



CHARLES "CHARLIE" K. CHEEZEM Backgrounder

The Charles K. Cheezem Education Center at Patrick Square is named for Charlie Cheezem. Raised in Andrews, S.C., Mr. Cheezem spent his high school summers working in construction. He entered Clemson University in September of 1940, becoming a member of the historic Class of '44. World War II interrupted his studies; Clemson was a military school at the time, and Mr. Cheezem's entire class was called into active duty during his junior year.

He was wounded in France during the Battle of the Bulge while serving in the infantry and received a Bronze Star Medal and the Purple Heart. Released from the hospital as the war was ending, Mr. Cheezem remained in Europe another 16 months, working with the Berlin District engineers, helping Berlin open its streets, get supplies through the Russian zone, and repair the city's infrastructure.

After completing his degree in civil engineering at Clemson University in 1948, Mr. Cheezem worked as a building engineer for DuPont Construction. And then, his career took a propitious turn: a friend persuaded him to move to thriving, competitive Florida to help start a construction company.

After a five-year partnership, his friend decided to go into banking, and Mr. Cheezem continued in the real estate business. He formed Cheezem Development Corp. (CDC), taking the company public in 1973. Mr. Cheezem operated CDC as a NASDAQ-traded company for several years before selling his controlling interest in the mid 1980s.

Right from the start, Mr. Cheezem's vision was striking. As hard as it is to imagine, Florida had no planned retirement communities until CDC developed Ridgewood Groves near Tampa/St. Petersburg in the mid 1950s. This 1200-home retirement village, marketed to people who were 55 or older, featured a community pool and clubhouse as amenity strong points.

An early pioneer of condominium development in Florida, CDC entered the Miami market with Brickell Place, the first major, phased luxury condominium in what has since become Miami's premiere financial district. Next, partnering with Hong Kong's Swire Properties, CDC optioned a major portion of Miami's Cloughton Island and developed the first phases of the Brickell Key project. Brickell Key now stands as one of the city's most valuable assets, a delightful mix of condominiums, office buildings, retail offerings, and a hotel.

Perhaps CDC's most spectacular turnaround was Miami's South Beach. At the time the CDC project was envisioned, the area was derelict, its waterfront so crime-ridden that even police hesitated to venture there at night. Indeed, *Florida Trend* magazine article asked, "Who will save South Beach?" The answer was Charlie Cheezem. His South Pointe Tower initiated the remarkable conversion of South Beach into a glamorous, international play ground.

After selling his controlling interest in CDC in 1985, he moved near his beloved alma mater, Clemson University, intending to retire. However, the area's potential lured him back into land acquisition and development. He made several large purchases, including the 1,222-acre Ashtabula Plantation property surrounding the historic home and slave quarters and a 144-acre farm bought from Clemson University's President Emeritus R. C. Edwards.

Some of this land was developed into Country Walk, the area's first large master-planned community, now a thriving neighborhood for Clemson's staff and faculty. Other parcels were sold to the United Methodist Church and to the school board for Clemson Elementary School.

During this time, Mr. Cheezem was also raising money for Clemson University. He served on the University's Foundation Board for several years and was recognized as Volunteer of the Year in 1992. He also spearheaded fundraising to expand the school's visitor's center and erect a bronze sculpture (representing both the student and the soldier) to reflect the life-changing experiences of the Class of '44.

Knowing it lay in the path of growth, Mr. Cheezem held on to another of his early S.C. land acquisitions, the 173-acre Digital Equipment site. It was sold last year to a development company owned by his son Michael. Now, this pristine property is being crafted into Patrick Square, a traditional neighborhood development with a thriving Town Center and more than 400 homes.

Patrick Square has donated to Clemson University both the land and the building for the Charles K. Cheezem Education Center to be built in the Town Center of Patrick Square. It will be a permanent home for the Osher Life Long Learning Institute (OLLI) at Clemson, which offers college-level courses to adults.

"We've come full circle," says Michael Cheezem. "Dad saw the beauty and the practicality of this land, and now I have the privilege to continue his legacy by creating a place that will continue to serve the university and the city."

Charlie Cheezem demonstrated a unique ability to create innovative communities that touched people's lives. Michael Cheezem is proud to continue that vision by cultivating the natural beauty of Patrick Square into a traditional neighborhood for all generations.

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Editorial Note: For the Patrick Square Fact Sheet and other information on the community, see www.PatrickSquare.com/news. To request photos and renderings, contact Helen Knight.