

A LOOK IN THE MIRROR

Sharpening our focus for challenging times

As Miami's adolescent years come to a close, it is time we start thinking about the city's journey into adulthood, a journey that will be marked by deliberate choices and responsible planning. One of the integral components of this journey will be a sharp focus on developing and attracting talent. This will require thoughtful and proactive leadership.

According to the 2008 South Floridian State of the Workforce report, 61 percent of the coming job openings in Miami-Dade County will require at least some level of post secondary training. The report also projects that professional and business services will be the fastest growing sectors. Although the recent economic downturn may temper earlier projections of job creation, the fact still remains that we don't have the talent to meet the demands of a growing city.

In Miami-Dade County less than 27 percent of residents have a bachelor's degree or greater, which is a serious weakness for an up-and-coming city. I believe we should start channeling more of our effort towards these three areas of focus:

BIOTECHNOLOGY & HEALTH SCIENCES

With a best in class operation like Baptist Health South Florida, internationally recognized medical research from the University of Miami, and the strong presence of pharmaceuticals and medical suppliers, Miami already has a strong foundation in the health sciences field.

The University of Miami has made great strides in promoting Miami as a biotechnology hub by spearheading development of the Miami Health District and University of Miami Life Science Park. In addition, Florida International University will be launching South Florida's first public medical school in 2009, which is expected to have a \$1 billion impact on the state economy.

Currently there are 28 hospitals and nearly 29,000 health care professionals in the Miami-Dade area. Between May 2007 and May 2008 the county experienced

over 7.5 percent employment growth in this sector. With continued expansion, employment needs will also grow. Yet we have no real holistic strategy for bolstering the talent pool to meet these impending demands. We must address this now or these initiatives will surely fail.

THE ARTS

Miami has a flair for style. From Art Deco to Miami Vice chic to the modern architecture that defines our skyline, Miami has always attracted and celebrated creativity. For decades artists, musicians, filmmakers, architects, and interior designers have contributed to the city's evolving style and sophistication. Although this "artist class" has always been here, it has not always been recognized for its critical contributions to Miami's development.

Recently the Beacon Council launched an initiative to push Miami as a new hub for fashion design. In addition to established and emerging designers, Miami-Dade is home to over 2,400 film, photography and modeling companies. With USA Network's Burn Notice based and filmed here, we are once again home to a television series. This not only draws attention to Miami as a city, it also provides a substantial boost to the local economy.

The presence of the Arsht Center for the Performing Arts, the New World Symphony Orchestra, and Art Basel have helped lay a strong foundation for arts and culture. This not only attracts talented artists, but also the sophisticated professionals we so desperately need. Proactive leadership is needed to focus attention on these areas through marketing initiatives and tax incentives.

SPIRITED ENTREPRENEURIALISM

There is no denying it, Miami is an entrepreneurial town. Opportunities exist for those willing to look and think outside the box. Part of our heritage as a city is that we are a place for new beginnings. Whether fleeing oppression from dictatorial governments or just escaping the confines of the Northeast, many of us are

seeking something better. This spirit of independence and drive is the foundation of our city's character.

As we become more established as a community and as a world player, the question we must face is how to maintain our entrepreneurial spirit. Maturing cities inevitably become more structured and institutionalized. During this evolution it will be critical to continue to foster small business growth and support entrepreneurial efforts through smart policies, tax incentives, and philanthropy.

MOVING FORWARD

In his book "Cities and the Creative Class," Richard Florida proposes three "Ts" as the key to developing a strong economic foundation for any American city. They are: Talent, Tolerance, and Technology. I believe we are in good shape when it comes to tolerance and technology, but talent is of grave concern.

It is time to become more focused and deliberate in addressing the gap between education level and job opportunities. This is not the first time these concerns have been expressed, yet I have seen very little leadership when it comes to meeting the talent demands of the future.

To meet the challenges, we must articulate a vision and choose a focus. Organizations such as the Beacon Council, the Greater Miami Chamber of Commerce and city and county governments need our help in defining and promoting who we are.

It is time for our young leaders to start thinking about our future and begin proactively forging a path to get there. **m**

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