



William D. Talbert, III

EDITORS' NOTE GMCVB President and CEO for 18 years, William Talbert, III also served as Chief Operating Officer for the prior nine years. In June 2016, he was appointed a member of the Commerce Department's 2016-2018 U.S. Travel & Tourism Advisory Board. On July 1, 2016, he officially became Chair of the Visit Florida Board of Directors for FY 2016-17. Talbert holds a master's degree in Public Administration from Florida Atlantic University and a bachelor's degree in Business Administration from the University of Florida. In 2006, he earned the Certified Destination Management Executive (CDME) designation.

ORGANIZATION BRIEF The Greater Miami Convention & Visitors Bureau (miamiandbeaches.com) is a private, not-for-profit sales and marketing organization. It is a private/public partnership with more than 1,000 private business members and four local governments: Miami-Dade, City of Miami Beach, City of Miami and the Village of Bal Harbour.

Will you discuss the history and heritage of the Greater Miami Convention & Visitors Bureau?

It was started in 1985 and coincided with a deep decline in tourism in Miami. There hadn't been a single group nor a single message, so the public and private sector got together and formed this Bureau to address the need.

How challenging is it to maintain a strong collaboration with so many components to Greater Miami?

We work very hard to keep the coalition all involved. We have government partners and public/private sector partners. The issue with the public sector partners is that they change. Therefore, people in my position spend a lot of time with the elected officials making sure we deliver a consistent message.

We not only have the county as a partner, but also the Cities of Miami and Miami Beach as well as 33 other cities. Building partnerships is an important part of our work.

How important has it been to get private sector buy-in and engagement?

One of the Top Luxury Destinations in the World

An Interview with William D. Talbert, III,
President and Chief Executive Officer, Greater Miami Convention & Visitors Bureau

It's critical. We have never had a problem with any hotel, although this takes a lot of work. The key players at properties change frequently, but we take the time to listen to all of them.

Is your focus on building additional business from key markets like New York?

We're focused on maintaining and growing core markets and then growing new markets.

We can do that through air service. We have a partnership with Miami International Airport, which is a county department. We have a person at the table with marketing incentive dollars when we look for new routes to Miami.

We're the only airport in the U.S. served by more than 100 airlines. We have boots on the ground in pretty much every country in South America and we are in 52 cities around the world. We are the only place in the U.S. where 50 percent of our business is international. We work very hard to keep the international market because there is competition for them, because they stay longer and spend more.

Will you highlight the product that you're offering today?

I have been in Miami since 1970. One of our goals was to become one of the top luxury destinations in the U.S. and we have blown through that; our goal now is to be one of the top luxury destinations in the world.

As a marketer, one way I can point to the fact that we're one of the top destinations in the world is because of Art Basel. We now also have the first EAST hotel outside of Asia.

What is the status of the new convention center?

On September 22nd, the new reimagined center will open with the first new four-hall convention with the American Health Information Management Association out of Chicago, followed by Computer Associates and the Plastic Surgeons group.

This is a 52-acre campus with a 60,000-square-foot ballroom so we can book all four halls and have a ballroom for lunch and dinner functions.

Across the street, we're turning an asphalt parking lot into a six-acre park with 600 trees, so guests will experience a greater sense of place.

The convention venues we have are as good as it gets.

Has the way you're getting the message out about Miami changed in the global marketplace?

We're doing a great deal digitally, but I believe in a high-tech, high-touch approach. There is

nothing better than bringing a meeting planner in to see the destination and the facilities. We do that with journalists as well.

Where did your passion for Miami and this role develop?

I didn't realize that everything I had done prior to this was training for this role.

The Bureau leadership took a chance on me because I had no real public profile and I had never been a CEO. Now, I have a great team.

I'm the brand police – if one wants to get me mad, just violate my brand police rules.

The reason I feel this way is because I was in Miami when it was at its low, working within the County government, and involved with law enforcement.

I don't take for granted how far we've come, so what keeps me up at night is remaining "on top" because once on top, the only move is down.

We spend time making sure we get better every day. It makes it easier that our public/private partners are supportive.

When you are always focused on continuous improvement, can you take moments to appreciate how far GMCVB has come?

We are always working on something, because we remember that time in history when it didn't look good.

Our main space is meetings, but we're also involved in creating a great community. Our focus is on live/work/play.

I have a saying: Come visit Miami, we're very close to the United States. We're the least U.S. city of U.S. cities, and that is what makes it so exciting. Someone like me who doesn't speak Spanish can work with people who weren't even born here. Miami is the kind of destination where we can all work together.

Travel and tourism equals jobs, jobs, jobs, and it's about jobs at every income level. In the hospitality industry, one can rise faster and further than just about any other industry.

Why isn't there better messaging about the critical impact of the hospitality industry?

Travel is about relaxing, but jobs and business is a harder sell. However, hospitality is the number one industry in Miami.

We're all for diversification and we hope everybody grows, because we know we're going to grow. It's significant that we have grown as a community and companies like Amazon have said we're a player in the space. We also now have people saying we're more than a beach. This is promising for us. ●