

FLORIDA CITY

Celebration a century in the making

CRYSTAL CHEW

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Florida City, whose early inhabitants were from Detroit, recently turned 100.

The city began its celebration of the milestone birthday in late July with an event that honored residents 80 and older.

"They are the ones who deserve it," said Commissioner Avis Brown, whose father was born in Florida City in 1922.

"They deserve the honor of saying they made an impact on Florida City. But the impact is not only on the city, but also on our children and our families."

Another form of celebration was done through Bob Jensen, vice-president of 1st National Bank of South Florida and president of the Florida Pioneer Museum, who told the stories of different pioneer families from Florida City in the South Dade News Leader throughout 2014.

Jensen will also be presenting a lecture on South Dade black history at the Florida City Commission Chambers on at noon on Feb. 2. It will last about an hour.

Florida City, established in 1914, was envisioned by Miami Land and Development Co. as an upscale retirement community. The company did not sell enough acreage and lots.

An Italian-American, James Sottile, purchased the mortgages on the debt of the ML&D Co on nearly 30,000 acres of land extending from what is now U.S.1 to Biscayne Bay. The city morphed from highly educated, retired professionals from Detroit to an Italian community engaged in agriculture.

The African American population of Florida City also grew and prospered. The black population of



ALBERT SIEGEL/MIAMI HERALD FILE

RIDING HIGH: Mayor Otis T. Wallace speaks at the inaugural bike ride for the Biscayne-Everglades Greenway in front of the Erbest P. Coe Visitors Center at Everglades National Park.



DANIEL BOCK/MIAMI HERALD FILE, 2014

ON TOUR: Karon Buckley gives a tour of the Florida Pioneer Museum to Steve Stabler, a visitor from Brunswick, Maine. Listed on the National Register of Historic Places, the museum at 826 N. Krome Ave. offers visitors a glimpse into South Florida history.

If you go

What: South Dade Black History: 1900 to Present

Where: Florida City Commission Chambers, 404 W. Palm Dr.

When: Noon, Feb. 2

Cost: The event is free and open to the public. An optional lunch will be available by reservation at 11:30 a.m. for \$10. Call Barbara Millenbruch for more information 305-230-9185.

Florida City was great enough to influence the local elections, but it wasn't until 1976 when former University of Miami Law School student and current Mayor Otis T. Wallace organized a voter registration drive.

Wallace was appointed as the first black commissioner in 1976 with the largest number of votes for a commission seat. The first majority black commission was elected in 1984.

"We have a diverse heritage," Wallace said. "Through the years, we've transitioned through all cultures. We're a city of diverse people."

With its unique location at the end of the turnpike, agricultural bases and arrival of major retailers, the community is steadily growing.

"This means we have staying power, that's for sure," Wallace said. "We're very proud of that."



MATIAS J. OCNER/MIAMI HERALD STAFF

GRAND PLANS: Florida City was originally envisioned as an upscale retirement community for its residents.