

COMMUNITY FEATURES

DIGGING IN

Abacoa's journey one for the books

By **KIT BRADSHAW**
Special to The Courier
Newsweekly

It's been nearly 20 years since the first shovel of dirt was dug on 2,055 acres of land adjacent to Donald Ross Road.

The community within a community called Abacoa is nearing build-out — as the last single family/townhome neighborhood, Windsor Park At Abacoa, is nearly sold out.

Only about 50 acres, almost all earmarked for commercial development — one small parcel is slated for townhomes — remains of the vast piece of property that was once owned by insurance tycoon John D. MacArthur, who founded Palm Beach Gardens.

ABACOA, A THRIVING COMMUNITY ...

Abacoa is a thriving community of single family homes, townhomes, live/work units, retail, business, professional and commercial space.

• It boasts Roger Dean Stadium, the Florida home of two bioscience giants, Scripps Research Institute Florida and Max Planck Society, the MacArthur campus of Florida Atlantic University with its invigorating Lifelong Learning Center, Abacoa Golf Club, Marriott's Courtyard Palm Beach Jupiter hotel, a 300-acre greenway, both middle and elementary schools, plus medical and



PROVIDED PHOTO
Bruce Rendina

professional buildings.

• There are about 15,000 people who live in Abacoa, with about 5,700 homes upon completion and about 1.8 million square feet of commercial space when Abacoa is done. There are 14 purely residential neighborhoods, four mixed use neighborhoods in the community and a workplace district with five different neighborhoods as well.

BIOSCIENCE HAS A HOME IN ABACOA ...

A key element is the presence of Scripps Florida and the Max Planck Society, which raised Abacoa

and Jupiter from pleasant areas to live, work and play — the perfect combination for a community built on the principles of new urbanism.

Then Gov. Jeb Bush encouraged the bioscience behemoth, Scripps Research to come to Florida.

The Palm Beach County Commission designated an area west of West Palm Beach, known as the Mecca Farms and the adjoining Vavrus property as the area where Scripps would go. But environmental and infrastructure concerns as well as lobbying by Jupiter and other county



Former Jupiter mayor
Karen Golonka



Nader Salour



Former Palm Beach County
commissioner Karen Marcus

George deGuardiola, the man who pioneered Abacoa.

“Dale was looking for land for FAU to expand north, since he was on the FAU task force, and I was on the task force to find a spring training facility for the Braves (at that time) and the Montreal Expos. During the breakfast, Dale said MacArthur wanted to be sure they located FAU in the right place, and I started to explain that it needed to be a community, where people could walk and bike without having to go on a collector road.

“I pulled out a napkin and drew it for him ... this access is this way, and these housing types should be part of it, and there should be a central business district ... it should be like a small town,” de Guardiola said. “Dale asked if I would make a presentation to the MacArthur board about this concept. Three weeks went by, and I went to Chicago to talk to the MacArthur board.

“The concept became a New Urban community by default, because having an easily accessible internal community is what New Urbanism is,” de Guardiola said.

ONE IDEA BUT MANY PEOPLE INVOLVED ...

There were several players in this scenario, including the MacArthur

areas prompted Scripps to reconsider where to locate.

Two possible locations were in the north and one in the south portion of the county, and eventually, county commissioners decided to have Scripps Florida headquartered in Abacoa, with additional acreage available just south of Donald Ross Road — the Briger property — for further expansion.

Two laboratory buildings created on the FAU campus in Abacoa temporarily housed the Scripps scientists until their building was completed in 2009. Soon afterward, another

bioscience giant, Max Planck Society, located its Florida operation in Abacoa, using the now vacated buildings as temporary labs. These labs then reverted to FAU when Max Planck moved into its own building in Abacoa in 2012.

ABACOA STARTED WITH AN IDEA AND A PEN ...

How did all this start? With a sketch on a napkin.

“Dale Smith, who was director of Florida operations for the MacArthur Foundation, and I used to have a weekly breakfast together,” recalled

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Foundation, which owned more than 40,000 acres throughout Florida, particularly along the eastern coastline.

MacArthur gave land to FAU to build its northern campus. Originally, FAU wanted 300 acres, but de Guardiola said that the university and the foundation, particularly the late Bob Friedman (a former FAU architect and later Jupiter Town councilor), negotiated the property to 137 acres.

“Bob Friedman never got the credit he deserved for his role in bringing FAU to Abacoa,” de Guardiola said. Friedman had a significant role in creating the first two laboratory buildings at the FAU Abacoa campus that provided temporary workspace for Scripps and Max Planck.

BRUCE RENDINA/KAREN MARCUS ...

Nothing could be written about Abacoa without the influence of the late Bruce Rendina, who was a partner with de Guardiola in the commercial areas, and a key player in the development of Abacoa. Rendina's son, Richard, now heads Rendina Companies, a national name in the development of medical and healthcare offices.

To move the stadium project along, de Guardiola's group gave 90 acres to the county, and in turn the county gave the developers \$25 million to build the stadium. Ground was broken in 1997, and with an extreme effort, Roger Dean Stadium was ready for the 1998 spring training season.

One of the most important individuals in Abacoa's infancy was then-Palm Beach County Commissioner Karen Marcus.

“Without Karen Marcus, forget-about-it,” de Guardiola said.

“A STRAWBERRY FARM”/ KAREN GOLONKA ...

“The property was a strawberry farm,” Marcus said recently.

“When George came to us and wanted to do the project, I told him they needed to annex this property to Jupiter and they agreed,” she said.

“One of the challenges was the fact that the property was large,” said then-Mayor Karen Golonka, whom de Guardiola said saw the vision for Abacoa and was instrumental with shepherding the project through the Jupiter Town Council.

“Initially the property wasn't in the town, but they wanted to annex it to Jupiter to have the oversight of the town's elected officials for this huge project. The first hurdle was – did we want this size of property in Jupiter. Yes, we did,” Golonka said.

MARCUS WEIGHS IN ...

Marcus, according to de Guardiola, did two things that helped the fledgling community.

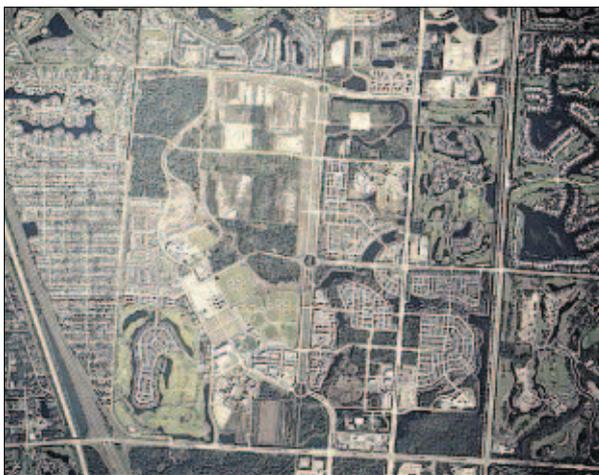
She put the expansion of the bridges across the Intracoastal Waterway on Donald Ross Road and on Indiantown Road on the county's five-year plan, which would ease traffic into the community.

And she suggested that de Guardiola sit down with the environmental people who could have fought the project. As a result, everyone chose Pat Painter to do the environmental study.

“Basically, we went back to the original Army Corps of Engineers' photos of Abacoa before it was farmed and restored the naturalness to Abacoa, the natural flow of water. It was that simple,” de Guardiola said.

SOMEONE ON THE GROUND ...

Cypress Realty and the MacArthur Foundation needed someone on the ground to help take the



PROVIDED PHOTO

Aerial view of Abacoa, by Cypress Realty, in 2012



PROVIDED PHOTO

Aerial view of Abacoa, by Cypress Realty, in 2004, shows much undeveloped land.

napkin concept forward. That man was Nader Salour, the president of what was soon called the Abacoa Development Company. It was Salour and his team that created the infrastructure of Abacoa that would provide access to the new stadium, which he was also responsible for building.

Salour remembers the time crunch for the projects.

“It was very difficult, to, in essence, build the infrastructure where there were farm fields, to connect Central Boulevard and Frederick Small, and Donald Ross, to build the stadium while FAU was under construction and to have 12 months to do it.

“We had to do it all

while still providing access for FAU's contractors and subcontractors and getting the stadium completed,” Salour said. “When you have a huge undertaking, if you are a few weeks late, that's considered acceptable. But with the spring training date for baseball, we couldn't be one day late. We had to get it exactly right to finish the stadium, get it approved, inspected and turned over to the baseball teams on time.”

GOLONKA ON “NEW URBANISM” ...

The challenge for both the developers and for the Town of Jupiter was that the New Urbanism concept was not the norm for building in 1997 as it may be

today. The overall concept is one of mixed use, a combination of commercial enterprises and residences.

“With Abacoa, we were not only looking at residential and commercial, but workplace, and trying to come to agreement about what that entailed,” Golonka said.

“For a long time, we weren't sure what the workplace/industrial would look like or what we wanted it to look like. The idea of having townhouses and single family homes on the same block or across from each other with green space between them was different,” she said.

To have this move forward, de Guardiola and his team worked with the Jupiter Town Council and its staff to create a new zoning code that would encompass all the moving parts of this New Urbanism community within the Town of Jupiter.

“It was a new concept for Florida, with the only other communities like this at Seaside (in the Panhandle) and Celebration (a Disney project near Orlando),” Golonka said.

• Buz DiVosta was the residential guru

The houses were a key element, and there was one name in Palm Beach County known for building exceptional houses. That name was Otto “Buz” DiVosta.

“Without Buz's commitment, Abacoa would be zero,” de Guardiola said. “There is no one like Buz in the world and I have tremendous respect for him.”

Because the concept was so new, DiVosta built a street of homes in the first Abacoa neighborhood, New Haven, showing the homes, the alleys behind them, and the greenspace. “After DiVosta committed to Abacoa, he knocked the ball out of the park,” de Guardiola said.

Eventually, Bruce Rendina bought all the commer-

cial locations; and DiVosta, which now is a building division of Pulte Homes, but still builds under the DiVosta name, purchased all the residential properties.

The problem for the town, however, was that although DiVosta was known for quality construction, the houses tended to look alike, so a “pattern book” of exteriors was created to bring variety into the neighborhoods as they were built.

“The challenge residentially was to be mindful of maintaining the representations of the development that had been made, and make sure than the homes had a character and identity for all the neighborhoods, instead of homogenous architecture,” said John Sickler, director of planning and zoning for the Jupiter.

“It was a big challenge, but everyone rose to the occasion and tried to make something that worked for everyone. There were a few neighborhoods not developed by DiVosta in Abacoa, but most of them were DiVosta neighborhoods.”

• Downtown Abacoa

The stadium, FAU and the residences were only part of the Abacoa equation.

Four years after Roger Dean Stadium was built, and the FAU buildings were going up, the Abacoa Downtown area was created.

Rendina and deGuardiola owned this property in the center of Abacoa, which featured a combination of restaurants and stores on the bottom floors and, at that time, rental units above.

“OVER 150 ACRES” ...

“The commercial property was over 150 acres, which not only included the town's business district

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but what was then the movie theater,” Richard Rendina said.

“That theater, owned by the Crown family, was later closed and torn down, and we bought the land back. We are now hoping to have a new concept there of a bowling alley and movie theater with the Frank family similar to what Bruce Frank has in Delray Beach at the CineBowl and Grill.

“Overall, there is a million square feet of commercial space in Abacoa, including medical office buildings that were developed either by my father or by me and my brothers,” Rendina said.

Through a winding set of circumstances, Rendina and de Guardiola sold their interest in Town Center to Lehman Brothers, but when Lehman Brothers had financial problems, Rendina bought them out, retaining the commercial areas of the town’s business district, but leaving the upstairs rental units to Lehman, who converted them to condos and sold them.

Woolbright bought the commercial enterprises next, but the bank took them over. Currently, the Simon family, FLF Holdings, owns what is Downtown Abacoa. FLF, according to the company’s information, is a real estate and management company that “targets quality income producing real estate assets that can benefit from our hands on management.”

“The town center of Abacoa is getting a second life, largely due to Josh Simon and a local company, FLF, which is based out of Jupiter,” said Jupiter’s Sickler. “While everyone likes to blame the location of Downtown Abacoa, it never had an owner who cared about success.”

Golonka is also optimistic about Downtown Abacoa. “The new owners of the town center are able to see on a regular basis what the issues are and I think that there is a much better chance it will succeed,” Golonka said.

THE FUTURE OF ABACOA? ...

With almost all of Abacoa completed, new ownership of Downtown Abacoa, bio-science firmly entrenched in the community, a long term spring training lease with the St. Louis Cardinals and the Florida Marlins, plus minor league play at Roger Dean Stadium – FAU flourishing and 15,000 people who are part of this New Urbanism concept – it looks as though Abacoa has moved from adolescence to adulthood.

“I sometimes come back to Abacoa,” said de Guardiola, who now lives in Miami.

“And I stand on the corner in the middle of the community and remember all the meetings about this project. I think of all the people who were important to the creation of Abacoa and I know that we gave birth to a sense of community that will

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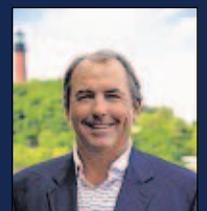
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STAND UP MUSIC FEST

Hurricane Season is upon us. And as Floridians begin preparing for potential disasters, John Denney will teach locals how to find the "Calm in the Eye of the Storm" for all who look for happiness and peace amidst the daily stresses and anxiety of everyday life that can look and feel like hurricanes.

Performance Coach John Denney will lead "Hard-wired for Happiness," an interactive presentation at Generation Stand Up's Music Fest where participants will learn how to maximize happiness with stress management techniques.

A "Glow and Flow Yoga" session follows with glow in the dark glow sticks led by Kim Depasquale of BlueLine Surf and Paddle Company.

The free event includes live music by local teens on Saturday, June 4 from 6 to 10 p.m. at the Harbourside Place Amphitheater, 200 N. U.S. 1 in Jupiter. Learn more at StandUpFoundationFL.org or call 772-263-3974.

GROSSOLOGY

Check out the South Florida Science Center and Aquarium's summer 2016 exhibition, Grossology: The (Impolite) Science of the Human Body.

The exhibit is open with the goal of educating children ages 6-to-14 and their families about why their bodies produce mushy, oozy, crusty, scaly, stinky things, which many people consider gross. Grossology is based on the best-selling book by science teacher

Sylvia Branzei.

The colorful exhibit incorporates sophisticated animatronics and imaginative exhibits to actively engage visitors. Learning is achieved through the use of interactive experiences, challenges and just plain fun. Grossology will run through Oct. 10.

The South Florida Science Center and Aquarium is located at 4801 Dreher Trail North in West Palm Beach. Admission to the South Florida Science Center and Aquarium during Grossology is \$15 for adults, \$11 for children ages 3 to 12 and \$13 for seniors aged 60 and older. Science Center members and children under 3 are free. For more information call 561-832-1988 or visit SFSciencecenter.org.

Submit your event listing and photo to jcnevents@gmail.com.

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PROVIDED PHOTO

George de Guardioli, the man who pioneered Abacoa, in front of a Bruce Rendina mosaic in Abacoa

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enrich the entire area."

As Salour said, "Abacoa is almost exactly what George de Guardioli originally pictured" ... during that long-ago breakfast with a sketch on a napkin.

ABACOA'S BUILD OUT STATUS TO DATE:

- Residential units built to date = 5,438. There remains up to 200 more residential units yet to be built.

- Commercial square footage built to date and under construction presently = 1,341,000 square feet. There remains a 4000 seat movie theater and approximately 450,000 square feet of commercial yet to be built.

Source: Donna Cesaro/Cypress Realty of Fla.

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