

# 40th Year MIAMI TODAY

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## MIAMI, FREEDOM PARK DEVELOPERS HAMMERING OUT DEAL'S BENEFITS TO PUBLIC, PG. 3



**VIOLENT CRIMES RISE:** Violent crimes rose more than 25% in the areas patrolled by the Miami-Dade Police Department in the first half of this year, new county figures show. Non-violent crimes rose 16% during the period. While homicides declined from 61 to 40 in the six-month period, virtually every other type of major crime increased. Rapes rose more than 21% to a total of 311, robberies increased nearly 50% to 464, aggravated assaults rose more than 25% to 2,362, and burglaries rose nearly 64% to 1,299. Motor vehicle thefts increased by a third, to 1,849. The figures do not include crimes in cities with their own police forces.

**INSURANCE BURDENS VARY:** Miami-Dade homeowners pay an average annual property insurance premium of \$5,093, according to a Florida Office of Insurance Regulation report issued this month based on data for the first quarter of the year. That's second highest in the state after Monroe County's \$6,729 average. Third is Palm Beach County at \$4,811, followed by Broward at \$4,802. Rates are far lower outside of South Florida, such as \$2,440 in Orange County (Orlando) and \$2,320 in Hillsborough County (Tampa). Lowest in the state is Sumter County, at \$1,438.

**GAS PRICE KEEPS FALLING:** Average gasoline prices in Miami have fallen 15.6 cents per gallon in the past week to \$3.84 per gallon, according to GasBuddy. Prices in Miami are 71.7 cents per gallon lower than a month ago and 81.5 cents higher than a year ago. The national average price of diesel has declined 13.1 cents in the last week and stands at \$5.14 per gallon.

**SLOTS PAY OFF FOR STATE:** As pari-mutuel facilities returned to more-normal operations during the pandemic, Florida tax collections from slot machines topped expectations. A report released Monday said slot-machine tax collections totaled \$241 million during the fiscal year that ended June 30, beating an earlier forecast of \$231.2 million. Pari-mutuels in Miami-Dade and Broward counties have slot machines, but pari-mutuels in the rest of the state cannot offer the games.

**COSTLY STAYS:** Miami ranks second among the most expensive cities worldwide to stay in an Airbnb, according to a 2022 report by photography prints and decor company Inkifi with data from AirDNA and World Population Review. The average daily rate of Airbnb stays in Miami is \$221.77, following Las Vegas with an ADR of \$223.68, and preceding San Francisco, which has an ADR of \$219.85. The study also shows that, since 2019, the number of active Airbnb rentals around the world has fallen from 303,535 to 209,682, a 30.92% drop.

### THE ACHIEVER



**W. A. Spencer Morris**  
Heading multiple developments locally and across Sunbelt  
The profile is on Page 4

## Free transit set to glide into Grove

By GABRIELA ENAMORADO

Freebee electric transportation that has been rolling across the county fare free is coming next to Coconut Grove, where a Freebee operation is to launch in October sponsored by the Miami Parking Authority.

"Freebee's ridership has steadily increased since it launched almost two years ago for the purpose of connecting people to their destinations in downtown Miami," said Alejandra Argudin, parking authority CEO. "We want to replicate this service to the community by sponsoring the Coconut Grove Freebee and encouraging more people to visit the central business district, increasing green transportation and stimulating the local economy."

The fixed-route circulator will service the authority's Regatta Harbour garage and the Coconut Grove Business District. The parking authority will offer 50% off parking for Freebee users who park at the Regatta Harbour garage. It will be \$5 per hour and max out at \$20. Those who park at the garage have access to the Freebee pickup and passengers will be able to track the Freebee vehicles in real time.

This will provide a parking option for those visiting the Coconut Grove Business District. It will also free up limited parking spaces in Central Grove.

The mobile app that accompanies Freebee, called Ride Freebee, will feature all the local Coconut Grove local businesses near the passenger's destination for free. The local businesses will be able to offer exclusive deals.

Freebee launched in 2012 as essentially an advertising agency with a small fleet of electric golf cart-like vehicles wrapped in ads of Fortune 500 sponsors transporting riders short distances on South Beach. Drivers worked solely for tips and riders flagged down vehicles. That model changed in 2016 with the Ride Freebee app.

Cities soon began to fund Freebee as public transportation, and the service spread to many municipalities in the county.

## New political action committee targets November

By MONICA CORREA

A political action committee created by the Greater Miami Chamber of Commerce in June 2021 will hold its first candidate interviews in September to decide who to support in November, a first for the chamber, which has long remained out of politics.

The chamber, which has lacked a staff leader for the political action committee, referred to as a PAC, soon will have a new vice president of governmental affairs. Matthew Monica comes aboard Aug. 29, after the Aug. 23 primaries but in time for candidate interviews for November.

Mr. Monica has been chief operating officer for David R. Custin & Associates and has worked almost two decades in campaign strategies. He replaces Spencer Pylant.

"This guy is extremely knowledgeable, has a great deal of experience to the job," said Alfred Sanchez, president and CEO of the GMCC. "We've been without a government affairs VP for the past several months. The first thing that [Mr. Monica] would be doing when he comes in would be putting out plans and events for the PAC."

The non-partisan committee aims to advance entrepreneurial priorities, educate political lead-

ers about the needs of Miami-Dade businesses, and publish recommendations and support politicians who work to meet those needs.

The PAC's four priorities remain transportation, workforce housing, education and workforce development and resiliency, said Mr. Sanchez.

The plan is to begin candidate interviews in September to have the full list of recommendations, and the reasons the PAC is supporting those politicians, before the general elections.

"What we're looking for and the kinds of questions we will be asking are related to what their positions are regarding business, legislation and other important topics," Mr. Sanchez said. "We're in the middle of formulating [the questions] through the committee."

The PAC, he added, will participate only in "key races locally," such as for the county commission, local commissions within the county, and significant state-level races that could affect Miami-Dade.

In addition, the PAC plans to meet with local politicians who are not running, especially at the county level, to discuss topics of importance to the committee.

During the chamber's 2022 legislative review, it supported bills relating to the PAC's priorities:

- Resiliency – HB 513, requiring the South Florida Water Management District to submit an infrastructure study by Oct. 1, 2023, on the status of the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers Section 216 Central and Southern Florida Project; and HB 2639, Coral Gables' citywide septic-to-sewer conversion assessment.

- Transportation – the chamber is supporting HB 2807, Ludlum Trail corridor high-speed fiber internet infrastructure; the HB 2839 Ludlum Trail Corridor fund of \$2 million for the construction of the 5.6-mile greenway corridor for nonmotorized active transportation; and HB 2393, the South Dade Trail 20-mile off-road multi-use and mobility corridor fund of \$3 million.

- Workforce housing – SB 1150 and HB 495, authorizing ad valorem tax exemption for property used for affordable housing.

- Education and workforce development – SB 1918 and HB 1319, a school readiness program would require early learning coalitions to adopt a payment rate schedule rather than a payment schedule and to reimburse contracted schools' readiness program providing the minimum payment rate; and SB 1422 and HB 1181, Florida Kidcare Program eligibility, increasing the income eligibility threshold for coverage.

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