

Authority helping business owners beautify storefronts

BY YUDISLAIDY FERNANDEZ

At a time when downtown retailers are getting hit with a reduction in tourist traffic and cash-strapped locals buying little – the Downtown Development Authority is lending a hand.

Downtown-based businesses – whose taxes fund the authority’s operations – can apply for shutter, facade and tenant improvement grants to makeover their storefronts.

The authority’s grants – administered by partner agency Miami Downtown Partnership – help downtown business owners beautify their establishments.

So far, the Downtown Partnership has administered about \$400,000 in shutter and facade makeovers for 17 storefronts and seven tenant improvement projects, said Josie Legido Correa, Downtown Partnership executive director.

“We are looking to continue

these programs because they have been successful,” she said.

With the shutter program in effect close to two years now, owners can apply to have their old style shutters replaced with new see-through ones at zero cost, she said.

“They help improve the pedestrian feel of downtown, so people can window shop at night and gives a feeling of security and more light...,” she said.

Businesses with new see-

through shutters are eligible for the facade grants, Ms. Legido Correa said, which cover exterior improvements such as painting, windows and door repairs and signage.

The authority pays 50% of the cost – before it covered 75% – but the agency is cutting back to stretch remaining funds to assist more businesses, she said.

The tenant improvement program is available to those opening a business in downtown,

helping with build-out costs.

To make setting up shop an easier process for potential tenants, she said, the agency holds their hand through the process.

The downtown partnership can help investors look for a location, guide them through the permitting process, apply for the storefront improvement programs and help in promoting their new business, she added.