

# County waives rule, names center for former commissioner

BY GABRIELA HENRIQUEZ STOIKOW

The South Miami-Dade Cultural Arts Center is to be renamed "Dennis C. Moss Cultural Arts Center" as county commissioners approved a resolution waiving a rule establishing that "the naming, renaming, or designation of a county road, facility, or property may not be for any elected official currently serving or having served in any elected office within the last five years."

"It seems very rampant lately that so many things are being renamed for people that are either still living, or are still a politician, or do not fall within that five-year length of time that they have to have been out of office," said Miami-Dade resident Mary Waters at the public hearing of the resolution.

Rule 9.02 of the commission's Rules of Procedure also provides that the commission may by a three-fifths vote of members present name a county road, facility, or property after a living individual who "has made a direct, significant lifetime contribution to this community."

"I think that some public servants here in Miami-Dade County deserve recognition prior to their passing," said Danielle Cohen Higgins, commissioner of District 8, where the arts center stands.

"Commissioner Dennis Moss is



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**Danielle Cohen Higgins**

the perfect example of that, not only because of his service of 27 years to Miami-Dade County, nor because of his incredible efforts after Hurricane Andrew, his list of service and accomplishments for South Dade are exceptionally long and outstanding and he has a famous saying of 'We leave footprints in the sand' and renaming the South Cultural Arts Center after Commissioner Dennis Moss would be exactly that, leaving his footprints

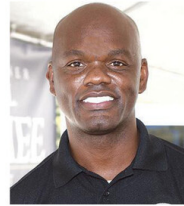
in the sand," she added.

Commissioner Kionne L. McGhee was listed as a co-prime sponsor, and the document received co-sponsorships from Chairman Jose "Pepe" Diaz, Vice Chairman Oliver Gilbert, and Commissioners Rebeca Sosa, Jean Monestime, Sally Heyman and Sen. Javier Souto.

"Commissioner Moss was the engineer behind ensuring that the South Dade community would have representation as it relates to cultural arts," Commissioner McGhee said. "The reason being that this is so important is to give individuals their flowers while they are still here to remind them how much we appreciate them," he added.

Mr. Moss currently serves as vice chair of the Miami-Dade Expressway Authority and his term expires in May 2025, according to the authority's website.

The lifelong resident of south Miami-Dade County and former District 9 commissioner left office in November 2020 due to term limits. In his over 27 years of service, he worked on a comprehensive plan to rebuild areas affected by Hurricane Andrew, helped save the Homestead Air Reserve Base after the federal government listed it for closure, and advocated for the South Miami-Dade Cultural Arts



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**Kionne McGhee**

Center, the document notes.

Mr. Moss has been involved in multiple community organizations including the South Dade Alliance for Black Neighborhood Development, the Metro-Miami Action Plan Trust, the Land Use and Water Planning Task Force, the South Florida Regional Planning Council, and the Richmond Perrine Optimist Club, the legislation adopted last week says.

A review of Miami-Dade legis-

lation reveals that commissioners have waived the same rule two times within the past year.

In May 2021, the commission approved a resolution sponsored by Commissioner McGhee renaming "Goulds Park" as "JL (Joe) and Enid W. Demps Park." Joe and Enid Demps established the Greater Goulds Optimist Club and created many community programs including football, basketball, and cheerleading programs. Enid Demps is currently the vice chairwoman of the Community Council 15.

In March 2021, commissioners also approved the renaming of "West Perrine Park" as "Wilbur Bell Park." Mr. Bell has been a Perrine resident for 79 years, founded numerous businesses in south Miami-Dade, and in 2020 was elected chairman of Miami-Dade County Community Council 14-3-14. That proposal was also brought by Commissioner McGhee.

As Miami Today reported last week, the naming of some county assets historically has entailed payments to the county. Last year county commissioners approved a \$135 million, 19-year deal for the naming of the county's FTX Arena, and the Adrienne Arsh Center for the Performing Arts of Miami-Dade County was named for the \$30 million donor who helped fund the county project.

# Slesnick offers insight into ethical leadership in public life

BY MONICA CORREA

Exemplar ethical behavior has played a large role in building a successful life in business and public service for Donald D. Slesnick II, former Coral Gables mayor, lawyer and retired lieutenant colonel, who continues to hold extensive philanthropic and civic roles focused on better public service and ethics.

The political world, he said, has become very combative. "When you read some of the literature that people turn out during campaigns, you start to think if these people ever thought twice before they published that stuff, because it lowers the level of the conversation into kind of a mud fight, and that's not what we would expect from our leaders."

Mr. Slesnick, who was mayor of Coral Gables from 2001 to 2011, said he misses serving the people and city hall "doing what I can for my city."

He has also served on the Greater Miami Chamber of Commerce (GMCC) executive council and founded an award-winning program for ethics in business and government in the late 1990s.

"One of the reasons that we started [the program] was that Miami was being criticized widely around the United States for being a place where people couldn't trust doing business, because there were so many unethical activities going on, both in government and the private world," he said. "And so we knew that the time had come to change that image, and the way to do it was not just to whitewash it or even paint over it, but to change the ethics and the basic understructure of the community itself."

Mr. Slesnick has been chairman of the American Bar Foundation Fellows; president of the Col-

## INSIGHT

Continuing a series that began with MiamiToday's 40th year, we turn weekly to past Achievers for insight on relevant issues and suggestions for younger persons who will be involved in dealing with those issues.



**Former Coral Gables Mayor Don Slesnick seeks ethical leadership.**

lege of Labor and Employment Lawyers; on the Dade Cultural Alliance, the Dade Heritage Trust and the Florida Trust of Historic Preservation; been vice president of the Orange Bowl Committee; founding chair of the Gables Good Government Committee, and other organizations. Mr. Slesnick is a Vietnam retired 1994 lieutenant colonel, a former Army advisor to NATO forces in Germany, and was recently appointed as an Army Reserve Ambassador for Florida.

He serves on the Greater Miami Chamber of Commerce as chair of the Military Affairs Council and is the director of community and partner relations for St. Thomas University's Ethical Leadership

program.

"My role is to try to bring partnerships to the institute with the community organizations," he said. "We've created a community advisory council with people from those organizations."

Community advisory board members include Rear Admiral Brendan C. McPherson of the Seventh Coast Guard District; the president of the local Coral Gables Rotary Club Ana M. Fournaris; Deborah Koch, American Red Cross executive director for Greater Miami and The Keys; and the Dade Association of School Administrators, which represents all the administrators of the Miami-Dade County public school system, including Jorge Garcia, its executive director.

"The thing about ethics is that there's so many pressures on people, and this goes across the board," he said. As the GMCC fought in the '90s to portray Miami's image as an honest and fair place to do business, current efforts such as Miami Mayor Francis Suarez's in encouraging companies to move their headquarters to the area "are critical to make sure that people around the world understand that they can trust the environment, trust the politicians to act honorably and trust other businesses to interact with them in an honest fashion."

Giovanni R. Castro is a young



**Giovanni Castro: "You need passion and purpose" in involvement.**

rising star in ethical leadership, said Mr. Slesnick. He has served as deputy chief of staff for Miami Suarez and senior aide to former Lt. Gov. Carlos Lopez-Cantera, as well as manager for Florida state and local government affairs for Verizon, and recently Uber's government relations leader for Florida and the Southeast. This month he was selected for Leadership Florida 12th Connect Class, where 46 Florida leaders participate in a nine-month educational program.

"You need passion and purpose for what you're going to be involved in the community," Mr. Castro said, "because even on your longest workdays, you know you need to have that passion to want to give back to your community."

Mr. Castro chairs HYPE Miami, a Greater Miami Chamber of Commerce committee that provides young professionals leadership training and networking opportuni-

ties with senior-level executives. He is also on the board of directors of WOWCenter, which offers training and education to adults with a range of disabilities in Miami Dade.

"I truly believe that you need to create an environment for growth," Mr. Castro said. "You need to be a collaborator, a convener, a problem solver. You want to be that go-to person fostering that positive environment."

Honesty, integrity and fair dealings are what create the desired image to preserve in the business or political world, Mr. Slesnick added.

"First is your own life, what you need to get in order to have other people trust you; secondly, it's the image we project, what makes our area successful; and thirdly, the way you act is the way you employees will act," he said. "If they see you cutting corners, they'll cut corners; if they see you hiding the truth, they will hide the truth."