

MDC's Eduardo Padrón set the standard for excellence in this community — and far beyond

BY DAVID LAWRENCE JR.

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WHITE HOUSE

I look back at my 30 years in Miami — a whole generation — and think of the greatest leaders I have known and the institutions that have sustained us the best. The person and the place that always comes to mind: Eduardo Padrón and Miami Dade College.

The college, buttressed by our first-class public education system, is front and center in every young person having the chance to succeed and to live the American Dream. Its student body reflects the rainbow of America to a degree unmatched by any institution of higher education in the United States. Literally 2 million students have learned under Dr. Padron's presidency.

No leader has left more of a mark in academia and in building community than Dr. Padron.

No leader in our midst has been so internationally and nationally recognized and honored, (including with our own country's highest civilian honor, the Presidential Medal of Freedom).

No leader has been more creative — the Miami Book Fair being but one of many splendid examples.

No leader has better lived and demonstrated a commitment to the diversity of community and country. Miami Dade College has graduated more Hispanics and African Americans than any institution of higher education in our country.

No leader I know has had a more profound effect in preserving the best of buildings that speak to our history as a community. (The Freedom Tower first comes to mind.) Dr. Padron is a builder, too — of edifices, as well as scholars. (A year ago, I spoke before Honors College students — each impressive, each being superbly prepared to contribute to community and country.)

No leader in our midst has hosted more gatherings of U.S. presidents — seven in all.

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No leader has been more innovative and entrepreneurial. That's saying a lot because Greater Miami has a host of innovative entrepreneurs.

Each of us lives many chapters. Each of us is a temporary steward of service. Then others take the reins, in the best cases — like Dr. Padron's — building upon a foundation of excellence made stronger,

Dr. Padron is entitled to a wonderful next chapter (the time to read more good books and — just maybe — a bit of time to relax, though he, like me, doesn't do so well at relaxing. As “president emeritus” of Miami Dade College he will continue to help raise the resources that undergird excellence.

We have been, and will continue to be, blessed by his decency, his depth, his achievements on behalf of so many others.

Thank you and Godspeed, Dr. Padron.

David Lawrence Jr. is retired publisher of the Miami Herald and chair of The Children's Movement of Florida.