

DOWNTOWN MIAMI: The hot urban alternative to South Beach

Over the past year, downtown Miami has filled with new residents, retailers and restaurants — all reasons for promoters of the once-deserted area to cheer. Then the Miami Heat added two new stars in LeBron James and Chris Bosh to its lineup, and the cheering turned to a full-on celebration.

“It puts us back in the ballgame in a big way,” said public relations specialist Tadd Schwartz, who promotes downtown.

In addition to the Heat-fueled second wind, downtown boasts the Adrienne Arsht Center for the Performing Arts, which opened in 2006, and the new Miami Art Museum and Miami Science Museum, set to open in 2013 and 2014 respectively.

The efforts have followed a resurgence of life in once-empty downtown condos.

Since 2003, more than 22,000 condo units have been built, forcing developers to slash prices and paving the way for buyers and renters — many of them young — to find bargains. Hip hotels, nightclubs and restaurants followed the new residents; the area is projected to have about 6,000 hotel rooms by the end of the year.

“Downtown is now a happening place,” said Neisen Kasdin, former Miami Beach mayor and an attorney who serves as vice chairman of the Miami Downtown Development Authority. “It has a very cosmopolitan flare



JOE RAEDLE/GETTY IMAGES

URBAN RETREAT: Miami's skyline has drastically changed during the past five years. New theaters, condos and the Miami Heat's stars have helped fill up the once neglected area.

to it. All of that creates an organic attraction that money can't buy.”

The authority, funded by a tax levy on properties in the area, has a \$465,000 budget for marketing the area as a live-work-play destination on TV, online,

in social media and in print.

Those efforts include joining with the tourism bureau and Beacon Council to pitch the destination in the United States and abroad for business and leisure travelers and for group meetings — a sell made tougher by down-

town's lack of a major convention center, which it is seeking. That strategy includes ads in The New York Times and CNN Latin America.

The DDA also is pitching lifestyle and travel writers and broadcasters, positioning down-

town as a South Beach alternative.

Despite the momentum, the area faces hurdles, said Kim Stone, executive vice president and general manager for the American Airlines Arena and the Miami Heat.

When the arena surveys guests after concerts and basketball games, one issue trumps all others, she said: Safety.

Police are addressing concerns about crime, and several agencies are working with the homeless. A campaign to spruce up everything from signs to sidewalks to parking lots is underway.

“There's still a lot of work that needs to be done,” Schwartz said.

— HANNAH SAMPSON

DOWNTOWN MIAMI

Population: 71,000

The draw: Brickell hotels and nightclubs, restaurants, The Miami Heat and the Adrienne Arsht Center for the Performing Arts

The pitch: Urban alternative to South Beach

Annual budget: \$465,000

Who pays: Miami Downtown Development Authority, an independent city agency funded by a tax on properties in its boundaries

Obstacle: Getting people to move their vacations across the causeway from South Beach

Website: miamidda.com