Individuals, nonprofits share status as our unsung heroes

By Marilyn Bowden

An educator, an arts administrator and some nonprofit organizations working quietly behind the scenes to improve the community were among those chosen as Miami’s unsung heroes by their peers.

Barbara Stein, executive director of Actors’ Playhouse in Coral Gables, was nominated by Pat Dahne, Arvida Realty’s regional director.

“She does a incredible job,” she said. “Nobody knows how hard it can be to make a nonprofit theater a success.

“She also brought real quality to the shows there and turned what could have been an eyesore on Miracle Mile to a real attraction that brings nightlife to the area.”

Another unrecognized benefactor for the city, Ms. Dahne said, is Joyce Elam, dean of the business school at Florida International University.

“She has vision to be positioning them to be a real power-and-prestige business school by developing FIU as a top school in the e-commerce area,” she said.

José Valdés-Fauli, president & CEO of the South Florida region of Colonial Bank, nominated the Special Immunology Services Unit at Mercy Hospital.

Under Director Shedrick Boren, the program assists AIDS patients with insurance and doctors, he said.

“It was founded by a federal grant from the Ryan White Program,” Mr. Valdés-Fauli said. “They serve about 4,000 people a year. It’s a remarkable program and an incredible story, but something that one talks about.”

Mr. Boren said the seven-year-old program hit the 10,000-patient mark a couple of months ago.

“We have raised and used about $30 million,” he said. “Our budget last year was almost $10 million.”

In addition to providing social services and financial assistance in the form of grocery vouchers, bus passes, utility payments and insurance premiums, he said, the program has a medical network of about 50 private practice physicians and ancillary services.

“The top 10 physicians in the community are on our panel.”

Mr. Boren said. “The poorest members of our community are receiving the best quality money can buy.”

Dade Community Foundation was the top choice of Xavier A. Dominicis, southeastern public affairs manager for Toyota Motor Sales USA.

The foundation, established in 1967, operates as an endowment for the county. Former county commissioner Ruth Shack has been at the helm for nearly 15 years.

Over the past 15 years, Mr. Dominicis said, the foundation has secured $23 million for Miami-Dade County’s needs from outside sources, including the Ford Foundation, the Kellogg Foundation and the State of Florida.

“The foundation is credited with innovative initiatives such as Miamians Working Together,” he said, “which identifies groups and initiatives that bring the community together in a tangible way.”

For example, he said, a partnership between the Haitian American Foundation and La Liga Contra el Cancer provides cancer screenings to residents of Little Haiti.

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