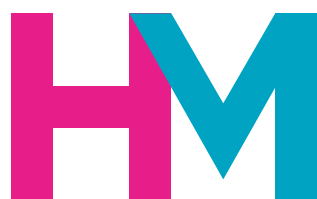




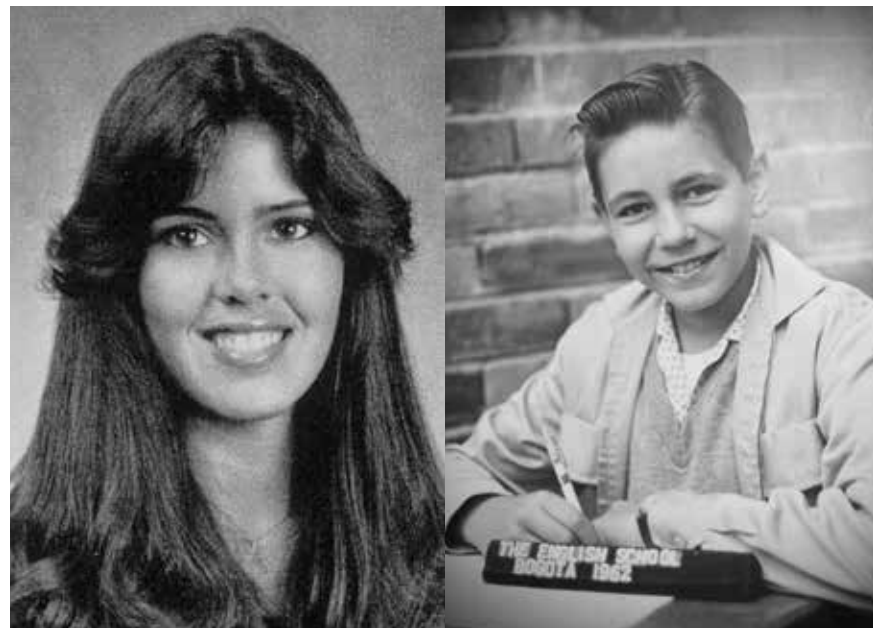
History
Icon
Awards

2025





**History
Icon
Awards**



Honorees

2025

Abess Family

Legacy Award: Honors a family or organization's longstanding contributions and historical significance in shaping Miami.

Pérez Family

Philanthropy Award: Recognizes exceptional philanthropic support of HM and causes related to the museum's work, such as heritage preservation and civic engagement.

Florida Power & Light

Innovation Award: Highlights groundbreaking ideas or initiatives that have contributed to Miami's growth and identity.

Miami Dolphins

Education Award: Acknowledges an organization's commitment to advancing educational opportunities in Miami and promoting understanding of the city's diverse heritage.

Dr. Dorothy Fields

Preservation Award: Honors exemplary efforts in preserving and conserving Miami's historical artifacts, sites, or narratives, contributing to the museum's collections, and enhancing public awareness of the city's heritage.

Gov. Bob Graham (In Memoriam)

Leadership Award: Pays tribute to someone who has made a lasting impact on Miami's cultural and historical fabric. Celebrates their legacy of service, vision, and dedication, ensuring their memory continues to inspire the community.

Mission & Vision

HM brings together the diverse and multifaceted stories of Miami, inviting visitors to explore what it means to be Miamian and call this city home. As the museum of Miami, we honor the voices of its communities, recognizing their unique contributions to shaping the city we know today.

Through innovative exhibitions, collections, and programming, HM embraces the complexity of Miami’s history and its evolving future. Visitors are invited to connect personally to the city’s stories, understanding how their own histories intersect with Miami’s rich narrative. These connections foster a sense of shared belonging to both our communities and our city.

HM is known and respected as the collector and authoritative presenter of unique Miami experiences and stories. As such, we aspire to become a hub within an interconnected learning network, reaching across Miami’s educational system. Taking advantage of new learning and communication technologies, HM will become a dispersed museum, present on street corners, in schools, public spaces, and, through the internet, on every mobile phone in Miami. HM’s distributed content will deliver Miami’s stories wherever people live, work, play, and learn.

A Message from Our Leadership

Miami is a young city, still defining its own story. At just 129 years old, we are in the midst of shaping our identity, building the values that unite us, and setting the course for our future.

For over 85 years, HistoryMiami Museum has been at the heart of this process, collecting and sharing the stories that inspire a deep sense of belonging. By telling the stories that connect us all, we create a space where every person can see themselves reflected in the city’s journey. We aim to illuminate our past, strengthen our present, and shape the future of Miami with bold hope and unwavering commitment.

As our city’s history continues to unfold, the choices we make today will shape the legacy we leave for generations to come.

That is why we are launching the **History Icon Awards**—to celebrate the individuals, families, and organizations whose visionary contributions have defined Miami’s cultural, social, and economic landscape. These honorees are more than leaders; they are the trailblazers whose passion and dedication inspire all of us to continue building a thriving, inclusive city.

HistoryMiami Museum is proud to honor these icons, whose work embodies the bold, diverse, and forward-thinking spirit of Miami—values we all share and celebrate together.



Natalia Crujeiras
CEO and Executive Director



Michael D. Gold
Chair, Board of Trustees

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Natalia Crujeiras'.

Natalia Crujeiras

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Michael D. Gold'.

Michael D. Gold

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Mistress of Ceremonies



Laurie Jennings is a 6-time Emmy award-winning broadcast journalist, public speaker and TV host. Her 30-year TV news career started in Youngstown, Ohio and took her to Cleveland, Boston, MSNBC and Miami. After 15 years as the main evening anchor at South Florida’s #1 WPLG-TV (ABC), Laurie stepped away to find a more flexible schedule for her aging parents and her family. She is now the president of her own media company, Laurie Jennings LIVE, where she represents two South Florida businesses as their brand ambassador in digital and TV marketing.

Laurie is an active philanthropist who can also guide you through South Florida’s charitable landscape. Since arriving from the Northeast 25 years ago, Laurie has been deeply involved in the community through “United Way” as a board member and now trustee, “Baptist Children’s Hospital”, “Voices For Children”, “Holtz Children’s Hospital”, “American Red Cross”, “Special Olympics”, “Jackson Memorial Hospital”, and “Chapman Partnership for the Homeless”. Ever since giving birth to micro preemie identical twin boys in 2006, Laurie has proudly co-hosted the March of Dimes’ annual “March for Babies” in both Miami-Dade and Broward Counties.

Laurie graduated from Cornell University with highest honors in government, and then earned her master’s from Northwestern University’s Medill School of Journalism. She was born and raised in Greenwich, Connecticut.

Miami New Times voted Laurie “Best TV News Anchor” in 2012. *Florida Monthly Magazine* voted her “Best Local TV Anchor” in 2010. *Broward/Palm Beach New Times* voted Laurie “Best TV News Anchor” in 2008. Laurie received Voices for Children’s “Most Valuable Protector” Award in 2007, United Way’s “Starfish Award” in 2011, and was honored by the March of Dimes as a “2019 Woman of Distinction”. Laurie was inducted into the National Academy of Television and Science’s “Silver Circle” in 2020 for her distinguished career in broadcast news.

Abess Family



LEGACY AWARD



Bertha and Leonard Abess, Sr., at a charity event on April 21, 1977.

Celebrating a Century of Service

For over a century, the Ungar and Abess families have been more than simply observers of Miami’s evolution; they have been architects of its progress. Their story is one of innovation, generosity, and an enduring commitment to the place they have called home for generations.

Arthur and Marcella Ungar arrived in Miami in 1917, before the real estate boom of the 1920s. They settled into a small, wood-framed bungalow with their young daughter, Bertha, and another child on the way. Arthur quickly established himself in Miami’s nascent business community, founding one of the city’s first automobile dealerships, the Ungar Buick Company. Known as “the Chief,” he became a key figure in Miami’s civic life, helping to establish athletic programs at the University of Miami, becoming a founding member of its reconstituted board, playing a pivotal role in founding Mount Sinai Medical Center, becoming a founder of Temple Israel, and advocating for the creation of the Orange Bowl where he served as its President. When he passed away in April 1969, the *Miami Herald* remarked that “few of Miami’s current leaders can boast—and The Chief was not boastful—of helping a city grow for half a century.”

In 1936, Bertha Ungar married Leonard L. Abess, an astute accountant with a keen entrepreneurial spirit. The son of Romanian Jewish immigrants, Leonard arrived in Miami in 1925 drawn by its rapid development. Recognizing the growing need for accessible financial services he co-founded Miami Beach Federal, the nation’s second savings and loan association. He built the state’s largest private accounting firm and served as president of the Florida Board of Accountants under three governors. He co-founded City National Bank in 1946 after World War II. Under his leadership, the bank became a pillar of stability, helping Miami’s expanding middle class secure their financial futures, until it sold in 1978. But Mr. Abess’ vision extended beyond banking—he was deeply committed to fostering economic



Left: Jayne and Leonard Abess Jr.

Below: Arthur Ungar



growth while uplifting the community. Bertha and Leonard dedicated themselves to philanthropy, supporting institutions including United Way Miami, Miami Jewish Health System, Mount Sinai Medical Center, and Temple Israel. Equally passionate about social change, Bertha established a center for at-risk youth, ensuring vulnerable children had access to education and support. She remained a steadfast advocate for her community until her passing in 1997, while Leonard continued his lifelong commitment to generosity until his death in 2001 at the age of 97.

Leonard Abess Jr., their son, married Jayne Harris in 1983. He continued the family's legacy of business leadership and philanthropy and in 1984 he re-acquired City National Bank. Under his leadership the bank flourished, solidifying its position as a cornerstone of Miami's financial sector. Upon selling City National Bank in 2008, he was recognized by President Barack Obama during the President's address to the Joint Session of Congress for distributing \$60 million from the sale among his employees and retirees, an unprecedented gesture that highlighted his deep

appreciation for the individuals who had contributed to the bank's success. He was also named as one of *Time* magazine's list of '100 Most Influential People in the World', by the Florida Bankers Association as 'Banker of the Year' and by *Reader's Digest's Best of America* issue, as 'Boss of the Year'. Leonard is past Chairman of the Board of Trustees at the University of Miami; former Miami Branch Director of the Federal Reserve; and former Board Chair at Mount Sinai Medical Center. He is currently a national commissioner of the Anti-Defamation League, trustee of Fairchild Tropical Botanic Garden, a member of the World Wildlife Fund's National Advisory Council and a member of the Board of Managers of the New York Botanical Garden. He is Chairman and CEO of ThinkLAB Ventures.

Continuing with the family's commitment to their community, Jayne Harris Abess has served at United Way Miami for over 35 years. She is currently an Executive Committee member where she continues to champion various important initiatives. She is a former United Way Board Chair and former co-chair of United Way's Community Investment Committee. Jayne is Chair Emeritus of Goodwill Industries of South Florida and past president of the Junior League of Miami. She led the family's creation of the Jayne and Leonard Abess Surgical Welcome Center and the Abess Family Neonatal Intensive Care Unit at Mount Sinai. Jayne continues to be involved in early childhood education advocacy efforts.

Jayne and Leonard Jr. have championed various causes including education, environmental conservation, and social responsibility. Their forward-thinking philanthropy is exemplified by their support of the Abess Center for Ecosystem Science and Policy at the University of Miami. They founded the Abess Greenhouse at the Peddie School and the Abess Center for Environmental Studies at Miami Country Day School. The Abess' developed 220 acres at the little-used Opa Locka airport, creating hundreds of jobs in an economically challenged region and helping bring the airport to one of the top five in the US for private aviation. Together, Jayne and Leonard are recipients of numerous community service awards.

Their three children Ashley, Matthew and Brett Abess, continue to exemplify the family's tradition of service and philanthropy.

Pérez Family



PHILANTHROPY AWARD

History
Icon
Awards

Darlene and Jorge Pérez.

Building a Legacy of Giving Back

Jorge M. Pérez's journey exemplifies a profound commitment to transforming communities. Born in Buenos Aires to Cuban parents, his early years were marked by movement — first to Cuba, then to Colombia, where his family sought stability, and then to the United States, where he pursued higher education. His path took him from student life in New York to Miami in 1976, a city on the verge of transformation. Arriving at a crucial moment just before the economic and social upheaval of the 1980s, Pérez looked past the challenges and recognized opportunities that would shape both his future and Miami's skyline.

With a master's degree in urban planning from the University of Michigan, Pérez initially worked as an economic development director for the City of Miami. However, his entrepreneurial spirit soon led him to found The Related Group in 1979 with New York developer Stephen M. Ross. Starting with affordable housing projects in underserved areas like Little Havana and Homestead, Pérez demonstrated that development could be profitable and meaningful. Over the next decade, he expanded into market-rate rental apartments and luxury condominiums, contributing to revitalizing neighborhoods from Miami Beach to Brickell. Today, his company is a powerhouse in real estate, having developed over 120,000 residences, commercial and retail spaces, and significantly reshaped Miami's skyline.

While his business success is undeniable, Pérez's legacy is found in his lasting impact on Miami's cultural landscape. His passion for art and philanthropy led to his landmark donation to establish the Pérez Art Museum Miami (PAMM). His generosity has continued to grow, with additional contributions to the museum and the establishment of El Espacio 23, an art space that promotes creative expression in the city's Allapattah neighborhood.



The Pérez Family: from top left, clockwise: Jon Paul, Felipe, Nick, Kastyn, Darlene, Jorge and Christina.

At his side throughout this journey has been his wife and partner, Darlene Boytell Pérez, a dedicated advanced registered nurse practitioner with more than 25 years of experience specializing in gastroenterology and the Hepatitis C virus, philanthropist, and community leader whose commitment has been equally transformative. As the matriarch of the Pérez family, Darlene has played a pivotal role in shaping their family's philanthropic vision, ensuring that their commitment to education, healthcare, and the arts continues across generations. Her advocacy has resulted in the founding of PAMM's International Women's Committee and efforts that have directly benefited institutions such as Florida International University (FIU), and United Way Miami.

Darlene is active in a variety of civic and cultural organizations, including serving on the boards of Generation S.O.S, the Women Photographers International Archive, the Nursing Advisory Council for the Nicole Wertheim College of Nursing and Health Sciences at FIU, and the Miami Cancer Institute Art & Design Committee. She is also a member of the Museum of Modern Art's (MoMA) Latin American and Caribbean Fund, and a board member of Wake Forest University.

Together, Pérez, Darlene and their children, Christina, Jon Paul, Nick, and Felipe, have embraced their city not just as developers but as caretakers and champions of the arts, culture, and social progress. Their impact reaches well beyond just buildings and museums. The Pérez family's philanthropic contributions, before and after establishing the Jorge M. Pérez Family Foundation and Related Philanthropic Foundation in 2015, have significantly enriched the Miami community, with well over \$100 million committed in support of 150 nonprofit organizations. In 2019, the family launched the Pérez CreARTE Grants Program, which has invested over \$11 million to bolster Miami's creative ecosystem.

The Pérez family's legacy represents vision, action, and profound generosity. They view Miami not merely as a place for development but as one to enrich. Their efforts, philanthropy, and steadfast commitment to the city they cherish have cultivated a more vibrant, inclusive, and inspired Miami.

Florida Power & Light



INNOVATION AWARD



A new FPL power plant in south Miami-Dade county, circa 1950.

Powering Innovation and Growth

In the summer of 1924, Miami experienced a surge of energy when Florida Power & Light Company (FPL), a New York-based subsidiary of American Power & Light Co., acquired the struggling Miami Gas Company. Shortly after, Miami-Dade County commissioners granted FPL a 30-year franchise. What began as a bold experiment in a growing city has evolved into a century-long mission of innovation, resilience and service that continues to strengthen Greater Miami.

As soon as FPL purchased the former gas plant along the Miami River, the company immediately began constructing a larger electrical facility. The company’s rapid expansion during the mid-1920s mirrored the rapid growth of Greater Miami. Land that had been citrus groves just months earlier was subdivided, connected by roads, and soon linked to utilities. Among FPL’s earliest projects were extending power lines north to Golden Beach and west to the newly built community of Hialeah.

Beyond powering homes and businesses, FPL played a pivotal role in modernizing everyday life in Miami. From its showroom on Flagler Street, the company introduced residents to the conveniences of electric appliances, selling stoves, water heaters, refrigerators and vacuum cleaners. At a time when most relied on iceboxes for food storage, washed clothes by hand and bathed in cold water, FPL championed the benefits of electricity, and Miamians embraced this new way of living.

From the start, FPL was more than an energy provider—it was a driving force behind Miami’s growth. One of the first corporations to support the Miami Community Chest, now United Way Miami, FPL established itself early on as a civic leader. FPL is committed to powering strong communities making



FPL employee Bob O'Connor reports issues with a Miami utility pole to the area headquarters on August 5, 1956.

them better places to live, work and raise a family. And, during World War II, it played a crucial role in ensuring power for critical military infrastructure, further solidifying its importance to the region.

Natural disasters have relentlessly tested FPL's resilience throughout its history. The company faced its first major challenge in 1926 when a powerful and destructive hurricane devastated Miami, toppling 1,500 service lines across south Florida. FPL swiftly mobilized emergency crews from other states and restored 1,200 miles of power lines within a month, setting a strong precedent for future hurricane recovery efforts.

Nearly 70 years later, in 1992, FPL confronted one of its greatest challenges when Hurricane Andrew, a historic and catastrophic Category 5 storm, ravaged south Florida. The widespread destruction underscored the urgent need for a more resilient electrical grid, prompting FPL to make groundbreaking investments in grid hardening, undergrounding power lines, and installing advanced smart grid technology. These innovations have firmly positioned FPL as a national leader in storm preparedness and power reliability. To honor the lasting impact of Hurricane Andrew and the critical lessons learned, the company later sponsored an exhibit at HistoryMiami Museum, reinforcing its deep ties to the city's rich history.

FPL's commitment to innovation has extended far beyond disaster recovery. In 1972, it introduced Turkey Point Nuclear Generating Station, the first nuclear power plant in Florida, revolutionizing the state's energy landscape. Today, FPL leads the charge in renewable energy, investing in solar energy centers, battery storage and smart grid technologies that align with Miami's vision for a sustainable future.

FPL's focus on delivering reliable electricity from a diverse energy mix is not just about keeping the lights on—it's about shaping Miami's future. From powering neighborhoods nearly a century ago to driving innovation today, FPL's story is inseparable from Miami's own.

Miami Dolphins



EDUCATION AWARD



Scoring Big in Education

In a city as dynamic as Miami, where cultures blend, skylines transform, and trends come and go, one thing has remained constant—the love for the Miami Dolphins. Since their founding in 1965, the Dolphins have been more than just a football team; they have become an enduring symbol of Miami’s spirit, shaping the city’s sports culture and community through philanthropic initiatives.

When politician Joe Robbie and entertainer Danny Thomas introduced professional football to Miami, the excitement was immediate. The city was quickly evolving into a year-round destination, driven by tourism, Latin American influences, and a booming economy. To involve the community, the franchise organized a contest, inviting fans to submit name suggestions for the new team. More than 20,000 ballots were submitted, with suggestions ranging from the Mariners and Mustangs to the Missiles and Barracudas. Ultimately, the Dolphins narrowly defeated the Miami Mustangs, earning one lucky fan two lifetime season tickets.

Miami’s newest team debuted in 1966. Though the early years were challenging, the Dolphins swiftly ascended to greatness. Under the legendary coach Don Shula, they transformed into a powerhouse, culminating in their historic perfect season in 1972, an unparalleled achievement in NFL history.

While the Dolphins’ on-field achievements have secured their status in football history, their influence reaches well beyond the gridiron. The Miami Dolphins Foundation has served as a catalyst for positive change, especially in education, health, and community service.

One of their most influential initiatives is the Nat Moore Endowment, which fosters the next generation of leaders by providing scholarships and vocational grants to high-achieving high school seniors in Miami-Dade, Broward, Palm

Larry Csonka (#39) sprints down the field with the ball during the Dolphins vs. Jets matchup in Miami. — November 19



Legendary Dolphins coach Don Shula signs a poster following the team's perfect season in 1972.



From left to right: Roster from the team's historic 1972 season, Nat Moore with 2023 Scholarship recipients.

Beach, and Monroe counties. These students, chosen for their academic excellence and community involvement, receive financial support to pursue their educational goals—without restrictions on their field of study. Scholarships are distributed over four years to ensure that recipients complete their education, empowering young leaders who will shape Miami's future.

Dolphins Cancer Challenge (DCC) has raised millions for cancer research at the Sylvester Comprehensive Cancer Center in Miami, while their Football UNITES initiative brings people together across the community to foster understanding and improve relationships to create a more inclusive South Florida. Whether supporting youth football leagues, honoring first responders and military personnel, or providing meals and resources to families in need, the Dolphins consistently demonstrate that they are more than just a football team—they are a vital part of Miami's community.

In a city known for its constant evolution, the Miami Dolphins remain a beloved institution. Generations of fans have proudly donned aqua and orange, passing their loyalty down from one generation to the next. Whether in Super Bowl victories or rebuilding years, the Dolphins have remained a crucial part of Miami's identity.

As Miami grows into a global hub, the Dolphins stand as a unifying force, a source of pride, and a testament to the city's enduring spirit. For nearly six decades, they have given Miami something to cheer for—both on and off the field.

Dr. Dorothy Jenkins Fields



PRESERVATION AWARD



Dr. Dorothy Jenkins Fields at the Black Archives, September 1986.

**Committed to Preservation,
Education, and Advocacy**

Dr. Dorothy Jenkins Fields has dedicated over five decades to ensuring that Miami’s Black history is preserved, honored, and accessible for future generations. As a historian, educator, and archivist, she has safeguarded the stories of Black Miamians and created spaces for their contributions to be studied, celebrated, and integrated into the broader historical narrative. Her achievements are groundbreaking—by launching the movement to preserve and exhibit Miami-Dade County’s Black history, she has reshaped the way the region acknowledges and honors its Black heritage, ensuring it is an essential part of the city’s historical identity.

Her passion for history is deeply rooted in her family’s remarkable legacy. Her grandparents, Samuel David and Ida Ellen Roberts Johnson, emigrated from the Bahamas in the early 1900s and settled in Miami’s “Colored Town,” now known as Overtown. They raised seven children, including Dr. Fields’ mother, Dorothy, a longtime educator, and her uncle, Dr. S.H. Johnson, Miami’s first Black radiologist. Despite the challenges posed by segregation and limited educational opportunities, all seven Johnson children earned college degrees—a testament to the family’s unwavering belief in the power of education to create change.

Dr. Fields grew up in Overtown and later Brownsville, immersed in a community of perseverance and civic engagement. Her mother instilled in her a passion for learning, while her stepfather, James Daniel McKellar, who worked for nearly 50 years as head waiter at the Miami Woman’s Club, modeled hard work and service. Their home was a center for cultural and educational exchange—values that would define her mission.

After graduating from Booker T. Washington High School, she earned a B.F.A. from Spelman College, a master’s degree in curriculum and instruction from



A century-old icon of Overtown reopens

BY NADEGE GREEN
ngreen@miamiherald.com

The historic Lyric Theater, Miami's oldest entertainment venue, symbolizes a time when Overtown was a bustling cultural hub: jazz icon Duke Ellington thrilled audiences on its stage; poet Langston Hughes recited there; soul songstress Aretha Franklin charmed concert-goers with her gospel tunes.

Over the decades, the theater — built in 1913 by black tycoon Geder Walker — was either treasured or neglected.

Thursday evening, the renovations to and expansion of the aging icon were unveiled to about 100 guests. Community leaders and organizers say the historic theater will once again bring the arts — and job opportunities — to Overtown.

"This is only the beginning," said Dorothy Fields, who led the effort to save the building from demolition after it fell into disrepair in the 1980s. "My vision is that people will come from all



JOYFUL OCCASION: Pat Santangelo, left, looks on as Irby McKnight congratulates Dorothy Fields on the reopening.

over the world to celebrate black culture at The Lyric Theater. That's my hope."

Fields, founder of the Black Archives History and Research Foundation, successfully lobbied

to have the theater, at 819 NW Second Ave., listed in the National Register of Historic Places in 1989. The Lyric once anchored the

• TURN TO LYRIC, 7A

The newly constructed lobby is located adjacent to the original Lyric Theater which was built in 1913.

the University of Northern Colorado, and a Ph.D. in Public History with a focus on 20th-century African American history, archives administration, and historic preservation. She spent 40 years as an educator in Miami-Dade County Public Schools, where she developed curricula and worked to incorporate Black history into educational programs.

Her journey into historic preservation began in earnest in the mid-1970s with a simple yet transformative moment. While preparing for the nation's bicentennial, she visited the local library to research books about Black Miami's history. To her shock, the librarian informed her that no such books existed, stating, "I guess those people haven't thought enough of themselves to write their history." In that moment, Dr. Fields realized her purpose: to ensure that Black Miami's history was documented, preserved, and made accessible to future generations.

Assigned by the Miami-Dade County School Board to write the first local Black history nonfiction book, Dr. Fields also collaborated to research and write Julia's Daughters, published in 1980, a book highlighting the contributions of women in Miami's history.

She was also assigned to the HistoryMiami Museum, where she conducted research and developed curriculum. In February 1976, she curated Miami-Dade County's first Black history exhibit, which was showcased at the museum.

Her vision came to fruition in 1977 when she, as a volunteer, founded The Black Archives, History & Research Foundation of South Florida. She brought together community members to establish the organization as an independent institution with a clear mission: to preserve the documents, photographs, and oral histories that reflect the struggles and triumphs of Black Miami. Under her leadership, The Black Archives became a cornerstone of Miami's historical preservation, ensuring that the rich cultural contributions of Black Miami would not be overlooked.

Beyond collecting artifacts and documents, Dr. Fields' work in historic preservation has greatly influenced the city's landscape. She led the restoration of the Lyric Theater, revitalizing a space that once served as the heartbeat of Black Miami's cultural scene. Additionally, she spearheaded the creation of the Overtown Black Heritage Trail and Overtown Main Street, and worked tirelessly to ensure that Overtown's historic sites received national recognition and protection.

Now, as the 2024-2025 Creative Futures Fellow at the University of Miami's Center for Global Black Studies, Dr. Fields continues her commitment to the work she began decades ago. Her life's mission is deeply personal—intertwined with her family's extraordinary legacy and the broader history of Black Miami, a narrative of resilience, achievement, and the transformative power of preservation in shaping the future.

Even with a lifetime of achievements, Dr. Fields believes her greatest legacy is her family. Her husband, Samuel Black, and her daughters—Katherine, a New York attorney, and her husband, Marcus Marsh; and Edna, a history professor at Carnegie Mellon University and the 2025 Lincoln Prize Laureate—continue the tradition of advocacy and scholarship. Her grandchildren represent the next generation of changemakers.

IN MEMORIAM

Gov. Bob Graham



LEADERSHIP AWARD



Gov. Bob Graham served as the 38th governor of Florida from 1979 to 1987.

A Life of Service and Impact

In 1954, the *Miami Herald* named 16-year-old Daniel Robert “Bob” Graham, then a junior at Miami Senior High School, the City’s “Best All ‘Round Teenage Boy.” Nominated by a classmate, he was recognized not only for his academic excellence and entrepreneurial spirit—having already raised a herd of 20 Angus cattle—but also for his “humbleness of spirit” and his innate desire to serve his country. The honor came with a modest \$7.50 prize, a sum dwarfed by the immeasurable impact he would later have on Florida and the nation. Even as he rose from the dusty fields of his father’s cattle ranch to the halls of the U.S. Senate, that same humility remained his defining trait.

Graham’s story was shaped by his father’s legacy, Ernest “Cap” Graham, a pioneering figure who arrived in Miami in 1920 to manage the Pennsylvania Sugar Company before becoming a leader in Florida’s cattle and dairy industries. As a visionary businessman and dedicated public servant, Cap Graham later served in the Florida Senate, where he championed agricultural development and effective governance. From a young age, Bob Graham absorbed these lessons—not only in leadership but also in the steadfast belief that serving one’s community is both a privilege and a duty.

Born in Coral Gables in 1936, Graham was raised in a household where hard work was expected and public service was a fundamental part of daily life. His education at Miami Senior High School, followed by studies at the University of Florida and Harvard Law School, sharpened his intellect, but it was his hands-on approach to learning—reflecting his father’s work ethic—that shaped his career. This philosophy culminated in his renowned “Workdays” initiative, during which he took part in over 400 everyday jobs, from farming and teaching to construction and dishwashing. This commitment to understanding the lives of ordinary Floridians was not merely political theater; it embodied the values instilled in him on the family farm.



Gov. Graham established the Save Our Everglades program on August 3rd, 1983.

Elected as Florida's 38th governor in 1978, Graham's leadership was marked by transformational policies in education, environmental conservation, and economic growth. Under his administration, the state created over a million new jobs, and for the first time in history, Floridians' per capita income exceeded the national average. His signature Save the Everglades initiative became one of the most ambitious environmental preservation efforts in U.S. history, ensuring that future generations would inherit the same natural beauty he cherished as a boy.

In 1986, Graham transitioned to the U.S. Senate, where he maintained his steadfast commitment to public service for nearly two decades. As chair of the Senate Intelligence Committee, he led investigations into national security threats, opposed the Iraq War on principle, and co-authored crucial reports on the 9/11 attacks and the BP Deepwater Horizon oil spill. Even after leaving public office in 2005, Graham remained a catalyst for civic engagement—writing books, founding the Bob Graham Center for Public Service at the University of Florida, and mentoring the next generation of leaders.

Yet, perhaps Graham's most enduring legacy is his family's ongoing dedication to public service. His wife, Adele Khoury Graham, supported him throughout his career, spearheading education and community outreach initiatives. Their oldest daughter, Gwen Graham, has continued his legacy by serving in Congress representing Florida's Second Congressional District, and most recently as Assistant Secretary for the Office of Legislation and Congressional Affairs at the U.S. Department of Education. Another daughter, Arva Suzanne Graham Gibson, serves on the Executive Board of the Miami Downtown Development Authority where she is the Chair of the Arts, Culture and Entertainment Committee. She has also been selected as a member of the 2025 class of the Orange Bowl Committee, carrying on her dad's passion, commitment, and service to South Florida.

Bob Graham's life was a bridge between generations, linking his father's pioneering spirit with Florida's future. Through hard work, humility, and an unshakable belief in service, he left an enduring mark on the state and the nation—one that continues to shape Florida's future today.

Thank you

S P O N S O R S

Protector Level – \$10,000

- Abess Family
- Bermont Gold
- Florida Power & Light
- Greenberg Traurig
- The Jorge M. Pérez Family Foundation/
Related Philanthropic Foundation

Conservator Level – \$5,000

- Arva Suzanne Graham Gibson
and Tom Gibson
- AT&T
- Graham Companies
- Iris Guzman Kolaya and Christina Cuervo
- Shubin Law
- Rudy Hernandez and Natalia Crujeiras

I C O N A W A R D S C O M M I T T E E

Leighton Brown
Christina Cuervo
Mark Grafton
Iris Guzman Kolaya
Elissa Vanaver

Biographies for the honorees researched
and written by Iris Guzman Kolaya.



Downtown Miami from Biscayne Bay, from approximately SE 2nd St. to NE 7th St. Several buildings are under construction, including the Everglades Hotel (which opened in 1926); the Miami News Tower has been completed (1926).



HistoryMiami Museum

History Icon Awards

2025



101 West Flagler Street, Miami, FL 33130 • 305-375-1492

www.historymiami.org      #HistoryMiami