

FLAGAMI

Merchants: Vagrancy is 'bad for business'

■ A Flagami merchant and activist is seeking help from city and county police and officials to reduce the number of vagrants, who many say negatively affect business on local streets.

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Last week, Flagami merchants **Barón DaParré** and **Ramón Cruz** found two tipsy men behind their building, lounging on a cardboard box with a bottle of cheap vodka next to them.

DaParré and Cruz told the shaggy-haired men to leave. Suddenly, the men were in **DaParré's** face.

"What are you gonna do? If I get arrested, I'll be right back here tomorrow," one of them said, slurring his words.

DaParré pointed at the men as they left the alley.

"This is what we have to deal with on an almost daily basis. People around here are just fed up," he said.

He's not alone. Many of the merchants along Flagami's Southwest Eighth Street business corridor have recurring problems with the area's high concentration of vagrants and panhandlers.

"Some of these guys are genuinely looking for honest work," **DaParré** said. "I understand people need to make a

living. But a lot of them are just bums, and they're affecting our livelihood."

DaParré, who runs a photography studio and modeling agency at 7365 SW 8th St., is trying to rally other merchants and residents to press local officials and police for help in cleaning up the streets.

Most of Flagami is in City of Miami territory, except for the south side of Eighth Street, which is Miami-Dade County territory. **Tomás Regalado**, the Miami commissioner who represents Flagami, said the problem is real and recurring.

"I myself have had confrontations with these guys, and they do get belligerent," **Regalado** said. "It's a problem that's been going from bad to worse."

DaParré, founder of the Flagami Action Committee, gets many of the same complaints: men drinking in front of stores, harassing customers for money and using sidewalks and alleys as toilets.

Lisvany Sormeller, who manages Arrow Supermarket, said the situation is bad for



JUAN LOPEZ/FOR THE MIAMI HERALD

STEPPING UP: Photographer and activist Baron DaParré is coordinating efforts among city and county officials and police to address problems related to vagrancy.

business. "They harass elderly people for money. They're always peeing in front and around the side of our store," he said.

Marisleysis Gonzalez, owner of **Marisleysis Hair Design** at 7383 SW 8th St., echoes these complaints.

"I've had them throw up in front of my salon. I'm the one who has to clean it up," said **Gonzalez**, better known as having been the caretaker for Cuban boy **Elián González** during his stay in Miami. "They get into fights. I've had to call the police. Sometimes my clients are afraid to leave

after getting their hair done."

DaParré has often used his own money to print and distribute fliers and letters to his neighbors, to make them aware of the Action Committee's presence and purpose.

"I applaud **Barón's** efforts," said County Commissioner **Rebeca Sosa**, whose district includes Flagami's southernmost strip. "We do need to join forces to help protect the area. Little by little, I will do whatever I can to help," she said.

DaParré said the Flagami Action Committee will meet with Miami police, including

Cmdr. **Milady Irizarry** and Chief **John Timoney** on Jan. 31.

In the meantime, **DaParré** is distributing copies of an affidavit home and business owners can sign, authorizing police to confront vagrants when they enter private property — even if the owner isn't around.

"I'm trying to get a coordinated effort going with **Giselle Hidalgo** from the state attorney's office, so they can also send one of their investigators into the area," he said. "They have increased patrols. And I will continue trying to get everyone on the same page."