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A year after Miami tech boom started, locals meet Silicon Valley firms and hope to get hired

BY ROB WILE

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Hundreds of people turned out Thursday, Dec. 2, 2021, at a technology jobs fair at Miami Dade College's downtown Wolfson campus. **ROB WILE MIAMI HERALD**

Hundreds gathered at Miami Dade College's downtown Wolfson campus Thursday afternoon for a technology companies job fair that also brought together Miami-Dade and Miami's mayors and the presidents of the county's four major universities and colleges.

The event marked a 12-month capstone of sorts for the Miami-area tech boom that's seen the rise of billion-dollar companies but has left many local residents wondering how to get hired by those firms.

It came two days before the one-year anniversary of the tweet Miami Mayor Francis Suarez credits with help to kick off the Miami migration. He responded "How can I help" to a director of Founders Fund, the influential Silicon Valley venture group. That tweet has since been "liked" more than 5,000 times and retweeted nearly 600 times.

An emotional Suarez walked through the crowd Thursday as the fair swung into action. In remarks, he said

the event would end up transforming the lives of its attendees.

“Income inequality is real,” he said, “and a generational problem — though it’s something we’ve had since the beginning of humanity. But now, here, we have the chance to do something about it. Not through government, not through philanthropy but a third way, through empowerment.”

Miami-Dade Mayor Daniella Levine Cava said any disconnects between new-to-Miami tech firms and hiring local talent, an issue highlighted in recent weeks by the Miami Herald, would help be erased with the event.

The event proved a rare gathering of the presidents of Florida International University, Florida Memorial University, Miami Dade College, and the University of Miami — all of which co-sponsored the event and advertised it to their respective student bodies.

“We’ve got all the talent we need,” Levine Cava said, “and now we’re here to make that connection.”

Mike Shebat, co-founder and CEO of Traba, a new work and hiring portal with backing from Founders Fund, said he was looking to hire as many as 30 people from the fair for jobs ranging from sales and operations to engineering, with a salary floor of \$50,000. Within the first hour of the event, he’d already conducted a successful live interview with a sales representative candidate.

“We want people who can join as early team members, who can be scrappy,” he said, noting the company had experienced 850% revenue growth since launching earlier this year. “We need to build.”

Israel Rigaud, 29, has mostly worked in sales in the automobile industry, but wants to break into tech. Armed with a digital copy of his resume, Rigaud said his goal was to introduce himself in person to companies as a way of breaking through the barriers that come with applying online, especially for tech roles.

“Most people with jobs in tech either are the best at what they do, or knew someone,” he said. “I want people to get a feel for how I speak, my demeanor, how I carry myself.”

It is candidates like Rigaud that Marco, a tech firm that works with import and export companies, was likely seeking. Gina Macropulos, Marco’s chief of staff, said she was looking to increase technology roles, and was keeping an open mind about the diversity of backgrounds — defined in the broadest sense. She noted Marco employees range in age from twenty-somethings to septuagenarians.

“If we find someone with the right attitude and who is keen to build, we would try to make a role for them,” she said. “We don’t want to turn away someone we like.”

The job candidates at the fair covered that gamut. Among them was Alyson Van Stone, a 41-year-old cybersecurity student at the University of Miami in the middle of a career transition after years in marketing. Van Stone said she’d moved to Miami two years ago and had the good fortune of catching the Miami tech boom as it took off.

“I think the city is moving in a great direction,” she said. “It shows more growth, that there are all these new companies” opening corporate headquarters here.

Correction: An earlier version of this story misstated Traba’s starting salaries.

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