

# Sun-Sentinel

February 1, 2012

## Margaritaville brings excitement and renovations to Hollywood beach

By Tonya Alanez, Sun Sentinel

HOLLYWOOD — It won't break ground until June, yet the heavily anticipated Jimmy Buffett-themed Margaritaville Hollywood Beach Resort is spurring a much needed renaissance along the beach, proponents say.

It will bring revitalizing energy and excitement and jack up property [values](#) along the beach, say those who are riding the wave of Margaritaville excitement.



And in what's been coined the "Margaritaville effect" business owners are increasingly taking advantage of the Community Redevelopment Agency's grant program that helps pay for private property [improvements](#).

"Margaritaville is on their minds," said Manuel Pila, the CRA's communications manager. "They're aware the beach is going through a change and there is going to be an upgrade in the quality level of the retail and the lodgings, and they want to compete. They want to be ready."

The 17-story, 349-room island-themed resort will occupy six acres at Johnson Street on the Broadwalk and across A1A on the Intracoastal Waterway. The \$130 million endeavor will include seven restaurants, numerous bars and retail shops, a spa, pools and a simulated-wave pool.

[Margaritaville](#) will pay more than \$1 million annually in property taxes while generating millions of dollars a year in bed taxes and excise fees. It is predicted that guests annually will spend \$60 million within the resort and nearly \$30 million offsite.

Vinnie Meola, owner of the landmark Ocean's 11 Restaurant about five blocks south of Sheridan Street on A1A, expects to see plenty of Margaritaville overflow business.

"I think it's time Hollywood got out of the dark ages," Meola said. "Some people don't want it to change at all, and that's why it's not doing so well. It's lagging behind other beaches like Fort Lauderdale."

In a project update at Wednesday's City Commission meeting, developer Lon Tabatchnick said he's successfully clearing final permitting and [financing](#) hurdles.

"We're inside the 10-yard line, going in to score," he said outside the meeting.

Revised construction dates set site clearance for June instead of March. Construction will follow in July. And the opening date has been nudged back from March 2014 to August 2014.

"I think it's going to be like a great anchor store," said Debra Case, owner of the nearby Ocean Alley Restaurant and president of the Hollywood Beach Business Association. "It will really kind of complete the emptiness that the central beach maintains right now."

But it's not all paradise. Some Hollywood purists say the project's grand results might be a poor fit and a turn off that ruins the beach's current appeal.

In addition to congestion and parking nightmares, Dori Lynn Neuwirth, owner of Atlantic Sands Beach Suites, is worried that the mammoth resort will be a "turn off" to the guests she now attracts to her nine-unit vacation rental at Hayes Street and Surf Road.

"I'm not concerned that they'll take away my guests. If anything, I'm more concerned that my guests will want to stay further away," Neuwirth said. "It's that tall-building atmosphere that they're trying to get away from when they come to Hollywood."

Bike-rental merchant Leonard Ivler says he senses a push to scrub out the Broadwalk's quaint charm and replace it with an upscale aesthetic.

"I believe there's an effort to really change the whole look and feel of the beach," said Ivler, owner of Sun & Fun Cycles. "The older merchants and longtime businesses don't really fit into that concept. They're trying to make the beach something it's not."

Commissioners regularly gush over the project.

"I think we're going to get a whole new look," Commissioner Patti Asseff said. "I am excited. It's a whole new day for Hollywood. We're pulling our act together, that's how I look at it."

In recent years, the CRA has spent \$14 million transforming the once blighted 2.5-mile Broadwalk with a decorative low-lying beach wall, red-brick pavers, a concrete bike path, new lighting and buried power lines. Side streets have mosaics, sculptures, fountains and landscaping.

And now, thanks to the CRA's grant programs, the beach area is seeing an uptick in private property improvements, Pila said. "We see these sorts of clusters of projects coming on board one after the other," he said. "It's definitely a domino effect."

The CRA will reimburse a property owner up to \$50,000 if they spend \$200,000 or more on exterior improvements. And if located along the Intracoastal Waterway, the property owner is eligible for as much as a \$75,000 reimbursement. Similar grants are available to property owners who [simply](#) want to paint their places or to owners of small lodgings.

Billy's Stone Crab poured nearly \$200,000 into its building on A1A, painting, resurfacing the exterior with brick and adding crown molding. It is eligible for a \$50,000 grant reimbursement for renovations that were completed in October.

"We are the gateway to Hollywood. When you're coming over the Hollywood Boulevard bridge, you look to the left and there we are," General Manager Michael Leffler said. "We wanted to be a little more modern. Visually attractive always [improves](#) the traffic of people coming in. If you look schloppy, people are going to bypass you."

Nearby GG's Waterfront Bar & Grill is about to launch into "a complete facelift" that will include new signs, awnings, lighting, landscaping, stucco work, new docks on the Intracoastal and a resurfaced parking lot.

Because GG's qualified for the \$75,000 grant, it is going to spend more money on renovations than it initially intended.

"It allowed us to spend more," said owner Dan Serafini. "Margaritaville won't be the only new game in town, everybody will have renovated their properties and they will blend right in and that will just support the whole community."