On Sunday, July 27, 2008, an 82 year old craftsman style bungalow was moved from 310 SE 11th Avenue in downtown Fort Lauderdale to Middle River Terrace Park. Russell Building Movers, Miami, carefully guided the fragile structure on its journey along Las Olas Boulevard, Federal Highway, NE 15th Avenue and NE 13th Street to its new home at 1379 North Dixie Highway. A tractor pulled a 45-ton “tricycle” consisting of a steel beam platform resting on three dollies. Each dolly had two axles with 8 wheels, one in front and two behind for stability. Several crews removed and replace overhead lines, wires and cables to allow the house to proceed.

Known locally as the “Annie Beck House,” this second escape from demolition is credited to the patience and generosity of current owner Mrs. Diana Heileman. She purchased the choice property near the New River to build a house for her family but could not bring herself to tear it down. The bungalow has become the object of affection for an entire community. Word that Heileman was willing to donate it reached the son of a previous owner.
Shelby Grant Smith III approached the Broward Trust for Historic Preservation which he knew had kept other venerable Lauderdale properties from demolition—the Lauderdale Beach Hotel (now part of Las Olas Beach Club) and the old Escape Hotel (also known as Tiffany House). Hesitant at first because of the doubly daunting task of finding an available site and raising funds to restore it, Trust directors eventually agreed that it was a perfect fit for the non-profit corporation’s stated mission: to preserve significant Broward County architecture. They swallowed hard and decided to accept the gift with all its conditions and financial responsibilities.

The Trust’s yearlong search for a workable site came to the attention of the Middle River Terrace Neighborhood Association. They concluded that a building the residents could share with other non-profit groups for community activities would bring an energetic presence to their new park. After months of discussions, an agreement was reached and the Trust accepted the neighborhood’s invitation to provide a permanent home in the park for the Annie Beck House.

On January 8, 2008, Fort Lauderdale city commissioners approved the relocation.

When brought up to code and restored by the Broward Trust for Historic Preservation under the supervision of the Tamara Peacock Company, the Annie Beck Education Center will serve non-profit conservation and preservation groups such as garden clubs, landscape architects, and birding groups as well as the Middle River Terrace Neighborhood Association and the Broward Trust for Historic Preservation. The Trust will manage activities of the center which will be available to qualifying non-profit groups for special events.

Public hearings are scheduled to re-zone the land parcels as a park district. The house has been recommended for historic designation by the Fort Lauderdale Historic Preservation Board. A vote by the city commission on this recommendation is expected later this year at which time the Annie Beck House will become the first historic house in a Fort Lauderdale park.
BACKGROUND

The Alfred John “Doc” and Annie Beck house is a traditional craftsman bungalow with a small front-facing gable-end porch. Built in 1916 of Dade County pine, it remained at 334 East Las Olas Boulevard until August, 1977 when the property owner, First Broward Federal, decided to build a drive-in bank on the lot. Mrs. Beck, who was then 81, arranged for the house to be moved to the 11th Avenue location where she lived until she passed away in 1985 at age 89.

Doc Beck opened a pharmacy October 6, 1915, on New River Drive and Andrews Avenue. A charter member of the Fort Lauderdale Rotary Club, he was treasurer of St. Andrews Episcopal Church for 28 years, and was vice-president of the Chamber of Commerce and business manager for the Tarpons, the semi-pro baseball team. Doc Beck died in 1962.

Born near Ocala in 1896, Annie Atkinson Beck was co-founder of Fort Lauderdale’s first garden club as well as the Federated Garden Club Circles. She was president of the Fort Lauderdale Woman’s Club and became a nationally accredited flower show judge. She helped establish the garden club’s library, which was named after her, and was one of the founding members of the 1919 Study Club, which is still in existence. After the 1926 hurricane, Mrs. Beck and the garden club led a community-wide effort to re-landscape the devastated town.

She planted a yellow trumpet tree (tabebuia) in her front yard that became a local landmark. Later the city planted yellow “tabs” in a park located on Victoria Park Road in her honor.

The friendship between Doc Beck and another prominent pharmacist, Shelby Grant Smith Sr. (Smith Drug Stores), led Mrs. Beck to sell the bungalow in 1984 to Smith’s son, realtor and photographer Shelby Grant Smith Jr. With a view to selling it himself, Smith immediately made extensive restorations. However, according to the Fort Lauderdale News on January 24, 1985, “His efforts were designed to produce a charming house for sale. But Smith, a realtor, fell in love with the finished product and decided to call it home and studio. His work earned him a bronze plaque as a winner of one of the city’s seventh annual Community Appearance Awards.” The plaque and porch swing can still be seen on the front porch.

THE NEW SITE

Middle River Terrace residents are proud of their weekend-after-weekend of volunteer sweat and toil to clean up roughly four acres of drug-infested houses and heaps of trash and garbage, prior to the city’s acquisition of the land. “In the 1950s and 1960s a rare palm and orchid nursery had been replaced by apartment buildings that had become one of the worst drug problems in the city,” says neighborhood president and former city commissioner Tim Smith. Starting in 1997 and continuing through 1998, Fort Lauderdale city commissioners approved acquisition of several parcels. Construction of a small pavilion and finishing work on the grounds were completed in the summer of 2000.

Comments Broward Trust president Diane Smart, “When the Trust formed in 2002, it had a vision: to help make Broward a county that believes in preserving its historical resources. The gift from Mrs. Heileman, the cooperation of the City of Fort Lauderdale, the hospitality of the neighborhood, the grant approvals from the Broward County Historical Commission and the Florida Department of State, Division of Historical Resources, perfectly illustrate our confidence in this vision.”

The Broward Trust for Historic Preservation is a nonprofit, 501(c)3 corporation dedicated to identifying, preserving, restoring and maintaining the architectural heritage of Broward County.

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