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FINAL EDITION

SANCTUARY AT SEA



CHARLES TRAINOR JR./MIAMI HERALD STAFF

READY TO DEVELOP: A bridge connects North Island to Aventura, after a quick trip through the already inhabited South Island.

If you hate your neighbors — hate all neighbors, in fact — here's a rare chance to purchase a private island in North Miami-Dade. Warning: It's not cheap.

BY DONNA GEHRKE-WHITE
Special to The Miami Herald

You know what they say about waterfront land. The same thing they say about real estate in general: Snap it up while you can, because they aren't making any more of it.

So here's the deal: You can now buy your very own eight-acre piece of land skirted on all sides by water but linked to the Aventura mainland by bridge.

Price tag? \$49.5 million. A lot of money, yes, but for the clients Gary Cohen has in mind, a "drop in the bucket."

Cohen represents the Cohen Family Trust, formed by his father, Norman, who came south from New York to buy property in the 1960s.

It is not quite true, incidentally, that they no longer make waterfront property. North Island, as this undeveloped nugget is dubbed, is in fact a man-made island, born in the '50s, along with its sibling South Island, from sediment



CHARLES TRAINOR JR./MIAMI HERALD STAFF

ON THE MARKET: Gary Cohen and his Realtor, Scott Patterson, are hoping to get \$49.5 million for North Island.

dredged from the bottom of Biscayne Bay.

In the past decade, South Island became South Island of Island Estates, a retreat for the rich. It is now the gated, secluded setting for 22 sumptuous single-family homes, each worth multiple millions of dollars.

The family trust was planning to market North Island when the bottom

fell out of South Florida real estate. Although property values are still at or near low ebb, the trust is ready to try again.

To get to North Island, you have to drive through South Island, which may limit the development opportunities for the former. Plop a Trump Tower on North Island and you'll have a steady stream of fancy cars streaming through South Island en route to homes on North Island, an unhappy prospect for privacy-loving South Islanders.

One of North Island's selling points is that it is in deep enough water for the super-rich to dock their yachts, thanks to the dredging that resulted in its creation.

Although it is set just east of the towering development known as Williams Island — Cohen's father once owned that land, too, but sold it to Julius

• TURN TO ISLAND, 2A

TALLAHASSEE

Budget enables bigger classes

■ State lawmakers are poised to ease class-size requirements at the request of cash-strapped school districts, though voters have rejected the idea.

BY PATRICIA MAZZEI
Herald/Times Tallahassee Bureau

TALLAHASSEE — Florida voters last November rejected relaxing constitutionally mandated limits on class sizes. So state lawmakers have taken matters into their own hands.

Tucked in the House and Senate budget plan is a provision tweaking the definition of the educational core curriculum, a move that would reduce by hundreds the number of courses under class-size restrictions.

The change is welcome news for cash-strapped school districts desperate for looser — and less expensive — class-size caps. But it has irked some Democrats and teachers who pushed through the 2002 constitutional amendment for smaller classes.

Steep cuts loom for school districts as both legislative chambers prepare to slash per-student spending and funding for programs outside the classroom. Miami-Dade and Broward

• TURN TO CLASS SIZE, 2A

MiamiHerald.com/florida
Read more on state politics

TALLAHASSEE

Commercial designers show flair for a fight

■ You might expect a battle in Tallahassee over education, taxes or immigration, but the licensing of commercial interior designers has taken center stage in the state capital.

BY JANET ZINK
Herald/Times Tallahassee Bureau

TALLAHASSEE — The young woman stepped to the podium, eager for a chance to address Florida lawmakers.

"I came to this country for two reasons. I came for freedom, and I also came for a dream, a dream which you want to take away from me," said Lilian Perez, of Miami, her voice shaking. "You just don't care. I see your faces."

You might expect such passion to be about education, taxes or immigration.

Her plea? Save interior design. Forget about the tussles between unions and lawmakers, the Legislature and governor, Democrats and Republicans.

The real knock-down, drag-out fight this session is over commercial interior design.

Tears and cheers have punctuated hours of testimony as licensed interior designers warn

• TURN TO DESIGNERS, 2A

LATIN AMERICA

Former gang members try to shed their skin

■ As police pressure mounts on Central American gangs, former members are trying to get rid of tattoos that mark them for life.

BY TIM JOHNSON
McClatchy News Service

SAN SALVADOR — When Santos Guzman sought help from a state program for one-time gang members, there was no mistaking his gang affiliation.

His forehead bore the large tattooed inscription "MS-13 Sur," a unit of the feared Mara Salvatrucha, or MS-13, gang that has tentacles across Central America and the United States. Two tattooed teardrops trickled down his cheek below

his left eye. Huge tattoos on his chest and back gave him an ink sort of body armor. His fingers and legs also sported gang tattoos.

On his sixth visit to a state tattoo removal clinic, Guzman lay face down on a padded exam table. A physician aimed a jet of chilled air at a giant tattoo on Guzman's back, drawing a slight wince on his face. Then with a laser, she traced the outline of the tattoo, gently coaxing the ink out from below the skin.

Guzman wants the 20 or so tattoos on his body to vanish. He gave up the life of a gang-banger long ago but only recently learned that the evi-

• TURN TO TATTOOS, 11A



TIM JOHNSON/MCT

SLOW WORK: A laser operator outlines a tattoo on the back of former gang member Santos Guzman.

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