

# Community Background Report

## Westchester

### County

Miami-Dade

### Boundaries

North: S.W. 8th Street

South: S.W. 40th Street

West: S.W. 117th Avenue

East: Palmetto Expressway

### Community Type

Neighborhood

### History

Westchester, located southwest of the greater Miami area, was at the turn of the twentieth century part of Miami-Dade County's last frontier. When Henry Flagler extended the Florida East Coast Railway south from Miami to Homestead, it marked the beginning of the present Westchester (Jensen & Wiggins, 2001). Westchester's land had not previously been developed under the Homestead Act of 1862 because it was determined ineligible. The land was mainly low-lying prairie and was subject to seasonal rains, with flooding. This was also the case in much of what is now Greater Miami until reclamation of swamp lands began in the early 1900s under the provisions of Federal Legislation (Jensen & Wiggins, 2001).

Construction of drainage canals, which began along the southwest coast of Florida in 1907, soon turned previously uninhabitable land into prime real estate. By the early 1920s, the land was dry and ripe for development (Downes, 2006). By the end of World War II Westchester was in building boom brought on by soldiers returning home and buying houses using U.S. Veteran's Administration guaranteed low-interest financing (Jensen & Wiggins, 2001). Today, Westchester is a fully built area of well-kept homes. It is a convenient location to live in due to its proximity to expressways, hospitals, the area's largest university and the airport. The near future of Westchester focuses on governmental assistance from the County in resolving drainage issues associated with rainfall and encouraging a more cohesive community to comply with local area legislation concerning the appearance of homes (Zayas, 2004).

## Community Dynamics

The core of Westchester is the 5,162 acres between the two western-most major highways and between sw 40 street and sw 8 street. In the 1990s, this relatively affluent neighborhood was positioned to incorporate as were other neighborhoods which felt they were paying more in taxes than they were receiving in services. The 1996 Board of County Commissioners created Community Council 10, a quasi-governmental entity which provided a structure to address local zoning issues and to provide training for the expertise necessary to future municipalities (Moreno, 2006). The boundaries of Community Council 10 were drawn to limit the number of Councils within the county, and as such, were inclusive of several then existing neighborhoods. Although the Census Bureau recognized places such as Westchester and Coral Terrace, Community Council boundaries were more inclusive and at times exclusively drawn according to the unincorporated area within County Commission Districts. The current boundaries of the Council include Westchester, Coral Terrace and several other neighborhoods, diluting the sense of community in each of these neighborhoods. Though Westchester encompasses the homes of more than 30,000 people, there are rarely more than 15 people at an association meeting (Zayas 2004). One of the association's problems in the past has been trying to unite residents with different ethnic backgrounds and lifestyles.

Westchester is one of the more economically prosperous neighborhoods in unincorporated Miami-Dade County, posting higher average and per capita incomes, and lower poverty rates than the greater area. Westchester has seen an economic resurgence with the continuing growth of the nearby Florida International University which is a major employer within the County and draws educated professionals to the area. The average age of Westchester's residents, 43 years, is higher than that of the County, 35.6 years, with a larger adult and elderly population than the county average. Westchester has a smaller portion of its population under the age of five than the rest of the county, but possesses many private and public schools, especially for a neighborhood that size, there were 9,764 households out of which 28.0% had children under the age of 18 living with them. As of the census of 2000, there were 30,271 people, 9,764 households, and 7,947 families residing in Westchester. Westchester's average household and family size, 3.07 and 3.33 persons respectively, is slightly higher than that of the county, 2.84 and 3.35 persons respectively (Census).

The median income for a household in Westchester was \$40,762, and the median income for a family was \$44,863. Males had a median income of \$29,629 versus \$24,235 for females. The per capita income for Westchester was \$17,264. 11.8% of the population and 8.5% of families were below the poverty line. 13.0% of those under the age of 18 and 13.0% of those 65 and older were living below the poverty line.

In 2000, the ethnic makeup of Westchester was 93.78% white, 0.61% African American, 0.04% Native American, 0.51% Asian, 0.00% Pacific Islander, 2.81% from other races, and 2.23% from two or more races. Hispanic groups represented 85.31% of the population (Census 2000).

## Sources

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