

'Gayification' Expands in South Florida

Established Neighborhoods Draw New Crowds of Gays and Lesbians

By Ian Drew

In areas ranging from Los Angeles's Silverlake community to Columbus, Ohio's Short North to New York City's Chelsea neighborhood, the vibrant gay and lesbian community has injected their creative spirit and hard work into reinventing neighborhoods that were formerly on a downward swing.

The usual scenario of this 'gayification' is that many gays move in and fix up older real estate properties, thus increasing the value of these spaces. Alongside this expansion comes the opening of many gay businesses, which, in turn, draw a steady stream of creative upstart businesses that set up right alongside. A community is born.

The area then becomes chic and trendy, gentrification occurs, prices skyrocket, mainstream venues set up shop, and the ingenious forerunners move on to revitalize neighboring communities where the rents are still cheaper.

Gervase also cites a current area north of Hollywood Boulevard and south of Sheridan Street as rapidly growing in popularity. Bearing the signature mixed zoning of Victoria Park 16 years ago, Gervase says that it is one of the latest developing areas where a reasonable price for a home can still be had.

Contributing largely to the new popularity of the area amongst gays is the bustling downtown area located at the end of Hollywood Boulevard. Likening it to Dupont Circle in Washington, D.C., Gervase says that the lively mix of funky coffeeshops and restaurants have drawn many gays and lesbians residing in surrounding communities.

On any given night, the lower Boulevard section is filled with people enjoying live music, dinner and cocktails at gay-owned restaurants like Red Thai and Mankind, and shops such as Two Frenz.

helped to create some special events.

One such event is an informal "alternative lifestyle" night currently happening at the TGI Friday's restaurant located in the mall. The Monday night event, which is drawing a steadily building gay crowd mostly between the hours of 4pm and 8pm, was proposed by the multitude of gay staff members at the restaurant after they saw a need for a "gay happy hour," according to bartender Jerry Florence.

Although the manager of the restaurant is not gay himself, he has approved the night and it has been informally promoted by word of mouth to many gays and lesbians in the area.

Despite the popularity of the event and the mall, Joseph Waldron of Arvida says that the area, like Hollywood, draws a crowd of older, professional gay people. The difference is that they must have adequate financial resources just to live in the pricey area.

This is due to the expensive cost of real estate. Waldron says, "This is not a prototypical gay area. These places are not fixer-uppers but new or already fixed-up units priced very highly."

He also asserts that despite the gays that live in the area, it is not and probably will not become a typical gay community. "Many gays and lesbians move to a gay area for the sense of community and a support system," he says. "If you live in Aventura, you don't necessarily require that. These residents are travelers. They can afford to go where the action is."

Waldron says other Dade communities are also drawing concentrations of gay people, including Keystone, which features Mediterranean-style mini-mansions built in the '40s and '50s, and North Bay Village.

Middle River Terrace

Adjacent to Wilton Manors in Fort Lauderdale is Middle River Terrace, a small, still affordable enclave that offers a quiet center within Ft. Lauderdale's bustling gay community.

The area has improved through many efforts, including the formation of an active homeowners association that has developed programs such as bike patrols to rid the area of the drug dealers that once inhabited it.

It has quietly developed a reputation as a place where affordable housing is still available to those that can't afford pricier accommodations in neighboring Wilton Manors, Poinsettia Heights or Oakland Park.

According to JD Pryor of the Wilton Manors real estate agency Enfante and Associates, the area offers a diverse mix



of all people.

"Middle River Terrace is a melting pot of gay, straight, and all age groups with an overall feeling of acceptance and togetherness that is rare in many neighborhoods," he says.

Most of the residents appreciate its alternative, Key West-style feeling and its geographically centered location in Ft. Lauderdale. Pryor says, "These people are very proud of where they live and stay loyal to the neighborhood as it changes."

According to Pryor, because of its proximity to Wilton Manors and its gay businesses, it will not be long before the small area develops a few of its own. Proposed sites are already being negotiated along Dixie Highway.

North Andrews Gardens

Also stemming from the soaring real estate prices associated with Ft. Lauderdale communities Wilton Manors, Victoria Park and Poinsettia Heights is the increasing growth of a gay community within North Andrews Gardens.

The neighborhood is squared off between the area east of I-95 to 6th Avenue and from Prospect north to 61st street, in the unincorporated part of Broward County. It is currently composed of two areas, one east of Andrews and the other west of Andrews.

The sense of community is so strong in the area that the North Andrews Pride Group has been formed to give the residents a structured community atmosphere that still has yet to be formed in other developing areas.

A brunch was recently held with over 30 residents of the Gardens attending. The event was the third event held by the group so far, and more are planned as the community continues to grow.

"In the future, we hope to have a bowling night, a chili cook-off and a Christmas party," says Gary Bastian, cofounder of the group.

The group, which has no dues, by-laws or officers, says its role is to welcome gays and lesbians into the neighborhood and introduce them to one another.

Bastian says the developing community is perfect for those who strive for a close-knit, small town community feeling.

Hollywood



Prime examples of this in our own South Florida backyards are areas such as South Beach, Victoria Park and Wilton Manors. Formerly dilapidating and with a questionable future, the areas have been metamorphosed by members of the gay community and have thus grown to become viable economic, cultural, and architectural landmarks.

The cycle is again repeating itself. The revitalization of these two neighborhoods has caused neighboring communities to grow in popularity among the gay community. Four of these neighborhoods in particular are consistently giving insight into what will be the local epicenters of tomorrow.

Hollywood and Hollywood Beach

Four years ago, according to Dave Gervase, a top realtor at Arvida in Hollywood who has recently sold properties to many gay couples, gay people were still an uncommon sight in the community.

"I used to see someone who even appeared to be slightly gay in the area then and question if they were gay or simply just a lost European tourist," laughs Gervase.

The area, which was predominantly a home to retirees, has seen a recent upsurge in gays moving to the area, including many established couples and younger professionals who want to find a more quiet and reasonably priced median point between Ft. Lauderdale and Miami. Gervase defines the Hollywood Area as a "South Beach for the thirty-something set."

Many of them are settling in the area east of U.S. 1 called Hollywood Lakes. The area features many homes originally built in the '30s, '40s and '50s that are similar in style to the estate homes in Miami's Coral Gables at half the price.

Gervase knows of at least two gay clubs that will be opening in the near future. Trixie's will be opening up on Dixie Highway in the coming months and an old movie theater is currently being renovated as a gay club space.

By day, the area is home to such gay-frequented stops as Trend Furniture By Design and the Now Art Café, as well as several hair salons.

Directly adjacent to downtown Hollywood is the Hollywood Beach area that remains popular among northern snowbirds.

According to Scott Rivelli of the gay-owned California Beach Inn on Hollywood Beach, the area is a perfect place for beach living that makes the best of Miami and Ft. Lauderdale easily accessible.

Although not currently considered an outright gay community, the area, like downtown Hollywood, is starting to similarly draw older, more established gay couples.

According to Rivelli, who is also a Board Member of the Hollywood Beach Community, Hollywood Beach is "ripe to be taken over."

Aventura

Near the northern perimeter of Dade County, and close to Hollywood and Hollywood Beach, is the rapidly expanding Aventura Mall. The distinct blend of high end, luxury stores and fashionable eateries, as well as an AMC multiplex, has become a major attraction to tourists and locals alike.

The many businesses in the mall also attract and employ a large number of gays and lesbians. This has caused a few in the area to seek out affordable housing in the area in order to be closer to their place of business and has also

Aventura

