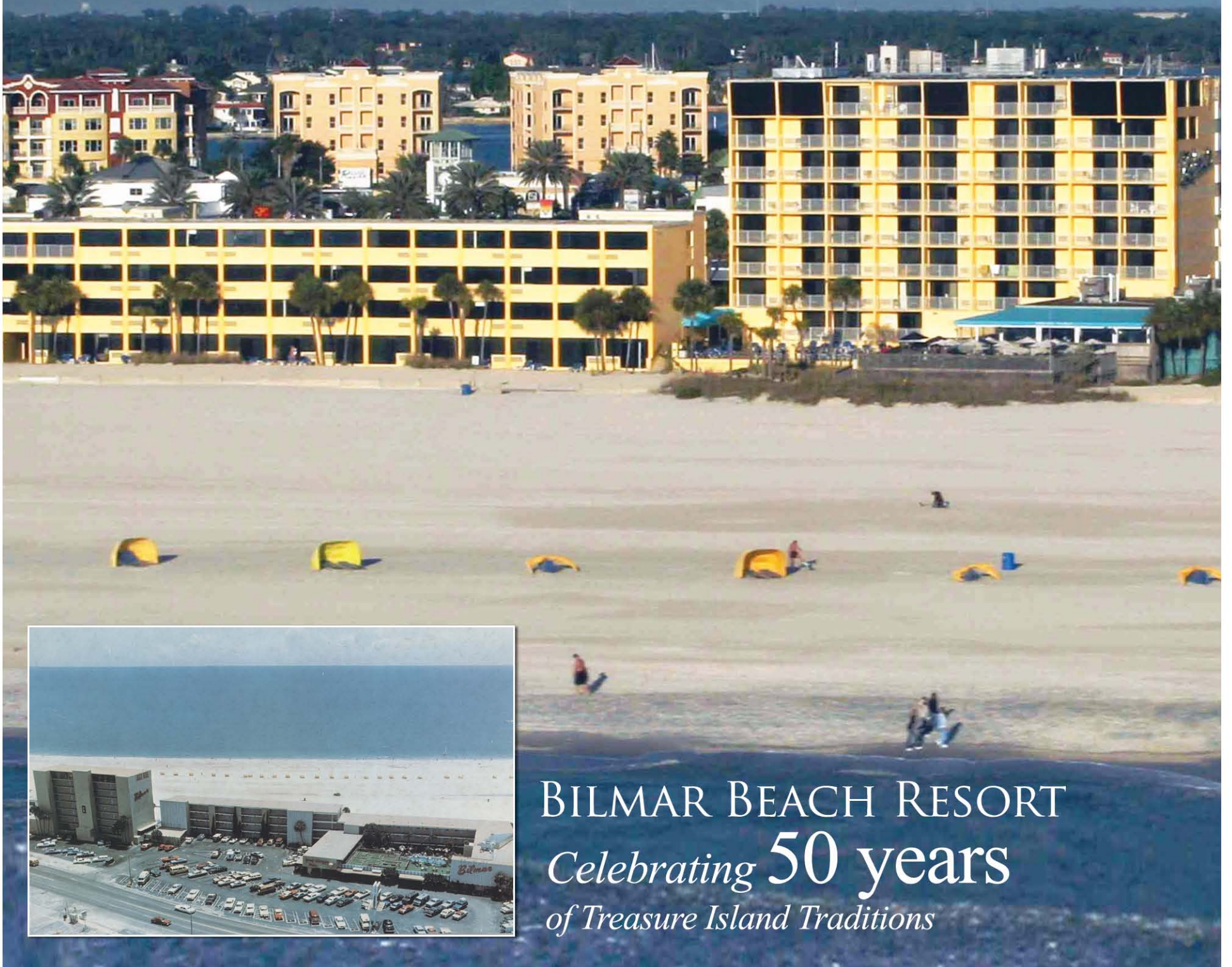


# Sun Coast Facilities

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# Today



BILMAR BEACH RESORT  
*Celebrating 50 years  
of Treasure Island Traditions*

# 50 Years of Island Tradition

■ Bilmar Beach Resort - Treasure Island, FL

The old saying “we grow better with age” is truly the case with the Bilmar Beach Resort, located on the sandy white beaches of Treasure Island, Florida. In the year of 2011 we will begin the celebration of the 50th anniversary of the landmark full-service resort. Since 1961 guests from all over the world have been making Treasure Island and the Bilmar their home- away- from -home, when visiting the Tampa Bay area.

## History of an Island

Treasure Island was not even an island before the hurricane of 1848 cut a 200 yard channel on the northern end through (what is now John’s Pass), separating Treasure Island from Madeira Beach. It received that name after being discovered by a turtle hunter named John Lewick. In 1908 the entire island was purchased for \$1.25 an acre and was little more than a sandy barrier reef, before the 24 voting residents incorporated it as Treasure Island in 1937. That all changed in 1939 when the original Treasure Island Causeway was built and gave direct access to the growing City of Saint Petersburg. Still, in 1955, there was very little development and (nothing that would resemble the Treasure Island of today) that now has over 9000 residents and an additional 158,000 annual visitors.

## Dreams and Debt

Russ Baltz from Grand Haven, Michigan first visited the Tampa Bay Beaches in 1955 to see his father in nearby St. Pete Beach. Already a busy tourist destination, he did not care much for the southern part of the county. In 1959 he discovered 550 feet of undeveloped land, in the heart of Treasure Island, adjoining the newly built Thunderbird Hotel. Putting up \$100,000 of inheritance money, Russ proceeded to recruit 5 couples, including some lifelong friends and a brother in law, to invest an additional \$100,000. Together the \$200,000 was only half of what would be needed to bring the dream of his Florida beach motel to life. After paying 8 points up front, the additional funds were secured from a “forever to remain unnamed” bank and the first phase of Russ Baltz’s dream was about to become a reality, on the northern 200 feet of property that Russ had originally picked out for his project. Working with builder Jimmy Knowles, they began the task of building the 3-story hotel with 64 rooms, courtyard pool, beach side bar and

the soon to be instrumental Grog Shoppe (named after the tavern in Robert Louis Stevenson’s novel Treasure Island). With \$17.00 in the bank account - actually that was a future reservation deposit - the doors opened on December 16th at 12:20 p.m.

## What’s in a Name?

The Bilmar name was not new to a lodging facility. Back in 1947, Russ had gotten into the hospitality business, after converting an old beach dance hall, in Michigan, into a 49-room motel and entertainment venue. In honor of his two children, Bill and Margot, he named the property the Bilmar Inn. In keeping with the family theme he proudly named the new 64- room hotel the Bilmar Beach Motel! Almost 40 years later the property changed hands, for the first time, and the new developer, Rob Risman, proudly kept the name and the family theme; Rob’s parents are named Bill and Marian.

## Phases for the Future

With only 64 rooms the thriving Grog Shoppe was producing the main income for the resort. With the help of a generous Texas couple, the financing picture became much brighter and the investors were able to get out from under the banks’ excessive fees and make headway towards eliminating the debt that had slowed them down. In 1964 the adjacent 200 feet of beach -front property was acquired from Dave Russell, who owned Admiral Farragut Academy. An additional 49 rooms were constructed via a connecting 4-story building. With over 100 rooms the Bilmar was now in po-

sition to truly promote a full service resort. Business was good and the original investors were being paid off in full.

In 1969 the last 150 feet of property was purchased and in 1971 the final phase of hotel rooms was built, featuring an 8-story tower with an additional 60 rooms, 8th floor owner apartments, large gulf-front swimming pool (making it the first area hotel boasting two pools) and the 3500 square foot Sunset Room, providing space to serve up to 300 people for dinners and meetings.

Now more than ever, the Bilmar Beach Resort was a Tampa Bay Beaches Landmark and an icon at the entrance to Treasure Island. Russ’ son Bill Baltz soon took over the general management of the Bilmar, from his father, and continued the traditions started in 1961. Instead of additional construction, friendly service and loyal employees were the key to the resort’s success for the next couple of decades.

## New Beginnings

After 39 years of ownership, the Baltz family made the heartfelt decision to sell the Bilmar Beach Resort. Rob Risman, president of Burton Carol Management Company out of Cleveland, Ohio, purchased the resort in 2000. In an era known more for the demolition of the mid-century beach hotels ( in favor of condo construction) the change of ownership came with a handshake and gentleman’s agreement to keep the Bilmar a resort facility. While appropriate maintenance had been done to the facilities and guest rooms, the décor and furnishings were in much need of renovations. Rob’s company specialized in residential apartment management and had complexes throughout Pinellas County. To ensure property care and maintenance of the resort, Rob

hired Forbes Hamilton Management Company out of Kissimmee, Florida to oversee the day to day management and work together with Rob’s team for the long range planning of the future for the Bilmar Beach Resort.

The first bold step taken was to paint the prominent 3- building complex a bold “South Beach Yellow” that highlighted the V-Panels with globe lighting on the exterior of the building. While received with mixed





reviews, from the island locals, it definitely gave the Bilmar Beach Resort an image you could not miss while traveling on Gulf Boulevard, (the main north and south route on the barrier islands). At the same time the owner's apartments, on the 8th floor of the tower, were converted into three deluxe penthouse suites. The floor-to-ceiling windows, offering spectacular views of the Gulf of Mexico and surrounding islands, offered the perfect location to provide upscale accommodations, not previously found on Treasure Island.

### Building for the Future

In 2003, a decision had to be made about the future of the Sunset Room. After 32 years, the room had hosted more than its share of meetings, celebrations and beach weddings that the resort had now become famous for, throughout Tampa Bay. Research showed the banquet business was critical for the resort's future but it relied heavily on weekend business only ;the same time the tourists and locals wanted to stay on the beach. With strong ties to Key West a deal was made to secure the brand name of "Sloppy Joe's on the Beach" and add a signature restaurant in the space, formally used for banquets. Working with the City of Treasure Island, Hennessy Construction Services was contracted to build a new destination restaurant (at the south end of the resort with two levels of outdoor dining extending onto the beach) with the best sunset dining views found on the island. "Sloppy Joe's on the Beach" has become a favorite for the locals and a must-see for any visitor from around the world. Another difficult decision was made to close the Grog Shoppe, which had long served as the signature lounge and

restaurant for the resort. In keeping with the traditions of being a wedding destination, a new banquet room was built in the general location of the Grog Shoppe. Again, Hennessy Construction Services was contracted to do intensive construction, including the removal of a wing of non-gulf front guest rooms, to make way for the 2500 square Crystal-Sands Banquet Room. This multi-use room allowed for the resort to host meetings and banquets that continue to provide an affordable beach retreat for businesses, class reunions and family celebrations.

### New Era of Luxury

It was seen and said by the loyal Bilmar guests that the time was past due to update the guest rooms. Still featuring wicker furniture and pecky cypress walls, the rooms looked like the remnants of a by-gone era. With a long-term commitment to the Bilmar Beach Resort, the decision was made in 2005 to "remake" the guest rooms into modern luxury accommodations. Under the close supervision of Joy Anzalone, COO of Burton Carol Management, and the construction company Frazee



inc., the 165 remaining guest rooms were taken down to the bare studs and built back to the décor and standards of today's top-line luxury hotels. New features included: granite bath surrounds and countertops, tiled foyers and bath floors, flat panel LCD TV's, orange peel textured walls and ceilings, new H.V.A.C. units, new doors and windows and all-new balcony and corridor railings. Two thirds of the units have kitchen efficiencies with custom cabinetry and glass stove-top burners. While the traditions and hospitality that made the Bilmar Beach Resort a landmark destination remained, it was not the old Bilmar generations of families, that had grown up, visiting. A new era had begun.



### Commitment to Tomorrow

After more than \$20,000,000 in reinvestment, Rob Risman has made a remarkable commitment to keeping the Bilmar Beach Resort a destination resort that the guest can have confidence in booking. With traditions like Dixieland Jazz, fabulous beach weddings and holiday festivities, upscale amenities and family programs, the property and service continues to exceed guest's expectations each year. The managements' commitment to the employees and community is evident with the resort receiving the "Mid-size Business of the Year Award" for 2009 and the General Manager being honored as the "Tourism Person of the Year" in 2010, by the Tampa Bay Beaches Chamber of Commerce. The entire Bilmar Team is active in the City Vision Committee's, Chamber of Commerce and Non-Profit fund raisers and boasts more than 520 years of Bilmar service, dating back 41 years. It is the long term commitment to the community and facility, that makes the 50th Celebration of the Resort just the beginning. The Bilmar Beach Resort is truly the location to Get Away and Get It All.



GET AWAY. GET IT ALL.

10650 Gulf Blvd. | Treasure Island, FL 33706  
(727) 360-5531 | [www.BilmarBeachResort.com](http://www.BilmarBeachResort.com)