

## How 2 new Miami Tech endeavors aim 'to bring the heartbeat back'



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## **5 questions with Chris Daniels about The LAB Miami and Reefside Ventures: 'We want to be the place where the dots connect for entrepreneurs and for the tech community'**

**By Nancy Dahlberg**

When Chris Daniels shared on LinkedIn that he has joined The LAB Miami as General Manager and he is partnering with Erick Gavin to create and run a full-cycle entrepreneurship program called Reefside Ventures in Miami, he described it best: It's a "full-circle moment" in his 10-year journey to help accelerate Miami's rise as a global tech hub.

Daniels most recently helped create and run, with Gavin, the Built In Miami program as part of Venture Miami, and earlier founded and ran the Shrimp Society to engage founders and young professionals at the earliest stages. He also has worked at startups and dabbled in angel investing. It all started a decade ago in Daniels' days as a "startup junkie" while studying at University Miami. He would spend evenings at tech events at The LAB Miami, one of Miami tech's pioneers, to experience and be part of "the real startup world."

The LAB has been expanded, renovated and reopened now as two entrepreneurial spaces in the heart of Wynwood. With a campus-like feel, the original LAB, at 400 NW 26<sup>th</sup> St., has been renamed The DOCK by the LAB Miami and will continue to be an entrepreneurial flex space for early-stage startups, founders, creatives, technical talent and community members. There's now a second space nearby, at 2750 NW 3<sup>rd</sup> Ave., Suite 24, which is called The LAB and is a membership community for later-stage startups, investors, and community leaders. For MiamiTech OGs, that's in the zebra-striped Wynwood Building, the location of The LAB Miami's very first space. Involved in the reincarnation is Danny Lafuente, an original LAB co-founder, startup operator and community leader Ayal Stern, and Scott Srebnick, CEO of Goldman Properties.

The LAB campus, now both buildings, will also house Reefside Ventures, which [according to Gavin](#) will be "a new incubator, accelerator, and venture platform built to power Miami's next wave of exceptional startups." Reefside will roll out three tailored programs to meet founders' needs at every stage: Reefside Sprints, which will include weekend bootcamps focused on specific startup challenges; Reefside Incubate, an 8-week, in-person incubator to help early-stage founders turn ideas into products; and Reefside Accelerate, a 10-week accelerator for post-product startups, laser-focused on scaling and fundraising. They are inviting the community to a [town hall event](#) on March 5 at The LAB.

I sat down with Daniels [pictured above] to learn more about the vision and plans for the newly opened LAB Miami campus and Reefside Ventures. Our conversation has been condensed.

***Q: What inspired you to take on the GM role?***

I always had a lot of love, honestly, for The LAB Miami. The new role was an incredible opportunity to help build the next chapter of something that was an amazing experience for me, and then also to think about what does Miami need now, and start chipping away at that next vision.

Miami had this tremendous growth during COVID, with all the new transplants and new energy and new funds here. For a while it felt like freshman year, where everyone wanted to go to events and meet everyone, but that has settled out over the past couple of years. What I've seen is that now people want high-quality programming around technology, around startups, around more in-depth topics. Miami's matured and the tech scene has matured. Of course, there's still a time and a place for broad, general events, and those are super fun and great networking opportunities.

And then, I think we identified a pretty big gap around early-stage funding, and specifically that funding coming from Miami-based investors. So that's a big piece of what we want to do here at the LAB: bringing out great startups and giving local investors the first opportunity to invest in them.



*The LAB, at 2750 NW 3rd Ave., Suite 24, is a membership community for later-stage startups, investors, and community leaders.*

***Q: What is your big goal for this next generation of The LAB in particular?***

The word that keeps coming up for me is 'heartbeat'. The big goal for me would bring the heartbeat of the Miami tech community back and under one roof – that's what we can bring to the table – so that there's more collaboration, more startups being started, growing and being funded, more talent getting opportunities to join those startups, more giving back to the next generation from founders and operators that have been successful. I always thought that a cool part of the Miami tech ecosystem was that successful founders and operators were always willing to help up and coming startups, and I'm sure they still are. I just don't think there's many opportunities right now to bump into those people casually, or to have structured programming around that.

Each LAB partner, between Goldman Properties, Danny, Ayal and myself, bring a unique piece to the puzzle. Obviously, the Goldman family has invested so much love and care and resources into Wynwood and The LAB, and it's clear that they have a long-term vision for Wynwood as the center of innovation in Miami. Ayal brings all his experience building big companies and navigating those challenges, and he has a bunch of investor connections, especially with running the Miami Israeli Collective. Then with Danny, who brings that original vision and love for the space and the concept to congregate, learn, and have fun together in the tech scene, and my experience with programming and working in the trenches with startups, it just feels like the stars lined up.

***Q: Tell me more about what Reefside Ventures brings to the ecosystem?***

We always thought with Built In Miami, we have all these amazing founders and they want to go to the next step. The Built In Miami curriculum was built for idea to product launch – and so what's the next part?

With Reefside, Erick and I are looking to have this progression where very early-stage companies can come in, be inspired and learn, and then go through the Reefside Incubator and get a product out, and then some of them will move on to our flagship accelerator and we help get them funded and increase their traction for their next chapter. It's really hard for startup founders to get a first check in Miami. Something needs to be done, we clearly know it does – let's launch this and fill that gap.





*Erick Gavin, exosystem operator and Reefside Ventures Partner*

***Q: How are you taking what you learned over the past 10 years to Reefside?***

I really love getting into proverbial trenches with the startup founders and getting on a whiteboard and just unblocking certain challenges or thinking through different strategies. One of the main takeaways from my journey is that for companies to get funding, unless they have a crazy track record of experience as a founder, traction is the winning pitch, especially in Miami where the investor base leans more toward that of 'show me, don't just tell me.' We have to gear our companies toward that.

Another big learning is the power of momentum. With the Built In Miami programs, we would see clear differentiation in the founders that were working with a lot of velocity, meaning they're making changes quickly, they're having more sales calls, they're having more discovery calls, and that creates the momentum that they carry into funding. And for the ones who weren't able to create momentum, it's an uphill battle. That ties into what we're trying to do with Reefside, to get people on this track to build momentum.

***Q: What is your March 5 event, the Miami Tech Town Hall?***

In a lot of conversations that Erick and I have been having, it seems like some people are just dissatisfied and don't feel that heartbeat so the event is a way to address a little bit of the elephant in the room. People are feeling a little bit lost in the tech community, and either don't know how to get involved or feel less inspired than they did a year or two ago. We wanted to have a town hall to together share resources and opportunities and programs to address the different gaps that now exist. [Register here.](#)

We want to be the place where the dots connect for entrepreneurs and for the tech community. We're excited to be that home base for entrepreneurs, for investors, for startup operators, for technical talent, and to help facilitate all those connections.



*Another view of The LAB, where the Miami Tech Town Hall will happen on March 5. Photos provided by The LAB Miami.*