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Prestigious Brickell Avenue is the banking and business center of Greater Miami.

Miami Sizzle

South Florida is just as glamorous and glitzy as you've heard, but what you don't know will convince you to take a closer look at practicing in this metropolis.

By Julie Sturgeon

PAUL KATZ, MD, REPRESENTS the typical 21st century Miami resident. He spent a majority of his rheumatology career in Washington DC—and the new millennium brought an opportunity to take an administrative position as senior vice president and chief medical officer at Mt. Sinai Medical Center in Miami Beach, Florida.

"I didn't have any ties or connection to the area other than, like most people, spend-

ing time down here on meetings or vacation. But I liked the job and fell in love with what the area has to offer," he says.

Dermatologist Loretta Ciraldo, MD, understands the attraction implicitly. She was a New Yorker for the first 30 years of her life, but moved to the beach when her husband accepted a two-year fellowship with the University of Miami. That was in 1983. "We were so lured by the tremendous opportunities of living here, we

never left," she says.

Both physicians found a Miami that contrasted with their perceptions. For starters, it's no longer a place where the old folks go to spend their last days in the sun. Katz's statistics reveal the mean age of residents in the Miami Beach section is a mere 40 years old—a far cry from the Medicare scene. "The resurgence of South Beach and the MTV Music Awards are now showing that this is a much younger and more vibrant community that it was years ago," Katz says. "That was the biggest surprise to me."

Ciraldo's surprise came from a different angle. From watching hit prime-time dramas like *Miami Vice* and later

CSI: Miami, she assumed the city was a danger zone. While the 2004 FBI Crime Report statistics do show Miami is worse than the national average in murders and robberies, it scores safer than average in rapes. And the average resident doesn't have any of these statistics on his radar screen. "I feel very safe living here," says Ciraldo.

Today, many of the physicians these professionals recruit to the area also arrive with a misperception of the ethnic mix. For one thing, physicians don't need to speak Spanish to communicate with their patients. Katz admits he's certainly tongue-tied when it comes to second

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languages. "It can be helpful, but there are a lot of very, very successful physicians here whose Spanish is non-existent," he notes. "Fortunately, for those of us who are not conversant, the vast majority of Spanish-speaking people are very fluent in English. They can usually take care of those of us who don't speak it so well!"

Of course, specific neighborhoods do look for specific bi-lingual candidates, says Martin Osinski, the president of Miami-based American Medical Consultants, a health-care recruitment and consulting firm, but in some cases French or Haitian is the magic word. That's because Miami's population roughly consists of one-third Caucasian, one-third Latin and one-third African American. Ciraldo is from an Italian background, and is proud to announce Miami-Dade County is home to 60,000 of her countrymen. "There's

ABOVE, The Douglas Entrance to Coral Gables, the city also known as the "City Beautiful," located just south of downtown Miami. BELOW, An aerial view of Aventura Beach shows Biscayne Bay, Miami Beach, and downtown Miami in the distance.



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MIAMI BY THE NUMBERS

POPULATION:

City: 362,470, Dade County: 2,363,600

CLIMATE:

Average Annual Rainfall: 59.8 inches

Average Annual Snowfall: 0 inches

Average High/Low temperatures:

January - 67.3°, July - 82.8°

Days of sunshine: 255

TRANSPORTATION:

Airport: Miami International Airport,

Fort Lauderdale/Hollywood Int'l Airport

Interstates: I-95, Florida Turnpike, Hwy. 1

COST OF LIVING:

ACCRA: 116.3 on scale of 100

Grocery items: 104.7

Housing: 146.8

Utilities: 101.2

Transportation: 101.6

Health care: 114.6

Miscellaneous goods and services: 103.5

Median value of owner-occupied housing units, 2000: \$124,000

Sales tax: 6.5 percent

Per capita income (2000): \$25,320

Median household income: \$35,966

Registered drivers: 1,598,322

Registered cars: 1,481,239

Registered boats: 53,290

Hotels: 277 with 35,196 rooms

Motels: 189 with 11,937 rooms

a very nice mix of ethnicity," she says.

City officials say all cultures are finding a niche in the area. For instance, the Royal Palm Crowne Plaza Resort, an oceanfront property opened in May 2002, is the first African-American owned and operated resort hotel in the United States. Urban Beach Week, held over Memorial Day weekend, transforms South Beach's famous Art Deco district into a hip-hop paradise, while events like the Bahamas Goombay Festival bring the party—complete with costumed jankanoo groups—into Coconut Grove's Grand Avenue streets for a week in June.

The modern Miami

Miami in 2006 reflects the good life. Statistics at the Florida Agency for Workforce Innovation reveal that the number of people employed in the



ABOVE, The Spanish Village area is busy in the evenings with visitors to the unique galleries, shops, and cafes along Espanola Way. LEFT, Miami's famous Art Deco hotels adorn Ocean Drive in South Beach.

leisure and hospitality market increased monthly during 2005. As of August 2005, Miami-Dade County's taxable restaurant sales reached \$2.3 billion for the year, a 9.8-percent increase over 2004.

The culture of entertainment reigns in many parts of the city. Hotel pools, restaurants, stores, and nightclub dance floors are no strangers to celebrities like J Lo, Oprah, Tobey Maguire, Cher, Leonardo DiCapro, Mick Jagger, Jack

Nicholson, Will Smith, Al Pacino, Harrison Ford, Lenny Kravitz, Cameron Diaz, Rene Russo, Tim Allen, Tyra Banks, Andy Garcia, and Denzel Washington.

According to the Greater Miami Convention & Visitors Bureau, commercial shoots alone generated an economic impact of more than \$36 million in 2003. They included spots for Wendy's, Daimler-Chrysler, Nestea, McDonald's, Mercedes Benz, and Verizon. In 2003,

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movies including *2 Fast 2 Furious*, *Bad Boys II*, *Out of Time*, and *Stuck on You* shot on location here hauled in another \$185 million in revenue.

The Miami International Film Festival is attracting international prestige. The former co-director of the Sundance Film Festival now serves as its director. But it's just one in the mix: The Brazilian, Latin American, Gay and Lesbian, Jewish, and Made in Miami film festivals also draw cineastes.

Then there's the modeling allure. In February, look for the crowds on Ocean Drive straining to get a peek at the Ford, Elite, Wilhelmina, and Next models competing in the Dodge Volleypalooza Model Volleyball Tournament.

And don't forget the music stars. Ricky Martin, Jon Secada, Enrique Iglesias, and Gloria Estefan own homes in this city; Sony, EMI, WEA, and Polygram each have Latin American offices in Greater Miami. No wonder an AOL-Travel & Leisure poll recently ranked Miami the number one city in America not only for the singles scene, but also for Latin beat.

Classical culture also manifests itself here. Downtown Miami will soon throw open its doors to a new symphony hall and cultural center for orchestra, opera, and ballet performances. And in true South Florida style, Carnival Hall won't be just any venue—designers bill it as one of the largest performing arts centers in the world, thanks to its three state-of-the-art performance venues, an education center, expansive outdoor plaza, and a historical landmark 1929 Art Deco tower.

Play time is high time for residents, and the outdoor fun is endless. Wildlife aficionados take advantage of everything from hunting alligators from airboats in

the Everglades National Park to oohing over the 3,000 exotic animals at Parrot Jungle Island. The Miami Seaquarium (yes, the same one made famous by the 1960s television show *Flipper*), Metrozoo, and Monkey Jungle also feed human's appetites for watching the animal kingdom up close and personal.

Natural Health magazine dubbed Miami the healthiest city in America in 2002, in large part due to the sheer number of golf, tennis and sporting facilities in the area. The more adventure-some might take up kitesailing, a relatively new sport, which involves manipulating a massive kite as it pulls you across the water. One moment you're surfing, the next you're airborne, hang-gliding over boats. Those who value their bones stick to parasailing, yachting, snorkeling, and diving. Fifteen years ago, the city supported one major sports team. Now it hosts four: the Heat (basketball), the Dolphins (football), the Marlins (baseball), and the Panthers (hockey).

A laid-back lifestyle

"There's a panache and marquee value to the South Beach area, but this is really a wonderful family community with a lot of spectacular suburbs and good schools," Katz points out. In reality, Miami is a big city spread out across an entire county, with virtually no downtown core that resembles the high-rise office clumps most cities offer. Ciraldo describes it as a "unique urban environment that feels like the suburbs." Both physicians chose to live on Miami Beach, where the cost of housing has skyrocketed in recent times. But fellow physicians get around this, they note, by purchasing housing in areas such as Coral Gables, Aventura, and Hallandale.

"The trade-off is the less expensive the houses, the more likely you are to be away from the action," Katz says. And the closer you want to live to the beach, the more you need to sacrifice the notion of a single-family home surrounded by the white picket fence.

"You can't go east because of the ocean, and you can't go too far west because you run into the Everglades," Osinski says. "As a result you find that housing prices continue to go up because there aren't a lot of locations in close to where you need to be." But there is good news on the horizon: Miami-Dade County recently approved approximately 55,000 new condominium permits, after building just 15,000 in the last 10 years. Osinski will leave it to the realtors to determine what this means in terms of glut and price—for him, it means physicians will have enough property available to find living quarters.

Even the prices don't necessarily daunt Ciraldo. When the cost of living comes up in conversation, she reminds her audience of her son, who works on Wall Street. "For the rent he pays for his studio apartment in Greenwich Village, he could live in a luxury one-bedroom place here with a pool and other very nice amenities. It just gets back to this is a really nice place to live.

"I have to admit that no matter how hard my work day has been, I still drive home and feel like I'm on vacation. The weather is just so beautiful, our weekends wonderful. It's a very leisurely kind of lifestyle compared to so many other major cities in America," she adds.

But unless you've lived under a rock in the past few years, the words South Florida also conjure images of hurricane damage: downed trees and power lines,

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twisted heaps of metal and brick that once were homes, lines of residents waiting for food and water. Osinski admits the previous two hurricane seasons have discouraged a number of physician candidates from exploring their options here. But those who already consider Miami home simply shrug their shoulders at this bad news and move on. "It's a part of the way of life," Katz says philosophically. "We just tell people this is one of the trade-offs for living in paradise. We're willing to take that chance, far and away."

Paging doctors

Because Miami covers a lot of ground, it has attracted a lot of hospitals to match, enough to ensure no one player dominates the field. "There is a tendency for people to want to go not only to places that have excellent care and excellent doctors but that are convenient to home," Katz says. "So while there are a few hospitals in the area who have an edge on the competition in certain areas, there are a lot of full-service hospitals here doing everything."

And good news for physicians: The competition means you can secure privileges at more than one location. Lock boxes in this market simply wouldn't make sense.

It also shakes out as state-of-the-art everything at the hospitals. From the press releases hospitals send out, they offer a plethora of services:

- South Miami Hospital, part of the Baptist Health South Florida network, touts its wards in maternity services, help for infants and children with developmental delays and disabilities, addiction treatment, weight-loss surgery, cardiovascular services, diabetes services, and cancer program. The American

Nurses Credentialing Center recognized it as a Magnet Hospital for Nursing Excellence in 2004. It recently opened a \$130-million expansion of a six-story medical arts building.

- Mercy Hospital recently won the J.D. Power and Associates Distinguished Hospital for Service Excellence. Its orthopaedic institute presented nine original projects at the American Association of Orthopaedic Surgeons in October 2005, a coup in light of the fact that 5,000 projects are submitted for consideration but fewer than 50 are accepted. In raw numbers, it means 18 percent of the meeting was dominated by this one facility.

- University of Miami/Jackson Memorial Hospital takes pride in the fact that its Ryder Trauma Center is the only adult and pediatric Level 1 trauma center in South Florida. That's just the start—its 66-bed Level III neonatal intensive care unit represents Florida's largest such facility, while the Jackson Transplant Center is ranked the seventh busiest in the nation and is the only Florida hospital to perform every kind of organ transplant. Finally, the Rehabilitation Center is one of a handful in the nation designated as a Regional Spinal Cord Injury Center.

- Mt. Sinai Medical Center & Miami Heart Institute offers the most active cardiac surgery program in South Florida, which helped earn its spot on Solucient's list of top 100 cardiovascular hospitals. It's also the only hospital participating in clinical trials with the National Cancer Institute.

This array of facilities creates a wide-open field for every physician with a desire to practice here, according to recruiters and administrators. Katz is always on the lookout for surgeons and surgery subspecialists, but he insists there are no saturated fields. "Everybody who practices is doing well—they are busy and in growth mode," he says. If you truly want a taste of how busy these

practices get, insiders say, randomly call a doctor's office for an appointment and see how long you are put on hold compared to elsewhere in the country.

Recruits typically hail from the New York area, South America, Mexico, or the Caribbean, in Osinski's experience. After all, it's a non-stop flight from here to Honduras or Nicaragua. Katz's records show different patterns with the same results. "There are people who say they are tired of dealing with winter," he says. "There are a lot of people who come here because of the multi-cultural nature of the city and access to Central and South America. And there are people who want to be near the water and the lifestyle associated with that."

And new graduates and the 40-something crowd are beating out those nearing retirement in joining the private practices of the Miami medical scene. Pay rates for those starting their careers, as is the case in any major metro market, are less than the national average but eventually catch up to the rest of the country, if not better, Osinski says.

As the president of the Dade County Medical Association, Ciraldo admits physicians here won't escape the bugaboos of the profession. Malpractice premiums often discourage high-risk specialties like neurosurgeons, trauma surgeons, and ob/gyns, for example. To fight back, the society has chosen to lobby for legislation holding expert witnesses accountable as one of its platforms in 2006. "We really believe that it can significantly cut down on frivolous lawsuits," she explains. "Unfortunately, there are people with a modicum of medical training and some credentialing who go around making themselves high-paid witnesses to testify against doctors. Clamping down on them should lessen

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doctors' fear of attack."

Osinski describes the market as "heavily penetrated" with managed care. Katz estimates it in 40 percent-plus range, with the bulk of the action coming from national companies—but stabilized. "They are all very aggressive, but there are still a number of physicians not participating in managed care contracts because there's enough volume here and they have built a reputation so they can pick and choose," Katz adds. "Not everybody jumped onto the managed-care bandwagon."

Nor have these professional difficulties created barriers between doctors and patients in Miami. According to Osinski, physicians are still well-thought-of for the most part, with frustrations aimed at the health-care system overall rather than specific doctors. In fact, the Hispanic population in Hialeah traditionally sets aside a "doctor day" when they present gifts and special tokens of thanks to their medical providers.

"If you're a doctor who would like to be in an atmosphere where you can really become part of a growing and very humanly oriented environment, then I'd invite you to come to South Florida," says Ciraldo. ■

Julie Sturgeon is a free-lance writer based in Indiana and a regular contributor to *UO*.