

Scott Hansel takes over as Chapman Partnership's CEO aiming...

This summer, the Chapman Partnership, a non-profit founded in 1995 dedicated to helping Miami's vulnerable communities and those experiencing homelessness, announced the hiring of its newest president and CEO, Scott Hansel.

Previously, Mr. Hansel was CEO of Community Partners of South Florida, a nationally accredited non-profit in Palm Beach County, since 2017. Under his leadership, the organization enhanced the quality of life for residents through a comprehensive model providing housing, financial, and mental health services.

Mr. Hansel brings over 30 years of business and entrepreneurial expertise, with a focus on improving communities by strengthening families and neighborhoods. He joined the organization in August and is poised to carry the organization into its 28th year of transforming lives.

Mr. Hansel spoke with Miami Today Reporter Genevieve Bowen.

Q: What is a typical day for you?

A: It starts with an early morning run, trying to get the blood flowing. Then, fighting a little bit of traffic from Coral Gables to downtown. It's early stage for me at the Chapman Partnership. I've just been here three weeks, so a lot of it is getting to know the staff.

I'm in meeting after meeting just learning about the people and our board members. Right now, I'm in relationship-building mode and trying to get out and meet people in the community since I'm learning a bit about Miami as well. More than anything right now it's just getting out and meeting people and learning the community better.

Q: What personal experiences helped shape your perspective on homelessness and community development?

A: I grew up in rural Appalachia in Kentucky and not in a very high-income family, although I didn't really know it at the time. I developed a sense of fairness and respect and the need for dignity because I was trying to overcome that.

Then, I spent several years in senior health care. The nonprofit world is fairly new to me. I started in Palm Beach County with a nonprofit, Community Partners of South Florida, six or seven years ago. It was my entry into the nonprofit world. Based on what I was seeing in my community, the disparities were concerning and they seemed systemic.

When I took this job, I didn't know until I got proximate to some of the issues that the face of homelessness is much more familiar than the typical narrative. You can't determine by looking at someone who is homeless and who is not. That's been driven a lot by the cost of living, the cost of housing and the fact that so many people who make low to moderate income live right on the edge of homelessness.

This move to Miami was a little different. I was focused more on the working poor and middle class in Palm Beach County, but started to see the big disparities and that a lot was going toward helping the workforce but not toward the extremely low-income folks, those who are homeless or near it.

I'm driven by my faith and I feel like this was an important role. When I was



Photo by Cristina Sullivan

Scott Hansel attacking the downstream housing challenges in aiding the homeless.

The Achiever

Scott Hansel

President and Chief Executive Officer
Chapman Partnership
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Born: Mount Vernon, KY

Age: 58

Education: Bachelor of Science in Pharmacy, University of Kentucky; Master of Business Administration, Bellarmine University

Personal Philosophy: Strength and courage are best demonstrated in one's willingness to embrace the fundamental human values of respect, kindness, integrity and vulnerability.

called by Chapman to come here, I felt it was the right place for me. Miami has done an amazing job through the Homeless Trust. Being part of that continuum of care, in partnership with the Miami Dade Homeless Trust, was a unique situation to have a significant impact, and that's why I'm here.

Q: What did you learn during your time with Community Partners of South Florida?

A: I took the role without knowing a lot about the nonprofit world. I came as an entrepreneur and with a larger corporation. However, it was managing a team, which is what I've always done, so that was consistent.

But what I didn't understand were the challenges, barriers and systemic issues that people living in disinvested communities have to overcome to succeed. It's like you're running a 100-yard dash and they're 10 to 20 yards behind the starting line and have to try to catch up. I learned that by becoming close to it, or proximate, as Bryan Stevenson said. He wrote about how being proximate to the problem is the only way to learn about it. So, I became proximate and started to understand it much better. Once I started to see it, I couldn't stop seeing it all around me.

I'm most proud of the fact that the organization ventured into housing development. As a team, we understood that housing was such an important issue for the folks that we were working with, and there was no supply. We figured we needed to create the supply. We went from not being in that space to in six years having a pipeline of both single-family and multifamily housing developments that we were putting together to create supply for folks that were priced out of the market.

One of the reasons I'm at Chapman is my experience in housing. I was also part of the Housing Leadership Council in Palm Beach County, which passed a \$200 million bond referendum that is also helping to fund the growth.

Q: What initiatives can local government and organizations explore to reduce homelessness?

A: The Homeless Trust is already using its funding to purchase existing properties. Part of the challenge at Chapman is that we're trying to stabilize folks and put them on the right path to go back out in the community. The obstacle is that the supply of housing is just not there.

The Homeless Trust has made a concerted effort to use its funding to purchase existing properties, rehabilitate them and then create those housing opportunities. State, county and city governments are putting funding toward housing. They recognize that it's a major economic challenge and if we don't create the supply, businesses don't have employees.

People are having to live two hours away and commute to work. It's a complicated, multivariable problem. Right now, both government as well as nonprofits just don't have the necessary funding to catch up. It's going to require a combination of public, private and nonprofit partnerships to see that happen.

Q: What strategies does the Chapman Partnership have to secure the necessary resources?

A: We receive about 60% of our funding from the Homeless Trust, and that comes from the food and beverage tax. The other 40% is a mix of corporate partnerships, private donors and philanthropic organizations. That portion we have to raise.

We have a philanthropic department and an extraordinary board. The biggest driver of that philanthropic arm is the relationships our board members have as well as a lot of generous people. We have many volunteers who give in kind. We also have a lot of corporate support.

We just got a nice commitment from a major corporation here and we'll be announcing that soon. We couldn't do it without that private and corporate philanthropic support. Miami is extraordinarily generous with its resources.

Q: Tell me about projects the partnership is working on.

A: A lot of it for me right now is trying to secure our culture and build. Building that trust is important. You can have a great strategy, but if your culture isn't great it will derail you. We have a great culture and team and we're building on that.

But one of the things we have to figure out is the downstream housing challenges. I'm working with the Homeless Trust and contributing my experience to help find solutions.

Also, across the street, we're building out a warehouse. It's going to become a workforce development training center. We don't know exactly what we're going to call it, but we're going to be doing things like construction and healthcare technology for the people that live here so that they're getting prepared to leave with job opportunities.

It's not just going to be training them, but it's also connecting them with corporate partners so that they leave with a job or get one while they're here. That's one of those big systemic challenges. We can find housing for folks but if they don't have the income to sustain it, it will be short-lived.

That's a major part, and we have an education and workforce development department that's doing amazing things. We're excited about growing that piece.

Q: How do you ensure that those who have been or are homeless are heard in the decision-making process?

A: That is one of the things I learned in my previous role very clearly, because it was a community development organization. A lot of times, projects, developments and policies are decided on without asking people what they want. It's like the Latin phrase "nothing about us without us is for us."

One of the things we've talked about at Chapman is to establish a resident advisory council that tells us what they want. If we're going to do something physically to the space here or we're going to bring in a new program, my first question is, have we asked the residents? What do they think? What do they want? And they always give you better information than what you will come up with on your own.

I've learned that in my time in this work. It's giving them a voice. It's back to the idea of fairness and dignity and respect. But it's more than that. You also get better ideas when you truly ask and involve people and give them a voice.

Q: How do you plan to engage the broader community to increase awareness of the causes and challenges of homelessness and foster long-lasting change?

...to build a workforce development training center for its clients

A: Another thing that I learned in my previous roles was showing up. I think it was Woody Allen who said “90% of life is showing up.” So, I want to show up everywhere I can, and that’s a hard pace to keep up.

But for example, tonight I’m going to the senior executive orientation that the commerce chamber hosts for new CEOs. I want to get involved as much as I can in the community. I have a lot to do here but it is my job to build those relationships, understand the community better, grow personally and engage other partners.

There are some things that we’re doing now that I’ve looked at already in the short time I’ve been here and said maybe there’s somebody else that does that better than us and that we can work together with. Often in the nonprofit world, people create new programs when there are 10 people around them doing the same thing.

So, we ask how we can create better partnerships with our other nonprofit peers. The only way to really know is by getting out and understanding what resources are available in the community. I’m going to encourage our senior team, as well as myself, to do that. To always ask that question, who else is doing it? Are they doing it better than us? Can we partner and create new ways to accomplish the same thing?

Another aspect is helping people understand that the face of homelessness is more familiar than it ever has been and that the stereotypical chronic homeless person is still there. The Homeless Trust is confident that we can achieve functional zero, which is rare, brief, non-recurring homelessness, in the near future. That’s going to require everybody to understand that it is a community challenge and requires the community to be involved in solving it.

Around half of our clients and residents here are families with children. That sometimes surprises people. It surprised me. When I walk through our campuses, particularly the one at Homestead, which

is a little different than the downtown one which is more of an urban environment, that one’s a little more rural. But I see people there and I can’t tell who are employees and who our residents are sometimes. The sad news is that there’s probably not a whole lot of difference.

In my previous role, I had three or four employees coming to me saying they were evicted because their rent went up \$500. That really hits home. My guess is that’s the best way to tell the story because I know that every business in downtown Miami has people that have said, “I can’t afford to live here anymore and I’m going to go someplace else.” That’s it as much as anything, using social media or whatever ways we can to tell the story in the right way.

I think as a CEO, the vast majority of the job is storytelling and rolling up other stories into one. So that’s a big part of my job, to make sure that people understand how close this is to them personally and that it’s not just someone else’s problem.

One thing that influenced me before I took the job at Community Partners of South Florida was that I was volunteering there and saw the disparities myself. I was assigned to mentor a gentleman who had been experiencing homelessness. What I learned was that he was reading Chaucer and John Stuart Mill and living in a tent behind this storage bin where he kept his Harley Davidson, the only thing that he owned and his pride and joy. But he was also going to Palm Beach State College making A’s and B’s trying to get an associate degree. That’s not who I thought I would be working with.

Q: What role do you see advancing technology like AI playing in addressing homelessness?

A: The communication part of it and getting the stories out is important. But also, being able to track data more effectively, like, where people are going and how to stay connected to folks long-term. Technology might play a real role in being able to help determine how to stay connected and keep people sustained.

One thing we’re trying to do is mine more of our data to see if we are putting our ladder against the right wall and if we’re doing the right things. A great example of this is how we’ve been tracking where our people are going to live and then looking at where we’ve helped them get employment to see if it’s sustainable. If we’re getting them a place to live in Cutler Bay and they’re working downtown, what’s the likelihood that’s going to be sustainable?

So, we’re using some of our internal information systems and data. It’s figuring out how to utilize the data and the information that we have to better serve our clients and to better prepare them for that self-determined success.

Q: What advice do you have for those who want to get involved and help reduce homelessness?

A: Just to show up and get proximate to it. The narrative that most of us have is different than what happens when we meet someone who is experiencing homelessness or work with an organization that’s trying to address the issues and realize how challenging some of the problems are and that there are barriers.

Also, in addressing major issues like economic mobility and homelessness, there are technical problems and there are adaptive problems. Technical problems mean they have a process that if you follow, you can solve that problem. These are adaptive problems. There’s no one process. You can keep doing the same process over and over and you’re not going to address the root cause.

We need more people to realize how many variables there are and understand that it’s not the personal fault of someone who is experiencing homelessness. It’s a multivariable problem that we have to try to solve. I think, for most people, getting close to it will change their opinions about it. But you’re not going to get it by watching TV or reading about it. It requires you to roll up your sleeves and come see for yourself.

If you don’t have the time to volunteer,

you can donate. But to be able to get to the point where you can say yes, you have to see it, not just physically but also emotionally. Anyone who reaches out to Chapman to donate is asked to do a tour. Chapman wants people to be invested and see boots on the ground and understand it. That’s part of the Chapman culture, for people to come and see how we work and what we do.

Q: What do you hope to contribute during your time with the Chapman Partnership?

A: First and foremost, I want to make sure that everyone who works and lives here feels safe, secure, invested in, respected and that there’s a safe space. From the ability to be vulnerable and to have a safe place, then comes creativity and innovation. That’s my first priority. I’m really focused on this team and I think that will have a major impact.

The other side of this is bringing some of my housing and community development experience to look beyond just the shelter aspect and how we stay connected to people once they leave here. How do we keep them safe, secure and sustainable?

There’s a term I’ve heard a lot in this field which is self-determined success as opposed to self-sufficiency, which is a little bit of a negative term. I love that idea of self-determined success. My goal is to be in partnership with the Homeless Trust, which is working hard to get to this functional zero and sustainable success.

Then, I hope to help the community see the reasons it’s important to invest in housing for the extremely low-income and not just focus on the workforce piece. The reality is, that’s a harder place to get to just because the financing is much more difficult. It’s going to take time. I hope to be part of that solution.

I hope to stay here in this role for a good while. I believe so much in the mission of this organization and ethos that Mr. [Alvah] Chapman, who was the architect of this, put in place. He had a passionate, spiritual focus that created this sacred space.