

Downtown NEWS

November 2020

UMV:

A Neighbors
Perspective
Downtown
Miami



An Architectural Jewel
The Central Baptist Church, built in 1926. A conversation with preservationist Megan McLaughlin. Page 7.



Miami Book Fair
The important literary festival is going virtual. And it promises to be just as exciting. Pages 5 & 8.

Downtown NEWS

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Cover Story | In Their Own Words

Women Who Make a Difference



Downtown News honors and celebrates women whose work improves the lives of Downtown residents. Difficult job, having to select eight ladies out of fifty percent of our population. But we are confident these ladies capture the wealth of talent, inspiration, determination and compassion women display at every turn, and its diversity. **Continued on page 6.**

The Neighborhood

Downtown NEWS
Page 6 - November 2020

Downtown Women Who Make a Difference



2020 marks one hundred years since women won the right to vote. That is a landmark Downtown News wanted to honor and celebrate.

And honor and celebrate the legacy of Justice Ruth Ginsburg, eloquent example of courage, intelligence and character.

The perfect occasion to herald downtown women, and highlight a lesson Margaret Thatcher imparted: "If you want something said, ask a man; if you want something done, ask a woman."

Fields included: economic development, philanthropy, education, government, community & opera, science, youth empowerment, and urban planning.

Left to right, and top to bottom, in alphabetical order. Top Row: Christina Crespi, Rebecca Fishman-Lipsev, Beatriz Gonzalez. Middle row: Eileen Higgins, Amal Solh Kabbani. Bottom: Arlen Ramsingh, Graylyn Swiley-Woods, and Dana Wall.

Christina Crespi
The Executive Director of the Downtown Development Authority observes: "As the pandemic began to unfold in our community, we immediately pivoted to focusing almost exclusively on promoting health and hygiene, educating our community about the importance of social distancing, cultivating a sense of community among our residents who are staying home, and providing immediate relief to our small businesses. In addition, following the stay at home order that completely upended the way we live, work and play, the DDA began implementing programs to inform, support, and sustain Downtown Miami's business community and 100,000 residents. From creating a Small Business Task Force aimed at helping businesses navigate state and federal funding programs, to co-hosting a live set with DJ and music producer David Guetta livestreamed from downtown Miami and viewed by more than 20 million people worldwide, the Miami DDA has made it a priority to help businesses and residents stay afloat and set a path to economic recovery."

Eileen Higgins
I ran for office to improve the way our neighborhoods are represented. As the first County Commissioner for District 5 from Downtown, I see our community through your eyes. Because I know Downtown and am out on the streets nearly every day, I've been able to react to problems and get solutions implemented quickly. When our sidewalks started being ripped up and spray painted by cell phone companies intent on installing gigantic poles for 5G, I was one of the first people to see the destruction and raise the alarm. By calling telecommunication companies into my office and holding them accountable for their mess, we've been able to get work sites cleaned up and our beautiful pavers put back in place. I am lucky enough to walk to work most days, and I know what it feels like to be a pedestrian Downtown. I've pushed our public works department to improve pedestrian signalization and crosswalks in the urban areas of the county.
The manuals and guidelines for our county roads are written as if everybody lives in the suburbs and spends most of

their commute time behind the wheel! I am working every day to change that. Downtown Miami, like everywhere else in the county, must be resilient in the face of climate change and sea level rise. We need more trees and outdoor spaces, but we don't have a lot of room to work with. I am dedicated to finding every nook and cranny I can to get trees and shrubbery planted, check out E. First Avenue soon for some much needed greenery, and making Downtown a more beautiful and sustainable neighborhood. I know Downtown has its challenges but as many of you know - I love a good challenge!

Rebecca Fishman-Lipsev
"Philanthropy, when most effective, is a team sport. So often, people approach their giving privately, based on their own, individual priorities. That can be impactful, but to truly move the needle on the issues we care about most, we need to think boldly and to stand together with others who share our values. Are you passionate about educational equity? Access to the arts? Climate resilience? You're not alone. My most important role as President and CEO of The Miami Foundation is bringing people together to create solutions that would not be possible by ourselves."

There's something particularly magical about doing that kind of work in the only major American city founded by a woman. Julia Tuttle saw this swampy outpost and envisioned something bigger. Every day in my work I try to channel her, to see issues like the digital divide, housing, sea level rise, and to mobilize our region toward serious solutions.
That spirit really comes alive on *Give Miami Day*, coming up on November 19. Thousands of residents give to strengthen hundreds of nonprofits, creating a historic moment for our community. We're in this together, and the more we live that value as residents, the healthier and more vibrant Miami will be."

Beatriz Gonzalez
I feel very fortunate to serve as President of the Wolfson Campus of Miami Dade College; I know it's exactly where I'm supposed to be. I love this city. After spending six years in Southern California, it's great to be back home.
The Wolfson Campus sits in the heart of our exuberant City of Miami, a bellwether place, having to figure out first what other cities and states have yet to see. Diversity, necessity, and opportunity combine to give Miami its creative energy. The natural tensions among different groups yield a space that is uniquely inspired and original. In this sort of environment, innovation is more likely. When I see Miami, I see asset after asset, and that asset-based approach towards the community in which we educate allows us to partner with stakeholders to build a better education for our students and a stronger public sphere.
Working with wide-ranging partners, such as the YWCA, ViacomCBS, and The Underline, is mutually beneficial and demonstrates Wolfson's distinct capacity to serve a broad span of constituents,

from a new high school graduate, to a working dad returning to school after many years, to professionals updating their skills to bring added value at work. The goal is to strengthen Wolfson Campus as a community-centered space. Our function is to serve: sometimes as educator, sometimes as convener, sometimes as respite from harried city life through our open-to-all events like Downtown Movie Night. Ultimately, we aim to be a trusted anchor, yet one that emancipates personally and professionally through engagement and education. It's a privilege to be in a role that calls me to build community in Miami.

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. "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." Amal Solh Kabbani is the current President of the Young Patronesses of the Opera.
Multitasking might be a defining characteristic. 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."

Arlene Ramsingh
A brilliant virologist with post-doctoral studies in human genetics at Yale University, Arlene is an expert on vaccines. Like most downtown residents, Arlene had to endure lockdown, but unlike most of us, she coupled her social isolation with science to invent a vaccine for COVID-19.
"I started poking holes in existing and proposed vaccine strategies for COVID-19, and then created a brand new molecule. I was able to come out with a new protein vaccine. I sent it to a colleague in New York, a structural biologist. After some refining, it was ready for testing."
And how is testing going?
"We received funding to finish pre-clinical studies in monkeys. We have contracted with a company in MA to make the protein vaccine. We need an adjuvant to formulate the vaccine and are in discussions with two vaccine companies for this. Once the studies in monkeys are completed, we will proceed to the next step - Phase I clinical trials in people."

We will need to partner with a vaccine company for the clinical testing phase since that is outside my area of expertise."

Graylyn Swiley-Woods

As Executive Director of the Overtown Children and Youth Coalition, I use Collective Impact, a valuable way to convene the community, stakeholders and agencies who affect and are affected by policies and programs on health, education, youth well-being, etc. Let me explain. First, Collective Impact requires having a common agenda by which all participants come to have a shared vision for change. This includes having a common understanding of the problem and approach to solving it. Second, *shared measurements* to assess common possibilities as well as pitfalls. The third condition, *mutually reinforcing activities*, which refers to the need for participant activities to be differentiated while still being coordinated through a mutual supporting plan of action. The fourth condition is *continuous communication*. The final condition argues for *backbone support*. This means a separate organization, with staff, and a specific set of skills, to convene, coordinate and serve in a leadership role.

Collective Impact suggest that if the appropriate people come together in constructive ways, with good information, they will create authentic visions and strategies for addressing the shared

concerns their community faces. This integration has led to numerous successful collaborations. At the end of it all, my philosophy is to *give people the power* sooner rather than later. Communities know more about their lived experiences and have solutions beyond anyone can provide from the outside. I say, give the people the resources deserved, and with a Collective Strategy, communities will become healthier, better, and wiser.

Dana Wall

At Street Plans, I manage the implementation of Tactical Urbanism projects to both help communities envision what permanent street transformations could look and feel like, and to implement infrastructure faster than a typical capital project process. Our methodology is central to our ethos: it's more effective to see a plan on the pavement than on paper. Our projects range from a day, to several years.

For Avenue 3, Street Plans provided technical expertise to help produce Taste of Avenue 3, a temporary street transformation and block party celebration, to help engender support for a future, more pedestrianized street. I worked with the Avenue 3 team to create a "rendering in real time" of sidewalk extensions and increased pedestrian space, supported by the MDT Quick-Build Program. On Biscayne Boulevard, we

worked with partners to turn parking islands into public space, as a catalyst for the long-term, permanent change of the street. As an advocate for bikeability and walkability, it's fun to get to create such immediate change directly with people, and evaluate its performance to inform long-term initiatives. I am a two-wheeled traveler, and always looking for the next parking lot to paint or bike lane to build!