

# WILTON MANORS

## ISLAND IN THE STORM

**Text** John O'Connor **Research** David Raterman

Outsiders have suddenly discovered its friendly, diverse neighborhoods. Tired houses have been done over to the nines, many by gay and lesbian buyers increasingly attracted to the city. Now, with increased values, developers are cleaning up less attractive parts of town... *and cleaning up in the process.*

Wilton Manors.... The name conjurs up images of a sleepy conservative bedroom suburb...nothing could be further from the truth. Through the concerted efforts of its outgoing mayor and council members the Island City

development. Individual companies, groups, commercial and residential developers are suddenly swooping down and seizing opportunity. For some residents it's all too much, for others it can't happen fast enough.

ing the past five years, areas previously in disrepair saw dumpsters full of plaster and wood, dotted with old appliances and outmoded bath fittings. Once the dust settled and the first "fixers" were sold, each neighborhood climbed in value. Old Timers sat in their Florida rooms and marveled at the numbers.

Now a diverse little mecca, the city has a high number of "non-families" at 58 percent. The median age is now down to 40 and there are 128 men for every 100 women. Although no official number exists, locals estimate at least one-third of the residents are gay.



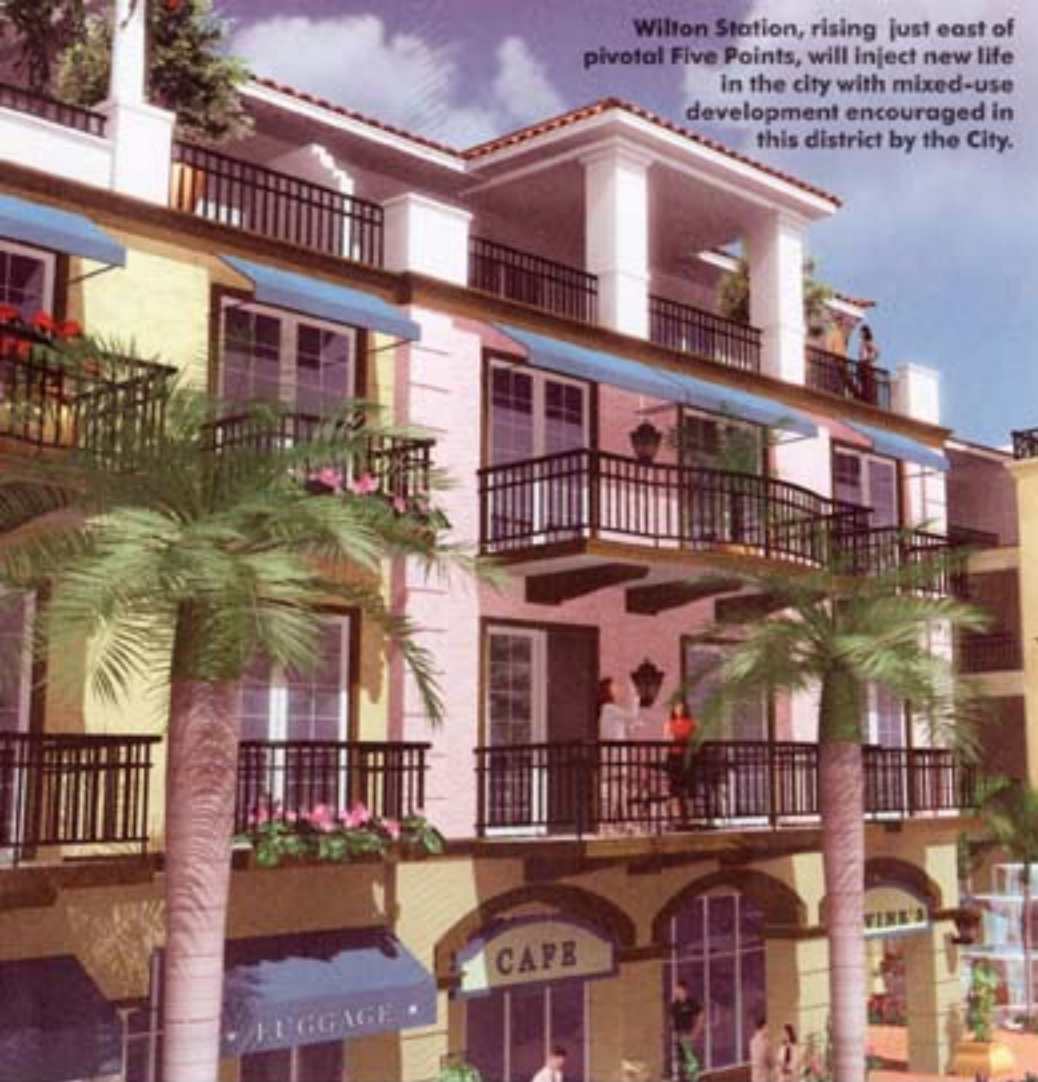
is riding the crest of a wave of development. But wait, unlike other neighborhoods and cities locally, this is development on multiple fronts that Wilton Manors has encouraged, shaped and controlled by being a city of action.

The storm of activity is being felt all over as the city prepares a master plan for future de-

velopment. For the past five years, Wilton Manors has been one of Broward County's top cities for increase in property values. In a similar time frame, areas of Wilton Manors, especially east, have seen a frenzy of renovation activity. The city has unquestionably become a gay destination city as were Palm Springs and Boston's South End a few years back. Dur-

This young and affluent market has not gone unnoticed by developers. **Wilton Station**, a 272-unit \$110 million complex soon to rise just east of Five Points, is sure to be a mixed-use anchor which will inject life into Wilton Drive and east down 26th Street. Placing ads in publications as diverse as *Genre*, *The New York Times*, *The Advocate*, and *HOME Fort*

Wilton Station, rising just east of pivotal Five Points, will inject new life in the city with mixed-use development encouraged in this district by the City.



Lauderdale, virtually guarantees developer Wilton Station, LLC, a cross-over audience from around the nation.

"In my opinion, the city is changing for the better as it becomes more well known," said one local resident, commenting on recent events. "I've had friends move here from Chicago, Boston, New York, California, and they'd all heard what a great place it was from other friends. With all these new people, restaurants are packed," he continued.

Restaurants are just a slice of the retail eager to open in Wilton Manors. Wilton Station plans a full 18,000 square feet of retail and in the works is Wilton Gardens, a new kind of retail center devoted to the garden. More on that later in this article.

According to Hal Miksch, executive director of Wilton Manor Main Street, all this will help establish the retail "spine" of the city along Wilton Drive, and, when complete, will be yet another catalyst to push along other efforts at creating a vibrant city.

"We are about economic viability and sus-

tainability, but we're also creating a cultural destination," says Mr. Miksch. The non-profit's goal is to create an environment in which business, art, and living can enthusiastically coexist and provide mutual nourishment.

"We're looking at higher education and urgent-care facilities, and to bring wireless internet access anywhere in the city."

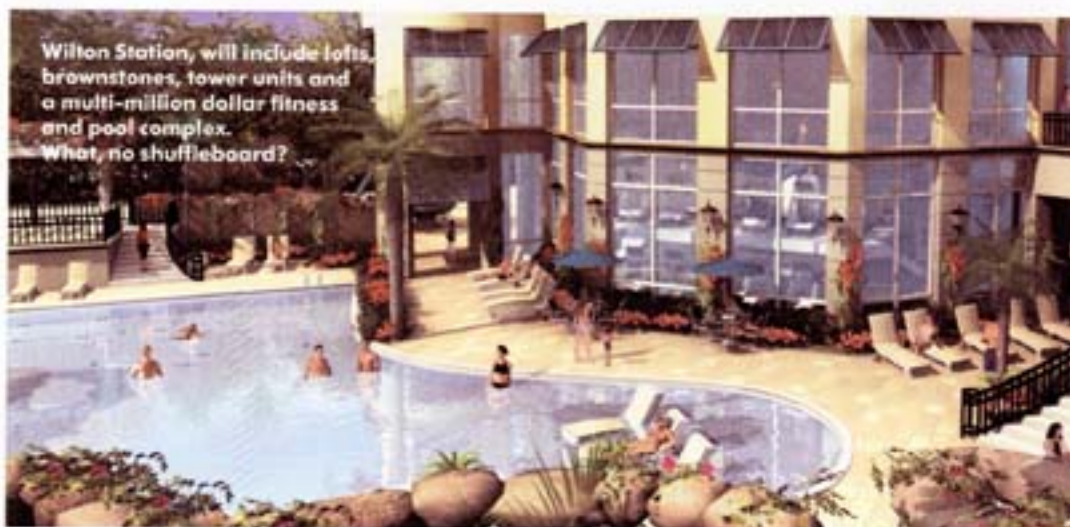
Bingo. A significant investment, Wilton Manors' installation of wireless internet is one sure fire way to grow new business and push the city ahead of the curve. A joint venture between Wilton Manors and Anywhere Internet, work has already started on this project. When completed, anyone with a laptop or PDA can surf the internet while sipping cappuccino at an outside cafe, and check email while waiting in a doctor's office. No longer an info technology fantasy, these expanded "hot spots" will enable business to be transacted wirelessly anywhere in town.

Anywhere Internet is building a Wilton Drive tower that will send high-speed signals to tiny antennas at 300 foot intervals along the

road. Within the next few months, businesses and residences should be enveloped.

"We're going to create a hot zone," says Brian Kidd, president of Anywhere Internet. "There (already) are multiple hot spots, and

"We get a lot of people who want to be mobile within Wilton," Kidd continues. "Businesses that want to be on the cutting edge, hoping to drive economic development, and it certainly drives occupancy. People tend to gravitate toward advanced technology. When



Wilton Station, will include lofts, brownstones, tower units and a multi-million dollar fitness and pool complex. What, no shuffleboard?

being able to roam between those hot spots creates the hot zone." As the Sun-Sentinel reported last month, Wilton Manors could be the first wireless city on the East Coast.

you can work anywhere, your life becomes easier."

Wanting to expand on this renewed energy in and around the city is Tarragon Realty In-