

Cutler Bay NEWS

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Town has made progress in spite of the 'BANANA People'

BY ERNIE SOCHIN



I can honestly say that I love to live in and be part of the Town of Cutler Bay.

Ten years ago hardly anyone had ever heard of us and referred to it as Cutler Ridge, Perline, or that place down there near the shopping center which used to be called Cutler Ridge Shopping Center and wisely changed the name to Southland Mall.

The town at that time was certainly not anywhere you probably would take visitors on a tour. That has all changed, and we have received many rewards and awards for the excellent planning and construction that has gone into our town. It has not been easy.

We public servants must deal with the "BANANA People" — Build Absolutely Nothing Anywhere Near Anything. This makes the job of decision making for our town most difficult. Anytime anything new comes before the council, you can expect immediately those who live perhaps one or two streets away to come up and make their feelings known.

This can be a scary experience for those of us not accustomed to this type of protest. Some 12 or 24 people in our small council chamber can look like a huge mob of people who will oppose your reelection or whatever you have in front of you. This goes for stores, duplex houses, multilevel apartments, or anything that may bring more people to the area. The biggest issue is the increased traffic that will result.

I hate to be the bearer of bad news, but I can promise you now that the traffic in our town will get worse as the town grows — and the town is growing. Even if it were not, a simple ride down Florida's Turnpike will show you hundreds of homes and apartments being built in the unincorporated areas over which we have no control. These people most certainly will be using our roads and frankly there is nothing we can do about it.

There are many people talking about various transit solutions to the problem. No doubt this will remove a few automobiles from our streets, but our style of living now with children being dropped off and picked up from school as well as the many after-school activities that they participate in, working mothers, etc., will simply not be alleviated by a transit system.

Another problem that we in Florida have is the heat and heavy rains that we deal with many



times throughout the year. Unless this transit system is able to pick you up and drop you off exactly where you need to be at any given time, you, like many others, will resort to your auto.

One possible method of alleviating this traffic is to allow people to both work and live in the same town, which is certainly not the case now. Building places for people to work in will bring the BANANA people out in force. If you look at Florida's Turnpike and the new entrances and exits being built, you know that the Department of Transportation is anticipating some huge growth in this area.

Our town has a great deal to offer people, especially young families that want good schools, playgrounds, places to shop and all the other amenities that we offer.

As elected officials we have the duty of planning and looking ahead to what this town will be like 10 or 20 years from now. When I first moved here there were approximately 9,000 people in the area and it essentially was a laid-back rural town. Things change as we all know.

If you look at Caribbean Boulevard now, you see a beautifully landscaped road with newly

paved driveways and houses that seem to be much better maintained now that these folks live on a beautiful Boulevard.

Anyone looking back at what it looked like prior to our changes will know what I mean: gullies in the swale made by DIY driveways, etc. But believe it or not there were the usual dozen or so folks who only saw horrible things happening on Caribbean Boulevard, i.e. curbs, etc.

We heard that children and dogs most certainly would be killed as a result of this and that people will no longer have a place to park, trucks would no longer be able to make deliveries, the mailman would find it impossible to deal with etc., etc., etc.

I attended a meeting once where an authoritative speaker actually drew sketches of Caribbean as a four-lane highway, with no town plans to support that idea. We can all see now that none of these have become a problem and when I try to solicit new businesses to move to our area I make it a point of showing just how beautiful things can be in Cutler Bay.

We also have added several roundabouts — or rotaries as they are sometimes called — which actually have minimized congestion on our roads. Certainly much better than four way stops or traffic lights.

It will take a bit of time until people adjust to the rules regarding roundabouts but I honestly think we are all intelligent enough to figure it out.

Of course we were threatened by some engineering types that tractor trailers would not be able to make the turn and cars pulling a boat on a trailer would find it impossible to negotiate the turn. This too has been disproved. Our section of old Cutler Road is recognized by many as the most beautiful stretch of this highway. You should have heard all the complaints that I got about putting people out of business, etc., etc.

We received awards for this project as well and just look at it now. Sometimes it is difficult, especially for new officials, to realize that aside from the 12 to 24 protesters that show up at these meetings, that there are another 47,000 folks who, for the most part, are very happy with what we have done and what we are doing. Unfortunately they don't come to our meetings and wave their hands as the protesters do, but we know from our daily conversations with people that we meet on the street, in supermarkets, and town events that, for the most part, people are very happy with the way this town has developed. I am too!