BLUE TECH JOBS: POLICY, INVESTMENT, AND WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT IN SOUTHEAST FLORIDA

SFRPC
South Florida Regional Planning Council
Proudly serving Miami-Dade, Broward, and Monroe Counties

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A JOINT CONFERENCE OF THE SOUTH FLORIDA REGIONAL PLANNING COUNCIL AND THE TREASURE COAST REGIONAL PLANNING COUNCIL

The Honorable Senator René García



Chair, SFRPC;
Miami-Dade County Commissioner, District 13

The Honorable Maria Marino



Chair, TCRPC;
Palm Beach County Commissioner, District 1

The Honorable Senator Steve Geller



SFRPC Council Member and Chair, Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy Committee; Broward County Commissioner, District 5

Randy Deshazo MA, MUP



Deputy Director and Director of Economic Development and Research, South Florida Regional Planning Council

Bob Swindell



President and CEO, Greater Fort Lauderdale Alliance; Chairman, Marine Research Hub Board

Nick Bourdon



Co-Founder,
Reef Arches

Tom Potts



Program Director,
DSF Science, DEEP

Bonnie Schneider



CEO & Co-Founder,
SkyWind Solutions

Alexander "Sandy" Spaulding



Senior Vice President,
Blue Ops, Inc.

Robert P. Smith, PhD



Vice President for Research and Economic Development, Nova Southeastern University

Jim Allen



Chief Executive Officer,
Chapman School of Seamanship

Terri-Ann Brown



Senior Director,
Miami Tech Works

Colin Polsky, PhD



Associate Vice President, Broward Campuses; Professor of Geosciences, Florida Atlantic University

Brittany Snyder, DM



Executive Vice President & CFO,
The College of the Florida Keys

Glenn A. Wiltshire



Deputy Director,
Port Everglades

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The Honorable Daniella Levine Cava



Mayor,
Miami-Dade County

Captain Rick Miller



U.S. Navy (Ret.), Executive Director,
South Florida Defense Alliance

James Kohnstamm, CEcD



Director of Economic Development,
Miami-Dade County

The Honorable Chip LaMarca



State Representative,
100th District

Philip R. McChesney, MSW



Director and Deputy Chief
Innovation Officer, Broward County

Loren Parra, MBA



Director and Chief Resilience
Officer, Department of
Environmental Resources
Management, Miami-Dade County

Chris Roschek, PE



Chief Resiliency Officer,
City of Hollywood

Katherine O'Fallon



Executive Director,
Marine Research Hub

Michael Burtov



Chief Innovation Officer and
Executive Director, Alan B. Levan
NSU Broward Center of Innovation

Daniel Kleinman



Founder and CEO
Seaworthy Collective

Mark Volchek



Principal and Founding Partner,
Las Olas Venture Capital

Steven Vollmer, PhD



Director, School of Environmental,
Coastal, and Ocean Sustainability,
Florida Atlantic University

Isabel Cosio Carballo, MPA



Executive Director
South Florida Regional
Planning Council

Thomas J. Lanahan



Executive Director
Treasure Coast Regional
Planning Council



THE HONORABLE SENATOR RENÉ GARCÍA

Chair, SFRPC;

Miami-Dade County Commissioner, District 13

Commissioner Senator René García joined the South Florida Regional Planning Council in February 2021 and currently serves as Chairman. Born and raised in the City of Hialeah, Commissioner García's passion for serving his community began nearly 30 years ago as a Councilman in the City of Hialeah. During his service as State Representative and then State Senator, René focused on helping those most in need and giving a voice to the voiceless as his number one priority. During his service in the Florida Legislature, he advocated for comprehensive reforms to mental health laws, sponsored legislation to end surprise medical bills following a hospital stay, and supported expanding health care services for children through the Florida KidCare program. He continues to be a staunch advocate for families, children, and seniors in Miami-Dade County and South Florida.

First elected in 2020 as County Commissioner for District 13 and then re-elected in 2024, Commissioner García truly believes in the importance of balancing the economic progress and growth of a community with the social needs of its people. He works collaboratively with others to address pressing community and regional issues such as workforce housing, the environment, crumbling infrastructure and safety in communities to create better communities for Miami-Dade County and South Florida residents.

Commissioner García currently serves on several Miami-Dade County Commission Committees. He is Chairman of the Recreation and Tourism Committee, Vice Chairman of the Safety and Health Committee, Member of the Transportation Committee and Chairman of the County's Behavioral Health Advisory Board.



THE HONORABLE MARIA MARINO

Chair, TCRPC; Palm Beach County Commissioner, District 1

Maria G. Marino is an award-winning leader in Palm Beach County and beyond. Elected to the Palm Beach County Commission in 2020 and again in 2024, she brings a results-driven approach to governance. Maria served as Mayor of Palm Beach County from November 2024 to November 2025. Previously, Maria served on the Palm Beach Gardens City Council from 2016 to 2020, including two terms as Mayor. She has been a champion of economic growth, infrastructure improvements, and community-driven policies.

Maria plays a key role in shaping regional policy and economic development, serving as Chair of the Treasure Coast Regional Planning Council, the Homeless Advisory Board and the Pal Mar Water Control District.

Previously, she served as Chair of the Tourist Development Council, the South Florida Regional Transportation Authority (Tri-Rail), the Solid Waste Authority, the Palm Beach Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO) and as an Executive Committee Member of the Business Development Board, overseeing critical regional initiatives.

Maria's legacy of leadership extends to the state and national levels through her service as Vice Chair of the Leadership and Governance Committee and Board Member with the Florida Association of Counties (FAC) and several appointments with the National Association of Counties. Affirming her standing as a trusted voice in public policy and a lasting force for principled, high-impact governance.

Maria's leadership and impact have earned her widespread recognition. She was honored with the 2019 Women of Excellence Award by the National Foundation of Women Legislators and is a multiple recipient of FAC's Presidential Advocacy Award (2021-2025).

Recently, Maria received the Inaugural Voices of Impact Award from the United Way of Palm Beach County/Women Unit. (2026) and the 2025 Giraffe Award Marvelous Mentor from the Women's Chamber of Commerce. Also in 2025, she was honored to receive the Edna W. Runner Humanitarian Award.

In 2023, she received the Leadership Excellence Award from Leadership Palm Beach County (LPBC). A past Board Member and committee chair, Maria still lends her time as a panelist and moderator at annual forums.



THE HONORABLE MARIA MARINO

Chair, TCRPC; Palm Beach County Commissioner, District 1

Named "Woman of the Year" in 2017 by the Palm Beach North Chamber of Commerce, Maria remains actively involved as a mentor and panelist for the Chamber's Women in Business Mentorship Boot Camp, while also serving on multiple subcommittees and as a Past Trustee Member. Maria's years of service to this initiative earned her the first Annual "Excellence in Mentorship" award in 2023 and the Chair's Appreciation Award in 2025.

In 2024, Maria was inducted into the Palm Beach County Sports Hall of Fame, a testament to her achievements both on and off the golf course. A former Broker/Owner of Marino Realty Group and Executive Director of the Jupiter Children's Foundation for over 20 years, Maria has been a leader in business, philanthropy, and community development.

Maria is a sought-after speaker, having addressed audiences at state and national conferences, including serving as Keynote Speaker for the Ladies Professional Golf Association, the Miami Women Leaders Conference and ESPN's Women Changing the Game Annual Forum.

With a deep commitment to giving back, Maria continues her involvement with over 30 local nonprofits and is a member of Impact of the Palm Beaches. She serves as a Board Member with the Children's Golf Foundation and The First Tee of the Palm Beaches. Previously, Maria co-chaired Palm Beach County Cares (a disaster relief organization), was President of the Edna W. Runner Tutorial Center and Board Member of the Forum Club.

A native of Connecticut and graduate of the University of Connecticut, Maria won the 1985 Connecticut Women's Amateur Golf Championship before moving to Florida to pursue a professional golf career. A nearly 30-year member of the Ladies Professional Golf Association (LPGA), she has served as a mentor, LPGA National Marketing Committee Member, Southeast Section Treasurer,and Director of Instruction for the Joanne Carner Golf Academy. Additionally, she is a 20-year member of the Golf Writers Association of America, with published works both locally and nationally. In 2019, she was honored by the Norwalk, Connecticut, Old Timers Athletic Association for her contributions to sports and the community.

Maria G. Marino's career is defined by bold leadership, strategic action, and an unwavering commitment to public service. She continues to be a driving force for progress, innovation, and collaboration in Palm Beach County and beyond.



THE HONORABLE SENATOR STEVE GELLER

SFRPC Council Member and Chair, Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy Committee; Broward County Commissioner, District 5

Senator Steve Geller served as Broward County Mayor during FY 2021. Elected to District 5 in 2016, he currently represents all or part of Cooper City, Southwest Ranches, Davie, Plantation, Sunrise, and unincorporated areas including part of the Seminole Reservation and all of Broadview Park. Geller serves as Chairman of the Broward County Water Advisory Board, Former Chair of the South Florida Regional Planning Council, and serves on the Executive Committee of the Florida Association of Counties (FAC) and on the Broward County Cultural Council. Geller also serves as Chair of the South Florida CEDS Strategy Committee established pursuant to the SFRPC's responsibilities as U.S. EDA's Economic Development District for South Florida.

Prior to his current service as a Broward County Commissioner, Geller was elected to the Florida Legislature in 1988 at the age of 29. He served in the Florida Legislature for 20 years; nine years in the House of Representatives followed by 11 years in the Florida Senate. Geller was respected by both Political Parties and chaired legislative committees under the leadership of both Democratic and Republican Presiding Officers. Geller chaired the Regulated Industries Committee in the House of Representatives, and the Agriculture and Consumer Services and the Community Affairs Committees in the Senate. Geller served two terms as Chair of the Broward County Legislative Delegation and two terms as Chair of the Hendry County Legislative Delegation. At the time of his retirement from the Florida Senate due to term limits, Senator Geller was the Minority (Democratic) Leader of the Florida Senate. Geller has also served as National President of two legislative organizations: the National Conference of Insurance Legislators (NCOIL) and the National Council of Legislators from Gaming States (NCLGS). Geller was born in the City of New York, New York in 1958. He has lived in South Florida since 1965. He attended Florida State University for college and law school, where he was a member of AEPi Fraternity.

He has lived in South Broward since his graduation from Florida State University College of Law in 1982. He is the principal of Geller Law Firm, where he practices law primarily in the area of Zoning and Land Use. He is married to Laurel Geller and they have two children Marc and Ben.



RANDY DESHAZO, MA, MUP

Deputy Director and Director of Economic Development and Research, South Florida Regional Planning Council

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Randy serves the South Florida Regional Planning Council as Deputy Director, Chief of Staff, and Director of Economic Development and Research. As Chief of Staff, Randy oversees, directs, and mentors Council staff while assisting the Executive Director in the development, funding, and implementation of the Council's work program. As Director of Economic Development and Research, Randy develops and markets new Council work products of value to the South Florida region.

With over 20 years of experience in urban and regional planning, Randy has worked in local government and for regional and transportation planning organizations in Florida as well as California and Illinois. He is experienced in forecasting, freight planning and investment, and land use-transportation interactions. Prior to coming to the SFRPC, Randy was Chief of Staff for the Tampa Bay Regional Planning Council, where he directed a variety of high-profile planning activities.

A proficient user of economic models such as REMI PI+ and IMPLAN, Randy has conducted award winning economic, fiscal, and cost-benefit analyses across a diverse range of issue areas: transportation investment, climate resiliency and environmental evaluation, target industry studies, public health, and land use studies. Randy is a graduate of the University of Texas at Austin and has a Master of Arts degree from the University of New Orleans and a Master of Urban Planning degree from the University of Michigan.



BOB SWINDELL

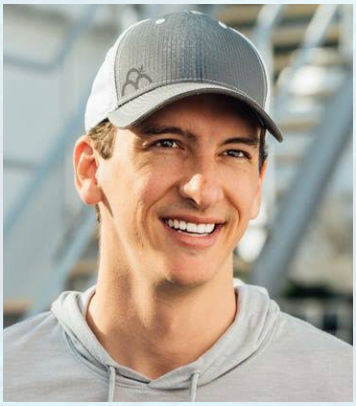
President and CEO, Greater Fort Lauderdale Alliance;
Chairman, Marine Research Hub Board

Bob Swindell was named President and CEO of the Greater Fort Lauderdale Alliance, Broward County's public/private economic development partnership, in 2009. He joined the Alliance as the SVP of Business Development in 2003. Bob and his team market and promote Broward County as a highly desirable business location to attract high skill/high wage jobs in targeted industries, diversifying the local economy.

A lifelong Broward resident, he has served in several business and community leadership roles; in 1992, during the impact of Hurricane Andrew, Bob chaired the local Board of the American Red Cross for 2 years. In 2018 Bob was honored by the Broward County Public Schools by being inducted into the Broward Schools Alumni Hall of Fame. He serves on several professional and community Boards including the United Way of Broward County Executive Board, The NSU Broward Levan Center of Innovation, Winterfest, CareerSource Broward, and the City of Fort Lauderdale Marine Advisory Board.

In 1989 Florida Governor Martinez appointed Bob to the Florida Board of Harbor Pilots. Governors Chiles, and Bush reappointed Bob. In November 2012, Bob was again appointed to the Florida Board of Harbor Pilot Commissioners by Governor Rick Scott. Florida Trend magazine has named Bob one of Florida's 500 most influential business leaders since its inception in 2017.

Two years ago, Bob was presented with the Golden Anchor Award for lifetime achievement by the Marine Industries Association of South Florida. He has been honored by local chambers of commerce for his leadership and was recognized as an Ultimate CEO by the *South Florida Business Journal*. In 2016, Bob was honored by the Florida Economic Development Council as Florida's economic development professional of the year. In 2013 Florida Governor Rick Scott presented Bob with the Governor's Business Ambassador Award.



NICK BOURDON

Co-Founder, Reef Arches

Coastal erosion is a massive problem for waterfront communities. That's why Nicholas Bourdon cofounded Reef Arches, a climate-tech startup creating ton-sized honeycomb structures that can be installed off coastlines to protect them from erosion. Made from 70% sand, they also help foster biodiversity. The company's technology is twice-patented.



TOM POTTS

Program Director, DSF Science, DEEP

Tom Potts is Director of Science at DEEP, where he leads strategic planning, permitting, and stakeholder engagement for the deployment and operation of the Vanguard undersea habitat. A marine biologist with more than 30 years of experience in ocean research, conservation, and undersea operations, he is helping advance technologies that enable sustained human presence beneath the sea and expand opportunities for scientific discovery.

Throughout his career, Tom has led multidisciplinary research programs and collaborated with government agencies, academic institutions, and industry partners to advance ocean science and environmental stewardship. He previously held leadership positions with NOAA's National Undersea Research Program and the Aquarius Reef Base.

Tom holds a master's degree in marine biology and brings extensive field experience as a certified scuba instructor, technical and scientific diver, submersible pilot, and remotely operated vehicle operator. His work includes scientific and technical publications, advisory board service, and the development of professional training and science education programs. He remains committed to building partnerships that connect emerging undersea technologies with meaningful scientific research, education, and ocean conservation.



BONNIE SCHNEIDER

CEO & Co-Founder, SkyWind Solutions

Bonnie Schneider is CEO and Co-Founder of Boca Raton-based SkyWind Solutions, which supports the blue economy with site-specific weather forecasts for coastal communities, ports, and marine operations. A former national television meteorologist, she held on-air roles at CNN, CNN International, HLN, NBC, and The Weather Channel. She is the author of *Extreme Weather* (Macmillan) and *Taking the Heat* (Simon & Schuster). A Boston University graduate, Schneider combines meteorological expertise with business strategy to guide weather-informed decisions.



ALEXANDER "SANDY" SPAULDING

Senior Vice President, Blue Ops, Inc.

Sandy Spaulding is the Senior Vice President of Blue Ops, Inc. Blue Ops builds uncrewed surface vessels (USV's) in the United States for the U.S. Navy, Coast Guard, and allied maritime forces. Using originally designed hulls, an open MOSA architecture, and modular payloads, Blue Ops' USV's give the operator capabilities that adapt to the mission. Sandy brings 30 years of marine and defense industry boat building experience to Blue Ops. He has led two of America's premier boat building companies, including The Hinckley Yacht Company and Hodgdon Shipbuilding, both based in Maine with offices and locations around the United States. Although Hinckley and Hodgdon are known as premier builders of yachts, they have also contributed over their histories to the defense industry during WW I and WW II and more recently projects for the Army and SOCOM. Sandy, and his brother-in-law, Barry Hinckley, were tapped by the CEO of Red Cat Holdings, a public company (RCAT) to establish Blue Ops in 2025 and since then have set up Blue Ops' headquarters and showroom in West Palm Beach and a 155,000 sq ft factory in Valdosta Georgia producing over 500 USV's a year. And just recently, they announced an affiliation with Florida Atlantic University to set up Blue Ops' testing, training and technology divisions at FAU's Harbor Branch Research Center in Fort Pierce.



ROBERT P. SMITH, PHD

Vice President for Research and Economic Development, Nova Southeastern University

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Researcher and academic leader whose work spans biotechnology, environmental microbiology, and interdisciplinary research. At NSU, Smith helps advance research and scientific discovery, with experience connecting academic research to real-world environmental and workforce challenges.



JIM ALLEN

Chief Executive Officer, Chapman School of Seamanship

Jim Allen is Chief Executive Officer of Chapman School of Seamanship and a retired U.S. Coast Guard Chief Warrant Officer 4 with more than 31 years of maritime service, including nearly 20 years at sea.

Since joining Chapman in 2018, Allen has held progressively senior leadership positions, including Director of Academics and Chief Operating Officer, before assuming executive leadership in January 2024.

A strong advocate for maritime workforce development, Allen has expanded career-focused training opportunities, most notably launching Chapman's Yamaha Marine Technician Certification Program in 2023, which has since become the nation's leading Yamaha marine technician training program. Under his leadership, Chapman serves approximately 950 students annually through professional maritime training, industry certifications, recreational boating education, and a summer youth program reaching nearly 250 students ages 11–17.

Through partnerships with industry leaders, employers, and organizations such as the National Safe Boating Council, Allen continues to strengthen maritime career pathways, address workforce shortages, and prepare the next generation of skilled marine professionals.



TERRI-ANN BROWN

Senior Director, Miami Tech Works

Terri-Ann Brown serves as the Senior Director of Miami Tech Works, leading efforts to connect employers with training providers while building a long-term pipeline of skilled tech talent. Brown oversees the Miami Tech Talent Coalition, a sectoral partnership of more than 250 stakeholders, and guides initiatives that align workforce talent with industry leaders, ensuring South Florida's tech ecosystem continues to grow and thrive.

Joining Miami Tech Works in late 2022, Brown brings extensive experience in human resources, organizational development, and community partnerships. Brown's work with the Venture Mentoring Team and corporate mentoring programs at Office Depot and Target provided hands-on insights into aligning resources with community needs, which Brown now applies at Miami Tech Works to strengthen partnerships and build workforce strategies. Brown's bachelor's in Communications and Marketing from Boston College sharpens her ability to affect change, while Brown's advisory role at the Alan B. Levan | NSU Broward Center for Innovation informs her perspective on technology in South Florida.

To broaden Miami Tech Works' impact, Brown continues breaking new ground by integrating emerging sectors like climate tech and applying strategies such as the Talent Pipeline Management® framework. Through collaboration with trusted partners, Brown is dedicated to building pathways into tech careers and enhancing South Florida's workforce development efforts.



COLIN POLSKY, PHD

Associate Vice President, Broward Campuses;
Professor of Geosciences, Florida Atlantic University

Dr. Colin Polsky is Professor of Geosciences, and Founding Director of the Florida Atlantic University School of Environmental, Coastal, and Ocean Sustainability (FAU ECOS) which launched in the fall of 2023. The mission of this multidisciplinary and multi-unit School is to elevate environmental research, teaching, and community engagement across the university. Dr. Polsky is a climate social scientist examining how people create, perceive, and respond to climate challenges. His training is in mathematics, humanities, French, geography, and science & international affairs (from U. Texas, Penn State, and Harvard). As ECOS Director, Dr. Polsky also leads program-building, fundraising, staffing, and communicating efforts to benefit students, faculty, and community.

Dr. Colin Polsky joined the Florida Atlantic University faculty as Professor of Geosciences in August 2014. His primary responsibility was to direct the Center for Environmental Studies, an on-going role that he continues to fulfill. Under Dr. Polsky's leadership, CES has embraced a new vision that builds on past successes while expanding into new domains. The vision of CES is to improve Florida's sustainability through research, education, and community engagement, on wetlands ecology, coastal resilience, and energy innovations.

Dr. Polsky is trained as a geographer, specializing in the human dimensions of global environmental change. He has completed four degrees with majors in four disciplines, plus a two-year postdoctoral training in a fifth field. This academic background has led to a sustained interest in advancing knowledge of U.S. climate vulnerabilities, in both methodological and applied terms.

As part of several inter-disciplinary teams, Polsky has received NSF grants totaling close to $18M of which $1.7M has been directed to his stewardship. His publications include 26 peer-reviewed articles, 2 co-authored books, 17 book chapters, and 11 other reports; he has delivered close to 100 public presentations in 8 countries. Polsky has served as co-convening lead author for a chapter in the 2013 National Climate Assessment, served on NRC, NSF, and USGCRP committees, and prepared reviews for several IPCC reports.

Polsky's administrative experience includes service for 10 years as Center Director, 8 years as director of a university undergraduate research program, 1.5 years as associate dean, and 1 year on an elected governance board. These experiences have led to significant experience with leadership and program-building, both within and across university departments; fund-raising from public and private foundations; staffing of diverse and multi-generational teams; and communicating with varied audiences, for both persuasive and reporting purposes.



BRITTANY SNYDER, DM

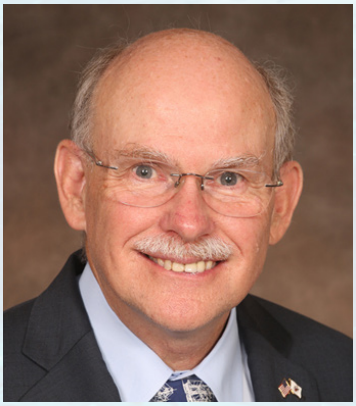
Executive Vice President & CFO,
The College of the Florida Keys

Dr. Brittany Snyder has dedicated more than 23 years advancing the academic and operational mission of The College of the Florida Keys (CFK). She was named Interim President by the District Board of Trustees, temporarily transitioning from her role as Executive Vice President and Chief Financial Officer.

Dr. Snyder began her CFK career in the Business Office before becoming an adjunct instructor teaching accounting, finance, and management courses. That experience sparked a passion for teaching that led to a progression within the academic division, where she served as a full-time faculty member, Business Program Chair, Dean of Arts and Sciences, Provost, and Vice President of Academic Affairs. In 2021, she was promoted to Executive Vice President and Chief Financial Officer, a role in which she has overseen the College's business operations, information technology, strategic planning, accreditation, human resources, facilities and construction, and sponsored programs. She has also served as CFK's accreditation liaison for more than a decade, leading the College's effort to become one of the first in Florida to earn accreditation from the Higher Learning Commission (HLC).

Beyond CFK, Dr. Snyder is active in professional and leadership roles. She serves the Key West Chamber of Commerce as Treasurer and board member, was the liaison to the Young Entrepreneurship Academy, and recipient of the President's Award in 2022. She is a member of the Upper Keys Business and Professional Women (BPW) and the Florida Federation of Business and Professional Women. Within the Florida College System (FCS), she sits on the Steering Committee for the Council of Business Affairs and the Operations Committee of the Risk Management Consortium and previously chaired the Council of Instructional Affairs as its small college representative. She was also selected to participate in the FCS Chancellor's Leadership Seminar.

Dr. Snyder holds a Doctorate in Management and a Master of Science in Accounting and Financial Management from the University of Maryland University College, and a Bachelor of Science in Accounting from Towson University.



GLENN A. WILTSHIRE

Deputy Director, Port Everglades

Glenn A. Wiltshire, a 30-year U.S. Coast Guard veteran, is the Deputy Port Director for Port Everglades, which is ranked among the nation's leading container ports and a world leader in the cruise industry.

Mr. Wiltshire has successfully implemented several innovative programs to support increasing cargo, cruise and petroleum volumes. He worked closely with U.S. Customs and Border Protection and other state and federal agencies to introduce new technology such as facial recognition and automated passport control. He also negotiated multiple long-term commercial agreements and managed capital improvements to port facilities. He serves as a member of the South Florida District Export Council for the U.S. Department of Commerce and is president of the Florida Ocean Alliance.

Mr. Wiltshire was the U.S. Coast Guard Captain of the Port of New York/New Jersey. Mr. Wiltshire's other previous Coast Guard service also includes serving as Chief of Staff for the U.S. Coast Guard Oceania District in Honolulu and as Executive Assistant to the Assistant Commandant for Marine Safety, Security and Environmental Protection in Washington, D.C.

He joined Port Everglades in August 2006 as the Deputy Port Director, and served as Acting Chief Executive/Port Director from March 2019 through June 2020 and from January 2024 through July 2024.

Mr. Wiltshire graduated from the United States Coast Guard Academy and received a master's degree in public administration from the John F. Kennedy School of Government, Harvard University.



THE HONORABLE DANIELLA LEVINE CAVA

Mayor, Miami-Dade County

Daniella Levine Cava was elected Miami-Dade County's first-ever woman mayor in November 2020 and re-elected in August 2024. She enters the Mayor's Office following a 40-year career as a relentless advocate for South Florida families. As mayor, she oversees a metropolitan government of approximately 23,000 employees, serves nearly 3 million residents, and manages an annual budget of approximately $12 billion.

Mayor Levine Cava's administration is focused on building a stronger, more prosperous, more resilient Miami-Dade. She protected lives and livelihoods by deploying a people-focused coronavirus pandemic response. She is prioritizing reforms to keep our county safe and free from gun violence through the Peace and Prosperity Plan, reinvigorating a thriving economy that delivers economic security and welcomes new investment, tackling the housing crisis by protecting tenants and building more affordable housing, preserving our environment, including Biscayne Bay and the Everglades, for generations to come, connecting every corner of Miami-Dade with the efficient and reliable public transit, and directly engaging with residents to make county government more transparent and accountable.

A social worker, lawyer, and community activist, she was first elected in 2014, and re-elected in August 2018, to serve as the Miami-Dade County Commissioner representing District 8. Previously, Levine Cava served vulnerable children, families and immigrants at Legal Services of Greater Miami and the Guardian Ad Litem Program. In 1996, she founded Catalyst Miami to help low- and middle-income families through service, education, and advocacy, which she ran for nearly two decades. With her husband, Dr. Robert Cava, a Miami native and practicing physician, she is proud to have raised two children, Eliza and Edward, in Miami-Dade.



CAPTAIN RICK MILLER

U.S. Navy (Ret.), Executive Director,
South Florida Defense Alliance

Rick founded PHAROS Mission Critical Solutions, a combined consultancy and technology integration practice, to work collaboratively with enterprises to achieve success. PHAROS also partners with technology companies to design and build integrated, bespoke technical solutions to tough operational challenges. Rick also serves as CEO of MobileDOCK USA-Americas, focused on smart technology solutions in ground transportation logistics. Additionally, Rick co-founded Security Clearance Pathway and the Security Clearance Pathway Foundation, two organizations focused on helping develop the next-generation national security workforce.

Prior to PHAROS, Rick led the Nautical & Safety Operations team at Carnival Cruise Line (CCL) where he was responsible for global nautical/marine operations for the largest cruise line in the world with a broad portfolio of functions. While there he also led the concept development, planning, design, construction and opening of Carnival's Fleet Operations Center (FOC), the largest and most advanced facility of its kind in the maritime industry. Rick represented CCL in corporate-wide initiatives that developed enhanced policies and procedures across all nine operating lines and 100+ ships of the corporate fleet.

The Carnival experience followed a successful career in the U.S. Navy including command at sea, with various shipboard and staff assignments across several specialties. Operationally, Rick was on extended deployments seven times across multiple regions, sailing all the world's oceans. He participated in Operations Desert Shield/Desert Storm, Operating Enduring Freedom, counter-piracy and counter-terrorism operations, and dozens of contingency operations in Europe and the Balkans, Africa, the Middle East, Central and South Asia, the Caribbean and Latin America. He was professionally qualified for multiple roles in both surface ships and submarines.

Ashore, he led current operations for U.S. Southern Command. Rick was a proven specialist in both strategic planning and financial management, serving multiple Pentagon tours as part of both the Navy and Joint Staffs. He planned significant portions of the Defense Department's programs and budgets, also guiding development of appropriations to support wartime activities and coordinating congressional engagements. He served on the personal staffs of both the Vice Chief of Naval Operations and Chief of Naval Operations, as well as leading special support on several issues for the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff. Additionally, he spent a year as a Federal Executive Fellow at the Institute for the Study of Conflict, Ideology and Policy in Boston, Massachusetts.



CAPTAIN RICK MILLER

U.S. Navy (Ret.), Executive Director,
South Florida Defense Alliance

Rick previously served as an advisor to the Secretary of Navy's Science & Technology Board, a Deputy Director at the Atlantic Council, is currently a member of The Consensus for American Security at the American Security Project, and Board Advisor to the U.S. National Drone Association. At the state-level, he serves as Vice Chair of the Florida Defense Alliance. In South Florida, Rick is Executive Director of the South Florida Defense Alliance and a member of Miami-Dade County's Military Affairs Board. Supporting education, Rick serves on a local congressional military service academy selection committee and co-chairs a Safety and Security Committee at Nova Southeastern University School. He also serves on the Board of Directors of the Economic Development Council of South Miami-Dade. He was instrumental in achieving the two spaceport territory designations in Miami-Dade County, development of the South Dade Aerospace Zone initiative, and a key project leader in the Florida Advanced Training Range initiative.

A graduate of the U.S. Naval Academy, distinguished graduate of both the U.S. Naval War College and U.S. National War College, and the Catholic University of America, Rick's degrees include engineering, international affairs, and strategic planning disciplines, as well as doctoral work in political economy. He is the author of over 30 articles, professional papers, and the book Funding Extended Conflicts, a history of U.S. war financing. He is a member of Pi Sigma Alpha, the National Political Science Honor Society. In his military career, Rick received multiple personal and team awards for superior achievement. He is a winner of the Naval War College's B. Franklin Reinauer Defense Economics Prize and the U.S. Naval Institute's Naval History Essay Prize. Early in his career, he designed, built, and raced a human-powered submarine that won the first ever international competition and was featured in a National Geographic television documentary, the Wall Street Journal, and Popular Science magazine.



JAMES KOHNSTAMM, CECD

Director of Economic Development, Miami-Dade County

A certified economic development professional with more than 20 years of leadership and management experience, James Kohnstamm serves as Director of Economic Development for Miami-Dade County, where he advances Mayor Daniella Levine Cava's vision for a Future Ready Economy.

In this role, Kohnstamm manages a broad portfolio that includes business retention and growth, while leading strategic initiatives designed to strengthen Miami-Dade's resilience, competitiveness, and long-term economic opportunity. His work focuses on aligning innovation, industry expansion, talent development, and public-private collaboration to position Miami-Dade as a leading global business destination.

Previously, Kohnstamm served as Executive Vice President for Economic Development at Miami-Dade Beacon Council, the county's public-private economic development partnership. There, he led a target industry strategy spanning ecosystem development, local business retention and expansion, and domestic and international business recruitment. Under his leadership, the organization secured record-breaking investments generating approximately $1.5 billion in annual recurring economic impact.

Recognized among the Top 50 Economic Developers in the United States in 2023, Kohnstamm maintains strong national and international relationships across the economic development field. He holds the Certified Economic Developer (CEcD) designation through International Economic Development Council, where he also served two terms as Chair of the Sustainability Committee. He served as a Board Member and Regional Director for Florida Economic Development Council and is Vice Chair of the City of Coral Gables Economic Advisory Committee.

Over the course of his career, Kohnstamm has developed deep expertise in the drivers of regional competitiveness and industry growth. His experience includes negotiating state and local incentive packages, implementing workforce development initiatives, leading economic analyses and strategic planning efforts, directing domestic and international business recruitment missions, and designing small business continuity and finance programs.

In 2018, he led the strategy for Greater Miami's bid for Amazon HQ2, resulting in finalist placement. Across more than 200 economic development projects, he has helped secure over 20,000 new jobs and billions in direct investment through work with major global companies including Boeing, Airbus, Kaseya, Univision, NBCUniversal / Telemundo, JPMorgan Chase, Blackstone, Millennium Management, MSC Cruises, Carnival Corporation, Spotify, Microsoft, Bombardier, and Amazon.



THE HONORABLE CHIP LAMARCA

State Representative, 100th District

Chip LaMarca is a lifelong resident of coastal Broward County, representing Broward's coastal communities. He's earned a reputation for being a citizens' advocate and respected voice for the taxpayers, families, veterans, first responders and pets in House District 100.

After attending Broward College and Florida Atlantic University, Chip followed in the footsteps of his late father helping create jobs in the construction industry. In 2006, after spending over 20 years gaining experience in the industry, he opened LaMarca Construction, a firm specializing in power generation. Chip and his wife Eileen now run The LaMarca Group, a business and nonprofit consulting firm. They reside in Fort Lauderdale with their French bulldog pup Rocco!

Chip always had a desire to invest his time in public service and in 2005 he was elected to the Lighthouse Point City Commission and he was re-elected in 2008 without opposition. In 2010 he ran a successful election to unseat the Broward County Mayor and was re-elected in 2014 with overwhelming support of the people in coastal Broward.

A passionate servant of the people, LaMarca made the personal sacrifice to leave South Florida in 2018 when ran an election for the State House of Representatives, keeping the only Broward seat in the majority and he has worked hard for the people of our community every year in Tallahassee, holding the line on spending, cutting taxes and bringing much needed resources back to our community for important projects.



PHILIP R. MCCHESNEY, MSW

Director and Deputy Chief Innovation Officer,
Broward County

Philip R. McChesney is a distinguished leader with extensive experience spanning public service, large-scale operations management, and financial services. His career is marked by a commitment to public welfare, strategic execution, and innovative problem-solving, underpinned by a Bachelor of Science in Business Administration from Bowling Green State University and a Master of Social Work from Barry University, providing applied knowledge of human services principles and community needs.

Currently serving as Director of the Consumer Protection Division and Assistant Chief Innovation Officer for Broward County, Florida, McChesney administers vital consumer protection and child care regulatory programs. His responsibilities include developing and implementing divisional policies, managing budgets, and overseeing enforcement processes for various consumer and child care ordinances. He also directs the County Innovation Unit, spearheading the implementation of business intelligence solutions and identifying innovative technology to address operational challenges and enhance decision-making across county agencies.

Building on a robust foundation in operational leadership, McChesney previously served as Executive Vice President of Operations & Education for Envision EMI, where he provided direction for over 160 residential programs and conferences annually, managing a budget exceeding $70 million. He was instrumental in executing over 80 contracts, recruiting and managing more than 700 seasonal staff, and fostering a culture of continuous improvement and risk management, maintaining an exceptional safety record. His tenure also included significant contributions to stakeholder relationship cultivation with universities and school districts to deliver tailored college immersion and career exploration solutions.

McChesney's leadership capabilities were further honed during his distinguished 20-year career in the U.S. Army, retiring as a Lieutenant Colonel. He commanded battalion-level operations, including the Joint Replacement Center for Iraq and Kuwait, orchestrating complex, multi-agency efforts to ensure personnel readiness, logistical support, and training requirements for thousands of deploying individuals. His military service was recognized with the Bronze Star Medal and multiple Meritorious Service and Army Commendation Medals.

Earlier in his career, McChesney served as Vice President and Banking Center Manager at Bank of America, where he managed branch operations, oversaw sales and lending activities, ensured financial and audit compliance, and coached teams. This experience provided a strong grounding in financial management and customer service excellence.



LOREN PARRA, MBA

Director and Chief Resilience Officer, Department of Environmental Resources Management, Miami-Dade County

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Loren Parra is the Director of the Department of Environmental Resources Management and Chief Resilience Officer for Miami-Dade County, where she leads countywide efforts to protect natural resources and safeguard public health through science-based policy, regulatory compliance, and community-focused education. Appointed by Miami-Dade County Mayor Levine Cava and subsequently ratified by the Miami-Dade County Commission in February 2026, Parra previously served in the dual roles of Chief Resilience Officer and Miami-Dade County's Chief Bay & Water Resources Officer where she spearheaded critical projects and policy related to the restoration of Florida's Biscayne Bay.

A seasoned organizational leader with deep expertise in environmental policy and science communication, Parra brings more than a decade of wide-ranging experience and expertise in public policy, advocacy, and government affairs, with a strong focus on environmental resilience and community development. Through her leadership, the County has increased state and federal participation in efforts to accelerate solutions to protect Biscayne Bay, including securing $5 million from the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers to restart the Biscayne Bay Southern Everglades Ecosystem Restoration (BBSEER) project. Parra has helped integrate the County's siloed work around flood reduction and improved water quality, championing more efficient investments that protect our neighborhoods and public dollars. She holds a BA in Political Science and Sustainability Studies and an MBA from the University of Florida. Parra resides in Coral Gables, FL.



CHRIS ROSCHEK, PE

Chief Resiliency Officer, City of Hollywood

Christopher Roschek, P.E. is the Chief Resiliency Officer for the City of Hollywood, Florida. In his role, Chris is a key member of the City's team responsible for the development of innovative solutions to the resiliency and sustainability challenges in a coastal community.

A licensed Professional Engineer, he has over 29 years of experience in municipal government, planning, engineering, construction, and environmental protection. He is a graduate of Syracuse University with a Master's Degree in Environmental Engineering.

Throughout his career he has focused specifically on water-related environmental issues. He has been active with the South Florida Regional Planning Council, Southeast Florida Regional Climate Change Compact, and other professional organizations, sharing sustainability and resilience strategies related to climate change, sea level rise, and stormwater management.



KATHERINE O'FALLON

Executive Director, Marine Research Hub

Katherine has led the Marine Research Hub's strategic vision since 2022, with the mission to connect academics, businesses, and policymakers to support the commercialization of research-based solutions into practical, scalable businesses that build the blue economy. She hosts *The Blue Economy Podcast*, producing more than a dozen episodes for a global audience. Before joining MRH, Kate spent 17 years as Marine Science Magnet Coordinator and educator with Broward County Public Schools, where she implemented marine science and maritime curriculum, built industry and community partnerships, and created interdisciplinary learning experiences. She holds a B.S. in Marine Biology from Long Island University (LIU) Southampton, New York, and an M.S. in Science Education from Nova Southeastern University. Kate serves on the Marine Advisory Council and Economic Resilience Council at the Greater Fort Lauderdale Chamber, serves on the steering committee for the Risk & Resilience Tech Hub, volunteers with the Plywood Regatta Committee at the Marine Industries Association of South Florida, and is a member of Leadership Broward Class XLIII.



MICHAEL BURTOV

Chief Innovation Officer and Executive Director,
Alan B. Levan | NSU Broward Center of Innovation

Michael Burtov is a serial venture-backed entrepreneur, author, innovation leader, and the Chief Innovation Officer at Nova Southeastern University and Executive Director of the Alan B. Levan | NSU Broward Center of Innovation. Over more than 20 years in entrepreneurship, he has founded and scaled venture-backed companies, generated millions in revenue and funding, and advised more than 1,000 startups.

His entrepreneurial work has been featured on ABC's Shark Tank, TIME Magazine, the Discovery Channel, CNN's Great Big Story, and in media around the world. Michael has also built a rapidly growing thought-leadership platform focused on entrepreneurship, innovation, artificial intelligence, and the future of business, reaching more than 100,000 followers on social media.

He is the author of The Evergreen Startup, a former Vice Chair of the MIT Enterprise Forum, a speaker and mentor at organizations including Harvard and MIT, and the holder of multiple patents and innovation awards, including the Edison Award.



DANIEL KLEINMAN

Founder and CEO, Seaworthy Collective

Daniel Kleinman is the Founder and CEO of Seaworthy Collective, a 501c3 nonprofit that supports current and aspiring entrepreneurs driving innovation for ocean impact (AKA BlueTech). Daniel's career spanned piloting, testing, and design for marine robotics – from ocean science and exploration at Woods Hole Oceanographic Institution to naval research at Bluefin Robotics and as a US Navy contractor. Daniel has a Bachelor's in Mechanical Engineering from the University of Florida, a Master's in Exploration Science from University of Miami's Rosenstiel School of Marine and Atmospheric Science, and a design and systems thinking background from Stanford University's d.school as a University Innovation Fellow.

Daniel also co-manages The Continuum, a $14M partnership as one of National Oceanic & Atmospheric Administration (NOAA)'s Ocean Enterprise Accelerators. He also is a member of the World Economic Forum's Global Future Council on the Regenerative Blue Economy and the Expert Advisory Panel for The Earthshot Prize. He also co-led the 1000 Ocean Startups Coalition's working group on diversifying the ecosystem.

Daniel has been recognized as the youngest Laureate of Prince Albert II of Monaco Foundation's Prize for Innovative Philanthropy, a 40 under 40 business leader by South Florida Business Journal, a 30 Under 30 by the University of Miami, a Future Climate Leader by the Aspen Institute, a TEDxBoston Planetary Stewardship speaker, and as one of Miami's Ambassadors for the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goal 14, Life Below Water.



MARK VOLCHEK

Principal and Founding Partner, Las Olas Venture Capital

Mark is a Founding Partner of Las Olas Venture Capital, which he started in 2016, and is now investing out of its third fund. Prior to starting Las Olas VC, Mark spent about 15 years at Higher One, a company he co-founded in 2000 while a senior in college. In his roles as CFO, Chairman and then CEO, Mark had a major hand in steering the company from its first round of seed funding and multiple rounds of venture funding all the way to its successful IPO in 2010, and beyond. He helped grow Higher One from just three founders to profitability, more than $250MM of revenue and over 1,000 employees. When Mark left in 2014, Higher One's products and services supported more than 1,900 schools and approximately 13 million enrolled students.

Between 2008-2016 Mark was an active angel investor and invested in over 30 companies personally. He was also a Director of the Founder Institute – South Florida, where he helped budding entrepreneurs get their companies started. Mark is the EY Entrepreneur Of The Year 2010 New England Financial Services Award winner and was an EY Entrepreneur Of The Year 2011 National Award finalist. He has been a regional and national judge for the program 2012-2024.

Mark holds a BA and MA in Economics from Yale University. He was a founding officer of the Yale Entrepreneurial Society and on its board from 2000 to 2010. This nonprofit organization promotes entrepreneurship among Yale students, faculty and alumni, and sponsors an annual business plan competition. Mark's past civic roles include serving as Chairman of the Tweed New Haven Airport Authority, Chairman of the Ft Lauderdale Aviation Advisory Board, and positions on the Florida Board of Take Stock in Children, the New Haven Economic Development Committee. He currently serves as the Chair of the Florida Venture Forum.



STEVEN VOLLMER, PHD

Director, School of Environmental, Coastal, and Ocean Sustainability, Florida Atlantic University

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Dr. Steve Vollmer is Florida Atlantic University's Director of the School of Environmental, Coastal, and Ocean Sustainability - the hub for solution-oriented environmental research at FAU. Steve is a renowned coral geneticist studying how tropical reef corals adapt and resist disease infection and thermal bleaching. He received his Ph.D. from Harvard University and is a National Academy of Science Kavli Fellow.