

MIAMI TODAY

37 Years

WEEK OF THURSDAY, DECEMBER 3, 2020

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COUNTY DRIVES TOWARD BROADER USE OF TAX-FUNDED TRANSIT-ON-DEMAND, PG. 11



MIA RECORD CARGO: Miami International Airport (MIA) appears to be headed toward a record year for cargo movements, with 1.9 million tons of cargo through October – a pace that the Aviation Department says will probably see the hub surpass its record of 2.3 million tons in a calendar year. MIA has served 52,504 cargo-only flights, a press note said, already 7,000 more than last year. “We are certainly thankful for the partnership we share

with the airlines, federal agencies and logistics providers within our local air cargo community, who have each helped MIA have a tremendously successful year already,” Aviation Director **Lester Sola** said in a statement. One contributor to increased cargo traffic is MIA’s designation as the first airport in the Western Hemisphere and the second worldwide to be designated by the International Air Transport Association as a pharmaceutical freight hub. The press note said, “MIA is prepared to be a leading air cargo hub for Covid-19 vaccines.”

KEY APPOINTMENTS: Miami-Dade Chief Financial Officer **Ed Marquez** will keep his job in Mayor **Daniella Levine Cava**’s administration, albeit without the additional deputy mayor title prior mayor **Carlos Giménez** gave him. And former Miami-Dade Police director **JD Patterson Jr.** got the official go-ahead from commissioners Tuesday to become Chief Public Safety Officer, a new job that oversees Miami-Dade Police, Fire Rescue and Corrections and Rehabilitation departments, as well as the Medical Examiner’s Office. “With the Office of Emergency Management as part of his portfolio, JD Patterson will play a leading role in the county’s response to the Covid-19 pandemic, as well as any future countywide emergency,” Ms. Levine Cava said, adding that she’d asked him “to work closely with our new chief medical officer, Dr. [Peter] Paige, in providing advice and guidance on how to best marshal our resources and fight the virus to keep our community safe.”

DOWNTOWN PARKING: The City of Homestead today (12/3) is scheduled to break ground today on a renovation of its downtown park, the name of which is more than familiar to residents past and present alike. The expanded Losner Park, named for a family whose history with the city dates back nearly a century that includes current Mayor **Steven Losner**, will include designs by Sasaki and Associates, the firm that master-planned the Beijing Olympic Games; new landscaping; several recreation areas for adults and children, and a new Homestead Veterans Memorial to replace the existing one, which will be relocated to the Homestead-Miami Speedway. All work will be funded solely by impact fees and grants, a city press note said. To view the groundbreaking virtually, visit Homestead’s Facebook page at 10 a.m.

THE ACHIEVER



Photo by Marlene Quaroni

Alan Dodd

Battles sea level rise and seeks stormwater gains for Miami

The profile is on Page 4

Beach puts mopeds on short reins

By KYLEA HENSELER

Miami Beach commissioners are cracking down on the use of “mopeds as toys.” If it passes a second vote next week, their latest action will prevent new scooter companies from setting up shop in the city.

In a preliminary vote last month, commissioners unanimously moved to prohibit future businesses from renting mopeds, motorized bicycles, golf carts or low-speed vehicles. The final vote is Dec. 9.

Under the ordinance, existing moped businesses could continue to operate, but they would be bound by a second new ordinance passed last month requiring scooter companies to install emergency “off” switches on vehicles. The switches won’t stop a scooter in motion, but drivers won’t be able to restart an engine once it’s stopped.

The new regulation would add teeth to the city’s ban on overnight scooter rentals, which does not allow rentals between 7 p.m. and 7 a.m. First- and second-time violators caught by police face \$100 and \$250 fines, according to the ordinance, and third-time violators will face a misdemeanor.

Commissioners are looking to go still further, as Michael Gongora suggested the city look into a regulation similar to one in Panama City that requires scooter rental firms to switch to a fully electric fleet within a set time period.

Such a regulation, he said, would reduce moped noise. Commissioner David Richardson, who sponsored the initial item on banning future companies, noted that it would also move the city in an environmentally-friendly direction, and he pledged to bring an ordinance or discussion item on the suggestion to the commission by January.

Commissioners Mark Samuelian and Ricky Arriola also voiced support for the possible amendment.

“Scooters contribute to this ill perception people have that anything goes in Miami Beach,” said Mr. Samuelian, “and that is not the case.”

Clock ticks on \$14 million for small business

By ABRAHAM GALVAN

As local businesses continue to recover from the pandemic, RISE Miami-Dade Fund has relaxed its eligibility requirements to ensure the remaining \$14 million is distributed by the end of December.

The small-business loan fund originally seeded with \$25 million of federal stimulus money has set a new Dec. 20 application submission extension, right before the Dec. 31 federal government mandate to return any monies not distributed.

Under the new qualifying guidelines, businesses can have up to 50 employees, a maximum annual revenue of \$5 million and a minimum credit score of 520. The maximum loan amount is now up to \$45,000 and loan payments have been deferred until February 2022, according to Michael John Green, vice president and fund director of commercial lending for Dade County Federal Credit Union, which operates the fund.

“Unfortunately, this pandemic is going to be here for a very long time, and we don’t know what 2021 holds,” he said. Since its

launch over the summer, RISE has issued more than \$7.5 million in loans to 400 businesses in Miami-Dade, with an average of \$16,000 each, Mr. Green added.

In partnership with Ascendus, Miami Bayside Foundation and the Black Business Investment Fund, RISE was created and approved by the county commission back in June. The loan will help small businesses that have been largely left out of other relief programs such as the Paycheck Protection Program or the small business administration’s disaster loans.

The economic development financial institutions also teamed up with a Pennsylvania-based artificial intelligence company called Cognistx to make the application process faster and help map businesses by county districts.

The goal has been to ensure equity across all county districts. By seeing where the loans are being made, they can focus on encouraging applications where the loan numbers are low, said Sanjay Chopra, Cognistx co-founder and CEO.

“We wanted to have a process where we can quickly store and make applications available to be processed,” Mr. Chopra said. “We ap-

plied artificial intelligence to check all of the requirements needed to qualify.”

Cognistx is saving about 30% of the time it takes to sort out applications that qualify and others that don’t, said Michael Sellinger, Miami Bayside Foundation’s loan programs director. “Our time is solely working with those who qualify, and it is also allowing us to sort applicants out by the district, which is really helping our ability to report back to county commissioners.”

While more common with larger corporate banks, artificial intelligence assistance programs are unheard of with small community loan programs and are only now gaining traction, Mr. Chopra added.

“Long-term, this artificial intelligence program will help aid all applications that impact small businesses and develop a playbook for the future making accessibility to loans more efficient,” he said. “We were able to quickly put a program together that will be here not only during disasters but brighter days to support small businesses in Miami-Dade.”

Details: RiseMiamiDade.com.

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