

August 11, 2009

Miami Circle Park Groundbreaking



The 2,000 year old Native American site on the banks of the Miami River might finally be getting its due after taxpayers shelled out \$27 million 10 years ago to preserve it. It certainly has been a long time coming, but I just got word that this Friday, August 14th at 5pm, there will be a special groundbreaking ceremony to mark the beginning of construction on the Miami Circle Park project. As reported in the [Miami Herald](#) back in May, the \$750,000 frugal state plan that would create a low-key park around the ancient landmark calls for a paved promenade around the 2.2-acre site at the mouth of the river, a drop-off circle for school buses and cars, modest landscaping and lighting and a few interpretive signs.

Still no definitive answer on what will happen to the circle itself, but speculation is that it will remain invisible for now until funding can be sourced to permanently display one of our city's most significant historical structures. Stones will probably be placed over the circle's protective fill to

mark its exact location.

The Miami Circle at Brickell Point was discovered in 1998 during archaeological excavations ahead of some planned commercial/residential development. The site contains early and late components of the primary village of the Tequesta people, who were one of the first Native North American groups encountered by Juan Ponce de Leon in 1513. The circle itself is comprised of holes and basins carved into the shallow Miami Oolite limestone that lies underneath the topsoil. Artifacts found during excavations were typical of the early Everglades inhabitant and included sand-tempered ceramics and shards, as well as bone and shell tools. Exotic items, like basaltic stone, galena, pumice, and chipped stone artifacts, were also recovered. Research also suggests that the site supports the footprint of some larger pre-historic structure, but further investigation is needed.

The site certainly has seen its fair share of development over the years – everything from the early frontier home of Mary and William Brickell to a 1950's apartment complex. However, in January 2008, the Historical Museum of Southern Florida was awarded a 44-year sublease on the property by Florida's Department of State for management of the Miami Circle. By January of 2009, the Miami Circle was designated Florida's 41st National Historic Landmark by the U.S. Department of the Interior.

Fast forward to today and while the current park plan is not perfect and there are a lot of questions still to be answered - it's certainly a step in the right direction towards fulfilling the Miami Downtown Development Authority's (DDA) vision of building a vibrant, pedestrian friendly waterfront. The way the land sits today as a fenced off vacant lot does not serve anyone's best interests, let alone share the historical significance of this piece of land. The money may not be there for a Smithsonian-style exhibition, but if we can open the space to public while preserving the integrity of the site for Native Americans and visitors alike all while increasing green space in Brickell – then I'm all for it.

A sample Phase I rendering of what the park will look like is below.

