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## State Department opens ‘media hub of the Americas’ at Freedom Tower

BY MARC CAPUTO

[MCAPUTO@MIAMIHERALD.COM](mailto:MCAPUTO@MIAMIHERALD.COM)

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The 17-story Freedom Tower at 600 Biscayne Boulevard in Miami. MAX REED MIAMI HERALD FILE, 2013

Miami’s iconic Freedom Tower, once a newspaper office and then a symbolic home for Cuban refugees, has a new purpose that’s rooted in its history as the “Ellis Island of the South.”

The building officially became the headquarters for a “Media Hub of the Americas” on Wednesday under an agreement between the U.S. Department of State and Miami Dade College. The State Department will use the office for hosting foreign dignitaries and engaging Spanish-language and Portuguese media.

“This is where it belongs, Miami being the gateway to the Americas,” said Miami-Dade College President Eduardo Padrón, president of the college. “It’s very significant for Miami. We’ve been after this for three years to convince them to do that.”

After more than three years of negotiations, the State Department this year was finally ready to open its offices in the tower and move some of its operations from Fort Lauderdale.

“It’s sort of the extension of the podium for U.S. policy in the Americas ... and the 30-40 million Americans who get their news in Spanish,” said State Principal Deputy Assistant Secretary Valerie Fowler.

“The leadership of Dr. Padrón was one of the big selling points for us,” Fowler said.

Padrón said the “media hub” won’t just be for the news media. He said that students and academics at Miami Dade College will also have an opportunity to meet or interact with foreign leaders and dignitaries who come through Miami.

Completed in 1925, the Mediterranean-style building on Biscayne Boulevard once housed the now-defunct Miami News before it moved in 1957. After Fidel Castro seized power in 1959, the U.S. government used the tower to process and assist refugees fleeing the Communist dictatorship.

The building changed hands a number of times. It was finally acquired by the college in 2005 when developer Pedro Martin donated it to the school. The tower is home to the Cuban American Museum and it houses the MDC Museum of Art and Design. The tower has hosted art exhibits that have featured the works of Dalí, Goya and Da Vinci.

“The Freedom Tower is more than ideal,” Padrón said. “It’s the most-representative icon of freedom and democracy.”