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Raising the bar in Hallandale Beach

By Larry Blustein
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As dozens filed into the recreation center at Peter Bluesten Park in Hallandale Beach on Saturday for the ground-breaking of a new facility, there was indeed excitement in the air.

From local leaders such as City Manager Roger Carlton, Mayor Joy Cooper and Commissioner Michele Lazarow – to Police Chief Quiñones and Parks and Recreation Director Cathie Schantz – this was the perfect setting to usher in a very progressive and bright future.

But before the first dirt is truly turned over on this impressive and state-of-the-art facility, it may be wise to understand who Peter Bluesten was – and what he represented.

As much as a Luther Halland and so many other families helped to shape and mold Hallandale through the decades, it was Bluesten who ushered in a new generation of residents and businesses.

His need to help the community grow and flourish through his real estate endeavors, drew positive attention to a city that had followed the lead of Gulfstream Park and Mardi Gras Racing & Casino (formerly Hollywood Dog Track).

But beyond his need to promote the community to other areas – what Bluesten saw was a coastal city that was tougher than others. They had residents and merchants who wanted this community to grow, and if it meant making sacrifices, they would do it.

When he started a one page publication back in the early 1960's, it was an opening for he and his family to do what they did so well at – support and showcase the community – while making an impact by being a part of just about everything.

The advertising base and popularity of his publication had grown – mainly because of Bluesten. The things that he did for people, businesses and organizations was never done before – and will be hard to duplicate.

"Peter was the genuine article who took care of everyone but himself," said South Florida Sun Times President Craig Farquhar. "He used to take food and gift baskets to residents and businesses to say thank you for advertising with us and for being loyal to the community."

Bluesten was also involved in every club and a part of every board – from Sunny Isles to Hollywood – and everywhere in between.

Part of those who were invited to Saturday's ceremony were the daughter of Bluesten, Norma Deyo, and his grandchild Jeann Spano.

"My dad was indeed a special man that so many generations have missed out on," Deyo said. "He had a routine every morning he went to the office. His bagel deliveries to our advertisers and those who he knew didn't have much, was the highlight of his day."

COLOR BARRIER WAS NO MATCH

How ironic that the former "City Park" would have Peter Bluesten's name on it. This is the man who broke down racial barriers in the community – right at the very site that will take on a progressive expansion.

Back in the early 1960's, racial tension was rampant – with clashes throughout South Florida. The hate was real, but Bluesten grew up in New Jersey and Massachusetts, would ignore locals and became Public Enemy No. 1 – when he extended an invitation to the Braves Minor League team to play an exhibition game right there in Hallandale.

Among the minor leaguers on that team traveling from West Palm Beach, were several blacks, including the brother of the great Jackie Robinson.

"Talk about crazy, Peter took so much heat for that," said former Vice Mayor Bill Julian. "Back then, this was a community that was one community, and a lot of those that lived on the 'other side of the tracks' didn't approve of that."

That day not only made those in Hallandale understand that if you are going to hate, you are not welcome, but it opened eyes. A major league organization recognized this small city, things can really start to take off.

As Gulfstream and other areas started to attract more businesses, which in turn brought in more families, it was Bluesten who developed all sports – including baseball and football.



"When we were growing up, it was always Peter who would drive up in his car and always had something for all of us," KJ Moore said. "He had that Chevy wagon with his real estate company on the side."

"Great memories. If people of today really wanted to know why this park is named after him, there's a pretty good idea that he did for Hallandale through the years made this community exactly what it is today, Moore added."

THE NEW PETER BLUESTEN PARK

When completed in 2019, the all new Bluesten Park will be one of the best you will find. One of the features of this project will be a new community recreation building that will house an indoor basketball court, weight rooms, meeting rooms, administrative offices, restrooms, and lockers and bathing facilities.

In addition, there will be a family recreational /community pool, tennis courts, basketball courts, multi-purpose sports field, baseball diamonds, racquet ball courts, walking/exercise trails, exercise stations, playgrounds and field house/restrooms.

Also, the partnership between the YMCA and Peter Bluesten Park is going to be special as well. Part of the ceremony on Saturday included President/CEO Sheryl Woods, who spoke about the tie with the facility.

"We are very excited about the opportunity to join such a first class City and facility that will be one of the best you will find," Carrillo said. "We will have the chance to introduce so many of our programs here - for children and adults."

Hallandale Beach was also represented by City Attorney Jennifer Merino, Project Manager Gregg Harris as well as longtime PA Coordinator Jonathan Carrillo and his staff.

PAL is a national organization that police departments in different cities across the country implement to foster a greater connection between law enforcement, cities, and communities through recreational sports.

PAL runs throughout the year, offering two to three sports children can choose from each month, such as baseball, basketball, cheerleading, football, soccer, and track and field. The teams travel throughout South Florida for games and are always accompanied by Hallandale Beach Police officers.

"We are looking forward to this partnership with the YMCA and to use this impressive facility," Carrillo said. "This is tremendous for every resident of this community as well."



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