

# **FREEPORT/LUCAYA: 25 YEARS LATER**

**By Marva Munroe**

Freeport/Lucaya has come of age. Its economy continues to grow — land sales and real estate, in general, having skyrocketed; construction is up by leaps and bounds. Tourism and industries continue to reach new heights. Today, Freeport's "rags to riches" story is evidenced all around this 149,578-acre mecca.

Some 25 years after its birth, Freeport/Lucaya's miracle story is still unfolding.

"We want everyone to see and hear about our growth and progress," said Jack Hayward, chairman of the board of Grand Bahama Development Company Limited, planners of this city. "Freeport/Lucaya is booming and we're certainly very proud about our plan that worked."

Work indeed it did. Back in 1955, Virginia-born financier Wallace Groves took a gamble on his belief that he could take a primitive island paradise and turn it into a major centre for industry, business, tourism and land development. He succeeded.

The signing of the Hawksbill Creek Agreement August 4, 1955, between Wallace Groves and the then Government of the Bahamas brought Freeport/Lucaya into existence. With hard work and co-operation between Government and the private sector, the result is today what hard-nosed businessmen conceded, a miracle.

Twenty-five years later, Freeport/Lucaya is Grand Bahama's driving economic force. The island's population is near 50,000. Almost half of its residents live in Freeport/Lucaya proper, where, currently the head-count gains at a phenomenal rate annually. While much of Freeport/Lucaya's

area is still undeveloped, its planners are preparing for a city accommodating double the current residents in another decade.

In the early 1950's, the island's 18th century-type economy was at a standstill. It was no joke that Grand Bahama was the poverty pocket of the Bahamas. Fellow Bahamians from more fortunate islands shunned Grand Bahama like the plague, for it was known up and down the archipelago as a "go-broke-place."

In its early days, Grand Bahama had few claims to fame. In 1513, Ponce de Leon, seeking the legendary "fountaing of youth," visited the island and termed the area off its north shore "bajamar," meaning shallow sea. This word, pronounced "baha-mar" in Spanish, is believed to have evolved into Bahama, the term that describes both the island and the country.

For more than 400 years after that visit of Ponce de Leon, Grand Bahama was an undiscovered Eden relegated to obscurity by the fast-moving events that followed in the wake of the frontiersmen who tamed nearby Florida and the islands of the Caribbean. A brief prosperity came with the United States Prohibition era when West End was a liquor trans-shipment point for the bootleggers. But, when Prohibition ended, the island slipped back into obscurity.

The delay in development was a blessing in disguise for Grand Bahama. When growth did come, it was planned, orderly and disciplined, free of the neon and glitter which have come to characterise so many modern resort areas, and free of many of the problems which plague industrial centres.

Despite its lacklustre history, the island's assets were many. It had bountiful supplies of fresh water, a rarity in the Bahamas. It was heavily timbered by dense forests of yellow pine, a commodity that was much in demand in the lumber and paper industries.

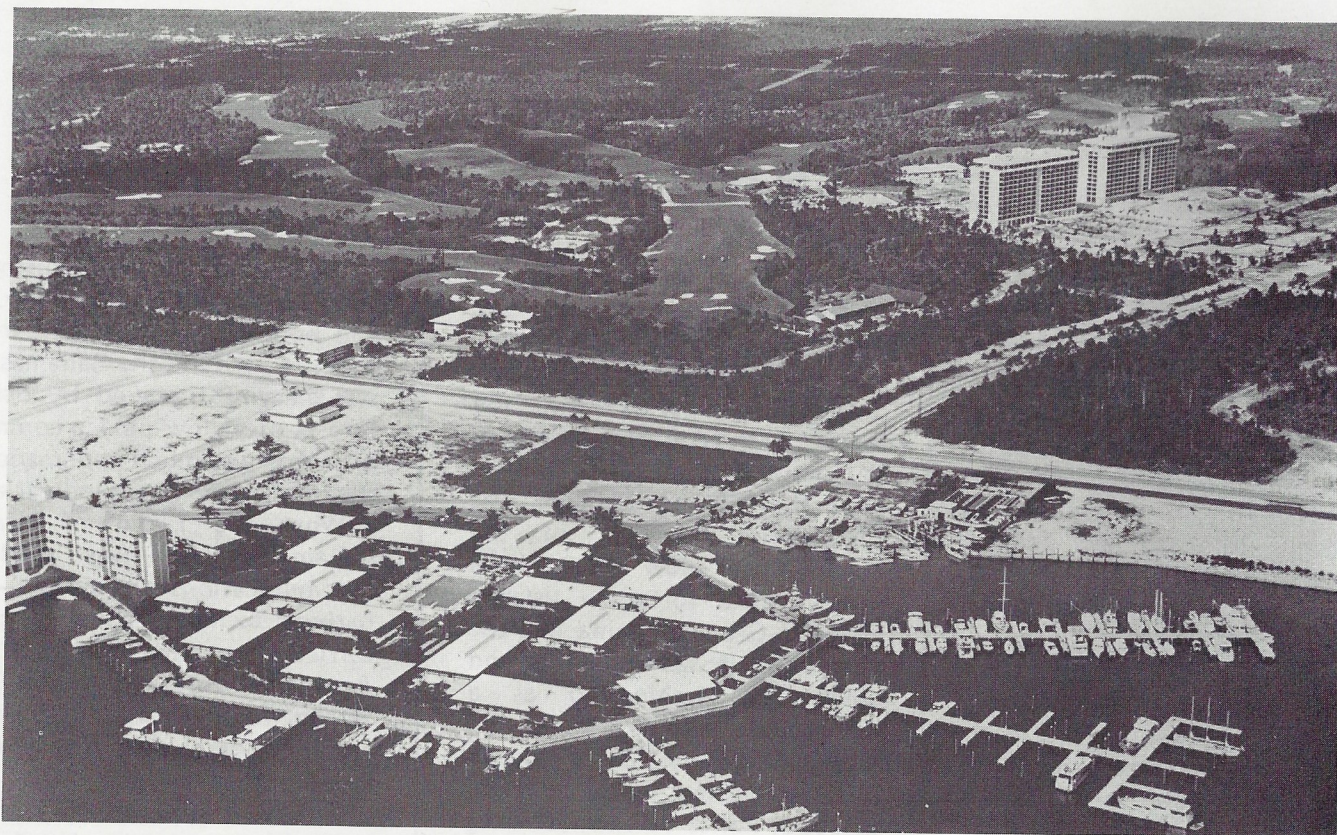
What the island of Grand Bahama needed was modern communications facilities — a harbour to handle the ships that carried the commerce of the Americas through the Gulf Stream to the rest of the world and a modern airport geared to travel in the Jet Age.

Today, Freeport/Lucaya, the nation's second city, boasts all these necessities, amenities and more.

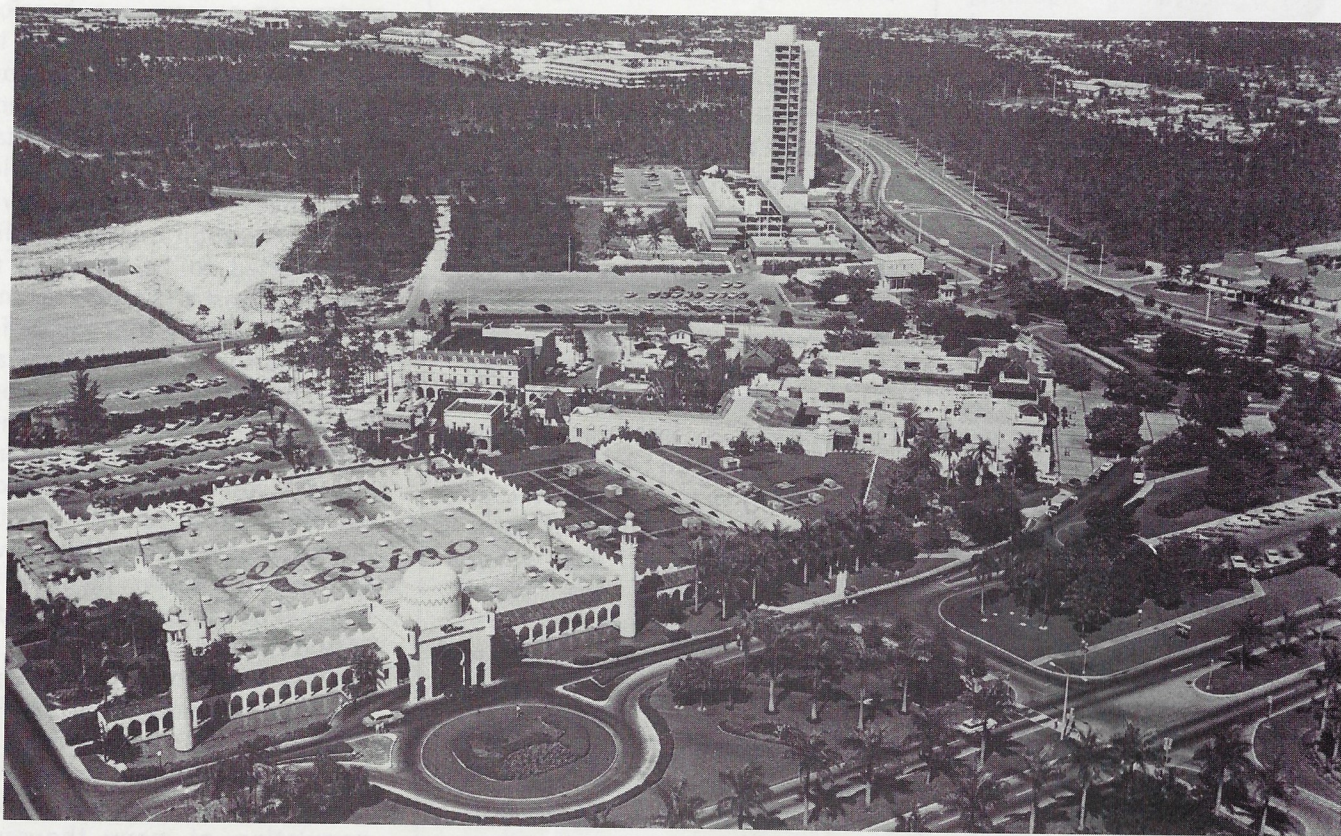
Its international airport has undergone numerous expansions and improvements, including the addition of a U.S. Customs and Immigration preclearance facility, added runway footage and a spacious charter wing. And, there's more on the drawing board. An additional \$2 million is budgeted to be spent on the airport. Construction is currently underway on 6,000-square-feet of office space, a 30,000-square-foot concourse extension, doubling of U.S. Customs and Immigration facilities, creating a transit lounge, which will also be used as overflow area to the existing lounge, plus weather, flight service and control tower facilities are being expanded. Completion date is August, 1981.

Observed Albert J. Miller, president of Grand Bahama Port Authority Limited: "Just 25 years ago, Freeport/Lucaya was a logging camp. Today, it has a population of many thousands. It is a resort destination with an annual visitor count of approximately half million and it is an





**AERIAL VIEW** of El Casino & International Bazaar, a "Little World's Fair", built in 1967 for \$3 million. The Bazaar is situated in the heart of Freeport, on a 10-acre tract.



**THE LUCAYAN** Harbour Inn and Marina, on Bell Channel Bay, is a favourite place for boating visitors to Freeport/Lucaya. The 150-unit complex offers complete boating service and repair facilities and docks for 28 yachts. The Bell Channel entrance to Lucaya, the area's resort focal point, is well-marked with a flashing beacon at the entrance and range lights, to aid boatmen. Behind are the Lucayan Country Club 18-hole championship golf course and one of the area's newest condominiums, the twin Lucayan Towers.

industrial centre with substantial investment and even more substantial prospects for the future."

This city's past 25 years reflect many changes — some physical, some not. "We have advanced, so to speak, from the forest of the logging camp, along hundreds of miles of new road, into new and numerous residential communities," he added.

To show its confidence in Freeport/Lucaya, Grand Bahama Development Company Limited has constructed low-cost homes for Bahamians, wooed investors to this city, and its land sales increase daily.

Due to the growing demands for more homes on the island, DEVCO developed Fortune Bay Four in Lucaya, building several canal-front homes, Bahamians and foreigners purchasing property and doing likewise. Today, this subdivision is among Freeport's finest. In addition, moderately priced homes have also been constructed in Yeoman Wood.

Boosting construction of residential homes even more are discounted land sales to Bahamians by DEVCO.

Condominiums by European and other developers are also being built and sold throughout Lucaya and Bahamian, a prestigious residential subdivision.

Never to be outdone are industries, the backbone of this city's economy. The Bahamas Government and the Port Authority approved licences and ground is being broken with completion dates set for the not too distant future for many and diversified new industries taking advantage of the amenities this city was created to offer.

Already opening its doors is the Electric Auto Corporation in the bonded warehouse on Queen's Highway. Anglo American Research is conducting a pilot scheme for the company.

A \$6 million fertiliser plant, to be operated by Recycling and Compost Company of Canada Limited, have completed plans

for the Construction of a 60-ton a day compost plant for the manufacture of fertiliser. Scheduled to begin operation by December, 1980, the plant will be manned by a Bahamian staff.

Kendall Foods Corporation of Goulds, Florida and Packer Groves have announced joint plans to plant 2.4 million lime, avocado and mango trees on 2,000 acres in specially designated areas in Lucaya. This is the first time that such an ambitious agricultural project has been undertaken by private investment on Grand Bahama.

The company will be known in Freeport/Lucaya as Grand Bahama Growers Association. In addition to the groves, a packing and processing plant (for the manufacture of lime juice and avocado pulp) will be built. It is estimated that 350 Bahamians will be employed in this operation.

Slated to begin a \$35 million venture in a year is Smith Kline Chemical Plant, manufacturers of pharmaceutical products. Ground



**THE IMAGINATIVE DESIGN** of this \$3 million shopping mart, known around the world as Freeport's International Bazaar, blends the architecture of East and West in an exotic labyrinth that has been described as "harmonious confusion." Dominating the entrance to the Hong Kong section of this retail version of the United Nations is the picturesque New Hong Kong Restaurant. An impressive cobalt-blue tile Mandarin gate arches over the entrance to the street. A street so Chinese in character that it could easily fool an Oriental.



has already been broken adjacent to Syntex Corporation.

Asked about the future of heavy industry in Grand Bahama, Stanley Wilson, manager of industrial and commercial sales for DEVCO, said: "The future is very good but the thing about it is that you won't see a major industry overnight. We have a lot of major industries we've been working on for the past 18 months but it takes 18 months to three years for these concerns to break ground.

"The Government has identified Grand Bahama as the centre of heavy industry because of the infrastructure already in place. We'll continue to have industry in the pipeline."

Existing companies such as Syntex, which produces the arthritic treatment Naproxen, has increased its production plant by 50 per cent.

Todhunter Mitchell and Co. Ltd. is now working on plans to start bottling some of the top brands it represents in the Bahamas. The firm's bottling and blending facilities, located in the heart of the light industrial area, are now engaged in developing its export market to Germany, Canada and the U.S.

According to Wilson, small service industries, such as restaurants and retail outlets, owned by Bahamians, are also expected to expand as the economy expands.

Keeping pace with Freeport/Lucaya's continuous growth are hotels. Starting with a mere 35 hotel rooms in 1963, this resort's visitor accommodations have grown to over 3,500 rooms in more than 15 hotels. Latest tourist arrival figures for 1980 show Freeport/Lucaya ahead in foreign arrivals by 18.9 per cent over a comparable period last year. More hotels are planned.

Electricity, another reliable "barometer" for measuring economic growth, has proliferated in 25 years. In 1964, with 500 consumers, the generating capacity of Freeport Power Company

was 3,500 kilowatts. In 1980, the company has more than 8,000 consumers using 110,000 kilowatts. It has 500 miles of transmission and distribution lines.

The number of banks and financial institutions has grown with the population. Thirteen assorted private and merchant savings and loan, and commercial banks now offer in Freeport/Lucaya almost every conceivable type of banking service.

First-class schools are established and growing in size and scope, keeping pace with the population expansion and the resultant educational demands.

Education maintains its prominence in the continuing development of Freeport/Lucaya. The Grand Bahama Port Authority, from the very beginning, realised education's importance and constructed the first school in Freeport/Lucaya. That school was later turned over to the Methodist Missionary Society and today is called St. Paul's College.

The Port constructed a high school, too, which in turn is now part of the Anglican Diocese of the Bahamas - Freeport High School.

In addition, there's Catholic High School and several prepara-

tory schools in the community. The Bahamas Government maintains the largest high school in the Bahamas - Hawksbill High, and plans are now underway for another Government subsidised school within the area.

Many of these institutions offer not only day classes but also double as evening institutes. Matriculation is geared toward the Bahamas Junior Certificate and the General Certificate of Education. The University of Miami also offers a programme at the Masters degree level.

Modern medical facilities are available and most other professional services can be found. Numerous religious denominations are represented and are encouraged to grow with the community.

With most social, civic and fraternal organisations found in similar size cities meeting regularly and offering membership to both male and female, the active person has an opportunity to become involved.

Points out Miller: "As Freeport/Lucaya develops, there will be the need for further change. As our population increases so will the demand for basic social amenities.

"The Grand Bahama Port

Authority group of companies are confident and optimistic as we proceed to the next 25 years.

"We will continue to exhibit a posture of co-operation and to play a leadership role in Freeport's and the Bahamas' social and economic growth and maturity."

The latest expanse of cultural appreciation is Freeport Friends of the Arts. This group of concerned members of the community, including Jack Hayward, has showcased world class artists. Its home is the Regency Theatre. Performances are offered regularly.

Among theatrical groups are the Grand Bahama Players and Freeport Players Guild who offer top-class stage productions.

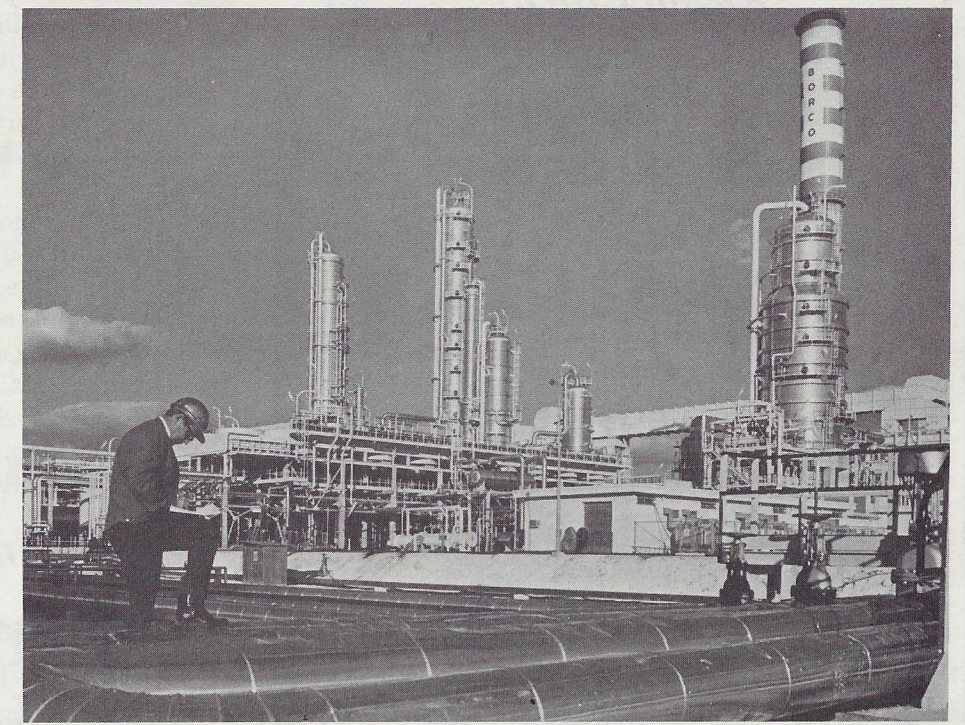
The Grand Bahama Entertainers Association has instituted the annual Bahamian "composition of the month" to further inspire Bahamian composers and poets to perpetuate that section of the culture.

The Vera Allen School of Ballet has been in existence for some years. Many fine performers have had their introduction to dance at either this institute or at Lois Seiler Dance Studio.

The developers and planners of Freeport/Lucaya, the Grand Bahama Development in its Bahamianisation programme. Through the emphasis of education and culture, today, Bahamians hold positions of trust in every industry operational in the make-up of Freeport/Lucaya.

To celebrate the 25th anniversary of its birth, a series of events starting the first week of November, 1980, and featuring a special proclamation inaugurating the Silver Jubilee, are in the planning stages by DEVCO. Political dignitaries from the Bahamas, the United States, England and other countries will be invited to attend.

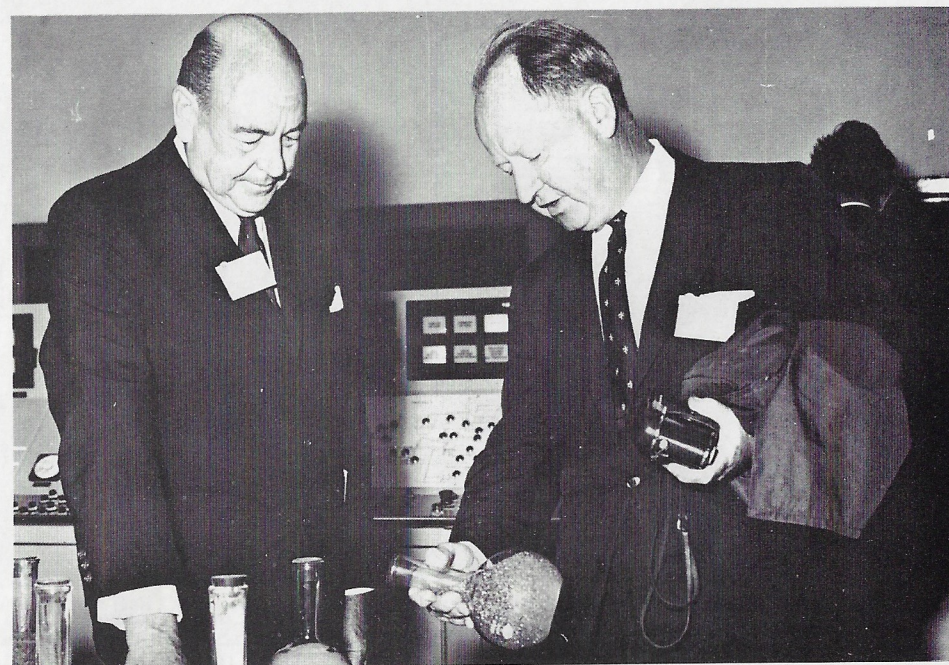
The Grand Bahama Port Authority's concentrated and revitalised interest in this second city of the Bahamas, heralds the beginning of a continuing "rags to riches" story. Happy 25th anniversary, Freeport/Lucaya!



**BAHAMAS OIL REFINING COMPANY** the Bahamas' largest industrial complex, built at a cost of \$100 million near this city's harbour went "on line" with its first unit in November of 1970. The remaining units became operational before the end of the year and BORCO now processes 250,000 barrels of crude oil daily. The refinery's main products are a line of low-sulphur-content fuel oils used mainly in the heavily-populated north-eastern United States where atmospheric pollution has become a major problem. In addition, the operation produces jet fuel, petrochemical feedstocks, kerosene and diesel fuels. Officials of BORCO, although making no definite predictions, pointed out that similar installations have resulted in the investment of hundreds of millions of dollars in satellite industries over a period of 10 to 15 years. (Photo by Martin Clemens Studio)



**AERIAL SHOT** of Garden of the Groves. A 12 Acre Botanical Wonderland. Featuring Tropical and Subtropical Plants, Flowers and Trees from Around the World.



**Wallace Groves and Leslie B. Worthington** inspect various products of the Bahama Cement Company on Dedication Day, March 16, 1965.