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# For Miami Dade College, 56 years of success



BY MARK COLE  
[mdc.edu](http://mdc.edu)

On this day in 1960, Miami Dade College (MDC) opened its doors to 1,428 students. That they settled into what had been a bunch of old chicken coops in Northwest Miami mattered little. From every corner of the community, people who hadn't seen a way out or up were suddenly sitting in a college classroom. You can't put a value on what it meant to feel that sense of possibility.

Five years later, MDC was the largest college or university in Florida. Since then, the college has been home to more than 2 million students and today is the nation's largest college or university. On Sept. 6, we honor the history of MDC, an academic institution so intrinsically linked to Miami-Dade County that it's hard to think of one without the other.

As MDC's vice president for advancement and executive director of the MDC Foundation, I've met with several of our alumni, many from those early years, whose vision and energy became catalysts for South Florida's rapid growth. Now, I spend time every day with our current students, several of whom are the vanguard of a new generation of entrepreneurs. I am their biggest fan.

Recently, I met a fellow MDC fan. He never misses a Book Fair and was up to date on projects like the Idea Center; MAGIC, MDC's new Animation and Gaming Center; and the Miami Fashion Institute. He knew of MDC's Honors College, which sends graduates to his Ivy League alma mater. But he was surprised to learn that MDC has a pressing need for additional funding.

"How do you do it?" he asked. I told him the strategy was simple: Recognize the need. Set the vision. Make it happen. Make it happen despite state funding that has plummeted in recent years. The college works daily to attract additional support, to create a program like MAGIC from a mere idea. I told him it was people like him who make it happen. People like him who soared at Harvard but first learned to fly at MDC.

Today, 52 percent of our students are the first in their families to attend college, and nearly 80 percent of first-time students require financial aid. In another community, our students' intelligence and potential might never be tapped, and we would all be the worse for that. Many MDC students arrive feeling out of their depth, wondering, "Do I belong?" But this is how change occurs. An MDC professor in the School of Education, preparing teachers, put a word to it: "Quickening," the moment when self-doubt gives way to "I can do this." That's how lifelong change begins.

Sept. 6 is "I Am MDC" Day. It's a day to celebrate the college, not just for the 2 million but for our entire community. By this point, it would be difficult to find a household or industry that hasn't been touched by MDC, our graduates and our arts and cultural events.

Our graduates hail from every neighborhood and work across every industry in our town. From pilots, bankers, dental hygienists, civic leaders, CEOs, nurses, police officers and fire fighters to Miami-Dade County Public School teachers, you spend time every day with our alumni. And while the opportunity of education provided at MDC has changed their lives, our alumni and our events have changed yours.

One faculty member, one staff member, one graduate at a time, MDC has advanced our quality of life in Miami and changed the lives of our friends and neighbors. I invite you to support MDC in extending the opportunity of education to those in our community most in need of this opportunity.

Envision a program, fund a scholarship, or support an MDC cultural event. Today, and every day in South Florida, we are all MDC.

*MARK COLE IS VICE PRESIDENT FOR ADVANCEMENT AT MIAMI DADE COLLEGE AND EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR FOR THE MDC FOUNDATION.*



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