobs. He passed the half-century mark this month, so we just wanted to remind him that youth is such a fleeting thing and he is now officially an old man! Here's a recent photograph of Dirk right after he hooked and boated a snook. Happy birthday, Dirk! May you have many more.

## Palmetto High Class of '61 marks 50th with reunion

BY CAROLE WERRY

**F**ifty years ago, the first graduating class of Palmetto Senior High School received diplomas in the school auditorium.

These students, who grew up in a much smaller Miami, spent their free time dancing to rock and roll, having beach parties at Matheson Hammock, Crandon Park and Tahiti Beach, and whooping it up as much as they could. They drove their cars to Jimmy's Hurricane to order burgers from carhops on roller skates and packed their cars full of kids to go to drive-in movies.

But they did their share of studying and began the standards of academic excellence which continue at Palmetto High today. This first graduating class also had the privilege of naming the school mascot, choosing the school colors, naming the newspaper and yearbook, picking the school song and starting traditions that are still carried on.

Recently the alumni of this first graduating class came together to celebrate a joyful 50th class reunion and they did it with

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## Positive PEOPLE in Pinecrest

These Positive People help add to the quality of life in Pinecrest. Look inside for their stories.



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# VILLAGE, from page 1

walked and rode my bicycle the three blocks to school and back home. And just as we were 50 years ago, when my family moved here, we remain a vibrant community that attracts young families to move here for our excellent schools, beautiful neighborhoods and wonderful quality of life. Imagine my joy at sitting with a group of fourth grade girl scouts at Palmetto Elementary last week and sharing with them that I too was a girl scout in fourth grade at Palmetto Elementary, and maybe one day one of them would be the mayor of Pinecrest!

Did you know that Palmetto Senior High school's very first graduating class, the class of 1961, recently held its 50th reunion? I had the opportunity to attend this class of '61's visit to see the school once again (sadly it looks much the same) and to look at their yearbook; it was hard to believe, the Palmetto expressway was being built as the Palmetto high school opened it's doors. The swim team swam in a rock pit; they even had a rifle club. Pictures show the old fashioned switchboard with the operation plugging in the connection. And speaking of connections, this class had an opportunity to talk to the current juniors and seniors, the yearbook and newspaper staff interviewed some of them to learn about their history and legacy. Now I am excited to say this inaugural class will be helping us start a Palmetto senior high school alumni association to support the tradition of excellence at the high school. So we feel a responsibility to assure the continuing educational excellence of our schools. Yet, the fact is over the past five years, with a declining economy, the Florida legislature has reduced our own school district's budget by \$2 billion. That is a huge impact on our school, and has affected staffing of counselors and media specialists, course options, class sizes, technology and facilities improvements. We must begin to look at the future needs and work with the district to see how renovations, such as was recently done by Miami Beach Senior High, can be done at our schools.

One of the first things I did after taking office was to convene an Educational Advisory Committee, which meets monthly. It includes the five principals of our local public schools, their PTA representatives, our school board member Larry Feldman, MDCPS school district and region representatives and concerned community members. We have speakers from time to time to learn about opportunities and initiatives.

Our first goal was to create an Educational Compact with the district, which took about a year. We learned what other cities have done, analyzed our needs and came up with some goals. One of which was to enhance the technology at our five local schools, which are in need of significant enhance-

ments to stay competitive with the brand new schools that have been built in recent years. After all, these schools were built more than fifty years ago, and they look it. Hence was borne the Smart Schools Campaign, a commitment to raise the funds to bring smart boards to every classroom in each of the five schools in Pinecrest. Out of that effort, the SmARTy Dog project was created; we are currently at 26 amazing dogs which are springing up all over Pinecrest, at the schools, in our Parks and gracing many of our sponsoring businesses. The dogs, which are painted by local artists and a few by the schools' students, will be public art for the next three months, and then will be auctioned off on March 28 in Pinecrest Gardens, with all proceeds going to fund new technology in our schools.

The second goal was to provide a means by which our own Pinecrest students would be more inclined to remain in our Palmetto schools, rather than see any attraction to attending outside magnet schools. So, the Green Academy was established to highlight the excellence of their environmental science programs and collaborate with our Sustainability initiative, which I will discuss a bit later. This is our first year as a Green Academy and we look forward to a wonderful new partnership with the newly established CLEO institute, created by Caroline Lewis, the founder of the Fairchild Challenge.

The CLEO institute is a comprehensive initiative to inform and engage the community and the broader world in understanding climate change and what our role should be. It is now based at Pinecrest Gardens and will help develop educational programs on climate change and how we must take a role in preventing more adverse impact on our environment.

All five of our schools are also instituting wellness policies that will assure healthier eating at our schools, and more physical activity for our students, to combat the rising number of child obesity cases. They are growing organic gardens, and hosting their own farmers market at Palmetto elementary and soon at our other neighboring schools. To all of you who faithfully attend and contribute so much to the Education advisory committee, my heartfelt thanks, it is a very special community collaboration, and shows how much we all care about maintaining excellence in our schools.

This year, Pinecrest Community Center has expanded also, with new programming and fitness options, as well as many new programs for our senior citizens. The Fitness center expanded to a second room and added more equipment. We had hoped for additional construction to expand the center, but it is being postponed due to a weak economy and a desire to hold off on capital projects this year.

The national recreation consultant we hired several years ago, Ken Ballard, to conduct an operational audit, assured us in his recommendations to expand the center that for each dollar invested, we would see expanded revenue, and he was correct. Expansion of the center is also important in order to address all of the needs of a significant senior population, as we have 640 residents aged 80 or older.

I hope you all saw the wonderful article in Neighbors on our Pinecrest Pioneers, who, I am sure, have found a Fountain of Youth in those old water wells! In addition to the twice-a-year luncheon we host for our Pioneers, our enhanced attention to our seniors based on requests for programs and services, necessitated bringing on a part time senior activities coordinator this past year, Janice Drawing, who brings significant experience in senior programming and has created many new enrichment programs, fitness classes and cultural activities for our seniors, which will ensure their quality of life remains high and they stay active. The community center advisory committee has been re instituted and is welcome to hear your ideas and feedback on making it the best venue for all of our community.

## PINECREST GARDENS

Our botanic garden continues to grow under the tender loving care of our horticulturalist, Craig Morrell, and our operations manager, Wayne Myers, and their staff. The long-time commitment to enhance the gardens by the Pinecrest Garden Club and the Community Garden Charitable Fund has truly made this a source of great community pride. The Pinecrest Gardens Advisory Committee helps guide the council by reviewing and updating the master plan and the hard work of redesigning the plant book, the map and the signs. These are all now installed and in use, so please take advantage of this gorgeous garden, come spend a day and really get to know it, take the new maps and explore, or take a guided tour. This past year has been incredibly productive due to the incalculable hours donated by the members of the Advisory committee, the Club and the Fund. I can't thank you all enough for the dedication you have shown to maintain our Gardens, and to create ever more opportunities to enhance cultural enrichment for all of us. We can now also boast a New Volunteer program, for all aspects of the gardens, botanic and cultural, which has recruited new energy, with orientations training and support for our much appreciated volunteers. The Gardens have flourished in the cultural arena as well, with the vision and energy of Director Alana Perez, and the technical and programming expertise of Jerry Kinsey, is

now a constant source of cultural events, music, dance art and of course children's music and dance. We have the best weekly farmers market, in town and our second season of jazz series is a great success. This year new programs include once a month Sunday brunch, monthly chick flicks, family movie night, this weekend is the Latin Spice, and of course the long time favorites, the Art Festival, Taste of Pinecrest, Eggstravaganza Earth Day Festival and so much more! A new Pinecrest Gardens Membership drive has begun and will provide opportunities to come to the gardens as often as you like for a nominal rate, as well as contribute at higher levels if you choose.

We have also finally received the long sought designation to be listed on the National Registry of Historic places. We have been capturing oral histories of our Pinecrest Pioneers and provide them on our web sites. Our respect for and responsibility to carry on their legacy reaches into all aspects of community life. This year, we had the opportunity to honor the accomplishments of one of our respected residents and national Baseball Hall of Famers, Andre Dawson, a long time Pinecrest resident, who grew up in South Miami, and who shared with us that one of the first baseball fields he played on as a child was at Suniland Park. So in naming one of Suniland ball fields Andre Dawson Field, we honor his legacy.

## SAFETY AND SECURITY

Safety and security are always uppermost in our minds for our family, our homes and businesses, and I am so proud of the Pinecrest police department and our community-oriented policing. Recently, the department's Crime Prevention Officer, Detective Alex Martinez, was recertified as a Crime Prevention Practitioner. This designation qualifies her to perform sophisticated residential and commercial property security surveys to help make them more crime resistant. If you haven't availed yourself of this free service, I highly recommend you consider doing so.

On the crime front, the news is not good. Perhaps as a consequence of our moribund economy, when compared to the same period last year, Part One crimes are up approximately 25 percent, with considerable increases in the frequency of car and home burglaries. While the department has made some arrests in these cases, these trends continue and in our car burglaries the vast majority of cars entered were left unlocked with valuables inside. Please do your part by removing all valuables, secure all doors and be sure to call our police if you see anything

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charges for the costs of siting, designing and obtaining the licenses and permits for the new nuclear plants without having to commit to ever building the plants. So far they have raised over \$300 million, and counting. They received a certificate of need back in 2007, before the real estate bubble burst and the economy tanked, and growth slowed significantly. They have not yet received a license by the Nuclear Regulatory Commission, which may never happen. The truth is, and the hope is, that these new plants never get built and that instead we move into the world of distributed renewable energy. Our resolution to repeal Early Cost Recovery has been adopted by the Miami Dade League of Cities and other cities all over the state, so we are again leading the way.

Finally, we passed a resolution this year to declare that when the franchise agreement entered into by Miami Dade County, before we ever incorporated, expires in 2020, that the Village of Pinecrest will have weaned itself away from reliance on franchise fees (which are in fact only a pass through for cities, allowing their residents to pay an extra fee on their electric bill, which is then passed through to the cities) sort of a back door tax arrangement the utilities came up with as an

exchange for cities to promise not to compete with them for creating energy. That might have worked 30 years ago, but has no place in today's municipal structure when it will be renewable energy that drives our new economy.

So, from the proposal three years ago to run new lines down US 1, the Pinecrest Council has stood firm and united, we have informed ourselves, coalesced with neighboring municipalities and invested our village resources to make sure we preserve and protect, far more than the corridor, but our health, security and future. I thank the council for fighting on with me.

### WHAT'S AHEAD?

Looking to the future, I am so proud of our Youth Advisory Council. These 15 middle and high school students, appointed by the council, are learning about the operations of our village and about leadership. Each month, a department director provides them with a detailed overview of how their department operates. They heard from our police chief this past week, had a discussion about safety at school and in the neighborhood, and each one of them put the police department's number in their phones to have if they ever

saw or heard of something not quite right.

Our Youth Media Project then engaged them in creating a message and recording it on our radio station, 1590 AM. Check it out on your car radio. Although the sound quality is not what it should be — the critically important upgrade was the victim of this year's budget cuts — I am hopeful that it will be included as a priority for communication in emergencies, and even for daily updates on happenings in the village for next year's budget. They also are participating this year in the Junior Orange Bowl Parade with a float. The theme is, of course, Pinecrest is Living Green, and we will have with us the Palmetto Senior High School marching band. Come out to cheer them on Jan. 2 in downtown Coral Gables.

### NEW VILLAGE MANAGER

One final highlight for this past year has been the hiring of our new village manager Yocie Galiano Gomez, who has done a remarkable job of transitioning the village staff to her new leadership. She has created a real team, bringing all staff together for weekly meetings; she is out in the

community and, most important to me and our council, she is extremely responsive to our residents and makes it a priority for staff as well.

The first real test was balancing our budget and this year for the first time we hosted a Town Hall meeting to share with the residents a real analysis of the challenges we faced and how to approach them as cautious stewards of your tax dollars. She brings so many strengths to the village; most notable is her love of our community and I see it in all of our staff, it is part of the fabric of our local government, a true respect for, and appreciation of its legacy and a desire to work hard to promote it.

This coming year will see many more new and exciting opportunities to get involved in the village, and if you have some time and desire to be more involved in your community, we would love to have you join us. If you don't receive the Village E news the first of each month, you won't know all the wonderful things that go on in your own back yard, so be sure to go online and subscribe. In summary, in Pinecrest, it's all good!

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