In partnership with the City of Coral Gables, the Coral Gables Community Foundation launched the Commemorative Bench Program in 2016.

Families and friends from around the community have placed benches in Coral Gables’ beautiful parks to honor memories, milestones and loved ones.

This is a collection of the stories behind the benches, Benchstories.

Thank you to the City of Coral Gables for making the Commemorative Bench Program possible.
Adrienne Goyette was born in 1938 in Oakland, California where her father was stationed with Pan American Airways. Her family returned to Coral Gables when she was two years old. Her uncle came to Coral Gables to work for George Merrick. She attended St. Theresa and Coral Gables High School. She was the daughter of Pan American Clipper pilot Captain Cyril Adrian Goyette and Maria Mickler Goyette of Coral Gables. Adrienne grew up on Coral Way, next door to St. Phillip’s church and was one of four children, along with siblings Michele, Suzy and the late Paul Goyette.

Adrienne’s younger years were spent taking horseback riding lessons at the Coral Gables Riding Academy. For fun, she enjoyed water skiing with her friends on Biscayne Bay or going to a movie at the Miracle Theater because it had air conditioning and was a great way to beat the heat in the summer.

Adrienne was crowned 1957’s Miss Miami and enjoyed a career as a model and later as a flight attendant with Eastern Airlines prior to meeting Edward Joseph Feenane and becoming a mother to seven children.

She was a gifted artist and member of the Miami Watercolor Society, she painted historical sites of her much-loved Coral Gables and was regarded for her commissioned home portraits. She was active in the community and was among the first members of Beaux Arts, YPO and Vizcayans.

Of all her many hobbies, she was a great tennis player, golfer, cook and gardener. She was most proud of her accomplishment as a mother to seven children.

by Sissy DeMaria
Pat Blanco and her husband moved to Coral Gables as newlyweds in 1978. Pat raised her children Camilo, Andrew and Maryellen in the same home she first moved and where she still lives today. The children grew up with the neighborhood children, playing on the street and riding their bikes to Salvadore Park. The Blancos’ neighbors have become family to them, being there since Pat first moved to the Gables and still living next door today. While the children have grown and moved away, they love coming back whenever they can. "Coral Gables is home, and a fine home it has been and will continue to be for my grandchildren," Pat shared.
Lenore Carrero Nesbitt was born on July 19, 1932 in Miami Beach’s Victoria Hospital. The daughter of Key West natives Tildo Sanchez Carrero and Kitty Hodge Carrero, she lived on Mindello Street until her teenage years. The family moved to 508 Hardee Road in the mid-1940s. Her parents convinced Lenore that her leadership abilities and pragmatic style would lend themselves to the legal profession. After graduating from Coral Gables High School, Lenore attended Stephens College and Northwestern University and received a Bachelor’s degree in Speech Communication.

Determined at this point to be a lawyer, she entered the University of Miami School of Law and was the sole female in her class. She also met her husband Joseph at UM. Long nights of studying and classroom preparation were rewarding—as she graduated #1 in her class in 1957. That honor didn’t help her in obtaining a position in Miami law firms; her only job offer was as a legal secretary. Lenore and Joseph would practice law together before he became a State Court Judge in 1970.

At 36 with two young children, Lenore was diagnosed with cancer and underwent a radical mastectomy. Her resolve never weakened and she made up her mind that she too would become a judge. In 1975, her dream came true and she was appointed a State Court Judge Criminal Court Division. Known for her “tough but fair” approach, she handled many cases, by far the most memorable was the McDuffie trial in 1980. In 1983, her ultimate dream came true and she became the first female federal judge in the Southern District Court of Florida serving until her death in 2001. She was posthumously inducted into the State of Florida’s Women’s Hall of Fame. Many lawyers today credit her with mentoring and guiding them in the profession.

“Judge Lenore” loved her home on Hardee Road. Decades of holidays were spent making her famous Christmas cookies, mango chutney and fruitcakes. She loved trick-or-treaters on Halloween, her mango-filled yard, and pecky cypress-lined front porch. Hardee Road always meant home to her and hours were spent in Jaycee Park with her children on weekend afternoons. Lenore died at home at 517 Hardee Road in 2001. She is survived by her children Sarah Nesbitt Artecona and Thomas Nesbitt.

By Sarah Nesbitt Artecona
Plaque Text

“THE SLESNICK FAMILY-2016
DON, JEANNETT, KATHLEEN
ANNE, DON, CECI, OLIVIA
JULIA, CECI, SEBASTIAN”

The Slesnick Family is pleased to sponsor a “Foundation Bench” in Young Park encircled by Castile Plaza. This small neighborhood park embodies so many things that say “Coral Gables”. The lovely Mediterranean Revival architecture featured on the bordering houses; the giant spreading Banyan tree in its center and the heritage monument sponsored by the Daughters of the American Revolution. This patch of green public space sits within four blocks of the Slesnick family homes now and for the past 45 years.

We are proud of our beautiful hometown and glad to show that pride with our family’s bench. We hope that future generations will enjoy being able to relax and reflect in this idyllic setting.

By Don & Jeannett Slesnick
The Barusch Family relocated from Cleveland, Ohio to Coral Gables, Florida in 1949. Edward and Florence Barusch were owners of Superior Refrigeration in Cleveland. They moved due to Edward's father Samuel's heart condition. The entire Barusch Family which included Edward, Florence, daughter Caron, son Robert and grandparents Samuel and Cecelia all planted their new roots at 504 Ponce de Leon Blvd. Edward planted an assortment of fruit trees which still bear fruit today!

The Barusches lived and raised their family at their beautiful Ponce residence for 23 years. The residence included a white concrete wall which was used as a playground where neighborhood children would come and play in a safe environment which all could enjoy. The white concrete wall is still standing today!

Once settling into their new home, Edward and Florence formed a new company called Barusch Air Conditioning and Refrigeration. Edward was an innovator within the air conditioning and refrigeration industry. He held the original patents for the reverse cycle heat pump valve which afforded one touch of a button to provide heat or cooling depending on weather conditions. This provided a standard a/c unit to either cool or heat and has become an industry standard and is used worldwide to this day. He also invented the Tap and Seal Valve, which allowed technicians to easily have access to a sealed a/c system.

Both Caron and Robert graduated from Coral Gables Senior High. Robert went into business with his father and Caron attended the University of Florida.

After Edward and Florence’s passing, Robert continued the family business his father began and to this day maintains a successful company, now known as Robert S. Barusch Air Conditioning. With over 50 years of experience, Robert has a reputation in the Air Conditioning Profession, second to none. He always exceeds the expectations of his clients. Robert has two daughters, Aimee and Allison and is married to Joanna Gaines Barusch. Allison has two sons, Ethan and Lucas Blandon.

Caron met and married her husband Marvin Leff, who founded AA Rubber Stamp and Seal Company, also located in Coral Gables at 2526 Ponce de Leon Blvd. Caron joined him as a working partner, in a 40-year successful venture dealing with the Banking Industry, Legal Profession and Office Supply Industry. Their products included, forming corporations for the legal profession, manufacturing signs, printing and rubber stamps. Caron is a University of Florida alumna and Marvin is a University of Miami alumnus. They have one daughter, Colbi and a son-in-law Bradley Congress. Colbi is also a UM alumna.

This bench is named today in honor of the Barusch Family and the legacy of their contributions to our beautiful city of Coral Gables! 

By the Barusch Family
Marlene Kerdyk was known as the Matriarch and “First Lady” of Coral Gables. She is the only individual in the City’s history to receive a 65-year service pin for her dedication to the city, which included teaching, serving charitable organizations and supporting her husband, son and brother in law as they served on the City Commission.

Marlene was born Marlene Sculte on December 20th, 1932 in Mankato, Minnesota to German parents. She moved to Coral Gables to attend the University of Miami. In 1957, Marlene graduated UM and began teaching first grade at Sylvania Heights Elementary. She also met and married William Kerdyk that same year. They were married for almost 50 years until William’s death in 2007.

Marlene and William had three children together: Former City Commissioner and Vice Mayor Bill Kerdyk, Jr., professional golf player Tracy Kerdyk and Chief of US Customs and Border Protection Kim Kerdyk.

While her brother in law, husband and son have served consecutively as City Commissioners, Marlene was active in the University of Miami Hurricane Club, the Coral Gables Women’s Club, the original Museum of Science and the Coral Gables Garden Club.

The Kerdyk family established the Kerdyk Family Trust Scholarship Fund at the Coral Gables Community Foundation to annually award a scholarship to a graduating senior who has shown an interest in music during his/her high school years.

In addition to her children, Marlene is survived by grandchildren William III, Lindsay and Leigh Kerdyk.
Roy Schoen Family

Bench Location: William H. Kerdyk, Jr. Family Park – 6611 Yumuri Street

Plaque Text

“THE ROY SCHOEN FAMILY
IN HONOR OF
KATHLEEN & JACK JENKINS”

Kathleen Duffy Jenkins is a native Miamian, born in 1923. Her father worked at the Post Office and the family lived in downtown Miami. Jack moved to Miami as a child. Jack and Kathleen met at Miami Jackson High and after Jack served in the US Navy during WWII they married in 1948. They raised one son and two daughters in Allapattah and then moved to Kendall. Jack passed away in 1992 and was very active in church and worked first at the Electrical Equipment Company and then retired from the Post Office. Kathleen lived in Kendall and now resides at Riviera Health Resort in Coral Gables and frequently comes to Kerdyk Park to enjoy the beauty of Coral Gables. One of her daughters and her family has resided in Coral Gables for many years and continues to enjoy the many local amenities.

By the Roy Schoen Family
The Tonkinsons honor Mary Young

*Bench Location: Rotary Park – 512 Ponce de Leon Boulevard*

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Plaque Text

“THE TONKINSON FAMILY
HONORS
MARY YOUNG FOR
OUTSTANDING CITIZENSHIP”

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The Tonkinson Family honored Mary Young for her outstanding citizenship in the City Beautiful.

Mary Young is the Executive Director of the Ziff Career Services Center for the University of Miami’s School of Business. She was the first female Chair of the Coral Gables Community Foundation and the Foundation’s annual gala co-chair for three consecutive, successful years. She has served on the Executive Committees of the Citizen’s Board of the University of Miami, Dade Heritage Trust (DHT), CHARLEE Homes for Children and the United Way of Miami-Dade County.

She was recognized in 2011 as one of five Women who Make a Difference by the Junior League of Miami and by the March of Dimes as a Humanitarian of the Year. She was previously chosen a “2007 Woman of Impact” by the Miami Women’s History Coalition and was recognized in 2006 as” the United Way’s Dorothy Shula Volunteer of the Year award winner.

Mary received the George E. Merrick Award of Excellence from the Coral Gables Chamber of Commerce in the summer of 2012 and was honored by the American Red Cross in March 2013 as a SPECTRUM AWARD WINNER in Education.
Plaque Text
"THE ROY SCHOEN FAMILY
IN LOVING MEMORY OF
IDA & MEREDITH SCHOEN"

The Meredith Schoen and Ida Gaughan families settled in Miami during the 1920s. Meredith arrived from Iowa with his large family at age five in 1926. Former farmers, they had traveled by truck, purchased a lot in Northwest Miami and lived in a tent until they endured the major 1926 hurricane, taking cover under their truck. Ida’s family came from New Jersey and her father operated his own plumbing company while she grew up in Allapattah and graduated from Miami High. They married in 1941 shortly after Meredith enlisted in the 77th Infantry Division. He was decorated for action on Okinawa. After the war, in 1948 they purchased a lot near the Prado Entrance in Coral Gables and built a home which remains in the family today. They raised three boys and four girls who grew up enjoying Country Club Prado, Salvador Park, Venetian Pool, Coral Gables Youth Center as well as the many other parks and amenities of the Coral Gables area.

By the Roy Schoen Family
The Tonkinson Family honored Don & Jeannett Slesnick for outstanding citizenship and their dedication to enhancing the quality of life in the City Beautiful.

Don & Jeannett have made a positive difference throughout Coral Gables and Greater Miami by generously donating over $175,000 to more than 100 deserving organizations and causes through the Slesnick Family Fund at the Coral Gables Community Foundation such as the Coral Gables Museum, the Coral Gables Art Cinema, Actors' Playhouse and the Miami Bach Society.

Don Slesnick served as Mayor of Coral Gables from 2001-2011 and has been active in numerous civic and business organizations including the Coral Gables Community Foundation where he proudly served as Chairman from 1997-1998. Don is currently serving as the 79th President and Chairman of the Orange Bowl Committee. Jeannett Slesnick is a top realtor in Coral Gables and a former City Commissioner. She currently runs a lifestyle magazine called Jeannett’s Journal. She too served as Chairman of the Coral Gables Community Foundation in 2008. The Slesnicks enjoy spending time with their children and four grandchildren as well as continuing to volunteer their time to non-profit organizations in their community.
In 2016, the Coral Gables Community Foundation placed a bench in Ingraham Park to celebrate its 25th Anniversary and 25 successful years of philanthropy in the City Beautiful.

Established in September 1991 by community leaders, the Coral Gables Community Foundation, through its discretionary, donor-advised and scholarship funds has helped youth, elderly, and disabled and sponsored cultural activities, awarded academic, dance, and music scholarships, and offered seminars to educate the public on important health, finance, and estate-planning issues, awarding over $6 million to worthy causes.

A nonprofit 501(c)(3) organization, the mission of the Coral Gables Community Foundation is to foster programs and initiatives that enhance the quality of life for people who live, work learn and play in “The City Beautiful” Coral Gables.