

2013-14 STATE OF THE VILLAGE ADDRESS
Mayor Cindy Lerner

December 13, 2013
Delivered at the Pinecrest Pioneers Luncheon
Evelyn Greer Park

Thanks to Baptist Health for their sponsorship of this event and for their support of many other programs, such as the lunch and learn series they provided last month, we look forward to their regular involvement.

As I complete my fifth year as Mayor, I look back proudly on what we have accomplished together, the Council, staff, residents, and community. We have worked hard to assure the things that make up our quality of life here; safety and security, schools, beauty and greenery including our trees, lush landscapes, peaceful canals and exquisite botanic gardens, sense of community, including our community center, library, and vibrancy of our cultural arts. But I also look forward to the projects we are beginning to plan. And it is not just planning *for* you, I believe, as does our Council, its planning *with* you. Over the past five years we have created new opportunities for our residents to be involved in planning our future, with the creation of advisory groups, including Education, Transportation, Community Center, Pinecrest Gardens, and of course, the Youth Advisory Council, and with shorter term initiatives such as our US 1 Visioning process which included residents and property owners.

Our schools continue to be one of the primary reasons young families move to Pinecrest, as well as the highly regarded quality of life. Our Education Advisory Council meets monthly and includes the five principals, PTA representatives, School Board Member Dr. Larry Feldman, school district, and concerned community advocates. Last year, the district was successful in passage of a \$1.2 Billion General Obligation Bond for renovating facilities, updating technology, and building school replacements. Although our five schools were listed for renovation, the highly sought after and critically important replacement for my alma mater, Palmetto Senior High School, was not on the plan. But after a full court press by me and Dr. Feldman, we were in fact successful in getting a commitment to build a new school. Last summer I met privately with the Miami-Dade County School Superintendent to advocate for the replacement school, explaining that our enrollment is dropping because parents come to visit the school and despite the fabulous programming and AP classes, when they see the old physical facility, they refuse to enroll their students, so, I said quite frankly, Mr. Superintendent, just renovating the school is like putting lipstick on a pig. I think that must have had some impact as we had a visit in August from the school district facilities director who revealed to us that a new \$29 million school for Palmetto Senior High is promised in 2015-16! The newer parts of the school campus will remain; the gym, the science wing and

the auditorium and media center, but with significant upgrades and renovation. My everlasting appreciation goes out to Dr. Feldman and the Superintendent.

The Village has developed new partnerships to support our schools, with the creation of a new Palmetto Senior High Alumni Association, and the Pinecrest People Mover, which continues to grow ridership, allowing Pinecrest resident families to rely on our own transit system to transport their middle and high school students to and from school. I am hopeful that we will be purchasing the trolleys next year rather than leasing them, which will allow us to use them for other routes and purposes to transport our resident adults and seniors to the Metrorail or to shopping.

We built a beautiful community center in 2007 but it was modest in size and we have already outgrown it. Our community center was built way too small and with no snack bar or place to socialize, unless you participate in a class. All of our other parks have been over programmed with sports leagues, either soccer baseball or basketball, and hardly anyplace is available for a group of kids or adults to have a pick up game, as I recently learned from one of our youth council members. So, our long range plans include updates for the Pinecrest Community Center and Coral Pine Park.

Pinecrest Gardens completed the renovation of the Hammock Pavilion with support from The Villagers. And I hope to have a new restaurant in the Cypress Hall. One of the most important issues we have dealt with over the past year has to do with the planning for a restaurant at Pinecrest Gardens. The need for a food service is evident, and the Council went about analyzing this as we had done in the past with the enhancements to the Banyan Bowl. Five years ago, the Banyan Bowl was an amphitheater with a floor of wood chips. When we first talked about the opportunity to infuse cultural arts into the Banyan Bowl, we went about it methodically gathering the facts and the professional advice necessary to make a responsible decision. We brought in a cultural arts consultant, who conducted a study and provided us the options for building the infrastructure including the staffing necessary and the programming options. And now, five years later, we have a professional stage, sound system, lighting, new seats, and a director. We are providing music, theatre, dance; an extensive culturally rich program.

Now, we have followed the same sort of process with due diligence to determine whether to proceed with a restaurant. We first conducted a residential survey as part of our strategic plan in 2010 and 70% of those surveyed indicated a desire for a restaurant. Last year we hired Adelfi Group, a Miami based tourism and hospitality consulting firm, to perform an assessment and market analysis for the best food service options for the Cypress Hall. They provide the Council with the advantages and disadvantages of each option, and provided a recommendation taking into account the resident surveys, revenues and overall compatibility with the mission and spirit of the Village and the gardens. As a result, the Council

developed a shared vision, issued a request for proposals and has been negotiating with the restaurateur who came forward.

Now armed with a financing consultant, we followed their professional advice, and with expert legal guidance and advice, are negotiating the best possible deal with a wonderful restaurateur who responded to our RFP and has patiently worked to assure both they and the Village reach the best deal. I believe we have reached that deal and hope that the Council agrees with me so that we can move this forward in January when it comes up for a final vote.

Cognac - our first sister city; a notable achievement. On February 15, 2013, the Village of Pinecrest and town of Cognac, France signed a formal agreement to become Sister Cities. The agreement contemplates a friendship and exchange of culture, information and education, business, and tourism. Our cities have some similarities, the population size is similar as they have 19,534 residents and we have 18,300, and we both have a love of culture and host jazz series. Then there are some real distinctions, we are a new city, while Cognac is truly a medieval city that had its beginning in the 11th century, and is the birthplace of Francois I in 1494. It sits along the Charente River, which was one of the main supply routes for the salt trade, where it flourished. The Cognac region is of course best known for their eau de vie and is surrounded by 80,000 hectares of vineyards. My initial introduction to Cognac Mayor Michel Gourinchas was by happenstance, the Cognac delegation was visiting Miami in February of 2012 and the Mayor and I were both invited to a luncheon in Pinecrest Gardens, seated next to each other and struck up a conversation. At my invitation he and his delegation visited our Village Hall a few days later for an "official state visit" at which I issued a proclamation to designate the day "Cognac Day" in Pinecrest. The Mayor was very impressed and decided they would like to come and visit the following year during Cognac Day. The host organization of that luncheon where we met, Les Dames de Escoffier, Miami Chapter, provided an opportunity to visit France, with a tour of the Cognac region, which I had the great fortune to participate in last fall. The reception for us in Cognac was warm and we agreed to pursue the creation of a sister city relationship. And on February 15 2013, our second Cognac Day, Mayor Gourinchas, his wife and two of his council members were here in Pinecrest to sign the formal sister city agreement. The Mayor's wife Annie and Commissioner Patrick Sedlack's wife Sylvie even visited a culinary class at Palmetto Senior High to show how to make a French pastry. Last month, I was invited to attend the World Mayors Summit on Climate Change in Nantes, France, and took a quick side trip to Cognac to work on developing an educational exchange program. We visited Lycee Jean Monnet, their high school, and discussed how our teachers and theirs could develop educational exchanges, through the power of the Internet. Then visits to each others country will follow. Our teachers will be to create dialogue between the students of our two cities and through current technology on the Internet such as Skype. They will focus on culture, history, environmental issues, and of course food. They

will also be student trips and exchange programs between the two cities. And finally, the opportunity for adults to travel to Cognac will be a real option next summer, as we plan for a Sister City visit there.

Pinecrest has become a leader in "going green," sustainability and addressing our increased vulnerability to extreme weather and climate change. I have been very involved in the National League of Cities' Energy Environment and Natural Resources Committee, the Southeast Florida Regional Compact on Climate Change and PACE - Property Assessed Clean Energy. I have been writing about the implementation of the Property Assessed Clean Energy (Green Corridor) for the past few months. The special taxing district consists of seven member municipalities: Cutler Bay, Palmetto Bay, Pinecrest, South Miami, Coral Gables, Miami, and Miami Shores. The commercial and residential property owners now have the opportunity to make energy efficiency and hurricane protection improvements on a completely voluntary basis. The decision is yours and yours alone. No other property owner is affected, if you are not interested you are not impacted. If you choose to make improvements, you can do so without affecting your credit rating, and without out of pocket costs (other than the application fee). The costs will become a special assessment on your property and can be paid over 10 or 20 years when you pay your property taxes.

Pinecrest is known nationally as a leader in resiliency, and we are working collaboratively with the other 33 municipalities in Miami-Dade and with the county and the other 3 counties who comprise the Southeast Florida Regional Climate compact, in preparing for more extreme weather and the sea level rise that continues to impose new risks and challenges. I was invited to World Mayors Summit in Nantes, France, one of only four U.S. mayors; last week to speak at a conference in D.C. of climate scientists; and yesterday at the Greater Miami Chamber of Commerce. As incoming President of the Miami-Dade County League of Cities, I will be creating a much more collaborative process with the other cities and the county, to advance our knowledge and begin the difficult work to reduce risks of damage from flooding and sea level rise.

So, for my final three years as Mayor, I have a *Bucket List*, the things I want to accomplish before my term is over. In addition to the restaurant at Pinecrest Gardens, the final amenity missing from our Village is a Dog Park in Pinecrest. We first began the discussion in 2009 at the request of several residents. For the next year, the Council at that time discussed it, considered various locations and focused on Veterans Wayside Park. In an effort to develop consensus between those who wanted to leave it as is and those who wanted to bring people and their pets to make real use of an underused park, the Council looked at using just the northern half of the park, which was then determined to be too small. The efforts of a year's worth of discussion failed at that time, disappointing many. We promised we would continue to pursue other potential sites and after another three years it appears we are back at the same site, the only real option. This past year, the current Council agreed to budget

\$100,000 in the 2013-2014 budget in the event the decision to go forward is approved. We have also authorized the Village Manager to retain a consultant to design a site plan. A dog park committee has collected hundreds of signatures in support. One of the things missing in Pinecrest is a place to congregate and to socialize with your pets, other than standing in the middle of the street, or waiting until Sunday morning to go to the Farmers Market, there is not a single dog friendly park in Pinecrest, much less a free run dog park. This is truly a community that embraces opportunities to socialize, and it is high time we infused some life and canine love into Veterans Wayside Park. There is no reason the Veterans Memorial and the now annual celebration of Veterans Day on the southwestern quadrant of the park and the potential for the rest of the park space as a dog park cannot peacefully co-exist.

In conclusion, I would like to give a little history on how our Pinecrest Pioneers semi-annual celebrations, with the help of our Garden Club and other volunteers, who love cooking and baking for a wonderful luncheon, have been held over the past four years. This event came about as a result of my meeting and befriending one of our residents, Joyce Diehl, who was 89 at the time and still mowed her own yard, who I met during our "Leave Well Enough Alone" effort to fight a proposed special assessment on homes with wells, a year before I ran for Mayor. Joyce was having a special birthday and as she was widowed and never had children, we decided to throw a little birthday luncheon for her as her Pinecrest family. It occurred to me that there must be many other "Joyces" living in Pinecrest, and that we should seek them out, bring them together and celebrate all of our 'Pioneers". And so I used my voter file, looked up all residents 90 and over and there were more than 100. Then we backed it up to 80 and older and it was more than 600! Thus, our Pinecrest Pioneers were born.

It is particularly meaningful and special to me that we do this as a community; it's what's beautiful about bringing our residents together to be more like a true Village, a caring community. I hope you all enjoy this luncheon as much as I do, and see why it was the perfect place to deliver my State of the Village address. Thanks to the Garden Club and volunteers, and thanks to our student performers, and to our staff who work hard and care deeply about keeping Pinecrest such a beautiful place to live.