

Stadium

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people at the concert jumped in after it. There are so many memories."

But these days Worth and the growing number of key figures in South Florida who have rallied in support of Marine Stadium are more focused on the future than on the past.

"I think it has a sensational future," Worth said.

As well it should, says Jorge Hernandez, Friends' other co-founder and architecture professor at the University of Miami.

"Here you have a verdant island [setting] in the middle of a submerged national park, larger than Central Park," Hernandez says. "We know that this is the only stadium of its type in the country and we have been unable to identify another one like it so far anywhere in the world."

LONG HISTORY

The 6,566-seat grandstand of Marine Stadium was completed in 1964 and originally dubbed Commodore Munroe Stadium. Its folded-plate roof supported by eight slanted columns anchored through the grandstand led to it being considered a highlight of Miami Modern architecture. Originally the land it sits on was owned by the county. It was deeded to the city of Miami for the purpose of building the stadium. It cost \$2 million for development and dredging. The manmade basin — 6,000 feet by 1,200 feet — is the length of the Washington Mall.

From 1964 through the early 1990s, Marine Stadium was a very busy place. Originally designed for boat racing, the stadium also featured musical performances of every type, boxing, water shows, Easter sunrise services, campaign rallies and community events.

However, in the later days of that period, Worth says, the stadium was not managed well and fell into disrepair. In 1992, Hurricane Andrew swept through South Florida. In its wake, the city claimed the storm did major damage to the stadium and requested FEMA funds to

demolish it. However, a study commissioned by the insurance company found that the storm did no damage and only \$2 million to repair and only \$2 million to

\$3 million was needed to repair damage from years of use and poor maintenance.

From 1992 to 2007, the stadium remained shuttered, was vandalized with graffiti and suffered further deterioration from neglect. Numerous development proposals included demolition of the structure, but it remained standing.

In June 2007, the city unveiled the first draft of a master plan for Virginia Key by the planning firm ELDSA. The Marine Stadium was not on it. The 200 people in atten-

portive and we arranged for our first meeting," Worth says. "We thought we might have five people show up and we had 20."

There was a synchronicity to the launch of the preservation initiative. Separately from Worth, Hernandez too was pondering the fate of the stadium.

"I'd been kicking it around in my head," Hernandez says. "I was driving back and forth to Key Biscayne. I had a son in crew so we were visiting the basin often. Here we were setting up tents to avoid the sun and here is this stadium just sitting there. Don was pitching at the same time."

Worth met Hernandez and the organization was formed in February 2008. The Friends group is an informal, all-volunteer coalition of individuals and organizations under the administrative umbrella of Dade Heritage Trust, Miami-Dade County's foremost historic preservation organization. The goal of the group is simple — to have the stadium restored.

In April 2008, Friends of Marine Stadium had its first event, a fundraiser at the Miami Rowing Club held in conjunction with Team Row, a not-for-profit organization that seeks to promote rowing among the community's youth. The event sold out (more than 400 people attended) and the stadium initiative received coverage on the front page of the Metro section of the Miami Herald.



CLOCKWISE FROM ABOVE: 1. A DRAWING OF THE RE-FURBISHED STADIUM. 2. GRAFFITI FILLS THE ENTIRE STADIUM. THE FLOATING STAGE WAS A HIGHLIGHT FOR CONCERT GOERS.

dance at the community meeting unanimously and spontaneously asked the city to put the Marine Stadium back in the plan.

At the time, the stadium's future remained uncertain. Several months later, Worth — a Miami Modern enthusiast — said that his wife, Nina, saw something on television about the stadium that sparked the birth of Friends of Marine Stadium.

"We called Dade Heritage Trust, they were very sup-

Since then, the Marine Stadium preservation effort has accelerated and garnered near-universal support.

In the summer of 2008, the stadium made it onto a revised Virginia Key Master Plan, albeit surrounded by parking structures. Shortly thereafter the City of Miami Historic and Environmental Preservation Board approved the designation of the Marine Stadium, the basin, and an envelope of land 100 feet east and west of the Marine Stadium — all the way forward to Rickenbacker Causeway. The City of Miami administration appealed the designation of the basin and envelope of land, but allowed the stadium designation to stand.

Momentum continued to build. In April 2009, the Marine Stadium was named to the National Trust for Historic Preservation's "11 Most Endangered Historic Places," and later to the Florida Trust For Historic Designation's "11 Most Endangered" list. The World's Monuments Fund, the foremost organization worldwide devoted to the preservation of architectural and cultural sites, named the Marine Stadium to its 2010 watch list (significant sites that are endangered), along with places such as Macchu Picchu, the historic center of Buenos Aires, the City of Old Jerusalem and Gaudi's La Sagrada Familia in Barcelona.

In October 2009, the City Commission heard another revised master plan with less density proposed surrounding the stadium and incorporating many of the ideas incubated by Hernandez and his students at a preservation workshop. The city also dropped its appeal of the historic designation of the Marine Stadium Basin and envelope of land surrounding the stadium, and tabled discussion of another revised master plan until May 2010.

A month later, Tomas Regalado — a preservation supporter — was elected mayor of Miami.

Most recently, a study estimated the cost of the concrete restoration at the stadium to be between \$5.5 million and \$8.5 million — far less than was cited in a 2008 city report that estimated the cost of concrete restoration to be as high as \$15 million.

And just this week, a Miami Commission committee is hearing a proposal to apply \$3 million available from bond funds earmarked for preservation to the eventual revival of the stadium.

The initiative has been "lightning in the bottle," Worth says. "Friends of Marine Stadium is more of a movement than it is an organization."

Dade Heritage Trust Executive Director Becky Roper Matkov is very pleased and impressed with the preservation progress to date.

"Since 2008, it has gone from being an idea to getting so much support — political, from media and even some financial support," Matkov says. "It's moving along a lot faster than we ever believed it could. It's been great."

A BRIGHT FUTURE

Advocates agree on the next steps toward resurrecting the stadium. Supporters must continue to rally for the stadium to be a centerpiece of a new Virginia Key Master Plan. In trying financial times, funding sources for the renovation must be identified. Although studies are still needed, a rough estimate for the total cost of renovation has ranged upward to \$30 million.

"This is where Sammy Davis Jr. hugged Richard Nixon. It's where Pete Townsend of The Who lit his guitar on fire, threw it in the water and a dozen people at the concert jumped in after it. There are so many memories."

— Friends of Marine Stadium co-founder, Don Worth

Perhaps most important, the right use has to be planned for — and the right management identified.

"The city can't run it and we have no interest in morphing into some kind of organization to run it," Worth says. "We're talking to many different event promoters to determine what the best market is for it. We have a list of 28 event promoters who would like to use it. It can host many different types of events so well."

Worth says the Friends have received "great interest" from people who could manage it successfully but he does not want to reveal details.

Supporters also recognize that locating capital for the effort will be a challenge.

"The city will need to get creative in funding," Hernandez says. "We're working on being placed on the National Register of Historic Places, which will allow the use of preservation tax credits now."

Matkov said the potential \$3 million discussed this week is a good start and that private donors are interested both for sentimental reasons and because of the potential economic benefits a revived stadium could provide.

"We'd certainly appreciate private donors," she says.

In the meantime, the push goes on for Miami Marine Stadium's prominent inclusion in the vision of Virginia Key's future. On March 27,

a Virginia Key Planning Charrette is scheduled for 9 a.m. at the Rusty Pelican.

Marine Stadium supporters share a belief in its bright future.

"The stadium could be like the front door to the larger picture of what Virginia Key will be," Hernandez says. "It could pull people there and it could be a source of revenue to support [Virginia Key]."

Questions still must be addressed in regard to use, management and funding, but given the challenges supporters have overcome already, the smart money might be on the movement that is

Friends of Marine Stadium.

"The answers are within five miles of us," Worth says.

For more information on the Friends of Marine Stadium and their efforts, visit marinestadium.org.



CLOCKWISE FROM ABOVE: 1. A SIDE-VIEW OF THE STADIUM. 2. THE ABANDONED STADIUM. 3. BOAT RACES PACKED THE STADIUM ON WEEKENDS.

