

Downtown NEWS

February 5, 2023

Unique Monthly Visitors: 467

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New DDA Board Members

The Miami Downtown Development Authority (DDA) swore in five new board members, including former DNA President Amal Solh Kabbani.



From left to right: Christina Crespi, executive director of the Miami DDA; Amal Solh Kabbani, vice president of Publicis Groupe; Nick Katz, founder of Skate Free and owner of Andrew Skate Shop; Patrick Goddard, Brightline president; City of Miami Commissioner Manolo Reyes; City of Miami Mayor Francis Suarez; Dr. Maryam Laguna Borrego, Miami Dade College's (MDC) Vice President for External Affairs & Strategy and Chief of Staff; and Martu Freeman-Parker, Mana Fashion Services managing director. Photo courtesy of RBB Communications.

The Miami Downtown Development Authority appointed five new board members: Miami Dade College's (MDC) Vice President for External Affairs & Strategy and Chief of Staff, **Dr. Maryam Laguna Borrego**; Mana Fashion Services Managing Director, **Martu E. Freeman-Parker**; Brightline President, **Patrick Goddard**; Publicis Groupe Vice President, **Amal Solh Kabbani**; and founder of the nonprofit organization Skate Free and owner of Andrew Skate Shop, **Nick Katz**.

The five new members were selected from dozens of candidates by a Nominating Committee of Miami DDA board members. The committee's nominations were then approved by the DDA's full board of directors and subsequently accepted by the City of Miami Commission. "Downtown Miami is thriving as the epicenter of a world-class city. Thousands of new residents and dozens of new businesses call this neighborhood home every year, and as we have grown exponentially, so does the need for us to expand our board with more dedicated leaders," says City of Miami Commissioner Manolo Reyes, who also serves as Chairman of the Miami DDA. "The new additions to our board of directors are stewards of the community who live and breathe Downtown Miami and are committed to seeing the area reach its full potential."

The Downtown Development Authority

The Miami DDA is an independent agency of the City of Miami funded by a special tax levy on properties in its district boundaries. It is governed by a 15-member Board comprised of three public appointees and 12 downtown property owners, residents and/or workers who are tasked with overseeing the direction of the agency and setting policy. The DDA is committed to grow, strengthen, and promote the economic health and vitality of downtown Miami. Visit www.MiamiDDA.com for more information.

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Meet the 5 New Board Members

Dr. Maryam Laguna Borrego, Vice President for External Affairs & Strategy and Chief of Staff to the President, Miami Dade College. For more than a decade, Dr. Laguna Borrego has turned her passion for advancing higher education into an accomplished career. At MDC, she serves as a facilitator and conduit between the Office of the President and key internal and external stakeholders, including the College's Board of Trustees. As the external affairs vice president and chief of staff, she provides leadership and operational oversight for MDC's government affairs, cultural affairs, The Idea Center, the 10,000 Small Businesses Program, strategic plan implementation, and leads the Office of the President.

Martu E. Freeman-Parker, Managing Director, Mana Fashion Services. Freeman-Parker has worked with some of the most recognized names in fashion and design, including Ralph Lauren, Victoria's Secret, Calvin Klein and Condé Nast Publications, and currently serves as the managing director of Mana Fashion Services. Freeman-Parker also operates her apparel consultant business, M.E.F. Productions LLC, in Miami, where she offers a variety of services to budding designers, in addition to being the founder and host of Fashion TALKS Miami and authoring the book, "Get the Hell Out!"

Patrick Goddard, President, Brightline. As President of Brightline, Goddard is responsible for leading the multi-billion-dollar intercity passenger rail's development and expansion, which will connect South Florida to Central Florida. He also oversees the company's go-to market strategies, including more than 1.5 million-square feet of transit-oriented development. As a recognized leader and philanthropist, Goddard was recently recognized as one of the South Florida Power 100 by City & State Florida. He has also been named one of the South Florida Business Journal's "Power Leaders 250" and Florida Trend's "500 Most Influential Leaders". He also serves as a member of the Florida Council of 100, is a graduate of Leadership Florida's Executive Class and sits on the board of Camillus House.

Amal Solh Kabbani, Vice President, Publicis Groupe. With deep experience in retail, finance, automotive, and hospitality industries, and an exceptional record for account retention and mature market growth, Kabbani is leading the charge in revolutionizing enterprise communications at one of the oldest global marcomms agencies, Publicis Groupe. She previously held positions at Inter Régies/M&C Saatchi in Beirut, YAR Advertising, Mullen Lowe, and SourceLink. In addition, Kabbani has served as the president of the Downtown Neighbors Alliance and Young Patronesses of the Opera and is a founding officer of Magic City Opera. She currently serves as the president of 50 Biscayne Homeowners Association.

Nick Katz, owner of Andrew Skate Shop and founder of Skate Free Born and raised in Miami, Katz found a way to combine a profoundly influential force in his life, skateboarding, with his passion for giving back to his hometown through his nonprofit, Skate Free, which helps underprivileged youth find an outlet through the sport. The organization partnered with the Florida Department of Transportation, the Miami Parking Authority, and the City of Miami Commission to open the City's first public skatepark, Lot 11 Skatepark, in the heart of Downtown. Since opening its gates in 2019, Lot 11 has become known as one of the best skateparks in the U.S., with global visitors and public endorsements from top professional athletes. Katz is also the owner and operator of Downtown Miami's Andrew Skate Shop, which opened in 2017, solidifying him as a beacon in skate culture for the city and the world. His brand is sold in over 25 stores worldwide and has been featured in Vogue, GQ, HypeBeast, The Face, Complex, i-D and Thrasher. ###

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Amal Solh Kabbani



Mayor Francis Suarez and Amal Solh Kabbani. Photo, Downtown News.

In 2020, *Downtown News* published the feature story [Six Downtown Women Who Make a Difference](#). Here is an excerpt depicting Amal Solh Kabbani:

Corporate executive, promoter of the opera, and the respected and somewhat feared president of the Downtown Neighbors Alliance, an organization that represents downtown Miami residents and keeps government officials and business interests accountable. She observed: “Downtown is a thriving community, but too often neglected, abused... Well, not anymore, not in my watch! We strive to keep residents informed and involved.”

As to the opera: “Culture and the arts are foundations to any modern civilization, and it’s a shame to have any form fade over time. I love opera, the one artistic genre that contains music, drama, visual arts, dance, and literature. Making it accessible to children is a way to guarantee that it continues serving as an outlet for society to express its hardships or happy times.”

Multitasking might be a defining characteristic of Amal Solh Kabbani. Any preference? “Education is closest to my heart. Opera, besides its elegance, increases our cognitive ability... Children should be regularly fed opera. If we build enough awareness with new generations, maybe we can produce right here in Miami the new Wagner, Verdi or Mozart.”

One Question to Conclude

At the swearing in ceremony, *Downtown News* asked Amal Solh Kabbani about her early goals as a board member. She replied: “Harness the tools the DDA platform will open up for me to not only improve quality of life for our urban core but implement programs to make people fall in love and want to stay permanently and grow roots here!”

If history is an indication of the future, well, the new members of the DDA Board give Downtowners reason for optimism.