



MIAMI BEACH

# Association debuts new app

■ A Miami Beach neighborhood association reaches out to residents through a new app.

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A Miami Beach neighborhood association is riding the growing app wave.

With its technological know-how, the West Avenue Corridor Neighborhood Association is changing the way other neighborhood associations interact with their members. The group, known as WAVNA, has taken a step to unify the community and inform them on pressing neighborhood issues through an app.

The app, WAVNA Vote Local, released in late July, aims to update corridor residents with news and information regarding candidates seeking elected office in Miami Beach. The app aims to be unbiased and to provide residents with candidate biographies, upcoming meetings, and assistance with voter registration.

Currently, the association distributes a weekly newsletter to an email subscription list of about 1,000. The app also boosts its reach with an online presence on social media platforms like Twitter, Facebook, and YouTube.

WAVNA is one of about 45 neighborhood associations in Miami Beach and recently merged with Lincoln West Resident Association. WAVNA's district covers Fifth Street to 17th Street and runs from Alton Road to the bay.

Available for free download on the association's website, as well as on Google Play, the app is currently awaiting approval from Apple's App Store. Although WAVNA Vote Local is still a work in progress, Christine Florez, president and co-founder of the association, went ahead with its release in order to have residents engage with it and provide feedback.

"The focus of the app was to organize, engage and inform," Florez said. "To be part of the electorate and to participate in our democracy."

Florez focused on finding a developer for the app that was inexpensive and user-friendly. Since she compiles most of the information the association distributes, she wanted to be able to create the app without learning computer programming or hiring a third party.

Florez, who doesn't have a background in graphic design or programming, used the service Conduit Mobile to create the app in one day. Florez pays the \$39

monthly fee along with one-time developer fees of \$25 to Google Play and a pending \$99 to the Apple App Store.

The association also relies on other Internet services like Google Alerts, Google Voice, Google Docs, and online PowerPoint templates to help run the business and put together the newsletters.

"Technology creates opportunities to share, reuse and make your own [products] easily and cheaply," Florez said. "There are so many off-the-shelf products out there that make it look easy to look like a genius."

Founded in January 2012, the association was intended to provide a forum to discuss issues such as traffic, neighborhood programs, and beautification. After about a year and half, monthly meeting participation grew to about 60 members.

Hal Philipps, an association member, said its products have been helpful. He had moved from another neighborhood association on the Beach but was disappointed that there wasn't one in place at the time on West Avenue.

"My old neighborhood association in the Venetian Isles was strong in representation, but [WAVNA] created a means of communication that was much

better than anything that I had ever experienced," Philipps said.

Some residents of Miami Beach that live outside WAVNA's district have signed up for the newsletters because they don't have a neighborhood association, Philipps said, or they prefer WAVNA's newsletter.

"Without a neighborhood association it's very difficult to know what's going on. The newsletter has ended up being such an informative piece of information," Philipps said.

Other Miami Beach neighborhood associations like Collins Park, also email weekly newsletters to a list of over 300 as well as run a Facebook page. However, the president of Collins Park, Ray Breslin, says that he does not see himself participating in more social media platforms.

"Not for this 66-year-old. I will never tweet," Breslin said. "I don't even use LinkedIn even though I have an account."

However, Breslin would permit a plugged-in individual, such as new board member Shawn Vardi, to expand to other platforms.

"[Vardi] will no doubt launch us to the next social media level," Breslin said.

WAVNA opted to put so much emphasis on finding alternate



methods to convey a message because its founders believe that having a wide array of communication methods is key in reaching as many residents as possible.

"Not everybody is going to engage in the same way," Florez said. "Some people want to read the email, some want to show up to the meetings. All those different perspectives means you have to interact with them in a different way."

NORTH MIAMI

# Lawsuit against mayor costing taxpayers money

■ North Miami taxpayers are paying to defend Mayor Lucie Tondreau from a lawsuit challenging her right to remain in office.

BY NADEGE GREEN  
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North Miami taxpayers are picking up the tab as Mayor Lucie Tondreau defends her right to remain in office against a challenger who says she did not live in

the city for the required full year before the spring elections.

A judge will decide if Tondreau can stay in office in the lawsuit brought by former Mayor Kevin Burns, who ran against Tondreau in a June run-off election. Meanwhile, not everyone is happy that the city is paying Tondreau's legal bills.

"I don't think it's appropriate for the city to represent mayor Tondreau at this

time because what she was alleged to have done happened when she was citizen Tondreau. She wasn't Mayor Tondreau," said North Miami Councilman Scott Galvin.

But others see it differently.

"The lawsuit was filed after she became mayor of the city. I don't think there's any problem that the city is paying for these legal expenses," said Councilman Phil

ippe Bien-Aime. "Over 4,000 people went out and voted for Mayor Tondreau. We need to respect those people."

North Miami is paying well-known local attorney Benedict Kuehne as co-counsel on the case. A contract with the city shows Kuehne will bill \$250 an hour for his work, \$200 an hour for work performed by other attorneys in his firm and \$90 an hour for

paralegals. In addition, the city will cover the costs for out-of-pocket expenses like photo copying and long distance charges.

Whether or not it's proper for the city to pay Tondreau's legal fees for an allegation that occurred before she was mayor is not clear.

North Miami did not respond to emailed questions to clarify why the city is representing Tondreau, but a

legal expert said it's not unusual.

"When you're a public official, it's sometimes difficult to determine who picks up the tab and for what," said Ryan Padgett, assistant general counsel for the Florida League of Cities. "If they do not provide representation, and whoever is being sued is successful, the city can be on the hook for reimbursing the official for his or her legal fees."