COMMUNITY MINDED

There are plenty of developers building structures, but in Coral Gables, the movement is toward building community.

BY CIARA LAVELLE

To the uninitiated, real estate development might sound like a joyless job. You might envision stacks of paperwork, navigating mazes of city codes and laws, or crunching numbers on an endless spreadsheet. But according to Brent Reynolds, CEO and managing partner of NP International (NPI), building a place is about one thing: people.

"There is a quote I commonly use when it comes to describing NPI's approach to any project: 'We're far more passionate about creating experiences than just building structures,'" says Reynolds. "Creating a space where people feel a sense of community is top on our list of those experiences."

A mission to bring people together drives the design of Gables Station, an NPI mixed-use development project that combines residences with commercial and public spaces that's rising in Coral Gables' McFarland neighborhood. For starters, the general design of the project was inspired by the neighborhood itself.

"After getting a deeper understanding of the rich history of the community, we

Courtesy of The Plaza Coral Gables

felt their story not only needed to be told but also preserved," says Reynolds. "We produced a film on the neighborhood, entitled *Graceful Voices*, which was aired by PBS nationally. We further integrated their story into our Public Art curation for the open space of Gables Station."

Other efforts toward thoughtful development include organizing the design around a central area, a "natural space where people can interact organically," according to Reynolds. From there, residents can head to a wellness center, a local shop or restaurant, or even hop on the nearby public transportation to get to other parts of town easily.

"Our properties are built with the intent to bring tenants, residents and guests together to share extraordinary experiences as a familiar community," Reynolds says.

Unique to Gables Station is its integration with The Underline, a linear park and community space located beneath the Metrorail line that's been planned by the County and is under development in sections. "The Underline will connect communities and create new environments which do not exist today for people to enjoy and become actively engaged," says Reynolds. "Gables Station absolutely mirrors not only these elements, but also its focus on a healthy lifestyle, public art and the importance of sharing the history of the surrounding communities."

Gables Station isn't the only development focused on bringing residents together in the city. At The Plaza Coral Gables, coming to Fred B. Hartnett Ponce Circle Park,

Key Design Factors

A well organized community looks seamless, but requires plenty of planning, including:

1. RESIDENTS
As the people living in a community, their opinions must be heard and valued.

2. MIXED USE
From small-scale retail and dining to office space, businesses fuel the engine of a community.

3. OPEN SPACES
Areas for people to congregate and celebrate together promote a sense of community.

GABLES STATION was designed with the dynamic of daily living in mind.

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"No development can succeed without a strong partnership with the community it lives in." — Agave Ponce Mission Statement

developers prioritized community wishes like maintaining the Mediterranean Revival architecture of the area and making certain there was ample space for recreation, arts and culture.

The Plaza also honors the unique history of its location. Originally designed by George Merrick as an area to house artisans and craftsmen, the "Crafts Section" of Coral Gables was once ruled from the Arts Center building, built circa 1925. That building still stands, and will be incorporated into The Plaza's public space.

Agave Ponce LLC, the company developing The Plaza, shares Reynolds' community-centric philosophy. "No development can succeed without a strong partnership with the community it lives in," reads its mission statement. According to these local developers, creating superior neighborhoods is all about balancing what already exists with an educated sense of what's to come, which sounds much simpler than it is. But with creativity and an emphasis on quality of life, these companies are changing the way neighborhoods develop, and *that* is very Coral Gables!

Courtesy of The Plaza Coral Gables (2)