

# Coral Gables residents welcome redeveloper

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While many developers prefer to take the easy route, building on raw land in South Miami-Dade County or West Broward, Debra Sinkle-Kolsky relishes the challenge of revitalizing an urban or inner-city community.

It's been a little over a year since Sinkle-Kolsky's firm Redevco celebrated the grand opening of the Shoppes of Liberty City. Now she's hoping to breathe new life into another of Miami-Dade's predominantly black neighborhoods.

Redevco has joined forces with the Lola B. Walker Homeowners' Founda-

## Retail and residential development planned for vacant lot.

tion of Coral Gables to redevelop a 1.6-acre lot at U.S. 1 and Grand Avenue, now owned by Miami-Dade County.

The partnership plans to build a mixed-use retail and residential development with a Bahamian village adjacent to the McFarlane Homestead Historic district. That area was origi-

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## GABLES DEVELOPMENT



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**PARTNERS:** Debra Sinkle-Kolsky, fourth from left, of Redevco, walks with homeowners foundation members, from left, David Bolton, William Cooper, Ellen Tucker, Carl Prime, Elizabeth Andrews and Herbert Butler.

### ▶ DEVELOPMENT, FROM 1C

nally settled during the 1920s by Bahamian immigrants.

"We've put a lot of years into identifying neighborhoods in need of economic stimulus," said Sinkle-Kolsky, an owner of the Lauderhill-based Redevco. "They take a lot of time to put together, but personally they're very rewarding and they make economic sense."

The project will provide jobs and services for area residents, as well as a source of future income that the foundation could use for projects.

Some of that money could go to restoring the shotgun houses and tin-roofed bungalows that in 1995 were placed on the National Register for Historic Preservation.

The Redevco project will pay homage to that heritage through the design. The exact format will be decided in the next several months, but pre-

liminary discussions call for a mix of neighborhood retail shops, professional offices and single-family homes or apartments. Sinkle-Kolsky hopes to begin construction before the end of the year.

The prospect excites residents, who are tired of the land being used as a parking lot for Carver Elementary School across the street. They want service-oriented businesses like a dry cleaner, doctor, dentist or beauty parlor.

"Hopefully this will encourage other people to stop and do business here," said William Cooper, president of the foundation. "We don't want to be known as a downtrodden neighborhood. This is about progress."

Before any development can move forward, the Miami-Dade County Commission will hold a public hearing Feb. 26 to approve the donation of the property and a \$230,000 grant to the foundation.

Miami-Dade Commissioner Jimmy Morales, who facilitated the partnership between Redevco and the residents, has been trying for years to find a use for the land that would have the community support. Other projects have never gotten off the ground because residents feared they would be forced out by developers.

Redevco's track record helped. The Liberty City shopping center was the area's first major commercial development in about a decade, providing the community with desperately needed retail services like Winn-Dixie, Wendy's and Hollywood Video.

The developer also built the Promenade Plaza in Richmond Heights in 1979 and then redeveloped it as part of a community partnership after Hurricane Andrew. In a format similar to the one planned for Coral Gables, Redevco formed a joint venture with the Richmond Heights United Pastors

Community Development Corp. Ultimately, the community bought out Redevco.

"That kind of partnership is exactly what we should be promoting in these neighborhoods," Morales said.

There are already signs that the redevelopment tide is starting to turn along Grand Avenue, particularly in the Coconut Grove section that is part of the city of Miami.

Developer Michael Comras just bought property to build Grand Avenue Plaza, a 17,500-

square-foot, pedestrian-oriented center at Grand Avenue and Douglas Road that will be anchored by a CVS drugstore.

Developer Andy Parrish is finishing a renovation of the Royal Poinciana on Grand Avenue, which will convert the landmark bar just a stone's throw from the Redevco project into a law office for attorney Tucker Gibbs. Parrish also plans to redevelop another former bar, Gil's Spot, and he's trying to finalize a deal to land People's Bar-B-Que as the ten-

ant for the building near the Comras project.

As one of the first developers to recognize the area's potential, Parrish hopes the projects will be "sensitive to the community," catering to those who live there now.

"Development is inevitable in this community because of where it's located," said Parrish, whose company Wind & Rain has built 15 homes and its own office building in the area. "You can make money and still do it right."