

LOCAL & STATE

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IN MY OPINION
Fred Grimm
fgrimm@MiamiHerald.com

SkyRise could bring us fame, maybe fortune

But ... but ... but it doesn't have to be Christopher Columbus. That's how I said it. Sputtering with frustration. Thinking about the very niftiness of a gigantic, cloud-scraping monument soaring over the skyline of Miami Beach or Fort Lauderdale or ... what the hell ... Peanut Island.

That was two decades ago. About 1,500 disassembled bronze chunks of a colossus called "Birth of the New World" were stashed in a Port Everglades warehouse. A free gift from famed Russian sculptor Zurab Tsereteli to South Florida.

Tsereteli had wanted to give us something special to commemorate the 500th anniversary of a certain voyage. You know. In 1492, some fellow sailed the ocean blue.

South Florida would have none of it.

Sadly, Tsereteli's gift arrived a few years too late. For most of the previous five centuries, Columbus fairly dripped with prestige. Enough that the District of Columbia, two counties, a dozen U.S. cities, including two state capitals, a major river in the northwest, an Ivy League university, scores of high schools and a band of knights (along with a nation in South America and a province in Canada) were happy to expropriate his name. But by 1992, his heroic rep had begun to be tarnished.

Chris, however accomplished as a navigator, lacked the people skills and ethnic sensitivities to sustain his image through the '90s. Arguably, Columbus has had plenty of accomplices since 1492 in the exploitation of Native Americans. But being the first celebrity white guy to visit the New World, and with rumors of genocide on his résumé, he has lately become the poster boy for the invaders' unseemly behavior.

So Miami Beach turned down a statue that would have loomed 30 stories high over the entrance to the Port of Miami. So did Fort Lauderdale. Palm Beach County killed a proposal to prop up Chris on a pile of dredge dirt called Peanut Island.

But it wasn't a replica of the actual Christopher Columbus in that warehouse. If Columbus ever sat for a portrait, the pic was lost in some 16th-century garage sale. He pre-dated the selfie. Aside from some vague historical descriptions ("a lot like Gérard Depardieu"), nobody knows what he looked like. The statue's 11-foot-tall head was sculpted with the elongated features of a Disney cartoon character. Besides, the figure depicts a sailor clutching a ship's wheel, a nautical innovation that wouldn't come along until the 1700s.

So we could have just renamed the damned thing, called it his more sensitive cousin Fred Columbus. We could have called it "Lebron

• TURN TO GRIMM, 2B

MIAMI-DADE COUNTY BUDGET

Labor talks cast long shadow

■ Three-year union contracts are up for renewal for Miami-Dade workers. The mayor wants to cut pay and extend concessions that are scheduled to end this year.

BY PATRICIA MAZZEI
pmazzei@MiamiHerald.com

In Miami-Dade County government, a Metrorail conductor can get paid overtime while on vacation. A union rep can get overtime without working at all. And, sometimes, three bus drivers can get paid even if only one is driving. Those are some of the benefits

the county has targeted as part of labor-contract negotiations with its eight employee unions. Tense talks began last month over the agreements, whose three-year term expires in September.

Mayor Carlos Gimenez's administration wants to review existing job perks, make a slew of prior concessions permanent and

— most alarmingly for unionized workers — slash salaries by 10 percent.

"I am fully cognizant that employees made significant concessions during the last two contract terms," Gimenez wrote in a June 20 memo to county commissioners. However, he added, "I intend to address those 'benefits' included in our contracts that do not make good business sense and are egregious in nature."

That hard-line approach has

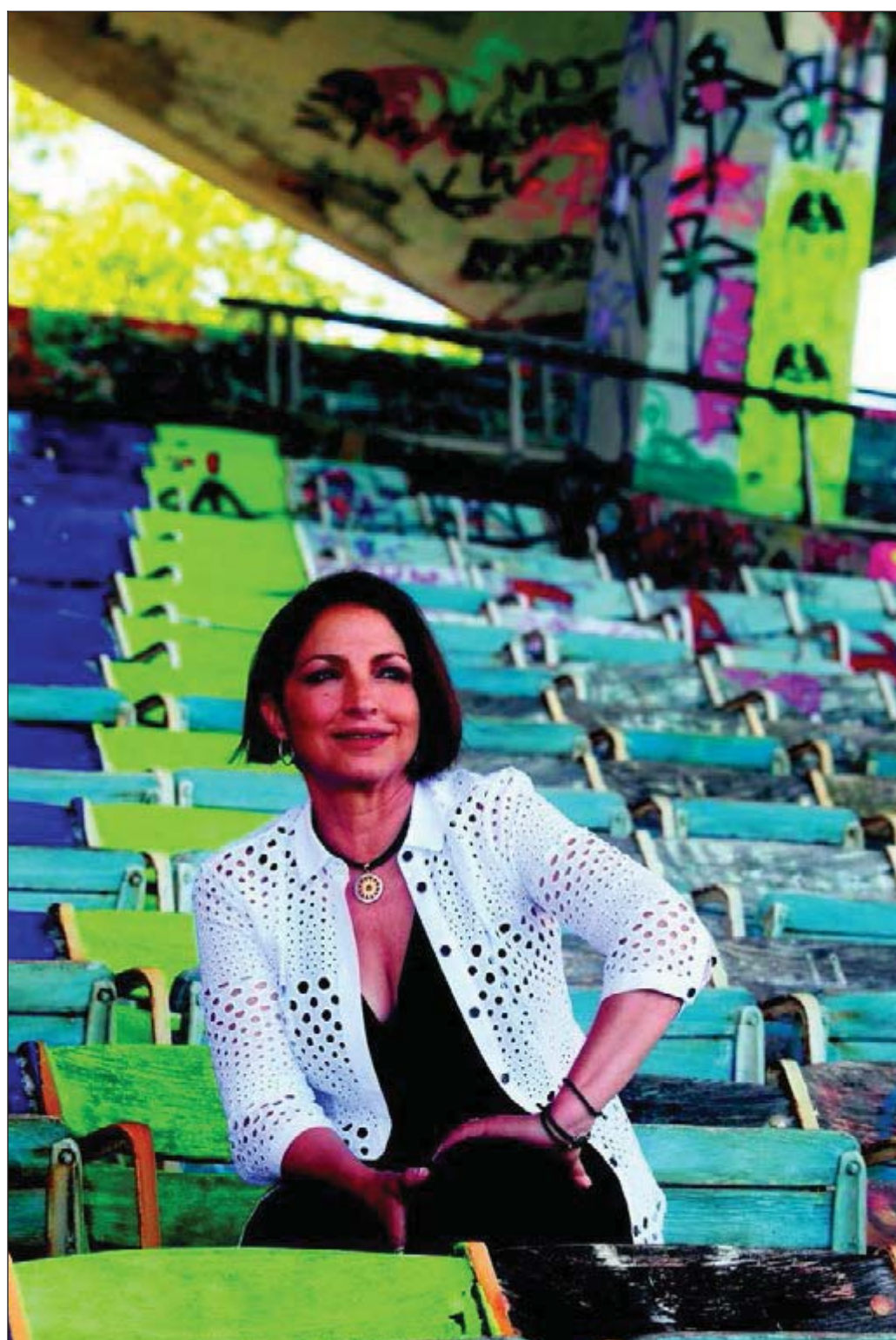
provoked a backlash from unions, who accuse the mayor of failing to come to the collective bargaining table with an open mind.

Of particular concern to labor is Gimenez's push to do away with concessions workers made in 2011 that are supposed to be restored this coming October. Among them: an extra \$50 in each paycheck, added pay for working holidays and money to offset

• TURN TO BUDGET, 2B

MIAMI MARINE STADIUM

ESTEFAN GIVES \$500,000



PHOTOS BY PETER ANDREW BOSCH/MIAMI HERALD STAFF



Gloria Estefan announced Saturday at Miami Marine Stadium that she is donating \$500,000 toward restoration efforts. At left, Hilario Candela, who designed the stadium in the early '60s, gives Emilio and Gloria Estefan a piece of art made from the stadium. **Story, 6B.**

MIAMI GARDENS

City sues big banks, says lending was predatory

■ Miami Gardens officials say that four banks targeted minority neighborhoods for high-risk loans, despite the danger of harm to the neighborhoods.

BY LANCE DIXON
ldixon@MiamiHerald.com

Miami Gardens is suing four major banks for predatory mortgage lending targeted at minorities, which the city believes led to a reduction in property taxes, additional spending on foreclosed homes and a decrease in property values due to the multiple foreclosures.

The city is asking that the court rule that the banks — JPMorgan Chase, Wells Fargo, Citigroup and Bank of America — violated the Fair Housing Act, award the city unspecified damages, and enter a permanent injunction against the banks and their employees to prevent the alleged violations and discriminatory behavior.

The banks deny any wrongdoing.

The suit was filed in federal court in Miami on June 13 by a group of lawyers who also sued, in similar cases, on behalf of the cities of Miami and Los Angeles last December. Miami sued Wells Fargo, Citigroup and Bank of America, while Los Angeles sued all four banks. Those cases all remain open.

Although the federal cases in Los Angeles and Miami are ongoing, the banks have had to pay up in the past.

In 2012, Wells Fargo settled in a case brought against them by the Justice Department. The bank paid \$175 million to thousands of borrowers across the country, including about 4,100 in the city of Miami, but admitted no wrongdoing.

Bank of America paid \$335 million to settle a Justice Department discrimination suit in 2011 after allegations that the bank's Countrywide Financial unit, which denied the allegations, charged higher fees and rates to minorities from 2004 to 2008.

Miami Gardens' complaint alleges that as far back as 2004, the banks engaged in red-lining practices, or denying credit to certain neighborhoods based on their racial makeup; as well as reverse redlining, or offering a large number of predatory loans in predominantly minority neighborhoods where the banks knew the borrowers could not afford them.

The complaint said that, from 2004-2012, a black borrower in Miami

• TURN TO LAWSUIT, 2B

DEATHS | BOBBY WOMACK, 70

Soul singer, guitarist, composer of pop hits

BY PAUL VITELLO
The New York Times

Bobby Womack, who spanned the American soul music era, touring as a gospel singer in the 1950s, playing guitar in Sam Cooke's backup band in the early '60s, writing hit songs recorded by Wilson Pickett and the Rolling Stones and composing music that broke onto the pop charts, has

MIAMI MARINE STADIUM

Estefan giving \$500,000 for restoration

DAVID J. NEAL
dneal@MiamiHerald.com

Miami singing superstar Gloria Estefan, who has given her time to the restoration of Miami Marine Stadium, announced Saturday she's giving \$500,000 to the cause.

Estefan joined nine artists who showed how they are giving of themselves.

In the midst of the graffiti that has overtaken Miami Marine Stadium during its years of inactivity, nine artists painted murals from which prints will be sold at www.arthistory2014.com; proceeds will go to stadium restoration.

"I feel like I have the best job," said Australian artist Rone, who has recently painted murals in Taiwan, Montreal and London.

"I get to do what I love to help give something to the communities. It's not like giving money. It's like giving part of yourself. I can do personal work."

To Estefan, the bond with the stadium is personal.

She said that her concert there in the mid-1980s after the Miami Sound Machine's *Dr. Beat* became a hit felt like "the first celebration" of the band's arrival.

Also, the architect of the 1962-designed stadium is fellow

Cuban-American Hilario Candela. "It's almost a symbol of our community and how much we're a part of Miami," Estefan said.

Estefan, a trustee for the National Trust for Historic Preservation, pointed out that Miami is a relatively young city that needs to preserve its unique, iconic places.

She said she hopes her gift to Friends of Miami Marine Stadium would prompt others to pony up as the group tries to raise \$30 million by January.

The restoration would include removing the work of sneaky graffiti artists — and sneaky cheap jesters — that Miami artist Tatiana

Suarez said makes the place "almost hauntingly alive in the way it keeps changing."

Suarez usually does gallery work, so she said she has had to get used to that impermanence.

She expressed some surprise that her mermaid-in-water scene, which took her a day to paint, lasted a month without being tagged or vandalized.

The latter happened recently, and she was asked to show up with some paint for quick censoring.

Vandals did show a good bit of respect for her work, however.

"They didn't do anything to her face!" she said.