

New wave of entrepreneurial spaces washing ashore in South Florida

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CARL JUSTE / MIAMI HERALD STAFF

NEW WAVE: Pipeline has a high-design co-workspace in the heart of Brickell. Located on the 8th floor at 1101 Brickell, Pipeline opened in 2012 and currently has about 250 members. The founders are planning a second location in South Florida and are opening a Pipeline in Philadelphia this fall.

Jordan Melnick found his first investor at The LAB Miami, a collaborative workspace for entrepreneurs.

[LAB](#) co-founder Wifredo Fernandez introduced him to a new member, angel investor Mark Kingdon who had recently moved from New York. Melnick introduced Kingdon to Sktchy, an app he created that has attracted thousands of artists worldwide to create and share their portraits inspired by submitted photos. Kingdon was impressed with the app and the team and further discussions resulted in seed capital.

“We feel very lucky to have hit it off with Mark and grateful to The LAB folks for creating a space where connections like that can happen,” said Melnick.

Connections — in entrepreneur-speak, they are called collisions — are what these workspaces are all about, and an important ingredient of the entrepreneurial ecosystem South Florida is trying to grow. Many of The LAB’s 160 members are technology entrepreneurs and developers, many working in the creative industries; others are social entrepreneurs, investors and service

providers. The popular LAB, in an artsy converted warehouse in Wynwood, is one of a dozen or so such spaces — some for co-working, some for mentoring and “incubation” — that have flourished mainly in Miami’s urban core in the last couple of years. For entrepreneurs, they provide fertile ground to work, connect, collaborate and thrive.

As the ecosystem grows, new entrepreneurial spaces are putting down roots and spreading across South Florida.

While [options in Miami’s urban core](#) from Midtown to Brickell continue to grow, the new wave of

spaces is moving into other entrepreneur-rich parts of South Florida, such as Fort Lauderdale, Coral Gables and Boca Raton. This new group also includes co-working spaces and incubators that cater to specific industries.

Entrepreneurial co-working spaces typically draw a mix of startup companies, consultants and other professionals. Often the spaces provide educational and networking events for members and sometimes, the public. Costs vary, but most run about \$200 to \$300 a month for full-time use of the co-working space and its amenities; a dedicated desk or four-walled office costs extra. While amenities vary, they all offer wifi, access to conference rooms, generous hours of operation to accommodate night owls and weekend warriors, and of course plenty of java.

“But it’s not really about the space, it’s the community inside,” said Juan Casimiro, who heads Casimiro Global Foundation that teaches entrepreneurial skills to students and micro-businesses around the world. He works at Fort Lauderdale’s Axis Space.

On Las Olas Way fronting the New River, [Axis Space](#) is poised to fully open in early fall. The 21,500-square-foot, four-floor 24/7 co-working center has modern offices, co-working desks, a large event area and a host of amenities including a nap room.

The fourth floor, with glass offices and conference rooms in a variety of sizes with river views, is already buzzing. The space will soon have two open floors of communal work space, an event floor and a large shaded (and wired) work space outdoors — this is South Florida, after all. Just as The LAB Miami does, Axis plans to host its own classes and events to benefit entrepreneurs and technologists as well as allow organizations to use the space. Already, Code for Fort Lauderdale, a group that works on technology projects to serve the community, has been meeting there.

Axis Space’s founders purchased the building several years ago. Originally the plan called for executive offices. But about two years ago, after learning about the collaborative spaces popping up in startup communities around the country, the team changed focus and started a new design. As part of its research, Sebastian Vela, co-founder and Axis’s “community chief,” traveled to New York, Boston, Washington, D.C., Chicago, San Francisco and Los Angeles, visiting co-working spaces and learning about their best practices.

The founding team, which also includes Sebastian’s father, Jairo Vela, an architect, and Alex Yokana, a builder, also hired Brett Hudson, formerly business development director at The LAB Miami, as community curator. “We are looking to expand the ecosystem. We want to be part of the larger network — it’s about building it out and expanding the pie,” said Hudson.

The downtown Fort Lauderdale area, central to all of South Florida, is swimming with condos and young professionals. But it lacks cohesion, said Hudson, making it an untapped market for Axis Space. “It looks a lot like Miami a few years ago,” he said.

By pulling nontraditional workers together, spaces like Axis are becoming ecosystem developers that encourage collaborations, said Hudson. And trends are working in their favor: By 2020, the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics estimates that 65 million Americans, or 40 percent of the U.S. workforce, will be independent contractors or solo entrepreneurs. Workspaces that offer educational programming and other opportunities to foster community, innovation, creativity and social interactions will be in demand, Hudson said.

Carlos Zamora of Sensation Enterprises, a small marketing firm, is one of the early adopters at Axis Space. When the home office and the library were no longer working for him, he spent about two months hunting for office space before finding Axis. “Seeing co-working and office space together, we were sold. The emphasis is on community. We all like to share knowledge,” said Zamora, who has already made key connections with developers and designers working at Axis. “The way businesses can grow is helping other businesses.”

BRICKELL ACTIVE

Axis Space’s founders are not the only ones seeing opportunities in new markets. [Pipeline](#), which opened in the Brickell financial district in November, 2012, is now actively scouting for a second location in South Florida, said co-founder Philippe Houdard.

Adam Boalt is one of the 250 members in the Brickell location. Since early last year at Pipeline, the serial entrepreneur conceived, launched and grew his current startup, LiveAnswer, a 24/7 business phone support company. He has hired mobile developers, a designer and a lawyer he got to know at Pipeline and received expert advice through his development and prototyping process and while building a sales team.

“For everything I’ve needed, there are people here who do that or know someone who does,” he said.

Now a team of nine, with seven of them at Pipeline, LiveAnswer could find a larger space elsewhere but is staying put because of the connections, Boalt said. “Every day, you never know who will walk through that door.”

Those kinds of connections were exactly what founders Houdard and Todd Oretsky had in mind when they opened the contemporary 14,000-square-foot Pipeline with sweeping views of the city and Biscayne Bay. Their idea was to build a membership that includes young startups, larger companies, serial entrepreneurs, lawyers, investors and service providers. Houdard said about half of the membership is international, such as Latin American entrepreneurs and intrapreneurs looking to grow their businesses in the United States.

“We fundamentally believe the way young entrepreneurs benefit most is when they are not only around other entrepreneurs but also seasoned veterans,” Houdard said. “There’s a gentle hand that pushes the people together, and we do this in a variety of ways.” For instance, at its regular PipeUp series where members share their stories and expertise, designer and HGTV host David Bromstad recently gave a talk on creativity.

Houdard won’t say yet where the second South Florida location will be, but it is not in Miami’s urban core. Still, like the Brickell location, it will be set in an area with a high concentration of entrepreneurs. Pipeline is also opening a location in central Philadelphia this year.

Going where the entrepreneurs are is a key strategy. [Büro](#) Miami, one of the original co-working spaces in central Miami that opened in 2010, last year opened a second location in the Sunset Harbour neighborhood of South Beach. That office now services 150 members, including many startups, said Michael Feinstein, founder of Büro Group.

As Miami’s tech startup scene has grown, Büro Miami’s flagship center has expanded. In June,

Büro's three-floor Midtown location nearly doubled in size to 18,000 square feet and serves 250 members, including startups such as Everypost, Futbol Sites, Stepflix and Fish Indie.

"We are in expansion mode with plans to open an additional two South Florida locations in 2015," Feinstein said. Büro has also forged partnerships with co-working spaces around the country, allowing members to work from New York, Chicago, Los Angeles and other major cities, he said.

Meanwhile, more niche players have moved into the market, joining facilities such as The Innovation Center at the [University of Miami Life Science and Technology Park](#) that offers co-working space and offices plus access to shared wet and dry labs and other services to about 25 life science and health-tech companies. It's a hub for events too, including the eMerge Americas hackathon it hosted in May.

Reportedly in the works is an incubator for cloud technology companies as well as several co-working and incubator spaces geared to creatives and the design community. Last month, Macy's announced it would be opening an incubator for fashion design in Miami.

Recently opened on Coral Way in Miami is the [Center for Social Change](#), a collaborative work environment for social entrepreneurs and nonprofits. The center itself is a collaboration of Charity Deposits Corp., Charity Services Centers and the new nonprofit entity, Center for Social Change.

"Social innovation is exploding but Florida is lagging behind. There is so much potential," said Lauren Harper, one of the center's founders. South Florida has a number of social entrepreneurial ventures in their infancy that need nurturing and funding to get to the "venture-ready" stage, she said. At the same time, nonprofits need to build new, innovative revenue streams to fund their missions. "We are seeing a real need for a social entrepreneurial ecosystem."

While half the area is still being finished, about a half-dozen organizations with a social purpose have moved in and the space is already taking on a community center feel. When complete there will be nine offices, a yoga and workout room and conference spaces that surround a large open co-working area and kitchen — putting collaboration literally at the center of things, Harper said.

Calling itself "part think tank, part community builder," the center plans to offer an accelerator and host social entrepreneurial and impact-investing events and workshops on site and at larger venues around South Florida, Harper said.

INCUBATORS

Incubators differ from co-working spaces in that they are typically geared to startups and require a startup to apply for membership. In addition to work space, they typically offer below-market rent, some structured programming and a mentor network to help the selected companies grow. Where the definitional lines blur, some co-working spaces offer incubators or incubator-like services, and some incubators accept some co-workers.

[Venture Hive](#) in downtown Miami is South Florida's largest space for entrepreneurs. The two story, 35,000-square-foot facility houses an accelerator, incubator and other services for technology startups.

Venture Hive currently houses 29 companies in its incubator, which includes 14 mostly international tech companies in the hospitality, logistics, healthcare and creative industries that

were in its accelerator classes. The [new Microsoft Innovation Center](#) open to the public is at the Hive, and a large “living room” welcomes entrepreneurial events, from Startup Grind to Tech Cocktail to the weekly 1 Million Cups. Taking its ecosystem-growing role seriously, Venture Hive held technology-entrepreneurship summer camps for 2nd- through 5th-graders and will host a program for high school students in the fall.

A few blocks from Venture Hive, Miami Dade College’s CREATE incubator in the new Idea Center @ MDC [is set to open](#) this fall on the Wolfson campus, serving Miami Dade College’s 165,000 students with entrepreneurial education and resources.

And in Broward and Palm Beach counties, incubator options are expanding.

Boca Raton’s [Technology Business Incubator](#) inside the Research Park at Florida Atlantic University is a 15,000-square-foot incubator serving 20 companies. Each member is assigned a TBI Council of Advisors member as part of an organized program to track success, the incubator said. Last month, [it announced a partnership](#) with FAU’s Center for Cryptology and Information Security to help startups in the cyber-security industry, said Andrew Duffell, CEO of the research park.

And this fall, Florida Atlantic University will be opening an incubator as part of [Tech Runway](#), where startups will get mentoring, office space and other support. Initially funded with \$1 million in state dollars, Tech Runway will help at least six startups this fall but will accept applications from the public starting this fall for a larger spring program.

The [Enterprise Development Corporation of South Florida](#) runs a new incubator in Boca as well as one in Coral Springs. This fall, the nonprofit organization will be opening an incubator with Broward College in west Fort Lauderdale for promising startups, regardless of whether they are affiliated with the college. In Boca, the 12,000-square-foot incubator, located in the technology corridor off Congress, now houses nearly 20 startups. With 34 offices and co-working space, there is room to grow. The EDC also mentors Palm Beach County startups that aren’t in the incubator, said EDC’s CEO Rob Strandberg.

The EDC program is a prime example of the growing movement of collaboration among co-working centers. EDC recently expanded to more fully service Miami-Dade County, where it currently assists more than two dozen startups with mentorship, strategy and capital raising assistance.

Rather than opening a full-size incubator, the nonprofit is sharing an office at Büro Miami with the Accelerated Growth Partners angel network and Florida Venture Forum trade group, giving the organizations an opportunity to collaborate on services and events. The organizations are also planning to assist at Miami Dade College’s new incubator. Strandberg said he and other EDC mentors can meet with entrepreneurs at Büro or go wherever the startups are based. EDC also supports entrepreneurs at the [MEC261](#) co-working center in downtown Miami.

“Organizations are becoming location-agnostic, giving the entrepreneurs access to resources wherever they are located. Everybody’s jumping in to help,” said Strandberg. “It really does take an entrepreneurial village to raise these startups.”

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Choosing a coworking space

The good news is options abound. The best way to choose a co-working space is to test-drive a few because each space has its own vibe and mix of amenities and co-workers. Most offer free or discounted day passes to try them out.

When weighing the options, here are some other factors to consider:

- Does the environment fit you and the culture of your company and clients? Some are more artsy and creative, while others are more modern and business-like.
- Does the mix of co-workers suit you? Most spaces curate their memberships, going for a mix of startups, consultants, professionals, investors and larger companies. Some are more concentrated in tech, others not. During your test drive, you will get a feel for the mix.
- Do you want a place with lots of events? Check out their event schedules and member-only educational offerings. These spaces typically offer more than a Friday afternoon happy hour.
- Is being near public transportation important to you? Some are close to Metrorail or Trolley stops.
- If you drive, is parking included in the cost? If not, what will it cost and how available/convenient is it?
- Are there restaurants and cafes within walking distance? Some offer bike-sharing.
- When do you really plan to use the space? Some are open 24/7, while others aren't. However, if you don't plan to work in the wee hours of the morning, the limited hours may not be a factor.
- If you will need regular use of conference rooms or meeting areas, are they available enough of the time and included in the cost? If extra, put that into your cost equation.
- Are the founders and management teams on site and do they know all the members? Because of the collaborative nature of these spaces, friendly management is an important consideration.

Nancy Dahlberg

Joining the downtown Miami scene

Shared workspaces in Miami's downtown and Brickell areas [are plentiful](#), but that's not stopping two more focused on entrepreneurs from joining soon:

- **Mindwarehouse:** Set to open in September, mindwarehouse on the 7th floor at 111 NE 1st S. plans to curate its membership to offer expertise in the major components needed for building a successful business, including marketing, technology, legal, finance, mentorship, etc., said Brian Scheinblum, its founder and an entrepreneur in the hospitality industry. The space, which is pursuing a "green" certification for its interior, is 7,800 square feet to start with room to double, he said. More information: mindwarehouse.com

- **Building:** Built by tech entrepreneurs for tech entrepreneurs and in the planning stages for nearly two years, Building is being developed by the founders of Miami-based .CO Internet and STRAAT Investments. The three-floor, 16,000-square-foot co-working community center in West Brickell, complete with a roof garden, will cater to technology startups as well as growth-stage companies, said Jose Rasco of STRAAT. Building is expected to open by year's end. More information: [Building.co](#)