



Freedom Tower Oral History Project Surpasses 300 Interviews, Capturing the Voices Behind the Freedom Tower's 100-Year Legacy

MIAMI, FL — (May 12, 2025) - The Freedom Tower, a National Historic Landmark stewarded by Miami Dade College (MDC), has announced a major milestone in its oral history project: more than 300 stories have been recorded and archived, preserving the personal accounts of Miami residents connected to the Tower's legacy. Launched as part of the Freedom Tower's centennial initiative, the oral history project has become a cornerstone of the building's renewed mission.

"In collecting these stories, we are preserving the voices, memories, and emotions that define our community," said MDC President Madeline Pumariega. "Each story reminds us that history is human, and that the Freedom Tower has long stood as a place where humanity and heritage meet."

Collected over the past two years through a community-driven initiative led by the Museum of Art and Design (MOAD), the flagship museum of Miami Dade College, in partnership with the MDC Archives, the interviews were conducted in both English and Spanish to reflect the rich cultural and linguistic diversity of Miami. Honoring the Tower's role as "El Refugio" during the period it housed the Cuban Refugee Center, from 1962–1974, the archive includes narratives from Cuban exiles, as well as Haitian immigrants, Nicaraguan refugees, Bahamian families and others who sought opportunity and belonging in Miami.

The Freedom Tower Oral History Archive captures stories from artists, civic leaders and everyday residents whose lives intersect with the Freedom Tower's evolving legacy, including firsthand refugee accounts from cultural icons such as **Emilio Estefan** and **Willy Chirino**; testimonials of the Pedro Pan experience from **Miguel Bezos**; personal memories from **Rafael Peñalver**, whose father served as a physician at El Refugio; reflections from previous stewards of the Tower, such as **Jorge Mas**; and generational ties from **MDC President Madeline Pumariega**, who shares a personal family connection to the Tower through her parents.

The recorded oral histories will play a vital role in the Tower's reopening exhibitions this fall, helping to animate interactive displays and serve as educational tools for students, researchers and the public. These first-person accounts will bring depth to the visitor experience, transforming historical events into lived memories. In several exhibitions, excerpts from the recordings will be embedded in digital kiosks, listening stations, and immersive environments, allowing visitors to hear directly from those who were shaped by the Tower's role in Miami's history.

The Museum of Art and Design at MDC will continue to collect oral history recordings throughout the year. For more information or to submit your story for consideration, visit <https://mdc.edu/freedomtower/share-your-story/>.

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About the Freedom Tower

Built in 1925, the Freedom Tower is designated a National Historic Landmark and one of Miami's most iconic buildings. Originally serving as the headquarters for The Miami News daily newspaper, it later became a processing center for more than 650,000 Cuban exiles seeking safety and opportunity during the 1960s and 1970s. Today, the iconic tower is directed by Miami Dade College (MDC) and houses the Museum of Art and Design (MOAD). After undergoing a significant restoration, the Freedom Tower will reopen this summer for its centennial celebration, inspiring visitors through its shared history and our collective legacy of hope, courage, opportunity, and the quest for freedom. Visit <https://mdc.edu/freedomtower/> for more information.

About the Museum of Art and Design

The Museum of Art and Design (MOAD) at Miami Dade College offers groundbreaking exhibitions and programs that aim to explore the challenges and opportunities we face locally. MOAD convenes artists, designers, and thinkers to address the urgent questions of our time. As the flagship museum of Miami Dade College, MOAD strives to be a catalyst for action and a place that empowers people to remake their city. MOAD follows the College's lead in operating across Miami with its Museum Without Boundaries initiative, which takes place in city neighborhoods and invites everyone to be a part of the conversation. The Museum, located inside the National Historical Landmark Freedom Tower, will reopen this year to mark the Tower's Centennial anniversary. For updates and a full schedule of events, please visit www.moadmdc.org and check our [Facebook](#) and [Instagram](#) channels for regular updates.

About Miami Dade College

Miami Dade College is the most diverse institution in the nation, with 167 nations and 63 languages represented in its student body. The college's eight campuses and outreach centers offer over 300 distinct degree pathways, including associate and baccalaureate degrees, certifications and apprenticeships. MDC is the recipient of many top national awards, including the prestigious Aspen Prize. The College changes lives through accessible, high-quality teaching and learning experiences. It is home to the Miami Culinary Institute, the Miami Animation & Gaming International Complex, the Miami Fashion Institute, The Idea Center, the Cybersecurity Center of the Americas, two AI Centers, the Center for Learning, Innovation and Simulation at the Medical Campus, the Business Innovation & Technology Center, the School for Advanced Studies and New World School of the Arts, among others. MDC has been recognized among the nation's "Great Colleges to Work For" since the program's inception. The College serves as an economic, cultural and civic leader for the advancement of our diverse global community. MDC alumni and employees contribute more than \$3 billion annually to the local economy, and graduates occupy top leadership positions in every major industry. MDC's renowned rich cultural programming includes the Miami Book Fair, Miami Film Festival, the National Historic Landmark Miami Freedom Tower, Koubek Center Mansion and Gardens, Live Arts Miami at MDC, the Lynn and Louis Wolfson II Florida Moving Image Archives, and the Museum of Art and Design. MDC has admitted more than 2.5 million students and counting, since it opened its doors in 1960. Approximately 120,000 students are currently enrolled. For more information, visit www.mdc.edu.

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