

Art: Transforming Opa-locka



Walter Hood Oasis at 37th Avenue, with sculpture by Gale Fulton Ross



Bonner + Stayner Micro-Enterprise



Thrive Kitchen



R&R Studios' Open Room

MADE IN OPA-LOCKA

Opa-locka. You hear about it in South Florida and beyond. Is it the next great community? It's certainly on its way.

Opa-locka's founder Glenn Curtiss believed in creative real estate development, choosing an Arabian Nights-inspired architectural style for the city. Today, over 70 historic Moorish Revival buildings still give Opa-locka a unique identity, but it takes imagination to envision it as Miami-Dade's next cultural hub. Yet, Opa-locka's leaders are reviving the community with a robust revitalization agenda in which creativity, engagement, and the arts play a central role in improving the quality of life.

It began in 2010, when the private, non-profit Opa-locka Community Development Corporation (OLCDC) secured \$20 million in federal stimulus funds to acquire and rehabilitate foreclosed and vacant housing. Could housing funds be leveraged to elevate the entire community? OLCDC reached out to nationally-known urban designers, market analysts, and housing and community development practitioners for advice. The resulting Opa-locka Vision 20/20: A Framework for the Future mapped out the potential for anchoring the city's transformation through its iconic architecture, an economic cluster of automobile parts recycling operations, and greater South Florida's thriving creative economy. Though the city's challenges are many, its unique physical identity and its location – easily reached by highway, air and rail transit connections – could become the basis for a placemaking strategy in which art is foundational.

In just a few years, OLCDC has attracted more than \$83 million in resources for housing, economic development, streetscape enhancements, redevelopment, education, health and the arts. With careful planning, OLCDC is working with city leaders to incorporate art throughout, believing that art in all its forms enriches the lives of people. Here are highlights of what's happening:



Neighborhoods and Housing. OLCDC's primary neighborhood focus is Magnolia North where streets were barricaded in 1987 to curb drug trafficking. The dealers left but so did residents – and the barricades stayed. OLCDC has rehabbed 32 residences to date, bringing a new energy to the neighborhood. Moreover, OLCDC's proposal to remove and replace the barricades with public art and spaces received initial funding from the National Endowment for the Arts.

Four impressive artist teams were selected from a call for artists that generated 212 responses from across the globe. OLCDC commissioned Roberto Behar and Rosario Marquardt (R & R Studios) to create the Opa-locka Public Art Master Plan. Based on this 10+ year plan, OLCDC is incorporating art into revitalization strategies using Magnolia North as a case study and is encouraging the city and other developers to do the same. A network of parks and public spaces to support civic engagement, outdoor activity and healthy living in the neighborhood is being implemented.



Led by OLCDC, over 300 residents and volunteers recently planned and built a KaBOOM! playground space with domino tables and small community mural. R & R Studios will soon engage residents in the creation of their "open room," an intergenerational park for various community activities with an anticipated opening in 2016.

Another artist team is helping address the issue of economic viability for residents. Jennifer Bonner and Christian Stayner, along with Germane Barnes, conceived Made in Opa-locka to nurture community- and home-based businesses with eye-catching transformations of foreclosed or abandoned homes, branding, technical assistance, and micro-enterprise funding.

The University of Miami School of Architecture's 2013 capstone project rethought the Barracks, 32 acres of former military housing. The resulting redevelopment plan includes mixed-income housing, retail, commercial, and public space all within walking distance of Tri-Rail and downtown. Recommendations for design guidelines and major corridor improvements were also provided. OLCDC and the Related Urban Development Group's new affordable senior housing complex, Town Center, has attracted nearly 200 new residents to the downtown area and incorporates the work of local artists Gary Moore and Najeeb Campbell.



Downtown. Opa-locka's compact four-block downtown is anchored by the elaborate Arabian Nights-inspired former city hall and adjacent fire station. The historic complex, which exemplifies artistic achievement and creativity, is being restored and repurposed as a regional hub for arts and cultural programming, an integral element in placemaking. By 2015, its walled gardens and shaded lawns will host festivals, exhibits, and performances in the heart of downtown, drawing from and adding to the region's booming arts economy.

Also downtown, OLCDC is developing Thrive, South Florida's first commercial kitchen, to promote the culinary arts and spark the growth of nearby food-related businesses. Culinary entrepreneurs will have access to the 20,000 SF state-of-the-art facility, professional coaching, and technical assistance. OLCDC is also converting an unused building and yard into artist studio and event space. The first event, an exhibition curated by Tumelo Mosaka in November 2014, will feature local and nationally known artists from the African Diaspora.

Corridors and Gateways. In 2013 OLCDC commissioned artist/landscape architect Walter Hood to reimagine the Ali Baba Avenue corridor. Phase I of Oasis/Oases will turn the corridor into a temporary large-scale public art work with paint for a new visual identity. The project's long term endeavor transforms Ali Baba into a series of landscape interventions where storm water is temporarily detained to nurture shaded green oases. Artist Gale Fulton Ross' monumental sculpture and community time capsule Many Voices, One Story will be the gateway feature for one Oasis. At the opposite end of Ali Baba, Bonner+Stayner is working to expand a popular BBQ stand in Magnolia North for an Oasis that will replace a street barricade and include space for evening festivities that are a neighborhood tradition.

revival

Artist Studios and Residencies. There is a shortage of affordable artist studio space in Miami due to a surge in land values caused by the success of South Beach, the Design District, and Wynwood. An integral part of Opa-locka's economic development strategy is to encourage artists to relocate to the city permanently. There is abundant warehouse and industrial space, often with the high ceilings that artists covet for studios. Artists who work with recycled or found materials will find thrift stores and a large supply of auto, boat, and even aircraft parts. OLCDC is also exploring the feasibility of developing a complex of affordable live/work space with fabrication shops. OLCDC can tap public and private financing sources to create opportunities for artists to rent or own studio or live/work space. Some artists have already opened studios in Opa-locka.

Germane Barnes is OLCDC's first artist-in-residence, living in Magnolia North and working on Made in Opa-locka since January 2013. Acclaimed photographer Hunter Barnes also completed a short residency in Fall 2013 to create a public photographic installation.

Education, Health and Wellness. In recent years, OLCDC has also increased partnerships to improve residents' access to quality opportunities and services. A middle school summer camp with the Florida Education Fund focuses on creativity in math, robotics and test preparation while University of Miami students are bringing arts education to an afterschool program, engaging youth in the creation of bike racks for a new park. Furthermore, OLCDC is working with local healthcare providers to bring wellness centers to downtown and Magnolia North.

Keeping it Real. Make no bones about it: Opa-locka is still very much a work in progress. The property tax base is very low and residents are largely below the poverty level. However, Opa-locka has come a long way since the 1980s when it acquired an unfortunate reputation that lingers today.

Over the last four years, important steps have been taken to address its economic and physical condition and to prepare for planned redevelopment, including forming a Community Redevelopment Agency, commissioning market studies and several plans. By the close of 2014, it is anticipated that the City will have adopted a new land use plan and zoning ordinance, a strategic plan for downtown, and the public art master plan while starting the first stage of a much-needed major storm water infrastructure improvement. In addition, better code enforcement is adding to neighborhood safety and desirability.



Believers and Partners. OLCDC's innovative approach to community development has attracted media attention and investment by prominent sources, including the National Endowment for the Arts, U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development, U.S. Department of Health & Human Services, Miami-Dade County Commission, Knight Foundation, Surdna Foundation, Miami Foundation, Health Foundation of South Florida, The Children's Trust, Wells Fargo Bank, and Federal Home Loan Bank of Atlanta.

In addition to funding, OLCDC is generously supported by many partnerships including the City of Opa-locka, Miami-Dade County (MDC) Commission, MDC Department of Cultural Affairs, Harvard University's Loeb Fellows Program, University of Miami, Miami-Dade College, Florida International University, Public Allies Miami, Jessie Trice Medical Center, and South Florida Regional Planning Council.

Find Out More. To learn more about this remarkable transformation or to arrange a visit, please contact:

Aileen Alon

Arts & Cultural Initiatives Coordinator

aileen@olcdc.org | 305.687.3545 x224



Opa-locka Community Development Corporation
490 Opa-locka Blvd. Suite 20 | Opa-locka, FL 33054



Phone: 305.687.3545 | Fax: 305.685.9650

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