

COMMENTARY

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Why cabbies are ticked off

Men wait. Men fester. They sit on inverted plastic milk crates along the chain-link fence perimeter. And wait.

They steal a little of the scant shade offered by a few scraggy buttonwoods growing along the fence. And wait.

An hour passes. Another hour. They wait.

They sit at the four picnic tables. A few play dominoes, snapping pieces onto the metal table tops. Others shuffle cards and play casino.

The sun bakes down on the staging area where cabs are lined up in long rows, the drivers waiting, and waiting, for a chance to make an airport run. A voice on the radio insists it's 87 degrees in Fort Lauderdale, but the temperature exceeds 200 on this unadorned expanse of black asphalt.

Men wait. Men fester. Cabbies who work the airport can wait one, two, three hours before they're dispatched from a staging area amid the scrubland east of U.S. 1. Once at the airport, it could be another 20 minutes parked at the arrivals concourse.

Time is not money. Not here. Time is a commodity in considerable surplus with little relationship to income. Drivers talk of starting their workday in their leased cabs at 5 a.m., then working to midnight to gross only four or five or six runs out of the airport.

A DICEY JOB

Jean Porter, originally from Haiti, like most of the men here, says they never know if that long wait will bring them a piddling \$10 run to the 17th Street Causeway. And then back to the staging area to begin their wait anew. "It's like Russian roulette."

Between runs, they talk. An ironic offshoot of the unhappy conditions endured by Broward County cabbies is that all this time offers them the opportunity to congregate at the airport staging area and discuss their common plight. They have time, in the long hours between runs, to invent a strategy.

Last week's cabbie protest was planned in this lousy parking lot. The drivers bucked the rules that mandate 50 airport fares go to Yellow Cab, the long-dominant taxi company in Broward County, for every one of the struggling inde-

Uptown downtowns

South Florida suburbs, once known only as bedroom communities, are creating downtown centers of activity for residents to live, work and play in. But planning experts warn that these suburban downtowns must stay close to what the market dictates, and must not try to compete with each other.



1. Miramar

The Town Center is a \$66.5 million vision for a new city hub, residential uses, a performing arts center, a park and a library. The centers will be at Red Road, Hialeah Road and the not yet completed Miramar boulevard extension.

2. Mizner Park in Boca Raton

A mix of boutiques, restaurants, music and art on 30 acres. The architecture combines 1920s Spanish with a contemporary style. This part of town was once neglected, but now is its own community within the city. Mizner Park has four buildings around a central park with fountains and gazebos.

3. Miami Lakes Main Street

Built on the "new town" concept of suburban street design that emphasizes a town center. The Main Street design calls for homes within walking distance of schools, parks, stores and offices. Home to Town Hall, the first two phases cover 90 acres.

4. Weston Town Center

Main Street is surrounded by 35 restaurants and retailers, courtyards, outdoor gardens, fountains and pools. An outdoor complex includes a charming streetscape. The center features a Publix, a bank and a ball tower.



PHOTOS AT TOP: Displaying the model of the planned Miramar city hall first phase at the site of the future Miramar Town Center are, from left, Vice Mayor Gloria Saberman, Mayor Lori Meyers and City Manager Robert Payton.

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PHOTOS BY PATRICK FARRELL, WALTER MICHEL, JOE BERREUS JR., CANDACE WEST AND GRAPHIC BY LYNN DEKORRERS/HERALD-STAFF

THE NEW TOWN CENTERS

Suburbs trying to create hubs

BY NATALIE P. MCNEIL
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Four years ago, Yvette Katsanakis and her husband traded the cosmopolitan life of St. Beach for the more laid-back pace of Miami Lakes.

As a young family, the Katsanakis wanted to live in a community that was a little slower, but still vibrant. They opted for a home within walking distance of Main Street, Miami suburb's "downtown" with its cluster of apartment homes, boutiques, chain store restaurants and movie theater.

"I love it here. It's fabulous," said Katsanakis, mother of an 8- and 7-year-old. "You don't have to drive anywhere. It's like a town where everyone knows everyone."

Miami Lakes' Main Street is the envy of many South Florida cities.

Other municipalities have built or want to build similar versions. Mizner Park in Boca Raton and City Place in West Palm Beach are successful examples of regional activity centers carved out of residential communities.

The Weston Town Center upscale retail center in a city that was literally carved out of the Everglades, opened in 2001.

Leaders in Miramar, Da Pomboke Pines, Sunrise Plantation have expressed interest in following suit.

They are part of a trend called new urbanism, a movement that advocates mixing residential, retail and office use sometimes in the same street — in order to foster a sense of neighborhood and decrease traffic congestion.

It's a new twist on an old theme: a throwback to the downtown, which had a once-

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