



EDUCATION

## Miami Dade College honors outgoing President Padrón with campus to call his own

**BY COLLEEN WRIGHT**

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Though he's not gone yet, Miami Dade College President Eduardo J. Padrón received no shortage of parting gifts on Friday.

Dignitaries bore him proclamations, keys to the city, keys to the college, a LEGO replica of downtown Miami's iconic Freedom Tower and a Southwest 6th Street sign with a new moniker: Eduardo J. Padrón Street.

But the ultimate gift for his impending retirement was perched high above Miami Dade College's Little Havana outpost. What was once the InterAmerican Campus was officially renamed the Eduardo J. Padrón Campus. A new sign was unveiled.

Politicians, academics, family and friends of Miami Dade College and Padrón gathered on the parking garage's rooftop Friday to dedicate the campus to its president of nearly 25 years and faculty member for almost half a century. Padrón [announced in February](#) that he would step down in August, prompting a [national search to find his successor](#).

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That'll be hard to do, according to the praise many showered him with on Friday.

“So many people in this room ... owe their life careers to you, Dr. Padrón,” said the event's emcee, Juan Mendieta, the college's director of communications.



Local leaders and officials celebrate the renaming of Southwest 6th Street into Eduardo J. Padron Street during the ceremony to rename InterAmerican Campus the Eduardo J. Padron Campus in Little Havana on Friday, May 17, 2019. *MATIAS J. OCNER MOCNER@MIAMIHERALD.COM*

Politicians took turns honoring Padrón and recalling their own experiences as MDC students, friendly elbowing each other as Padrón’s favorite. MDC board chair Bernie Navarro donned red plastic sunglasses to pay homage to Padron’s signature look.

“Although I’m his boss, he is a second father and a mentor,” Navarro said.

“Bernie, you can put on all the sunglasses you want,” quipped Miami-Dade County Mayor Carlos Gimenez, “but you’ll never be as cool as Eduardo.”

Another example of Padrón-centric can you top this was on display between political rivals Gimenez and Miami Mayor Francis Suarez. Both mayors declared May 17 as Eduardo J. Padrón campus day, but Suarez also gave Padron keys to the city and announced a proposal to begin a scholarship in his name.

“I’m not trying to one-up the county mayor,” Suarez said, drawing chuckles from the crowd.

Right after, Miami Commissioner Joe Carollo invited Gimenez and County Commissioner Eileen Higgins up on stage for the unveiling of the new Eduardo J. Padrón Street sign.

“They’re the 800 pound gorilla, we’re only 100 pounds,” Carollo said, referring to the county.

The event was full of frills tailored to Padrón. The presentation of the colors was by the JROTC at Miami Senior High School, Padrón’s alma mater. The Miami Dade College Symphony Orchestra played before panoramic views of downtown and south Miami-Dade that may soon be viewed by Padrón from his office as president emeritus.

“This is something I never dreamed would happen,” Padrón said. “It’s happening today and I still can’t believe it.”

Padrón acknowledged the college as his own family, but took time in his speech to address his son, Camilo, whose football games and piano recitals he had to miss because of work commitments.

“You know that my family is everything. You know that I not only have you but an extended family that is Miami Dade College,” Padrón said. “You are my support system, you are my safety net, you are the source of my strength.”

At the March 19 Miami Dade College Board of Trustees meeting, vice chair Jose Fuentes walked in a proposal to honor Padrón long after his retirement. Fuentes thought the InterAmerican campus, which expanded in the 1980s to accommodate students from the Mariel boat lift, most closely mirrored Padrón’s story. He came to the United States from Cuba as an unaccompanied teen in the Pedro Pan operation.

“One of the things I said, you know, ‘Why don’t we just do the right thing and honor this gentleman by changing the name of the InterAmerican campus to the Eduardo J. Padrón campus?’” Fuentes said.

Without being advertised ahead of time, It was seconded and unanimously passed. An official suggested Padrón’s chairman emeritus office should be in that building. It’s not clear yet how much the name change will cost the college.

Trustees at Florida International University were just as revering of Modesto A. Maidique, the similarly long-tenured president of FIU who was credited with transforming the university, in 2009 when they moved to name its main campus after Maidique.

But last year, FIU’s board of trustees explored ways to [strip the campus of its namesake](#) after Maidique criticized how the university handled the disastrous bridge collapse that killed six people. Trustees [dropped the effort](#) under pressure.

“I can only worry about today. I don’t worry about the future,” Padrón said. “Frankly, my name being engraved, etched in the walls of the college, it’s not just about me ... it’s about what I represent. I represent the efforts and the perseverance and the sacrifices of so many people and families that knew that education was the only way to achieve the American dream.”

“It may say Eduardo Padrón,” he said, “but really ... it represents the village of people that have made it possible.”



Miami Dade College President Eduardo J. Padron attends the Ceremony to Rename InterAmerican Campus the Eduardo J. Padron Campus in Little Havana on Friday, May 17, 2019. [MATIAS J. OCNER MOCNER@MIAMIHERALD.COM](mailto:MOCNER@MIAMIHERALD.COM)

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