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Downtown agency says it has lured 17 undisclosed companies

By ABRAHAM GALVAN

One year after the Miami Downtown Development Authority (DDA) launched its "Follow the Sun" economic development campaign, the agency has secured commitments from 17 new-to-market firms that will create a projected 1,835 high-wage jobs over the next three years.

These new positions are expected to pay an average annual salary in excess of \$128,000 and participating companies are expected to bring more than \$42 million in combined capital investment to downtown Miami, according to the development authority.

"Follow the Sun" launched in fall 2020 and has since attracted companies that expect to occupy more than 250,000 square feet of real estate in downtown and Brickell areas. The Miami DDA's Board of Directors said they have approved up to \$940,000 in funding to facilitate the arrival and expansion of these firms and the employment opportunities they will create. Names of the businesses and amount of individual funds distributed are confidential, the DDA said.

"2021 picked up where 2020 left off, with a steady stream of companies and their executives looking to downtown Miami as a great place to hire talent, grow their business and enjoy a better lifestyle," said Manolo Reyes, Miami city commissioner and DDA chairman. "Miami has always been a business-friendly city, and the Miami DDA's 'Follow the Sun' campaign is raising the stakes by sending a message that this is a community that takes economic development seriously, both in terms of the jobs it creates and the support it brings to existing businesses."

The business and employment developing initiative is tailored to companies that plan to create a minimum of ten new jobs downtown. For the 2022 fiscal year, applicants are eligible for a one-time payment of \$1,000 per employee in the Miami DDA district – up to \$50,000 per business annually and \$150,000 over a three-year period. Eligible companies

must pay employees a minimum salary of \$80,000 per year.

"Miami has positioned itself as a business-friendly community where companies from outside the region can nurture talent, collaborate with other like-minded firms, and afford their team members a desirable quality of life," said Miami DDA Executive Director Christina Crespi. "Our 'Follow the Sun' program is taking things a step further by sending the message that companies can access all of these benefits and access an added layer of support. Beyond providing funding, our team is assisting firms with their office relocation plans, making connections with local universities, and fostering collaboration with existing Miami businesses."

The influx of businesses and residents into downtown Miami is also fueling the area's real estate market. Average Class A office rents have increased for four consecutive quarters with an average direct asking rate of \$53.21 in downtown and \$71.39 in Brickell, with more than 1 million square feet of new office space currently under

development, according to Colliers' third-quarter office space market report.

"It's not only about the incentives or the funds, but more about getting validated and getting our name out to the market," said Akos Balogh, co-founder of Moscase, which is one of the participating companies in the new-to-market business launching campaign. "Being here as an international entrepreneur and as an immigrant, it's not so easy to find the right way to speak with the right people to hire."

The software start-up company is currently looking for office space up to 3,000 square feet in the downtown or Brickell area and plans to open early next year, said Mr. Balogh, who added he will start the hiring process of about 14 people in the next couple of months.

"We are super ambitious to be the next big thing in Miami, which is a hardware, software-based startup," he added. "The Miami DDA is really serving as a concierge service for startup companies like us. They are really guiding us through the entire process and that is what is making a big difference, the personalized service and touch."



Christina Crespi