



August 28, 2009

B- Herald: The new South Beach?

Brian Basti likes to get into an area before the crowds.

He was a pioneer in Miami's edgy Park West neighborhood with nightclubs I/O Lounge and PS14. His other clubs helped put the Design District on Miami's hip and trendy map.

Now he sees a similar opportunity in downtown Miami. That's why he recently opened Ecco Pizzateca + Lounge. The two-story space starts the day as a restaurant catering to the business lunch crowd and then morphs into a late-night party lounge.

Basti is part of a new wave of entrepreneurs who see downtown Miami as an untapped market. The interest is motivated by a combination of the economy driving down rents and a growing market of residents moving into downtown's new high-rise condominiums.

[...]

Don Vernon knows about taking chances in a developing area; he opened Uncle Sam's music on South Beach in 1985, just when the area's revitalization was getting started. Now, he is finalizing a deal to open a cupcake bakery and cafe in downtown Miami.

``It's a new area like South Beach was," said Vernon, who hopes to open his business for less than \$200,000 and get a city grant to offset some of the costs. ``I just see it as a place that has a lot of opportunity to grow. I like the feel of it. It's got a lot of a grit."