



**meet the neighbors**

By Jacquelyn Powers Maurice

# ACTIVIST SABRINA COHEN HAS TAPPED FAMED ARCHITECT KOBİ KARP TO DESIGN HER ADAPTIVE BEACH & RECREATION CENTER ON MIAMI BEACH



Sabrina modeling the Kobi Karp hoodie

For over a decade, Sabrina Cohen has been championing for people with disabilities to be able to use our parks and beautiful beaches. While it started as a personal crusade after she got stuck in the sand while trying to access the ocean, this has grown into a wider movement touching the lives of locals and international tourists with disabilities. You may not realize it, but a swim in the ocean can require specialized equipment, multiple trained professionals, beach mats and water wheelchairs. And this affects 29% of the population in Miami-Dade County. Hence, the Sabrina Cohen Foundation was born, a 501c3 nonprofit organization dedicated to developing adaptive fitness and recreational programs, in addition to funding innovative therapies that will provide a better quality of life for individuals living with paralysis and various disabilities. . . .



Renderings for Sabrina Cohen Foundation- Adaptive Recreation Center





Sabrina with Sunset Island resident Mrs. Lombardi and daughter Brooke Lombardi



Sabrina with Sunset Island 4 resident David Grutman



Karp family and staff with Sabrina



Karp family at Sabrina's Adaptive Beach Day

"I was always into fitness and exercise," Cohen recalls. "I was a swimmer in high school, I was in gymnastics, I did ballet, I was a tomboy. Exercise was always ingrained into who I am as a person. After my spinal injury, exercise became of primary importance to regain function, stay healthy and live an active lifestyle. In 2012, I had just broken my foot and I was recovering from pneumonia. I was with a colleague on Ocean Drive and it was a beautiful sunny day and I just wanted to get near the water. I started rolling my chair into the sand and I got stuck. It took about six tourists to get me out. They were all really cute, so I didn't mind, but it was still a moment where I felt humiliated and helpless. And so that's where this idea was born. I literally got stuck in the sand. I marched into City Hall with this grandiose idea that we needed to create better access for people with disabilities or mobility challenges. And they welcomed me with open arms."

As a result of her activism, in 2016, the Sabrina Cohen Foundation created Adaptive Beach Days twice a month on 64th and Collins Avenue, attracting people from all over the world. "Sometimes it's the first time in five or ten years that they've been to the beach or the ocean," Cohen notes. "However, I always knew

that to do this right, we were going to need a facility to complement the outdoor access all year round." The City of Miami Beach agreed and donated the land to house this Adaptive Beach & Recreation Center with a full technology lab, fitness center and rooftop swimming pool. The building will be located on the northeast corner of the City's 53rd Street and Collins Avenue P-72 surface parking lot.

Next, Cohen, with the help of advisor Debbie Leibowitz, met with architect Kobi Karp (Sunset Islands home owner) to discuss coming on board the project. "I jumped on it right away and said yes," Karp says. "My wife Nancy and my boys became involved, too. Sabrina has created a community destination. It's not only for young people, it's multi-generational. There are veterans who are handicapped from their service with the United States army." Karp donated his architectural services and designed a stunning structure both in its visuals and approach.

"We looked at the design in a different light," Karp continues. "Usually the experience of somebody in a wheelchair is to bring you into the building and you progress into an elevator until you

come out to the floor you desire. Instead, we created a ramp somewhat similar to what Frank Lloyd Wright did at the Guggenheim; the experience of that museum is that you are basically moving up a ramp. Although the Guggenheim is not handicap accessible because the slope is higher, the concept is the same. You ascend up the building via a floating ramp, allowing you to experience the tropical outdoors. And as you ascend or descend, you see other people coming up and down and you can talk to them. It's a very unique architectural experience. There will be ivy and landscaping growing on the actual building itself, creating a green wall, which is unique and special." Already, the design is generating accolades, including a feature in Architectural Digest last year.

"This facility is utilizing universal design, which means everyone can access it," Cohen adds. "Most disabled people get their exercise from a physical therapy gym or clinical hospital-like setting. I wanted to create something that was exactly the opposite of that. In my neighborhood in Sunset Harbor, there's like six gyms on one block. But I have to travel an hour to find a place to exercise. At our facility, you come into our gym, there's a technology lab, a café, you're making friends, you're doing a yoga class, you're

doing some art therapy, you're going to the beach. The idea is to be progressive and different." The three-story building will also have solar panels, a backup generator and meditation garden.

In terms of the Adaptive Center's progress, the Sabrina Cohen Foundation is responsible for the fundraising and must hit several financial goals in order to proceed. By the end of this summer, they need to raise \$1.5 million to reach their first commitment. The final number is \$10 million. Cohen is meeting with private companies and donors for naming rights and sponsorship opportunities.

For more information on how you can help and/or sponsor a section of the building, please contact Sabrina Cohen at 305-968-8024, [sabrina@sabrinacohenfoundation.com](mailto:sabrina@sabrinacohenfoundation.com) or visit [www.sabrinacohenfoundation.org](http://www.sabrinacohenfoundation.org)