

METRO & STATE

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IN MY OPINION
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Corruption outrage fades with familiarity

Repeat something long enough and even the unacceptable will become commonplace. It's a technique perfected by cult leaders, brain-washers and our local caste of powerful crooks.

They've been lying and stealing for so long that it's hard to summon outrage.

For those still willing to try, the past week offered a bonanza: Emmanuel Nwadike, a consultant to the city of Opa-locka accused of demanding kickbacks; Miami Commissioner Michelle Spence-Jones fined \$500 for being ethically challenged; and two Miami cops arrested on suspicion of protecting drugs and stolen goods. Meanwhile, the city waits to see if Police Chief John Timoney will finally admit that his 14-month "test-ride" of a Lexus was wrong.

Then we have the others: Commissioner Jose "Pepe" Diaz, who took a fishing trip with developers and didn't disclose it; developer Raul Masvidal, arrested last year and accused of fraud and theft; and Spence-Jones, who, despite her slap on the wrist by the ethics commission, still remains in the sights of the Miami-Dade state attorney's office and the county police.

All of them insist they're innocent, a position so popular that it should come with its own bumper sticker: "Welcome to Miami: We deny any wrongdoing."

GUILTY OF GRANDER THEFT

Maybe it's just a misunderstanding. Or maybe we can recover the stolen money in \$500 increments until the year 2805. Either way, the crooks are guilty of a grander theft: the people's goodwill.

Last month, Miami-Dade commissioners voted to override a veto by Mayor Carlos Alvarez that would have halted the expansion of the Urban Development Boundary. Everyone knew the Commission would vote to allow Lowe's to build outside the UDB. The whole thing took just minutes. Protesters didn't even bother to show up.

EDUCATION

Teachers get housing help

■ A loan program hopes to help inner-city teachers buy homes, with one small catch: a five-year commitment.

BY CURTIS MORGAN
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If there is a bright side to South Florida's gloomy housing market, this might be it:

Nora Janvier, a schoolteacher with two kids, can finally afford a decent place of her own to live. That's in no small part because of help — and a \$25,000 loan on very attractive no-interest, no-pay terms — from a new Miami-Dade County program aimed at helping struggling inner-city schools and

the people who work in their classrooms.

Janvier, a special education teacher at Edison Park Elementary, is the first teacher to cash in on a homeownership program being offered to up to 15 teachers in schools in county District 3, which includes Liberty City, Overtown, Little Haiti, Allapattah and other nearby communities.

"It's difficult to keep good teachers in these schools," said County Commissioner Audrey Edmonson at a gathering Saturday outside Janvier's home in a pleasant West Little River neighborhood

•TURN TO HOUSING, 2B



BIG DAY: Nora Janvier, left, receives the 'key' to her home during a celebration ceremony. With her is Greicy Lovin of the Metro-Miami Action Plan Trust. ALEX KOLYER/ FOR THE MIAMI HERALD

SUMMER SAFETY



PHOTOS BY MARICE COHN BAND/MIAMI HERALD STAFF

YOUNG SWIMMER: Gerald Little, owner of Little Swimmers, holds 4-year-old Cristian Hoyos while he learns to swim at Miccosukee Golf & Country Club. Little co-founded Swimmers for families who can't afford swimming lessons.

"We're almost getting to the point where it's getting harder to get people on a bus and go before the Commission," attorney and Hold the Line leader Michael Pizzi told me after the override.

Faced with politicians increasingly viewed as compromised, the savvy are learning to go straight to the courts, as the Vizcayans did to halt development of the massive towers near Mercy Hospital and as Pizzi has threatened to do on the UDB issue.

The consensus seems to be that, in a place where corruption strikes more often than the common cold, elected officials are toxic.

ZONING-CHANGE BATTLE

Friday, I received an impassioned e-mail from a group who has been fighting a zoning change in their West Miami-Dade neighborhood. The neighborhood board as well as the county's Planning and Zoning Department had all recommended denial. But, on Thursday, commissioners put off a final vote on the change, which would have increased the density in the area.

The neighbors had collected signatures and distributed photos "like the fancy lawyers."

But as they made their arguments, they noticed that some of the commissioners weren't even listening. "They were distracted, talking among themselves. It was like a second-grade classroom," one of the neighbors told me.

After this conversation, however, she called me right back, begging not to be quoted by name. The fight isn't over, she explained, and she didn't want to alienate commissioners.

The subject line said it all: "Urgent — Commissioner corruption?"

Outrage has vanished. But hope endures. At least she used a question mark.

POOL: THE SILENT KILLER



LEARNING TO FLOAT: Nandi Okonkwo, 8, learns to float on her back with help from Giovanni Alexander Diez.

■ South Florida has remained a national hot spot for child drownings — accidents that can be prevented.

BY ANA ACLE-MENENDEZ
Special to The Miami Herald

Summer vacation is almost here and with it comes one of the most dangerous seasons for kids — when the number of drownings spikes.

"It's the No. 1 killer of young kids in South Florida," said Miami-Dade Fire Rescue Lt. Eddy Ballester. "We have that dubious distinction of suffering more tragedies than anywhere else in the country."

momsmiami.com

For more, click On the Web and find links to swimming lessons and water-safety classes in South Florida.

Although we are surrounded by the ocean, lakes and canals, most kids drown in backyard swimming pools. And most of those accidents can be prevented by several actions:

- Teaching kids how to swim or at least survive in the water.

- Using pool fences, pool

• **TURN TO DROWNINGS, 2B**

TALLAHASSEE

Infamous Bush-Gore ballots face uncertain future — chads and all

■ All six million-plus ballots cast in the historic 2000 presidential election remain in storage, and the secretary of state is debating whether to move them out.

BY GARY FINEOUT
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TALLAHASSEE — In the final seconds of the new HBO movie *Recount*, a box labeled "Palm Beach County ballots" is shown sitting inside a gigantic warehouse. As the camera pulls slowly back, it reveals row after row of boxes stacked to the ceiling.

While the image is a pure Hollywood creation, the truth is the ballots from the chaotic 2000 presidential



MiamiHerald.com
See photos of the 2000 ballots at Today's Extras

election are still around.

Five years ago, the state of Florida gathered up boxes of ballots from 65 of the 67 counties and stashed them inside the cramped, air-conditioned confines of the state archives in Tallahassee.

After much hand-wringing and debate, state officials decided in 2003 that they should hold onto the more than six million votes cast in the historic election between Al Gore and

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