



BUSINESS

Former AOL head praises Miami startup scene: 'There's a hunger here, a scrappiness.'

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community Thursday, one thing stuck out: Miami's swagger.

"You go to some other cities, and they can be a little bit cautious," he said in an interview aboard the bright red motorcoach his team has converted to comfortably seat 25 to tour the country's emerging tech hubs. "There's a hunger here, a scrappiness, a confidence."

Miami's was the 42nd city Case has toured since launching his effort in 2014. Thursday's Miami visit followed stops in Orlando, the Space Coast and Tampa Bay. Through Washington, D.C.-based Revolution LLC, the investment fund he created after leaving AOL, Case seeks out investment opportunities in cities and states that may lack the visibility of Silicon Valley or New York but are turning out successful startups. Earlier this year, Revolution [invested \\$100,000 in Miami-based educational video platform company Caribu](#).

Thursday's tour kicked off with a breakfast at Miami Freedom Tower downtown, where Case laid out his case for looking beyond traditional tech hubs. To date, the fund has nurtured 19 companies to successful "exits" — via public offerings or private acquisitions.

The breakfast was followed by a visit, closed to press, of the downtown NAP data center created by Manny Medina and now owned by Equinix. Next was a student-led demonstration of a video game at Miami-Dade College's Miami Animation & Gaming International Complex (MAGIC) program at the school's downtown Wolfson campus. Fittingly, a representative of Magic Leap, where MAGIC graduates have gone on to work, was on hand with demonstration goggles of its Magic Leap One technology.

Caribu's Tuchman was among some 20 local female startup founders and tech organization directors at a lunch hosted by [Fort Lauderdale-based boat marketplace Boatsetter](#) and its CEO, Jaclyn Baumgarten, aboard a double-decker tour boat. One attendee remarked that if the boat had somehow sunk, Miami's entire tech leadership would have gone with it. Also on board were Knight Foundation-Miami Program Director Raul Moas; eMerge Americas President Melissa Medina and CEO Felice Gorordo; Chewy co-founder Ryan Cohen; Case Foundation CEO Jean Case and Sheila Johnson, co-founder of Black Entertainment Television and CEO of Salamander Hotels and Resorts.

In an interview, Case remarked on Miami's diversity. "It is more inclusive than maybe any city we've been to," he said.

That image was reinforced as the bus made its way from Wyncode's new, glass-walled office in Wynwood to Overtown's Tribe, one of just three black-owned tech co-working spaces in Florida.

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investing in underrepresented parts of the tech scene, whether that be geographic, ethnic or gender. In a panel discussion hosted by Hatcher, Danie Spikes, CEO of beauty box startup [beloved inc.](#), spoke of the difficulties of being black, female and located in Florida. Recent data show the Sunshine State receives about 2 percent of all venture funding, despite being home to more than 10 percent of the U.S. workforce.

Case said both his investment fund and the Case Foundation are dedicated to helping overcome those barriers. Typically, his fund invests in one or two companies in each city following a stop.

One got immediate funding: Xendoo, which offers cloud-based bookkeeping, got a cool \$100,000 after taking top place in the Rise of the Rest pitch competition. Other finalists included Caribshopper, an e-commerce platform giving Caribbean shoppers access to world markets; Deepblocks, an artificial intelligence platform for real estate developers; DermaSensor, a device that can detect skin cancer; Epica, a platform that organizes large data sets and uses artificial intelligence to make predictions; Imalac Inc., a device for stimulating breast pumping; Luxe Fête Social, which provides at-home dinner parties on demand; OBE Power Networks 1, which provides electric vehicle charging on demand.

Case said Miami seems to be at an inflection point as an entrepreneurial ecosystem, though he declined to rank it against the nation's other hubs.

“I think the community here will continue to grow,” he said. “The question is how far, how high will it get?”

The tour heads next to San Juan, Puerto Rico.

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