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Five Questions With Christina Crespi of the Miami Downtown Development Authority



*CHRISTINA CRESPI, EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR AND CEO OF THE MIAMI DOWNTOWN DEVELOPMENT AUTHORITY.
PHOTO: MIAMI DOWNTOWN DEVELOPMENT AUTHORITY*

In recent years, Downtown Miami has transformed into a densely populated boomtown.

Christina Crespi, executive director and CEO of the [Miami Downtown Development Authority](#), counts more than 90 construction cranes dotting the skyline.

“We have more cranes in Downtown Miami than the entire state of California,” Crespi said.

The flurry of activity brings both challenges and opportunities.

The following conversation has been edited for length and clarity.

Commercial Observer: I remember when Downtown Miami was very much a 9-to-5 place, with not many residences. Now it feels completely different. What changed?

Christina Crespi: In the early 2000s, we had a lot of new developers who came in and started doing developments. Then the crash came, and there was nobody to fill all those units.

They really shifted the focus to market Downtown Miami to that millennial generation. They moved in when it was affordable. A lot of these folks have gotten older, and they have children now.

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Unique Monthly Visitors: 49,596

We have about 150,000 residents downtown. That really did spur more of that 24-7 focus. You didn't even have a grocery store back then. We have Whole Foods now, and we have Publix. Lucky Strike just opened at Miami Worldcenter. A bowling alley in Downtown Miami — who would have thought?

What's your biggest challenge?

Getting the word out about all these wonderful programs we have. And just how many cranes we have and what that means. We've had so much growth, and that can lead to congestion.

We try to communicate through our social media channels how to get around downtown. It can get a little confusing. We like to heavily promote our free Metromover, and we've been working on a How to Get Downtown campaign — not only where to park but also how to get around once you are here.

We've also got the Freebee, the electric vehicle that circulates through Downtown Miami. It's free, and you can wave it down or you can call it on the app. We just had our 10,000th rider.

What programs are you focusing on now?

We have a lot of older buildings, and because of the Surfside collapse, the city is requiring 40-year recertification of buildings. So last year, we opened up a permit clinic at 166 East Flagler Street. We have a staffer there to answer questions from 9 to 5 every day. You can walk in and ask any question.

And on Thursdays, we have people from the city building department, from the zoning department, from different departments there. Instead of having to run all over Miami, everyone is there in one place. We've helped over 500 businesses navigate these issues in older buildings.

During the pandemic, the DDA was offering incentives to office tenants. Is that still necessary?

We just revamped the program to focus on ground-level retail. We are doing really well on office. We really want to bring back businesses on our ground-level floors.

We're incentivizing startups to come in. We offer incentives up to \$50,000, depending on the square footage a business takes, how many employees they have and whether the wages are above area median income.

The downside of all the growth is that downtown has gotten expensive. Do you see any solutions?

Unfortunately, the DDA doesn't have advocacy around those issues. We support any policies that would bring more of a balance.

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