

Farewell to Flagler

And perhaps it'll be back to the Boulevard for the Coppertone Girl

By Margaret Griffis
Special to *BT*

She's pushing 50, still parading topless in public, and her fans love her that way. But time has been cruel to the famous Coppertone Girl. That's why the vintage bathing beauty came off her downtown pedestal last month – to get herself a face-lift.

With members of the Dade Heritage Trust and MiMo Biscayne Association present, a historic Coppertone sign that graced Miami streets for 49 years was gently dismantled and removed from its 14-year home on Flagler Street for repair. Before that, the neon sign overlooked Biscayne Boulevard at the now-demolished Parkleigh Hotel near the Freedom Tower. Former caretakers Dade Heritage Trust recently bequeathed the sign to the MiMo Association for the relocation



Coming apart at the seams: If the girl and her dog can be restored at a reasonable price, they'll once again grace the Boulevard.

BT photo by Margaret Griffis

and restoration work.

All Tropical Signs of Florida unexpectedly needed two Saturdays (May 17 and 24) to complete the work of bringing down the sign. Alec Blotnick, president of the Hialeah-based company, explains that removal often takes more work than installation. Happily, the delay gave passersby more time to witness the event, and many were thrilled to learn of the restoration. Jerry Bengis, whose father built the sign and is working with Tropical on the project, estimates that repairs could run between \$30,000 and \$40,000.

Recognizing the goodwill and continued advertising value of the sign, owner of the Coppertone brand, the Schering-Plough Corp., is willing to help the project financially. Spokeswoman Jennifer Samolewicz says, "If the repair cost is reasonable and an appropriate new location is assured,

Schering-Plough will consider funding some or all of the cost." She adds that future maintenance will be part of that decision-making process. (Schering-Plough is picking up the cost of the sign's removal and inspection.)

The MiMo Association wants the Coppertone Girl moved to the MiMo Biscayne Historic District, where her kitschy 1950s appeal will blend naturally with the post-war architecture. A specific relocation site has not yet been identified, but association president Fran Rollason says the MiMo District is "where she will be treasured and enjoyed as she should be, for many more years to come." Indeed, with all the loose ends seemingly coming together, that blue bathing suit could soon enjoy another day in the Miami sun.

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