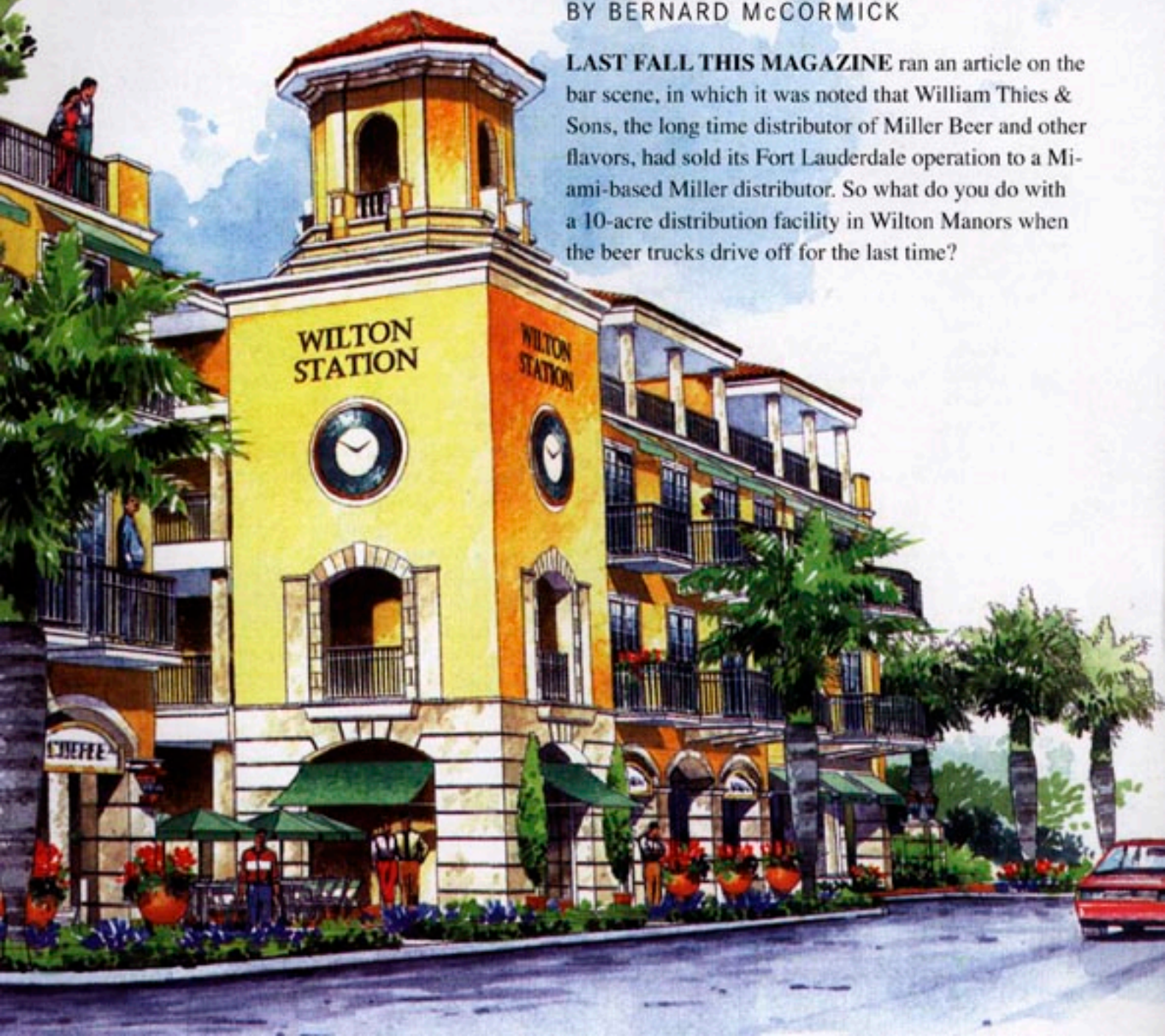


Wilton Station

BY BERNARD McCORMICK

LAST FALL THIS MAGAZINE ran an article on the bar scene, in which it was noted that William Thies & Sons, the long time distributor of Miller Beer and other flavors, had sold its Fort Lauderdale operation to a Miami-based Miller distributor. So what do you do with a 10-acre distribution facility in Wilton Manors when the beer trucks drive off for the last time?



WILTON STATION

How about a 10-acre real estate development called Wilton Station? On paper, the 272-residential/commercial complex is one of Broward County's most interesting redevelopment projects. Located near the five points intersection of Wilton Manors, hard by the FEC railroad, it appears perfectly placed to fill a need in a community that has become one of South Florida's— and the country's— most conspicuous gay municipalities. An estimated 40 percent of Wilton Manors' residents are gay, and the city has a gay majority on its council. Wilton Drive, one of the five roads that meet at five points, is filled with night spots for the homosexual community and many gay-owned businesses.

Among the principals in Wilton Station, not surprisingly, is William Thies, III, a member of the family who has owned the land for years. William Thies and his brother Jim are also in the bar business. They took over the beer distributorship from their father, William Thies, Jr., who in turn succeeded his father, who bought the business in the 1960s. Thies is joined in Wilton Station by Dr. George Galluzzo, a dentist and longtime friend. Galluzzo has been involved in real estate almost as long as he has been in dentistry, which is 14 years. The team also redeveloped Gulfstream Condominiums of Las Olas, a condominium along the Himmarshee Canal in downtown Fort Lauderdale. Both are directors of Gulfstream Media Group, publisher of *Gold Coast Magazine*.

The other members of the development group are Jim E. Ellis, an experienced developer and former Blockbuster executive; Thomas Blouth, an attorney and CPA; and John Custer, a retired contractor. The operation, which has been highly praised by the community, appears to be first class all the way. Architect Vernon Pierce is himself a Wilton Manors resident. The Galleria Collection, headed by Paul McRae, is handling sales and Stiles Corporation is the general contractor.

Former Wilton Manors Mayor Jim Storek has called Wilton Station "an amazing New Urbanism project." Wilton Manors government officials tend to agree.

"We went through the city, county and state approval process, without a single vote against us, and that's unprecedented," said Dr. Galluzzo.



(Top) Idyllic walkways make this place a home. (Above) Incorporating water is a must in Fort Lauderdale.

closely with Wilton Manors Main Street, the nonprofit corporation creating a vision for Wilton Drive on a traditional small-town, pedestrian-friendly center.

"We wanted to design a village to complement Wilton Manors, not overtake it," said Hal Miksch, executive director of the organization. In that sense, Wilton Station might be called a village within a village. The plans look more like what one would expect to find on Las Olas Boulevard. The gated, residential section will consist of townhomes, lofts, tower suites and multilevel brownstones. There will be 58 garages, 272 air-conditioned storage units and 16 poolside cabanas. At the heart of the project is Club W.S.A. recreation center with a resort-style swimming pool, ringed by cabanas, a rock waterfall and two spas. The developers are taking advantage of a section of the North Fork of the Middle River at the rear (north end) of the project. There will be a 300-foot boardwalk offering opportunity for small boating.

Separate from the residences, and facing 26th Street, will be 18,000 square feet of commercial frontage.

The project appears so focused on its market— with an emphasis on exercise and pet-friendly amenities shown to be popular with gay buyers— that it received an unusual



Wilton Station will not be a staid development, but will be alive with accents and architectural flourishes. It will be a bustling hub designed for a very active life, those involved said.

at the gay community.

Obviously aware of the appeal of Wilton Station to the gay community (response from a gay publication has been greater than mainstream ads), the developers are nonetheless marketing to a general audience as well. They think the location warrants that. It is directly across the street from the very popular Old Florida Seafood House, and they hope the location by the FEC tracks might someday become a huge advantage. The FEC is openly campaigning to become part of Tri-Rail, which makes all the sense in the world because that track is far more useful as a commuter line than the present route on the CSX along Interstate 95. When Tri-Rail was launched in the late 1980s, the FEC wanted no part of passenger trains. The railroad has since been sold, however, and the new management is selling and developing its vast real estate

holdings along the route. It sees a commuter service as a catalyst for developing its property, particularly in the downtowns along the route. There has even been thought given to linking the present Tri-Rail route to the FEC in Broward County in order to serve the business districts of Fort Lauderdale, Hollywood and Miami. The present CSX route takes Tri-Rail west in Dade County to a terminus near the Miami International Airport, far from the business core of the city. As the name Wilton Station suggests, any future stop near the new development would make it one of the more ideally situated residential locations in Broward County.

Moreover, a station near Wilton Station would surely have an effect on Wilton Manors' future, transforming a small but interesting place into a transportation hub, with all the ancillary redevelopment not far behind.