

## IN APPRECIATION

# BUSINESS LEADERS REMEMBER BEACON COUNCIL CEO FINNEY

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**M**ichael A. Finney, president and CEO of the Miami-Dade Beacon Council, died April 3 at age 65.

Finney died of a heart attack shortly after returning from an economic development trip to Israel with Miami-Dade County officials.

News of his sudden death sent shockwaves through the South Florida business community, as the beloved business leader was an active and healthy man known for being an avid golfer and riding a scooter to work.

“We are shocked and profoundly saddened by Mike Finney’s sudden passing,” said George Bermudez, chair of the Beacon Council board of directors and senior VP/Miami business banking executive at Bank of America. “Mike was an inspiring, brilliant and humble leader whose commitment to this community was unmatched. The entire Beacon Council family – our board of directors, investors and team – appreciate how lucky we were to have Mike at the helm, and are devastated by his loss. He was devoted to his family, and our hearts go out to his wife, Gina; his sons; grandchildren; and extended family.”

Finney was named head of the Beacon Council in 2017. That year, he joined economic leaders across the tri-county area in an unprecedented collective bid to lure Amazon.com’s HQ2. The effort won the region a spot on the technology giant’s shortlist while boosting its reputation as an emerging innovation hub.

When he first came to Miami for the job interview, “Finney walked into a room with 30 strong-minded individuals and won everybody over,” said Interport Group of Cos. Chief Strategy Officer Gary Goldfarb, a longtime Beacon Council board member who was chair in 2021.

More recently, Finney helped usher businesses through the challenges of the Covid-19 pandemic, including efforts to connect struggling companies with federal and local aid. As South Florida’s economy rebounded, he played a key role in recruiting dozens of technology and financial companies to Miami-Dade County.

The Beacon Council’s early shift to recruiting companies to the region during the pandemic paid off.

With Finney at the helm, the Bea-



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— GARY GOLDFARB,  
longtime Beacon Council board member



COURTESY OF GROVE BANK & TRUST

Grove Bank & Trust hosted a reception to toast Finney’s arrival on July 22, 2017. Pictured are Laura Lafata, CL Conroy, Felix Pike, Business Journal President and Publisher Melanie Dickinson, Finney and Susan Greene.

con Council had a record year in 2021, as it helped attract more technology and finance companies to the county. It secured 4,989 new job commitments from 32 companies, the most in the organization’s 36-year history.

“He was one of the top economic development professionals I ever met,” Greater Miami Chamber of Commerce President and CEO Alfred Sanchez said. “He thoroughly understood every aspect of economic development .... What he brought to the Beacon Council was tremendous stability and tremendous vision. He will be sorely missed. I don’t know how you replace a guy like Mike.”

It’s often difficult for someone from outside the community to take over an organization in Miami-Dade and

thrive, but Finney mastered his job in a very short period of time, said Greenberg Traurig shareholder Jaret L. Davis, who chaired the Beacon Council and its search committee when Finney was hired.

Finney accomplished that because of his skill, intellect and ability to bring together different coalitions of people by focusing on what was best for the community, Davis said.

While Miami didn’t land Amazon’s HQ2, officials at the tech company were impressed by Finney’s presentation, and it led to positive developments down the road, Davis said. The bid improved regional cooperation among South Florida’s three counties, and that has continued.

“Those same efforts were used to

market Miami to the rest of the tech community, which helped a great deal with the tech renaissance we are now experiencing,” Davis said.

One of the major programs Finney created was Miami Community Ventures, which helps low-income people in Miami-Dade find living-wage jobs and pathways to good careers. Davis said Finney utilized the Beacon Council’s 501(c)(3) status to obtain national grants to keep the program going.

Finney was on the board of directors of the Miami branch of the Federal Reserve Bank of Atlanta and the board of Baptist Health South Florida. He was also a leading voice for diversity in South Florida business.

“I have tremendous respect for Mike Finney, personally and as a leader at the helm of the Beacon Council,” said *South Florida Business Journal* President and Publisher Melanie Dickinson, a Beacon Council board member. “Mike understood the strengths and the needs of our community, and he’ll most certainly be missed by so many of us. But we will continue to feel his impact for years to come, as his legacy lives on through the many leaders he helped cultivate who will continue to work toward the betterment of the community.”

Born in Flint, Michigan, Finney joined the workforce as an auto assembly worker. He then went into the aerospace industry and rose through the ranks to become a corporate leader. He was later an economic growth adviser for then-Michigan Gov. Rick Snyder, and president and CEO of the Michigan Economic Development Corp.

“Ever since he was here, Michael Finney made everybody around him better,” Goldfarb said. “There were very strong personalities around him, and he managed it beautifully. He did an incredible job .... We were better because we met him.”

Finney is survived by his wife, Gina; three children; and two grandchildren. ❧



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