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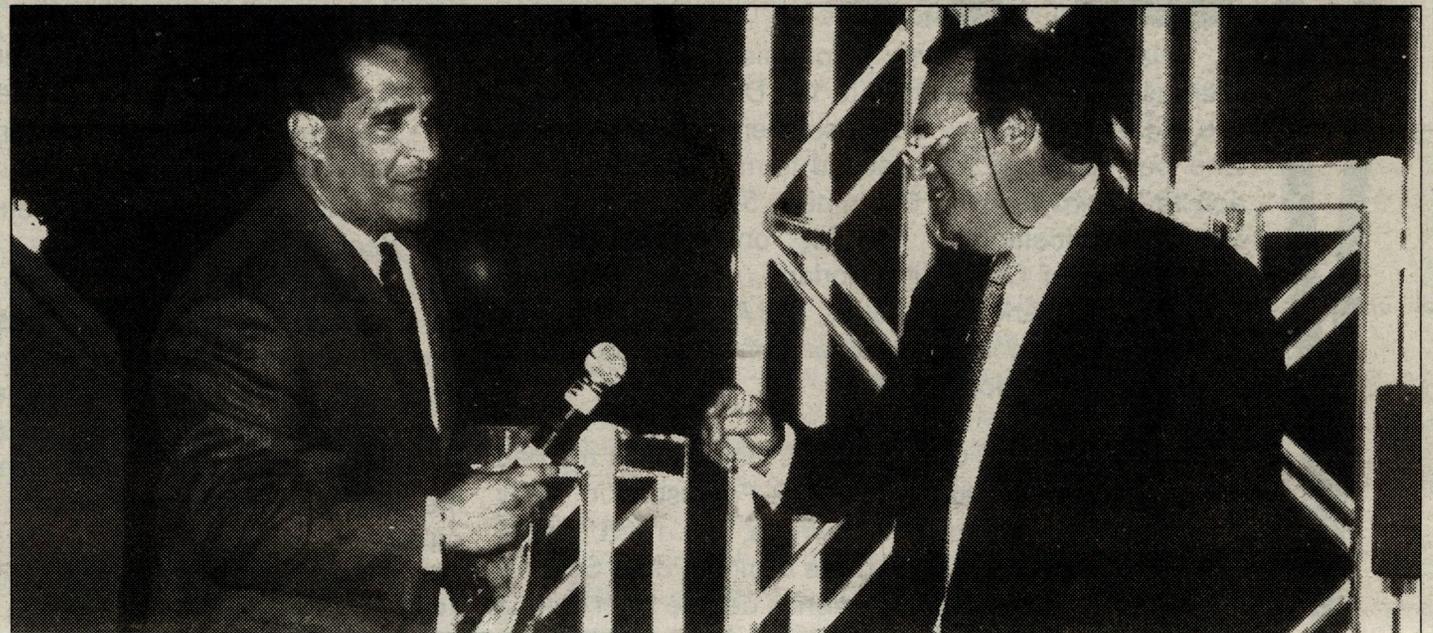
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...s elects new association board

Britto leaves mark on Kendall Village





Miami-Dade County Commissioner Joe A. Martinez (left) receives the microphone from Jeffery Berkowitz, president of Berkowitz Development Group Inc. Martinez holds a letter from Miami-Dade Mayor Alex Penelas supporting the Kendall Village Center.

BY ROBERT MORRISON

Four permanent sculptures by prominent pop artist Romero Britto were unveiled as part of the ushering-in of Kendall Village Center during a cocktail reception hosted by Berkowitz Development Group Inc. on Thursday, Feb. 22.

The event also helped unveil the mixed-use project covering nearly 40 acres at SW 88th Street (N. Kendall Drive) and SW 124th Avenue.

The reception had quite a VIP-strewn attendance, with Miami-Dade County Commission chair Gwen Marigolds, Miami-Dade County Commissioner Joe A. Martinez and automobile dealership mogul Alan Potamkin showing up to mingle.

Potamkin, a partner with developer Jeffrey Berkowitz in the mega auto dealership project originally slated for the site, related some of the story of the long, hard road that after 13 years led to Kendall Village Center as it is today. Many concessions and changes had to be made to the project to accommodate concerned Kendall residents and county commissioners, Potamkin explained. But, the Berkowitz Development Group was willing and eager to work hand-in-hand with the community.

One of the Kendall Village Center's unfinished buildings was used for the reception, as well as to display some of Britto's paintings.

Britto, born in Brazil, considers himself a Miamian. The artist has had extremely successful shows all over the world, with more on the way.

"I'm thrilled to be part of the beginning of this project and I'm proud to show my work to so many people," Britto said.

His works are each unique patchworks of bright colors and thick lines that come together to be cities, animals, nature and people, and can be found in galleries the world over, in restaurants and in the homes of many famous people. Their likenesses even show up on clothes, purses, bow ties and cumber buns. One gallery, Britto Central, is located on Miami Beach at 818 Lincoln Rd.

Kendall Village Center is comprised of 262,500 square feet of retail, restaurant and entertainment space, and 160,000 square feet of office space, 60,000 of which will become a satellite classroom and administrative facility of Nova Southeastern University. There will be 87 townhomes, of which 54 are already under contract.

Much of the development is open, but many more tenants are on the way. Currently open are such restaurants as Bahama Breeze, Starlite Diner and On the Border; child entertainment hotspot Chuck E. Cheese; wellness-oriented L. A. Fitness and the Vitamin Shoppe; shoe stores Famous Footwear and Payless Shoe Source, and a Verizon Wireless.

The remaining tenants all should be open by August. Coming are Old Navy, Gap, Gap Kids, Pier 1, Latin American Café, Gatsby's and Ann Taylor Loft. Regal

Cinemas had executed a lease for a 16-screen megaplex, but the status of that lease is not yet determined.

On an outdoor stage, Jeffery Berkowitz, president of Berkowitz Development Group Inc., thanked the attendees and other contributors to the project.

"West Kendall has never looked this good."

Berkowitz invited Martinez up to the podium, where the commissioner read a letter from Miami-Dade County Mayor Alex Penelas, which said, "I think [Kendall Village Center] is a great addition to the community."

Britto also came to the podium to express his thanks and gratitude before Berkowitz readied the unveiling of the sculptures, which ring a building in the center that will be used for town meetings and other public functions.

Potamkin; his wife, Claudia; Berkowitz's wife, Yolanda; Martinez, and Margolis all helped other guests in the unveiling, grabbing corners of the covers and awaiting the signal from Berkowitz. At that signal, covers fell, flashes flared from cameras to a chorus of "oohs" and "aahs."

The crowd applauded the beautiful lighted sculptures and Berkowitz called them "unique additions that fill my heart with joy."

For information about Nova University's plans at Kendall Village Center, contact Deo Nellis at 954-262-8801. For information about Kendall Village Homes, the residential part of the project, contact Jim Perez at 305-971-3060.