

71 graduate from camp to develop county's future bankers

By CATHERINE LACKNER

The Center for Financial Training and Miami Dade College graduated 71 students last month in the ninth annual class of the Future Bankers Camp, which prepares young people for careers in financial services.

Students for the four-week course came from 12 Miami-Dade public schools' Academies of Finance and from Miami Dade College. High school students were referred by their principals or academy leaders in their junior year after having maintained a 3.0 academic average or better, said Connie Laguna, president and CEO of the Center for Financial Training.

The program is free to students because it is well supported by nearly two dozen banks and local institutions, the Chapman Partnership and others. This year, it was

sponsored by CareerSource of South Florida, CNC-Nurturing Hispanic Communities and local institutions.

The camp includes classroom work, a Miami Dade College textbook, on-site visits and tours, and a 150-hour internship, to help students see if a banking career is right for them. "It's not just for the students, but for the parents, too," Ms. Laguna said.

"I also help them once they graduate by referring them to banks in our network, which is definitely an advantage," she said.

While students can walk away with certifications from the American Banking Association as bank tellers or customer service representatives and get jobs, they are encouraged to go on to four-year degrees, she said.

It's hard to keep precise track of former graduates' career paths, because

their phone numbers and email addresses frequently change, Ms. Laguna said, but of the 2012-13 class, many are now in four-year degree programs and 30% are employed full- or part-time in financial institutions.

One student who was in a homeless shelter entered the camp "and was very successful," Ms. Laguna said. "It was wonderful to see how well he did in the program and at the bank."

Participating this year were Banco Santander, Banesco USA, BankUnited, BBVA Compass Bank, Biscayne Bank, City National Bank, Coconut Grove Bank, Continental National Bank, First National Bank of South Miami, International Finance Bank, JetStream Federal Credit Union, Mercantil Commercebank, Ocean Bank, Pacific National Bank, Popular Community Bank, Professional Bank, Regions, Sunstate Bank, TD Bank, Wells

Fargo Bank, the Florida International Bankers Association, the South Florida Banking Institute and the Morrison Brown Argiz & Farra accounting firm.

"Training high school and college students for the workplace of the future is a rewarding task, and we are proud of our role in helping in the career development of what often are at-risk youths," said A. Alfonso Macedo, president and CEO of Ocean Bank, in a release. "It's one of the key elements in our long-standing support of education in South Florida."

"It's very rewarding and gratifying to know you're giving many kids an opportunity they would not have at home," Ms. Laguna said. "We're showing them this is a thing they can really do. Many mentors stay on with the kids even after they have graduated and have moved to the next step."

Brazilian debt collectors leverage gateway to Latin America

By MARCUS LIM

Brazilian-based Way Back International Debt Collection has a presence in over 150 nations. Now, through a new location in Miami-Dade County, the company is using Miami's gateway to the Latin community to continue expanding abroad and throughout the US.

The debt collection company officially opened at the start of the year near Miami's international financial center in Brickell. Juliana Simões, its international business manager, saw Miami as the perfect area to gain a foothold in the US.

"When reviewing our options for our first regional office, we were looking for an area that was an international gateway. It had to be diverse, multi-cultural and progressive. Needless to say, we found all those qualities present in Miami-Dade County," Ms. Simões said. "This location is only a few [flight] hours away from our headquarters in Brazil and gives us easy access to cities and clients throughout the world."

The company opened its doors in 1991 in São Paulo and has since amassed noteworthy clients, including Coca-Cola, 3M, Xerox, American Express and Hertz. Ms. Simões hopes her client list will aid the company in finding potential American customers.

"We have a strong client list in Brazil and we can offer the same services to American companies," she said. "We want to expand business, get to know



Photo by Maxine Usdan

"Miami-Dade has a lot to offer as far as the connectivity concept," said Beacon Council VP Mario Sacasa.

people, companies and understand the American market."

As shareholders of TCM Group, a global alliance of local debt collection agencies and specialized law firms, Way Back's connections reach over 150 countries, aiding in the collection process.

The Beacon Council was credited with helping Way Back establish itself in Miami. Looking for foreign investments and attracting them to Miami, a November 2014 Beacon Council delegation in São Paulo for a business seminar met with the

debt collection company, which was interested in Miami.

Mario Sacasa, Beacon Council senior vice president of international economic development, provided the company with information on Miami-Dade regarding the financial industry, demographics, statistics, marketing analysis, orientation and site selection. Way Back is now situated four floors below the Beacon Council, on the 20th floor at 80 SW Eighth St.

A strong factor in the Beacon Council's role of helping Way

Back is employment opportunities in the county.

"We want to help them grow and expand and thus also creating employment, which is our main mission," Mr. Sacasa said. "Miami-Dade has a lot to offer as far as the connectivity concept, the physical connection of airport and seaport, financial network connectivity, technological and telecommunication platform of connectivity and the high diversity is very important, as people from every country in the hemisphere are represented here. So when you put that all together, it makes it a strong global destination place."

He lauded Miami's gateway into Latin America as an entry point into the US as a great opportunity for the company.

"They anticipate an opportunity to do what they do best and collect debts from different countries, being in a good financial center where they can work," Mr. Sacasa said.

Ms. Simões says the company has a specific knowledge of the debt collection process and understands the language, collection culture and laws of many countries, which will help with collections.

"Debt collection process abroad is quite expensive, long and also demanding. Our clients will not have to deal with these, as it can be difficult to collect abroad," Ms. Simões said. "It is very easy for companies to ignore calls or emails. We are able to do this through our partnerships through the world, over 150 countries."

"So that means someone in Miami has a debt to collect in Dubai, for example. I have an office in Dubai with an executive who speaks the same language and understands the culture and law and will do the job." Another perk for clients is if Way Back doesn't collect the money, they don't have to pay. "We know this is a very strong economy and full of opportunities. One thing that we bring is companies don't pay us until we recover the money. If we don't recover, they don't pay," Ms. Simões said.

With over 200 employees in Brazil and in many offices of the debt collection company across the globe, Ms. Simões hopes the Miami branch could one day expand. For now, Mr. Sacasa says, they are starting small, and international companies typically take longer to expand their manpower.

"This is the typical case for many international companies coming here. They tend to start relatively small. Due to legal requirements and immigration, they may take longer," Mr. Sacasa said.

He notes that the Brazilian company has made an initial investment of \$200,000 and the average salary offered of \$70,000 a year is higher than the average Miami-Dade or Florida salary.

"Miami-Dade County has a robust and thriving international financial sector," Larry Williams, president & CEO of the Beacon Council, said. "That environment makes it easy for companies like Way Back International Debt Collection to select Miami as the location to best handle clients regionally and around the world."

Details: Way Back International Debt Collection website - <http://www.wayback-usa.com/index.html>

➔ **A+**

One of the Healthiest Banks in the country. Right in your backyard.

Proudly serving this community for 42 years

- Personal & Business banking
- Residential lending
- International banking
- 19 South Florida banking locations

Member FDIC EQUAL HOUSING LENDER

DepositAccounts.com Healthiest Bank rating as of 1/1/2016 based on 12/31/2015 financial data.

TOTALBANK
Strength. Commitment. Expertise.



totalbank.com 305.448.6500
info@totalbank.com