

## Miami has arrived on global tech scene

May 9, 2015 / Letter to the Editor - **By Bernie Navarro**

Anyone who didn't attend last week's second annual eMerge Americas event should not make that mistake again. eMerge was a resounding success, with more than 10,000 attendees from across the globe, fascinating speakers and countless entertainment activities. Founded by visionary entrepreneur Manny Medina, the movement to make Miami a Silicon Valley of Latin America is paying off in significant ways.

This wasn't always a foregone conclusion. When the event was first announced, skeptics and naysayers tripped over each other to predict a failed effort. Our economy has always been limited to tourism and a sporadic mix of construction and real estate, but we now have an entirely new industry to help Miami thrive in the 21st Century, and beyond.

The brilliance of Medina's strategy was to leave no stone unturned and to harness the power of an entire ecosystem:

- **Education:** All of our major scholastic institutions and universities have gotten behind the effort in significant ways — not only exhibiting at the event, but launching incubators, accelerators and technology coursework for their students.
- **Inspiration:** Startups are being dreamed up, created, launched and run from our back yard, with glowing examples such as Open English and Yellow Pepper leading the way.
- **Credibility:** Legacy companies are opening Latin American headquarters here with leading mavericks such as Facebook launching thriving operations in our city.
- **Investment:** Many venture-capital and private-equity firms have decided to open brick-and-mortar offices here, the most prominent example being Scout Ventures. Also critical to these efforts is the commitment of the Knight Foundation.
- **Leadership:** Virtually every form of civic government has gotten behind the effort, serving as major proponents of the movement. We as a voting public have elected leaders like County Mayor Carlos Gimenez, who made a big bet on technology, including a \$1-million pledge, and the early returns look very promising.
- **Recognition:** Our media sphere, led by the prodigious work of the Herald's Nancy Dahlberg, has taken note and alerted the public.

This is a potent cocktail that has led to significant progress and served as a catalyst of big things to come. I know because I attended last year's eMerge event and became unexpectedly inspired. I run a mortgage-lending business and didn't necessarily need to broaden my horizons into the tech world. But my eyes were opened in May 2014 to the possibilities for our city, as well as my own aspirations.

For that reason, we spent a full year plotting the birth of Fundrageous, a real-estate crowdfunding business seeking a \$50 million capital raise. Our official launch was Monday morning at eMerge, and we couldn't be happier with the sensation of being shot out of a cannon. I'm just one of many who caught the bug, and that's the whole point.

What Manny Medina and his remarkable staff have done is inspire a community and create a movement, while not forgetting to have fun along the way.