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 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 $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 EDSA. The Marine Stadium was not on it. The 200 people in attendance and Worth said he and the organizers were 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.

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.
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 25 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 underway.

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 marinesadium.org.