

## Here's What We Should Do

*In the words of residents, this is **what our neighborhoods need in 2008***

**Compiled by Christian Cipriani**

Special to *BT*

As 2007 was drawing to a close, the BT asked a select group of civic activists for a report on what they wanted to see happen in their respective communities during 2008. The responses were so thorough and thoughtful that we didn't have room for all of them. To read these contributions in their unabridged form, visit us online at [www.BiscayneTimes.com](http://www.BiscayneTimes.com).

### **BAYSIDE**

*By Christopher Harty*

Harty has lived in Morningside and Bayside for the past seven years. He is a dealer in 20th-century design and art, an aspiring writer, and according to his friends, an opinionated, obstreperous social critic.

Bayside is a fine place to live, so when **I asked friends and neighbors their thoughts on fixing problems** in the coming year, I did it with a smile. Here's what they (and I) had to say:

**Security:** In the past year, we've had numerous burglaries and at least one robbery at gunpoint. Police presence increased recently, but Bayside and adjacent neighborhoods are continually targeted. Alarms, security bars, hedges, and weapons are all solutions, but it's a disturbing image — barricading yourself inside with a pistol because your orchids disappeared.

**Real Estate:** The elephant in the living room, along with the insurance lion, the hurricane hyena, and the tax tiger. Their collective effect has left most homeowners angry the state hasn't produced real relief, worried that assessments will increase yet again, and confused by contrary reports about the housing market.

Sewers: The ongoing sewer project has brought inconvenience and more to Bayside, but it's actually happening. Let's hope they wrap it in a timely way, and that it works as planned. Wilma showed me what a sunken living room really means; it would be nice to avoid a repeat. And please, put our [bayfront] park back the way you found it.

The Park: Or not. I live near the park, walk my dogs that way most days, and long for some type of water access. Not a huge boat ramp, just a small one for kayaks and canoes. Why not require it from whoever develops the adjacent lots? All Miamians need more access to the bay.

NE 10th Avenue Lots: It's too late to save the Prescott mansion, so what's the best use for all those waterfront properties? I enjoy the breezes and views that emptiness makes possible, but I'd like them to have a future as well as a past. It's probably a forlorn hope, but adding them to the existing park would be ideal.

**Biscayne Boulevard:** Now that the street is back, let's try to keep the bistro-boutique character going. Many small business owners went under during the reconstruction. The city needs to help suitable businesses move in and the remaining rogues, rascals, and assorted vice mongers move out.

## **WYNWOOD**

By *Dorothy Quintana*

At **98 years young**, Quintana seems to grow more potent with age. She continues to fight for improvements in Wynwood, where she's lived in the same house since 1957. Both residents and politicians turn to her when it's time to get things done.

Roberto Clemente Park: The building named for me in Roberto Clemente Park has spent years in disrepair, filled with termites, with the mayor and commissioners continually failing on promises to fix it. I'm ashamed to have my name on it. The park needs proper restrooms, better lighting, and for the police to stop drug use and prostitution at night.

**Crime Prevention:** The area is growing less safe. For the first time in my life I spent money on cameras and security systems; I can't take

chances at my age. There's a lot of drug dealing, prostitution, break-ins, and muggings in Wynwood, and criminals operating here from other neighborhoods. We need support from Commander Gomez and his officers. A clinic on NW 29th Street, between 1st and 2nd avenues, got 100 bikes for cops to patrol our streets. We don't even see squad cars let alone bike patrols — day or night. What we do see are groups of uniformed officers sitting around the NET Office and cafés. Police don't properly respond to emergency calls and crime reports, that's why you never read about our crimes in the papers. The Miami police need to listen better to NET leaders like Albert Zamorano and do a better job protecting Wynwood.

Political Support: District 5 Commissioner Michelle Spence-Jones came to me for votes, and I got her votes. But she has neglected Wynwood, and Mayor Diaz did too. They've both lost Wynwood's faith. We need new leaders in 2008.

Blight: Wynwood is filled with abandoned and decaying houses, and no one is renting the ones that have been refurbished. Homeless squat in and around empty houses, and empty lots are used for illegal dumping. If you ask me if all the art galleries and Midtown Miami made Wynwood better, I say, "Better for what?"

## UPPER EASTSIDE

*By Patrick McCoy*

McCoy is a 15-year resident of Morningside, past president of the Morningside Civic Association, founding president of the Morningside Historical Education Society, and currently runs his own business as a Realtor with Fortune International.

If wishes did come true, this is what the Upper Eastside would ask for:

**Police:** Fairly paid and motivated rank-and-file police officers who respond quickly to 911 calls, being led by a chief who is beyond reproach.

**Parking:** Simply put — parking for the MiMo District.

**Litter:** No trash left behind! Make our city beautiful! The Upper Eastside needs a comprehensive code enforcement program with follow-up and

ticketing.

Public Transportation: Bus drivers who stop at red lights and follow traffic rules! Covered bus benches would also be nice.

Streetscape: Sidewalk, curb, gutter, and paving improvements to all Upper Eastside neighborhoods is now long overdue.

Miami 21: Will someone please tell us what this is?

Homelessness: We need a major solution to the homeless situation. It increasingly appears to be out of control and does not help the “City Beautiful” image that our leaders continue to talk about.

Traffic: It’s becoming gridlock out there. I wish for an effective mass transit plan to ease inner-city congestion. We would like to see NE 82nd Street revert to two-way traffic and 79th Street converted into a business-friendly corridor, with slowed traffic and street beautification.

## **EDGEWATER**

*By Richard Strell*

Strell is an eight-year resident of Edgewater who works in the real estate industry. He’s long been involved with local issues, most recently as president of the Neighborhood of Edgewater Area Residents (NEAR).

Edgewater’s population is growing fast. Neighboring Wynwood is also emerging as an important arts center, and Midtown Miami complements the growth of both areas. But Edgewater’s gentrification has brought new — and renewed — challenges.

Environment: Residents aren’t waiting for our “green” mayor to fund neighborhood initiatives over giant public-works projects. We’ve got our own point people to address problems exacerbated by the many the empty lots.

The Homeless: A large percentage of Edgewater’s homeless couldn’t hold down a job in the best of circumstances, but they have very limited housing and social-service options. This is not to excuse the crimes they generate on our streets, but it’s a problem that needs

compassionate solutions in 2008.

**Crime:** Many 911 operators lack patience and basic communication skills. And local cops aren't easily able to cull information and connect the dots when it comes to researching crime patterns from recent reports. These are very fixable problems we hope will change in 2008.

**Miami 21:** The city's planning department has been unable to explain Miami 21, millions of dollars and years after starting the process. For Edgewater, illustrations show the waterfront looking like Ocean Drive, but reality will mimic what we're used to — 48-story monoliths with cyclone-fenced alleyways shut at night.

**Social Fabric:** Edgewater is a natural urban mix of people of all economic backgrounds — new and old businesses, large and small buildings. It's what makes the community great. New and old Edgewater residents are working to make it an increasingly desirable place to live and work. They don't want to just drive past their security gate, take the elevator, and order take-out. They want to feel safe walking around outside at night, to shop at local stores, and visit parks and local events.

## **LITTLE HAITI/BUENA VISTA**

*By Pradel Denis*

For the past year, Denis has served as president of the Buena Vista East Historic Neighborhood Association. A trained civil engineer, among other things, Pradel is the president of Land, Home and Beyond, a contracting firm.

The Little Haiti/Buena Vista area would like to see the following improvements and initiatives happen during 2008:

**Derelict Properties:** Having the Miami City Commission pass the abandoned-and-derelict-properties ordinance, introduced by the Little Haiti NET office and Buena Vista East Historic Neighborhood Association.

**Code Enforcement:** Stricter code enforcement of ordinances that pertain to the aesthetics of commercial and residential properties in the City of Miami.

Revitalization: The creation of a partnership between the City of Miami and business owners in Little Haiti/Model City and Buena Vista to oversee needed infill projects and coordinate the revitalization of existing buildings along major corridors — NE 2nd Avenue and N. Miami Avenue from 54th to 79th streets.

Architecture: Make façade improvement grants accessible to property owners along the aforementioned major corridors, and encourage the use of Caribbean and Britannia Bay gingerbread architecture.

Streetscape: The implementation of a streetscape project for NE 2nd Avenue and N. Miami Avenue — new infrastructure, new drainage system, new curbs and sidewalks, new medians with irrigation systems and lights, new street lights, lots of trees.

Pedestrians: Realization of pedestrian-friendly sidewalk market structures along NE 2nd Avenue and N. Miami Avenue from 54th to 79th streets.

Utility lines: The replacement of all overhead utilities along the aforementioned routes; all wires need to be buried underground.

Community Center: Secure funding for a state-of-the-art community center in Little Haiti, where licensed carpenters, electricians, plumbers, contractors, programmers, and AUTOCAD drafters can give our children hands-on experience using projects within the community itself.

Empowerment Zone: Including Little Haiti in the next empowerment zone.

Police: Having our own police commander to oversee the Little Haiti NET area, thus prompting more officers to serve as roving patrols within our community.

## **NORTH MIAMI**

*By Mike McDearmaid*

The term “civic activist” was coined with someone like McDearmaid in mind. Aside from serving as president of the Central Homeowners Association, he has devoted himself to the North Miami Jaycees, the Community Redevelopment Agency’s advisory committee, the North Miami Police Department’s strategic planning committee, and the

national youth and elderly support group NANAY, among other organizations.

When thinking about how to address North Miami's wishes for the New Year, someone suggested I walk along NE 125th Street and maybe NW 7th Avenue to ask business owners their opinions, and to ride the bus. Here are some of the initial comments I received while riding the bus:

"The world seems to be going mad."

"It's about the rich getting richer, and the poor getting poorer."

"My family can't even afford a doctor anymore."

"Nothing seems like its gotten better this year."

"Everything seems to be going faster and faster, like being on a bicycle that's out of control and you can't get off."

Yet one thought on everyone's mind — and North Miami's first wish for the New Year — was: "It's so violent and crazy out there, everyone needs to come to their senses."

When pinning down what North Miami families want for 2008, I was surprised to hear — overwhelmingly — a desire for homeownership. As one bus-rider told me:

"We've been hearing about affordable housing for many years now, and I keep getting on waiting lists, but nobody is getting a place to live."

The next big thing on people's minds is the need for more police officers. Crime is out of control in North Miami, especially, as several people noted, the gang situation.

This topic even got the bus stoics talking. Some described how they are always fearful for their safety. Others chimed in with accounts of how crime and violence had affected them, their family, and their friends.

Third on everyone's wish list: education. And although I mentioned our brand-new schools, people said the quality of education in the schools is lacking. Quality daycare is, too. North Miamians have been hearing about jobs coming to the city for years. Well, many people were riding

the bus because they still have to travel to other cities for work.

The number-one need expressed by business owners was police protection, followed by more city initiatives to help support and stimulate business. They feel that North Miami tries to make it difficult to get anything done. Number three on their list was the general state of the city. As one businessman phrased it: “The city needs to get organized and clean itself up.”

Speaking with homeowners, it's clear that crime and the need for more police is a top concern, followed by code-enforcement issues, or the lack thereof. Residents also feel the city needs a clear vision, and that things like branding workshops were just window dressing. As one resident put it: “We need to figure out who we are as a city, where we want to go, and instill pride once again in our citizens.” And last but not least, North Miami needs more recreational facilities and parks.

## **MIAMI SHORES**

*By Mark Sell*

Sell has lived with his family in Miami Shores since 1989. A veteran editor, writer, and public-relations consultant, he has served on various community boards. He is director of client services for Wragg & Casas Public Relations.

If composing a Miami Shores “wish list” for 2008 is a fool's errand, here is one anyway, most of it — despite appearances — beyond the control of elected or appointed municipal officials.

**Sewers:** We need them, along 2nd Avenue and throughout Miami Shores, Biscayne Park, and El Portal. This won't happen, as North Miami is not accepting new connections or unable to pay, and NE 2nd Avenue is already chopped up — without sewer lines.

**Downtown:** A vibrant downtown, outdoor and indoor cafés with interesting food, thriving professional offices, and galleries, boutiques and specialty stores sprinkled among the Starbucks, Quiznos, and Subways. We love the notion but must shelve this thought until the roadwork is done in spring 2009.

**Bookstores:** A thriving independent bookstore and intellectual center

near Barry University. A bookstore might need a lock on textbooks as a profit center, as margins are brutal in the independent bookstore and nonblockbuster publishing business.

South Florida could use a real university district, but doesn't have one — not near the University of Miami, Barry, nor the region's various Brutalist-architecture campuses.

Underground Utility Cables: Weston's got them and its power was out 45 minutes during Wilma. We were out 15 days — the price of relative historic charm. Good luck paying for this one.

Public Transportation: Light-rail system along FEC tracks and Metrorail up Biscayne Boulevard. The former is a distinct possibility by 2020; the latter a bit farther away. This need will only grow more apparent. Once again, Miami-Dade is true to form, ensuring that development outpaces infrastructure.

Informed Residents: We must build a caring, independent-thinking citizenry looking beyond their backyards to their neighbors, and to people in other neighborhoods and stations in life. The obverse of Shores community spirit is an occasional smug, beady-eyed "Not In My Back Yard" streak. The village's motto — *Viventes En Sole* ("To Live in the Sun") — is not exactly a bracing call to civic action, but "Not In My Back Yard" isn't either.

## **EL PORTAL**

*By Slade Cole*

Cole has lived in the Miami area for 14 years and currently resides on the Little River in El Portal, where he likes to canoe and walk his dogs. In addition to civic leadership in such neighborhoods as Oakland Grove and El Portal, he's a Realtor with Keller Williams and also runs a residential painting business.

If the Village of El Portal could have its wishes fulfilled in 2008, they would be the following:

Taxes: The community needs to support of the proposed 1.35 percent property tax-cap amendment, and the village council should be resourceful in still providing essential services without having new residents pay an unfair amount. Residents should visit this

www.CutPropertyTaxesNow.com and submit the petition.

The Seawall: El Portal needs an alternative to the village council's current plan to erect an industrial seawall along the Little River. Among other things, a seawall would destroy the backyards of most residences along the river.

Crime: We need to reduce the number of burglaries and break-ins, in part by better securing chronic hotspots for crime, like the footbridge at NW 2nd Avenue and 86th Street.

Conservation: The Little River area should be designated historic and its wildlife better protected.

Informed Citizenry: It would be great if more El Portal residents took time to become aware and engaged in village issues.

Environment: El Portal needs to continue to expand and protect its tree canopy and vegetation. Continue planting oak trees along roads and funding projects like the native landscaping recently installed at village hall. We could also use medians along N. Miami Avenue and NE 2nd Avenue, with royal palms or oaks trees.

Speeding: Implementing a few speed bumps or other speed-reducing devices on several key streets in El Portal would deter speeding drivers from using them as shortcuts and make our village safer.

Feedback: [letters@biscaynetimes.com](mailto:letters@biscaynetimes.com)

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