

## When Apathy Reigns

### *The Noble House Grove Isle Saga*

By HEINZ DINTER, PhD

Why don't they want to get involved?  
Why do they turn their back on a precious gift of nature that offers so much tranquility, so much pleasure, so much profound living, and so much economic progress?



Because they chose apathy over caring. That is why. We are focusing on a shame that did not have to linger. It did not have to be. And if those who live there do not rise to the call for action, their paradise may become a body of water with dead fish, void of manatees because they will have fled to a healthier environment, and death of nature may be wreaking the surrounding's doom. The challenged waters of Biscayne Bay lapping at the shores of and shielding Fair Isle in Coconut Grove (Miami), Florida deserve better — and so do those who have been calling the island home for nearly three decades. And it will come to the surface that the house of cards erected on Fair Isle and named Grove Isle by home owners and business entities is not a noble house. And Biscayne Bay may suffer, falling prey to avarice.

Fair Isle is home to three high-rise condominium buildings 510 condo dwellers call home as the Grove Isle Condominium. Sharing the island with the home owners are the Grove Isle Hotel & Spa and the Grove Isle Club, owned and operated by Noble House Hotels & Resorts based in Bellevue, Washington. Yet another commercial establishment operates from Fair Isle: The Grove Isle Marina.

### **Biscayne Bay — Pride of the *Magic City***

Extolling the beauty and identifying the needs of this magnificent body of water hugging Miami is not an effort; it's a labor of love.

Those who live near the shores of Biscayne Bay or are surrounded by its lapping bliss appreciate its beauty and serenity. But are they truly concerned about its future well-being?

The following reminiscence by Robert A. Burr ([rob@quantumleap.net](mailto:rob@quantumleap.net), author of *Rob's Redland Riot*), a member of one of Miami's most prominent pioneer families, adds even more significance to what we must learn about this segment of Miami's and Biscayne Bay's proud history, and what we must protect:

*Early pioneers that arrived before 1900 depended on the bay and local creeks and rivers for transportation. The only road was the old military trail from Ft. Lauderdale to Ft. Dallas on the Miami River. It was not a good road and was prone to flooding often.*

*Little River (Biscayne Blvd at 78th Street) and Arch Creek (the original settlement now known as North Miami) were populated by pioneers in the 1890s. These waterways were critical for moving crops to market in Miami via the bay.*

*I can give you info about the first Bay Causeway and the first man-made bay islands. My great-grandfather was chairman of the Dade County Commission, the*

*leading political figure in the county from 1915 to 1921 and the most vocal proponent of road building.*

## **Jamie Colee Makes Promises**

James (“Jamie”) P. Colee, then Vice President Development, Noble House Hotels & Resorts, addressed a letter dated January 12, 2000 to the members of the Grove Isle Club at the Grove Isle Hotel & Spa.

*Dear Grove Isle Members,*

*I would first like to apologize for the inconvenience that you are experiencing as a result of the hurricane damages to the Tennis Facility at the Grove Isle Club and the delays in repairing the facilities. We are making every effort to take this opportunity to upgrade the entire facility. However, when dealing with insurance companies and local building authorities, things have a tendency to take longer than we would all like. I am sorry for any incorrect information that you may have received from the local management and can assure you that they are giving you the best information that they can and are in no way intentionally trying to misguide you. You are indirectly feeling the same frustrations that we are in settling this insurance claim and the false promises that we are given by building authorities and insurance representatives.*

*On the brighter side, as we continue to negotiate the improvements to the facility, the repairs to the Tennis Facility will result in a top notch, professional, facility that I think all Club Members will be proud of. We are taking the opportunity to improve all of the problem areas that the club has had to endure for some time.*

*In the upcoming week of January 17th, we will be starting the following improvements as well:*

- *Install proper drainage for all courts that will keep the clay run off from draining into the bay and protect the delicate ecosystem that have been affected in the past years by sediment run off from our courts. Tentatively scheduled to start 1/17/99. [Since January 17, 2000 fell on a Monday, 1999 should most probably say 2000.]*

*I hope that this information helps to get you as excited about the upcoming improvements to the Tennis Facility as we are. I understand that this has been a frustrating experience for all of you and understand that the process of change and upgrading a facility is never without its share of difficulties. I can only ask that you remain patient a bit longer and you will not be disappointed. In the upcoming weeks, you will begin to see all of the changes that we have all been waiting eagerly to take place. I hope that seeing actual construction in progress will help to calm the frustrations that you have had and excite the Club Members about the future of the Tennis Club Facilities. I think that when we are completed, we will have one of the finest tennis facilities in South Florida.*

*Please feel free to give me a call any-time to discuss this or any other matter pertaining to the property improvements at Grove Isle.*

*Sincerely, (signed) Jamie Colee, V.P. Development, Noble House Hotels and Resorts*

In addition to the promise of protecting the delicate ecosystem, the letter contained eight additional promises related to the club’s tennis facilities.

The overwhelming majority of the promises made in 2000, especially those related to solving major problems such as dealing with the delicate ecosystem, remain promises in 2006.

Noble House Hotels & Resorts is owned by the Colee family with father Patrick (“Pat”) R. Colee as Chairman.

In October 2005, Scott R. Vokey, vice president and general counsel of Noble House, confirmed the information contained in the letter is “old” but does not deny the problems still exist. Patrick and James Colee refused to comment.

Vokey, in an email of October 2, 2005 to Heinz Dinter (he researched the issue and contacted Noble House executives to verify the facts), stated: “... and you threaten us (there is no question that you are threatening us by your reference to DERM, etc.) with publication of old, incomplete information.”

Vokey, in an email of November 5, 2005, vehemently continues the stance of all is well by refusing to admit the truth, belittling the gravity of Noble House’s disrespect for environmental concerns and the laws in place to save our ecosystems from destruction, and falsely claiming “... you will find that the allegations related to Jamie Colee’s 1999/2000 letter also are unsubstantiated. All the work was done. Again, I have no intention of proving that ... In any event, what is the point of looking in the rear view mirror of 5 or 6 years ago? Do you honestly think that is news?”



When money is unreasonably coveted,  
it is a disease of the mind which is called avarice.

Cicero (106 BC-43BC)

Roman author, orator and politician



Neither Noble House nor Grove Isle Hotel & Spa, operator of the Grove Isle Club, has presented any evidence that the work to protect the Biscayne Bay ecosystem was carried out. The staff of the tennis facility confirmed that this and other repairs promised five years ago were not carried out. This is also well-known to the Grove Isle Club tennis players. Why did Noble House not keep its promise way back in 2000 to fix the courts? Why does Noble House now try to sweep the issue under the rug?

Why did everybody keep their eyes closed when they saw streams of clay gush into Biscayne Bay following a downpour, or the watering system did not obey intended time limits and worked overtime, or worse, when a broken watering pipe turned a tennis court into a water fountain display with pollution in clear sight? And, as Jamie Colee so eloquently admits, Noble House permitted sediment run-off from the courts into Biscayne Bay before 1999 — and they let it continue for all these years. Should there not have been an uproar from the club members?

## **The Conscience of Grove Islanders**

The Grove Isle condo residents and other Grove Isle Club members dream of peace of mind but are too busy pitching in and to be counted. What does it take to turn apathy into action? It’s the silent killer: Apathy.

Should sadness or indifference control our conscience?

Jamie Colee’s letter five-and-a-half years ago went to 510 Grove Isle home owners (condominium documents dictate Grove Isle Club membership), approximately 100 condo renters (yes, renters must be club members in addition to the condo’s owner), close to 100

owners and occupants of Grove Isle marina slips (the club membership rule also applies to slip renters), and the “off-island” club members numbering more than 200.

What can the conscience of some 1,000 intelligent, conscientious residents and beneficiaries of island tranquility — who pay nearly two million dollars in annual membership fees to Noble House — accomplish? Is it nothing?

Not one, not a single Grove Isle Club member asked the simple question after many years of Biscayne Bay’s struggle to stay alive as a healthy marine environment and as the pride of the *Magic City*. Why is nothing being done to stop the pollution of Biscay Bay when Noble House decided to save money. The Grove Islanders didn’t care or didn’t want to get involved. Did they simply forget about the hypocritical promise made by the Noble House executive?

All hell broke loose when Grove Isle Club member Heinz Dinter brought Jamie Colee’s promise to everyone’s attention. Noble House management struck with the deadly speed of a venomous Cobra: in a desperate move to hush the voice of truth they kicked Dinter out of the Grove Isle Club and resorted to ugly extortion attempts to silence the pen-swinging newsletter publisher.

The expulsion of the avid tennis player, coupled with extortion attempts by Noble House, orchestrated by Vokey, the Noble House vice president and general counsel, and Grove Isle Hotel & Spa and Grove Isle Club general manager Michael D. Allen was designed to silence Dinter and, among other problems, drown the Biscayne Bay pollution disgrace in the clay-drenched waters of the bay. Noble House management hoped that their scandalous conduct as owners and operators of the Grove Isle Hotel & Spa would float downstream and would soon be forgotten. They were counting on the fleeting conscience of the Grove Islanders and their ardent desire not to get involved. Noble House counted on the apathy that would keep the lion’s roar of protest to a whisper no one would hear.



Apathy — 1. Lack of interest or concern, especially regarding matters of general importance or appeal; indifference. 2. Lack of emotion or feeling; impassiveness.



Here are typical reactions of Grove Islanders the Noble House executives count on in their quest to maximize profits for the Noble House owners at the expense of Biscayne Bay’s health — a quest made safe with the cover-up assured by apathy.

In an email message on November 25, 2005, Grove Isle Club member Janette Giddings scolded Dinter: “Heinz, this has gotten old. Why don’t you leave it alone and move on????”

Ex-tennis partner Hedwig van de Kreeke was blunt in her demonstration of blatant denial of conscience with the following email message on November 27, 2005: “Heinz, please remove me from your address book and stop this bitterness, it causes cancer in your body.”

More revealing is the sentiment of the three club members who enthusiastically pitched in to document atrocious service at the Baleen restaurant and to be brought to the attention of general manager Michael Allen. But Grace Korse, Maruca and Robert Crosby didn’t want to get involved any further when the next step called for standing by their earlier effort of telling management the truth — what is wrong. They chose to stay in the background because they preferred to favor apathy over standing by their principle of right versus wrong. They simply did not want to be involved any further.

That leaves the question, “What about the pollution of Biscayne Bay?”

Why do we let unethical businessmen terrorize and abuse us? Why are we pouring our hard-earned money into efforts to unjustly enrich others? Why don't we spend our wealth on peace of mind instead of stacking sandbags to stem the flood called CARING? Why don't we? Because of APATHY, that's why.

## **Protecting the Environment and Looking Out for Your Grand Lifestyle**

Is DERM the last and only option in efforts to protect our Biscayne Bay?

DERM is the Miami-Dade Department of Environmental Resources Management whose primary goal is to help protect, restore, and conserve the air, water, land and ecosystem resources of Miami-Dade County.

Why does it have to come to this? The answer pains those who care and make it a point to understand.

It's the "I don't want to get involved" syndrome and the fear of getting whipped by the "big guys" with beaucoup money to toss into the ring if a fight (that's lawsuit) surfaces.

### **What is an ecosystem?**

An ecosystem is defined as an ecological unit consisting of abiotic components such as air, water and land coexisting with biotic components such as plants and animal life. All members of the ecosystem contribute to its sustainability because of their dependence on each other. When left undisturbed, an ecosystem has the ability to naturally balance itself. Each ecosystem possesses unique characteristics that are necessary for the species that reside there to flourish and evolve. Because of the importance of ecosystems to our health, the environment, and even our economy, Miami-Dade County DERM is working diligently to protect and manage our ecosystems as efficiently as possible.

### **Reporting Environmental Emergencies, Complaints, and Environmental Crimes**

The Department of Environmental Resources Management (DERM) responds to environmental complaints and emergencies 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. If your complaint is an emergency please call (305) 372-6955. If the situation is not an emergency you can file a non-emergency environmental complaint online at [http://www.miamidade.gov/derm/forms/environmental\\_complaints\\_form.asp](http://www.miamidade.gov/derm/forms/environmental_complaints_form.asp).

The following situations, among others, should be reported to DERM immediately:

- Waste liquid discharges or spills into storm drains, street drains, parking lot drains, waterways, or onto the open ground.
- Any spill or discharge to the environment of suspected (hazardous) waste.
- Chemical spills or dumping incidents; any dumping of chemical drums or containers or abandoned drums.
- Turbid (cloudy) water in any waterway, canal, or Biscayne Bay; may be due to construction and may be discharged through a pipe or from a storm drain.
- Any dredging or filling in or along Biscayne Bay.

If any of the above situations are observed or arise contact the Miami-Dade County Department of Environmental Resources Management/DERM Complaint Desk at 305-372-6955.

Environmental Crimes may be reported to the Miami-Dade County Police Department Environmental Crimes Unit at 305-477-1616 or <http://www.miamidade.gov/mdpd/>.

## What are the Findings and Actions of DERM?

[[[ I AM WAITING FOR A RESPONSE FROM DERM. ]]]

Will complacency and “I don’t want to get involved” result in Biscayne Bay dying a slow death while apathy reigns?

I submit this manuscript — with all facts verified — for publication:

- Title: When Apathy Reigns
- Audience: General public
- Topic: Apathy permits abuse of the environment and violation of environmental laws for the purpose of satisfying greed.
- Word count: 2,770
- File format: MS Word (also available unformatted) or file format of your choice.
- Fact verification: Documentation can be supplied for the verification of all facts.  
The attached two-page letter was mailed to all Grove Isle Club members.  
Upon request, I will supply names, phone numbers, and email addresses of people in the know, their relationship to the issues, and what they know.
- Photos: The photograph of Grove Isle is a 700x274 JPG file.
- Authorship: You are welcome to use this material under your byline or use my byline subject to your edit.
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