

New spinoff Dream in Green promotes energy alternatives

BY MARILYN BOWDEN

One of the most recent arrivals on Miami's nonprofit scene, Dream in Green has already had enough of an impact on the community to garner a 2010 Sustainable South Florida award from the Greater Miami Chamber of Commerce.

Founded by participants in the chamber's 2006 Leadership Miami program, Dream in Green has a goal to promote energy conservation and renewable energy initiatives as well as raise awareness about environmental issues, said Executive Director Gabriole Van Bryce, who named Nick Gunia, president of Alterna Corp., and Carlos Canino, an attorney with the law firm Stearns Weaver, as "two business movers and shakers" whose leadership in the organization has made it work.

"I've had a passion about conservation and sustainability since I was a youngster," Mr. Gunia said. "When Leadership Miami charged teams of participants with developing a group project, I proposed a program to educate K-12 students about environmental sustainability."

While the idea wasn't embraced by the group, it did interest Mr. Canino.

"Nick and I take different approaches," the attorney said. "He's more the climate-change guy, and I'm the energy-saving guy. To me, energy efficiency is not about politics. It's about saving money."

When it comes to environmental concerns, Mr. Canino said, the struggle has been between those who believe climate change is actually occurring and those who don't, so right from the start the organization's founders agreed to remain bipartisan.



Photo by Maxine Usdan

The county has been Dream in Green's main funding source, says Executive Director Gabriole Van Bryce.

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"We didn't want to exclude anyone," he said, "so we didn't align with any particular organization."

"In prioritizing our programs," Mr. Gunia said, "we decided that what we call the Green Schools Challenge would be the most

meaningful program we could deliver, because it focuses on youngsters, who are the most receptive to behavioral change. It's our flagship program."

Both men said they saw schools spending millions on energy and utilities that could be directed elsewhere.

"Our idea," Mr. Gunia said, "was that if we could engage students in conservation at their schools, it would save money in the district that could be used for teacher salaries, textbooks, classrooms and what have you. Aside from wanting to provide them with a strong foundation, we wanted to help save money for the district. That's some-

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thing we've been successful at doing since the inaugural year."

Mr. Canino said to stir interest in Dream in Green, he puts the accent on how important the environment is to South Florida.

"I've traveled all around the world," he said, "and when I say

Miami, people think beaches, the Everglades. These are the things that create our brand, so who better to be involved in student-led initiatives than the stakeholders – the children in public schools?"

"We can save money in schools and redirect that money to better education as well as teach kids about the environment and managing energy needs," Mr. Canino said. "Teachers may supervise, but the initiative has to be student-led."

Ms. Van Bryce said Miami-Dade County has been the main source of funding for Dream in Green.

"The goals at the county's Office of Sustainability are in direct alignment with ours," she said. "They promote resource conservation and waste reduction and have been terrific partners for us. It's a challenging time for them, and we'll be sharing a smaller pie, but we look forward to continuing our relationship."

Another source of funding is the federal Environmental Protection Agency, Ms. Van Bryce said – "a prestigious one for an organization as young as Dream in Green."

But in the long term, she said, support is going to have to come from private business.

"I come from a strong business background, and I believe wholeheartedly in the three-pillared foundations of business development – economic responsibility based on social responsibility and environmental sustainability," she said. "Dream in Green embraces a model where business, government and nonprofits form ties in new and creative ways."

"I'm looking for solid partnerships with businesses that really want to support our schools and teachers."