

Education Fund distributes \$3 million in materials, produce

By ABRAHAM GALVAN

Ever since the pandemic struck back in March, the Education Fund has had to find initiatives to continue to reach out and support Miami-Dade County students, parents and teachers.

With the help of sponsors and donors, the nonprofit has been able to distribute nearly \$3 million in materials and food produce benefitting more than 90,415 families, 60 schools and 1,500 teachers, said Linda Lecht, the fund's president.

"It's not over just yet. We are really committed to connecting the private sector with public education," she said. "We strive to design and implement initiatives that involve the entire community in improving our schools."

Along with the Teacher Care Campaign and Covid-19 relief efforts, the Ocean Bank Center for Educational Materials' 11,000-square-foot warehouse and distribution program has been a significant lifesaver for Miami-Dade teachers, Ms. Lecht said.

"Teachers can come and shop for free for their classrooms and students," she said. "Students in need are then receiving the necessary tools to succeed in the classroom."

Just by volunteering their time at the warehouse, teachers may shop free every six months. Applications for teacher pass



Food from Food Forests for School edible gardens is delivered in autonomous vehicles.

requests during the Covid-19 crisis are still being accepted.

Before the pandemic, students were learning about nutrition and healthy eating habits through the organization's Food Forests for Schools edible gardens, which uses outdoor learning laboratories in about 26 public elementary schools.

Students would take bags filled with fresh produce and supplies home weekly. With the pandemic leaving many students learning from home, the fund was looking for a variety of ways to provide supplies to students and their families safely, Ms. Lecht said.

The ED Fund teamed up with Ford Autonomous Vehicles and its self-driving technology

partner Argo AI to make contactless deliveries in Ford's Fusion Hybrid self-driving test vehicles. Ford is currently building a self-driving service in Miami-Dade for ride-hailing and goods delivery and offered to help make deliveries to students' homes through an eight-week pilot program.

"It's been a challenging year in Miami for students, parents and teachers," said Alex Buznego, Miami market manager for Ford Autonomous Vehicles. "Maybe there was a way to accomplish our objectives and at the same time help our neighbors in the community. We reached out to organizations that needed our services and the rest was history."

The pilot program made weekly contactless deliveries of supplies to the families of about 50 students attending Fienberg-Fisher K-8 in Miami Beach and Riverside Elementary School in Little Havana and delivered over 500 meals. Through the Ford Motor Company Fund, \$72,000 was also donated for the cause.

"One family got the produce bags right before Thanksgiving and they were able to use the food for their dinner," Ms. Lecht. "Most of the families of our students aren't working, and that is why we are making sure they are getting much-needed essentials that we use every day."

Details: <https://www.educationfund.org/>.

Dade Heritage Trust invests in a building, cares for tenants

By ABRAHAM GALVAN

Dade Heritage Trust is making progress and moving forward with its pilot project of preserving and renovating a historic affordable housing building in Miami's Little Havana neighborhood.

With a historic preservation revolving county grant of \$1 million, the trust has designated a historic two-story, four-unit multi-family apartment building at 1401 SW Fifth St. The next step is to secure and renovate the exterior, starting with the roof, said Christine Rupp, the trust's executive director.

"We want to harden the outside of the

building first for the security of the tenants and then start putting in new windows, electrical and AC," she said. "But we never know what we are going to encounter until we start working on it."

Built in 1935, The 5,000-square-foot building is also to have an edible garden, interior restoration of historic details like the chimneys, new kitchens, flooring and bathrooms.

"We hope this project can become a model for the community on how to renovate and preserve an old historic building," Ms. Rupp said of the vintage building, which was purchased for \$650,000.

Ms. Rupp said the Dade Heritage Trust

has been working closely with leading community organizations like Healthy Little Havana to make sure they are taking all of the proper measures to better the quality of life of the current tenants.

"We are working closely with Healthy Little Havana and looking at the neighborhood to see how we can improve it with affordability and cleanliness, she explained. "We consider them a partner taking on a more holistic view because we want to continue to rehabilitate and improve developments in the neighborhood."

The health of Little Havana is at the forefront of everything the organization does, said Sofia Cuenca Aguirre, Healthy Little

Havana's program manager.

"Putting investment in these properties also includes investing in the health and quality of living for the tenants, especially when it comes to old mold, carbon monoxide and asbestos," she said.

Another challenge on the horizon is how to restore the unit's interiors without disrupting the tenants, Ms. Rupp added.

"We don't really feel at this time displacing them will be a good idea, but they are thrilled with the progress and have a sense that we care," she said. "We want to help educate our tenants on the significates of historic architecture and learn more about the history of the neighborhood they live in."

Coconut Grove

February 4

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