History of Coral Springs

Known as "the City in the Country," Coral Springs has become a premier South Florida community, known for its abundant parks, quality schools, numerous athletic programs, and attractive neighborhoods.

Prior to its incorporation as a City in July 1963, the area that was to become Coral Springs was part of a huge tract of land acquired by Henry "Bud" Lyons between 1911 and 1939 that totaled over 20,000 acres of marshy wilderness in western Broward County. Clearing and draining the land himself, with the help of workers from the Bahamas, most of the land was used to grow beans, earning him the nickname "Titan of the Bean Patch." Lyons died in 1952, leaving his vast land holdings to his family, who converted the land to be used for ranching, bringing in 5,000 head of cattle.

After a series of wet hurricanes had flooded much of the southern portions of the State in 1947, Florida created the Central and Southern Florida Flood Control District (now the South Florida Water Management District) that built a network of canals and levees throughout South Florida. The canals helped to further drain the land that would become Coral Springs.

Similar to the land rush of the 1920s, after World War II there was another real estate boom in South Florida. Coral Ridge Properties, a land development firm, was started by James Hunt, Joseph Taravella, and Stephen Calder to develop communities in Broward County. By the late 1950s, they were running out of land to develop in the Fort Lauderdale area and were seeking opportunities further west.

Although still somewhat swampy, land in the northwest corner of the County, now owned by Lena Lyons, perfectly suited Hunt's vision for a master-planned community. On December 14, 1961, Coral Ridge Properties purchased 3,860 acres for $1 million. They moved three wooden shacks onto the land, along with five Coral Ridge Properties employees, which made the land eligible to incorporate as a City under Florida law. The City of Coral Springs was chartered on July 10, 1963. Other names that were considered included "Curran Village," "Pompano Springs," and "Quartermore." Additional land purchases from the Lyons family brought the total land in the City up to 5,000 acres.

By 1964, a master plan was developed that projected a population of more than 50,000 residents living in small neighborhoods throughout the community. On July 22, 1964 the first land sale was held in Ft. Lauderdale's Galt Ocean Mile Hotel, selling 536 building lots for $1.6 million. Looking to give the new town a country flair, Hunt ordered the construction of the Covered Bridge that same year. It is now a Florida Heritage site.

Coral Ridge Property employees staffed the City administration, with Werner Buntemeyer holding the position of City Manager from 1964 to 1974. In 1965, Coral Ridge Properties acquired an additional 5,000 acres from Lena Lyons, increasing the area within the City to 16 square miles.

From the very beginning, Coral Ridge Properties enacted strict landscaping and sign laws designed to create a beautiful and natural looking town. In May 1965 a second land sale was held, this time in Coral Springs, with Johnny Carson on hand to help draw buyers. Johnny himself bought almost 55 acres of land. This time 1,100 lots were sold. Then the first residents began moving in, including Wilfred Neale II and Robert Fuller in The Hills in early 1965. Both became early City Commissioners.

Also in 1965, the City's first employee was hired- Police Chief Richard Vedilago who was assisted by a German Shepherd named "Sergeant Satan."

According to Stuart McIver, in 1966, Westinghouse Electric Corporation acquired Coral Ridge Properties so that they could use the new City as an "urban laboratory to evaluate new products, such
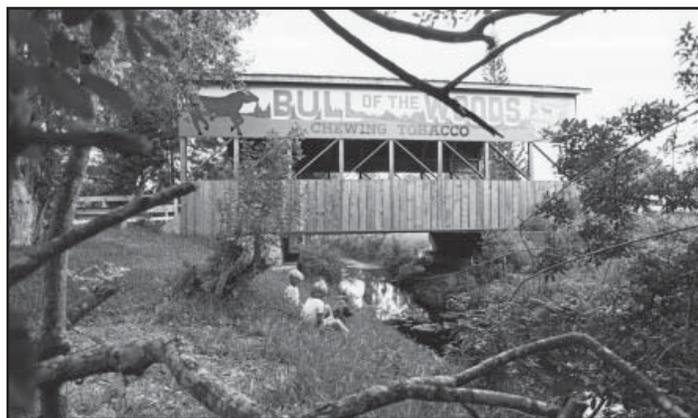
The Covered Bridge built in 1964, spanning the canal on Northwest 59th Avenue just south of Wiles Road, was the City's first structure and is a Florida Heritage Site. The Covered Bridge was renovated in 2007, and local artist Val Tascon repainted the artwork to match the original design.

Coral Springs' first police officers were Vic Vedilago and Sergeant Satan, hired on November 1, 1965 when the official population was 10. They patrolled mostly barren landscape coming across more snakes and alligators than people.

Pony Express: Before door-to-door delivery began, residents picked up their mail at the Coral Ridge Properties Administration Building, which is now City Hall. Local delivery didn't begin until 1970.

Village Green, the City's first shopping center, built in 1967 at the southwest corner of University Drive and Sample Road, included a barbershop, restaurant, pharmacy and market, leased by Publix. Before that, all shopping had to be done in Margate via Wiles Road as Sample Road did not run to 441 until 1970.

as a home utility center, home sewage disposal systems, an infrared heating system, full electric kitchens, and central air-conditioning and heating systems."

In 1967 the City had several hundred residents and held its first election. Lewie Mullins was elected Mayor and Robert Fuller Vice-Mayor. The remaining commissioners were Wilfred Neale, Peter Giordano, and Richard Hunt.

The census of 1970 set Coral Springs' population at 1,489, although the City Manager believed the actual number was closer to 3,750. In January of 1970, the Broward County School Board voted to build the City's first elementary school. Westinghouse opened its "Electra Center" designed to showcase state-of-the-art home systems. Some of these modern conveniences were built into model homes in the Electra Lab to allow visitors to experience motion-detecting lights, electric kitchens and home security systems first hand. The volunteer Fire Department was also started in 1970. Early in 1971, the last large increase in property came with the purchase of the Remsberg Ranch on the north side of the City. The City was now 13,400 acres.

In 1974, O. Benjamin Geiger was elected Mayor and began the task of making Coral Springs independent. This included establishing the City's first ad valorem property tax, which at $4.0000 mils, was a huge increase to residents' tax bills. He also led the commission in hiring Phillip Kelley as the new City Manager, completing the break from Coral Ridge Properties. It was during this transition that the City's codes and ordinances were created and the charter was modified to reflect the new vision for the City. The Commission wanted a professionally run City, so they chose a strong City Manager form of government.

The City grew at an incredible pace. Ten new public schools, a regional mall, shopping centers and parks sprang up around the City during the 1970s. By 1980, the population had swelled to more than 37,000 people.

During the 1980s, growth continued to be the City's greatest concern. By 1985 the population had passed 50,000 and schools were overcrowded throughout the community as young families poured into the neighborhoods. The realities of development were beginning to have an effect by increasing traffic and crowding, providing series of challenges for the City's planning office.

The Honda Classic moved to Eagle Trace Country Club in 1984, which brought national attention to the City.

The total property value had passed the $1 billion mark in 1983 and the City had to begin planning bond referendums for community parks, a public safety facility, fire stations, and a community center. Recognizing the strength of the City's financial position, Moody's Investors Service increased the City's bond rating from Baa to A-1, and Standard and Poor's from BBB+ to A+.

City Hall was originally the Administration Building for the corporate headquarters of Coral Ridge Properties.

Coral Springs was rapidly filling up with single-family homes and apartment complexes, earning it a reputation as a "yuppie" bedroom community. That began to change after 1986 when the Sawgrass Expressway was constructed, linking the City to the major transportation centers in Broward County. The City was becoming more and more attractive to corporate relocations and retailers.

The 1990s turned out to be a critical decade in the life of the City. Only thirty years old, the City was nonetheless facing a staggering growth rate— which created a huge demand for City services aimed at enhancing quality of life. Between 1990 and 2000, the City's population grew from 78,864 to 117,549 and the taxable value from $2.8 billion to $4.7 billion.

By 1994 it became apparent that there was a need for better recreational and cultural programming for City residents, so several existing facilities were improved and new ones opened to serve the growing population. The Coral Springs City Centre was renovated to add an Art Museum and renamed the Coral Springs Center for the Arts, where arts and community programming for all ages is offered. The Aquatics Complex was expanded and improved, with a new fitness center and better diving pools. The Sportsplex and Tennis Center were created to provide additional recreation activities.

At the same time, City residents passed a $7.5 million bond referendum to purchase Environmentally Sensitive Lands with the goal of purchasing and preserving the few wetlands left within the City of Coral Springs. These parks, including Red Lichen and Sandy Ridge, provide educational and aesthetic treasures to the City's park system.

The biggest change to affect the City began in 1993 when City Management implemented a Total Quality Management program, designed to completely overhaul operations and service delivery by becoming customer-focused and quality-oriented. The central feature of the program was a new business model that would take us from "government as usual" to a high-performance municipal corporation. The strategic and business planning system we use today— allocating resources strategically through data-driven decision making—was instituted in 1995.

It didn't take long for the new model to prove itself. In 1997 Coral Springs was awarded the Florida Governor's Sterling Award, making it the first municipality to be awarded a state-sanctioned, Baldrige-based quality award, and again in 2003, receiving the GSA for a second time validating our sustained commitment to delivering the highest quality of customer service to our community. In 1998, our "Time=Life Team," a process improvement team that created the City's outstanding Emergency Medical Services division, won the Florida Sterling Quality Conference Team Showcase Award and went on to place fourth at the National Conference. Soon after, the Forest Hills Resident Association, one of our older neighborhoods, was awarded the Neighborhood of the Year Award from Neighborhoods, USA.

Recognition wasn't the only positive outcome from the City's business model. When 95% of our residential property was developed in the late 1990s, we reached "build-out," a time when growth-related revenues dropped precipitously. We were able to make the transition smoothly, without any change to our current operating millage rates.

The new millennium has brought even more exciting news. We are the first state or local government to receive the prestigious Malcolm Baldrige National Quality Award for performance excellence and innovation, a presidential honor. In presenting the award at a national conference in Washington, DC, Secretary of Commerce Carlos Gutierrez commended recipients for developing an innovative approach to performance excellence that benefits their organization, their community, and our nation. Coral Springs is also among an elite group of only 34 cities nationwide to have bonds rated "AAA" by all three rating agencies on Wall Street. AAA is the highest credit rating afforded to municipalities for superior financial performance management. All three rating agencies praised the City's solid overall financial position, effective long-range planning and prudent management policies.

Sources:

City of Coral Springs; *1994-95 Guide to Program and Facility Sponsorships*; 1994.

City of Coral Springs; *Economic Development Brochure*; 1988.

City of Coral Springs; *Statistical Guide for Economic Development*; Coral Ridge Properties, Coral Springs, FL; 1989.

Greater Coral Springs Chamber of Commerce; *Guide to Greater Coral Springs Florida*; 1994.

McIver, Stuart; *Coral Springs: the First Twenty-Five Years;* The Donning Company, Norfolk, VA; 1988.

Wangberg, Wendy & Kevin Knutson; *Images of America: Coral Springs;* Arcadia Publishing; 2003.

Various City documents and memoranda.

Historical Advisory Committee Mission Statement

The principal mission of the City of Coral Springs Historical Advisory Committee is to actively collect, preserve and showcase memorabilia relating to all aspects of the City's history.

Furthermore, the City of Coral Springs Historical Advisory Committee shall work in conjunction with City staff to foster a sense of community spirit and to encourage citizen involvement and pride in the City's heritage.