

Embracing diversity: A conversation on the journey to inclusivity in the heart of Miami

In honor of Black History Month, Shaun Swanger, Swire Properties' Senior Vice President of People and Operations, and Roni Bennett, Executive Director of [South Florida People of Color](#), sat down for a candid conversation about diversity and inclusivity in Miami and Swire Properties' work with South Florida People of Color. For the last 4 years, Swire has partnered with this nonprofit organization that is bridging differences through education and facilitating meaningful dialogue to foster equity and a sense of community in South Florida.

Shaun Swanger: Thank you for joining us today, Roni, to discuss the journey we have embarked on together for the past 4 years. I first learned about the amazing work of the South Florida People of Color during the wake of the George Floyd murder. Swire Properties introduced me to you through our involvement with Friends of the Underline, which started our work together. You have made a lasting impact here at Swire. What are your memories of the beginning of this journey?

Roni Bennett: I am so glad you used the word “journey” because that is something we say at South Florida People of Color. Our work is an ongoing effort to cultivate deeper appreciation, trust, and understanding. We first began with our “Awkward Dinner” series at Swire, an experience that allows individuals from diverse backgrounds to come together in a safe space and have an open dialogue about their experience with race, gender, sexual orientation, and other identities. We discussed uncomfortable topics so we could better understand, build empathy, and connect with one another. We shared our stories that create an environment for open dialogue, growth, and learning. This series was met with enthusiasm from everyone at Swire, from entry-level employees to the Senior Leadership team, who allowed themselves to be vulnerable and partake in these awkward conversations.

Shaun: And you have a special ability to create these safe spaces. It allowed us to be completely honest without fear of judgment. We developed trust not only with your organization but with each other. At Swire Properties, we value integrity with a long-term focus, and it drives everything we do. Our work with South Florida People of Color strengthens our long-term vision of serving the community in Miami at large, a value I believe we share with you.

Roni: I absolutely agree. Miami is such a unique landscape due to its extraordinary diversity. Miami is a melting pot of personal identities and is shaped by its blend of cultures and backgrounds. This cultural richness is one of the defining aspects of Miami.

Shaun: At Swire, we are committed to nurturing this uniquely diverse community. Our ongoing collaboration with South Florida People of Color reflects this dedication. In expanding our partnership, we aimed to provide both our organizations with a platform, enabling the sharing of our vision with the broader community.

Roni: And what an incredible journey it has been! For two consecutive years, Brickell City Centre became the stage for our 'Diversity of the African Diaspora' event. This platform



showcased the incredible talent of local Black artists, featuring captivating performances in jazz, poetry readings, and live music. These festivities not only celebrated the artistic richness of the Black community but also became a catalyst for dialogue, empowerment, and unity within the Brickell community. The overwhelming support from over 2,000 attendees last year truly demonstrated the positive impact of our collaboration in expanding and enriching both of our communities.

Shaun: We were delighted Brickell City Centre was able to serve as a stage for such a powerful event. Our journey at Swire toward equity and inclusion is ongoing; it has no endpoint. I am so grateful for your partnership, Roni, and for our continued collaboration. I hope for the opportunity for more open and honest discussions.

Roni: Thank you, Shaun. Echoing your thoughts, South Florida People of Color remains committed to bridging differences through education, meaningful dialogue, and inclusive leadership. We're enthusiastic about continuing these conversations with Swire to shape equitable Miami communities while ensuring our shared values guide us on this impactful journey.

--Shaun Swanger, Swire Properties' Senior Vice President of
People and Operations, and Roni Bennett, Executive Director of [South Florida People of Color](#)