



**“IT’S ALL  
ABOUT OUR CITIES”**

**WEDNESDAY, OCTOBER 11, 2023  
HILTON MIAMI AIRPORT HOTEL**

**Executive Board  
2023-2024**

President  
Hon. Rodney Harris  
Mayor, City of Miami Gardens

First Vice President  
Hon. Karyn Cunningham,  
Mayor, Village of Palmetto Bay

Secretary  
Hon. Vivian Casals-Muñoz  
Councilwoman, City of Hialeah

Immediate Past President  
Hon. Juan Carlos Bermudez  
Commissioner, Miami-Dade County

Second Vice President  
Hon. Omarr C. Nickerson, Ph.D.  
Mayor, Village of El Portal

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T.B.A  
City of Miami

Hon. Oliver G. Gilbert, III  
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Hon. Cassandra Timothe  
Councilwoman, City of North Miami

Hon. Fortuna Smukler  
Commissioner, City of North Miami Beach

Hon. John H. Taylor, Jr.  
Mayor, City of Opa-Locka

Hon. Leanne Tellam  
Vice Mayor, Village of Palmetto Bay

Hon. Joseph Corradino  
Mayor, Village of Pinecrest

Hon. Javier Fernandez  
Mayor, City of South Miami

Hon. Jerry Joseph  
Vice Mayor, City of Sunny Isles Beach

Hon. Shlomo Danzinger  
Mayor, Town of Surfside

Hon. Jose “Pepe” Diaz  
Mayor, City of Sweetwater

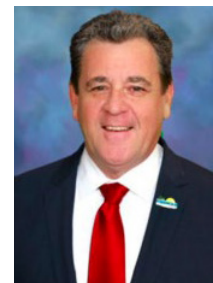
Hon. Richard Block  
Councilman, Village of Virginia Gardens

Hon. Eric Diaz-Padron  
Mayor, City of West Miami

9:00 a.m.- 10:15 a.m.: Continental Ballroom

**Mastering Flood Resilience: Achieving a 35% Insurance Discount and CR3 Rating**

Join us for an enlightening panel discussion on how cities and municipalities can unlock a 35% flood insurance discount and attain a prestigious CRS 3 rating, a vital achievement in today’s climate. As insurance companies now mandate flood insurance for all residents, communities must understand and implement strategies that alleviate financial burdens. In this presentation, you’ll learn firsthand from industry experts and community leaders who have successfully accomplished this feat. Discover how Cutler Bay, **one of only four communities in Florida and eleven in the entire nation**, secured the coveted CRS 3 rating.



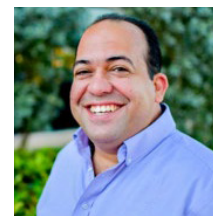
*Mayor Tim Meerbott is deeply committed to the Town of Cutler Bay, where he was the first town council member to be sworn into office in 2006, and subsequently elected as Mayor in November 2018. Mayor Meerbott believes that Cutler Bay is an excellent place to raise a family and has been extensively involved in the community. Most recently, Mayor Meerbott was appointed to the State’s Biscayne Bay Commission, and he was also appointed by the League of Cities, to the Miami-Dade County’s Biscayne Bay Watershed Management Advisory Board. Additionally, Mayor Meerbott attends the American Flood Coalition Mayors’ Summit, where he advocates for solutions to address flooding concerns in coastal communities. The Town of Cutler Bay, incorporated in 2005, is dedicated to environmental preservation, especially given the threat of sea-level rise on this coastal community. To this end, the Town adopted the Floodplain Mitigation Plan in May 2015, which aims to reduce the community’s vulnerability to natural disasters. Mayor Meerbott’s active involvement with the Town also includes being a member of the Town’s Charter Committee in 2014 and 2018, the Town Business Liaison from 2006-2010, and the Co-Creator and Chair of the South Dade Municipal Coalition that includes Pinecrest, Palmetto Bay, Cutler Bay, Homestead, and Florida City. In addition to his heavy involvement with the Town, he’s also a senior division manager for Allstate Corporation— where he’s worked for over 30 years.*



*Rafael G. Casals is the Town Manager of the Town of Cutler Bay, which is the newest municipality incorporated within Miami-Dade County. The Town is home to more than 45,000 residents and spans approximately ten (10) square miles. Mr. Casals played a significant role in the Town’s incorporation in 2005 as a part of the core group of department heads. He served as the Town’s first Public Works Director, and in 2013, Mr. Casals was appointed by the Town Council to serve as the Town’s second Town Manager since incorporation. Mr. Casals has over 30 years of municipal experience, and his professional affiliations include being a former President of the Miami-Dade County and City Managers Association in 2017 and 2005, as well as a member of the Board of Directors in the American Public Works Association. Prior to joining the Town of Cutler Bay, Mr. Casals served as the Assistant Town Manager/Public Works Director for the Town of Miami Lakes for three and a half years. He also worked as the City Manager for the City of North Bay Village for over four and a half years. Mr. Casals started his career in the City of Florida City while still in high school, where he worked from 1985 to 1988. He attended Homestead Senior High School and earned his Associate in Arts degree from Miami-Dade College before obtaining his Bachelor’s degree in Business Management from Florida Atlantic University. Additionally, Mr. Casals is an ICMA Credentialed Manager and a Certified Floodplain Manager, and he uses his knowledge and experience to improve the Town of Cutler Bay on a daily basis.*



*Alfredo Quintero Jr. is the Public Works Director for the Town of Cutler Bay, a role he’s held for over 11 years. He holds a Bachelor and Master of Science in Civil Engineering and has over 32 years of experience in the engineering and construction industry. He is a Certified Floodplain Manager, a State Certified General Contractor, a State Certified Roofing Contractor, and an ISA Certified Arborist. In his role as Public Works Director, he has led his department through multiple award-winning projects, including the Old Cutler Road Complete Streets Project, the Caribbean Boulevard Complete Streets Project, and has overseen the implementation of major Town improvements, including the expansion of the Town’s tree canopy, increased bicycle and pedestrian connectivity facilities, and improved drainage systems to Town roads. Under his guidance, the Town reached a coveted Community Rating System Class 3 in FEMA’s National Flood Insurance Program, providing flood insurance policyholders in Town with a 35% discount on their premiums.*



*Yenier Vega has been with the Town of Cutler Bay since 2013, as the Stormwater Utility Manager. He holds a Bachelor and Master in Public Administration from Barry University. A State Certified General Contractor with over 16 years’ experience. He has used his personal and career experiences as a Certified Floodplain Manager (CFM) to have an active role in the Community Rating System journey. As a class 6 in 2013, an extensive assessment of the current credits and potential credits was started. During this deep dive, several activities were looked at for increased points and new activities were evaluated for potential implementation in the Towns CRS Program. The journey from a Class 6 to a Class 3 was not a short one, but hard work and perseverance paid off. On August 1, 2022, a letter from FEMA verified that the Towns new CRS Rating was officially a Class 3. Our journey is not yet complete, as we strive to maintain and improve our class ratings.*

**Succeeding in Municipal Government: The Inception and The Emergence**

As a Mayor, as a Vice Mayor, as a Commissioner, as a Councilperson, as a Manager, as a Clerk of a Municipality... How do you achieve success? What are the steps to become successful? What does success look like? There will be obstacles and challenges that will confront you while working in Municipal Government. Whether you inherited these challenges as you began your administration or you were faced with them during your administration...How do you succeed from your Very Inception and Emerge Victorious? What are the steps that you need to take? Who do you need to have in place to assist you? Who don't you need to have working alongside of you? What does your Municipal Charter state? What is the Role and Job Description of those working within your Municipality? We will get our answers from some of those in our County who have been successful in Municipal Government.



**Mayor Omarr C. Nickerson, Ph.D** was born in Miami, Florida. He received his Bachelor's Degree from the University Of Miami "The U" in Liberal and Social Arts. He then went on to obtain his 1st Master's Degree in Global History and Socio-Geographic Studies from the University of Cairo, in Egypt. He got his 2nd Master's Degree in International Political Science and Economic Development from the University of Damascus, in Syria. His Doctorate Degree was also acquired in International Studies and International Relations/Affairs from the University of Beijing, in China, and the University of Damascus, in Syria, respectively. Mr. Nickerson is first and foremost a lecturer, who has given numerous speeches to the public throughout the Middle East and Asia. He also works as a "hands-on" educator with schools that are listed under the educational transformation status, due to their low scores on standardized tests. He has obtained Certifications in Micro and Macro Economics, World History, American Government, American History, and Geography. He also has Certifications to educate individuals with a wide range of disabilities, including those with Special Learning Needs, Varying Exceptionalities, Specific Learning Disabilities, and Emotional and Behavioral Disorders. As Mayor of El Portal, he has overseen Historic Economic, Financial, Infrastructure, Development, and Business Success. He credits the Residents of El Portal, the El Portal Administrative and Governmental Team, Ms. Clerk Jacobi, CMC, and Ms. Christia E. Alou, Esq., who he refers to as his "Tag-Team Partner In Success" regarding and in connection with these Historic Levels of Accomplishments and Achievements. When asked what he wanted for the village and community, he stated "More Council-Community Involvement and Improved, Transparent Communication," which would be his primary focus for El Portal's immediate future.

**State Representative Dotie Joseph, Esq.** serves as State Representative for District 108 in Florida's Legislature. She is the first Haitian-American to serve in an executive leadership capacity—Speaker, Minority Leader or Pro Tempore—in the U.S. at any state or federal level. Representative Joseph was born in Haiti and raised in Miami, where she attended public schools, went on to graduate from Yale University where she co-founded Yale's Haitian Student Alliance, and served as the Political Action Chairperson of the Yale N.A.A.C.P. She obtained her law degree from Georgetown University Law Center, where she volunteered to work on civil rights and refugee issues in the US and abroad. Representative Joseph has also served as a Past President of the Haitian Lawyers Association, First Vice-Chair of the Miami-Dade Democratic Party, a Member of the Miami-Dade Black Affairs Advisory Board, a Member of the North Miami Board of Adjustment, a volunteer attorney with the Miami-Dade Branch of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored Peoples (NAACP), and as a Volunteer Election Protection Attorney for both of President Barack Obama's campaigns. In addition to serving in the legislature, Representative Joseph is an accomplished attorney with the Ottinot law firm, and serves as a consultant to help nonprofits and businesses engage with the government to do business or execute policy intrigued initiatives.

**Christia E. Alou, Esq.** is El Portal's Village Manager. Ms. Alou is a government relations professional with over 30 years of experience leading government agencies and departments, as well as legislation, public policy and public affairs for agencies and organizations such as the Congressional Hispanic Caucus Institute, the Ohio Civil Rights Commission and the District of Columbia Mayor's Office on Latino Affairs. In 1991, Ms. Alou graduated from Howard University in Washington, DC, where she received her Bachelor of Arts degree in Broadcast Journalism with a minor in Spanish. While working for the Congressional Hispanic Caucus Institute on Capitol Hill, Ms. Alou attended the University of Maryland School of Law evening classes, graduating in 1996. Upon graduation, Ms. Alou worked on Capitol Hill for several years with the law firm, Verrill & Dana, LLC. She was drawn back into the public sector in 2002, when she was appointed by Mayor Anthony Williams as the Executive Director of the Mayor's Office on Latino Affairs for the District of Columbia. Ms. Alou moved to Miami, Florida in 2006 for a change of pace and to start her family. She resides in Miami Shores, Florida with her young daughter, Victoria Palma Alou White who is an aspiring artist. Ms. Alou is a strong proponent of the Arts and STEAM programs for children. Ms. Alou served on the Board of Directors for the Adrienne Arsht Center for Performing Arts for many years, and is the Arts Facet Chairperson and member of the Miami-Biscayne Bay Chapter of The Links Incorporated.



**Succeeding in Municipal Government: The Inception and The Emergence (Cont'd)**



**Sonja K. Dickens, Esq.** has been practicing law for 30 years. She has extensive experience in municipal law and litigation. She began her municipal career as an Assistant City Attorney for the City of West Palm Beach. Ms. Dickens previously was associated with the law firm of Brady & Coker in Fort Lauderdale, where she served as the Assistant City Attorney for the City of Lauderdale Lakes. In 2004 while at the firm, she became the City Attorney for the City of Miami Gardens. In 2006, Ms. Dickens became a partner with the firm of Arnstein & Saul, LLP in Fort Lauderdale, Florida and in 2009, Ms. Dickens started the City of Miami Gardens in-house Legal Department. Ms. Dickens earned her undergraduate degree from Spelman College in Atlanta, Georgia with honors and her Juris Doctorate degree from the University of Miami Law School in 1994. Ms. Dickens is Rated AV® Preeminent™\* by Martindale-Hubbell and serves as the Chair of the Miami-Dade League of Cities city attorney committee.



**Vanessa Joseph, Esq.** is currently the City of North Miami's Elected City Clerk. In this office, she makes history as both the City's youngest and first Black female City Clerk. Born in Chicago, Illinois, Miami became Joseph's home when she was a toddler. Today, Joseph is a well-respected attorney. In addition to serving the people of North Miami in her elected capacity, she is a dedicated employee of a notable non-profit organization dedicated to the needs of South Florida's immigrant population. From the University of Miami, Joseph earned a bachelor's degree in Political Science, a Master of Public Administration and a Juris Doctorate. Before fully launching her legal career, Joseph spent her years as a law student working as an advocate for immigration and human rights. During that period, she served at two legal clinics, where she fought on behalf of South Florida's immigrant community. She also advocated for veterans, persons with disabilities and individuals with HIV and AIDS. Today, as a practicing local attorney, Joseph continues to provide legal services to vulnerable populations.



**Councilwoman Cassandra Timothe** has over ten years of governmental experience. In 2012, she graduated from the University of South Florida (USF) with a degree in Political Science and a Master of Public Administration degree from Florida International University (FIU) in May 2020. Cassandra began her legislative career while working in the Florida Legislature for Florida State Representative Janet Cruz (now Senator Janet Cruz) and Florida State Senator Arthenia L. Joyner. As the Legislative Aide for Councilwoman Lisa Montelione in the City of Tampa District 7, Cassandra realized the power of local government, but she knew this job would be more meaningful if she were home. In May 2015, Cassandra joined the City of North Miami as the Public Information Officer (PIO). As PIO, Cassandra became the face and spokesperson for the City of North Miami. She resigned from her position to run for North Miami District 2. On Tuesday, June 1, 2021, Cassandra made her story by becoming the first black person, the first woman of Haitian descent, and the youngest person elected to serve North Miami's District 2. Cassandra will serve a four-year term as Councilwoman for North Miami District 2 which includes Palomar, Keystone, San Souci, Iron Manors, and Downtown North Miami.



**Home Rule, Live Local, and What You Need to Know**

A vibrant interactive panel discussion with elected officials, attorneys and planners on the status of Home Rule in Miami Dade County, the impacts of SB 102, and various case studies.



**Commissioner Juan Carlos “JC” Bermudez** was elected as the District 12 Commissioner for the Miami-Dade Board of County Commissioners on August 23, 2022. District 12 encompasses an area of western Miami-Dade County and includes the City of Doral, a portion of Hialeah, Hialeah Gardens, Medley, Sweetwater, and a large portion of unincorporated Miami-Dade County. Before joining the Board, Bermudez was the founding mayor of the City of Doral and served in that capacity for the first nine and a half years of the city’s existence. During his tenure as mayor, the city received numerous state and national accolades. He was re-elected as mayor in 2016 and served until he was elected to the role of District 12 County Commissioner. Bermudez served as the Vice Chairman of the Miami-Dade County Transportation Planning Organization (TPO) and currently sits on the Board of Directors for TPO. He previously served as a board member of the Florida League of Cities, Miami Dade-County League of Cities, Florida League of Mayors, and the United States Conference of Mayors, where he also chaired the International Affairs Committee. His fellow elected officials selected him to serve as the President of the Miami-Dade County League of Cities from 2010-2011 and a second time for the 2022-2023 term. Commissioner Bermudez is a practicing attorney and a member of the Florida Bar.



**Mayor Joseph Corradino, AICP** was elected as Pinecrest’s fourth mayor in 2016 and will continue to serve as Mayor through 2026. Previously, he served on the Village Council from 2006-2014 and was a member of the Village’s Planning and Zoning Board for four years. He earned a Bachelor of Arts from Villanova University and a Masters in Urban Planning from the University of Cincinnati. Mayor Corradino is a certified urban planner and is the president of The Corradino Group. He is a past Chairman of the Board or President of several local organizations including the American Planning Association, the Doral Business Council, ChamberSouth, the Economic Development Council of South Dade, and the Miami-Dade League of Cities.



**Mitchell Bierman, Esq.** is the Miami Office Managing Director. Mitch represents major international companies in the transportation, environmental, solid waste, engineering and construction industries in government affairs and administrative law matters. His work includes winning and negotiating large public contracts, public private partnerships, public infrastructure improvements, affordable housing developments and advocating for industry clients on legislative issues affecting their industries. Mitch first developed his skills and relationships during his government career as Assistant Dade County Attorney in the 1990s. He continues to serve local governments today as the Town Attorney for the Town of Cutler Bay and the Village Attorney for the Village of Pinecrest in Miami-Dade County, and he advises many of the firm’s other government clients on particular matters.



**Amina Newsome**, Senior Division Chief, Department of Regulatory and Economic Resources, Miami-Dade County. Ms. Newsome has worked as a professional planner for Miami-Dade County over 18 years. Her planning journey began as a senior planner for what was previously known as the Planning and Zoning Department. As the department name has changed, so have her positions. Ms. Newsome is currently the Senior Division Chief for Development Services where her focus is on zoning. Ms. Newsome holds a Bachelor of Science in Urban and Regional Planning from Michigan State University.

**Miami Gardens Shield Active Shooter Preparedness**

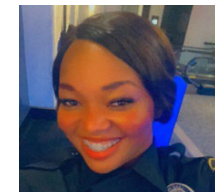
The Miami Gardens Police Shield Detail is committed to serving our community through information sharing and multi-agency partnerships to counter terrorism, homegrown violent extremists, and crime in the City of Miami Gardens. This presentation describes actions to take when confronted with an active shooter, responding law enforcement officials, and actions to take to prevent and prepare for potential active shooter incidents.



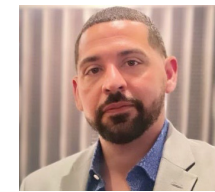
**Police Chief Delma K. Noel-Pratt** is an accomplished police executive with over 30 years of sworn law enforcement experience. She began her career as a Public Service Aide for the Miami Police Department in 1989. In 1993, she transitioned to the Miami-Dade Police Department (MDPD), where she achieved a 24.5-year career. During her tenure with MDPD, she held every rank from Police Officer to Division Chief. She was responsible for the oversight of several major and critical entities, including but not limited to the Miami International Airport, Port of Miami (PortMiami), Public Corruption Bureau, Special Investigations Division, Special Response Team, Aviation Unit, etc., making her a well-rounded candidate for greater heights. On May 1, 2017, Chief Noel-Pratt was sworn in as the first Black female police chief for the Miami Gardens Police Department. Under her leadership, several internal and multi-agency proactive operations have been conducted, which focused on the arrests of repeat violent offenders. This effort has aided in the continuous decrease in homicides.



**Officer Edwin Mompremier** was born and raised in North Miami, Florida. He is the oldest of two Haitian immigrants. He is a Navy Veteran who served his country from 2007-2015. During his service, he provided waterborne security and escorts on International and Domestic Harbor for the U.S. Naval Ships. He spent eight years in the Navy, of which three years were spent enforcing Navy regulations and Florida State Laws at Naval Air Station Jax. He then decided to pursue his dream career in the City of Miami Gardens as a Law Enforcement Officer. He has several certifications from the Department of Homeland Security and the Florida Department of Law Enforcement. He is part of a specialized unit called The Community Action Team, where he continues to focus on quality of life, and problem-orientated policing issues.



**Officer Encicida Tibo** is a Dominican-American who broke barriers within her family by becoming a first-generation police officer. Officer Tibo is a 6-year veteran with the Miami Gardens Police Department. During her tenure, she has been involved in every type of criminal investigation at a local, state, and federal level. During her time off, Officer Tibo engages her community and has partnered up with many non-profit organizations to help families in need. She continues to support the Miami Gardens community proactively and is currently serving as an Acting Sergeant in the Public Affairs Section. She continues to focus on her professional growth in an effort to address the quality-of-life concerns for the residents of Miami Gardens.



**Sergeant Pierre Cardonne** is a 19-year veteran of the Miami Police Department who currently manages and oversees the Shield Unit and Drone Program for the Specialized Operations Section. Prior to joining the Miami Police Department, he served honorably in the United States Marine Corps as a Communications & Intelligence Specialist. In 2002, Sergeant Cardonne was sworn in as a Correctional Officer with the Miami-Dade County Corrections and Rehabilitation Department and served three years. During his tenure in the Miami Police Department, Sergeant Cardonne has been assigned to the Training & Personnel Development Section, Tactical Robbery Unit, K-9 Unit, Recruitment and Selection Unit, Office of Emergency Management & Homeland Security, and his current assignments in the Shield Unit and Drone Program.



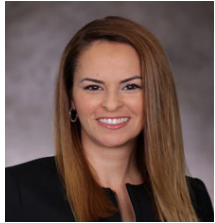
**Officer Jair Butron** has been a dedicated member of the Miami Police Department for the past three decades. Ofc. Butron has served most of his career in the Field Operation Divisions spanning throughout the Central and South District int the City of Miami. Officer Butron later transitioned over to the Firearms Unit, where he excelled right away by providing a different training aspect to the rank and file as well as other law enforcement agencies. As a seasoned instructor in several high-risk liability courses, Officer Butron has trained hundreds of officers and support personnel throughout his tenure. In 2018, Officer Butron was one of the founding members of the Miami Police Shield Detail.



**Officer Carlos Fontela** has a decade of law enforcement experience with the City of Miami Police Department. Officer Fontela worked in the Field Operations Division out of the Central District Station and was an essential member of the Downtown Beats Unit. Officer Fontela provided service to the community, which included working closely with the neighborhood stakeholders, organizing community meetings, and developing operational plans to identify current crime trends, crime patterns, and implement pro-active measures to mitigate criminal activity. Later he transferred to the Specialized Operations Section and was assigned to the Office of Emergency Management & Homeland Security. Under Homeland Security, Officer Fontela held the position of Shield Liaison Officer in the Shield Unit.

**The Fiscal Cliff: A Crisis for Working Families**

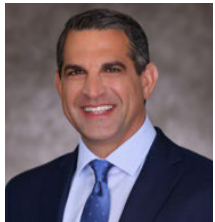
Miami-Dade’s affordability crisis has created a burden on working families whose incomes cannot match the local cost of living, despite small state-mandated increases in minimum wage. As wages increase slightly families find themselves losing essential benefits, and having to make tough choices, which may include remaining underemployed or unemployed. At the same time, employers, both government and private, are struggling with labor shortages negatively impacting their economic growth. This issue has become a lose-lose situation for both families and employers in industries across Miami-Dade and beyond. The Miami-Dade County Fiscal Cliff Collaborative, a combination of key community stakeholder leaders strategize economic and funding solutions to keep families and our business thriving while building a strong economy.



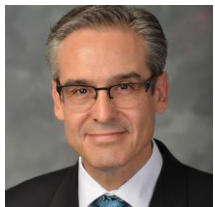
*Natalia Zea is a mother of two who serves as Chief Public Policy and Engagement Officer for The Children’s Trust. She spent several years working in community engagement and communications at Miami-Dade County Public Schools and was a journalist for the first 14 years of her career; working for a decade at CBS Miami as a news reporter and anchor. Natalia also serves as an adjunct professor of public administration at FIU, where she earned an Executive MPA. She believes ensuring that children and teens have equitable access to safe environments, health resources, and education and work opportunities is key to making Miami-Dade better for all.*



*Rick Beasley has served as the Executive Director for the South Florida Workforce Investment Board (SFWIB) dba CareerSource South Florida (CSSF) since August 2005. In this position, he oversees workforce programs in Miami-Dade and Monroe counties with an operating budget of \$75 million. He is in charge of one of the nation’s most dynamic “melting pots” – a diverse socioeconomic region. His vision for CareerSource South Florida is to create a model for the nation by establishing a world-class talent supply chain that fosters economic growth. CareerSource South Florida’s overarching strategic priority is to support economic development that leads to higher –skilled, better-paying jobs that improve South Florida’s quality of life and strengthen the economy.*



*James R. Haj joined The Children’s Trust as president and CEO in April 2016. With Mr. Haj at the helm, The Trust has enjoyed one of its most successful periods. Trust investment in programs and services for children and families in Miami-Dade County has risen to its highest levels. At the same time, administrative expenses dropped to their lowest percentage in the organization’s history. He also led The Trust through the unprecedented challenges posed by the coronavirus pandemic, expanding funding for emergency assistance programs, strengthening neighborhood supports and serving as an essential voice for children and families during unprecedented hardships. A lifelong educator, Mr. Haj started his career in Miami as a teacher, became a middle and high school principal, and eventually worked as assistant superintendent of Miami-Dade County Public Schools, before joining The Trust.*



*Alfred Sanchez is the president and chief executive officer of the Greater Miami Chamber of Commerce, South Florida’s first and the longest-sustaining business development organization and one of the largest chambers in the southeastern U.S. In this role, Alfred directs a team of 25 chamber professionals, supporting more than 400,000 employees of chamber member companies in South Florida. His involvement with the chamber spans 21 years and includes serving on the board of directors, chairing the Marketing Committee and Leadership Programs Group, and serving on the Nonprofit Committee.*



*Evelio Torres has served as President and Chief Executive Officer of the Early Learning Coalition of Miami-Dade and Monroe counties since 2007. In the 16 years that Mr. Torres has led the organization he has expanded its reach, programs and budget through strategic partnerships at the local, state and federal levels, including a \$55 million, 5-year Early Head Start grant to serve children 0 – 3 from low-income families. This was the second largest award in the nation at the time. Recognizing the need to professionalize educators to improve the quality of early learning programs, Mr. Torres established a Professional Development Institute that provides thousands of training hours at no cost to participants. The goals of the Institute are to improve professional standards, classroom interactions and child outcomes.*

**Yes, Your City might need to redistrict before you have another election**

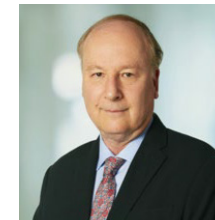
Hear from a premier expert on the redistricting process who was most recently involved in the City of Miami redistricting process, as well the City Clerk for the City of Miami Gardens who is currently leading his city through the process of redistricting. He will discuss the steps that the City of Miami Gardens had to take starting with a Charter change. There will also be a discuss on the recent amendment to Florida Election/Ethics laws with specific emphasis on the new requirement for the filing of form 6 for all local elected officials.



*Sonja K. Dickens, Esq. has been practicing law for 30 years. She has extensive experience in municipal law and litigation. She began her municipal career as an Assistant City Attorney for the City of West Palm Beach. Ms. Dickens previously was associated with the law firm of Brady & Coker in Fort Lauderdale, where she served as the Assistant City Attorney for the City of Lauderdale Lakes. In 2004 while at the firm, she became the City Attorney for the City of Miami Gardens. In 2006, Ms. Dickens became a partner with the firm of Arnstein & Saul, LLP in Fort Lauderdale, Florida and in 2009, Ms. Dickens started the City of Miami Gardens in-house Legal Department. Ms. Dickens earned her undergraduate degree from Spelman College in Atlanta, Georgia with honors and her Juris Doctorate degree from the University of Miami Law School in 1994. Ms. Dickens is Rated AV® Preeminent™\* by Martindale-Hubbell and serves as the Chair of the Miami-Dade League of Cities city attorney committee.*



*Miguel De Grandy is a partner in Holland & Knight’s Miami office and the practice group leader for the South Florida Government Advocacy and Development Group. Mr. De Grandy practices in the area of litigation and dispute resolution with particular emphasis on governmental, administrative, land use and procurement law. For governmental and private entities, he also counsels on redistricting, as well as complex annexation and incorporation issues. Mr. De Grandy served as a member of the Florida House of Representatives from 1989-1994, including being the ranking member of the Judiciary Committee and chairman of the Cuban-American Caucus of State Legislators from 1992-1993. Mr. De Grandy has spearheaded significant legislation, including the Rosewood Claims Bill that recognized the losses suffered by the black residents of a small town in Levy County, Florida, due to racial violence in the 1920s, and was rated in the top 10 percent of Florida legislators four consecutive years by the Miami Herald. With over four decades of experience, De Grandy has also served in several capacities in disputes dealing with redistricting and the Federal Voting Rights Act. In 1992, he served as lead plaintiff and co-counsel in De Grandy, et al v. Wetherell, a Federal Voting Rights Act action against the Florida legislature for violation of the federal voting rights of minority citizens in Florida. The successful challenge to the legislature’s redistricting plan resulted in creating several African-American majority districts in Florida’s congressional delegation. Consequently, for the first time in 100 years, Florida elected three African- Americans to Congress, and Florida’s Hispanic representation in Congress was also increased. During the 2000 redistricting cycle, Mr. De Grandy was appointed by the speaker of the Florida House of Representatives as lead special counsel on redistricting. He managed a dream team of lawyers that successfully guided the House through the 2000 redistricting process and was lead counsel for the House in subsequent litigation, successfully defending the legislature in the federal suit challenging the enacted Redistricting Plan.*



*Robert Meyers, Esq. practices in the areas of ethics and governance, and serves as ethics counsel to the firm’s municipal clients. As more regulations are being adopted, Robert advises municipal elected officials on these new standards and helps them make informed choices. As a former Executive Director of the Miami-Dade Commission on Ethics and Public Trust, Robert oversaw all operations, including enforcement, providing advice, training and education. While heading the Ethics Commission, he drafted hundreds of ethics opinions and analyzed state, county and municipal ethics codes. Robert also assisted with drafting model ethics codes and amendments to existing ethics codes in Miami-Dade County and across Florida. Under his watch, the Ethics Commission was recognized as a model local ethics commission and received accolades for its innovative programming and outreach activities, from organizations such as Transparency International, the National Association of Counties, and the National League of Cities. Robert is a former professor at Florida International University and the University of Tennessee where he taught courses in law, ethics and government. As a leading authority in the field of governmental ethics, he has been a panelist at local, state and national conferences sponsored by the National League of Cities, the Florida League of Cities, the American Bar Association, the Florida Municipal Attorneys Association, the National Institute of Government Purchasers and the Council on Governmental Ethics Laws.*



*Mario Bataille, CMC, serves as the City Clerk for the dynamic City of Miami Gardens, a role he assumed on February 14, 2018. With an illustrious career spanning various municipalities, Mr. Bataille brings a wealth of experience to his current position. Before his appointment as City Clerk of Miami Gardens, Mr. Bataille dedicated three years to the City of Hallandale Beach, where he held the esteemed position of City Clerk. Prior to that, he served as the Deputy City Clerk for the City of Miami Gardens for an impressive six years. His journey in public service began as the Microfilm Clerk for the City of Pompano Beach, where he spent three years honing his skills. Mr. Bataille stands out as a well-rounded municipal clerk, boasting a profound understanding of every facet of local government operations. His specialized expertise encompasses records management, elections administration, and agenda management, making him an invaluable asset to his community. Mr. Bataille holds a Bachelor of Public Management from Florida Atlantic University and is a Certified Municipal Clerk. He is currently an active member of the International Institute of Municipal Clerks, Florida Association of City Clerks, and Miami-Dade County Clerks Association. In 2014, Mr. Bataille was recognized as one of South Florida’s Top 40 under 40 Leaders for Today and Tomorrow by Legacy Magazine.*



**..Because I'm Happy: Achieving and Maintaining Happiness (Part 1)**

When it comes to Politics, Government, Democracy, Independence, Safety, Employment, and Overall, Everyday Life... **How do you Achieve and Maintain Happiness?** There will be problems and challenges that will confront you and your constituents, your voters, and your residents. In an increasingly urbanized and decentralized society, full of stressors and anxiety triggers...how do you achieve and maintain happiness for your population? What do your residents require and desire on a yearly, monthly, weekly, and daily basis that help dictate and define the achievement and maintenance of Happiness?



**Mayor Omarr C. Nickerson, Ph.D** was born in Miami, Florida. He received his Bachelor's Degree from the University of Miami "The U" in Liberal and Social Arts. He then went on to obtain his 1st Master's Degree in Global History and Socio-Geographic Studies from the University of Cairo, in Egypt. He got his 2nd Master's Degree in International Political Science and Economic Development from the University of Damascus, in Syria. His Doctorate Degree was also acquired in International Studies and International Relations/Affairs from the University of Beijing, in China, and the University of Damascus, in Syria, respectively. Mr. Nickerson is first and foremost a lecturer, who has given numerous speeches to the public throughout the Middle East and Asia. He also works as a "hands-on" educator with schools that are listed under the educational transformation status, due to their low scores on standardized tests. He has obtained Certifications in Micro and Macro Economics, World History, American Government, American History, and Geography. He also has Certifications to educate individuals with a wide range of disabilities, including those with Special Learning Needs, Varying Exceptionalities, Specific Learning Disabilities, and Emotional and Behavioral Disorders. As Mayor of El Portal, he has overseen Historic Economic, Financial, Infrastructure, Development, and Business Success. He credits the Residents of El Portal, the El Portal Administrative and Governmental Team, Ms. Clerk Jacobi, CMC, and Ms. Christia E. Alou, Esq., who he refers to as his "Tag-Team Partner In Success" regarding and in connection with these Historic Levels of Accomplishments and Achievements. When asked what he wanted for the village and community, he stated "More Council-Community Involvement and Improved, Transparent Communication," which would be his primary focus for El Portal's immediate future.



**Luis Gallardo**, Founder and president of the World Happiness Foundation and World Happiness Fest. Author of *Happytialism* and *The Exponentials of Happiness*. Director of the Gross Global Happiness program at the United Nations University for Peace. Luis Gallardo is a social innovator and entrepreneur who aims to achieve fundamental peace by developing ideas, connecting thought leaders, activists, and communities, and increasing awareness of the science of happiness, holistic education, and smart innovation. Over the years, Luis has been an advisor to CEOs, thought leaders, entrepreneurs, Nobel Laureates, and political and institutional game changers on strategic personal positioning and brand building. That access to the brightest and most conscious individuals has inspired him to understand that the world needs new lenses to realize growth and how humans and societies can thrive. Luis has worked in the corporate world as a global executive and has been a protagonist in transforming industries such as professional services and the Internet. Luis has been an international observer with the UN and OSCE in post-armed conflicts, establishing democracy and the right to vote. For Luis, Happiness is a human right and a life choice, an enabler of human development and social innovation. That's why he is committed to creating, with initiatives such as *bē* and the World Happiness Foundation and World Happiness Fest, spaces for academics, activists, social innovators, scientists, governmental leaders, institutions, and leaders, in general, to share and learn, to feel, understand and act towards a happier world and thriving societies. "The world needs new lenses to understand growth and how humans and societies can thrive."

**Greener, Equitable, Innovative Economic Growth**

Panelists will explore how to continue growing a future-ready economy in Miami-Dade County through resilient, equitable, and technology savvy approaches.



**Francesca de Quesada Covey** is the Chief Innovation and Economic Development Officer for Miami-Dade County. Reporting to Mayor Levine Cava, de Quesada Covey leads efforts to accelerate innovation within the \$11B+ county government and to increase economic activity in a county with \$155B+ GDP. de Quesada Covey is a seasoned technology executive and investor with over 15 years of experience. Prior to joining Miami-Dade County, de Quesada Covey was a partner at TheVentureCity, a global early-stage investment firm. In parallel, she served the Mayor of Miami Dade County as Tech and Innovation Advisor, and in 2023 she co-founded the Miami-Dade Innovation Authority, a not-for-profit investment vehicle supporting early-stage companies. From 2013-2021, de Quesada Covey worked at Facebook (now Meta) where she led business development and partnerships teams focused on new products. Before joining Meta, she served as Deputy Counselor of Strategic Engagement in the Office of Public Engagement under President Obama. de Quesada Covey holds degrees from Columbia University (B.A., political science and French) and Institut d'Etudes Politiques in Paris, France (M.A., finance).



**Mayor Danielle Levine Cava** was elected as Miami-Dade County's first female Mayor in November 2020 following a 40-year career as a social worker, lawyer, and advocate for South Florida families. Originally from New York, and raised across North and South America, she graduated from Yale College with an honors degree in psychology, and from Columbia University with graduate degrees in law and social work. After moving to Miami-Dade with her husband, Mayor Levine Cava worked at Legal Services of Greater Miami serving children in the school system, and at the Guardian Ad Litem program where she founded Voices for Children. She subsequently served as state administrator for foster care and adoptions in Miami-Dade and Monroe counties. She founded Catalyst Miami in 1995 where she dedicated two decades to building prosperity and civic leadership in all our communities. Levine Cava was elected to the County Commission for the first time in 2014 and served six years before being elected as Mayor. She has empowered small businesses, increased community policing in underserved areas, improved transit options and housing affordability, protected the environment and addressed climate change. She oversees more than 28,000 employees, serves nearly 3 million residents, and manages a \$9 billion annual budget. Mayor Levine Cava's administration is focused on building a stronger, more inclusive and more resilient Miami-Dade by directly engaging with residents to make local government more responsive, transparent, and accountable.



**Ivan Rapin-Smith**, is the founding Managing Director of Watsco Ventures, the startup incubator and venture investment arm of Watsco, Inc. Prior to joining the Miami-based Fortune 500 company, Ivan was the inaugural Managing Director of Venture Hive, a startup accelerator spun out of the University of Miami. Raised and educated in Belgium, Ivan earned a Master of Science in Electromechanical Engineering from the Catholic University of Leuven, and began his career in management consulting before co-founding two Belgian startups and Belgium's first startup accelerator. He moved to Miami in 2011, where he quickly became a key figure in the burgeoning local tech sector, dedicating his expertise to guiding startups towards sustainable, innovative growth and technological progress.



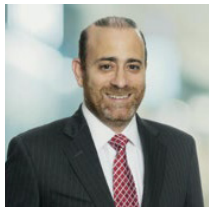
**Dr. Tiffany Troxler** is a Research Scientist and Associate Professor at the Southeast Environmental Research Center and the Department of Biological Sciences at Florida International University. Her research focuses on wetland ecosystems ecology, and informs management and restoration of coastal and freshwater wetland ecosystems. She is also the project collaborator and working group co-lead in the Florida Coastal Everglades LTER program. Troxler is Director and Associate Director for Science of the Sea Level Solutions Center. The Center's work is to advance knowledge, decision making and actions toward mitigating the causes and adapting to the effects of sea level rise. She is also currently leading a collaborative effort to examine the effects of salinity inundation associated with sea level rise on soil carbon balance in the Everglades coastal wetlands, and is contributing to a collaborative project led by the USGS to scale coastal carbon stocks and fluxes using remote sensing products.



**Laura Naramore** is an expert in operations strategy and program management. She is a business advisor on technology product market fit, development funding and multi-party collaboration. Her experiences include international projects and live/work assignments in NA, AP and EU. The MITRE Corporation is a private non-profit applied research and development institution of 7,000 scientists and engineers advancing United States national security. At MITRE, she is a pathfinder for opportunities to enhance threat resiliency and citizen well-being. She specializes in operationally affordable and politically feasible solutions in complex, nuanced and high stakes contexts. She is MITRE's lead for due diligence and operational assessments for underperforming federal programs.

**Hot Topics in the County**

An overview discussion of Miami-Dade County recently proposed and adopted legislation that has preempted or impacted the home rule authority of cities within the County.



**Chad Friedman, Esq.** is a partner and Co-Chair of the Municipal Practice at Weiss Serota Helfman Cole and Bierman. Chad represents developers and governmental entities in land use, zoning and general government matters. He is also a leader in the field of Property Assessed Clean Energy (PACE) programs. Chad represents local governments in the drafting, adoption, and implementation of land development regulations, including green regulations. In addition, he represents local governments in comprehensive plan amendment and quasi-judicial hearings (variances, site plans, rezoning, and special exceptions). Chad has also successfully defended governmental entities, such as the Village of Key Biscayne and Town of Cutler Bay, in land use litigation. On the private sector side, Chad helps developers and private property owners navigate the intricacies of the development review process. Over the years, he has assisted many private clients in securing the necessary development permits and other approvals required for the development of property.



**Former Senator Oscar J. Braynon, II** joins The Southern Group's Miami office after most recently serving in the Florida State Senate representing District 35 (Northern Miami-Dade County and Southern Broward County from 2011-2020). Oscar was unanimously chosen to become the Minority Leader for the 2016 and 2017 Legislative Sessions. Prior to being elected to the state senate, Oscar also served as the State Representative for District 103; and Vice-Mayor and Councilman for the City of Miami Gardens. Oscar's effectiveness as an elected official and businessman is fueled by a depth of prior work in government. As a Miami Dade County Commission staffer, Oscar learned the ins and outs of county government. As a founder of the City of Miami Gardens in 2003, Oscar has extensive knowledge of how a municipality works from the ground up.



**Jose K. Fuentes** has a strong network of contacts and over 30 years of experience working in the government and in the political arena. He is a government relations professional who represents local government, other public bodies and private sector clients in environmental, safety, infrastructure and water resources at the state and local levels. His client list includes the City of Miami, Homestead, Pinecrest, South Miami, Virginia Gardens, North Miami Beach, Sweetwater, and Miami Springs, to name a few. In the private sector, he represents Hitachi, Wade Trim, ShotSpotter, Atkins, Motorola, Pro Champions, Groupe ADP, Siemens, Mitsubishi and Ygrene/PACE. His extensive lobbying experience at the highest level of local, county and the state has helped him contribute to the passage of numerous legislations. He has also secured funding for the municipalities he represents through the allocation of major infrastructure projects funding. During his time as director of the South Florida Water Management District, Regional Office, Mr. Fuentes was instrumental in securing funds for key water projects Miami-Dade County.

# LUNCHEON SPEAKER



*Dr. Maria Galli Stampino*

University of Miami Dean of Undergraduate Affairs





# *Reception Speaker*

## **Udonis Haslem, “UD”**

Former professional basketball player, father & husband, businessman, and philanthropist. Three-time NBA Champion whose leadership, voice, work ethic, and passion – on and off the court – make him the embodiment of Miami HEAT culture and a beacon in the City of Miami.



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