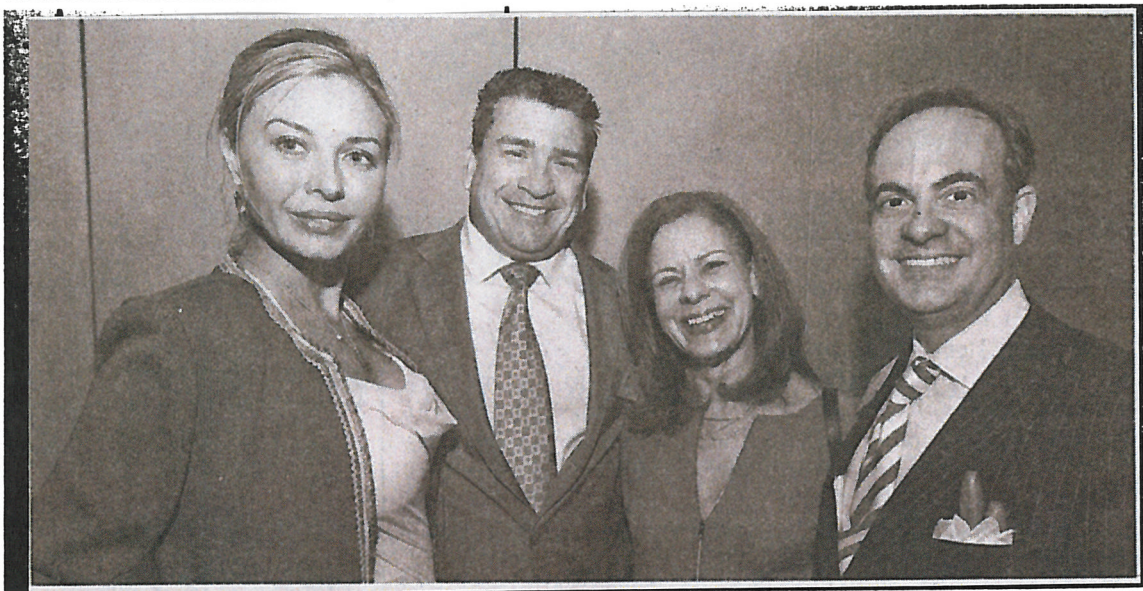


# MIAMI TODAY

WEEK OF THURSDAY, FEBRUARY 9, 2012



New Executive Director Elena Djakonova, Joe Fernandez with Fendz Asset Management, Josie Oteiza with Ocariz Garrastacho Accounting Firm and forum Chairman Carlos Deupi, Squire Saunders attorney.

## 5-year-old Miami Finance Forum expands, shifts executive directors

BY RACHEL TANNENBAUM

The Miami Finance Forum is expanding and growing, with new networking opportunities in Palm Beach County and a new executive director.

"We are expanding as the financial industry in South Florida expands," said Chairman Carlos Deupi, a corporate attorney with Hogan Lovells. "There is a large finance industry in South Florida; it is the epicenter for financial professionals, investment banking, capital markets, commercial banking, investment management and related professions – the full spectrum."

The Miami Finance Forum announced Elena Djakonova as executive director and appointed Kevin Henry, Jake Ives and Lance Ross to its board in December. Ms. Djakonova, previously the organization's marketing director, said her aims as executive director including growing and expanding the forum.

The 5-year-old forum brings together the finance community. It's hosting about ten more events this year than last, with membership rising.

"We have a couple hundred corporate members and about 10,000 on the mailing list; there is a lot of reach," Mr. Deupi said.

The Miami-based nonprofit trade association has been busy marketing events in other areas of South Florida. The idea to expand beyond Miami was sparked after Mr. Deupi heard of large number of people driving from Broward and Palm Beach to attend the forum's meetings.

"We wanted to bring events closer to them and to bring more people to the events who

haven't come before," he said.

To help with expansion, the forum hired public relations firm Roar Media nine months ago. Since then, they have been working closely together to create a professional website, events signups and a job board.

"It [Roar Media] has been instrumental and has helped with event planning and pre-event planning, they have helped with getting the message out," Mr. Deupi said.

In June 2011, the forum began hosting meetings in Fort Lauderdale every second month. Since then, Ms. Djakonova said, at least 11 meetings have been held outside of Miami.

Since the meetings in Broward have been successful, with the happy hour event in Las Olas selling out, Mr. Deupi said the forum began to discuss expanding into Palm Beach.

Hosting its first happy hour in Delray Beach in July, Ms. Djakonova said she was pleased with attendance.

"The event was in the middle of summer, when people are often vacationing," she said. "We have a core group, but we are seeing a lot of new faces."

The happy hours, Mr. Deupi said, educate those attending about finance.

"The happy hours are community-building platforms for networking with professionals involved in different areas," he said.

As for continued expansion, the forum hopes to collaborate on finance education by working with the top financial institutes in town, although Mr. Deupi said he couldn't reveal more. "We have hopes to expand financial learning in Miami."