

EDITORIALS NOVEMBER 16, 2016 6:38 PM

## A well-earned White House honor for Eduardo Padrón



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Among the actors and musicians, including Bruce Springsteen — The Boss! — being honored in the final awarding of the Presidential Medal of Freedom by President Obama is our stellar hometown academic, Miami Dade College President Eduardo Padrón.

The honor is beyond well-deserved — it's pretty much overdue. Dr. Padrón has been a champion and cheerleader for the nation's largest and most inclusive institution of higher education for decades. There's little doubt that just about every Miami-Dade County resident either has or knows someone who has been touched by Miami Dade College.

The college's hallmark is this: It enrolls and graduates a greater number of Hispanic and African-American students than any other school in the country. It's a perfect fit for Miami-Dade.

The college opened in 1960. Starting in 1980, Robert McCabe laid an even firmer foundation at the growing college. And on that foundation, Dr. Padrón has built MDC, figuratively, broader and taller — a model of education for the nation to emulate.

Dr. Padrón took over in 1995, and his leadership and marketing skills increased the school's impact on the community and beyond exponentially.

Though President Obama will give Dr. Padrón his medal, it truly is being bestowed on behalf of a grateful community.

Under Dr. Padrón's leadership, Miami Dade College has helped thousands upon thousands, including poor, immigrant and minority students, attain the dream of a college education.

Dr. Padrón sees himself as a motivator, a facilitator, an obstacle remover, he once told the Herald.

"I grow people. I motivate and help them do the possible and the impossible. That's how you get the most important things in life done."

Dr. Padrón is also a shining example of the diverse fabric of Miami-Dade County. His story of success took root here: He was a teenager in 1961 when his parents spirited him and his younger brother out of Cuba, sending them to Florida. His parents, of course, feared he would be indoctrinated at schools under the Castro regime.

What his mother told him the day she put him on a plane to the United States — as one of the 14,000 children who took part in the famed Operation Pedro Pan exodus — helped shape his life:

"Listen to what I am going to tell you," she tearfully told him at the airport. "Whatever happens when you get to the United States, you're going to study. You're going to get an education. That's the one thing no one can ever take away from you."

He believes that mantra to be true for everyone.

Dr. Padrón has been a tireless advocate for showcasing and preserving the history of Miami's Cuban exile community.

When the Freedom Tower, or *el refugio*, as exiles called the iconic processing center of the 1960s, became available, Dr. Padrón worked to have Miami Dade College acquire it and protect it.

Since then, he has spearheaded numerous events and exhibits that honor the exile legacy.

It's appropriate that Wednesday's announcement come during the Miami Book Fair, which the school has long hosted, along with the Miami Film Festival. After all, enhancing Miami-Dade's cultural scene is also dear to Dr. Padrón's heart.

So as the President Obama prepares to honor Dr. Padrón, so should all of us.

When it comes to education, he's The Boss.



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