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With or Without Trump, the Immigrant Dream is Alive in Miami Enclave of Doral

Tuesday, November 3, 2015, by [Alexei Barrionuevo](#)

Welcome back to Property Lines, a column by veteran real estate reporter [Alexei Barrionuevo](#). Each week on Tuesday, Barrionuevo will report on housing trends, real estate deals, and major business moves right here on Curbed.



Donald Trump's golf club and resort, Trump National Doral. Photo by Alexei Barrionuevo.

During a recent campaign stop in **Doral**, a suburb of Miami, **Donald Trump** boasted to supporters about how he re-negotiated a lower price with bankers for the golf resort he renamed [Trump National Doral](#). He said he wanted to "show off" in front of his daughter, Ivanka.

The speech calls to mind how excited Trump was about his \$150 million Doral purchase in 2012. Back then, Trump was also pimping the [city of Doral](#) as the next big thing in real estate. "If a house is for sale in Doral, if it doesn't sell within 48 hours, there is something wrong," he told me.

What seemed like typical Trump bluster turned out to be mostly right. Since the sale of the country club, Doral, home to 50,000 residents, has been [one of the fastest-growing cities in the nation](#). The **average sale price of \$318,000** in the most recent quarter is up 50 percent from four years ago, according to Avanti Realty, a Miami-based company that does extensive sales in Doral.

But the relationship between Trump and Doral real estate values might be more accurately described as "complicated." What began as a Doral infomercial—contestants [playing golf in pumps](#) and frolicking in the pool during the Miss Universe pageant last year—turned difficult as Trump began making more negative comments about immigrants, one of the key constituencies on which Doral's boom was built.

"We had great national and international exposure for Doral" thanks to Trump's resort, says Philip Spiegelman, a principal at International Sales Group, which is marketing [Downtown Doral](#), a major project directly across from Trump National. "All of a sudden, we felt like we were in wonderful shape. And then Donald goes and opens his mouth and wants to send every immigrant back to Latin America and build a wall."



An aerial view of the golf-course-heavy, suburban boom town that is Doral, Florida. Photo by Alexei Barrionuevo.

Doral started as a second-home destination, primarily for **affluent Venezuelans** who used the city as a staging spot for their U.S. visits. That began to change after **1998**, when Venezuela elected as president **Hugo Chavez**, a former paratrooper and coup plotter. More Venezuelans started to move their money out of the country, and to consider Doral their "Plan B" if economic conditions worsened, said Andres Korda, co-founder of Avanti Realty.

"At the beginning, they wanted to own a piece of Miami or Doral," said Max Alcalay, president of Addison House, a furniture company that has had a store in Doral since 1999. "If things got worse they would pack up their suitcases and move to Miami permanently. And that's what happened."

Doralzuela, as it came to be known, was an affordable option for affluent Venezuelans, who were accustomed to living in single-family houses with outdoor spaces. What began as a golf resort, the brainchild of New York City real estate builders Doris and Alfred Kaskel, who bought **2,400 acres of wetland** in 1959 for \$49,000 and built the **Doral Country Club**, developed into a [sprawling collection of mostly gated communities](#). Residential growth picked up starting in the late 1980s. Back in 2001, when my parents bought a second home in Doral, it was still a sleepy bedroom community.

After a chaotic national strike against the Chavez government which ended in 2003, buying in Miami became even more fashionable in Caracas. Lacking legal status and borrowing credit in the U.S., Venezuelans purchased homes in Doral almost exclusively in cash. "They would not negotiate any pricing," Korda said. "They even started competing against their friends on who buys the most expensive homes."

Korda and his business partner, Enrique Teran, had a window seat on the Venezuelan-led boom in Doral. They started their business in 2006. Today, of Avanti's 400 agents in the Miami area, 64 are native Venezuelans. "The Doral market is extremely pricey today in many ways because of the influx of Venezuelans," Korda said. "To the point now where you have Doral properties selling in many places for over a million dollars."

Today, the city is becoming more of a year-round community, and more Venezuelan than ever. More than **80 percent of Doral's residents speak Spanish**, with only nine percent of residents saying they only speak English. Residents sometimes forget they aren't in Caracas: This summer I watched a Venezuelan woman berate a teenage boy working at a Doral grocery store when he couldn't respond to her in Spanish. **Mayor Luigi Boria**, the city's first Venezuelan-born mayor, even proposed in 2013 to make Spanish Doral's official second language, though the council unanimously voted it down.

The housing crash only briefly slowed Doral's growth spurt. The Venezuelans kept coming—not dissimilar from [the Brazilians and Argentines snapping up Miami real estate in prior years](#)—and the city and developers smelled opportunity. They started a building boom that continues today. The city has approved more than [9,000 new residential units](#), more than 3,000 of which are already under construction.



The rooftop terrace of a six-bedroom model home at The Mansions at Doral, currently under contract for \$1.87 million. Photo by Alexei Barrionuevo.



One of the residences at The Mansions at Doral. Photo courtesy of The Mansions at Doral.

There are high-end offerings like Terra Group's [Modern Doral](#), a gated community of 319 single-family luxury homes, offering homes of four to six bedrooms, designed in the "modernist" Miami Beach architectural style of the 1950s and 1960s. Avanti recently did a sale there for \$1.5 million. Homes start at \$1.2 million at [The Mansions at Doral](#), a single-family development that will have 60 residents. Century Homebuilders Group and Devtov, the developers, are offering more than 100 customizations, including in-home elevators, extra bedrooms and rooftop terraces.

So far, they have sold over 60 percent and still have 20 homes left, said Cesar Lang, the Mansions' Creative Director, who gave me a tour of the six-bedroom, six-and-a-half bath model home, which is in contract for \$1.87 million to a family from India, Lang says. Most of the buyers are international, the majority Venezuelan and Colombian, he said. "Ninety percent of our deals are cash," he reports. "People who already live in Doral are upgrading."

Then there is [Downtown Doral](#), developer Armando Codina's 120-acre project to create a walkable urban commercial-retail corridor surrounded by town homes and 21-story condos buildings with more than 2,840 total units. It involves a trilingual (Spanish, Portuguese, English) kindergarten-to-third grade charter school that Codina donated, which will give priority to residents of Downtown Doral.



Building 1 under construction at the Downtown Doral development. Photo by Alexei Barrionuevo.

Trump was, at first, a welcome addition to this mix. For a time, developers in Doral eagerly piggy-backed onto the publicity Trump generated around his country club. The "Apprentice" star poured **\$250 million** into refurbishing the club, and planted 5,000 new trees around the course for added privacy. Trump also curried favor with the Latin American community, even publicly supporting Boria's bid for mayor.

In March, Boria gave Trump a key to the city, a move he probably regretted in June, when Trump made his comments about immigrants. The Spanish-language network Univision, which is based in Doral, pulled its support for Miss Universe. Trump fired back with a **\$2 billion lawsuit**. (The city council voted 3-2 in August to let Trump keep the key.)

"What was a very positive environment worked against us," Spiegelman said. "We talk very little about Donald in our sales presentations at this point."

Sales started out briskly at Downtown Doral, which offers one, two and three-bedroom condos ranging from mid-\$200,000 to about \$400,000. Building One, which is expected to be completed in January, sold out its 203 units; Venezuelans purchased about 47 percent of them. Sales at the second building have been slower, at a pace that is "about 65 percent of where we would like to be," Spiegelman said.



The view from the 19th floor of a west-facing apartment at Building 1 at Downtown Doral. The golf course is at Trump National Doral. Photo by Alexei Barrionuevo.

It's not all Trump's fault. "Venezuela is completely challenged," Spiegelman said, referring to the country's faltering economy and government money. For Venezuelans, "the cost of making an investment today has become prohibitive," he said, adding, "and that has had a huge effect on the flow of business for 2015." And Doral, which remains "incredibly Venezuelan-centric," as Spiegelman put it, may feel the brunt of the slowdown. You live by immigration, you die by immigration. Right, Donald?