

The Man Behind Midtown Boca

Here's the vision for transforming central Boca Raton

Written by GARY GREENBERG

Angelo Bianco has a lot on his plate these days. As managing partner of development juggernaut Crocker Partners, he's tasked with coordinating the extreme makeover of a 300-acre expanse east

of the Town Center mall at Boca. The goal of the "Midtown Boca" project is to transform a commercial zone into a mixed-use community, where people can live, work, shop, dine and play without ever having to get into their cars.

"We have an opportunity to reimagine and reinvigorate this area," says Bianco. "In essence, we're creating a village within the city of Boca Raton that has modern-day conveniences but is also a throwback to the days of walkable communities before the advent of automobiles."

To accomplish this goal, the 49-year-old father of three has to deal with city officials, fellow developers, architects, traffic engineers, various legal and zoning consultants, and others, including a public that seems increasingly wary of any new development in the rapidly growing city.

"You have to be a master of all trades, or at least competent in them," Bianco says about his job. "It's important to define everyone's role and to guide them. I'm like a quarterback. I call

people can congregate amidst trendy eateries, boutiques and entertainment venues, including an upscale bowling alley, high-end cinema and innovative "fitness marketplace."

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the plays, but I need a really strong team to help execute them."

The area—roughly bordered by the mall to the west, I-95 to the east, Glades Road to the north and Verde Trail to the south—is already a hodgepodge of shops, restaurants, offices, hotels and other commercial ventures.

"The missing link is residential," says Bianco. "As more and more people move in, meeting places like Boca Center will become part of their backyards."

Boca Center—once called Crocker Center—was recently reacquired by its namesake, Crocker Partners. Bianco imagines transforming it into something akin to an Italian piazza—an open plaza with a stage and fountain—where

The pedestrian-friendly community will be connected via broad sidewalks, bike trails, a free trolley, on-call golf carts similar to Boca's Downtowner, and designated spots for Uber and other ride-hailing services. Bianco is also working on getting a Midtown Boca Tri-Rail station.

Transportation is vital because plans call for adding between 1,300 and 2,500 condos and rental apartments, a prospect that concerns nearby residents who fear traffic gridlock and other potential problems from a sudden population boom. Bianco says that Crocker Partners tried to be as proactive as possible by engaging the community, an effort that included 16 town hall meetings. >>

Angelo Bianco

» “I’m very proud of how we took a self-initiated outreach program to the community to work with residents,” he says. “We’re the only developers anyone can remember doing this.”

Still, it’s not a done deal. The wheels of redevelopment move slowly, and there remains some grassroots opposition to the project.

“The biggest challenge has been working with the city to establish updated zoning regulations and guidelines for the area,” says Bianco. “It’s challenging, but everything is moving along.”

If all goes well, ground-breaking for the redevelopment will happen by the beginning of 2019. The build-out is expected to take 10 years

at a cost of about \$1 billion. It’s a big job, but Bianco has experience with cityscape-altering projects.

A former New York City real estate attorney, he was involved in the redevelopment of Rockefeller Center. Bianco moved to Florida for another job that “didn’t work out,” then hooked up with local legend Tom

Crocker, who built Boca’s Mizner Park.

“Tom’s very bright and daring,” says Bianco. “He’s a pioneer in mixed-use development, and he produces world-class projects. We first met for lunch at Max’s Grill, and I thought, ‘This guy’s fantastic. I want to work for him.’ So I did. It was the best business decision I ever made.”

Bobcat Strong

Boca High still makes Boca proud

Written by **GARY GREENBERG**

Stagnant budgets, low teacher pay, endless batteries of standardized tests, crumbling infrastructure and competition from charter schools

have staggered public school systems across the nation. But with the strength, ingenuity and adaptiveness of its mascot the bobcat, Boca Raton Com-

munity High School continues to flourish in difficult times.

“Our success comes from the culture of the school,” declares Principal Susie King. “We push students to challenge themselves. We like to get them outside their comfort zone, because that’s where the real learning takes place.”

Boca High has been an A-rated school for 13 consecutive years, and nearly 80 percent of its students pursue some form of higher education. Still, this year King introduced a college-bound program called Advancement Via Individual Determination (AVID) to get those numbers even higher.

The school features a highly regarded STEM (science, technology, engineering and math)

magnet program as well as a variety of advanced placement and college-level courses. It also offers training in trades and special education classes.

“We have a wide range of students with different needs, so our challenge is to determine how to meet those needs,” says King, the school’s former assistant principal who took over the helm last year.

Of course, a school is only as good as its teachers, and King credits Boca High’s faculty for its ongoing success.

“We have dynamic teachers who are well-spoken, outgoing and have that something extra that brings out the best in their students,” she says. “We’re like one big Bobcat family, and we want everyone to fit in.”



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— Susie King



Principal Susie King

AARON BRISTOL