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CORAL GABLES

Country Club Prado ready for closeups

Wedding parties and birthday girls are once again flocking to Country Club Prado for pictures after the city spent more than \$800,000 on renovations.

BY CARLI TEPROFF

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Dressed in a fancy purple party dress and shiny tiara, Mairlan C. Lainez leaned against a weathered brick pillar, flashing a toothy smile for the camera.

Next, she stood under a canopy of trees, moving her head in the direction of a photographer.

The 15-year-old said she had been dreaming about having her quinceañera photos “my whole life.”

And even though Mairlan, a Miami native, now lives in Tampa, she knew she wanted to come back to Coral Gables’ Country Club Prado to have “perfect” scrapbook pictures.

“It’s just so pretty here,” she said Friday after changing into comfortable shorts and a shirt. “There’s nowhere else like it.”

Known for its old-time charm, Country Club Prado, a passive park located at Red Road and Eighth Street, has become a chosen spot by many photographers for wedding, quinceañera and other occasion photos.

The well-manicured lawns and Mediterranean architecture took a leave of absence as city workers cleaned and renovated and polished. Now, brides, grooms, quinceañeras and sweet sixteens once again are drawn to the unique space.

Some say recent renovations to the brick and stucco entrance’s monuments and fountains — which were built in 1927 as part of founder George Merrick’s original plans for the City Beautiful — have made the place even more attractive.

“They made it look better and it still has the historical feel,” said Mairlan’s photographer, Salvador Rodriguez.

“People always want to take pictures here.”

With money from Miami-Dade County’s Building Better Communities General Obligation Bond, approved by voters in 2004, the city recently completed more than \$800,000 in renovations, sprucing up all the entrance columns, archways, balustrades, the pool and the two pedestal fountains.

City spokeswoman Maria Higgins-Fallon said the fountains likely will be turned on soon, and a ribbon-cutting ceremony will be held to rededicate the park.

“It is a very popular place,” Higgins-Fallon said, noting that the city frequently issues permits to commercial photographers. Commercial photographers must pay \$87 for a still photo shoot permit and \$289 for a video permit.

And though photographers say they love using Country Club Prado as the backdrop for pictures, getting a permit is often too expensive.

“We have been booted out a couple of times because we didn’t have a permit,” said photographer Barbara Rammoneda, who said she didn’t even realize at first a permit was needed for shooting at the park. “People can’t afford it.”

Rammoneda, who had just finished shooting one girl’s quinceañera photos, said her clients love Country Club Prado because it is a beautiful, natural environment.

“It just has an old-time feel,” she said.