

# INVEST MIAMI SPEAKS TO CORAL GABLES MAYOR JIM CASON



**Coral Gables is celebrating its 90th anniversary as a city this year. Could you tell us how the identity of the city has evolved over nine decades?**

Everything that Coral Gables is today, it owes to the vision of its founder, George E. Merrick. Merrick had a vision of creating, out of what at the time was wilderness, a planned city with an international focus. At a time when the U.S. was very isolationist, Merrick wanted to create a place that was a window to the world. This city would have a vibrant downtown, but also serene residential areas. Merrick envisioned a beautiful city, with winding streets surrounded by tree canopies, and that featured unique architecture, reflecting the finest European designs. Although Coral Gables has grown over the years, its fundamental core as a beautiful, international city, offering a good quality of life, has not changed.

**In what ways has the international aspect of Merrick's vision manifested itself in today's Coral Gables?**

We have more than a dozen consulates and trade commissions located in this city, and just as importantly, a large concentration of consuls who reside here. The quality of life is a strong driver, but we also have several high quality schools

offering international programs, a major university with students from more than 122 countries, plenty of cultural institutions, and a thriving international business community. We also have access to domestic and global markets due to our proximity to Miami International Airport. As a former U.S. ambassador, I can attest to how attractive these types of offerings are to diplomats, as well as international businessmen and women. Moreover, Coral Gables has a number of sister cities, including Aix-en-Provence, France; Cartagena, Colombia; Granada, Spain; and La Antigua, Guatemala. We will soon be adding Quebec, Canada.

**How would you characterize the business community in the Gables?**

Our city's population is comprised of a professional and highly educated workforce. Roughly 65 percent of our residents over the age of 25 have Bachelor's degrees, while around 30 percent have a graduate degree. The folks that comprise the business community here are lawyers, architects, financial advisors, the planners – those who operate on the strategic side of commerce. Additionally we have a strong presence of more than 155 multinationals and roughly 8,200 businesses. We also work closely with the Coral Gables Chamber of Commerce and our Business Improvement District (BID) who provide valuable programs to support business growth. In fact, our economy has been growing rapidly. According to the Florida Department of Revenue, the city's sum of gross sales nearly doubled over the past five years – from \$3.7 billion in 2009 to \$6.4 billion last year. And, while Coral Gables comprises less than 2 percent of Miami-Dade County's population, it accounts for more than 4 percent of its gross sales. All of these factors contribute to a healthy and vibrant international business environment.