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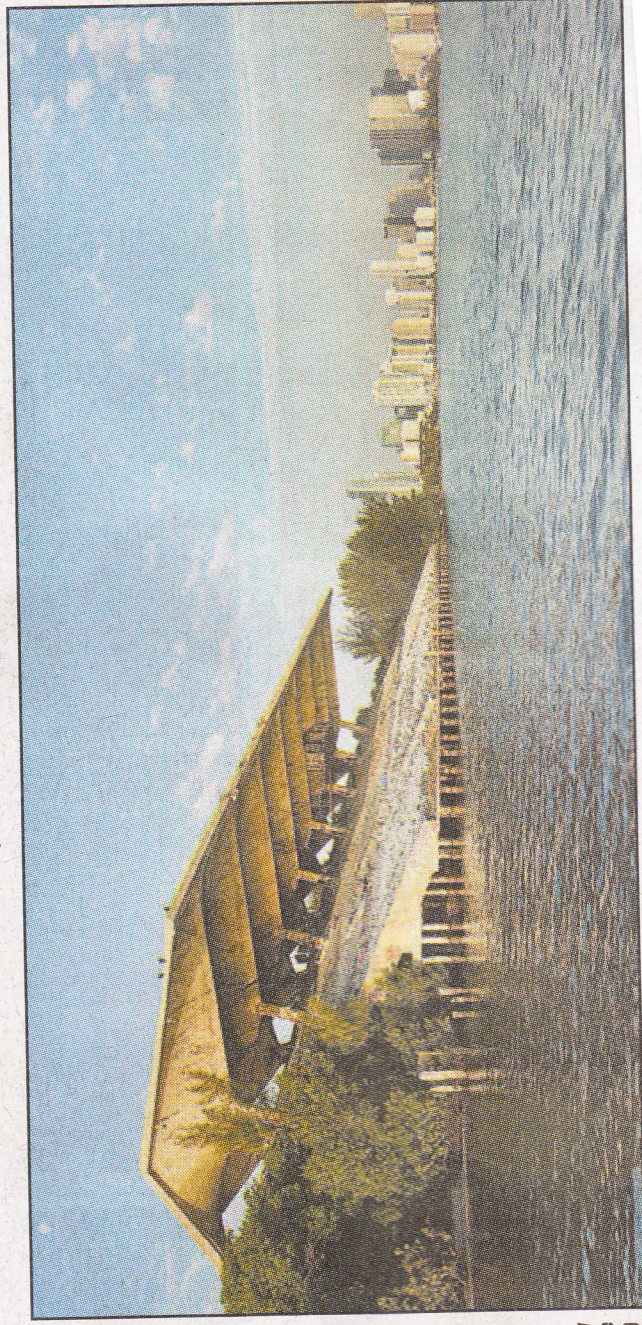
Historic Miami Marine Stadium may be given new lease on life

BY RON BEASLEY

The long dormant Miami Marine Stadium on Virginia Key soon may be given a new lease on life, thanks to the efforts of a group of concerned and very active citizens.

The City of Miami closed the stadium after Hurricane Andrew swept across south Miami-Dade County in 1992, although the storm did little damage to the concrete structure. It has lay unused and neglected for almost two decades, open to vandals, thieves and graffiti. Now, the not-for-profit Friends of Miami Marine Stadium (FMMS) is set to offer a plan to restore the bayside facility and operate it independently as an entertainment

Marine Stadium on Virginia Key is a striking Miami landmark.



(Photo by Steven Brooke Studios)

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Miami Science Museum

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venue, at no cost to the city.

"We are the first group to come along with a serious proposal to restore and operate the stadium," said Donald Worth, co-founder of FMMS. "The Orange Bowl, Bobby Maduro (Miami) Stadium and Miami Arena all were demolished and lost because no one could come up with a feasible plan to restore, operate and maintain those facilities."

Worth said his organization will restore and operate the stadium without receiving any funding from the city. He explained that the estimated \$30 million restoration cost will be funded through the sale of historic tax credits, a \$3 million grant from a county historic preservation bond fund and a capital campaign.

"The Miami Marine Stadium will be an asset to all of South Florida and an economic generator capable of hosting one-of-a-kind events," he said. "Visitors and Miami residents alike will once again have access to one of the best outdoor entertainment venues in the United States."

The FMMS was formed in January 2008 under the umbrella of the Dade Heritage Trust. It recently incorporated as a stand-alone non-profit entity with an impressive six-member board of directors that includes Hilario Candela, co-founder of the group and the original architect for the stadium; Jorge Hernandez, University of Miami professor of architecture and vice chair of the National Trust for Historic Preservation; Charles Urstadt, real estate veteran and chair of the Miami Design Preservation League; Jose Mendana Jr., a CPA and champion boat racer, and Worth, a retired businessman and champion of a variety of local preservation issues.

The Marine Stadium has a colorful history. Candela was a 28-year-old Cuban with a degree from Georgia Tech when he was commissioned to design the Marine Stadium in the early 1960s. The 6,500-seat grandstand and adjoining basin were built and

dredged in 1963 at a cost of \$2 million. The iconic stadium was an instant landmark and the basin became a paradise for powerboat racers and fans alike. The stadium's origami-like folded plate roof was then the largest span of cantilevered concrete in the world.

During its years of operation from 1963 to 1992, the Marine Stadium was a popular venue and hosted many events, including powerboat races, symphonies and rock concerts, Easter sunrise services, presidential appearances, talk shows and countless community events.

Performers played on a floating stage anchored just a few feet from the grandstand and oftentimes hundreds of boats would surround the stage, creating a unique entertainment environment. The roster of stars that appeared at the stadium included Jimmy Buffett, The Who, Ray Charles, America, Arthur Fiedler and the Boston Pops, and many others.

Over the years, a great deal of work has been done to save the stadium from the wrecker's ball. In October 2008, the Marine Stadium was designated historic by the Miami Historic Preservation Board. Then, in July 2010, the city's Master Plan for Virginia Key was approved with the Marine Stadium designated as a key component. At the same time, Mayor Tomas Regalado made restoring the stadium a key priority of his administration.

Meanwhile, the plight of the stadium generated national interest and it was named to the "11 Most Endangered List" by the National Trust for Historic Preservation (2009) and placed on the "Watch List" by the World Monuments Fund (2010). Jimmy Buffett also made a video endorsing preservation of the stadium and the *Miami Herald* printed six editorials supporting restoration. The next step is approval of the FMMS plan by the Miami City Commission.

For more information, go online to <www.marinestadium.org>.

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