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TODAY'S NEWS

MIAMI TODAY 7

## Downtown Miami creating alternative to absent Art Basel

By KYLEA HENSELER

With the year winding down, Miami's Downtown Development Authority is ramping up funding for key initiatives and new activations.

The organization will sponsor "Alt-B," a play on words for "Alternative Basel," which will grant funds to local artists to activate storefronts downtown throughout December, Executive Director Christina Crespi told Miami Today. At least \$50,000 and possibly more, she said, will be granted to artists who will take over vacant storefronts on Flagler Street and adjacent roads to showcase their art in the windows. Installations, she said, will vary from still art to dancers, and interest in the project is booming.

Each artist, she said, will be given \$2,500 for an activation, and each window will feature QR codes that visitors can scan to access information about both the artists and the property.

"We really wanted to plan a unique activation space that the community can enjoy that will

bring back a vibe to downtown," she said. Festivities will likely begin the week of Dec. 7 and run for a month, bringing tourists and locals alike to window shop and patronize local restaurants and retailers.

Dec. 11, she said, will also see the return of "DwnTwn Movie Nights," the development authority's bi-weekly cinema series at Maurice A. Ferré Park. The season's first production, "Elf," will be screened at 6 p.m. Dec. 11, and patrons will have to reserve tickets in advance and observe social distancing protocols.

Like "Alt-B," Ms. Crespi said, the movie series will promote a community feeling while providing patrons an excuse to shop and dine out. Before Covid, she said, the authority had hosted food trucks and happy hours to coincide with the events, which often drew a crowd.

Miami Today reported in September that the authority had planned to launch a 60-day pilot with delivery service UberEats that would have reduced some fees for local restaurants, but Ms.



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**Christina Crespi**

Crespi said the pilot has not yet begun and details are still being negotiated with the company.

Throughout the year, the organization granted over \$1 million to various programs including initiatives to distribute masks

and hand sanitizer and provide local businesses with chairs and umbrellas for expanded outdoor dining.

Additionally, Ms. Crespi said, it granted \$180,000 to Camillus House and Lotus House, two organizations working to combat homelessness in Miami.

The authority, she said, has been working with Camillus House for over ten years to provide employment as landscapers or part of a "cleanup crew." \$40,000 of the grant, she said, will go toward buying 75 beds at Camillus, which is vital, as having available beds at shelters allows police and outreach workers to offer homeless individuals shelter. Another \$40,000 will go toward their "Day Center Program, and \$50,000 will be put toward a new Lotus House pilot program that will provide outreach and shelter beds to women and children.

As part of its "Follow the Sun," campaign, the authority is also granting \$150,000 to private equity firm Blackstone, which has plans to open an office in downtown Miami that

is to create at least 200 jobs for employees earning an average of \$200,000 annually. The company, Ms. Crespi said, held a webinar in collaboration with the development authority to explain its decision to expand to Miami. A chief reason, she said, is the belief in Miami's diverse and growing talent pool.

Under the authority's incentive fund program, Miami Today reported in August, new or relocating companies can earn cash grants of \$500 per employee for the first 50 jobs, \$350 per employee for the next 50, and \$250 per employee after that. To qualify, a company must within three years create at least ten fulltime jobs, the average salary of which has to be at least 125% of the city, county or state average.

According to a spokesperson, Blackstone is hoping to hire 70% locals for the Miami office, rounding out the operation with transplants from other cities who will help get the new office going and contribute to the economy by buying homes and patronizing local businesses.