

Greater Miami Chamber beams up Light Up Miami

By M.-J. TAYLOR

It was no light-hearted gesture but a belief in a vision for Miami when the Greater Miami Chamber of Commerce took Light Up Miami under its wing last week.

The chamber's executive committee last Tuesday voted the two-year-old group, devoted to encouraging artistic uses of light on buildings and public spaces, an affiliate, said community development vice chairman Sherrill Hudson, managing partner for Deloitte Taskins and Sells.

"Light Up Miami is really the rope for downtown Miami," he said. It can be a "catalyst" to attract tourism and visitors.

Executive Director Carlos Batista formed Light Up Miami under the aegis of the Downtown Miami Business Association at the instigation of Miami Mayor Xavier Suarez. The mayor first talked up the concept at a chamber goals conference two years ago, says Mr. Batista.

After two successful events in 1987 — one Thanksgiving Eve and the other New Year's Eve in conjunction with the Orange Bowl Parade and the Fiesta by the Bay — the organization was spun off from the business association this year. Mr. Batista turned over the reins of the association to Patricia Allen so that he could take his light-up efforts countywide.

The organization wants to light up the cityscape "not only downtown" but all over the county, in "Little Havana, Liberty City, Miami Beach," said Larry Turner, a private



Lawrence O. Turner Jr., who recently joined Light Up Miami as its president, and executive director Carlos Batista, right, at the chamber's meeting last week.

Photo by Andrew Itkoff

investor who recently joined the organization as president.

The plans for Light Up Miami are still embryonic, and Mr. Batista says

he has "has no way of predicting what it means" to be a chamber affiliate beyond the cache of the association and the chamber's ability

to draw community leaders into the project.

"Some of our direction will remain," Mr. Batista said. For example, the organization will coordinate light shows for Thanksgiving and New Year's Eves again this year. And one of its primary goals has been, and will remain, to encourage private developers to light their buildings.

Beyond that he envisions buildings talking to each other with lights and lasers, coordinated through a computer network, and bridges that provide a light-and-laser show when raised to "create an event when a bridge opens and closes." A light show would ease the impatience of drivers who must wait while boats pass, he said.

"When you're waiting at a bridge, 1 1/2 minutes seems like 20," he says. "But a light show would make 1 1/2 minutes seem like 20 seconds."

And Mr. Batista hopes to create a light library of fixtures and equipment.

The chamber's sponsorship is a catalyst for bringing together many who are interested in seeing a light on a grand scale come to Dade County's skyline.

Last week Mr. Turner took R. Vann Helms, southern region marketing representative for Knight-Ridder Financial Information, to lunch to ask him to join the project.

Mr. Helms has since developed his concept into what he calls the Magic City Project — a plan that calls for a nightly extravaganza of lasers, fireworks and lighted buildings

coordinated with a simulcast of music on a local radio station.

Mr. Helms wasn't sure what role he might play in Light Up Miami but said, "I'll probably be the spokesperson for the thing ... I understand it so deeply."

The idea may have come to Mr. Batista from Mayor Suarez, but it is not a new concept to Mr. Helms, who has been promoting a similar but more elaborate concept since 1984.

During the first night of Metrorail's operation, Mr. Helms gazed up at Rockne Krebs' Miami Line — the rainbow of neon that graces the track over the Miami River — and the dark building beyond. And the idea of a lighted skyscraper-scape dawned in his imagination.

Whatever the origin of the idea, all involved say lighting the city will alter images and have enormous economic impact.

"It will change the image of Miami," said Mr. Turner. "It will be an entirely new experience to be part of Miami when it's lighted up. I believe you'll have economic revitalization anywhere it's done."

Mr. Helms concurs, calling it an "economic development program" that could "put us back on the map a la Christo" and the pink surrounded islands in Biscayne Bay.

And all agree that lighting the cityscape will attract people.

"Humans are attracted to light," Mr. Batista says. Light, whether artistic or not, "creates a feeling of safety. It's more than a feeling of safety because it enhances safety."