



RONALD M. BERGERON, SR.

Founder & CEO, Bergeron Land Development, Inc., Bergeron Family of Companies, Bergeron Properties & Investment Corp.

Ronald "Ron" Bergeron was born in 1943 in New Orleans, but he, along with his parents and older brother, moved to Florida not long after his birth. His mother's family goes back eight generations in Florida. The Bergerons settled in Davie, a small town in the countryside outside of Fort Lauderdale, where his father built and ran a small grocery store while his mother worked as a waitress. A few years later, the couple opened a small restaurant called Percy's Steak House. "Everyone loved my parents," says Bergeron. "They taught us boys to be kind and appreciative. My mother always said, 'Kindness is free.' They wanted us to be humble, disciplined, and determined. Really, they were mentors to us. I was very blessed to have them as my parents."

When Bergeron was a boy, he watched his parents build their first house. "We went to Port Everglades and got the wood for our house off the freight boxes. It was a small house, but it was ours, and we were proud of it. As my mother used to say, 'Thank God for what you have and don't worry about what you haven't got because you haven't got it anyway.' We were always grateful for what little we had."

Another important person in Bergeron's life was his grandfather, who was a game warden in the Everglades. He took young Bergeron with him on an airboat, giving him a tour of the tropical wetlands. "The whole thing fascinated me," says Bergeron. "The landscape, the wildlife, the smell of nature, the sunsets—it just became a big part of my life. My grandfather is the one who introduced me to nature and taught me the importance of the environment and conservation."

Bergeron's grandfather also taught him to wrestle alligators. "It's a sport and I've been doing that for 50 years," he says. "It's part of my culture, part of being a Gladesman." In 2006, Bergeron was wrestling an alligator that put him in a death roll down to the bottom of the lake, with his hand caught in the gator's mouth. He lived to tell the tale but had to have a finger sewn back onto his hand, had several bones broken in two fingers, and received multiple stitches. The story appeared in newspapers across America and today Bergeron is widely known by his nickname, Alligator Ron.

As a boy, Bergeron's parents took him to see a rodeo. From that day forward, cowboys were his heroes. "The rodeo arena was our form of entertainment," says Bergeron. "We didn't have tennis courts or golf courses.



Ron Bergeron's parents, Dorothy and Percy.

The arena was built by the pioneer families of the region, and my parents helped build it. Today the arena is called the Bergeron Rodeo Grounds in recognition of my family's contributions to preserving the rodeo arena and Davie's roots, culture, and heritage. At the age of 19, and for the next 20 years, Bergeron competed professionally in rodeo. He qualified for the Southeastern Circuit Finals three times and competed as one of the top 15 cowboys at the International Rodeo Association World Finals in 1984. In 2006, Bergeron was inducted into the Broward County Sports Hall of Fame.

In high school, Bergeron joined the football team. His coach soon became a mentor and a person whose respect he wanted to earn. "My coach taught me how to be disciplined," he says. "He worked us hard. One day I was frustrated, and I confronted him by asking, 'Coach, what do you want out of us?' My coach answered back, 'I want every cell in your body.' Bergeron responded, 'Yes, sir.'" The team went to the Goldcoast State Championships in the Orange Bowl that year and won.

CAREER

As soon as Bergeron graduated from Stranahan High School in 1962, he was eager to begin his adult life. He left home with a few hundred dollars in his pocket and got a 50-cents-an-hour job at a local gas station. One day, his former Boy Scoutmaster brought his car in for gas and asked Bergeron where he was living. After answering that he was living in the oil room in the back of the station, the Scoutmaster asked if he would be interested in maintaining his coconut grove, where he could live for free in a small abandoned house. Bergeron accepted the offer. Soon thereafter, a neighbor asked Bergeron to mow his pasture. Before long, he was also helping the local neighbors with baling hay and harvesting fruit. He put in long 18-hour days to complete all his jobs, and there were nights when he slept under his tractor because he was too exhausted to go back home.

Bergeron and his Scoutmaster formed a partnership and bought five tractors. One day, Bergeron went to him to talk about buying a bulldozer. His partner told him, "You are getting ready to go somewhere, and I've already been there. I'm going to give you my half of the business." In the end, Bergeron gave him the property they had bought together, and then he took over the business, which he incorporated in 1965 as Bergeron Land Development. By the time he was 25, he had 150 people working for him.

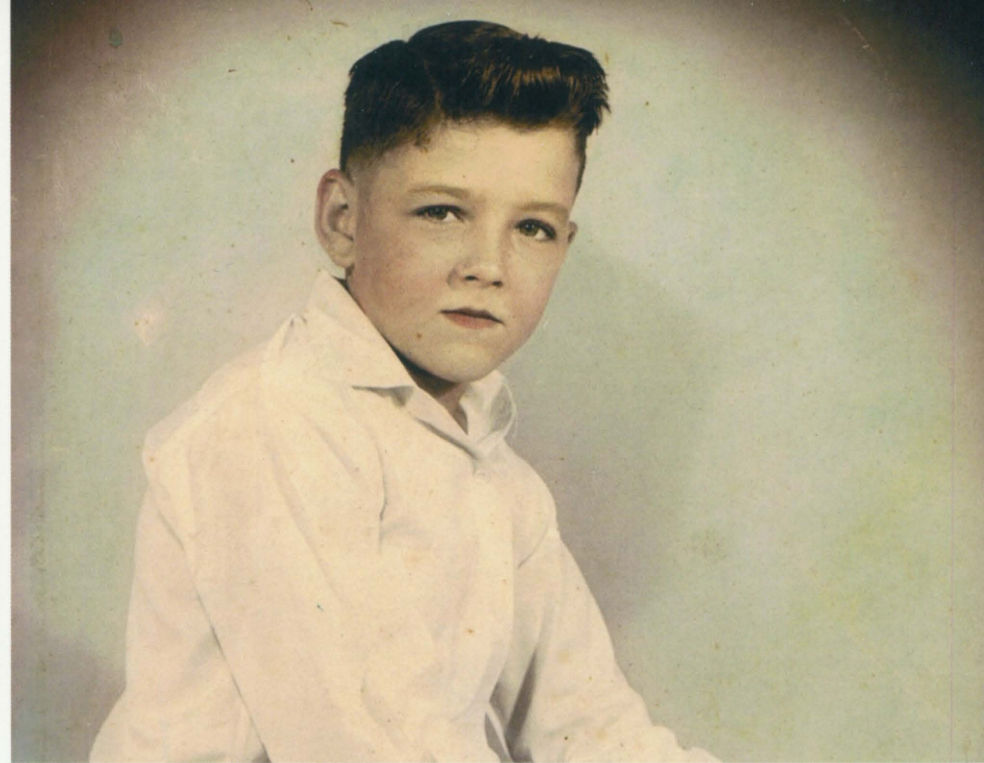
Bergeron read about a developer, Mort Kalin, who was going to build one of the largest communities in Florida. Bergeron made an appointment with Kalin, telling him he wanted to be the one to build his community. Kalin asked how much equipment he had, and Bergeron responded, "One bulldozer and a dump truck." Kalin's response: "Son, I'm not building a driveway, I'm building one of the largest communities in Florida." Disappointed, Bergeron turned to walk out of the office. At that point, Kalin noticed Bergeron's rodeo belt buckle, boots, and hat and asked if he was a cowboy. For the next 45 minutes, the two talked about their love of horses and how Kalin was in one of the last regiments of the mounted cavalry that went to war in World War II. By the end

of the conversation, Kalin told Bergeron he was going to give him a chance. Bergeron built the community, and Kalin, who is now 98 years old, became a mentor to him and still today is one of his best friends.

Bergeron began buying tracts of land that were in the path of development. His company would eventually build entire cities and major road systems and state highway interchanges. To succeed in the highly competitive



Above: Ron with his older brother, Lonnie. Next page, from left to right: This is the store, in 1949, owned by Ron's father and grandmother. Ron Bergeron, age 10. Bergeron's high school football team was the Gold Coast Champions in 1962. Alligator Ron bronc riding at the 1963 Davie Rodeo. Ron Bergeron with longtime friend, Mort Kalin, who served in the last mounted 112th Cavalry Regiment of World War II.





world of highway construction, in 1969, Bergeron entered into the mining and quarry business and supplied all his companies with highway construction material. By the age of 25, he had become a very successful businessman and entrepreneur, yet he lived in a house trailer until he was 40. "That's the discipline of a young man with no safety net," says Bergeron. "The greatest gift I ever gave was to build my parents a home before I built my own home. I didn't have wealthy parents; our wealth was in our love for our family. I chose to live moderately, even though I was a millionaire at 25. That's discipline and determination with every cell in your body."

Bergeron Land Development grew to be one of the most highly respected and largest site-development and roadway construction companies in Florida. The company has completed projects in the private and public sectors, including site preparation for residential subdivisions, commercial buildings, industrial, and other facilities as well as the construction of roads, highways, airports, and wetland mitigation areas. The company has been named among Florida's Top 100 Contractors in *Southeast Construction* magazine for the past several years and has been recognized worldwide by the American Civil Engineering Society for its Everglades Restoration project. In 1989, Bergeron incorporated a real-estate company, Bergeron Properties and Investments Corporation, which owns and manages a broad real estate portfolio of commercial and industrial properties throughout the United States and continues developing properties purchased by Bergeron more than 40 years ago.

WHAT I'VE LEARNED

Bergeron credits his upbringing with his early success. "I did what my parents always taught me," he says. "I woke up and thanked God for the day, worked out like I was going to the Olympics, went to work with every cell in my body, and then went home to be a good dad. It's important in business to always be honest and to live up to all your promises. That's how you build trust."

Bergeron is quick to define himself as a cowboy and a Gladesman. "That's my culture," he says. "Even with all my success, it has never changed who I am. I never traded in my airboats for yachts or my roping horses for racehorses. No matter how rich or famous, you still put your pants on one leg at a time. I still have the same values my parents instilled in me: earn respect because you can't buy it; kindness is free; spread your wings; thank God for every day; and don't worry about what you haven't got. They are good, strong values, and I don't think they will ever go out of fashion."

The father of six children, Bergeron says he is proud of the way they are carrying his legacy into the future. "The biggest part of my life is my family," he says. "I'm proud that my children, which include a former decade-long missionary in Haiti, a country singer in Nashville, a nurse studying to be a doctor, and my two sons that work with me so the Bergeron Family of

Companies can live into another generation. They are all living the American Dream. I also want to say how proud I am of my better half and partner in life, Ali Waldman. Together we have worked very hard to leave the world a better place and to support our community and many charities.

Appointed by two Florida governors, Bergeron serves as a Florida Fish and Wildlife Commissioner. He is the founder of the Bergeron Everglades Museum and Wildlife Foundation. His philanthropic activities include The Boys & Girls Club of Broward County, Wayne Huizenga Broward Partnership for the Homeless, the American Heart Association, Boy Scouts of America, Fort Lauderdale Historical Society, Equine Therapies for Handicapped Children, Bit by Bit, The Old Davie School Historical Museum, Professional Rodeo Cowboys Association, the Nova Southeastern Entrepreneur Program, along with many other charities. "Another thing I learned from my parents is to give back to your community and to remember and support your heritage," says Bergeron. "I think it's important to make a difference when and where you can."

Honored by his Horatio Alger Award, Bergeron says, "Not only are the members accomplished in their careers, they are also accomplished philanthropists. They are making the world a better place, and I'm happy to be a part of that. It will be a great honor for me to stand shoulder to shoulder with them. The American Dream is alive! Thank God for America and Happy Trails."

"It's important to remember your roots and your heritage. After that, be kind, be disciplined, and be responsible."

From left to right: Alligator wrestling is part of being a Gladesman. The Bergeron family. Alligator Ron and Alligator Ali. Bergeron at his ranch in the Florida Everglades. Alligator Ron rides his horse through the trails on his ranch.