

THE MIAMI HERALD  
*Spirit of  
Excellence*  
AWARDS

EDMUND FRANK BENSON

Edmund F. Benson has become to South Florida what Rachel Carson became to America: an endearing workaholic who spends every waking hour committed to protecting our beautiful and delicate environment, to ensure that the community inherited by today's children and their children will be a healthy one.

A native of Boston, Benson moved to South Florida in 1972 and retired from his furniture rental business in 1982. Since then he has devoted 100 percent of his time and energy to making South Florida a healthier place to live, concentrating on the *In-Yitrament*—life indoors at home, at work and at school. The 60-year-old Benson has waged an almost obsessive, virtually nonstop battle to clean up South Florida.

Targeting the public bugbears of ignorance, inertia, apathy and neglect, he has carried on what is sometimes a one-man war against pollutants, pesticides and those bureaucrats and politicians who by their disinterest or inactivity condone the spoilage with which such substances assault the region's air, soil and water. His style is nonconfrontational. His preferred technique, honed to perfection, is to persuade by erosion—pecking, pecking, pecking away until resistance collapses.

"We're right on the borderline of having decimated this beautiful environment," he says. "I'll tell you the thing that gets me, that motivates me to do what I've done. It's my generation that's created this. We created this mess, and the least I can do is to help clean it up and prevent future generations from sitting and wringing their hands and saying, 'How could they have done this?' I say it myself. I don't know how we could have let this happen. It's greed. It's unconcern. It's not caring. It's sadness. It's pure sadness."

During the past few years, Benson probably has been best known for spearheading a successful grass-roots crusade to get Dade officials to clean up the county's 160-acre incinerator complex northwest of Miami International Airport. More than four years of his efforts culminated when the County was forced to terminate its contract with the builder-operator of this waste-burning facility. Over \$75 million has been spent for desperately needed repairs and



operational improvements.

Dade Commissioner Sherman Wynn says, "We're about 85 percent cured." In September 1988, the county, poorer but wiser, recognized Benson's efforts by naming an eight-block stretch of Northwest 97th Avenue Edmund F. Benson Boulevard.

As chairman of the county's Solid Waste Recycling Task Force, he has worked with Dade officials to implement the curbside recycling plan—destined to become the largest in the country. As chairman of the Dade School Board's Nutrition Task Force, he has fought for healthy alternatives to the stereotypical lunchroom menus of the past and organized awards for outstanding food-service workers.

His latest efforts include mapping out a public awareness campaign to ban pesticides from hospitals, other public buildings and households; and stressing pre-cycling (buying only items that will not pollute the environment). He recently was named to the Blue Ribbon Committee looking into the problems at Jackson Memorial Hospital.

In 1986 Benson and his wife Susan, a teacher of hearing-disabled children in Dade public schools, established the ARISE Foundation. Through the ARISE Foundation, the Bensons give awards for food service workers in the school system, recycling awards for students and schools collecting the most recyclables, publish a nutrition task force report card and an environmental newsletter and sponsor seminars.

Thanks to Ed Benson, we can all breathe a little easier.