



## JACQUELINE DASCAL-CHARIFF

Chairman, Continental National Bank, Miami

Jacqueline Dascal-Chariff never envisioned a full-time career in financial services. But now, the daughter of the late banking pioneer and philanthropist, Carlos “Charles” Dascal relies on her marketing and entrepreneurial skills to build and expand on his legacy.

Photo by Jorge Parra

**O**ne year ago, Jacqueline Dascal-Chariff became the chairman of Continental National Bank, the first Cuban-American owned bank in South Florida. She oversees the bank's board of directors and is responsible for business development, marketing, communications and branding. The institution has more than \$350 million in assets. An experienced entrepreneur in the marketing and distribution of international consumer brands, she spent 10 years as a member of the bank's board of directors before becoming chairman. She holds a bachelor's degree in advertising and communications from Florida International University.

**EXECUTIVE South Florida magazine:** *Was it always your intention to enter the banking industry and join the family business? Did it take much convincing from your father and other family members to do so?*

**Jacqueline Dascal-Chariff:** No. It was never my intention to become a banker. My father was very big in the car business as well. I've always been an independent individual. I started my own business in advertising from the bedroom of my parents' home. I sold imprinted items to banking customers. I've always been an entrepreneur. I've had many different businesses that I've been involved in ... anywhere from developing a micro-brewery beer when that was a big thing to being in the in-line skate business when that was big. My claim to fame is how to know the next big thing and how to capitalize on it.

**EXECUTIVE:** *What is your vision for the business in terms of growth and development?*

**Dascal-Chariff:** Being from a different generation I have a different vision. We revamped and re-launched the website. We also launched our mobile app which I'm very happy with. Most of the banks of our size do not have that availability to their customers so I guess we're ahead of the curve. We are adding quite a few different aspects to the focus of the bank ... we are about to come out with a residential program that we are going very strong with. We have a wealth management division which we're looking to grow aggressively. We have this customer base in some cases from the very beginning of our 40-year history. Lots of baby boomers are accumulating their wealth and are in need of advice. We opened a branch in Sweetwater. We're looking to develop a program for teachers and students at FIU.

**EXECUTIVE:** *Has your experience in the distribution of international consumer brands led to growth in international clientele for the bank?*

**Dascal-Chariff:** Everything is related to marketing and I'm by nature a marketing person. That's how my brain works. If you know how to communicate and give people what they need you're going to be successful. As far as international per se, we are a local bank so we focus on local projects in financing. We have many international customers. It's not as though we are going out to the international market to look for opportunities. I am a Hispanic woman. We were the first Cuban-American bank in the country. Miami is a very Hispanic city. So I have the best of both cultures to give me the ability to relate to the two different mixes of what Miami is about.

**EXECUTIVE:** *As the Miami area continues another round of explosive growth, particularly through vertical real estate development, do you think this the right route to take?*

**Dascal-Chariff:** : I've got to tell you, it's getting crowded. The traffic is horrible. All the growth is great up to a point, but at what expense? This



is not something Miami suffered from even a few years back. We're going to have to revisit the infrastructure as all of these projects become completed.

**EXECUTIVE:** *What types of real estate lending does the bank undertake? Is it focused mainly on small business objectives? Does the bank envision the financing of large-scale, multi-use projects in the future?*

**Dascal-Chariff:** Our main focus has been up to now on the commercial real estate market. Going forward we're going to focus very strongly on the residential market, but proceeding with great caution. I feel a lot of this growth is being financed by buyers coming in with big cash payments.

**EXECUTIVE:** *What do you believe is Continental's chief competitive advantage amid South Florida's universe of community banks? Do you have any plans for acquisitions or expansion?*

**Dascal-Chariff:** Our biggest advantage is our deep understanding of the community and our customers. The bank has been here a long time and we have grown with many of our clients.

I have an entrepreneur's mentality, which is different than the typical banker. It helps me relate to my customer in a way that other bankers probably can't.

Automation is a beautiful thing, but that personal touch is special and it is difficult for a big bank to appreciate that. We want to help our customers grow their business and be there for them and not just be a recording on the other end of the line. We're always open to acquisitions if it's in our desirable footprint.

We will be the exclusive bank in Codina's Downtown Doral project and we will look at other expansion opportunities as they make themselves known. **E**