

Greater Miami Adventist Academy

NELSON FERNANDEZ

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Greater Miami Adventist Academy (GMAA) is a co-educational Pre-K-12 day school located on a five-acre campus at 500 NW 122nd Ave in Miami, Florida. Owned by the Florida Conference of Seventh-day Adventists and accredited by the Accrediting Association of Seventh-day Adventist Schools, Colleges, and Universities, a member of the National Council for Private School Accreditation, the school operates with the support of several constituent churches in the South Florida area.

The earliest records of the school date to 1912 after the Miami Temple congregation officially became a church. Miami Temple began in 1910 with 20 charter members and decided to start a school for their children. They named it Greater Miami Elementary School. Their first teacher, Miss Grady Lee, initially had between 20-25 students.

The group met in a tent during construction on the rest of the property at the corner of NW 8th Street and Miami Avenue. Once the building was erected, two school rooms were built in the back of the church with a porch to protect the children from the rain. The school grew, and in 1922 moved to a suitable building that would then house a three-room school, covering eight grades at 333 NW 30th Street.

By 1923, Miami Temple had 170 members, and Greater Miami Elementary had a dedicated building. Classes later transferred to the church building and continued there until the sale of the structure in 1925. From there, the school and church moved to a newly constructed church property at 862 SW 4th Street.

In 1950, the school had two classrooms, two teachers, and 86 students. At this time, there began a renewed interest in erecting a new school, because, for some time, classes had met in a church-owned property on NW 30th Street and 3rd Ave. Pastor W.O. Reynolds approached the Deering Estate, a prominent environmental, archaeological, and historical preserve in South Florida, about the price of a four and one-half acre plot of land owned by them at 3200 NW 18th Ave.

A Seventh-day Adventist Church member by the name of Mr. Bell had worked faithfully as an accountant for the Deering Estate, but had passed away a short time before. Though two other buyers offered as high as \$45,000 for the land, Elder Reynolds was able to secure it for \$15,000, because of the Deering Estate's appreciation for Bell's services.

Thus in 1952, the name of the school changed to Miami Junior Academy, and it began operating at the new site with two new buildings. One housed the six elementary classes, and the other the seventh and eighth grades and the principal's office. The need to enlarge the facilities prompted the Miami Temple, Miami Springs, and the newly built North Miami churches to undertake a monthly fund-raising program that resulted in a gymnasium, eight classrooms, and a library room.

In 1960, the academy added six new classrooms, a music studio, a large auditorium, and the senior high school level. The name of the school, Greater Miami Academy, would reflect the new accreditation. The first senior class graduated in 1961.¹

Plans for 1962-1965 included new elementary classrooms, also full teacher certification, and academy accreditation. In 1970, the school plant added a library and vocational building.² The school now needed more land for a playground. Two and one-half acres of land, adjacent on the west, became available.

Hialeah Hospital, a prominent hospital in South Florida started in part by members of the Miami Temple Church, purchased the property for the school from the Exotic Gardens Nursery.

In 1970 each room acquired air conditioning. The academy built a new room for the library, an additional classroom, and a combination garage and shop. As the constituency grew and enrollment increased, administration purchased two trailers housing two classrooms each to accommodate all the students³

In 1989, the school moved to a dedicated new academy structure at 500 NW 122 Ave, Miami, FL 33182. The school held an open house for it on July 30, 1989.

In 2006, the school adjusted its name to Greater Miami Adventist Academy to emphasize its connection with the Adventist Church. For several years, the school had two principals, one in charge of the academy and the other the elementary school. During the 2006 school year, they merged to form one K-12 academy.

Shortly afterward, administration prepared a three-phase master plan to improve the physical appearance of the campus. As of 2018, phase one has been completed. The improvements included new soccer and softball fields, tennis courts, basketball courts, an elementary playground, perimeter fence, a pre-school play area, and a cafeteria.

Renovations for the school continue, including new security systems, doors, and gates, updated bathrooms in the second floor and gym, flooring for all classrooms (including the gym and music departments), and landscaping.⁴ Ongoing plans for the school involve the construction of a 700-seat auditorium/chapel, a dedicated elementary wing separate from the high school, a track, and a pool.⁵

Principals:

S. G. Northcott, 1932-1959; Lester Stannard, 1960-1962; James A. Shepard, 1962-1965; Howard Kennedy, 1965-1969; Eugene Armour, 1969-1971; James A. Shepard, 1971-1974; James K. Herman, 1974- 1977; Robert Bolton, 1977-1978; Norman French, 1978-1981; Royce Spalding, 1981-1984; Dr. Julio Tabuenca, 1984-1986; Steve Watson, 1986-1987; Jack C. Stiles, 1987-1990; Manuel Fuentes, 1990-1995; Otis Graves, 1995-1996; Don Watson, 1996-1999; Don Watson, 2000-2001 (academy); Othneil Scott, (Elementary); Violet Weiss, 2001-2002 (academy); Othneil Scott eElementary); Roland McKenzie, 2002-06 (academy); Othneil Scott; (elementary); Dr. Luis Cortes, 2006-present (K2-12).

SOURCES

Seventh-day Adventist Encyclopedia. Second rev. ed. Hagerstown, MD: Review and Herald, 1996. S.v. "Greater Miami Academy."

NOTES

1. "Greater Miami Academy," *Seventh-day Adventist Encyclopedia*. Second rev. ed. (Hagerstown, MD: Review and Herald, 1996).
2. Ibid.
3. Lloyd Nies Whyte, interview with principal J.A. Shepard, January 14, 1973.
4. Cleopatra D. Trevilcock, interview by author, October 2, 2018.
5. Martha Morton, interview by author, October 6, 2018.

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