

MARCH
2025

AQUA

PINECREST

CHAMPION OF THE ARTS

Mike Eidson

THE SALSA QUEEN

At Pinecrest Gardens

A DREAMY ESCAPE

Bestselling Author
Rochelle B. Weinstein

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VISIONARY TRIO

RAFI MALDONADO-LOPEZ, MARGARET & MIKE EIDSON

Margaret and **Mike's** extensive philanthropic and cultural contributions, paired with **Rafi's** expertise as an arts innovator and cultural entrepreneur, have shaped **Sanctuary of the Arts (SOA)** into a thriving hub for artistic excellence.

With globally recognized pedagogue **Alice Arja** as International Curriculum & Education Director, **SOA** is home to a hand-selected ensemble of pre-professional dancers. Among its esteemed faculty, Principal Ballerina **Maria Teresa del Real** - who has been recognized by **Queen Elizabeth II** and **President Reagan** - continues to elevate the Coral Gables arts scene.

From hosting world-class artists like violinist **Joshua Bell**, Hollywood star **Wilmer Valderrama**, multi-E Emmy Award-winning writer **Luis Santeiro**, the world-renowned **Cleveland Orchestra** and **New World Symphony** to Grammy winners **Aymée Nuviola** and **Néstor Torres**, **SOA** sets the standard for creative brilliance, artist empowerment, and community engagement.

Our collaborations extend to prominent organizations such as **Miami-Dade County Public Schools**, the **Donna E. Shalala MusicReach Program**, **University of Miami's Frost School of Music**, the **FIU Wolfsonian Public Humanities Lab**, **Books & Books**, as well as **Poetry in America**, **South Florida PBS** and others. These partnerships further solidify **SOA's** commitment to enriching the cultural landscape of the community.

THREE



136 Frow Ave, 33133

HISTORIC



410 Andalusia Ave, 33134

PROPERTIES



2508 S Le Jeune Rd, 33134



SANCTUARY: Mike Eidson's Love Letter to Miami



Ambitious projects meet tenacious work ethic in Mike Eidson's arts-focused restoration.

BY MORGAN C. MULLINGS

LEWIS “MIKE” EIDSON CARES about his neighbors. Before he became the historic philanthropist he is known as today, he was a budding lawyer trying cases to make our streets safer. As the founders of the Miami Chamber Music Society and the Coconut Grove Playhouse Foundation, the Eidson family's impact is deeply felt.

His last name is one of three at Colson Hicks Eidson, a top firm located in Coral Gables with a 50-year legacy. Around the corner from the firm is the iconic bookstore and café, Books & Books. Its arched windows and textured walls are reminiscent of Italian architecture—something Eidson considered when restoring the old building into the landmark it is today. He was inspired by the original architect of Coral Gables, Phineas Paist, who designed several of the iconic stone buildings seen in the planned community. By maintaining Paist's legacy while bringing something new to the table, Eidson would go on to bring a rare arts and culture experience to Coral Gables.

THE LAW OF THE LAND

It was his first big case in 1975. Colson Hicks won \$3 million for families after a young woman died in a Ford Pinto explosion. Eidson joined the firm after serving in Vietnam and began learning just how much he cared about protecting consumers and how to use his newfound power as a lawyer to change victims' lives. Under Bill Colson's guidance, they reached an \$8 million settlement in 1986 and a \$100 million settlement in 1998—all in the

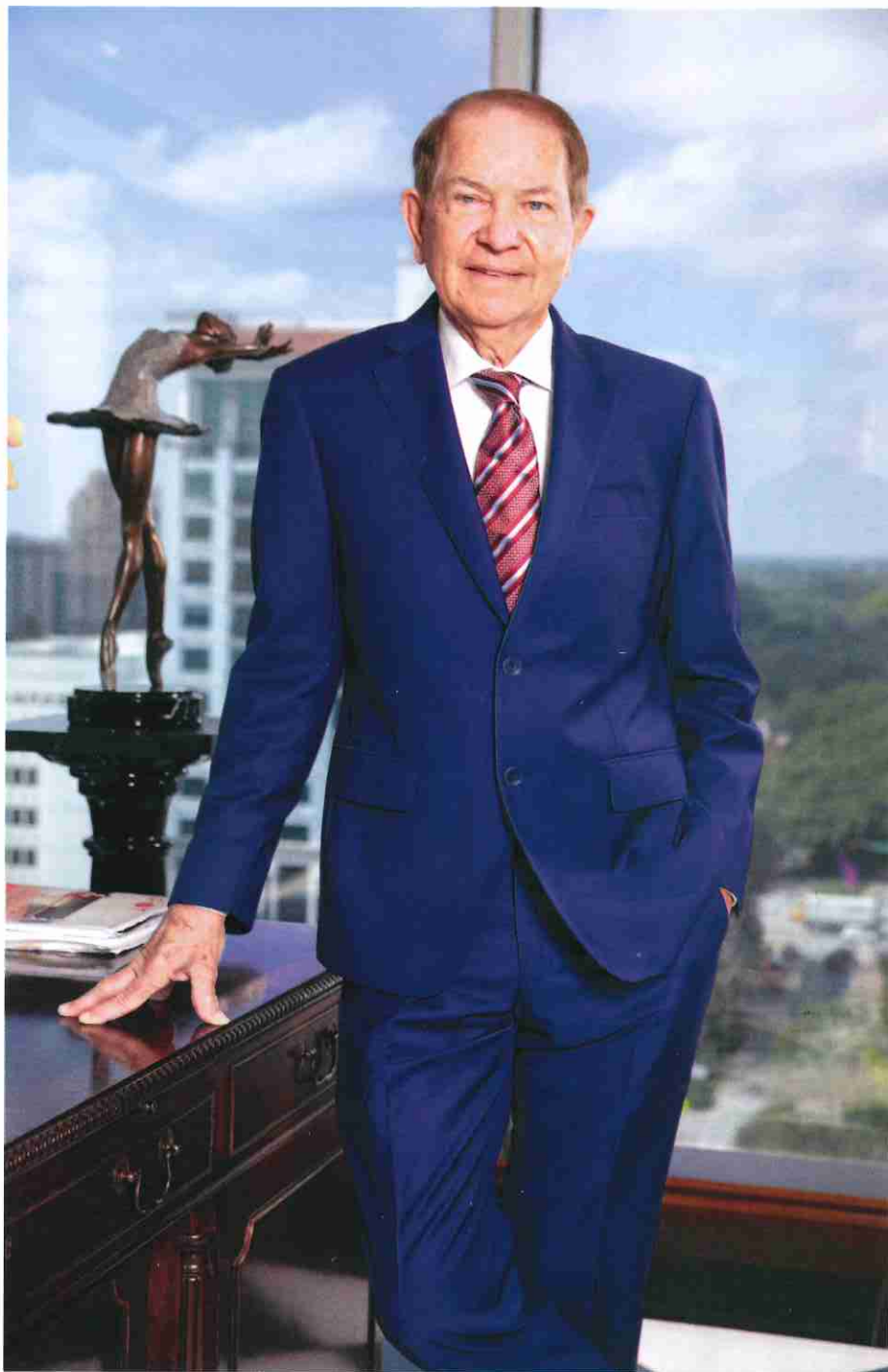
name of lost family members or wronged hospital patients. As Eidson became a more established trial lawyer, he helped shape litigation tactics for taking on large companies.

“It was always one basic argument. It was economically and technically feasible to make these changes, which would have prevented this death or injury,” Eidson said. But traditional litigators were always telling them they could not do it, and he set out to prove them wrong. “I didn't know what I was going to do when I went to work with them,” he said of his mentors Colson and Bill Hicks. “Dean Colson is my partner...but I was with his father, the guy that taught me how to do all this.”

Now with his successes as senior partner of the firm and with his nonprofit Sanctuary of the Arts, he has established himself among the great men that created Coral Gables and the generations of faith leaders in the city.

SANCTUARY: A PLACE OF REFUGE AND SAFETY

“This is what we saved. And look at it, it's spectacular,” Eidson told AQUA Pinecrest as he gave a tour of St. Mary's church. Most of the time, Eidson sees potential in things that others do not. The story of St. Mary's, the first African American church in Coral Gables, ends with a community's refuge returned. Asking the city to save a building means proposals, commission meetings and lots of red tape. “My wife and I are very big believers in community or we wouldn't be doing this and trying to make this a great place to live.”



Colson Hicks Eidson moved their headquarters to Coral Gables after 35 years in Downtown Miami.

something before anybody else sees it.”

Eidson does not view himself as a savior of anything and sometimes quips that his part in the philanthropy “doesn’t matter.” But without him, residents wouldn’t see small kids walking from school to the church to dance after classes.

He purchased the building for \$860,000 when the roof was caving in, replaced the roof and floors and made it an extension of Sanctuary of the Arts’ reach as an umbrella arts organization. Their operation, however, is stationed mainly at the historic First Church of Christ, Scientist building on Andalusia Ave. This is where locals have been experiencing a remarkable arts experience that doesn’t often exist beyond the Adrienne Arscht Center downtown. On Jan. 23, they hosted The Cleveland Orchestra’s Chamber Ensemble, and on Jan. 25, Dimension Dance Theater of Miami made their debut on the Sanctuary stage.

“The artists love it. I was really surprised. I was afraid that they wouldn’t like the fact that we have a limited backstage, but they don’t care, they want to perform. And the space itself is spectacular,” Eidson says. His wife, Dr. Margaret Eidson, calls it a jewelry box—the crown jewel being the ceiling with its halo glow and sheer size reminiscent of the pantheon’s famous hole to heaven.

Eidson did not mention architect Paist without mentioning Coral Gables founder George Merrick, who was the Christian Scientist responsible for the building’s signature stucco look. “Most people didn’t even notice it was there. Now everybody gets to enjoy it,” he said. Sanctuary for the Arts has continued to make upgrades, and now the space has enough speakers and lighting to host Broadway-style theatre productions.

The building also hosts the annual State of the Arts meeting. On Jan. 21, about 150 people gathered there over breakfast to discuss how their organizations could work together and advance the city’s art offerings and education. Eidson says it was as if “every arts organization

On Martin Luther King Jr.’s birthday weekend, Historic Coconut Grove church members gathered on the church’s new dance floor to celebrate Dr. King in an annual theatre performance. But before 2023, it was known as the dilapidated church marked for bulldozing.

Using his nonprofit Sanctuary of the Arts’ resources, Eidson fast-tracked the restoration of the historic building, turning it into a dance studio for the neighboring school children to use. “My best friend always says, ‘you always see

Dancers usually practice in the church's original service space, before they moved into the main building when the congregation grew.



in the city of Coral Gables were there.” In collaboration with the Coral Gables Community Foundation, they welcomed representatives from the University of Miami, Actor’s Playhouse, GableStage Theatre Company and Mayor Vince Lago.

FREEDOM OF MOVEMENT

Eidson loves to gush about the dancers. As former president of the Miami City Ballet board and chair of the Adrienne Arsht Center, this comes as no surprise.

Sanctuary of the Arts took popular dance shows like *Carnival of the Animals* and *Men Who Dance* to Broward Center for the Arts and Latin America. During the summer, there are choreography series and children’s dance classes. Artists who come from other countries stay at the hotel next door and walk back and forth from Sanctuary like it is their home.

Dancers are at the top of his list when it comes to collaborators. Rafi Maldonado-Lopez, Sanctuary of the Art’s principal managing director and accomplished dancer and choreographer, has been Eidson’s good friend since their days working with the Miami City Ballet. He is responsible for taking *Men Who Dance* and his take on *Carnival of the Animals* to places like Canada and Brazil.

Eidson said he is also honored to work with Edward Villela, founder of the Miami City Ballet, because, “It really started with him. He knew every single thing,” Eidson said. From putting on a ballet show, how the costumes are made, to the ideas behind famous productions, Villela answered all of Eidson’s questions.

“It was incredible, it was like taking college classes.” He gave another shout-out to Alice Arja, their international curriculum consultant. “I couldn’t do it without her.” An accomplished



ballet dancer from Brazil, Alice Arja is a respected teacher at Sanctuary. “In walks this woman who had created a syllabus to teach ballet in particular, all over the world,” Eidson said.

Eidson’s generosity has attracted “kind and generous artists” that carry the sheer weight of a packed theatre schedule, classes and interfaith experiences. “We thought it was appropriate for the arts, to leave it as a sanctuary. That’s what they were. We’re repurposing it without

losing the original purpose,” he said. That’s why Mosaic Miami, longtime interfaith community nonprofit, works and uses 18 classrooms in the buildings every day. Partnering with Sanctuary for the Arts and other local theater programs resulted in educational events like a film series and moderated discussions.

“This country has gotten to where it’s either friends or enemies...and I’m doing everything I can to change that, so that people can get along better,” Eidson said.