May 16, 2010

Dear the Town of Surfside,

It was with great pleasure and upmost pride to have served on Surfside’s 75th Anniversary Committee this past year. It was an honor to have been part of the planning and execution of the events leading up to and including our Town’s official anniversary: Family Fun Day at the 96th Street Park on January 31; the Arts Festival in the downtown area with a special tent devoted to the history of Surfside on March 13 & 14; and the cumulating Town Parade (along Surfside Boulevard) and the Surf Club sponsored beach barbeque on May 16.

Through these events and drafting this commemorative booklet, the Committee was consistently delighted by our Town’s wonderful history; Surfside’s incredible past came back to life. What became clear to us all is not only what a rich history Surfside has, but how fortunate we are to live in this beautiful oceanside community. Surfside has maintained the small-town, community feel of yesterday but continues to move forward with thoughtfulness, innovation and creativity. We look forward to our future generations serving on the 100th Anniversary Committee; it is this generation that will ensure Surfside’s remarkable future.

We give special thanks to Tim Milian, Parks and Recreation Director and Duncan Tavares, Tourist Bureau Director. We could not have successfully planned and executed our plans, events and this commemorative booklet without their help and that of their incredible staffs.

We also thank our honorary committee member Seth Bramson for his historical perspective and knowledge and for allowing us to use the Bramson Private Archives.

Further thanks to Kathy Imberman who copyedited this booklet with great skill and shared practical and interesting input and to longtime Surfside residents and former Mayors Marion Portman and Eli Tourgeman, who provided invaluable historical perspective and memorabilia. Thank you.

We wish the Town and its residents all the best and hope that future generations continue with the vision to maintain Surfside as the beautiful paradise it is today.

Sincerely,
The 75th Anniversary Committee

Ricardo Mualin, Chairman
Dana Kulvin, Vice-Chair
Joseph Graubart, Vice Mayor and Commission Liaison
Anthony Blate
Randy Rubin

Town Commission
Mayor Daniel Dietch
Vice Mayor Joe Graubart
Commissioner Marta Olchyk
Commissioner Michael Karukin
Commissioner Edward Kopelman

Town Officials
Town Manager Gary L. Word
Town Attorney, Lynn M. Dannheisser
Town Clerk, Debra E. Eastman
Police Chief, Dave Allen
Finance Director, Martin Sherwood
Building & Zoning, Paul Gioia
Parks and Recreation Director, Tim Milian
Tourist Bureau Director, Duncan Tavares
Office/Utility Coordinator, Catherine Colonna
Pioneer architect Russell T. Pancoast, who designed many of the early structures along Miami Beach, built the Surf Club, located at 90th Street and Collins Avenue, between 1929 and 1930. On May 18, 1935, resisting an attempt at annexation by the City of Miami Beach, 35 members of the privately-owned club incorporated the Town of Surfside and financed the venture with a $28,500 loan.

Even though at the time of its incorporation Surfside boasted only 50 residents and very few buildings, the future growth of our Town had been predetermined by The Tatum Brothers, prolific Dade County real estate developers of that period. Between 1923 and 1925, they had subdivided the land that would come to be known as The Town of Surfside from the Atlantic Ocean on the east to Indian Creek on the west. Another influential individual was builder Henri Levy, a Jewish immigrant from the Alsace region of France, who developed Biscaya Island and a portion of land from 87th to 92nd Streets between the years of approximately 1924 – 1938.
Spearman Lewis served as Surfside’s first Mayor. Mayor Lewis and the Commission envisioned a seaside town that incorporated resorts, residences and businesses; not so different from the Town’s current goals. Other notable Mayors include Colonel Rudolph W. Riefkohl, James P. Wendler and Marion Portman. Riefkohl was a decorated war hero from 1945 to 1975; Wendler was Publisher and Editor of the Miami Beach Times, a newspaper founded by his father; and Portman, was the first and only female Mayor of Surfside, as well as the first female Mayor in all of Dade County. Portman’s brother, Sidney King, also served as Mayor for one term during the 1960’s.

Today’s Commission is comprised of five elected officials: the Mayor, the Vice-Mayor and three Commissioners. The Mayor is elected separately from the rest of the Commission, who run in an at-large contest where the four highest vote-getters are elected, the highest vote-getter serving as Vice-Mayor.
Soon after incorporation in 1935, Surfside’s first Town Hall was constructed at 9550 Harding Avenue (the current location of Hair 2000, Inc.). Housed in the Town Hall were an eleven-man police department, a three-man fire department, the Commission Chamber, and a jail. Surfside’s fire fighting force eventually would eventually expand to 39 paid and volunteer firefighters. On March 1, 1973, Surfside signed a contract with Miami-Dade County to provide for outside fire/rescue services. The Miami-Dade fire station located closest to our Town is at Haulover Park.

In 1957, a new Town Hall was constructed at 9293 Harding Avenue, its current location, that included a Commission Chamber and Police Department. The proceeds from the sale of the old building, which sat in the center of the bustling business community, covered the costs associated with the construction of the new Town Hall. Within the Commission Chamber of this building, Surfside also had its own municipal court, which operated until 1977 when the Florida Constitution abolished the municipal court system. This structure would undergo a complete renovation in 2001. Located within the Town Hall at the time of the publication of this commemorative booklet are meeting rooms, administrative offices, the Surfside Police Department, and a state-of-the-art Commission Chamber.

In the 1950’s, Surfside owned its own water system, which included a 750,000 gallon ground-level storage tank that was located at Town Hall, and not visible to the public. Records do not show when that was dismantled. In about 1956, Surfside purchased its own garbage dump, located in what is now the City of Miami Gardens, saving the Town money on garbage hauling fees. In the late 1950’s, surplus acreage at the dump site was sold to finance municipal improvements and retire Town debt. It is unclear when the remainder of the land was sold and the dump ceased being used.
Surfside Town Hall 1957 – 2000, (photograph taken in 1995)

Surfside Police at the Beach, circa 2002

Surfside Town Hall, 2008

Powerful Community

As the provider of Florida’s lowest electric bill, Florida Power & Light Company congratulates the Town of Surfside for 75 years of oceanfront living.

www.FPL.com
The land that would eventually become home to the Surfside Community Center was acquired over a thirteen-year-period beginning in 1945, when Surfside was given a tract of land on the southeast corner of 93rd Street and Collins Avenue (this piece of land was utilized as a children’s playground until 1962). In 1956, Surfside purchased the Lehman Estate on the northeast corner of 93rd Street and Collins Avenue. The two lots provided the town with 110 feet of beachfront land, interrupted by a 50-foot wide road ending at the beach at 93rd Street. In 1958, Surfside exercised its eminent domain powers, closed the road, and obtained additional land resulting in a total beach frontage of 160 feet.  

The Surfside Community Center, originally planned as a Convention Center, was built by the Millman Construction Company on the aforementioned parcels. The project began on March 15, 1962 and concluded with the Dedication of the facility taking place on November 11, 1962. Many celebrities attended the festivities, including Jayne Mansfield, the famous 1950’s film actress. The building, designed by Francis R. Hoffman, housed a beautiful pool area (complete with a multi-lane lap pool, a small kiddie pool, and a snack bar), a large multi-purpose room with a stage, and two special function rooms. Over time the building came to house a library and offices for Surfside’s Tourist Bureau and Recreation Department. A popular summer camp program was initiated over 35 years ago and still operates at a full capacity today.

Hundreds of community events, meetings, weddings, and other notable functions have taken place at the Center. In 1964, World Heavyweight Champion Sonny Liston trained at the Surfside Community Center for his historic fight against Cassius Clay, who would soon thereafter change his name to Muhammad Ali, and be crowned the new champ. Clay made a surprise visit to the Center in hopes of riling up his opponent and distracting Liston from his pre-fight practice, an event that made national news!

The Community Center was demolished in March of 2008 due to concerns about safety, and to make way for a new, updated facility. The new facility was designed as a two-story structure, to be built in two phases. The first phase, a one-story building with offices, a large meeting room, snack bar/grill, children’s water park and lap pool, should be completed by 2011.
Surfside's business district, the two blocks of Harding Avenue between 94th Street and 96th Streets, was created early in our Town’s history and still retains much of its original small-town charm. While old-timers will remember such institutions as Sheldon’s Drugs, Surfside Florist, Danny’s, and Surfside Travel, recent additions including Publix, Flanigan’s, Ragazzi, and Sushi Republic appear to be on their way to becoming community landmarks. Surfside also is home to a branch of the United States Post Office which serves the entire 33154 zip code, including the communities of Surfside, Bal Harbour, Bay Harbor Islands, and Indian Creek Village.

It is interesting to note that The Tatum Brothers, the visionary real estate developers responsible for subdividing large parts of Miami and Miami Beach, had created the plan for Surfside’s business district long before the Town existed. Their 1924 Plat No. 6 subdivision plans allowed for a business section with an area for hotels and apartment buildings, essentially identical to its current configuration.

In 1975, the Town began offering a “Surfside Mini-Bus” shuttle service, which rode throughout the neighborhood stopping off at Food Fair (a grocery store that was located where Publix now operates). The bus was routed so that it would pass within one block of any home in Surfside. The original fare was 10 cents! The Town still offers its residents the bus service, however, it is now provided through a contract with an outside company. The service is currently provided at no charge to the residents, since it is paid for by Surfside’s portion of a Miami-Dade County sales tax dedicated to funding local transportation. Currently, the mini-bus runs throughout the Town (including by Publix), to the Miami Shores Aquatics Center and to the Miami Beach Miami-Dade County Library; it operates Monday to Saturday.
The beach, of course, is central to the heart and soul of Surfside. As the jewel of the Town, Surfside continues to make maintenance of its beach a top priority; it was completely refurbished in the 1990’s, and is scheduled to be refurbished again in 2011 (pending approvals and funding). Although Surfside’s beach sand used to be pink, the sand imported from the Caribbean for the replenishment project turned our beach white. Over the years, many events have taken place on this beautiful beach and most recently, in 2006, the Parks and Recreation Department inaugurated its Annual 5K Race.

Surfside has been home to many religious institutions throughout the years. The first one was the Surfside Community Church, established in 1945. There is no record of where this church was located but prior to opening its building, services took place at Town Hall, 9550 Harding Avenue. In 1953, the First Church of Christ Scientist came to town and was located at 228 89th Street. It is unclear when either of those churches closed their doors. In 1958, Casa de Jesus took residence at 228 89th Street, and still operates there today. In 1968, Surfside welcomed its first synagogue, Magen David Synagogue, located at 9348 Harding Avenue. It is still there today. The Shul of Bal Harbour was established at 9540 Collins Avenue in 1983 and is still a thriving synagogue in town. In 1997, Young Israel of Bal Harbour established a presence at 9592 Harding Avenue, 2nd Floor, where its congregation still meets. Between 1996 and 2006, the church Centro Cristiano Ebenezer operated at 9173 Harding Avenue. Most recently, the Sephardic Community Torah Center established a congregation at 310 95th Street.
Surfside’s residential areas consist of a mix of single-family homes, duplexes, and several apartment buildings west of Harding Avenue as well as high and low-rise condominiums and apartment buildings east of Harding Avenue. The single-family home section of the town was built in stages. According to a survey released in 2000, the construction of houses breaks down as follows: 1939 and earlier (176 homes constructed), 1940’s (431), 1950’s (934), 1960’s (195), 1970’s (536), 1980’s (330) and 1990’s (564) (no available data for 2000’s). 43

As previously mentioned, Henri Levy developed a large portion of the residential area. This included Veterans Park, located at Surfside’s entrance at Collins and 88th Street, which was originally referred to as June and Clemence Park after Henri’s two daughters. In 2009, the Town Commission declared June 9th as Henri Levy Day in the Town of Surfside. Levy also developed Normandy Isle and the 79th Street Causeway.

In 2004, the residents of the Town of Surfside voted overwhelmingly in support of a Charter Amendment which added the requirement of a popular vote before any changes can be made to the current twelve-story height limit for buildings on the ocean side of Collins Avenue. This is intended to help the town retain its relatively low-rise character and friendly charm.

Surfside is also known for its distinctive MiMo architecture. One well-known MiMo architect who built at least four houses in Surfside was Wahl Snyder. 42 Snyder is renowned as the architect who introduced the split-level house (1939) and townhouse designs (1964) to the Miami area. Snyder’s architectural hallmark was a keen interest in integrating the outside world into living space. Other famous MiMo architects who built houses in Surfside include Gilbert, Fein, Leonard Glasser, Igor Polivetsky, and Donald G. Smith.

Today approximately 5,280 people live in Surfside. There are approximately 1,262 single-family homes and 1,892 multi-family units. This is a far cry from the 1930’s when only a smattering of single-family houses existed and very few other buildings stood.

For at least over 40 years, there have been two public parks located within the single-family home district; the 96th Street Park at Bay Drive and 96th Street and the Hawthorne Tot-Lot at Bay Drive and 90th Street. In fact, the Hawthorne Park was dedicated May 18, 1960 in observance of the Town of Surfside’s 25th Anniversary. These two parks are consistently overflowing with children and host many festive Town events. The Tennis Center at 8750 Collins Avenue also provides a location for recreational opportunities.
Surfside has had its share of vice and infamous residents. During the 1940’s, there was at least one illegal casino in Surfside called the Brook Club, located on the west side of Harding Avenue, in the middle of the block between 94th and 95th Streets, where Danny’s Restaurant would later be located. The criminal activity at the Brook Club made local and national headlines, and Florida’s Attorney General campaigned to have it closed down.

There also was once a significant organized crime presence amongst Surfside’s residents. According to testimony provided to the United States Senate in 1950, Tony Accardo, a “boss” in the Capone crime syndicate, resided at 9199 Collins Avenue. In February 1930, another colorful Surfside character, Sam Tucker, was indicted by a Federal Grand Jury in Buffalo, New York. He was charged with operating a massive rum-running ring that operated a barge making runs between Canada and Buffalo. In official documents, Tucker listed his address as 1347 Biscaya Drive. In its 75-year history, at least twelve other gangsters “allegedly” had homes in Surfside.

Surfside also has been home to notable authors. Its most famous literary resident was Isaac Bashevis Singer, the renowned Yiddish poet and short-story writer, who was awarded the 1978 Nobel Prize in Literature. In fact, the 1994 memoir of Lester Goran, Singer’s friend during the Surfside period of his life, was titled “The Bright Streets of Surfside: The Memoir of Friendship with Isaac Bashevis Singer.” Surfside’s 95th Street is also known as Isaac Bashevis Singer Boulevard in the writer’s honor.

Another famous Surfside resident was Sid Tepper, who lived in Surfside for 35 years (1970 – 2004). Tepper wrote over 300 songs for famous artists, including 45 songs for Elvis Presley, as well as such classics as Red Roses for a Blue Lady, The Naughty Lady of Shady Lane and Kiss of Fire. In 2009, the Surfside Commission proclaimed June 25, Mr. Tepper’s 90th birthday, as Sid Tepper Day.

Although the television series was set in Miami Beach, Surfside is also associated with the South Florida detective show Surfside Six, in which three detectives, Ken Madison (played by Van Williams), Dave Thorne (played by Lee Patterson) and Sandy Winfield II (played by Troy Donahue) operated their headquarters off of a houseboat docked at the Intracoastal Waterway. The series ran from 1960 – 1962.

Sheldon’s Drugs, formerly located on the northeast corner of 95th Street and Harding Avenue, was used as an outdoor location for a scene in the 2002 movie All About the Benjamin’s. Many Surfside residents stopped by to watch the filming, and a few were even hired as extras.

Coincidentally, although originally named after flowers, all of Surfside’s streets west of Harding Avenue were long-ago renamed after famous (mostly English) poets: Edwin A. Abbott, Lord Byron, Charles Dickens, Ralph Waldo Emerson, Richard Hurrell Froude, Hamlin Garland, Nathaniel Hawthorne, and Washington Irving. At the ends of some of east-west streets before entering the beach look up and you will see birdhouses commemorating some of these authors. They were conceived of and built by a young town resident, Frank MacBride, III in 2001 for his Eagle Scout project. Another young Surfside resident was equally inspired by these poets and commemorated them in a poem of his own titled “I Live on Literary Row.”
Surfside has a historic presence within Florida and six different locations have been recognized as archeologically significant and/or historical by the Bureau of Archaeological Research within the Florida Office of Cultural and Historic Preservation. The six listed sites within the Town include: a prehistoric mound, a prehistoric midden, and four (4) structures. The Indian Creek Bridge, adjacent to the Town, is also listed.\(^5\)

In 1923, when The Tatum brothers were clearing the land for the subdividing and platting of what would become Surfside, numerous Indian remains and artifacts were found on Bay Drive. Despite this discovery, the road was paved over. A 1933 – 1934 archeological dig uncovered a 372-foot-long habitation mound (“the Mound”) and the remains of at least 50 Tequesta Indians, potsherds, arrowheads, bone tools, and other Tequestan artifacts made out of shell and stone. Unfortunately all of these remains, following cataloguing in Tallahassee, seemingly disappeared while in the state’s custody.\(^5\)

Another dig in 1935 unearthed additional Tequestan relics which were donated to the Smithsonian Institute.\(^6\)

Surfside currently boasts a population of about 5280 people. One figure estimates that by 2015 the population will be 7052.\(^6\) This population is a varied mix of ethnicity and culture. According to 2000 Census figures (the most recent figures compiled by the Census Bureau), Surfside had the twentieth highest percentage of Brazilian residents in the United States, with 1.60% of the populace. It had the twenty-third highest percentage of Colombian residents in the United States, at 4.66% of the town’s population, as well as the twenty-third highest percentage of Cuban residents in the United States at 20.15% of its population. Surfside also had the thirty-fourth most Peruvians in the United States, at 1.47%, while it had the eleventh highest percentage of Trinidadians and Tobagonians, at 1.30% of all residents. Surfside’s Venezuelan community had the eleventh highest percentage of residents, which was at 1.41%. As of 2000, Spanish was spoken as a first language by 49.40% of residents, while English was spoken by 42.10% of the population. Other languages spoken in our Town included Portuguese 2.36%, Russian 2.04%, German 1.39%, Yiddish 1.39%, and French, which was the mother tongue for 1.28% of the population.\(^6\)
May 2010

Dear Mayor Dietch and Commissioners:

As Mayor and on behalf of the more than two million residents of Miami-Dade County, I would like to extend my warmest congratulations to the Town of Surfside as it celebrates its 75th anniversary.

Since 1935, the Town of Surfside has served as an example of the type of community each municipality in Miami-Dade County should strive to be. As an area of tremendous growth, redevelopment and neighborhood togetherness, I anticipate more productivity and success in the years to come.

Miami-Dade County always takes great pride in supporting communities that enrich the quality of life of our society. Your town's commitment to delivering excellence and outstanding leadership in South Florida are commendable. The beneficiaries of your dedication are the residents and visitors of Surfside.

Once again, congratulations on this 75th anniversary celebration. I wish you continued health, happiness and success.

Sincerely,

Carlos Alvarez
Mayor

April 27, 2010

Town of Surfside
9293 Harding Avenue
Surfside, Florida 33154

I applaud and congratulate you all on the 75th Anniversary of the Town of Surfside. You have achieved much during this period of time and your accomplishments are noteworthy.

I know you all take great pride in the town and I look forward to seeing and hearing of many more outstanding accomplishment and milestones reached by the Town of Surfside.

Sincerely,

Sally Heyman
Commissioner
District 4
May 5, 2010

To Our Friends in the Town of Surfside,

On behalf of the Village Council, staff and residents of Bal Harbour Village, I want to extend our congratulations to the Town of Surfside on your 75th Anniversary.

We in Bal Harbour Village have always felt that we share more than a border with our neighbors to the south...we share the distinction of making up one of the most beautiful areas in the world. Maintaining and improving on that distinction, and the spirit of community, has been a driving force in the sixty-four years that Bal Harbour and Surfside have shared a common history. We look forward to continuing to work hand in hand with the Town of Surfside as we move into the future.

Best of luck as you embark on your next three quarters of a century of progress.

Yours truly,

Jean Rosenfield
Mayor

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May 3, 2010

Town Council

Kenneth Weinstein
Mayor

Irene S. Wallace
Vice Mayor

Stephanie Bender
Councilwoman

Jordan W. Leonard
Councilman

Alfredo Rada
Councilman

Isaac Salem
Councilman

Robert H. Yaffe
Councilman

Town Officials

Ronald J. Wesson
Town Manager

Marlene Monarde
Town Clerk

Craig B. Sherman
Town Attorney

Town of Surfside
9293 Harding Avenue
Surfside, FL 33154

Dear Residents of Surfside:

Congratulations to the Town of Surfside as it celebrates its 75th anniversary.

Best wishes to our "sister city".

Good Luck in the future!

Sincerely,

[Signature]

Mayor of Bay Harbor Islands
April 27, 2010

BERNARD KLEPACH
MAYOR

JAVIER HOLTZ
VICE MAYOR

ROBERT DIENER
COUNCIL MEMBER

DR. SCOTT SEGAL
COUNCIL MEMBER

IRWIN TAUBER
COUNCIL MEMBER

C. SAMUEL KISSINGER
VILLAGE ATTORNEY

STEPHEN HELPMAN
VILLAGE CLERK

INDIAN CREEK VILLAGE, FLORIDA

April 28, 2010

To the Town of Surfside:

It's hard to believe that this year marks the 95th year of Miami Beach and the 75th year of Surfside as cities. For 75 years, we have been close neighbors and friends.

The Town of Surfside has always been a charming place, full of engaged residents willing to fight to keep it the way they like it. The character of the community has therefore remained of high quality.

We in Miami Beach could not ask for a better northern gateway to our city. We wish the residents, and newly elected commission, led by Mayor Daniel Dietch, much success in continuing this long and grand tradition for many more years.

Sincerely,

Matt Herrera Bower
Mayor