

MDC president, historic figure cited for civic contributions

BY DESERAE DEL CAMPO

Eduardo Padron, president of Miami-Dade College since 1995, and **Athalie Range**, Miami resident since 1921 and the city's first black commissioner, are recognized for their efforts in building and sustaining civic pride in Miami.

Mr. Padron made Miami Dade College the top community college in the nation, attended by people from all cultures, said Christina Fernandez, public-information coordinator for the City of Miami. The college sponsors the Miami International Book Fair and owns the Freedom Tower in downtown Miami. Current enrollment is 155,000 students.

Frank Rollison, executive director of the Southwest Overtown Parkwest/Omni Community Redevelopment Agencies, cited Ms. Range for her run as the first black woman to hold a seat as a city commissioner.

"I'm frankly in love with this city," said Mr. Padron. "Anyone who comes here and is willing to work hard can be part of its leadership. You don't find that in many established cities in America. Miami is an open society, and that is what I love most about it."

"Miami Dade College is my passion," he said. "People from all different backgrounds come here to realize their dreams."

Mr. Padron has lived in Miami for more than 30 years since his departure from Santiago, Cuba, as a refugee. He attended Miami Dade College, received his bachelor's degree in economics from Florida Atlantic University and obtained his master's and doctoral degrees



Photo by Maxine Usdan

Athalie Range: Woman who broke racial barrier on Miami City Commission 41 years ago now working to reopen Virginia Key Beach.

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from the University of Florida. Developer Terra Group donated the Freedom Tower to Miami Dade College in December. Terra officials want to build a 62-story tower behind the 17-story building. The Freedom Tower is seen as a symbol of hope and freedom for Cubans who left the island nation in the 1960s and 1970s.

"There is no question the Freedom Tower is an important symbol in our city because it reflects the past and is a beacon of hope," said Mr. Padron, "but

you cannot restrain progress. Some of the most historical buildings are surrounded by modern structures."

Ms. Range was born in Key West in November 1915, but when she turned 6, her family moved to Miami.

Ms. Range still runs the family business, Range Funeral Homes, in Liberty City, which she opened with her husband, Oscar, in 1953.

As the city's first black commissioner in 1965, Ms. Range remembers when garbage pickup would take weeks in some black neighborhoods in Miami.

"It was during my time as a

city commissioner that I saw the inequalities going on within the government level," she said. "There was no representation for black people in the community."

Ms. Range is chairwoman of the Virginia Key Beach Park Trust. Virginia Key Beach, the only beach open to the county's black residents in the 1940s, is scheduled to reopen to the public this fall.

"It's important to have something that represents our heritage for today's generation and the generation unborn," Ms. Range said.

In 1970, Ms. Range was the first black to serve as head of a Florida agency when she was

secretary of community affairs. Then-Gov. Reubin Askew nominated Ms. Range.

It was through her efforts that \$8 million in federal funding was granted to the department to help families in western Florida after a drought.

"That money was used to assist the people in that area and retrieve their losses," said Ms. Range. "I was very happy to be a part of that."

Ms. Range has 10 grandchildren she says have always appreciated her stories of community activism. "You can only appreciate the future," she said, "once you know the past."