

An Enlightening Interview with Carlos Batista

Executive Director of Downtown Miami Business Association

CARLOS, HOW DID THIS "LIGHT UP MIAMI" PROGRAM GET STARTED?

The concept of Light Up Miami has been around for many years now. I have seen articles by Fred Tasker, for example, dating back 4 or 5 years on this subject. Also Van Helm has been promoting this concept from many years back. You can find posters and other visuals which demonstrate that lighting up Miami derives from the way Miami is itself. Miami seems to call for it. There is not any one moment of birth that I know of.

NOW WE DO HAVE A LIGHT UP MIAMI CELEBRATION, WHICH YOU, AS EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR OF THE DMBA HAVE WORKED SO HARD TO CREATE AND NOURISH.

Thanks Roger, but I can't take too much credit for it, really. The first time I gave the idea some thought was during the 1986 Goals for Miami Conference when Mayor Suarez asked why didn't DMBA do something about lighting up Miami. I heard the Mayor repeat the question to several other groups. Everyone agreed it was a good idea, but no one did anything about it. Several months later he repeated the question with more emphasis. I then took the concept to the Board of Directors of the DMBA, and in November 1987, it was approved and I was given the go ahead.

THEN WHAT?

I was at a loss as where to start. If you think of it, the possibilities and the magnitude of what can be done creates an instant overload. I began to read about other cities, I talked to hundreds of people including, of course, Tasker and Helms, also FPL, a lighting specialist friend Tony Novo, David Ross of Y-100, and I began to study the CenTrust building. The one obvious fact was that this was not a one person task.

SO WHERE DID YOU TURN FOR HELP AND INSPIRATION?

It is hard to tell with precision. From the beginning it was intended for Light



Up Miami to become it's own entity and form it's own non-profit structure. DMBA was the proper catalyst because it represents all businesses, although it is limited to Downtown, while Light Up Miami should be county wide. Structure wise, DMBA was the father. However, the real soul of Light Up Miami had it's birth and early nurturing in Sharky's at Bayside overlooking the Bay. Emilio Callejas, part owner of Sharky's, made provisions for a Light Up Miami table, with drinks at half price, every Thursday night. By word of mouth a friendly group of people would get together and spend the evening brainstorming lighting extravaganzas. Next morning, any idea that still made sense when analyzed under the early sunshine would then be pursued. Those days were the naive, but glorious days of wild and crazy thinking. The mayor had no ideas yet of what he had unleashed.

WHEN DID HE FIND OUT?

We are getting a little ahead of ourselves with that question, but he did turn the switch on November 25, the first Light Up Miami Celebration.

WHAT GOALS DID YOU FINALLY ARRIVE AT? WHAT ARE THE THINGS YOU WANT TO ACHIEVE?

Contacting building owners and

building managers was first in the agenda, but we needed a bright idea to reach the imagination and the excitement of those who are the decision makers. You see, we knew from the beginning that Miami provides the perfect blend of long term lighting technology and one time only series of events. Let me explain. In 1985 Houston had a 4 million dollar extravaganza that made history. However, it did little for Houston in long term effect. Orlando has a Light Up Orlando event every year, but they have no lighting to speak of. Their emphasis is in the event. Detroit has a 6 million master plan for lighting technology, but has no event to speak of.

Miami is at the perfect threshold, and we will measure our success years from now on the effectiveness of obtaining permanent colorful lighting on new and old buildings and public places, thus, with good taste, creating Miami - "the City of Lights." Therefore the primary goal is "to accomplish permanent exterior color lighting" and to spice it with events along the year reflecting the hopes expressed by Larry Turner of making Miami "THE CITY OF LIGHT AND FESTIVALS." When we talk about lighting in Miami we are referring to 'lighting technology all year round' and 'event lighting.'

WAS THERE A KICK-OFF EVENT TO START THINGS ROLLING?

Looking back, the first solid action was getting the cooperation of Mayor Xavier Suarez, Mayor Steve Clark, CenTrust President, David Paul, and the owner of Museum Tower, Armando Codina to act as co-chairmen. At the invitation of the four co-chairmen we had a boat ride out to the Bay one July evening to look at the Miami skyline. Using the very unique ship called DIDEROT we invited top CEO's of corporations in Miami. Fortune was with Light Up Miami since it's beginning, three graduate students in Architecture at UM had recently discovered anew process for computer generated visuals never before possible. The group, now called IMAGE NETWORK, developed for us a computer simulation tape of how the Downtown skyline could be transformed with the use of color lights and other lighting techniques. It was a smash success, and even David Paul was impressed. The boat ride in the DIDEROT July 2, 1987 was the official commencement of Light Up Miami Celebration as we have it today.

YOU KEEP REFERRING TO "US" AND "WE." WHO EXACTLY IS "WE?"

Light Up Miami is truly a community effort, and I will later show how it is not the work of any one person, or group, or sponsor. It is possible that the most active elements lighting up the city are being done without my knowledge. Too many things happen at the right time in the right places. However, I refer as "we" to that active group of enthusiastic people who kept meeting at Sharky's and kept hammering out the nitty-gritty of organizing the thousand details it takes to bring an idea from concept to reality. At the risk of insulting friends for lapse of memory, the large number of volunteers includes Allan Rouse, Donna R. Wood-Benny, Jim Dodge,

Marta Casa-Celaya, Bernard Kayman and others.

After a few meetings, some of the building managers became more involved in the planning day-to-day efforts: Bill Roberts of the World Trade Center, Jack Goodrich of Amerifirst, Bill Kelly of One Biscayne Tower, Bill Sinko of Miami Center, Maria Escovar of 1221 Brickell. Also Al Tarabori and Andy Andrade have given guidance and advice from CenTrust and the County Court House.

The *Miami River Magazine*, with you, Roger, has been the voice and the conscience of the Light Up Miami effort, the driving force and the horse power behind the cylinders of the complex machinery. The "we" is vast and expansive, and I have enjoyed thoroughly the evolution of thoughts and ideas filtered through discussion and massaging until it all finally surfaces somehow to fulfillment among the hundreds of people actively pursuing the idea of Miami as the City of Lights.

IS THERE A FINAL DECISION MAKING BODY WITHIN THE LIGHT UP MIAMI PROGRAM?

Yes, we call it the Executive Committee, which is comprised of seven knowledgeable civic leaders.

HOW WERE THEY SELECTED?

By nature of their proven leadership and knowledge on related issues to our goals. Jack Lowell for example, had started the light up of the Brickell Median in 1986 and he is constantly motivating Brickell businesses to demonstrate community spirit. If you know how hard that can be, you will agree the Jack has been very successful. His own building of One Brickell Square is proof by example. Tony Novo is an expert in lighting and a powerful force in the Hispanic community. Guy Sanchez, from FPL and chairman of this committee, combines all the ingredients

necessary for this venture: he is an Engineer, works for the power source company, is well-known and liked by the Miami Community and you can't find a nicer human being. Roy Kenzie, because of his participation in the incredible building strides that Downtown has experienced in the last 10 years. Esther Favole, former aid to the City Mayor, now replaced by Merci Lopez, and Carol Henderson from Bayside, and myself.

WHAT IS THE FUTURE OF LIGHT UP MIAMI?

The future objective is to develop a cohesive long range plan that helps include lighting city-wide in an organized fashion, and helps focus attention on such things as lighting bridges, public buildings, lighting sculptures in public places, etc. This will be possible by obtaining and maintaining a broad base participation of neighborhood groups and organizations such as the Chamber of Commerce, BOMA, Miami Board of Realtors, and others through an independent, community-wide non profit "Light Up Miami Celebration Inc."

WHY ARE YOU DOING THIS WORK?

Miami is such a glorious, wonderful city. I have been to 48 of the 50 states, and in almost every major American city, and Miami is head and shoulders above all of them in its potential, and we are still growing. We all hear about problems of image. We all know how much New York envies Miami. We all have experienced the growing pains. Miami is the mecca of exiles in today's world. Miami is an example to the world on how cultures have strived and learned to co-exist by overcoming frictions. Miami is magnetic and energetic. Miami is the capitol of the Americas in commerce, finances and we hope soon in entertainment, education and health. Miami has grown visionaries and entertainers of world renown. Miami gets hit





and is up and going again. There is an innate buoyancy, a youthful energy and consciousness, there are always things to do and places to go. What lighting has done for the CenTrust in making the CenTrust internationally known so can lighting do for the entire city of Miami. And the leaders of Miami such as David Paul, are willing to share and not to monopolize what their ideas and daring has made for their corporation. In the 1970's Miami had a mayor who was oriented towards building and development. He supervised the physical enhancement and highrise growth of the city of Miami.

In the late 1980's Miami now has a Mayor who is people oriented, and is making the beautiful city begin to serve humanly all of it's residents, by mending scars of growing up conflicts, by filling with people the structures, by raising the income standards, health and education from the bottom up, by bringing together different groups previously pulling apart. The transition from one to the other is perfect. The timing is correct. And to all of this, lighting can

be a unifying factor, a symbol that everyone can relate to – from a child to an older person, from rich to poor, from native to a visitor – we all appreciate the element of light. I think that the time is right, and the element of lighting Miami is propitious, and all that is needed is a little push for Miami to become known as the City of Light and Festivals.

Imagine yourself anywhere in the world saying "I am from Miami, the City of Lights and Festivals," and people in other countries knowing exactly what you are talking about.

WHAT IS THE ONE CRITICAL FACTOR NEEDED TO REACH THIS GOAL?

The main goal is that all the buildings along the skyline incorporate a lighting design of quality and color, visible from the freeway, bridges, water and air, such as the CenTrust, the World Trade Center, the Museum Tower, Amerifirst, One Brickell Square, 1221 Brickell, and others. But it needs to go further, also the goal is that surrounding neighborhoods such as Little Havana, Liberty

City, Allapatha, Coconut Grove . . . etc, that they all tie in with lighting to the overall efforts. Good lighting enhances safety, beautifies Architecture, elevates the human spirit, symbolizes wisdom, "It is better to light a candle than to curse the darkness." Our community can come together through the concept of lighting - proven unexpectedly by the experience of those who were Downtown the night of November 25th - because lighting connected and communicated through the vast distances and void spaces between skysises and skyscrapers were magically interconnected by lasers and spotlights, creating a unity in the urban scape that involved the viewer physically and emotionally as part of a spatial phenomenon. People saw the monumental buildings in a new light, so to speak, with themselves now as part of it all, on a new scale, one that they could relate to, and no longer as a small particle in a sea of out-of-reach buildings. They could feel as part of our Miami, the City of Lights. That is why Light Up Miami has become an effort where the whole community participates.

