

## THE HISTORY OF HILLCREST



In 2008, we invited **Herb and Jason Tobin**, son and grandson of Ben Tobin, the developer of the Hillcrest community, to a Hillcrest Leadership Meeting to talk about the history of our Hillcrest Community. Here is what we learned.

In 1945, Ben Tobin Acquired the Hollywood Beach Hotel. In that acquisition (10 acres on the ocean) he acquired the 100 acres Hollywood Beach Country Club in downtown Hollywood as well as the 300 acres of land which is today Hillcrest Condominiums. Twenty-five acres, now Washington Park, they sold to the school board. Ben acquired the property through the U.S. Navy which was used as an officer barracks and training facility during World War II. The original owners were Ed Rosenthal, who also owned the Del Coronado Hotel in San Diego and Edmund Kaufman, one of the brothers who owned Kay Jewelers. In the early 1960's, with the advent of jet travel, Ben Tobin and his son Herb became involved in a process of determining what the best use for the Hillcrest site was.

One idea for the area was a rock pit, which was a very lucrative business in those days. A cemetery was another option. But the Tobin family were always in the people business so the final decision was to build 50+ similar 3-story co-ops that would look like Buildings 3,4,5,6,7,8,9,10,11, called the E-buildings due to their shape.

In the early 60's jet travel cut the commute from New York to Florida from four hours to two. Puerto Rico became the preferred destination so many Florida hotels turned to the convention business. Hillcrest was meant to be a retirement community for people with modest incomes. A lady by the name of Barbara Gompers, who had lived in **Building 21** until she sold her unit to move to an ALF ad many have, was the registered Manager of the Hollywood Beach Hotel. She would travel to country Clubs up north and sell units to groups of members. Prices started at roughly \$6,700 to \$6,900 and hit a high of \$15,000 as demand increased. The Country Club was the center of the community for the new owners. Then as things progressed, it was necessary to build 5 stories to meet demands. The evolution of the buildings in Hillcrest was buyer-driven. The original sales offices were on the site where **Building 15** now stands. 48th Street was the Main entrance. After **Buildings 15, 16 17, and 18** were built, residents indicated they wanted taller buildings with lobbies and security. Building 21 was the first high-rise ever built on a golf course in Florida. Residents would sell their units and move to the new ones. It was common for someone to have owned a 3-story, move to a 5-story and end up in a high-rise. One bedroom units in building 21 were 994 SF including the balcony, 2 bedroom units were 1296 SF including the balcony and for the first time two rows of corners were called "deluxe" and totaled 1499 SF.

Buildings 1 through 21 were co-ops; this is what New Yorkers knew and were comfortable with buying. **Building 22** was the first condo. It even had a name "Madrid" which is still on the sign out front. A new amenity was added to the now six lines of 1499 SF corner units –

saunas! The day they announced it the Surgeon General came out with a statement that saunas were bad for people with heart conditions...! Only three corner units ended up with saunas.

**Buildings 22, 23 and 24** with the exact floor plan layouts had a steady influx of buyers. **Building 25** was the first 12-story building and started out as a 252 unit building. At this time, so many people were buying more than one unit and combining them, it ended up with 235 including large 1634 SF corner units with double balconies. So when **Building 26** was built, the first – and only- three-bedroom units were built totaling a whopping 2444 SF which included 2 balconies, one off the living room and one adjoining the master bedroom.

Many developers built and sold units with the promise of building a Country Club in the future. The Tobin motto was, "The Promises are on the Premises" so the Country Club was always a part of the community although it was a separate entity that sold memberships. At this time, Florida started instituting the toughest condo laws in the country due to developer mistakes. The Tobin family took heed and historically, our buildings that were well maintained from the beginning have withstood the test of time ... and Hurricane Wilma!

Twenty-four buildings comprise Hillcrest. **Buildings 6, 7 and 8** were built first and faced the 18-hole golf course and are adjacent to the first pool recreation complex building. The number 13 was considered unlucky so there was never a Building 13 in the plan; and of course, no unit number thirteen in any of the buildings. The family held the land destined for Buildings 12 and 14 for a long time. **Building 11** was the only building that did not have Golf Course access and 12 and 14 would have flanked Building 11. The Tobin family sold the land and another developer built Washington Palms.

Herb and Jason then started answering the questions that had been submitted by the members of the Leadership group.

**Building 5** wanted to know about the galvanized piping in the building that was starting to corrode. Herb explained that many of the materials as well as the codes were different back in the sixties. Galvanized pipe is what was used; today we have PVC pipes, which were not available then. He added that they used aluminum wiring when building the Hillcrest Country Club because copper was hard to come by due to the Viet Nam war. Many things would have been done very differently today, but the technology at the time was not as advanced.

Another question was why the elevators in Building 23 seem to run more smoothly than the other buildings. When Building 23 was being built, Westinghouse and Otis were on strike. The Tobin's had to go to Canada to buy a package unit, and once the strikes were over, they went back to their original vendors according to plan. Ironically, the elevators in Building 23 turned out to have the longest life and Hillcrest 23 were the last to have to replace their elevators which they are doing this year. Herb pointed out that elevators remain one of the most important pieces of equipment that need on-going preventative maintenance for safety and liability.

Why were **Buildings 15 and 16** built with only one parking space per unit and no guest parking at all? The demographic at the time were retirees and snowbirds with one car. In many cases, the wife did not drive at all. Also, the codes dictated one space per unit. Today, with the changing demographics, the code changed to 1.5 and sometimes 1.75 spaces per unit in the developments being built today.

Why were **Buildings 19 & 20** built as rental apartments? What not many people know is that these were the last two Hillcrest buildings. When 26 and 27 were being built (both 12 story buildings), they were completely sold out pre-construction with over 200 extra paid deposits meant to roll over to 19 and 20!

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However the market changed. During the Carter years, the prime rate rose to 22% and people got out of the market. So, these buildings were owned and managed as rental apartments by the Tobin Family. They sold all the units to an investor in 2002 that started selling the units to individuals, both investors and residents and both buildings are now condos. Each has a Board of Directors that still allows rentals. Herb Tobin stated that he feels he made two mistakes in the development of Hillcrest. One was not forming a Master Association and the second was that the Country Club should have been structured as an equity club with the owners having that amenity as a part of their unit ownership.

Again, the demographics were changing. The original owners were Country Club people; it was part of their lifestyle. However, in the 80's, the new owners moving in were not into it. Many were still working and did not have the time or the funds to join a Club. The Country Club Corporation of America bought it in the early 80's but soon gave it back due to falling membership. Nat Joseph and Sol Jaffe, who played gin rummy with Ben Tobin, were also partners. Nat Joseph was in the fastener business and Ben was fond of saying that anyone who dealt with "nuts and bolt" had to be crazy. Sol Jaffe lived in Building 26 and owned a dozen car dealerships. Charlie Shannon, the President of Building 26 at the time, also ran the Club. They bought Tobin out and later sold the Club to the Japanese for 9 million dollars. In its heyday, the Country Club offered golf, catering, dining and parties. It was not a Recreation Center. That is why the Playdium was built, to fill that need. The Playdium had pool tables, card rooms, saunas, arts & crafts and a library. Later on, the gym was added. Harry Cott, owner of Cott Beverages lived here in Hillcrest. He too moved several times and ended up in **Building 21**. His hobby was building models, which were displayed for years at the Playdium.

Hillcrest continued to change as more active, working people moved in. The Country Club changed hands several more times with continued lack of interest from the newer residents. Herb addressed other construction issues. Concrete balconies are no longer being built today but were the only option at the time. Cement Craft offered pre-cast concrete balconies formed with steel (untreated at that time). So today, 35 years later we have rebar's that have rusted and swollen over the years; especially if the owners used indoor/outdoor carpet on an open balcony that retained moisture when it rained. The solution today is to re-preserve or replace. Thanks to the 40-year safety inspection, buildings have addressed their structural and electrical issues successfully and to date, all Hillcrest buildings 40+ years old are prepared to pass the inspection.

Why was **Building 21** built with mostly convertible corners rather than the deluxe two-bedroom corners? Again, the buyers drove the changes. When the buyers wanted air-conditioned lobbies and 24/7 security, the high-rises – never a part of the original plan – came to pass. **Buildings 22 through 24** all have the deluxe 2-bedroom corners, while **Building 21** only has them in the units ending with numbers 19 and 20. Roman tubs started in **Building 23**. **Building 22** has a heat exchange unit but the rest of the high-rises have A/C towers on the roof. The sizes of the corners increased in **Buildings 25, 26, and 27** when the market was booming. 21 through 24 have 1499 sq. ft. corners while 25 through 27 have 1634 sq ft corners that include double balconies. **Building 25** does not have a sister building but has the largest number of units. **Building 26** was built with the only 3 bedroom units. When the market changed, building 12-story buildings ceased. The last two buildings, **Buildings 19 and 20** have six stories and eight stories respectively.

Some of the original owners in **Building 25** remember when they had golf course views across the street before 26 and 27 were built. Why? Buildings 26 and 27 were always part of the master plan but the fourth tee was in that area until it the Executive Golf Course was reconfigured according to the master plan. Hillcrest was one of the first communities where the utilities were underground; cable, power, sewer, etc.

A member asked about the area between Hillcrest Drive and Pembroke Road on the west side of Park. This property was always

owned by the City of Hollywood but the Tobin's, as well as some of the Leadership members, remembered that it was originally a City Dump and an incinerator then a landfill. Now it is a collection center and fueling center for City vehicles. The land abutting **Building 25** is also owned by the city and Hillcresters definitely need to stay informed about future plans. The lesson to be learned here is that Hillcrest has always been subject to drastic changes based on the market of the day. Today is no different. We lost the Golf Course, which was sad, even to those of us who don't play.

We have all in one way or another gotten enjoyment out of living in a golf community. The first plan, back in 2009, was to build a 13-story twin condo on the land where the original Country Club sat and town homes across the street. We decided we wanted upscale homes and town homes rather than another high rise building that would be marketed to renters. When the covenant was lifted on the 18-hole golf course, the current plan went into effect with 645 homes/townhomes. Hillcrest is zoned for 300 units and we have 2,355 condos so 645 was the limit of the number of residences that could be built.

Usable park space with walking trails, lakes, tennis courts and a community center were all part of the plan. From Baby Boomers to Millennials, beautiful surroundings that lend themselves to exercise and activity are desirable assets. We have a group of new neighbors who complement the eclectic mix of retirees, young professionals and couples starting families as well as our well-to-do snowbirds.



Part of what has happened over the past few years that has nothing to do with the Parkview project is the addition of a Charter School called Championship Academy on the site that used to be the Playdium. Dr. Frank Gaines is the new principal and he is determined to make Championship Academy an A rated school. In future issues of Inside Hillcrest, we hope to have a page written by the Academy students to keep us updated on how things are going in their world since they are part of our neighborhood.



In one issue we interviewed three Parkview families and introduce them to you in Inside Hillcrest. We look forward to having a Parkview page included in Inside Hillcrest also. Our Hillcrest family has grown over the years and our main goal is the same, to have a beautiful, safe, and happy place to live. As Mario Puzo said, "The strength of a family like the strength of an army, lies in its loyalty to each other."

**Welcome to Hillcrest – the Hidden Jewel in Hollywood!**  
TO BE CONTINUED...!