

Community organizations made sure residents were aided

BY ABRAHAM GALVAN

The shutdown caused by the pandemic did not stop several community leaders from reaching out and going beyond their means to help their community.

From providing legal immigration services to yoga classes, community organizations made sure residents were taken care of one way or another.

MUJER has been a critical organization working to ensure that everyone in need of help, regardless of legal status, can access the assistance they need, said United Way's President and CEO Maria C. Alonso, giving a spotlight on the hard work the organization has made under the direction of Susan Rubio Rivera.

"With Covid-19, there was a huge issue with our immigrant community in South Dade not being able to access services due to their immigration status. They needed numerous needs like Covid-19 testing because some of these families are afraid to venture out," Ms. Rivera said.

The advocacy organization made a major call for essentials items and went knocking door to door educating the community on the best ways to stay safe, she said.

"There is a lot of mental health issues within this community and we want to continue with emotional support. Sexual assault has increased during the pandemic because vulnerable women are stuck at home and can't escape," she said. "One of the best things we do is go knocking at their doors. They know us and trust us and are grateful for our assistance."



Sabrina Cohen worked to launch a virtual fitness program for those who live with physical disabilities.

Ms. Rivera said her team has reached out to hundreds of households in South Miami-Dade County during the pandemic.

"As of right now, there's a huge need for rental assistance. We are really concerned for our community knowing that there's still so much more people needing our help out there," said Ms. Rivera, whose organization offered financial assistance to more than 1,000 families with more than \$300,000 allocated for rental and food assistance.

Ocean Terrace Holdings Developer Sandor Scher said he had the honor of getting to know **Sabrina Cohen** and her foundation and learning first-hand about the extraordinary work she is doing for persons living with paralysis and other physical disabilities – both



Susan Rubio Rivera led MUJER.

through the adaptive beach days initiative and in advancing plans for a world-class, new adaptive recreation center in Miami Beach. "It was no surprise to me that

when the Covid-19 pandemic struck, Sabrina went to work right away to launch a virtual adaptive fitness program, available for free five days a week with the help of trained adaptive fitness instructors," Mr. Scher said. "That program is helping people with paralysis and physical disabilities stay active and healthy during this volatile time."

Ms. Cohen recently worked to launch the virtual fitness program, and doing ongoing work to give a voice and provide needed services to the disabled community makes her a true example of the best of our city, Mr. Scher added.

"We quickly moved to a virtual platform with adaptive fitness classes, including boxing, upper body fitness and power yoga,"



Ms. Cohen said of the roughly 100 participants who take online classes every week. "Not only South Florida clients attend, but people from around the US can also join."

At this time, she says, it's too dangerous to head out to in-person therapy sessions or exercise classes for residents with disabilities, who can be very vulnerable to Covid-19. "Programs are geared towards people with disabilities but it's not exclusive if a family member wants to join in."

The Sabrina Cohen Foundation is working hard to develop a three-story facility at 53rd Street and Collins Avenue. The full-service building would have a rooftop pool with state-of-the-art technology and robotics labs.

"Right now, we are in phase one of fundraising with a milestone to raise \$2.5 million by the summer of next year," she said of the \$10 million development project. "We are excited to be trailblazers and give this kind of services, like popups events and soon, our facility for people with disabilities can have a permanent beach access and enjoy it."

First responders and their supporters faced dangers squarely

BY ABRAHAM GALVAN

At times when people were confused and afraid of what the coronavirus would bring, first responders and major community-based organizations raced straight into danger and faced the significant impact the pandemic would eventually cause.

Right before Coral Cables Fire Department Captain and newly named Infectious Disease Control Officer Daniel Amador had a home-bound Covid-19 testing site, Miami Beach had one in place under the direction of Infectious Disease Control Officer and EMS Manager **Salvatore Frosceno**, who became his main resource and mentor, giving him all the weapons needed to make his job easier.

"He's somebody you instantly feel comfortable around. If you have to ask for help, you don't feel like you're asking a dumb question, which makes that interaction much more welcoming," Capt. Amador said.

After becoming a firefighter over 32 years ago and a registered nurse during his respected long career, Mr. Frosceno said he always had a compassion to help and save lives.

"When the pandemic first hit, we didn't have a handbook to go back on to tell us exactly what we should do. This has been a dynamic thing that quickly evolves and changes every day," Mr. Frosceno said. "We needed to be up to date



Salvatore Frosceno was mentor. and keep up with this virus. When I learn new details, I like to share it with all my colleagues and the six different fire departments in Miami-Dade County. It has just been very unprecedented times."

Mr. Frosceno said he has been around for a very long time and it's his responsibility to teach the others.

"Captain Amador is our new generation and it's our responsibility as leaders to pass on our knowledge. This pandemic has really pushed us far to new learning curves and lessons along with the latest science," he said.

Fana Holtz, president of Fana Holtz Foundation and benefactor of Holtz Children's Hospital at Jackson Memorial Hospital, has always admired how committed **Matthew Whitman Lazenby**, president and CEO of Whitman Family Development, which created Bal Harbour Shops, has been



Matthew Whitman Lazenby donated masks and a testing location.

not only to health workers but the whole Bal Harbour community.

"One powerful example was when Matthew worked with Bal Harbour Village to help residents and first responders as the Covid-19 pandemic hit. In partnership with the village, Matthew donated more than 10,000 masks to first responders and residents," Ms. Holtz said.

Mr. Lazenby also made significant contributions from his family foundation to local religious institutions serving families in need

and made the Bal Harbour Shops site available at no cost to be used as a Covid-19 testing site, she said. "Matthew's efforts have no doubt helped many in our community get through this difficult time."

"We recognized that in addition to critical needs in local health facilities, there was a significant mental health concern with anxiety and separation," she said. "This was a great way to celebrate the resilience of the company to find a way to support our faith leaders."

Whitman Family Bal Harbour



Foundation contributed a total of \$750,000 to three community organizations so they could help families in need during the Covid-19 crisis. Benefitting organizations were St. Joseph Catholic Church, the Shul Jewish Community Center, and Church by the Sea. The family also allowed for the set-up of a Covid-19 testing operation at the shops' site for one month, while it was temporarily shut down, at no cost. The foundation purchased the tents and materials necessary for the Covid testing site, Mr. Lazenby said.

"We donated over 10,000 masks to Miami-Dade first responders at several institutions like Mount Sinai Medical Center, fire stations and Miami Jewish Health," he said. "We always believe throughout the four generations of my family [it's important] to give locally and to initiatives and causes that address local programs and locally rooted forms of education, health and social services."