

MIAMI-DADE COUNTY

'Be like Mike': Tribute paid to the late Miami-Dade Beacon Council CEO Michael A. Finney

BY OMAR RODRÍGUEZ ORTIZ

UPDATED APRIL 25, 2022 10:53 PM



Daniella Levine Cava, mayor of Miami-Dade County, speaks to the audience during a memorial service for Michael A. Finney, president and CEO of the Miami-Dade Beacon Council, at Miami Dade College's Wolfson Campus in downtown Miami, Florida, on Monday, April 25, 2022. DANIEL A. VARELA dvarela@miamiherald.com



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Friends and family members of Michael A. Finney, former CEO of the Miami-Dade Beacon Council, gathered Monday to pay him tribute at Miami Dade College's downtown campus.

Finney, 65, died of a heart attack on April 3 in Miami.

He was an important behind-the-scenes player as head of Miami-Dade County's economic development agency. Since he was recruited in 2017, Finney was credited with re-energizing the council and bolstering efforts to improve economic equity and inclusivity across Miami-Dade, particularly during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Finney also helped connect workers in low-income, high unemployment neighborhoods with employers paying a living wage. The initiative, Miami Community Ventures, was modeled on a successful program of his native state of Michigan.

He was appointed leader of a [tri-county proposal in response to an expansion bid from Amazon](#), which promised to attract 50,000 jobs to South Florida. The bid was attractive enough to land the region on Amazon's shortlist of 20 finalist candidates, though it ultimately fell short.

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Days before Finney's passing, he had flown back to Miami from Israel, where he joined Miami-Dade Mayor Daniella Levine Cava and others to promote the county as a global economic hub.



Daniella Levine Cava, mayor of Miami-Dade County, presents Gina Finney with a County Resolution commemorating her husband's impact on the community, during a memorial service for Michael A. Finney, president and CEO of the Miami-Dade Beacon Council, at Miami Dade College, Wolfson Campus in Miami on Monday, April 25, 2022. Daniel A. Varela dvarela@miamiherald.com

At his memorial service, Levine Cava said Finney was a leader like no other.

“He had a decades-long career advising elected officials, business and civic leaders about economic development and how to strengthen local and state economies to support industries and create job opportunities for all residents,” she said. “He understood people and he recognized competing priorities, and was somehow able to always find common ground.”



Carlos A. Gimenez, U.S. representative for Florida's 26th Congressional District, speaks to the audience during a memorial service for Michael A. Finney, president and CEO of the Miami-Dade Beacon Council, at Miami Dade College, Wolfson Campus in downtown Miami, Florida, on Monday, April 25, 2022. Daniel A. Varela dvarela@miamiherald.com

U.S. Rep. Carlos Gimenez, who was mayor of Miami-Dade during the beginning of Finney's tenure, said he was skeptical when he was first told that the Beacon Council would hire someone from out of state to lead the organization.

"I got to tell you, from the first minute that I met Mike I knew he was the right guy," he said. "His legacy will continue to grow as Miami becomes what ... is its destiny."



The audience during a memorial service for Michael A. Finney, president and CEO of the Miami-Dade Beacon Council, at Miami Dade College, Wolfson Campus in downtown Miami, Florida, on Monday, April 25, 2022. Daniel A. Varela dvarela@miamiherald.com

[READ MORE: After leading Amazon bid, Beacon Council President Finney will stay on through 2023](#)

Eric Knowles, CEO of the Miami-Dade Chamber of Commerce, said Finney understood that the Miami-Dade community could not be better without all of its residents working together to improve the lives of the less fortunate.

"It is up to each and every one of you in here to hold one another accountable, that our community becomes the community that Mike envisioned," he said.



Gina Finney reacts to stories being told about her late husband during a memorial service for Michael A. Finney, president and CEO of the Miami-Dade Beacon Council, at Miami Dade College, Wolfson Campus in downtown Miami, Florida, on Monday, April 25, 2022. Daniel A. Varela dvarela@miamiherald.com

Mike Finney Jr., one of Finney's son, credited his mom, Gina, for his father's success.

"Our dad never would have ever gotten anywhere close to where he could be if our mother wasn't so nurturing and loving," he said, standing next to his brothers Marcus and Austin.

He affirmed that their dad was the best role model they could ask for, always leading by example.

"We are always going to know what to do because our dad, he told us, we watched him do it for so long," he said.

George Bermudez, chair of the council's board of directors, said he was "joined by the hip" with Finney during the Israel trip, witnessing how he worked with companies wanting to open offices in the county. As a father of an 18-year-old high school student, he said he has always told his son to be a good human being and to always do

the right thing, but that he didn't know who could embody those qualities and be a role model for his son.

“I always wondered how would that person look like or be like,” he said. “And now I can tell my son, ‘Be like Mike.’ “

To watch Finney's memorial service, go to mdc.edu/livestream.

Reporter Andres Viglucci contributed to this story.

This story was originally published April 25, 2022 9:53 PM.



OMAR RODRÍGUEZ ORTIZ



305-376-2218

Omar is a bilingual and bicultural journalist, covering breaking news in South Florida for the Miami Herald and El Nuevo Herald. He has a master's degree in journalism from the University of Texas at Austin and a bachelor's degree in education from the Universidad de Puerto Rico en Río Piedras.

Originally posted on:

<https://www.miamiherald.com/news/local/community/miami-dade/article260748042.html>