FYI Miami is a weekly feature of Miami Today, keeping readers ahead of the news. Here are highlights from the most current edition.

FIU GRANT: The increasing use of alternative medicines and Florida International University's growing attention to research resulted in a five-year, $1.2 million grant, FIU officials announced. "There's been increasing interest in alternative medicines and funding has increased several-fold to study them," said Bradley Bennett, head of FIU's Center for Ethnobiology & Natural Products and associate professor of biological sciences. "The public has been using herbal products and there is a medical and scientific community that didn't know much about these products." He said the FIU center's primary objective is to investigate the use of natural products in both traditional and modern health systems.

TRADING UP: Directors of the Beacon Council, Miami-Dade County's economic development arm, voted unanimously Friday to ask the US House of Representatives to vote today (12/6) to give the president trade-promotion authority that the council sees as a vital step to Greater Miami's bid to host the secretariat of the Free Trade Area of the Americas, now in discussion stages among 34 nations of the Americas. The council was told that about 30 more representatives' votes were needed for passage.

TAX ABATEMENT SOUGHT: The Beacon Council's board resolved 17-8 last week to ask the legislature to abate the 6.9-cent-per-gallon aviation fuel tax at the state's airports for up to 18 months to help troubled airlines. Officials of American Airlines, United Airlines and Avborne Heavy Maintenance Inc. sought the abatement while Miguel Southwell, the No. 2 executive at Miami International Airport, opposed it. Council officials agreed after the vote to meet with airport officials to hear their side of the story.

BANK POST: City National Bank of Florida named George F. Knox to its board of directors. Mr. Knox is an attorney with his own practice and is of counsel to the law firm Adorno & Zeder. The former City of Miami attorney and city department director specializes in economic development issues. With the appointment, City National's board expands to 15 members. The 17-branch financial institution at the end of the third quarter this year reported $1.97 billion in assets and earnings for the year to date of $37.4 million.

TRADE TAX GRANT: A US Treasury general government appropriations bill named FIU professors Simon J. Pak and John S. Zdanowicz principal investigators for a $2 million grant to continue their development of software that would uncover international pricing schemes the pair allege cost the US $45 billion in income tax revenues last year by analyzing every trade transaction in the US Department of Commerce database. Their work, according to Sen. Byron L. Dorgan of North Dakota, the bill's sponsor, would help determine policies the IRS could adopt to collect the taxes. Dr. Pak becomes an associate professor at Penn State University in January. Dr. Zdanowicz remains a professor in FIU's College of Business Administration.

FOUNDATION AWARDS: The Dade Community Foundation announced $200,000 in grants to nonprofits participating in "Miami's Working Together," which organizers say is an initiative to increase the impact and scope of efforts by local civic groups. Projects range from creating a high school youth council to increasing health care access in the southernmost region of the county.
Organizations involved and the amount of their award are
Communities in Schools of Miami and Human Services Coalition,
$35,000 each; Haitian Women of Miami, $30,000; Jesus People
Ministries and Sweet Vine, $40,000 each, and Trust for Public Land,
$20,000.

STATE LEADERS: The Florida Chamber of Commerce has named
several Miami-area residents to participate in its 20th annual
Leadership Florida program, which involves attending five two- and
day sessions in cities throughout the state over a period of eight
months. Taking part are Michael Carricarte, president of Amedex
Insurance; Rocky Egusquiza, contribution program manager in Miami
for Ford Motor Co.; Sara Herald, executive vice president for Union
Planters Bank; Kathie Klarreich, a journalist who lives in Key
Biscayne; Sharon Liebman, an attorney with Bell South; Joe Oglesby,
associate editor of the Miami Herald; Joe Pena, a director with the
Dade Community Foundation, and Ari Lynn Turner, general counsel
and deputy chief of state with the Miami-Dade mayor's office.

BEACH BUSINESS: The City of Miami Beach is granting 60-day
extensions and waiving late-payment charges until Jan. 31 for
payments due Dec. 1 on occupational-license and sidewalk-cafe fees,
has extended a 20% discount on parking smart cards and is offering
free Electrowave shuttle services after 9 p.m. An online survey seeks
to tap other business needs. Details: ci.miami-beach.fl.us.

AGENCY GUIDE: The State of Florida has published "Consumer's
Guide to Health & Human Services Programs Provided through
Florida's State Agencies," a guide to offerings at nine state agencies.
The pamphlet includes information on services for children, the
disabled, the elderly and veterans, said publicist Sue Garnbill, and has
Internet addresses for other state and federal programs. Details: (888)
419-3456 or floridahealthstat.com.

GRAND GRANT: The Florida Grand Opera announced a $500,000
grant from Estelle & the late Emil J. Gould to help support its training
program, Young Artist Studio. The grant will be paid over 10 years
with half annually supporting one member of the program and the
balance eventually to create a $250,000 endowment to maintain after
10 years the Gould Family Young Artist scholarship in perpetuity.

CANTO REPLAY: Novelist Ann Patchett will be guest speaker at a
Brickell Avenue Literary Society luncheon at noon Friday in Northern
Trust Bank, 700 Brickell Ave. Ms. Patchett, whose original September
engagement was canceled in the wake of terrorist acts, is author most
recently of Bel Canto, which deals with interactions between a group
of terrorists and their hostages. The book was reviewed in our Sept. 13
issue. Details: (305) 529-7713.

BLUE LAGOON CHAMBER: In last week's FYIs, the correct
phone number for the Blue Lagoon Chamber of Commerce event,
"Impact of the Florida Legislature's Action on Your Business in the
Coming Year" at 7:30 a.m. Dec. 12 in the Miami Airport Hilton
should have been (305) 261-2233.

DOWNTOWN ARTS: The Downtown Miami Partnership, the New
World School of the Arts, the Green Door Gallery and the Wallflower
Gallery downtown are playing hosts to "Art Loves Downtown
Miami," a street festival scheduled to start at 6:30 p.m. Dec. 13 on
North Miami Avenue between Second and Third streets. Organizers
said event features would include short performances and "a
distinctive arrangement of conceptual and traditional art displays."
Details: (305) 579-0069.

WOMEN IN 2002: Miami-Dade Parks is seeking nominations for its
14th annual "In the Company of Women" awards, to be given out
March 20 at Vizcaya Museum & Gardens. The awards are divided
into "honoree" and "pioneer" categories and are presented to cap off
March as Women's History Month. Submissions are due by Jan. 14.
Details: Laura Phillips, (305) 755-7800.

SEASON BELLS: The Greater Miami Symphonic Band has
scheduled an appearance of the St. Andrews Handbell Choir as part of
its annual holiday concert at 8 p.m. Dec. 18 in the University of
Miami Gusman Concert Hall, 1312 Miller Drive, Coral Gables. UM is
on a holiday break at the time, note organizers, so that parking should
be plentiful. Cost is $8; $4 for students. Details: (305) 273-7687.