

Leaders stand out for distinctive efforts to spur area growth

THE BEST OF MIAMI 2010 ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

By JACQUELYN WEINER

There are those who stumble on success by chance and those who create it.

As Miami-Dade finds its way out of the recession, select leaders stand out for their dedication to spurring area growth.

In her nine years as president of the University of Miami, Dr. **Donna E. Shalala** has carved the way for exciting new discoveries and area careers in the life sciences, said Jack Lowell, vice chair of the Beacon Council's board and vice president at Flagler Real Estate Services.

"The life sciences center is going to be a great job generator over time," Mr. Lowell said. "Her recruitment of major research specialists and top deans to the university has made a dramatic improvement."

The first phase of construction on the University of Miami Life Science and Technology Park, a research and development building, is expected to be complete in the second quarter of 2011, according to the park's website.

"The first building will include 400,000 square feet of wet labs, offices, and shared facilities to be leased by both established and spin-off companies," according to the university's web site. "The project is a major step toward making South Florida a biomedical research powerhouse and a major medical destination."

Dr. Shalala joined the University of Miami as president in June 2001. Her resume includes top-level positions at universities in New York and Wisconsin, serving as US secretary of health and human services un-

der President Bill Clinton and as assistant secretary for public development and research at the US Department of Housing and Urban Development under President Jimmy Carter.

She has received countless awards, according to the school's website, including more than three dozen honorary degrees and the Presidential Medal of Freedom – highest civilian award in the US.

Since Dr. Shalala became president, the University of Miami has climbed national rankings, hosted presidential debates in 2004 and 2007 and gained recognition as a top research university.

But the school's influence stretches beyond its borders, Dr. Shalala said.

"I believe that universities are economic engines," she said. "They're not only educational institutions, but they create jobs in their communities."

And to keep the "best and brightest" in Miami, Dr. Shalala said, the life sciences and technology fields offer promising opportunities.

"This is where the action is going to be."

Another Miamian focusing on technology to spur area economic development is **Marc Billings**, founder of high-tech startup aid Incubate Miami.

Business incubators like Incubate Miami help new businesses grow by providing office facilities, conference space and services like phone, internet access and other necessary infrastructure.

And they're effective at keeping jobs in the community: 84% of companies that graduate from a local startup stay in the area, Mr. Billings said.



Photo by Maxima Udan

Marc Billings founded a high-tech incubator "with the goal of bringing more innovation" to downtown.

Incubate Miami is "an excellent model that is fostering more partnership between the city's public and private sectors with the goal of bringing more innovation to downtown Miami," nominator Alyce Robertson, executive director of the Miami Downtown Development Authority, wrote in an e-mail.

"Creating a strong technology base will help spur new jobs and wealth for our region in today's new economy," Ms. Robertson wrote. "And in less than a year, the program is already seeing great success."

Launched in 2009, Incubate Miami has worked with about 40 local companies and physically housed six, Mr. Billings said.

It is also in the midst of a 1,800-square-foot expansion to its current space at 200 SE First St., he said, to be complete by the end of June.

In addition to providing "a home base for entrepreneurs," Incubate Miami's free, county-funded programs like twice-monthly expert roundtables and financial consulting provide a support system for budding area technology firms, Mr. Billings said.

It's about "creating a confidence for young entrepreneurs to develop their company," he said.

A 35-year Miami resident, Mr. Billings said his motivation in founding Incubate Miami was to kick-start the area's drive to present high-tech opportunities.

"Miami is fundamentally behind in the game in creating new jobs in high tech," Mr. Billings said. "Somebody had to take the next step."

Technology is an especially promising growth area, he said, because "every sector of Miami corporate life" can benefit from it.

And helping spur that growth has been both rewarding and fun, Mr. Billings said.

"Creating new ideas is a great part of our business," he said. "The energy surrounding it is fantastic."

As for other industries, you can't discuss Miami-Dade's economic development without a nod to tourism, one of the area's largest dollar generators.

And of the thousands of visitors who pour into Miami each year, about 95% arrive through Miami International Airport.

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The airport's major carrier, American Airlines, has ferried visitors in and out of the Magic City at a rate of 300 flights a day and counting, said **Peter J. Dolara**, senior vice president for Mexico, Caribbean and Latin America based in Miami.

American Airlines stayed put in Miami during the economic downturn when many other industries cut back, adding flights to its growing hub.

For the airline's dedication to the area and efforts in marketing the destination, William D. Talbert III, president and CEO of the Greater Miami Convention & Visitors Bureau, nominated Mr. Dolara as a Miami leader in economic development.

"Under the leadership of Peter Dolara, the Miami hub has grown to be one of the largest gateways in American Airlines' network, providing more than 75% of the inbound airlift to Miami and employing more than 9,000 people," Mr. Talbert said in an e-mail. "American Airlines plays a key role in Miami's success as a global, world-class destination."

Mr. Dolara, who is originally from Uruguay, started working for American Airlines in 1971 and came to Miami from New York 20 years ago to help build the hub.

Being on board from "day one," Mr. Dolara said, he has watched Miami grow from 19 flights a day to its current 300 flights a day.

Since "the very early days of Miami," Mr. Dolara said, "we understood that tourism in Miami International Airport is critical to the flights."

That's why the airline has worked to market the area, he said.

"The [customer] wants to know 'If I go there, what do I do?'" Mr. Dolara said. "The business is the destination on American Airlines. We are a vehicle."

And with Miami being "paramount" to the cruise industry and the "best place to do business with Latin American and the Caribbean," American intends to continue growing its area hub.

"Miami is positioned as an ideal city," Mr. Dolara said. "This is something that we're going to continue working on and promoting."