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Nonprofits' stars serve as backbone in every aspect of life

By ABRAHAM GALVAN

Miami wouldn't function without major nonprofits as its backbone, serving those in need across all aspects of life.

The Miami-Dade County Homeless Trust, led by Chairman **Ron Book** and Executive Director **Victoria Mallette**, is balancing compliance with compassion through the new Homeless Reporting Tool. The tool brings together county organizations to prevent arrests of homeless individuals after HB1365, which bans sleeping in public spaces. Mr. Book and Ms. Mallette continue to unite social service providers, law enforcement, and county agencies. They drive measurable results and aim to end homelessness in Miami-Dade County, said Carlos Fernandez-Guzman, president and CEO of Pacific National Bank.

In 2025, the trust mapped out and then developed this online tool now used across multiple county departments, including the Miami-Dade County Sheriff's Department, Solid Waste Management, Parks, Recreation and Open Spaces, Transit and Public Works, and Regulatory and Economic Resources, providing the most comprehensive and precise data to date and supporting the release of the community's most accurate annual homeless census.

"The tool helps us immediately deploy an outreach team when there is an expression of concern or a complaint related to a homeless individual or encampment, and it helps us be first in from a human services perspective, but then coordinating with regulatory agencies, solid waste agencies, local police departments, when we know we have to address an issue involving homelessness," Ms. Mallette said. "It's a humane approach to addressing homelessness, making sure the individual experiencing homelessness has access to a menu of options prior to any arrest, suggestion of arrest, or suggestion to move on."

Since its launch, the tool has logged more than 500 unduplicated reports, uncovering previously unidentified pockets of homelessness.

"We've trained 19 police departments on the tool, policies, procedures, and standard operating protocols that go along with the tool. We've trained solid waste departments. We've trained in regulatory



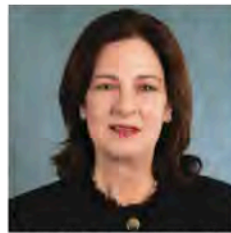
Ron Book is long-time chairman of Miami-Dade's Homeless Trust.

and economic resources. We've trained in internal services. We've trained FDOT and entered into [a memorandum of understanding] with the Florida Department of Transportation," she added. "We're now embarking on training individual elected official offices so that their constituent services folks who receive concerns and complaints can immediately enter them into the tool, which immediately triggers the response of one of the Homeless Trust contracted outreach teams."

The Homeless Trust has also received \$5 million from the Right at Home Initiative, a new national initiative to stop homelessness before it starts. The trust is developing a local homelessness prevention system with the aim of significantly reducing the number of individuals and families entering the homeless system in Miami-Dade.

The goal is to provide flexible and rapidly deployable financial assistance, combined with individualized case management, to help families maintain self-sufficiency. Miami-Dade County is one of just 10 chosen pilot sites across the nation. Evidence collected during this 12-month process is to be shared with Right at Home to lay groundwork for a federal homeless prevention strategy.

"By targeting prevention resources, we believe we will reduce the number of people entering the homeless system," Mr. Book added. "With an end to homelessness within reach in Miami-Dade, it makes sense for the Homeless Trust to turn its attention to homeless prevention and use available data, technology, and research to determine how to



Victoria Mallette is the executive director of county homeless trust.

target financial assistance in the most strategic way."

Mileyka Burgos-Flores and the Allapattah Collaborative CDC have built something that is both intentional and deeply impactful. At its core, Ms. Burgos-Flores' work is about making sure that as Allapattah grows, the people who built its neighborhoods are not left behind, said Valeria Perez Ferreiro, founding executive director of GreenLight Fund Miami.

Through a community-driven approach, the collaborative is actively breaking down barriers that have historically limited access to economic opportunity. From supporting small businesses and preserving the Little Santo Domingo corridor to creating pathways toward ownership and economic mobility, their efforts are rooted in trust, inclusion, and long-term impact, she said.

Ms. Burgos-Flores' leadership has been key in shaping this vision. In only five years, she has done more than most of the largest non-profits, and understands how to connect stakeholders across sectors, residents, business owners, institutions, and turn that into real, tangible progress, Ms. Perez Ferreiro said.

Through the Allapattah Collaborative CDC's Small Business Resilience programs and community engagement, Ms. Burgos-Flores' latest project, 3010 Allapattah, is expected to be a first for Miami, bringing for the first time a commercial community ownership model to Miami that combines affordable housing and commercial ownership for businesses in the community.

The Collaborative CDC has been working with small businesses, teaching them, connecting them to resources, and connecting them to access to capital. Since the pandemic, it has been able to bring them over \$7 million in access to capital, Ms. Burgos-Flores said.

"The other thing that we are doing right now is recent, last year, we bought a piece of land, and we want to develop that into a model that is not really in Miami, it's a shared equity model where people who are not able to afford their

storefront right now will be able to afford a storefront and hopefully be able to stay rooted in community," she said. "The site is going to have affordable housing as well, and we will be working with the City of Miami and the county to make this a reality."

The 3010 Allapattah site is going to be different, because it's going to be community-owned, and it's going to be a shared opportunity for businesses to own their storefront, she added. On the top floor, the plan is to have community spaces and micro businesses. These are restaurants, small restaurants, and cafes.

"We are trying to crack a code on how we do this, and how we do it affordably, and how we grow with the community being involved every step, because another thing that I've noticed is that sometimes people feel that if they include community, things are going to get a lot more complicated and expensive, and it's totally the contrary," Ms. Burgos-Flores continued. "The community is going to be your champion, and they're going to be the end users who need to be part of the process, and I think that's something that we do very differently, because we want the people that are going to be in this building to be the ones helping us."

Development plans for the mixed-use building are in the visual and architectural selection phase.

"The process with the architects means that we're going to start having concrete conversations with the community, concrete conversations in the permitting of the site and in the due diligence before we break ground, hopefully early next year," Ms. Burgos-Flores said.

Annelies Da Costa Gomez is deeply passionate about strengthening and improving the community she loves. She is an active volunteer with the United Way of Miami Center for Excellence (CFE), where she serves as a member of the CFE Committee. She is also a past United Way Board member and former chair of the CFE Committee, said Mayi de la Vega, founder & executive chair of ONE Sotheby's International Realty and United Way board member.

Currently, Ms. Da Costa Gomez works closely with the Center for Excellence in its partnership with Early Head Start, a federally funded



program that offers a holistic approach to supporting Child Care Centers in high-risk communities.

Through this initiative, the organization educates and supports directors, teachers, children, and their families by providing free educational programs in both English and Spanish. The program also connects children and their families with essential resources and assistance, including educational support, emotional services, and job training opportunities.

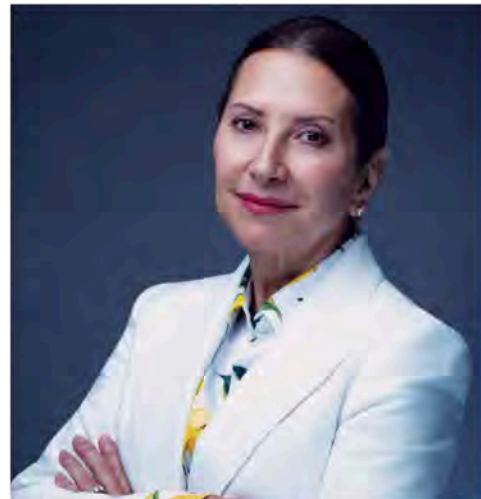
"I'm very involved with the grant that we got. It was a federal grant with Early Head Start, and we partnered up with a large number of at-risk centers in Miami-Dade County, and in total, we're working with 520 kids and their families and the centers," Ms. Da Costa Gomez said. "We provide free courses to the teachers at United Way for anybody in both English and Spanish, and work with the children. We monitor the child from the moment the child starts coming to the center. We provide nutritious meals together and provide counseling to the family."

She also serves on United Way's Public Policy Council and has traveled to Washington, DC, to meet with the US Secretary of Education to advocate for children and their families. She has also met with representatives in Tallahassee to support policies that strengthen education and community resources for families across Florida.

"It is so rewarding, first of all, to see the teachers who graduated thrive, and see parents become so involved," Ms. Da Costa Gomez said. "It makes me sometimes very emotional when I talk about it, just because I see the rewards of what we are doing, and I seriously believe that education is the key to creating a healthy, thriving community, which is what we need for Miami."



Mileyka Burgos-Flores makes sure Allapattah's residents keep up.



Annelies Da Costa Gomez is United Way volunteer, board member.