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**COUNTY CRIME UP 20%:** Serious crimes have risen more than 20% in Miami-Dade County areas patrolled by county police in the first nine months of this year, a Miami-Dade Police Department report shows. Violent crimes have risen nearly 31% to 5,050 reports, from 3,865 last year. Non-violent crimes are up more than 18%, to 20,402, from 17,253 to this point last year. Sex offenses as a whole have risen more than 13% to 656, including a nearly 20% increase in reports of rapes. Robberies have increased nearly 42% to 724, Aggravated assaults are up nearly 33% to 3,680, burglaries are up 16% to 1,931 and larcenies up more than 15% to 15,251. The only major decline is homicides, which are down nearly 20% in the area to 65, from 81 in the first nine months of last year. The figures do not include crimes in areas patrolled by municipal police departments.

**COLOMBIANS LOOK TO MIAMI:** Colombia once again is the nation with the most searches for Miami real estate during September, according to the Miami Association of Realtors, with 11.7% of international searches, followed by Argentina with 6.85% and Russia with 6.69%. The Colombian share of searches at MiamiRealtors.com is up 8.93% since last September. Bogota and Medellin are the top global cities searching for Miami homes at site, followed by Buenos Aires, Argentina; Caracas and Barquisimeto, Venezuela; and Madrid, Spain. "The changing political landscape in countries such as Brazil, Colombia and Chile," said association Chairman Fernando Arencibia, "are leading global buyers to diversify their money into more secure investments."

**THE FINAL STEP:** The Florida Board of Governors is expected to confirm Kenneth Jessell as president of Florida International University when it meets Nov. 9 and 10. The university's Board of Trustees on Monday formally voted unanimously to name Dr. Jessell the university's sixth president. Dr. Jessell has been interim president since January, when he replaced Mark Rosenberg after he resigned and recently returned to teaching at the university. Dr. Jessell had previously been the university's senior vice president for finance and administration and chief financial officer for 13 years. Prior to that, he had been an administrator for 26 years at Florida International University.

**CANADA POSTING TO CHANGE:** Susan Harper, who has been Canada's consul general in Miami for nearly six and one-half years, is to depart in November for her next posting in Dallas.

## THE ACHIEVER



Photo by Cristina Sullivan

### Karim Alibhai

Aims to develop notable project at riverfront Hyatt Regency

The profile is on Page 4

## Incinerator site is fiery Doral issue

BY GABRIELA HENRIQUEZ STOIKOW

Doral Mayor Juan Carlos Bermudez, to become a county commissioner Nov. 22, says he will ask to reconsider sites for a waste-to-energy facility due to be built in Doral beside the current Covanta plant.

"It is my opinion that there is a possibility of potentially finding a resolution, whether it's through a public-private partnership with the county or in another fashion, where we may be able to find other sites," he told a Zoom meeting Monday.

The last-minute event was organized by Mayor Daniella Levine Cava's administration just one day prior to a vote to renew the Covanta contract for the existing Resources Recovery Facility service.

The contract extension, approved by county commissioners Tuesday without discussion, would give the county enough time to build the new waste-to-energy plant without affecting solid waste services in the county. "It's an extension until we come up with a long-term plan," Ms. Levine Cava said.

She presented a report in July analyzing locations for an incinerator that shortlisted four locations: at the existing Doral site, in Medley, and two locations on Ingraham Highway.

Further analysis was proposed, and she requested "the opportunity to conduct community outreach with respect to the potential sites." The commission, however, selected the Doral site as it would take the least time and money.

County rules establish that a commission action may be reconsidered only at the meeting at which the action was taken or at the following regular meeting. But they also say a motion to reconsider "may be made only by a commissioner who voted on the prevailing side of the question and must be concurred in by a majority of those present at the meeting."

The motion selecting Doral was made by Chairman Jose "Pepe" Diaz. Mr. Bermudez is to take his commission seat, possibly allowing for a reconsideration.

## Miami targets larger ad signs at more locations

BY JOHN CHARLES ROBBINS

While a city board has caused a major delay to the Miami City Commission's plan to allow outdoor advertising signs in some of the city's premier waterfront parks, the commission followed with a vote advancing an even more aggressive measure allowing large digital ad signs on city property.

Before the commission Oct. 13 were two related items: The final reading of an amendment to the sign ordinance to allow advertising signs in three bayfront parks, sponsored by Joe Carollo; and the first reading of an amendment to the sign ordinance allowing larger digital advertising signs at numerous city-owned properties, sponsored by Alex Diaz de la Portilla.

Mr. Carollo's proposal could not move forward because on Oct. 11 the Planning, Zoning and Appeals Board (PZAB) voted to defer the legislation 90 days.

After discussion of the proposal and the rights and authority of PZAB, the commission voted to withdraw Mr. Carollo's proposal. It had passed unanimously on first reading Sept. 22.

Mr. Carollo's legislation would allow advertising signs up to 20 by 20 feet in Bayfront

Park, Maurice A. Ferré Park, and Virginia Key Beach Park.

The original advertising sign ordinance allows outdoor advertising signs at three city-owned sites: James L. Knight Center, Olympia Theater and Building/Gusman Center for the Performing Arts, and Miami Children's Museum.

Mr. Diaz de la Portilla's proposal would add Bayfront Park; Perez Art Museum Miami (PAMM); Adrienne Arsht Center for the Performing Arts of Miami-Dade County; Maurice A. Ferré Park; and "Any government-owned location within the Omni or SEOPW CRAs (Southeast Overtown/Park West Community Redevelopment Agency)."

The following locations would be deemed Digital Free Standing Sign Sites: Bayfront Park; PAMM; and Maurice A. Ferré Park. Signs up to 1,800 square feet would be allowed.

The purpose of both amendments to the city sign ordinance notes, "... the City of Miami seeks to bring in necessary revenue to maintain and improve government-owned properties within the City."

City Attorney Victoria Méndez explained that state law requires these types of signs be reviewed by the PZAB before commission can grant final approval.

Per city code, the PZAB can defer an item for up to 90 days, and provisions allow two additional deferrals up to 45 days each.

Mr. Diaz de la Portilla was not happy hearing this and eventually asked Ms. Mendez to draft an amendment stripping authority of PZAB by only allowing one deferral to its next meeting, which must be within 30 days. If PZAB does not hear a matter, it would constitute a denial and move on to city commission.

City Manager Art Noriega wanted both proposals withdrawn, but Mr. Diaz de la Portilla fought for a vote on first reading for his proposal.

Mr. Diaz de la Portilla said, "I want to move forward with it. It's first reading. Mr. Carollo had his item, and he had first reading. He has a vision for what he wants to do, I have my vision for what's to happen in the Omni CRA area ... and also some of the Allapattah and Health District areas.

"I want to pass it and then we come back and deal with the whole PZAB issue and how we're going to change the law ... but I want to get the ball rolling," he said.

Manolo Reyes again voiced concerns about the impact of large lighted signs on city residents. He was the lone no vote to approve Mr. Diaz de la Portilla's proposal on first reading.



# Karim Alibhai looks for notable project at Hyatt downtown...

Karim Alibhai started his career in the hospitality industry over 35 years ago. In 1987 he became the founder and principal of Gencom, one of the leading real estate investment and development firms with a focus on the acquisition, development and management of luxury mixed-use hotels and resorts with some residential components.

Over his career, Mr. Alibhai has led the company through more than 150 hotel transactions with over \$3 billion in funding from large investors. Gencom currently focuses on luxury brands including Ritz-Carlton, Four Seasons, Rosewood, and Hyatt properties in cities in the US such as Miami, Philadelphia, and Colorado, and internationally in Costa Rica and Bermuda, as well as in countries across the Americas, Europe and the Caribbean.

Mr. Alibhai remains passionate about hospitality and real estate development and sees with pride all the achievements of the company.

"I just love this business, especially taking something and making something out of it," he said. "We want to make a difference and do something special with what we invest in."

Karim Alibhai spoke with Miami Today reporter Gabriela Henriquez Stoikow.

**Q: Can you walk me through your career?**

**A:** I moved to the States from Kenya – I'm a first generation Indian – and moved to Houston, where I finished my university and started my career with what was what I would call a negative two-star Best Western hotel. It was a bad time in Houston. My family said, 'This is your MBA in the business. Figure it out.' So, I started in a very difficult situation.

But in a period of 10 years thereafter, I started acquiring other properties in Texas and around the country and kept working my way up the food chain. From Best Westerns to Holiday Inns, to Sheratons and Marriotts. So, for 10 years, I built the company that we owned and managed to close to 55 hotel properties. We were not in the luxury business at the time.

An interesting situation is that we took our first company public, in the form of a real estate investment trust, and merged our operating company with the company that was Wyndham International. At the same time, I was visiting Miami and had struck a partnership with two gentlemen by the name of Woody Weiser and Don Lefton who are well-known in Miami and were involved in a lot of things, [among these] the Grand Bay Hotel in Miami, which in the '90s was the only luxury hotel. We ended up partnering with them on that project, then on the only mall project in the '90s, and on the land here in Key Biscayne.

In 1998, I was visiting Miami on business and I made a decision that I'm just going to move to Miami and make this home, and we started at that time the development of what is now the Ritz-Carlton in Key Biscayne in conjunction with Woody Weiser and Don Lefton. It was a challenging development and we opened right before 9/11, so it was also the toughest time to open any business. But I'm pleased to say it has worked out



Karim Alibhai at Ritz-Carlton in Key Biscayne, among projects he most enjoyed creating.

Photo by Cristina Sullivan

## The Achiever

### Karim Alibhai

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really well. It's now been over 20 years since this property has been open. What it's done for Key Biscayne is greatly appreciated by people here.

My new business is headquartered in Miami and we've built two main businesses over the last 20 years since we moved here, one in what we call the luxury mixed-use space, which is branded hotels like Ritz-Carlton, Four Seasons, Rosewood, Auberge, St. Regis and other luxury brands.

We were amongst the first to do a residential hotel mix in the luxury segment in the '90s and that has become a cornerstone of our business. We now have developments not only in Miami, but we've done ski resorts, city hotels, and today we are doing a significant development in Costa Rica, which will be over \$2 billion in total development value. We have brands like Four Seasons, Rich Reserves which is under construction, Auberge, and a lot of residential that we're developing.

The other part of our business that we've continued since then is having our own hotel operator companies and investments where we will operate brands independent to other resorts under franchise arrangements. In the 2000s, we were a significant shareholder in what became a public company called Interstate Hotels

and Resorts, which at that time was the largest independent hotel management company outside the brands.

Subsequently, in the last seven years, we've built another company where we are a significant shareholder today called Pyramid Global Hospitality, headquartered out of Boston, with roughly 250 hotels and resorts under management, seven in Europe, 180 in the Americas, and 45,000 rooms. These are mostly hotels that are managed, even though we have ownership in a number of them. So, my career has really spanned all segments of the hospitality industry. I'm pleased to say it's always been hospitality related, with a significant residential that is connected with hotels and resorts.

**Q: Can you talk to me about the Hyatt Miami downtown project you are working on?**

**A:** Most recently, this project has got us very excited, since ultimately I've lived in Miami for the past 25 years, this is where my kids go to school and this is where I want to be. During the pandemic, we were able to forge a partnership with Hyatt Hotels, who's been a partner of ours for a long time in different parts.

The Hyatt Regency downtown, which is a very prime site in today's Miami downtown, is an opportunity to do something that would be of benefit to the city and would be a very notable project just like we did The Ritz-Carlton in Key Biscayne. The idea was born to do what's now called the Miami River Bridge Project, which we're working through the various permissions and votes necessary.

But we think what we have designed with Arquitectonica serves the market extremely well because the existing Hyatt is very old, and the Knight Center, which the city runs, is really not in the greatest condition and is not reflective of what the new Miami is looking to be.

We've seen major businesses moving downtown, so the concept [we've designed] is a world-class Hyatt Regency with almost 200,000 square feet of meeting space, which would replace the Knight Center's meeting space, and an additional 260 serviced apartments on top of the Hyatt.

In addition, there are two more towers

in the site that will be rental apartments, which we think Miami will need with all the people moving down here. It's about 1,500 apartments in two towers.

And then it's our goal to really beautify the riverfront with great restaurants and retail there. For the city, it's also a big win. Not only have we committed over \$25 million to affordable housing, but compared to the existing situation, the city should receive almost \$1 billion in taxes and land rent over the life of the lease.

This development can go a long way in improving infrastructure in Miami and other needs that Miami will have. We also think this development fixes a number of issues right now on traffic and congestion, [regarding] the way the ramp works right now and what we have planned will be greatly beneficial to traffic.

So, while we have other projects that are being developed or being pursued, this is the most significant project for Gencom, which we're very focused on and looking to get a referendum in November and get the vote. The majority of the commissioners endorsed and backed the project with the goal of getting started sometime late next year.

**Q: Can you tell me more about the benefits to the community?**

**A:** The project's construction will create 4,500 jobs, while the number of permanent jobs post-construction will more than double from 350 to about 900.

We're going to have about 50,000 square feet of open-air public space along the river, which will be an amenity for downtown resident residents and the destination where you can enjoy that green space.

**Q: Which other projects do you currently have in South Florida?**

**A:** We have been involved with The Ritz-Carlton, Fort Lauderdale, which we sold our interest last year. We're still involved in partnership with The Ritz-Carlton Coconut Grove in Miami, and in The Ritz-Carlton in Key Biscayne.

**Q: Do you have any future plans for investment in Miami that you could share?**

**A:** We don't have anything identified at the present time. We will always be looking selectively. I think [the downtown project] is of scale, size and importance, and will receive most of our focus over the next few years. But we do see ourselves continuing to invest in Miami given that we are based here and we see great long-term potential.

**Q: How do you make a decision to invest in a new property?**

**A:** I'll start with a very simple question, what is the potential, which over the years, I've built companies around hotels and properties and we've made acquisitions in Europe and the Americas. Initially, you can look at something and say, 'Okay, here's the potential for this one.'

We like to do value-add projects. We don't want to acquire something that's just totally fixed and pretty. We like to come in and either build or completely redo, and then it comes down to running some numbers and economics.

For example, the Miami Downtown Project, the old Hyatt is doing well. They

# ...as his global hotel operations have created 150 transactions

can do so much better if it was a newer with better meeting space. So, the potential of what we can do is how we like to make our decisions generally.

**Q: What are the top three projects that you've enjoyed the most developing?**

**A:** I would say The Ritz-Carlton Key Biscayne. Then a ski resort called The Ritz-Carlton Bachelor Gulch in Beaver Creek in Colorado. That was a very unique project where we rebuilt a giant log cabin.

I think the most recent one has been our Costa Rica [project] which is called Peninsula Papagayo, where we were able to take what we call a jewel in the rough and really polish it and take it to the next level. It had started 20 years ago with the people that own it, they just stopped taking care of it and it was doing okay, so when we saw it, we said 'Wow, the potential here could be amazing, so let's buy, let's fix it and then expand it,' which is what we're doing. It's still a work in progress, but I would say those will be the top three.

**Q: Gencom has a lot of properties in Costa Rica and Bermuda. Is there a reason?**

**A:** Firstly, we've been looking at Central America and Latin America for the last 15 years. We were not getting comfortable with the politics and the volatility. What we saw in Costa Rica is very stable government; I call it the Hawaii off the East Coast. It's got similar topography, the Pacific, a very high level literacy in the labor force, and really great service. Many parts of the Caribbean are not known for their service. It's only two and a half hours from Miami, five hours from New York, three hours from Texas

For this kind of experience, people go mostly to Hawaii when they can come to Costa Rica and it's even closer. With that we made the decision that this is something worth investing in and so far it has proven us right. 96% of our customers are American. All the rates that we get on the rooms and the residential sales are US type rates but yet our labor costs is cheaper because it's in Costa Rica.

So, we're able to continue to reinvest.

We just launched this year a wellness resort up in the mountains in Costa Rica, called Hacienda AltaGracia, which is an Auberge Resort. That's how Costa Rica became of interest.

Bermuda was interesting because Bermuda really died in the '70s. It used to be famous, the Queen and everyone had been there, and then they just went into decline. People forgot about Bermuda. People would go to the Caribbean to Cayman, Turks and Caicos and other islands.

About six years ago, we were invited to look at a situation about a troubled property in Bermuda which was a Rosewood Hotel and [we] visited the island because one of the banks we worked with was now going to be owning the property. We saw that things were changing in Bermuda. There was a new airport being built, the government was going to be very proactive with tourism, they were giving good incentives and rebates, so we felt encouraged and even though it's on the Atlantic, it's got Caribbean looking. It's much more sort of first world in terms of the law – it's British law. So we made that investment and it turned out very successful for us.

Then we bought our second project, which is a 600-room, 126-acre which used to be a very famous project called Southampton Princess, which is now Fairmont Southampton Bermuda.

We bought that to completely redevelop it. It was supposed to start construction last year because of the pandemic, we're now starting this year in November and it would take about 18 months to complete. It's a complete reworking of that project which will make us the largest employer in Bermuda.

The island is only an hour and a half from a population of 20 million people in the Northeast US. But it was kind of out of sight and out of mind. That is what attracted us and into those two areas.

**Q: Are you planning on making any investments in Latin America?**

**A:** For the moment we don't. Things always change.

**Q: What is your forecast for the indus-**

**try in the short and long term?**

**A:** I think short term, everyone's a little worried. For the next 12 to 18 months, will we have a recession, interest rates are going up, companies like FedEx are reporting lower earnings, construction costs have gone sky high. So, we could see for the next one or two years things being difficult.

Long term, we think the resort and leisure sector will continue to do the best. I think the pandemic has made people realize they need to take more time off, shorter vacation, but more time off, and I think that's a trend that's going to stay.

And the fact that people will also learn they can work from anywhere, so that allows them to take long weekends and work from a resort on a Friday. I think that's going to really help the long-term trend in that segment.

I think city hotels are going to be challenging because while they'll catch up at some point, I think there won't be much new construction because business travel and conferences are not going to be, we think, at the same level that they were pre-pandemic. People just sort of learned and said, 'Well, we can do this small conference by Zoom. Let's do the other one by travel.' So, if there's four board meetings a year, many companies will have two in person and two by Zoom, Teams or equivalent. The long-term trends on city hotels and conferences are going to be challenging in a lot of markets.

**Q: What is the best piece of real estate advice that you've received so far?**

**A:** Don't ride your losses and take your profits when you can. That means that if you've made a bad decision in real estate and bought a property that's just not going to work out, stop trying to hope and wish it will work out and keep putting good money after that.

Cut your losses. You can always make it up somewhere else but the amount of capital you have to put in, and also your time, drains you. That was very good advice because over the years, there are mistakes that happen and you want to be

sure that you just don't get caught up in your mistakes.

Take profits when you can basically means don't think everything is going to be forever perfect. In any market in the world, we've seen things change, like right now a major city like Chicago, you're seeing major moves out and businesses and real estate are really suffering. Whenever something's doing well, either you sell it or you sell a part of it, but take profits when you can and don't just think it's forever going to be great.

**Q: What makes Gencom different from other companies in the industry?**

**A:** I believe it's a combination. We want to do something different and we are fortunate to have a very good track record in what we've done over the last 35 years in different markets. We have financial and capital partners who really follow us on our projects. If we have a project, it's generally not difficult for us to find the additional capital to do it because of the track record and the fact that we do value add and think outside the box.

**Q: What do you consider your biggest achievement?**

**A:** In my personal life my four kids, and I think being able to touch and influence so many lives with what we do and create. Whether it's in Colorado or Costa Rica, with what we do we create a lot of jobs and opportunities for people and that's an achievement I'm proud of.

**Q: Do you have any hobbies?**

**A:** I love tennis play. I play tennis at least three times a week. Even though the travel industry is my business, I love to travel, especially going back every few years home to Africa, Kenya; it's always very nostalgic. And I love to read.

**Q: How would you describe your style of leadership?**

**A:** It's very collaborative. I personally like flat structures, where I'm accessible to anyone in the company. I like to involve even a junior analyst in more than just what they're supposed to do, so they can learn other parts of the business, whether it's legal or it's construction.