

# CORAL GABLES

MAGAZINE



STREETWISE

## Talk of the Town: Concerts, Groundbreakings, and Local Wins

January 7, 2026

# Centennial Concert

## *A Venetian Pool Celebration*



*A night of celebration: the centennial concert at the venetian pool*

When Coral Gables was first founded, salesman (and first mayor) Doc Dammers was known for his elaborate marketing techniques, including organizing concerts in the coral rock quarry that became the Venetian Pool. Flash forward a hundred years to last month, when the City of Coral Gables closed out its centennial celebrations with the Grand Finale Concert, an evening of history, music, and community held at the Venetian. The pool, drained for the occasion, is now open after roughly a year of reconstruction. But for a Sunday night in December, Eduardo Marturet conducted the Miami Symphony Orchestra there, to the delight of Gableites who paid \$250 each for the once-in-a-lifetime experience.

The hour-long concert began with three suites from Georges Bizet's famous opera "Carmen" and then continued with a plethora of pop hits, with performances of "My Way" and "Feeling Good" by vocalist Zesi, and "Part of Your World" from "The Little Mermaid," featuring teenage vocalist Dana Spejh. After a rendition of Chuck Berry's "Roll Over Beethoven," the night ended with the classic "When the Moon Shines in Coral Gables," a 1920s song written to promote the city in its early days. In opening remarks, Mayor Vince Lago endowed Oscar Morejon of John Bell Construction with the key to the city, after the firm was entrusted with the historic restoration of the 60,000-square-foot pool. – *Kylie Wang*

## Salazar Flips the Script?

*U.S. Rep. Salazar's New Book & New Stance*



U.S. Republican Congresswoman María Salazar, above, whose 27th congressional district includes the Gables, recently hosted a private event at the Coral Gables Museum to discuss her new book, "Dignity Not Citizenship." At the event, Salazar met supporters, signed copies, but declined to take part in any Q&A. The book explains her rationale

behind the Dignity Act 2025 – a bipartisan bill co-sponsored by her and U.S. Rep. Veronica Escobar of Texas (Dem.) that grants undocumented immigrants a pathway to citizenship. Salazar was previously on record saying the U.S. has over 10 million people working in construction, hospitality, agriculture, dairy, fisheries, and slaughterhouses, who are undocumented but not criminals. Days after the event – which attracted protestors – President Trump issued his Thanksgiving announcement that all immigration applications from 19 “high risk” countries would be shut down. Salazar, who previously supported Trump’s immigration policies, issued a statement to the Miami Herald which called the crackdown “un-American.” The Miami Dade College and University of Miami grad, one of the few Cuban Americans in Congress, said the new policy amounted to “collective punishment” of “the innocent for the sins of the guilty.” – *Luke Chaney*

## A New Bank in Town

BankMiami Opens Its Doors On Sunset



*Left to Right: Ceo Mary Usategui, with co-founders and EVPS Daniel R. Martinez and David Monter*

Over a decade has passed since a new bank has made its way into the city, and this time it comes with the added milestone of being the first woman-founded bank in Miami: BankMiami. Founder, president and CEO Mary Usategui, who started at age 18 as a teller at Coconut Grove Bank, brings more than 20 years of experience to the job. Usategui is now an honoree of the South Florida Business Journal's 40 Under 40 list and CFO of the Year. She is joined by co-founders and EVPs Daniel R. Martinez and David Monter, who will serve as chief banking officer and chief operating officer, respectively, adding another 30 years of experience. The bank is located at 1515 Sunset Drive; the opening celebration was held last month around the corner at the rooftop of Daniel's Miami steakhouse. *—Amanda Martell*

## Baby Props

### *A Generational Groundbreaking*



*Allen Morris with his son Spencer and infant grandsons at the groundbreaking of Ponce Park, a residential mid-rise*

Allen Morris, the developer best known in the Gables for his Mediterranean-style Alhambra Towers, is determined to mirror that iconic office tower with an equally iconic residential mid-rise on Ponce Circle called Ponce Park. The project, which was amended several times to satisfy concerns from neighbors, is also capped by a tower and built to exacting standards that will attract some of the highest per-square-foot condo prices in the city. He is also kicking in \$2 million to refurbish adjacent Ponce Park with public art.

Last month, a gathering of architects, builders, and sales folks from Sotheby's gathered to shovel some dirt and, by so doing, break ground on the project. Morris, who will move into Ponce Park when it is finished late next year, is nothing if not a generational resident of the Gables (among other things, he is married to June Morris, daughter of the city's first – and only – female mayor Dorothy Thomson). Morris' father founded the firm, and son Spencer serves as president of The Allen Morris Company. Getting the next generation ready, Allen and Spencer posed at the groundbreaking with Spencer's infant sons – “the first of many for them,” quipped Allen. –*J.P. Faber*

## A New Sign in Town

### *An Homage To Coral Gables Debuts*



*Ribbon cutting of the Miami Association of Realtors' "Coral Gables" sign on Giralda Plaza, with Mayor Vince Lago, Miami Realtors Association president Jonathan J. Alfonso, and Chamber of Commerce Ceo Jorge L. Arrizurieta*

The Miami Association of Realtors joined the National Association of Realtors and the City of Coral Gables to unveil a new four foot- tall set of "Coral Gables" letters at Giralda Plaza at the end of November. The installation is part of a placemaking effort which has created similar displays for other South Florida neighborhoods over the past three years, supported by a grant from the National Association of Realtors. The goal: highlight community pride and create a photo-friendly landmark for residents and visitors. The ribbon cutting was attended by Mayor Vince Lago, Coral Gables Chamber of Commerce CEO Jorge L. Arrizurieta, Vice Mayor Rhonda Anderson and City Commissioner Melissa Castro, along with representatives from the Realtors associations. *—Amanda Martell*

# The Importance of Rest

## *Saatva Gets An Olympic Endorsement*



*Two-time olympic gold medalist Ashleigh Johnson*

We recently joined luxury mattress purveyor Saatva at the Shops of Merrick Park, where two-time Olympic gold medalist Ashleigh Johnson announced the brand's new role as the Official Mattress and Restorative Sleep Provider of Team USA at the LA28 Olympic and Paralympic Games. Staff guided guests through the mattress lineup, including the Saatva Classic Mattress, which is priced at \$2,334. When Johnson (Team USA's water polo goalkeeper) took the floor, she discussed the role sleep plays in an athlete's performance and how rest becomes increasingly important as they age. Johnson also spoke about recovery outside the pool, explaining that time spent resetting the mind and body matter just as much as time spent training. Guests received a gift bag that included an embroidered robe personalized with their initials along with face cream, a mask, and other curated items centered on rest and wellness. –*Amanda Martell*

## The End of an Era

### *Snow's Jewelers Departs The Mile*



*The Snow Family, top: Eddie Snow, Austin Tellam, Christopher Hansen. Middle: Mary Snow, Judy Snow, JJ Snow Hansen. Bottom: Teddy Tellam*

The 30-year anniversary of the Miracle Theatre is not the only anniversary being noted this month. Sadly, however, the other is for a closing. Snow's Jewelers has been a fixture on Miracle Mile (almost adjacent to the theater) for just over 50 years. Back in 1974, proprietors Eddie and Judy Snow were newlyweds willing to risk their future on the Mile, then pockmarked with a high vacancy rate due to a recession. They have been there ever since, raising two daughters – Mary Snow, who until recently was the president and CEO of the Coral Gables Community Foundation, and JJ Hanson, a local

realtor. “I’ll still do business in an office nearby as a consultant,” says Eddie, who held a closing party for friends and clients at the shop just before Christmas. “But my days of fronting on the mile are over.” Doors won’t officially close until March, as an ongoing sale empties the inventory. – *J.P. Faber*

## Flash Back, Flash Forward

### *The Miracle Theatre Celebrates Its 30th Birthday*



*Actors’ playhouse artistic director David Arisco, founding executive producing director Barbara S. Stein, and founding chairman of the board Dr. Lawrence E. Stein review plans for the miracle theatre in 1994.*

It was 30 years ago when the City of Coral Gables purchased the Miracle Theatre on Miracle Mile from entertainment giant Wometco, saving it from conversion into a Ross Dress for Less. Barbara and Larry Stein, who had been operating Actors’ Playhouse since 1988 in Kendall, struck a deal with the city to make it their new home, signing a

40-year lease and raising \$10 million to create the new theater. That anniversary was celebrated last month with a reprise of the musical “Man of La Mancha,” which was the first production Actors’ Playhouse held in their new venue. Opening night for the adventures of knight errant Don Quixote came with accolades for the community leaders who helped make it happen, including former mayors Raul Valdes-Fauli, Don Slesnick, and Dorothy Thomson. Inspired by Cervantes’ classic novel, the musical “Man of La Mancha” is set during the Spanish Inquisition as a man, imprisoned and awaiting trial, leads his fellow inmates in a play within a play. The award-winning song “The Impossible Dream” seems appropriate for the task of saving and converting the theater, which has become a mainstay in the cultural life of Coral Gables. Artistic director David Arisco, who directed the musical in 1995, also directed the current reprise. – *J.P. Faber*  
**And the Winner Is...**

*Coral Gables Resident Fernando Mendoza Wins The Heisman Trophy*



*Coral Gables’ own Fernando Mendoza wins the Heisman memorial trophy.*

“Mommy, this is your trophy as much as it is mine. you’ve always been my biggest fan...”

The Heisman Memorial Trophy is the most prestigious award in college football, going each year since 1935 to the top player of the regular season. The last time a UM player won it was in 1992, when quarterback Gino Torretta led the Hurricanes to an

undefeated regular season. This year's winner was not a UM player, but he hails from Coral Gables: Fernando Mendoza, the quarterback of No. 1 Indiana, was the first Hoosier to ever win the award. In an emotional address upon winning the award, he said, "Mommy, this is your trophy as much as it is mine. You've always been my biggest fan. You're my light, you are my 'why,' you're my biggest supporter. Your sacrifice, courage [and] love – those have been my first playbook, and the playbook I'm going to carry by my side through my entire life." He then thanked his grandmother in Spanish. The Mendoza family home is in the South Gables; he attended Christopher Columbus High School and is the first Cuban American to win the award. – *J.P. Faber*



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**About:** Coral Gables Magazine is a lifestyle publication dedicated to the people, culture, and businesses of Coral Gables, Florida. Covering local news, real estate, dining, arts, and community events, it highlights the elegance and vibrancy of "The City Beautiful" while celebrating the stories and leaders that shape its unique character.

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