

When my family left Cuba in late 1959, my mother had the foresight to settle us in Coral Gables. We moved to Almeria Avenue in 1960 and we lived across the way from Mrs. Leah Kerdyk, mother and grandmother to Commissioners William Kerdyk, Sr. and Jr. She waved to my grandmother across the street and though not conversant in each other's native tongue, they spoke the language of civility and graciousness.

Coral Gables was a small town then, simpler, less complicated. Growing up in the central Gables, I flew a kite in the open field that is now the Biltmore II apartments. When the David Williams broke ground, a huge buzz broke out over one of the city's first high-rises. My dad remembers attending the all day City Commission meeting in the late 1960s when the Cocoplum development issue brought the meeting to a fever pitch. Sitting now in the Commissioner's seat, I look to the past much as Chief Justice Oliver Wendell Holmes did, "To understand the todays, to talk about the tomorrows, I spent times in the yesterdays."

The Coral Gables of my youth is long gone. It is still a beautiful city whose civic values are strong, where our city's remarkable history, our beautiful tree canopy and our enviable services are renowned. However, I no longer live in the Central Gables, but in the North. Those residing south of Dixie live in the Central Gables and those south of Sunset Drive live in the South. Though we have the same address, the mindsets and geography are quite different.

In the mid 1990s, Coral Gables grew via annexation. Hammock Lakes, Snapper Creek, Pine Bay Estates and Deering Bay become Coral Gables after a long courtship by city administration. Those who personally experienced it up close are candid in their assessment of the promises made, that to this day remain unfulfilled. Monies flowed into the city from these areas, benefiting all residents, yet additional police and fire services that lured these residents from unincorporated Dade did not materialize. Special roving patrols paid for by special taxing districts were supposed to disappear with a Gables address. Many of these areas, whose homes sit on multi-acre estates with sizable property taxes, still pay for roving police

patrols. Those of us who live in the North and Central Gables don't think twice about those services, nor do we pay extra for things already covered in our property taxes.

Enter the Kings Bay annexation, stuck in limbo since 1996. A \$2.4 million dollar price tag was placed on building a fire substation and tagged to the small community, a report that begged me to look deeper at the real staffing issues neglected in the mid 90s.

A Yiddish proverb says, "Ask advice from everyone, but act with your own mind." I sought information from staff, from County Commissioners and from my southern neighbors. I listened carefully and opened the map, viewing our current boundaries and future growth. I realized that to view Kings Bay as an isolated issue, failed in my estimation, to address the larger regional picture. Kings Bay forced us to look honestly at the future for our whole city. It was the proverbial straw that broke the camel's back.

As a Commissioner for the entire community, I saw that the price tag for Kings Bay was really for the whole southern region, and ultimately for the entire city. When you relieve areas already slower in response times and low in staffing, you add a safety factor for all. What we needed seven years ago with the initial annexations, we must face now. Annexations no longer seem to be an "if" for us, but more of "how" to do it right and to be ahead of the curve when other areas join our city. We learned a valuable lesson from the south Gables.

The quick roll call vote at last Tuesday's City Commission meeting belies the time given to the issue over the past 3 months. I made a heartfelt, thought-filled decision last Tuesday, one I believed to be in the best interest of our whole community. I'm sure all my colleagues did the same.