Prominent judges evaluated merits of 27 award nominees

By Marilyn Bowden

Leaders in Miami’s business and educational arenas served as judges for the 2002 Gold Medal Awards contest, evaluating the merits of 27 contestants in competition for gold, silver and bronze awards in individual and organizational categories.

"The nominees for the Miami Today Gold Medal Awards represent the wide range of individuals and companies working to improve the quality of life and economic prosperity of this community," said Paul Sugrue, who has served as a judge since the contest’s inception. "They represent the best of the best, recognized in their individual fields of endeavor. The Gold Medal Awards program brings them to the attention of the broader business community, for which I applaud Miami Today."

Dr. Sugrue came to Miami 26 years ago as a professor in UM’s department of management science. He subsequently served as associate dean of administration & research and as senior vice provost before taking up his present position in 1992.

A native of Cambridge, MA, he was educated at universities in Massachusetts and Rhode Island.

J. Antonio Villamil, founder of Washington Economics Group and also a veteran of previous Gold Medal panels, said the entrants keep getting better and better.

"They are the jewels of South Florida and of our state," he said. "I noticed a lot of pro bono work and commitment to public service as well as creating jobs here."

Mr. Villamil, who served as an economic advisor to the previous Bush administration in Washington, is no stranger to pro bono work himself.

He’s currently chairman of the economic roundtable at the Beacon Council and also chairs the international economic development group for the Greater Miami Chamber of Commerce.

At the state level, he serves on the board of directors of Enterprise Florida and chairs the Governor’s Council of Economic Advisors.

“This was a very difficult task," said Joyce Elam, dean of the College of Business Administration at Florida International University. "The candidates were all strong. This is a very impressive group of people."

Dr. Elam, who succeeded Harold Wyman as dean in 1998, is also the James L. Knight professor of management information systems. A native of Texas, she taught at her alma mater, the University of Texas; the Wharton School at the University of Pennsylvania; and Harvard Business School before coming to FIU.

“Collectively all the applicants were very impressive, both from the individual contributor standpoint and the company standpoint," said Peter Roulhaic, vice president and community programs director at First Union National Bank of Florida, recently acquired by Wachovia. "I was amazed at how many people are truly making a difference in our community. It made our job as judges more difficult.”

Mr. Roulhaic, who hails from Jacksonville, has been very active in the community since his arrival in 1977. He’s currently first vice president of the Greater Miami Chamber of Commerce, on track to become chairman in June 2003.

He serves on a number of boards, including the advisory board of the Greater Miami Local Initiatives Support Corp., which finds funding and technical assistance for community-based organizations; Carrefour, which provides housing and support programs for the homeless, and the Beacon Council, the county’s public-private economic development wing, on whose executive board he also sits.

Frank Nero, the Beacon Council’s president & CEO since 1977, came to Miami from Jacksonville, where he served as both deputy mayor for economic development and executive director of the Jacksonville Downtown Development Authority.

A native of New Jersey, Mr. Nero served the Carter Administration as a regional representative for New York City for the US Department of Labor, and later as chairman of the Federal Regional Commission.

He’s on the board of the Greater Miami Convention & Visitors Bureau, the Greater Miami Chamber of Commerce, South Florida Workforce and the Coalition of Chambers. Ramiro A. Ortiz, president of SunTrust Bank Miami, also heads the bank’s private client services area.

Born in Cuba and raised in South Florida, he’s long been involved in community service, most notably this year as chairman of the Greater Miami Chamber of Commerce. In 1999 Mr. Ortiz co-chaired the United Way of Miami-Dade’s campaign and in 1998 received the National Multiple Sclerosis Society’s Hope Award.