

A specialty food market in North Miami Beach

Again, our search for interesting markets that provide Italian food brought us to Lorenzo's Italian Center at 16385 West Dixie Highway, North Miami Beach, Florida. It is directly across from the Post Office in North Miami Beach and near The Ancient Spanish Monastery. It has survived the big chain food stores since the Italian Center opened in 1964. Ben and his wife Millie began providing many specialty products, baked goods, fish, meat and cheese selections. It has a marvelous olive bar. Their wine offerings are extensive. We have found that their variety of spices are excellent.

Until Ben Lorenzo died of a liver ailment on January 15, 2018 at the age of 89, the Center was run by Ben and his son David Lorenzo with other family members and staff. Lorenzo faked his birth certificate and entered the military when he was 15 years old. In the US Navy, he served on the USS Arkansas and experienced the hydrogen bomb test explosion in the Bikini Atoll.

Laurenzo was born in Schenectady, NY, son of Achilles Laurenzo and Estherina Cassella. He credits his mother with her cooking and real estate knowledge in starting his business. According to the *Miami New Times* article, Laurenzo told people he never missed a paycheck from the age of 5. Ben moved to Florida and started his food business in 1951. Laurenzo's Italian Center attracted famous stars like Frank Sinatra, Sophia Loren and Jack Nicholson. Laurenzo's Center shipped their food world-wide. Robert Mondavi, Louis Latour and other gourmet wines were brought into the Center during the 1960's and 70's.

According to an article in the *Biscayne Times* (November 2015), North Miami Beach is a very diverse community:

"North Miami Beach is a five-square-mile city of 42,350 people wedged between North Miami, Sunny Isles Beach, the unincorporated Skylake-Highland Lakes area, and Aventura. Its neighborhoods include Eastern Shores, an affluent waterfront community just across the bridge from Sunny Isles Beach, where single-family homes sell for about \$1 million. But most of this city's residents aren't rich. The median household income is \$40,755, and 20.1 percent of its population live at or below the poverty level.

North Miami Beach is a diverse community, as evidenced by its small shops and restaurants. Roughly 25 percent of the city is Haitian-born or of Haitian ancestry, according to the latest census figures. The rest of the population is mixed, including Cubans, Dominicans, Hondurans, Colombians, Peruvians, Puerto Ricans, Jamaicans, Russians, Polish, Italians, Mexicans, Chinese, Filipinos, French, Irish, Israelis, Germans, Arabs, and various other nationalities. Just under half the population was born somewhere else. Divided in broader groups, 35 percent of NMB's residents are Hispanic, 20.6 percent are Anglo, 41.2 percent are black, and 2.9 percent are Asian.

North Miami Beach doesn't have a beach -- but you can get to Sunny Isles Beach and Haulover Beach pretty quickly via NE 163rd Street. The city is located directly between Miami and Fort Lauderdale, and is adjacent to the Golden Glades Interchange and major roadways like Biscayne Boulevard and Miami Gardens Drive. That central location helped NMB grow in the 1940s, 1950s, and 1960s -- but not so much these days."

This photo program will give you a brief tour of the Laurenzo's Italian Center.





Sources: <http://laurenzosmarket.com/>, <https://www.yelp.com/biz/laurenzos-italian-center-n-miami-beach>,
<https://www.chamberofcommerce.com/north-miami-beach-fl/2244504-laurenzos-italian-specialty-food-market>,
http://www.biscaynetimes.com/index.php?option=com_content&id=2221:city-on-the-verge&Itemid=252 and
<https://www.miaminewtimes.com/restaurants/ben-laurenzo-founder-of-laurenzos-italian-market-dead-at-89-10010122>.

acuri.net John R. Vincenti **Laurenzo's Italian Center: A specialty food market in North Miami Beach**