

# Aventura news

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## Hotwire Communications sponsors meeting as Superintendent Alberto Carvalho speaks to Aventura Marketing Council about school re-opening

BY ELAINE ADLER

In a recent Zoom meeting of the Aventura Marketing Council/Chamber of Commerce (AMC) sponsored by Hotwire Communications, Miami-Dade School Superintendent Alberto Carvalho shared his thoughts on the status of school reopening in the wake of COVID-19. AMC Chairman Gary Pyott, Association 1st, thanked meeting sponsor, David Ramos, Executive Vice President/General manager/Southeast Florida, from Hotwire Communications. Ramos noted "Hotwire strives to ensure our clients have the best in products and services along with white glove support as we specialize in providing the world's fastest internet and digital video and a suite of automation products. Our team of dedicated professionals have proven that no technology challenge is too difficult to accomplish. One of the greatest initiatives is solving the digital divide that exists in our communities. Thousands of students and families in Miami-Dade and Broward have gone without much-needed internet connectivity or computers they need for schoolwork or for parents' work. Our Empowering Communities Foundation is committed to doing their small part to provide that connectivity to those that need it the most."

Ramos introduced Superintendent Carvalho by saying, "We all know what a very special Superintendent we are so fortunate to have. As our community faces a pandemic, civil unrest, financial hardship plus a robust hurricane season, our appreciation runs deep for this gentleman!"

Supt. Carvalho said, "I greet you with humility, a bit of fatigue and a growing excitement about reopening of our schools. In January, Miami-Dade County Public Schools positioned itself well in advance of this pandemic hitting our shores. We predicted back in January not if but when this virus would have its impact on our community and decided to project, prepare for and develop leadership solutions for a worse- case scenario. How would we



A past year's photo of Supt. Carvalho with students

provide continuity of teaching and learning for our students in an equitable way? We began drafting our pandemic plan and instructional continuity plan in January. By March, we had trained teachers and launched two different versions of a continuity plan with accountability. Back in 2012, this community approved a \$1.2 billion bond referendum to modernize our schools and bring 21st century technology to our students and teachers. This enabled us to fortify and provide ubiquitous universal wi- fi connectivity to our students, buy massive amounts of individual portable devices for our students and hotspots to eliminate what David from Hotwire referred to earlier as the digital divide that often plagues communities -- discerned simply on the basis of zip code at birth. So when we closed our schools on March 13th in advance of the state's shutdown orders, we had done so after surveying parents to determine what technology needs were in their home as far as devices and connectivity. We distributed over 120,000 devices to our students in addition to about 11,000 hotspots for students who did not have home connectivity. We were able to continue to teach despite adversity of conditions that positioned themselves

against our community. It was not easy... mistakes were made. But we were able to maintain on average a 91% attendance rate online with close to 100% connectivity. Recognizing that 73.4% of our children live at or below the poverty level, we were able to maintain 50 schools open for food distribution on the go. We have since distributed close to eight million meals. We have shifted the times, initially in the mornings, now in the evenings, to make it easier for the parents to pick up multiple packets of meals for breakfast and lunch for multiple days. We were able to negotiate waivers with the federal government to make it easier for parents to get meals, regardless of where their children attend schools, with reduced accountability or verification. But that wasn't enough. We knew there were some parents, despite the fact that schools were open, who had no access to transportation or were working and we decided through our foundation to ask the community for financial support to accomplish two goals 1) bring hot cooked meals to the poorest families and children by overlaying the county's map with the highest pockets of poverty, and 2) put back to work one of the most deeply impacted industries in our communities-- restaurants

and hotels. We raised \$1.3 million and have been supporting more than 40 restaurants across the county...from Miami Beach to Miami Gardens, Homestead to Doral, Liberty City and Overtown. Through that effort, we have distributed over 140,000 hot cooked meals as we continue to support small and medium-sized businesses while simultaneously feeding children and their parents. But we have not rested. Throughout the summer, we recognized that as the school year approached and conditions would probably not be appropriate for us to reopen the buildings, we developed what we thought was the best approach to distance learning. We heard from parents and teachers that our first approach to continuity online forced parents, students and teachers to pivot from a multitude of platforms to access content. So we made a bold decision. We decided to contract with a private sector entity that had a long history with Miami-Dade where they had provided Miami-Dade online and homeschooling products for students. We decided that it was a reputable entity approved by the state that integrated all of the content and curriculum in one single platform, making it easier to be a one-stop shop for all educational needs.

However, for all the grand promises and beautiful vision, we had a plan that unfortunately did not work for a number of reasons. I had some questions and concerns as the day was approaching and I kept hearing about the moving of the goalpost. But three days prior to school opening, the company's CEO provided assurances and their lead engineers assurances that their capacity and ability to provide an excellent educational experience were all a "go". So we launched on August 31, our first day of school, with high hopes...hopes that were not met. This was for me one of the most difficult days of my professional career. We began to make quick plans to address the issues, but it was clear to us that after days of 13-14 hours of conversation that it

# Business community comes together to keep us safe



**By Aventura Commissioner Gladys Mezrahi**

As we go through every day in this unprecedented time, we know that our Aventura Police Department is doing everything possible to keep us safe. That feeling of safety is unique for each one. Coming from Colombia, many times I experienced the awful feeling of being unsafe, so for me this becomes personal.

With months of living through a pandemic, police are on high alert for those who want to disturb our safety. With the economic downturn, thieves are looking for more opportunities, and thanks to our

Aventura Police Department, they are being kept at bay. That led me to thinking about how our community can help keep our police safe, and what tools we can provide for them.

Thanks to our business community the Aventura-based Ari Financial Group, through its philanthropic arm Ari Financial Foundation, we were able to announce a donation to sponsor Aventura Police officers through the Pathwaves' NeuroEmpowerment™ program to help them with readiness, performance and resilience in every area of function - mentally, emotionally and physically.

Present at the event were Eric Bouskila, President of Ari Financial Group, G. Cole, Founder and CEO of Pathwaves, Police Chief Bryan Pegues and myself.

"As a CEO of Ari Financial Group, I always teach my clients 'protection fist'" said Eric Bouskila as he presented the donation. "For me, the first line of protection is the police. The police need to have the tools to deal with stressful situations, and we can do this through the partnership with the incredible methodology that Pathwaves provides."

A fitting initiative to start during September, known as National Suicide Prevention Month and in the midst of the

COVID-19 pandemic during which time the number of mental health cases have increased. The donation will run for three months and will help six officers.

"Suicide Prevention Month is an important time to create awareness about the fact that we can all use support in improving how we handle what is happening around us" said G. Cole, Founder and CEO of Pathwaves. "Our NeuroEmpowerment™ program is a unique methodology that combines integrative neurofeedback and coaching, providing long-term sustainable mental health improvements, and relief from disorders. It will enable each first responder to be at their highest mental aptitude and equip them with the tools and mental fortitude to adapt as they progress through their life and professional career."

According to Chief Pegues, mental wellness and resiliency is not something that they could talk about five years ago. He spoke of his gratefulness for the community coming together to take care of the police officers who love taking care of them. The Chief said, "I hope this is a breakthrough moment for the first responders who need help," He then continued saying that he hopes "this is a breakthrough moment for the First Responders who need help, who need resiliency and performance enhancement to deal with the decades and decades of stress that have accumulated over their careers."

The hope is that other organizations will consider sponsoring more first responders to go through this program that will ultimately help the community as a whole.

For more information on these organizations visit [www.arifinancial.com](http://www.arifinancial.com) and [www.pathwaveslife.com](http://www.pathwaveslife.com)

