



Music of the City

UPFRONT

ELEVATORS QUALIFY AS THE ODDEST COMMUNAL EXPERIENCE. A dozen people elbowed into a flying box, staring at numbers on the wall in silence. But an out-of-the-box sort broke protocol one recent day.

I love this city!" he nearly shouted. "Where I come from everyone looks like me. Okay, one by one, tell me where you're from." And so it went, from Cuba to Venezuela, to Israel and Nigeria and Germany and Haiti, Argentina and Honduras. And of course, our protagonist from the nation of Vermont. Eight floors, nine countries and a lot of smiles when we landed.

I have to agree with our elevator maestro that Miami is a wonderful place. Pull up a chair at an outdoor café on

al instruments and voices. They can be wildly spontaneous and still precise. And they never lose track of one another. They trust each other.

College presidents are not in the music business, but we should be fascinated by the dynamics that produce great music. At Miami Dade College, the largest institution of higher education in America, there are 170,000 students and close to 6,000 teachers, advisors, deans, provosts, janitors, IT specialists and more. We are, undeniably, an organizational bureaucracy, just like any other

it is the poorer students who are critical to reasserting the nation's economic mobility. Far too many low-income and minority students arrive under-prepared for college-level work and weighted by financial and family responsibilities. They need a community that refuses to let them fall away.

A lot is at stake. As a noted urban expert recently said, "If your city's economic plan doesn't include an educational component, you don't have an economic plan." And that implies the vital surrounding communities cannot stop at the campus boundary. It takes a village, as the saying goes.

To that end, a very significant gathering took place last month in Miami. At the table were the heads of the public education sector—the schools superintendent and the presidents of Miami Dade College and Florida International University, the area's public university. But the meeting was truly uncommon because of the presence of an additional 30 leaders from business, media, philanthropy, government and civic entities. We gathered to address what is known nationally as the Talent Dividend. Advanced by the nationally-re-

garded CEOs for Cities organization, the Talent Dividend challenges urban regions to raise the college graduation rate by one percentage point.

Lest you wonder what a mere percentage point could mean, it amounts to \$1.7 billion dollars in added personal income per year in this community. That translates to more middle class stability, increased business activity, more jobs and a healthier economic and social environment.

What occurred in that room was recognition; an understanding that educating our people is everyone's responsibility, for everyone's benefit. Strategies came forth like a big band trying out a new piece. Notes and chords popped up, followed by a new harmony and the promise of a powerful integrated sound. It was almost as good as one of those salsa concerts that shakes this city—a different blend of music but no less heartfelt. And no less necessary for the soul of a wonderful city.

Dr. Eduardo J. Padrón is president of Miami Dade College, the largest institution of higher education in the nation, and chair of the Association of American Colleges and Universities.

VITAL SURROUNDING COMMUNITIES CANNOT STOP AT THE CAMPUS BOUNDARIES.

Lincoln Road and just close your eyes and listen. You'll hear the world strolling by in all its glorious rhythms. Miami is steeped in music born in Africa and Mississippi and places beyond, sifted through Brazil, the Caribbean, Cuba and more.

I am not a musician but I have learned to listen. Not much can match the experience of a group of musicians who have jelled. They become something more than individu-

large company.

But the entire point of this machinery is learning. That's our music. Just like a well-oiled ensemble, we need to be more than the individual parts; we need to be a community of learners. This is true today more than ever before.

Today, students from upper income families are three times more likely to get a college degree than classmates from low-income families. Yet,