NON-PROFITS TAKE A LEAD • HEALTH CARE HEROES • EDUCATORS MOVING AHEAD • CARING EMPLOYERS • INNOVATORS • SHINING STARS • GOING THE EXTRA MILE • LEADING DEVELOPMENT COMEBACK • BRINGING TECH TO MIAMI • LEADING RESIDENTIAL BOOM • CREATIVE RECOVERY • NEWCOMERS • MAKING MIAMI RESILIENT • KEEPING US MOVING • SOLVING THE HOUSING PUZZLE • ECONOMIC GENERATORS • CLOSING THE ECONOMIC DIVIDE • BUILDING DOWNTOWN’S FUTURE • SPREADING THE ARTS AROUND
Stepping up to make Miami more resilient and sustainable

By Kylea Henseler

As Miami-Dade seeks solutions to climate change and sea level rise-related issues, a number of individuals have stepped up to help make us more resilient and sustainable.

These two words, said Aris Papadopoulos, founding chair of Miami-based nonprofit Resilience Action Fund, which provides resources that are designed to be used by policymakers and practitioners, are critical to informing themselves on resilient development.

Centuries, but they’re failing at a very high rate.”

Community over the last couple of years. We invested a lot in the US in a long-term vision project.

Aris Papadopoulos was on his way to a meeting on the 64th floor of the North Tower of the World Trade Center on Sept. 11, 2001 when the first plane struck. After evacuating and thankful to have a second chance at life, the MIT-trained engineer started looking at why buildings are vulnerable to terrorism.

Trainee started working with Miami Beach Urban Studios to a composting facility, which now has 126 participating families get a bucket every week and giving them a second life. They have hundreds of pounds of unsellable produce and single-stream recycling still leads to a great deal of waste as one contaminated product can spill many, they quickly turned to reusing scraps and providing sustainable solutions by sewing old T-shirts and sheets into grocery bags. When covid hit, the group, which includes fairly-paid working mothers who lost jobs during the pandemic, pivoted again to making masks. They made over 900,000 masks, sold under a partnership in which each mask sold provides for two masks to be donated.

The group has started making bags again, she said, buying hundreds of pounds of unsellable t-shirts from places like Goodwill and giving them a second life. They also visit schools to teach students about recycling, and have started a community composting program that now has 126 participating households on Key Biscayne. For $176 per year, she said, families get a bucket every week that can be filled with kitchen scraps and dropped off at a community market or picked up by a volunteer. The waste is then taken to a composting facility, which members can visit to learn more about the process. As part of their dues, members are entitled to a portion of the soil produced by the composting site each year.

Mr. Rionda and Theo Quenee, founder of Send It 4 The Sea, were also inspired to start their organizations to combat excess waste, particularly in the ocean and Biscayne Bay.

“The shoreline cleanups this guy and his crew do are second to none,” Frankie Ruiz, Miami’s chief wellness officer, said of Mr. Queene. The group, Mr. Quenee told Miami Today has removed 30,000 pounds of garbage from Biscayne Bay since 2019 through its cleanup efforts.

The core of the organization, he said, is students at area colleges, as young people can reach new generations in a meaningful way. After starting up in Nicaragua, Mr. Queenee said the organization was founded with the goal of helping watersports athletes give back to the ecosystem that supports them.

A message the group tries to get across, he said, is to work on “reusing” because “recycling” isn’t as easy as it seems. After he and his girlfriend got in the habit of filling a bag with trash each time they hit the beach, the public media to raise awareness of plastic pollution. Inspired by the public stations that allow pet owners to grab bags to pick up dog doo, Mr. Rionda thought a similar concept could work for beach cleanups.

After winning a Miami Foundation Public Space Challenge, he got to work installing on local beaches wooden posts with reusable buckets that allow people to pick up trash as they wander. When covid hit, he, the organization sponsored over 30 events where small “pods” of people could do a socially distanced cleanup.

The model, he said, inspires lifestyle awareness and participation, as seeing the consequences of pollution can lead individuals and groups to make different choices.

Some, he said, got involved themselves. The idea to a Fill a Bag DIY initiative whereby camps, Girl Scout troops, students or other people and groups can apply for a fill bag and learn how to set up a station on their own beach. There are now 35 stations around the country, Mr. Rionda said, with the majority in Florida, one in Cape Cod, and a participant looking to build one in Indonesia.

Papadopoulos wondered, or will future Miami Beach residents be asked about what the island will look like in the year 2070.

Papadopoulos noted that future private investors may see opportunity in funding sustainable projects.

To this end, the city approved the Miami Beach Resilience Vision online workshop July 21 that will present ideas from the Miami Beach Urban Studios Sea Level Solutions Center and take comments, reactions and suggestions from the public and policymakers.

One question, for example, is how the conversation will look in the future. Will Miami Beach residents have private cars in 50 years, Mr. Papadopoulos wondered, or will the streets be canals similar to those of Venice? Or some kind of mix?

Such ideas, he said, take a long time to gel, which is why it’s important to begin a long-term dialogue with residents and community stakeholders. While there’s no doubt any resiliency upgrades will come with a cost, Mr. Papadopoulos said, it’s important to begin a long-term dialogue with residents and community stakeholders.

While the city and its communities face a long-term battle with climate change, some members of the community are addressing the issue of waste, pollution and education in more immediate ways.

After moving from Miami to Spain in 2009, Helena Iturralde, her girlfriend got in the habit of filling a bag with trash each time they hit the beach and started teaching students at area schools in Key Biscayne the organiza-

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