

# Cutler Bay

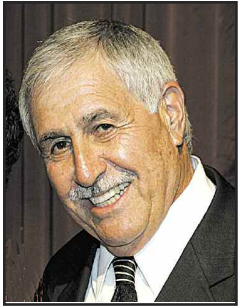
DEC 27, 2011 - JAN 9, 2012

SERVING SOUTH DADE

## Once again I got called to the principal's office

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Vice Mayor



I got called to the principal's office — again!

This time it wasn't to be disciplined (more on that later), but to be "Principal for the Day" at Centennial Middle School. What a treat that was.

First, seeing my name up on their marquee and then going to "my office" to have a great school breakfast with the real principal, Yamilla Caballo, and two of her aides, administrative assistant Alphonso Thomas and vice principal Eric Wright. Vice principal Dominique Audain was too busy solving problems to join our breakfast. One may have involved a kid with his foot stuck in a trombone. Don't ask.

I previously had asked my 6-year-old granddaughter Natalie, who had been in school just a short while at that point, what I needed to do as principal. She gave me a very specific description of my duties. Start the day by making an announcement to all the students, then go back to the office and sign a lot of papers. Have students come to the office, and call their parents in for a conference, sign some more papers and then go home. Sounds easy enough, so off I went.

I made my announcement on their sophisticated video system and tried to instill in the students the importance of learning and how they would be competing with children in other countries who were academically far ahead of us.

I stressed parental involvement and illustrated this by comparing us to South Korea, where they are light years ahead of us in learning. The only complaint they have in South Korea is that the parents are putting too much pressure on the students to learn. This, I said, was a good thing. I begged them to get their parents more involved in their studies and, if

they weren't, ask them to be.

I tried to illustrate by my own experiences in that they never know what they will be doing in the future and that it behooved them to learn as much as they could now. I attempted to prove this by showing all of them a video of me jumping out of a plane from two and one half miles high.

After my TV time, Ms. Caballo began dragging me around the school, up and down stairs, across buildings, etc. I say dragging because she literally was running, in high heels no less, while I limped along as best I could. As she was running, she constantly was bending down to pick up scraps of paper left by students on the floor while at the same time calling for janitorial support on her radio whenever she spotted a spill or something else needing attention.

Wow! As we passed students in the hallways, she seemed to know them all by name. Don't ask me how she does that. My wife, what's her name, couldn't answer it either.

Visiting the classrooms was itself an adventure. I asked if they had any questions that I might answer. I was able to handle most until one cute young lady asked; "Why does a small town like Cutler Bay need a vice mayor?"

Trying to explain why I do what I do is sometimes not easy. It certainly isn't for the money, and I haven't done anything statue-worthy, but at best I contribute in some small way to all the improvements that we are seeing in our town. My reward will be leaving it a slightly better place than it was when I began. I am not sure the kids grasped that idea, but I hope at least some of them will.

Now the teachers: What a bunch of dedicated people I got to see in action there. It kind of reminded me of my school days back in the Neanderthal era in Boston, where teachers weren't allowed to be married (no kidding) so



My name up on the marquee

that they could devote all their efforts to teaching and nothing else — and that they did!

One Centennial teacher in particular, Justin Koren, caught my interest so much so that I didn't want to leave his classroom even though Ms. Caballo was kind of rushing me along. Justin was illustrating how people's lack of concern for others could lead to things like the Holocaust. He separated the class by skin color and showed what it might be like to be isolated from others both from the positive and negative aspects and then had the students switch roles to see what the other side felt. Again — wow!

I must admit that in the past, and with all that I have been reading about our educational system, I was beginning to become quite worried. If we manage to employ more people like the ones I met during my day as principal at Centennial, we have nothing to worry about. Perhaps we may someday have our own high school with similar qualities.

Oh, yes — why was I sent to the principal's office the first time? It was in the second grade and my drawing of Santa Claus wasn't getting any attention, so I drew him anatomically correct, performing a normal bodily function. Kids, don't try this at home!