

THANK YOU _____ FOR YOUR INTRODUCTION...

AND ON BEHALF OF MAYOR CARLOS GIMENEZ, I WANT TO THANK YOU FOR GIVING ME THE OPPORTUNITY TO SPEND THIS EVENING WITH YOU AS WE GATHER TO CELEBRATE THE 8TH ANNUAL MAGNOLIA GALA.

THERE IS AN OFT-QUOTED SAYING THAT STATES: "THE MEASURE OF A SOCIETY IS HOW WELL IT TREATS ITS MOST VULNERABLE..."

THE INTERESTING THING ABOUT THIS QUOTE IS THAT IT HAS BEEN SAID BY SO MANY PEOPLE THROUGHOUT HISTORY, THAT WE DON'T REALLY KNOW WHO ORIGINALLY SAID IT.

BUT, ALL OF US IN THIS ROOM KNOW WHAT THIS QUOTE MEANS, BECAUSE WE ARE ALL ACTIVELY ENGAGED IN ITS REALITY.

THE WAY WE TREAT OUR CHILDREN, THE DEVELOPMENTALLY AND OTHER DISABLED, AND OUR ELDERLY, SAYS EVERYTHING ABOUT US, AND WHO WE ARE.

THIS IS WHY I AM SO PLEASED, AND CAN THINK OF NO BETTER WAY TO CELEBRATE OLDER AMERICANS MONTH THAN HERE WITH YOU, OUR PARTNERS AT SUNRISE.

OUR ADMINISTRATION HAS MADE IT A TOP PRIORITY TO CARE FOR OUR SENIORS, AND WE ARE ALL WORKING TOGETHER TO MAKE SURE SENIORS CAN AGE WITH THE DIGNITY THEY SO DESERVE.

I AM PROUD OF HAVING JOINED MAYOR GIMENEZ IN CUTTING THE RIBBON ON OUR FOURTH PUBLIC HOUSING BUILDING, THE JOE MORETTI BUILDING, FOLLOWING STIRRUP PLAZA, SOUTH MIAMI PLAZA, AND THE DANTE FASCELL BUILDING, REPLACING THOSE AGED STRUCTURES WITH MODERN, REFURBISHED APARTMENTS.

THIS IS AMONG THE MOST SIGNIFICANT INVESTMENT IN PUBLIC HOUSING HERE IN MIAMI-DADE COUNTY IN DECADES, AND IT GOES TO FURTHER OUR COMMITMENT TO PROVIDING OUR SENIORS WITH THE VERY BEST IN HOUSING OPPORTUNITIES.

ANOTHER EFFORT WE ARE ENGAGED WITH IS RAISING AWARENESS ON ALZHEIMERS.

STATISTICS SHOW THAT IN THE STATE OF FLORIDA, A LITTLE OVER 450,000 INDIVIDUALS ARE LIVING WITH ALZHEIMER'S DISEASE, AND THIS NUMBER IS EXPECTED TO RISE TO OVER HALF A MILLION PEOPLE BY 2020.

BUT THESE ARE MORE THAN JUST NUMBERS. IT'S OUR PARENTS, AND GRANDPARENTS, AND IT'S A DISEASE THAT AFFECTS US ALL. THIS PAST MARCH, MAYOR GIMENEZ BROUGHT TOGETHER REPRESENTATIVES FROM THE NATIONAL ALZHEIMER'S ASSOCIATION TO CONTINUE WORKING WITH MIAMI-DADE COUNTY TO SUPPORT EARLY DETECTION OF THIS DISEASE.

OUR COMMITMENT IS ALSO SHOWN THROUGH OUR PARTNERSHIP WITH ORGANIZATIONS LIKE YOURS, WHO ARE DOING A GREAT JOB IN HELPING OUR SENIORS.

A FEW YEARS AGO, I WAS ABLE TO ATTEND AN APPRECIATION CELEBRATION FOR SUNRISE AT YOUR ADULT CARE CENTER IN WEST MIAMI.

I SAW HOW THE ADC CENTER PROVIDES CARE AND SUPPORT FOR SENIORS WITH VARIOUS COGNITIVE DISABILITIES, AND THE SERVICES PROVIDED TO ADULTS WHO NEED SUPERVISED CARE IN A SAFE PLACE OUTSIDE THE HOME DURING THE DAY.

THE EVENT WAS A TRUE CELEBRATION WITH A LOT OF SOCIALIZING, INCLUDING RUMBA DANCING AND AEROBICS.

THE MOST IMPORTANT THING I SAW WAS THE LOVE AND COMMITMENT SHOWN TO OUR SENIORS, AND THE FUN THEY WERE HAVING.

THERE IS NO REASON THAT OUR SENIORS CAN'T ENJOY THEIR GOLDEN YEARS WITH FUN, AND EVEN BY CONTINUING TO GIVE BACK TO OUR COMMUNITY.

THIS IS WHY WHILE MIAMI-DADE COUNTY IS INVOLVED IN A LARGE NUMBER OF WAYS IN THE CARE OF OUR SENIORS, BUT WE ALSO PROVIDE WAYS FOR SENIORS TO CARE FOR US!

OUR FOSTER GRANDPARENT PROGRAM CELEBRATED ITS 41ST ANNIVERSARY LAST DECEMBER...

AND THE PROGRAM HAD 82 VOLUNTEERS PROVIDING TUTORING AND MENTORING TO AT RISK CHILDREN OF MIAMI-DADE COUNTY. THESE GRANNIES, AS THEY ARE LOVINGLY CALLED, PROVIDED NEARLY 66,000 HOURS OF SERVICE.

OUR RETIRED SENIOR VOLUNTEER PROGRAM IS NEARLY 40 YEARS OLD,

AND IT RECRUITS AND MATCHES VOLUNTEERS 55 YEARS AND OLDER WITH COMMUNITY SERVICE ASSIGNMENTS THROUGHOUT THE COUNTY. LAST YEAR, MORE THAN 540 VOLUNTEERS PROVIDED CLOSE TO 140,000 HOURS OF SERVICE.

THIS IS OVER 200,000 HOURS OF SERVICE PROVIDED BY SENIORS IN OUR COMMUNITY.

FINALLY, AS I THINK OF THE WAYS WE CAN ALL HELP ONE ANOTHER, IT BRINGS ME TO ONE LAST STORY.

YOU MAY HAVE HEARD THIS ONE BEFORE, BUT I DON'T THINK IT HURTS TO BE REMINDED, BECAUSE IT HAS A VERY POWERFUL MESSAGE.

ONCE UPON A TIME, THERE WAS AN OLD MAN WALKING ON THE BEACH AFTER A BIG STORM HAD PASSED AND HE FOUND THE VAST BEACH LITTERED WITH STARFISH AS FAR AS THE EYE COULD SEE, STRETCHING IN BOTH DIRECTIONS.

OFF IN THE DISTANCE, THE OLD MAN NOTICED A SMALL BOY, AND NOTICED THE BOY WAS OCCASIONALLY BENDING DOWN TO PICK UP AN OBJECT AND THROW IT INTO THE SEA. THE OLD MAN ASKED "MAY I ASK WHAT IT IS THAT YOU ARE DOING?"

THE YOUNG BOY ANSWERED “THROWING STARFISH INTO THE OCEAN. THE TIDE HAS WASHED THEM UP ONTO THE BEACH AND THEY CAN’T RETURN TO THE SEA BY THEMSELVES. THEY WILL DIE, UNLESS I THROW THEM BACK INTO THE WATER.”

THE OLD MAN REPLIED, “BUT THERE MUST BE TENS OF THOUSANDS OF STARFISH ON THIS BEACH. I’M AFRAID YOU WON’T REALLY BE ABLE TO MAKE MUCH OF A DIFFERENCE.”

THE BOY BENT DOWN, PICKED UP ANOTHER STARFISH AND THREW IT AS FAR AS HE COULD INTO THE OCEAN. THEN HE TURNED, SMILED AND SAID, “IT MADE A DIFFERENCE TO THIS ONE...”

AND THAT’S THE MESSAGE HERE:

NO MATTER HOW BIG THE CHALLENGE, NO MATTER HOW LONG IT TAKES, NO MATTER HOW MANY STARFISH WE NEED TO PICK UP...

IT’S IMPORTANT THAT WE ALL WORK TOGETHER...

YOU HAVE A PARTNER IN THE MAYOR’S OFFICE, AND WE WANT TO WORK WITH YOU TO MAKE A DIFFERENCE.

THANK YOU FOR HAVING ME HERE, AND THANK YOU FOR EVERYTHING YOU DO.

