



downtown comes to life



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Population growth brings new vitality to the urban core



Miami overlooked its urban core for decades. Businesses downsized, relocated, and closed, but few opened. Sidewalks sat in disrepair, buildings grew decrepit, and parks were neglected. New Miami residents in search of housing made a beeline for the suburbs. Workers commuted in each morning, but left at dusk.

Today, downtown Miami is turning a corner, following a decade of unprecedented public and private investment. Since 2002, close to \$13 billion has been invested in downtown Miami, creating a strong base of commercial and residential development and serving as a magnet for new businesses and residents. And while much attention (and criticism) has been given to Miami's condominium surplus, the reality is that people are moving in at a record pace because of that very development.

► residential

An occupancy study commissioned this summer by the Miami Downtown Development Authority (DDA) found that 62 percent of the residential units constructed during the building boom are occupied by full-time residents (both renters and owners), with market equilibrium likely to be reached within three years. Further, census projections indicate the area's population has increased from 40,000 to 60,000 since 2000, with another 10,000 downtowners expected over the next six years.

For the first time, Miamians are seeking an urban lifestyle – one that is more accessible and affordable than ever before. Downtown's standing as Florida's largest employment center is fueling this trend. The same residential towers that made headlines as relics of overdevelopment are now filling up with young professionals, retirees, and even families.

But while residential growth is an important step in the rebirth of our city's urban core, there are many more chapters to the downtown Miami story.

► retail

The next chapter will tell the story of growth in the retail sector, which is serving and employing downtown's residents. In fact, Miami's Central Business District and the Brickell Financial District are both witnessing steady retail activity at a time when most markets across the country are stagnant. The past few months have seen a record number of restaurant and lounge openings in the

once vacant East Central Business District and Brickell Entrance neighborhoods. Hotspots like Tre Bistro, Mia at Biscayne, Ecco Pizzateca, Brickell Irish Pub, and Pieduck's Pizza are catering to the city's residents.

Downtown Miami's pattern of growth is not unprecedented in South Florida – entrepreneurial retailers fueled the renaissance of Miami Beach's Lincoln Road Mall in the early 1990s. Much the same way that South Beach became a shopping and dining Mecca, merchants and restaurateurs are now upping their investments in downtown in hopes that the area's growing population will bring profits.

► quality of life

So what comes next, now that downtown Miami is home to a growing number of people and a solid base of businesses to serve them? Now it's a matter of sustaining this growth and meeting the needs of those who have already migrated in.

A recent survey found that downtown Miami residents care most about the little things: clean streets, crosswalks, plants and trees. Over the past year and a half the DDA, along with its partners at the City of Miami and Miami-Dade County, has initiated more than \$4 million in projects to beautify the district by adding sidewalks and crosswalks, modern lighting, and newly-planted trees. Additionally, working with the Florida Department of Transportation, \$3 million has been allocated for beautification, drainage improvements and resurfacing efforts along Brickell Avenue.

The DDA is also attracting visitors and promoting activity among residents after dark and on weekends. Events such as the free DWNTWN Concert Series serve as the perfect complement to our cultural and entertainment destinations, including American Airlines Arena, the Adrienne Arsht Center for the Performing Arts, Gusman Center for the Performing Arts, Miami Dade College, and the Miami Art Museum.

We are working with the City of Miami to make downtown streets more resident- and visitor-friendly through programs that clear storefronts of illegal signage, wipe out graffiti, rid streets of panhandlers, and provide visitors with walking directions, in addition to working with the City of Miami Police Department for a more secure downtown. Likewise, the façade improvement initiative is helping retailers improve the aesthetics of their storefronts. More than 75 percent of retailers on Flagler Street have already agreed to participate.

Last month, the Miami DDA's board voted to approve the Downtown Master Plan, which provides a long-term blueprint for revitalization and will help guide public investment priorities for the district well into the future.

To be sure, downtown Miami still has a way to go and our to-do list remains long. But the residential and retail growth taking shape is proof that our urban core is coming to life. Rest assured this progress is no accident; it was the result of long-term foresight and billions in public/private investment. Realizing Miami's full potential as a world-class city will require that we maintain this level of commitment.