

WESTON, Fla. — In December 2002, Ariel Dunaevschi, then the owner of a furniture business in Caracas, Venezuela, was on vacation in New York with his family when opponents of President Hugo Chávez called a crippling labor strike hoping to bring the government to its knees. As the protest wore on, paralyzing the country’s oil industry and devastating the economy, the Dunaevschis saw a very uncertain future for Venezuela and arrived at a painful decision: they would be better off staying in the United States.

They flew to Florida and rented a house here in Weston, a suburb west of Fort Lauderdale that has become so popular with Venezuelan immigrants, it is known as Westonzuela.....

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Venezuelans are outnumbered in South Florida by Cubans, Puerto Ricans, Colombians, Mexicans, Nicaraguans and Dominicans, according to data from the 2006 census, but Venezuelan leaders here believe their population may have vaulted to fourth place on that list, upwards of 100,000, taking into account those who have overstayed tourist visas.

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“For a while you may forget about Chávez, forget about Miami, you’re drinking your beer, you’re insulting everybody, you’re having fun,” he said. “It’s a way to forget about everything.”



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