

Meet Mr. Manners

Written by Olga L. Figueroa, Special to the BT
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Biscayne Park is one of Miami-Dade County's best-kept secrets. The pie-shaped village is wedged between Miami Shores and North Miami, and people who've lived in Florida all their lives may have never heard of it. Others have spent their whole lives here.

Incorporated as a town in 1931 and renamed Village of Biscayne Park in 1933, Biscayne Park boasts a lush landscape, grassy median parks, a diverse population, and is abundant with bird life and other creatures.

Over the past few years, though, things have changed a tad, particularly in terms of property

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values, higher taxes, and small-town charm. Our proximity to downtown Miami and the beaches has lured big spenders, and with them have come changes and rules not everyone agrees with. Some of the quaint architecture has been replaced by contemporary designs that stick out like a wedge of Camembert at a church picnic. Some newbies don't respond to "hello" or "how's it going?"

In recent years, village politicians have estranged themselves both from the very people who helped elect them and what little local media covers their events. There have been exceptions, of course, but they've moved on.

Enter the recently appointed village manager, Krishan Manners, who sent out an introductory letter and invitation to residents interested in helping to preserve the quality of life in the village. I replied, and he says that the response so far has been good, and even better from long-term residents who are happy with stricter code enforcement and more police protection.

Manners knows the situation well, having served as public services manager for the public works, code, and building departments under the previous administration. He'd also served as interim village manager for a few months and was later selected from a pool of applicants for the position.

As village manager, he's approaching the job with tact and trying to help locals, both new and established, using assurance and proper manners (pun intended). Residents of Griffing Boulevard, for example, have been asking for increased police protection west of NE 6th Avenue, to help discourage rolling stops. Meanwhile, the residents of the east side of NE 6th Avenue, the larger portion of the village, are concerned about fewer patrols and more serious crimes.

A few weeks back, one home video camera recorded two teenagers trying to steal mail from a home on 114th Street and NE 8th Avenue. The attempt, posted on nextdoor.com by the homeowner, was foiled by UPS driver James Brown, who knows practically everyone in that piece of the pie.

Nextdoor.com members' video cameras have also caught drivers rolling through the stop signs on Griffing Boulevard. But let's keep in mind that this is Biscayne Park, not Brooklyn. We have

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lush, beautiful yards, lovely parks, two playgrounds, and ball fields. Our kids don't play stickball on Griffing Boulevard, a state-designated road.

The divide between residents west of 6th Avenue and those east of 6th Avenue, who make up most of the village population and deal with the bulk of the traffic, is an old story. Manners is trying to mend fences, but some people don't seem eager to assist.

Those residents who don't care to see a neighbor's junk pile or decaying motorcycle collection should consider purchasing another property or building a fence. They say it's like the adage of expecting a spouse to change after the wedding -- not going to happen.

Speaking of code enforcement, our compliance officer should be allowed to do her job without enduring confrontational attitudes. She is just *doing* her job.

Manners has his hands full; in his introductory letter, he invited residents to assist him in running the city, but to come ready to work and to reach out to others.

To longtime residents who feel that the negligence of their property should be grandfathered into new rules, I say, remember Sira. Sira Ramos, a former village code enforcement officer.

"Chlorine is cheap," she used to say. Well, so are mulch, top soil, and grass plugs. If you've been using your lawn or a swale area to park on for the past decade or so, don't expect sympathy from city officials.

Good neighbors respect one another. They don't snitch and or complain behind one another's backs, or cry foul when they're called out by village officials for an unsightly mess.

Concerted efforts must be made, says Manners, who meets weekly with each entity of village government.

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Both sides must make an effort. It's ludicrous that for multiple weeks a few months ago, police had to constantly remind residents to lock their cars and not leave valuables in unlocked vehicles. We're in Biscayne Park, not Oz.

I'd like to see officers catching thieves and speeders, and protecting residents -- not babysitting them. This village is our slice of the pie, but we don't have to be spoon-fed.

Feedback: letters@biscaynetimes.com