

MIAMI TODAY

WEEK OF THURSDAY, MAY 7, 2020

SERVING SOUTH FLORIDA'S MOST IMPORTANT AUDIENCE

Fresh out of Harvard Business School in 2014, Della Heiman was whittling down her list of where to launch her healthy, plant-based culinary concept, Della Bowls.

She wanted to start in a city where demand and awareness of such an offering was high but supply was limited. It ultimately came down to two cities, Chicago and Miami.

Weather was the pivotal factor at first – even by late spring, Chicago was freezing – but six years later, she said, what really cemented her decision was how receptive, supportive and collaborative Miami's entrepreneurial community was.

"I fell in love with Miami and the incredible people here," she said. "The community opened its arms to help welcome a new, very green entrepreneur find my path and support me."

But like many food startups today, the traditional business models that relied on brick-and-mortar locations proved prohibitive amid Miami's rising real estate pricing. So she adapted, tapping into the vast entrepreneurial community that had been so helpful when she first arrived.

The result was the Wynwood Yard, Miami's first culinary incubation space, where between November 2015 and May 2019 more than 200 entrepreneurs – including 35 long-term residents – spent time testing and perfecting their concepts.

"We tried to show that entrepreneurship is really risky, and it's much more palatable and safe for them when they can do it in a space together, take on less financial risk trying out their ideas, get more support from the community and tap into and leverage a larger marketing apparatus," she said. "Many were successful and went on to scale at new locations."

In addition to operating a location at the Wynwood Yard, she opened several "cloud kitchens" – locations designed solely for pick-up and delivery – throughout Miami.

The Wynwood Yard was always a temporary solution, she said, and in

THE ACHIEVER



Della Heiman

Founder and CEO

The Doral Yard and Della Bowls
8455 NW 53rd St., Ste. 106, Doral,
33166

(305) 744-5038

Della@YardHospitality.com

Born: Cincinnati

Age: 32

Education: Master of business administration, Harvard Business School, 2014; Bachelor of history and Spanish literature, Washington University in St. Louis, 2009

Personal philosophy: "If you always do what you've always done, you'll always get what you've always got."

anticipation of its closure last year she and business partner Joe Furst – the former executive director of Goldman Properties who co-founded the Wynwood Business Improvement District and now runs Place Projects – began to look for a new, permanent home.

That will become the Doral Yard, a 20,000-square-foot space in Downtown

Doral whose first phase is set to open this year and will build on what made the Wynwood Yard special, expanding its food, entertainment and cultural offerings.

"The Wynwood Yard was very much a build-it-as-you-go process – iterative and lacking a very thoughtful design process from the beginning, because it was it was so scrappy," she said. "In the Doral Yard, it's the opposite approach. Now we know how our business works and what elements are successful and work for us. We've made sure those elements are done to the best ability we can."

Before moving to Miami, she worked domestically and abroad in political communications, venture capital and for Standard Textile, her family's institutional textile company, which manufactures health and hospitality products for 60 markets worldwide.

She also co-founded InsideIL, a non-profit designed to help Israeli startup companies match with interns from top business schools across the globe, while finishing her MBA.

Ms. Heiman spoke by phone with reporter Jesse Scheckner.

Q: Why did the Wynwood Yard close? Did you have any say in the matter?

A: No. When I originally signed the lease with my landlord, David Lombardi, a great guy who's had a footprint in Wynwood for years, he said, "This is vacant property. I'm comfortable with you trying to pop up your business here and see how it goes, but I'm actively trying to sell it and, when I do, your lease is going to be terminated."

As much as people found it jarring, it was always part of our agreement that he would extend our lease for as long as he could, and when he sold the property that would be the end.

My original lease was very short, for less than a year. Luckily, we were able to stay there for 3½ years. When the time came, he sold the property to Lennar and they allowed us to extend our lease until May 5, 2019, and then we vacated immediately.

Along with our vacating of the site,

Della Heiman uses a Harvard Business School approach...

every other business on that block also vacated – businesses like O Cinema and Art Miami, which are so impactful in arts and culture here.

Q: What was the concept behind the Wynwood Yard?

A: Miami, like a lot of cities, is a place where people are doing all kinds of interesting things but not necessarily crossing paths in one space that fosters art, culture, culinary entrepreneurship and creativity in a way that's casual and open-format.

I had this vision of a space where entrepreneurs could thrive by working together and leveraging shared resources and then providing a platform for them to be creative and test out their craft in an iterative manner.

I look back on my initial letter of intent I submitted as part of our permit applications to the City of Miami, and I had all these different components – a community garden where people could come and learn about cooking farm-to-table, field trips for kids, entrepreneurs testing out their craft, growing their ideas and scaling in the community, and artists that come on stage and test out things they're experimenting with and growing their audience.

It all sounded pretty lofty, especially given that I wasn't from Miami, had never lived here or run a for-profit start-up before, and it was really amazing. It's just a testament to this city and all the people I've been lucky enough to meet here.

Q: The Doral Yard's opening date, once expected to be in late 2019, has been pushed back more than once since. How frustrating have these delays been, and when will it open?

A: We're ready to open. We have our permits and are ready to go. It's just a matter of seeing how soon we're able to open from the perspective of governmental regulation with regard to the coronavirus.

There's been frustration. I hope we'll be able to open soon, but I see a silver lining in the fact we haven't.

Wynwood was at the epicenter of the Zika outbreak, and the Yard was part of that. Because we were the only outdoor venue in Wynwood, we ended up with numerous cases of Zika with our team members.

We were really transparent about those



Photo by Matt Roy

Della Heiman goes from the temporary solution of Wynwood Yard to create Doral location.

cases, and it wreaked havoc on our business. It did for the whole community, but in particular the Yard was very hard hit. It was the most anxiety-producing, stressful situation of my life – to feel responsible for a team of 80 people and an illness that was not well-understood at the time by public health officials.

Having been on the other side of that, where we are open and had to deal with the absolute domino effect of what that does to your business, team, community and all your concerns with people's safety that come along with that, at this moment I feel grateful we weren't open for that reason.

Where my heart is bleeding now is for the owners of other restaurants in our city, country and around the world that are dealing with everything we experienced to a lesser degree with Zika but that was still quite intense – knowing they're in this nightmare now, where they're not sure when it's going to end.

Q: The Doral Yard is being introduced in phases. What will each comprise, and what was the thinking behind that approach rather than opening everything at once?

A: The phased approach has been an outcome of our design process, some changes that we made from a design perspective that forced some parts of the project to take a little longer to design and develop than others.

We originally planned to open them all at once, but once it became clear it was taking longer to design, we decided to work with ones we could get some parts of the project open. The project is designed in a way where the two phases work together holistically and rely heavily on each other.

When Phase 1 opens, it will still have some missing pieces that will be filled in by Phase 2. Once the whole project's open together, it's going to be exciting and we hope groundbreaking for the community in ways that build on and elevate what we did in Wynwood.

Q: There's mention on the Doral Yard website of an anchor restaurant for its second phase, set to open next year. Do you have a restaurant locked down for that yet? If not, what type of restaurant do you see as best fitting the needs of the space?

A: There'll be several restaurants for the outside space. Some I can tell you about. We've identified our partner for the anchor restaurant, a talented entrepreneur, but we haven't announced it yet. It'll be full-service with about 100 seats.

The other restaurants will be smaller kiosks outside, and there's three vendors we're working with outdoors. One is Pokekai, a local concept founded by a brother and sister who have small locations in Doral, the Gables and Orlando.

Then we have two amazing dessert

...in shift from former Wynwood Yard to new Doral Yard

vendors – Morelia Gourmet Paletas, which will open inside and transition to the outside space once that's open; and Santo Dulce, a churros [and ice cream] that knocked it out of the park as one of our culinary vendors at the Wynwood Yard.

We expect them to also do quite well in Doral.

Q: With which local organizations – public, private and nonprofit – do your businesses most interact, and can you characterize those relationships and what they do?

A: Our stronger partnership is with Prism Creative Group, founded by Isabella Acker. I've been working with them since we first opened. They've been involved in curating our music programming and helping us with marketing, branding and diverse community outreach.

We'll be working with them again in Doral on music curation, strategy and programming, and any kind of live art on our stage – music, dance and other creative activations.

Another we worked closely with at the Yard is Little River Cooperative, run by Muriel Olivares and Tiffany Noe. They're a local farm that curated our garden at the Yard and were also involved with us programmatically.

They brought a lot of life and beauty to the space with everything they grew. We had the largest urban, organic, edible farm in the county.

We do a lot of programming with Radical Partners. We've had partnerships with Guitars Over Guns. We have cooking partners for events, school partners for field trips and culinary partners for activations. It's a long list, a lot of moving pieces.

Q: There were plans for several years for a North Beach Yard. Why did that ultimately fall through, while the one in Doral is succeeding? Why is this different?

A: With any project, there's the idea for the project – the vision of it – and the actual tactics of getting it off the ground. For me, the difference there has been a function of partners, timing and our concerns or lack thereof of whether the business is the right fit for the community.

With Doral, in terms of it being a private sector project with a clear business

model and going into a community that's receptive of our model and excited for it to be there, the stars aligned.

The North Beach Yard project, which we'd worked on prior to Doral coming on the radar, was something we felt inspired and energized. We spent a lot of time, energy and capital trying to get it off the ground.

Ultimately the complications of trying to partner with the City of Miami Beach government, fundraise on a project that changed a lot and hearing a lot of concerns from the community about noise – we have a strong live music component to the business – it just wasn't the right fit for us.

At the end of the day, we see ourselves as a modern-day community center, a place where people from every walk of life can come in and have a positive experience. That's what the Yard is. We don't want people to see what we're doing as a disturbance. We want them to see it as an asset.

Q: How far has Della Bowls come since you launched it, and what do you aim to accomplish with it in the near future?

A: Della Bowls was really the impetus behind everything we've created. Originally, my business model was only focused on Della Bowls. I planned to open multiple brick-and-mortar locations. In that sense, the business has taken a completely different direction.

Given the world we're living in today, even more so now than ever, the model we're pursuing is the right one for our business. In the Yard location, where we have an entertainment and programmatically focused business model, Della Bowls is a perfect fit.

Outside of that, the ghost kitchen model is right for us. It's been amazing to build the company with great people. I've been working with Chef Julie Frans for Della Bowls and the Yard since 2015, and Trina Sargalski, our director of marketing and communications, to build the brand into what it's become.

It's been a crazy, wild ride, but we've loved every step of it, and I'm proud of the product we're serving today, what the menu's become and how many loyal fans we have. How far they'll go to get a Della Bowl is really gratifying.

We feel we're doing something unique, even within the world of plant-

based food, and are excited about its potential. We'll be opening some new locations on the ghost kitchen side in Miami and are really excited to open the brick-and-mortar location in the Doral Yard.

Q: Why did you choose to go with a plant-based menu for Della Bowls rather than one inclusive of all diet types?

A: The original impetus for the concept was we're in something of a public health crisis in this country in terms of how people eat. There's a lot of consumption of overly processed food. Heart disease and diabetes are at all-time highs and continue to climb.

A lot of these risks are preventable and/or reversible if people are able to change what they're eating and the way they move their bodies. Our philosophy is there are a lot of illnesses that aren't preventable, but for those that are, nutrition and exercise can really be a huge force in moving the needle.

When I was in college, I lived and studied around the world in Latin America and Europe. I got so much exposure to food supply chains and how people eat. It was tremendously eye opening. When I came back to the US and saw the excess here, the amount of processed food, I saw it through a new lens.

I spent more time living with people who cooked all their meals, are way more connected with where their food comes from and have a totally different perspective and respect for what they put on their plate every day.

I got very interested and concerned about the public health issues and food insecurity in the US – how many people don't know when they'll get their next meal and, on top of that, have access to healthy food.

All that combined into research I did as a business school student about different approaches one could take to help and tackle this problem. Because I don't work in the healthcare space, the most logical place to do that was by creating a more viable and accessible model for healthy food.

I was very inspired by Chipotle. They've done a tremendous job of scaling a high-quality menu and keeping the price point low. I kept thinking about what that would look like with plant-based food.

I'm not solely a plant-based eater, but

I believe plant-based food is the foundation of a healthier approach to eating. Because we already consume so much animal protein today, the most logical thing is to create a plant-based menu to help balance it out.

We aren't trying to proselytize in that concept or tell people to be vegan. We don't even use "vegan" when we talk about our menu. It's more about including more plant-based foods, because it's still hard to get a solid, healthy, plant-based meal that's delicious and nourishing.

I developed the menu in business school, and I was able to do it with my classmates, who were such a diverse group of people. I'd have 15 friends

over for dinner, and everyone was from a different country.

Getting their feedback at that early stage and seeing how people from different backgrounds interacted with the food, what they thought about it, allowed me to get a lot of data up front in what would be workable in a restaurant-type setting.

Q: What was the last good book you read, and what is your favorite book?

A: My favorite book is "Cutting for Stone" by Abraham Verghese, and I just finished "The Center Cannot Hold: My Journey Through Madness" by Elyn Saks, a fascinating book about a brilliant woman attorney and thought leader who

is schizophrenic.

I'm now reading "This Is the Story of a Happy Marriage" by Ann Patchett, a compilation of essays she wrote. She's probably my favorite author.

Q: What do you consider your greatest achievement?

A: Having cultivated a strong community. At times like this, where the world is so topsy-turvy, I'm grateful to be surrounded by the most incredible family, partner and friends.

My team and the people I work with are brilliant, creative and entrepreneurial. Just being surrounded by people so positive and supportive makes my life a joy.

