



George W. "Bob" Gill Jr., Father of Broward County Hospitality

Following World War II, Chicago-born US Navy veteran George Gill Jr. moved to Fort Lauderdale to get into the year-round construction industry. He and his father founded Gill Construction Company and began building houses, which they sold to returning G.I.s. By 1950, it was estimated that the company was annually building 75 percent of the homes in the city. They built approximately 3,000 houses. In 1948, Gill decided to go into the hotel business, and on New Year's Eve 1949, he opened the 50-room Escape. It was the first hotel on the beach to offer a swimming pool and to stay open year-round. Gill developed three additional properties on the beach: the Jolly Roger (1952), the Yankee Clipper (1956), and the Yankee Trader (1964). The Jolly Roger was the first to offer in-room air-conditioning. The Yankee Clipper was the first to offer a floor show venue. Gill is considered a marketing genius. He would bring northern travel agents to Fort Lauderdale and introduce the foreign market to the city. He was instrumental in bringing the New York Yankees spring training camp to town in the 1960s. Gill helped to promote college Spring Break, and when it was "banned" after 1985, he facilitated the change to a family-friendly resort destination. Gill was a long-standing member of the Broward County Tourist Development Council and also served on the Florida Commission on Tourism. (Inset, courtesy of the Fort Lauderdale Historical Society, Gene Hyde Collection.)