

SOUTH FLORIDA BUSINESS JOURNAL

End of investigation

U.S. Attorney probe into firms's past dealings resolved

NINA LINCOFF, 6



THE VIEWFINDER



Chocolate goodies made here daily

Dozens of chocolatiers create about 15,000 pounds of treats a day at Hoffman's Chocolates in Lake Worth.

JOCK FISTICK & EMON REISER, 7

COMMUNICATIONS

Telemundo pitches new TV studio

The Spanish-language network could build a major facility with hundreds of jobs in western Miami-Dade County.

BRIAN BANDELL, 4



EXECUTIVE PROFILE

RELATIONSHIPS KEY TO SUCCESS 9



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COVER STORY

The Light King

Energy-efficient lighting is a tough sell, so Daniel Gold of Fort Lauderdale-based Future Energy Solutions just gives it away

PAGES 12-13

GUEST COLUMN

DEMAND FOR MIAMI OFFICE SPACE TO SLOW



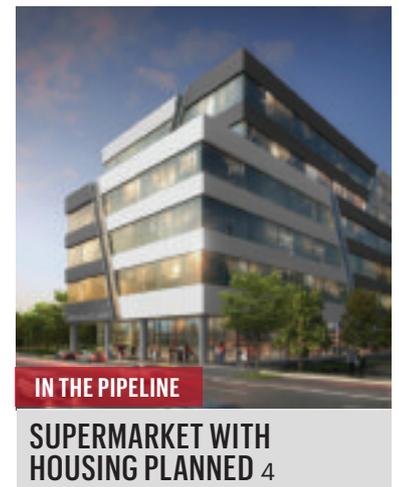
The CEO of The Allen Morris Co. shares his take on what's ahead for South Florida's

commercial office space, retail leasing and multifamily housing sectors in a region with explosive growth in 2015.

W. ALLEN MORRIS, 15



Hotels by guest rooms 10



IN THE PIPELINE

SUPERMARKET WITH HOUSING PLANNED 4

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EXECUTIVE PROFILE

'Relationships are important'

CHARLES URSO ON WORKING WITH SUPPLIERS FROM DIFFERENT CULTURES



Charles Urso travels the world to source the marble he sells.

JOCK FISTICK

Charles Urso makes most of his sales in South Florida, but he travels hundreds of thousands of miles across the globe for his business to source the highest-quality marble he can find.

He founded Marble of the World in 1985 after selling his Grease Lightening quick lube business to Jiffy Lube. After helping a client find green marble in Guatemala, Urso got into the business himself. One of his first sales was to the bank building on Andrews Avenue and Broward Boulevard in Fort Lauderdale.

Now Marble of the World has 56 employees in its Fort Lauderdale headquarters, Miami and Palm City, and sales were up 23 percent in 2015, he said. Urso also plans to open two locations this year, in either Palm Beach, Naples or Orlando.

What was your childhood like? I grew up in Brooklyn, in Bath Beach. It was a typical upbringing you see in the movies – playing stickball in the street, making scooters out of broken skates, and playing marbles in the dirt. A very

CHARLES URSO

Age: 65
Born: Brooklyn, New York

Residence: Sea Ranch Lakes

Current position: CEO and owner, Marble of the World

Previous positions and boards: Owner, quick lube franchise Grease Lightening; member, Lynn University Monument Board for the Wall of Remembrance (honoring victims of Haiti earthquake); town councilman, Sea Ranch Lakes

Education: High school diploma

1950s upbringing in Brooklyn, where everyone unlocked their doors and everyone knew everybody's business.

What was your first job? I worked in just about everything. My father, to make extra money, did plumbing on the side. I would help him at night. We would collect junk and bring it to Coney Island to sell. I worked in the grocery store for the butcher, delivering and trimming off the fat. I worked in the fruit store. I painted fences. I had a part-time job in the body shop. After high school, I would change clothes and go change fenders.

What was the best career advice you've received? An old girlfriend said: "Charles, you are terrific and you know where you want to go, but you don't know how you're going to get there. So you need to plan." You need to pull a map out and plan your trip, and you'll get there in half the time at half the cost.

How did you get involved in local politics? In my community, Sea Ranch Lakes, we have our own police and

a mayor. It's only 208 homes on A1A between the ocean and the Intercoastal. My two neighbors were mayors at one time or another. I thought it would be very interesting and something I would enjoy. But after running your own business and people come to you with objections about what you are trying to do ... after one term as a councilman, I said: "That's enough for me."

What was the biggest order you've ever received? It was [from] a Russian architect ... \$2 million for two homes, all very special materials. And 15 or 17 containers went to the Boca Beach Club for black granite pavers on the beach. It went on the driveway and part of the roadway was elevated ... They actually removed it all. Sometimes it looks great, [but] doesn't really perform in that environment for that use.

How do you manage relationships with marble suppliers in other countries? Each culture is different, and they all respect different norms in their culture. In this industry, relationships are important. I always tell the suppliers: "When I send you the money, I never say, 'the money is broken or damaged and you can't get the full value of the dollar.' So I don't want broken or damaged material from you, and then we have to talk about a discount" Our business is much more cash intensive now than ever before. We have to send wire transfers before we even ship [the marble]. We've got Italian suppliers where we go to the factory to select the stone, and they ship me something else. You try to take credits and don't take business from them anymore.

What was your biggest challenge in business? It's growth and it's people. It's harder to get human capital than financial capital.

What have been some of your best travel experiences? They say you can't get a bad meal in Italy and, for the most part, that's true. Turkey is a beautiful, beautiful country. Istanbul is a fabulous city. The food and people and the culture are great ... Spain is lovely. Barcelona is one of the prettiest cities I've been to.

– Brian Bandell