



# COCONUT GROVE TIMES

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## CROSSING OVER



*Brave and visionary developer helps erase the line between the "two" Groves*

BY S. J. ALEXANDER

Every 30 years or so, Bruno Carnesella brings a new housing concept to Coconut Grove.

"In 1974 I built the first townhouse in Coconut Grove," the developer proudly recalls, "and now I'm building the first loft units in the area."

Carnesella likes being an innovator in the sometimes cookie cutter world of residential development. His first unit in 1974 actually had a huge tree branch projecting through the structure's roof, necessary to fit the house on the lot and still

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preserve the trees.

His projects have included other firsts such as the national drugstore chain, CVS, near the corner of Grand and McDonald, the first new commercial construction on Grand Avenue in years. According to Carnesella, the property immediately adjoining this property will feature a Bank of America branch office, right on the corner of Grand and McDonald. Although details on the bank construction are sketchy at present, the momentum of these new developments on Grand Avenue show a dramatic change beginning to occur in the area known as the West Grove.

The new loft building will reflect the island style of the Bahamas and stay below the five-story height limit expressed in the Grand Avenue Vision Plan.

"This was important to us," said Will Johnson, head of the Coconut Grove Village

West Homeowners and Tenants Association. Grove Lofts "received the full endorsement of the association," said Johnson, adding, "we see things moving and see the synergy of the new plans and developments."

Juxtaposed to the successful CocoWalk, downtown Coconut Grove and the surrounding popular and expensive residential areas, the West Grove is an area of increasing potential for both commercial and residential real estate development. Local residents have worked long and hard to clean up and revitalize their community, forming part of a successful team effort to reduce the crime level by 25 percent in the past five years.

Now comes the first residential project on Grand Avenue in decades. Grove Lofts will be



*Bruno Carnesella*

nity has already expressed interest in the retail space. Although there will be underground parking available on site, a valet service will facilitate access to the building.

The residential units will take up levels two, three and four and feature two bathrooms and a kitchen in addition to a large terrace. The

a mixed-use development, featuring commercial and residential units in a four-story building directly across from the CVS and the future Bank of America. Grovites know the site as the former home of the Mandarin Gardens Chinese restaurant.

The commercial component on the ground level totals 2,000 square feet that may be subdivided into smaller units. Carnesella is pleased the local commu-

900-square-foot units can be fully customized by individual owners, in true loft style. The rooftop houses a pool and an aerobic facility, which, just as the fourth level residences, will offer unobstructed views of Biscayne Bay. The kitchens feature top of the line integrated appliances and smart boxes that can be programmed to allow remote monitoring of alarm systems, ambient temperature and video cameras in the unit.

The target market for this building is young professionals who want to live in Coconut Grove. The units will sell for somewhere in the low \$200,000s—within the range for entry-level housing in the highly desirable area.

This type of development "will continue the positive growth of the Grove," said Robert Masrieh of Sunny Investments, who owns the premier retail corner at Main and McFarlane in the village center. "The more real bodies that live in the Grove the better we are all around."