Tri-Rail Offers Options For South Florida Commuters

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Nearly 5.5 million residents live in the Miami metropolitan area, which includes Miami-Dade, Broward, and Palm Beach counties, and according to tourism officials at Visit Florida, the state’s official tourism marketing corporation, 126.1 million out-of-staters visited the Sunshine State in 2018. That’s a record number of visitors! It sure felt as if most of them ended up in South Florida- So, it’s no wonder traffic is almost to a standstill during rush hours, and if the truth be told, almost all the time with no apparent rhyme or reason. By the time most people get to work after worrying about count-

Club eXpats: Helping Transplants Transition Smoothly

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Known for its ethnic diversity and cultural mélange, Miami is also considered a gateway to Latin America. As such, there are a multitude of national and international businesses that want to set up shop here. Everybody wants to come here for one reason or another, which makes the following service one of the best finds ever!

Moving to a foreign country where you might not even know the language can be a bit unsettling and quite overwhelming. Where will you live? How do you turn on basic services? Where do you buy groceries? How will you get around? What about the kids’ schooling? With so many daunting questions, where do you even begin? If only there was a one-stop-shop where everything can be handled with ease and basically, stress-free, where you and your family are provided with personal assistance and guidance with all that is needed for relocating to your new residence. Well, that is exactly what was created when three residents from Key Biscayne got together and founded Club eXpats, LLC in March of 2012.

I was able to catch up with the Club eXpats founders, who all are expatriates themselves, to learn more about their much-needed service. Rebecca Calvet, who hails from Madrid, is the Managing Director; Ana Bonet from Argentina, is responsible for marketing, design and social media, and works out of the

Visionaries Take Miami Lighthouse for the Blind To A New Level

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In historic Little Havana, on the corner of eighth avenue and sixth street, stands an impressive four-sto-

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Through the legacy of blind piano teacher, Dorothy “Dolly” Gamble — and with the assistance and support of her friend, the venerable Helen Keller — Miami Lighthouse started out by offering occupational and social services to its clients. Today, much of its growth and success is owed to Virginia Jacko, the first blind president and CEO in the organization’s history. A woman without sight but with limitless vision, compassion, and charisma, Jacko and her dedicated team have redefined how services to the visually impaired are delivered.

Early in her tenure Ms. Jacko employed a simple and effective strategy of running Miami Lighthouse like a major university. Creating local partnerships and securing sponsorship from donors, played a key role in securing the funding needed to expand. She next focused on expanding services and raising awareness. A current example of which is being listed as a community partner for Andrea Boccelli’s annual Valentines concert. Finally, Jacko and her team focused on improving education for the blind.

“Young children are exposed to so much in their environment. For them to understand this whole world, they must be educated,” said Jacko. “We need to teach them to understand what happens around them.”

For our pre-school, we have a co-teaching model in every classroom: a classroom teacher and a teacher for the visually impaired. It is the first true inclusion model we are aware of in the United States. We recruit the children from the neighborhood that can be role models; the others are literally blind children from the neighborhood that can be role models,” said Jacko.

I asked Jacko about the benefits of such an educational program. “We do that because too many blind people only hang around blind people. Stevie Wonder and Jose Feliciano know how to function in a sighted world. The reason is because they hang around sighted people. It’s a sighted world. Our music program is an inclusion program with sighted musicians performing with blind musicians. It took that model and incorporated into our pre-kindergarten so that we develop empathy and have a connection to the sighted world.

To illustrate her point, I joined her and Eva, her beautiful black Labrador and seeing-eye dog, as we toured the facilities. We arrived on the pre-school and kindergarten floor and entered the classrooms. I watched as children happily came up to Jacko and pet Eva. As the children played and interacted with their teachers, I had to remind myself that the class was evenly divided between blind and sighted children since I could not see the difference.

As we continued the tour, Jacko pointed out that all the artwork on display in the building was created by her senior clients. Personally, I thought the pieces were far superior to a banana taped to a wall or anything else you’ll find at Art Basel.

“Senior group activities are important,” Jacko explained. “Too many blind people will just stay home. They lose their independence and become dependent on family members or enter assisted living. We prevent that by providing them with somewhere to go and something to do.

“The other day, one of our clients told me rich people have their country club; we have more than that, for us, Miami Lighthouse is our country club.”

As I interacted with the people in the senior activities center, I noticed a wide range of handcrafted jewelry, paintings, and sculptures, each one completely unique and beautiful. One gentleman was halfway through crocheting an American flag. How he had allocated the stars, and stripes in their correct location without the use of his eyes was impressive and beyond my comprehension. While speaking with some of the seniors in the activity room and hearing their stories, I realized everything about Jacko’s statement was true. This was more than a community center. For many members, this was their connection to the sighted world.

It was at that moment that I truly understood the importance of Miami Lighthouse’s mission. It is not enough to accommodate access and services for the blind and visually impaired. It is our responsibility as a community to actively build an environment where they can continue to contribute to that community. Our first step should be the continued support of organizations such as Miami Lighthouse. With a leader like blind visionary Virginia Jacko, it shouldn’t be too hard.