

**Front Porch Florida: The Florida
Council of 100 Involvement**

From 1999-2004

A Report from the Florida Council of 100

February 2004

Introduction

Helping Florida's inner cities has been a priority of Governor Bush since being elected governor in 1998. Through the establishment of Front Porch Florida, the state has been actively involved in revitalizing economically-stressed inner cities throughout the state. The Florida Council of 100 has been intimately involved with the Front Porch Florida program since its inception, and continues today to be active in many Front Porch Florida communities.

The purpose of this report is to document the Council's involvement with Front Porch Florida over the last five years. The report demonstrates the effectiveness of the Council's involvement in these communities and why its involvement has been beneficial to the communities. Finally, the report provides recommendations to the Governor on how to improve the program for the future.

The Council's Assistance in the Formulation and Implementation of Front Porch Florida

In 1998, shortly after being elected governor of Florida, Governor Bush asked the Council of 100 to help lift the economic well-being of disadvantaged Floridians. The Council established the *Task Force for Improving Business Opportunities and Capital Investment in the Urban Core*, chaired by Alex Sink, retired President, Bank of America – Florida, in early 1999 to address this priority of the state. The original objective of the task force was to develop ideas to improve the economic well-being of inner-city entrepreneurs and residents. Early on in 1999, the task force selected two major priorities: To develop a compendium of best practices from around Florida and the nation; and to assist in the formulation and implementation of Governor Bush's Front Porch Florida program.

In January 2000, the task force released a report, *Revitalizing Florida's Communities: A Report from The Florida Council of 100*. The report provided a series of recommendations, which included support for the Front Porch Florida initiative, and also made a commitment from the Council to be actively involved in helping to implement the program. Some of the key steps in the Council's commitment included:

- The Council will strongly urge its members which provide capital – to consider investments in areas suffering from disinvestment
- The Council will suggest to its members creative approaches to revitalization, such as suppliers from, or close to, Front Porch neighborhoods, in an effort to increase employment possibilities in these areas
- The Council will urge its members to provide much-needed management expertise to businesses in Front Porch communities and other depressed areas

Over 1,800 copies of the report were distributed to all members of the Florida legislature, selected agencies in the Governor's office and across state government, Governor's Revitalization Councils in the Front Porch communities, and all mayors, economic development councils, chambers of commerce, and college and university libraries across Florida.

The Front Porch Florida program was designed in 1999 by Governor Bush to provide wide-ranging assistance to specific economically disadvantaged neighborhoods across Florida. It is a grassroots, bottom-up approach to community revitalization. The initiative focuses on the family and empowers residents to define and resolve neighborhood problems. Task force members worked with the governor's newly formed Office of Urban Opportunity early on to help the process for the selection of the communities. The primary criteria utilized in designating Front Porch Florida communities is:

- Geographical size of the community
- The community's action plan
- Whether the community has already begun to address aspects of the neighborhood plan
- Whether strong partnerships have been established among the residents, local government, and the private sector
- Demonstrated ability to organize and activate community residents and business owners

The program seeks to advance a policy that will release the power of local communities in Florida's urban cores to rebuild their neighborhoods through a redevelopment process that is neighborhood-driven, asset-based, and focused on community relationships. Front Porch Florida employs a comprehensive approach, empowering urban core residents to define and develop solutions to their problems, particularly in the areas of higher quality education, economic growth, and environmental preservation. Front Porch communities are provided educational and technical assistance to help residents plan and implement projects that will make long-term changes.

Each Front Porch community establishes a Revitalization Council, a volunteer group, which is the direct body that contributes and actively participates in the implementation of the Front Porch Florida initiative in their community. The Revitalizing Council oversees the Action Plan, a community's "road map," that includes:

- Vital statistics about the community
- Major issues
- Issue priorities
- Implementation steps and timelines
- Short-term and long-term goals
- Measurable outcomes
- Feasibility analysis

In addition, each community has a Community Liaison who is a subcontracted individual from the Office of Urban Opportunity and paid to provide the Revitalization Council and the community full-time resource development and technical assistance..

Sustaining the program proved challenging for the state, but by mid-2002, Governor Bush had designated the full complement of 20 neighborhoods across Florida as Front Porch Florida communities, as listed below. Those with a "#" have a Council of 100 liaison working with them:

- #Greater Pensacola Front Porch, Pensacola*
- #Dorsey-Riverbend Neighborhood, Ft. Lauderdale*
- #Greater South Central Neighborhood, St. Petersburg*
- #Greater Frenchtown, Tallahassee*
- #Northwood/Pleasant, West Palm Beach*
- #Opa-Locka-North Dade, Opa-Locka*
- Duval Area Neighborhood, Gainesville
- #West Bartow Neighborhood, Bartow
- #Holden Heights Community, Orlando
- #Riverside Community of Little Havana, Miami
- Goldsboro Neighborhood, Sanford
- West Ocala, Ocala
- #Gifford Neighborhood, Indian River
- #Rogers, Rousch Field, Singeltary, and Washington, Bradenton
- #Heart of East Tampa, Tampa
- #Sylvania Heights, Shalimar
- Newtown, Sarasota
- Sherwood Forest, Jacksonville
- #South Immokalee, Immokalee
- Central City Neighborhood, Daytona Beach

*In August 2003, the governor announced that six communities had reached self-sufficiency and had “graduated” from the program. These communities do not lose their designations, but will no longer have a formal contract with the state.

Today, the Council of 100’s Front Porch Florida Working Group is chaired by Rusty Stephenson, President, AmSouth Bank, Florida and Mississippi Banking Group. As shown above, 15 Council members serve in 14 Front Porch Florida communities as business liaisons, providing their expertise to help their local Front Porch community improve living and working conditions. A more detailed discussion of the Council liaisons’ involvement with their communities is depicted in the following section.

History and Status of the 14 Front Porch Florida Communities with Council Member Involvement

Greater Pensacola Community, Pensacola

Council Liaison: Susan Story, President and CEO, Gulf Power Company

The Greater Pensacola Community is primarily low income, comprised of the City of Pensacola and Escambia County. The population decreased by 19.52 percent between 1980 and 1990, and this decline continues to the present. 38.8 percent of the population have a total family household income below the federal poverty level.

According to the 1990 Consensus, there are 12, 948 residents; the per capita income is \$9,429; the average unemployment rate is 6.05 percent; and the average poverty reate is 38.8 percent. The median price of a single family dwelling is \$35,512.

Dorsey-Riverbend Community, Ft. Lauderdale

Council Liaison: Frank Scruggs, Shareholder, Greenberg Traurig

The Dorsey-Riverbend Community, with a population of 15,293, is an African-American community in the Northwest quadrant of Ft. Lauderdale. During the 1940's, the community had established businesses, such as grocery stores, funeral homes, and restaurants. The population increased during the 1950's, and African-American doctors and lawyers established practices. With the advent of integration in the 1970's, and the intrusion of I-95, most of the African-American professionals left the community.

According to the 1990 Census, the community has the lowest median income per capita income in the country. The per capita income is \$6,699; the average unemployment rate is 14.3 percent; and the poverty rate is 43.5 percent.

In August 2003, the Dorsey-Riverside Neighborhood "graduated" from the Front Porch program having reached its revitalization goals.

Greater South Central Neighborhood (GSCN), St. Petersburg

**Council Liaisons: Bill Habermayer, President, Progress Energy Florida
Vince Naimoli, Chairman, CEO & President, Anchor
Industries**

The Greater South Central Neighborhood (GSCN) in St. Petersburg, with a population of 10,212, is tied to the history of 22nd street, the center of the African-American community. The community has established six neighborhood associations that work collaboratively for GSCN residents. Per capita income is \$6,699 and the average unemployment rate is 11 percent. In August 2003, the GSCN "graduated" from the Front Porch program having reached its revitalization goals.

Greater Frenchtown, Tallahassee

Council Liaison: Bill Smith, President & CEO, Capital City Bank Group

The Greater Frenchtown community was one of the first neighborhoods established in Tallahassee, located to the northwest of the Old Capitol. Frenchtown is within a one-mile radius of two state universities, Florida Agricultural and Mechanical University and Florida State University. Until racial desegregation and urban flight in the 1960's and 1970's, Frenchtown was a social thriving economic, educational and residential center of African-American culture in North Florida.

Today, the community has 8,411 residents, with a per capita income of \$4,723. The average unemployment rate is 12.4 percent and the average poverty rate for individuals is 49.4 percent. In August 2003, the Greater Frenchtown community "graduated" from the Front Porch program having reached its revitalization goals.

Northwood/Pleasant, West Palm Beach

Council Liaison: David Clarke, President & CEO, Rinker Materials Corporation

The Northwood/Pleasant community, with a population of 13,299, is predominately African-American, and has been actively seeking to improve the neighborhood through resident driven efforts of housing and community development for more than 12 years. Resident driven efforts include the development of community development corporations and other social services agencies that have been involved in a variety of community development activities. Per capita income is \$9,588 and the average unemployment rate is between nine and 22 percent.

In August 2003, the Northwood/Pleasant community “graduated” from the Front Porch program having reached its revitalization goals.

Opa-Locka-North Dade, Opa-Locka

Council Liaison: Walter Revell, Chairman & CEO, TYLin Int’l/HJ Ross

Opa-Locka is a small, predominantly African-American community that was incorporated in 1926. The city is primarily an industrial community with the Opa-Locka airport representing the single largest land use.

The population of Opa-Locka is 15,283. African-Americans represent 69 percent of the population while 27 percent of the population is Latin American. Per capita income is \$7,491; the average unemployment rate is 13.3 percent; the median income is \$15,099; and nearly four out of every five households receives some form of government assistance. The median age is 27 and 51 percent of all households are headed by a single parent. 52 percent of residents 18 years and older did not complete high school.

In August 2003, Opa-Locka Front Porch Florida community “graduated” from the Front Porch program having reached its revitalization goals.

West Bartow, Bartow

Council Liaison: Barney Barnett, Vice Chairman, Publix Super Markets

The West Bartow Neighborhood is home to Bartow’s original African-American community and one of the city’s oldest neighborhoods. The neighborhood is a quiet, working-class community and home to approximately 1,269 residents, which is about 8.4 percent of the city’s population. Its ethnic makeup is predominately African-American with a per capita income of \$10,524, and an average unemployment rate of 6.6 percent. Residents formed a community-based neighborhood improvement corporation more than three years ago and continue to hold neighborhood meetings. Employing a multiple-tiered strategy, a neighborhood revitalization plan was created, while at the same time, efforts such as cemetery cleanup, landscaping, and street improvements are underway.

Holden Heights, Orlando

Council Liaison: George Koehn, Chairman, President & CEO, Sun Trust Bank

Located 1.5 miles from downtown Orlando, Holden Heights is home to 5,380 residents, with a per capita income of \$21,511. The average unemployment rate is 6.5 percent and the average poverty rate is 30.87 percent.

Riverside Community of Little Havana, Miami

Council Liaison: Remedios Diaz-Oliver, President & CEO, American Containers

Located in Miami, the Riverside Community of Little Havana is adjacent to downtown Miami, and is a major work center and urban core. It houses many local governmental offices and has a natural boundary that represents an asset for commercial and tourist purposes. The Miami River, one of the main routes of transportation in downtown Miami and surrounding areas, is a great tourist attraction and defines the north boundary of the community.

With over 1,464 residents, per capita income is \$6,762. The average unemployment rate is 11.89 percent and the average poverty rate is 36.73 percent.

Gifford Neighborhood, Indian River

Council Liaison: Darryl Sharpton, President, Sharpton, Brunson & Company

During the 1960's, the residents of Gifford saw a need for change. The neighborhood was growing and needed streetlights, sidewalks in school zones, stop signs and representation at county meetings. Neighbors united to form the Gifford Progressive Civic League in 1961, and soon after found a voice. The league has played an important role over the last 40 years, helping to improve the area by directing the attention of their local government to their community's needs.

Through the help of community volunteers, Gifford is proud to list its accomplishments over the last two decades – from road paving projects to establishing community-wide water and sewer systems, to affordable housing and youth activity centers. The 5,123 residents of Gifford will continue their commitment with this new designation.

Bradenton

Council Liaison: Jim Dwyer, President, Tropicana Products

The Bradenton Front Porch Community is comprised of the Rogers, Rousch Field, Singeltary, and Washington Neighborhoods, which are a diverse community, with a total of 3,797 residents. The area is located close to the downtown area of the city.

The residents coordinate programs such as job training, life skills, computer, and high school equivalency classes. The community is working towards lowering teen pregnancy rates; creating substance abuse prevention and treatment programs; and focusing on teaching families the importance of self-sufficiency.

They are also developing mentoring programs to encourage the neighborhood's youth to plan for their future. The Front Porch Florida designation will help this community attract new businesses as part of their revitalization efforts.

Heart of East Tampa, Tampa

Council Liaisons: Carlos Alfonso, CEO, Alfonso Architects

Clarence McKee, President, Chairman & CEO, McKee Communications

The 5,368 residents of the Heart of East Tampa Community decided it would take a partnership between its residents and members of the business community to identify and reach its goals.

At the top of the list is the revitalization of 22nd Street, a once-vital hub featuring minority businesses and affordable housing. The Heart of East Tampa would like to encourage investors to bring back this once vibrant center of economic activity.

The community is also working with the Hillsborough Area Regional Transportation Board to identify and provide transit service improvements to the area. In addition, the neighborhood is coordinating with the City's Parks Department to provide recreational facility improvements.

The neighborhood has also created the framework for a plan to improve the "climate" for families in East Tampa by enlisting the help of law enforcement to help ensure their streets are safer.

South Immokalee, Immokalee

Council Liaison: Scott Edmonds, President, Chico's FAS

The 6,848 residents of the South Immokalee Front Porch Florida neighborhood are placing their focus on their youth. Their goal is to restore community pride, reduce crime and make their streets safer through their partnership with the U.S. Department of Justice's Weed and Seed Program. Weed and Seed encourages communities to reduce crime, develop safe havens, promote positive role models for their youth and provide alternative youth opportunities.

The residents of South Immokalee are also committed to beautifying their neighborhood, revitalizing their economy, and is currently working on a plan to provide sidewalks giving children a safe pathway to and from school.

The South Immokalee Front Porch Florida Neighborhood has a per capita income of \$3,661; the average unemployment rate is 12.4 percent; and the poverty rate is 57 percent.

Sylvania Heights, Shalimar

Council Liaison: Susan Story, President and CEO, Gulf Power Company

Sylvania Heights is a community that was established more than fifty years ago. It is one of the oldest communities in the Ft. Walton Beach area. It is a community that has become more unified and has worked for the past six years to revitalize the neighborhood and provide solutions to problems such as major drug trafficking, abandoned and substandard housing, abandoned

vehicles, crime, child-care, education, safety, help for our elderly, transportation, and beautification.

Sylvania Heights is predominately an African American community. According to the latest county survey and other sources, Sylvania Heights has a per capita income of \$11,970, a population of approximately 397, an unemployment rate of approximately 6.5%, and a crime rate (with statistics from 1998) of 106/397 for violent crimes and 284/397 for level III crimes.

Impact of Council Involvement in Front Porch Florida Communities

Benefits

The Council of 100 has played a beneficial role in the Front Porch Florida communities mentioned above over the years. Based on feedback from Council member liaisons, state community liaisons and others, the benefits of the Council's involvement are evident, as depicted below.

- Opens lines of communication between the business community and the Front Porch Florida community—empowers community residents who feel they are being acknowledged and heard for the first time
- Enables partnerships to develop—a key component in helping these communities to focus on revitalization efforts
- Opens doors and provides opportunities that would not have otherwise occurred
- Provides financial support and resources, such as education materials, funded administrative positions, receptions and meetings—provides training
- Provides leadership expertise—business can provide expertise, such as how to communicate with government, how to conduct a meeting, how to bring different stakeholders together

Lessons Learned

There are lessons learned that can be shared among the communities as well as future Front Porch Florida communities that are important to articulate. Below are some lessons learned that have been derived from the Council's experience in Front Porch Florida.

- The Council liaison's company should have a representative serve on the Governor's Revitalization Council—enables continual involvement and demonstrates commitment
- It is critical to have buy-in from civic leaders in the community
- It is important to leverage resources and the business/community relationship
- The development of partnerships is essential—partnerships help to sustain the efforts
- The Council liaison or company representative needs to routinely interact with the community and dedicate time—providing financial resources is important but not as effective and influential as providing personal commitment
- It is important to have clear and open communication between the Council liaison and Front Porch Florida community
- It is possible to implement community change through a grassroots effort

Best Practices

There are numerous examples of successes in the Front Porch Florida communities that are worth sharing with other communities. Developing a compendium of best practices that can be replicated throughout the communities is a goal that the Front Porch Florida program should advocate. Below are some of the best practices that have evolved from the Council liaisons' involvement in their communities:

- Provide a community “get together” at the Council liaison’s corporate headquarters at the beginning of the process helps establish the Council liaison’s involvement and credibility
- Work with the community to develop grant requests, offer letters of support
- Establish a strong community council
- Encourage broad, creative thinking to foster ideas and hope
- Develop joint efforts with local governments (doubles the impact)
- Schedule meetings with community leaders to introduce them to Front Porch liaison
- Outline actions from the Neighborhood Action Plan that the company can contribute to immediately
- Look for partnerships with other organizations in the community
- Develop process to breakdown barriers between different sectors within the community that had never interacted with each other in prior years

Recommendations on Improving Front Porch Florida

Based on the Council’s experience in the Front Porch Florida program since 1999, we conclude that the following recommendations will help improve the program as it continues to successfully improve the lives of those residents in some of Florida’s most economically-stressed areas.

- Incorporate the Office of Urban Opportunity into an executive agency. Currently, it is an independent program within the Executive Office of the Governor. Allowing it to be part of an agency will provide more funding and staff, which our interviews indicated is needed
- Provide access to best practices among the communities. Developing a compendium of best practices to share with others is critical for spreading success across the communities
- Provide more training for community members. Many community members have never experienced a grassroots effort such as Front Porch Florida, and lack the skills necessary to communicate, coordinate and build a vision for their communities
- Provide more resources and additional funding
- Engage a national or regional community development organization at the beginning of the process to provide expertise based on experience in inner city revitalization. Implementing a strategic outreach approach would assist the community members in the early stages of the process
- Hire more than one state community liaison to oversee the local revitalization process. Several interviews confirmed that one person is not enough to handle such a challenging and demanding task. Even having an additional administrative staff position would make a substantial difference