

### Nearly 100 City of Miami employees made more than \$200,000 last year



Miami has only recently shed its notorious distinction as the nation's poorest municipality, thanks to the buoying effects of the real-estate boom, just in time to get clobbered by the nationwide recession/depression rooted in the collapse of that very boom. Now the good times are over, and the city faces declining revenues across the board.

Yet even with an 8.2 percent unemployment rate for Miami-Dade and Broward counties, and shrinking tax revenues, Miami, with a population of 404,048 and a median income just over \$26,000 per year, continues to compensate dozens of employees at pay rates far greater than comparable cities. Much of the expense is related to the city's lax management of its fire department, where salaries negotiated by the firefighters' union are generous, and where vacancies and strict staffing rules have pushed overtime pay through the roof.

In calendar year 2008, a total of 97 city employees received more than \$200,000 in compensation, costing taxpayers more than \$22.76 million, according to documents prepared by the city's budget office and department of employee relations. Interestingly, 84 percent of those individuals were middle- to high-level supervisors at the fire department.

Obtaining this information was not easy, even though under Florida's public records law it must be made available to anyone requesting it. In this case, a *BT* representative, frustrated in his efforts to acquire the data on his own, turned to a city commissioner for help. City bureaucrats did act on the commissioner's request and produced two spreadsheets listing every city employee whose total compensation in 2008 came to \$200,000 or more. The commissioner, however, has since asked not to be identified.

## Gravy Train

Written by Erik Bojnansky  
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Other city officials, among them budget director Michael Boudreaux, city manager Pete Hernandez, and chief financial officer Larry Spring, all declined comment, didn't respond to e-mails (or in one case an office visit), and didn't return phone calls. No one, it seems, wants to discuss, or even be associated with, questions about how the city can continue paying such high salaries and balance the budget when property and resort taxes are plummeting. Even Mayor Manny Diaz, never at a loss for comment when talking about pet projects like a taxpayer-subsidized Marlins baseball stadium, was tight-lipped about the salaries. His spokeswoman, Helena Poleo, would only say this: "He does not have any comment."

Why the reluctance? Because the issue of overpaying city employees is a public relations minefield -- especially when it involves the politically active fire union, known for its ability to mobilize during elections. As BT contributor Frank Rollason, a former Miami firefighter and assistant city manager, put it in a March column analyzing a proposal to freeze the salaries of the city's *nonunion* employees: "Union families vote in great numbers and are very active in supporting candidates who protect their salaries and benefits. Nonunion employees serve at the will of the manager and are safer targets...."

Obviously this is not a subject that Miami officials like to talk about. Compare that attitude to the City of Fort Lauderdale, which for the past two decades has annually released the names of its highest-paid employees. Headlines in the *Miami Herald* and *Sun-Sentinel* expressed alarm that 300 of Fort Lauderdale's 2500 employees made more than \$100,000 in 2008. Yet only 25 topped the \$200,000 mark, at a cost of \$3.9 million.



A more revealing city-to-city comparison is Miami and Atlanta. In terms of population, Atlanta (519,000) is substantially bigger than Miami (404,000), but the two cities are very close when it comes to cost of living and wage levels. Despite the need to serve 115,000 more residents, Atlanta has just 500 more city workers than Miami -- 4500 vs. 4000. Plus the City of Atlanta is responsible for running Hartsfield International Airport, which is big and busy and comparable to Miami International Airport. But down here, the county operates the airport, not the city.

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Somehow Atlanta manages to get everything done with just six city employees who make \$200,000 per year or more. *Six*. Of those, two are airport executives, meaning they have no equivalent in the City of Miami and shouldn't be counted. So a mere four City of Atlanta employees have salaries in the \$200,000 range, compared to 97 for Miami. (For more details, see accompanying charts.)

Atlanta's Big Six: Police Chief Richard Pennington, chief financial officer Margaret Crenshaw, chief operating officer Greg Giornelli, city attorney Elizabeth Chandler, aviation general manager Benjamin R. DeCosta, and aviation deputy general manager Arnaldo Ruiz. Total annual salary costs: \$1.33 million.

Miami may not have an aviation department, but it does have a fire department, officially known as the Department of Fire-Rescue. The department's current budget is \$80.1 million. Of its 685 employees, 81 received more than \$200,000 in total compensation in 2008. Capt. Jon Hart was the highest-paid person among that elite crew. In fact he brought home more money last year than anyone employed by the City of Miami: \$308,317.88.

Robert Suarez, president of the Miami Association of Fire Fighters union, says Hart, a rescue supervisor, and several other supervisors work marathon hours, sometimes as many as 100 per week, to offset vacancies that plague the department.

"The only way someone could have gotten that amount is an enormous amount of overtime," Suarez says. "That is not anyone's regular salary."

Also inflating firefighter salaries are three years' worth of retroactive pay raises doled out to lieutenants, captains, and chief fire officers after the Miami City Commission ratified the fire union's contract in 2007, Suarez says. Some of those payments were issued in 2008. As a result, several workers in the fire department were paid more than their bosses.

In addition to Hart, five who held ranks of captain and chief fire officer were paid more than city manager Hernandez, Miami's tenth-highest-paid employee, who received \$274,980.88. Eleven supervisors are listed as receiving more than fire Chief William "Shorty" Bryson, who pulled in

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\$260,557.76. Among them is Thomas Flores, who retired as an assistant chief and payroll division boss in 2008 but was brought back briefly as a consultant to assist the city's payment of retroactive pay raises. Flores banked \$267,704.93, according to city documents, which would make him the 15th-highest-paid city employee.

Commissioner Joe Sanchez, a candidate for mayor, was unavailable for comment at deadline. But his commission aide pointed out that Sanchez was the lone vote against this year's budget because it raised residents' garbage fees -- though garbage fees are not directly affected by employee salaries.



Sanchez's opponent for mayor, Commissioner Tomas Regalado, worries the City of Miami will soon face a huge deficit owing to declining property and resort tax revenues, which may lead to the firing of low-level, low-paid workers. "I think that there is a total divorce between reality and city business," Regalado says. "The administration has not figured out that we are in an economic crisis. My fear is that, come budget process, the little people will be the ones affected and the big salaries will not be touched. To me that is not only wrong but also immoral."

As Regalado understands it, there are plenty of employees among Miami's 4000-plus workforce who make more than six figures annually. "There are more than 700 employees who make \$100,000," he says. "That is a very accurate figure. I have heard that from people who ought to know."

Yet Regalado doesn't want to criticize firefighters' salaries, instead directing his ire toward "the suits," upper management. "I think that probably they will try to shift the focus on uniform people, but there are a lot of suits who make a lot of money," he says, adding that several city

# Gravy Train

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departments are top-heavy with three or four assistant directors.

But even without overtime, firefighters make a decent amount of money. According to Lt. Ignatius “Iggy” Carroll, Jr., spokesman for the fire department, the salary range for rank-and-file firefighters is between \$44,685 and \$67,993 per year. Officers make more. A fire lieutenant’s salary range is between \$51,823 and \$81,191. A fire captain’s is from \$59,956 to \$93,934. Chief fire officers are paid between \$69,351 and \$108,653. Assistant fire chiefs, deputy fire chiefs, and fire chiefs earn salaries between \$133,134 and \$223,391.

Union president Suarez points out that fire-rescue responds to 90,000 emergency incidents a year, with 80 percent having to do with medical emergencies and 20 percent dealing with fires. Suarez also insists that the city would not have to add so much overtime on top of firefighters’ base salaries if the city were more adept at filling vacant positions and issuing promotions. Right now there are eight captain vacancies and ten lieutenant vacancies within the fire department, Suarez says. Since the fire-union contract requires firefighters attached to a station, a fire truck, or a rescue vehicle to be supervised, supervisors such as Hart must work far beyond their normal 48-hour shifts. “I know one of the reasons [Hart’s] salary was high is the city’s delay in promoting captains,” he says.

Suarez, a lieutenant, claims he is actually frustrated that so much money is going to overtime. He fears that equipment needs may suffer. “It kills me because it all comes out of the fire department’s budget,” he says.

**Miami's Top Salaries**

Rank	Name	Job Title	Department	2008 Compensation	2007 Compensation	2006 Compensation	2005 Compensation	2004 Compensation	2003 Compensation
1	Tom	Chief	Fire	223,391.00	210,000.00	195,000.00	180,000.00	165,000.00	150,000.00
2	Ignatius "Iggy" Carroll, Jr.	Lt.	Fire	81,191.00	75,000.00	70,000.00	65,000.00	60,000.00	55,000.00
3	John	Chief	Police	75,000.00	70,000.00	65,000.00	60,000.00	55,000.00	50,000.00
4	John	Chief	Police	75,000.00	70,000.00	65,000.00	60,000.00	55,000.00	50,000.00
5	John	Chief	Police	75,000.00	70,000.00	65,000.00	60,000.00	55,000.00	50,000.00
6	John	Chief	Police	75,000.00	70,000.00	65,000.00	60,000.00	55,000.00	50,000.00
7	John	Chief	Police	75,000.00	70,000.00	65,000.00	60,000.00	55,000.00	50,000.00
8	John	Chief	Police	75,000.00	70,000.00	65,000.00	60,000.00	55,000.00	50,000.00
9	John	Chief	Police	75,000.00	70,000.00	65,000.00	60,000.00	55,000.00	50,000.00
10	John	Chief	Police	75,000.00	70,000.00	65,000.00	60,000.00	55,000.00	50,000.00
11	John	Chief	Police	75,000.00	70,000.00	65,000.00	60,000.00	55,000.00	50,000.00
12	John	Chief	Police	75,000.00	70,000.00	65,000.00	60,000.00	55,000.00	50,000.00
13	John	Chief	Police	75,000.00	70,000.00	65,000.00	60,000.00	55,000.00	50,000.00
14	John	Chief	Police	75,000.00	70,000.00	65,000.00	60,000.00	55,000.00	50,000.00
15	John	Chief	Police	75,000.00	70,000.00	65,000.00	60,000.00	55,000.00	50,000.00
16	John	Chief	Police	75,000.00	70,000.00	65,000.00	60,000.00	55,000.00	50,000.00
17	John	Chief	Police	75,000.00	70,000.00	65,000.00	60,000.00	55,000.00	50,000.00
18	John	Chief	Police	75,000.00	70,000.00	65,000.00	60,000.00	55,000.00	50,000.00
19	John	Chief	Police	75,000.00	70,000.00	65,000.00	60,000.00	55,000.00	50,000.00
20	John	Chief	Police	75,000.00	70,000.00	65,000.00	60,000.00	55,000.00	50,000.00
21	John	Chief	Police	75,000.00	70,000.00	65,000.00	60,000.00	55,000.00	50,000.00
22	John	Chief	Police	75,000.00	70,000.00	65,000.00	60,000.00	55,000.00	50,000.00
23	John	Chief	Police	75,000.00	70,000.00	65,000.00	60,000.00	55,000.00	50,000.00
24	John	Chief	Police	75,000.00	70,000.00	65,000.00	60,000.00	55,000.00	50,000.00
25	John	Chief	Police	75,000.00	70,000.00	65,000.00	60,000.00	55,000.00	50,000.00
26	John	Chief	Police	75,000.00	70,000.00	65,000.00	60,000.00	55,000.00	50,000.00
27	John	Chief	Police	75,000.00	70,000.00	65,000.00	60,000.00	55,000.00	50,000.00
28	John	Chief	Police	75,000.00	70,000.00	65,000.00	60,000.00	55,000.00	50,000.00
29	John	Chief	Police	75,000.00	70,000.00	65,000.00	60,000.00	55,000.00	50,000.00
30	John	Chief	Police	75,000.00	70,000.00	65,000.00	60,000.00	55,000.00	50,000.00
31	John	Chief	Police	75,000.00	70,000.00	65,000.00	60,000.00	55,000.00	50,000.00
32	John	Chief	Police	75,000.00	70,000.00	65,000.00	60,000.00	55,000.00	50,000.00
33	John	Chief	Police	75,000.00	70,000.00	65,000.00	60,000.00	55,000.00	50,000.00
34	John	Chief	Police	75,000.00	70,000.00	65,000.00	60,000.00	55,000.00	50,000.00
35	John	Chief	Police	75,000.00	70,000.00	65,000.00	60,000.00	55,000.00	50,000.00
36	John	Chief	Police	75,000.00	70,000.00	65,000.00	60,000.00	55,000.00	50,000.00
37	John	Chief	Police	75,000.00	70,000.00	65,000.00	60,000.00	55,000.00	50,000.00
38	John	Chief	Police	75,000.00	70,000.00	65,000.00	60,000.00	55,000.00	50,000.00
39	John	Chief	Police	75,000.00	70,000.00	65,000.00	60,000.00	55,000.00	50,000.00
40	John	Chief	Police	75,000.00	70,000.00	65,000.00	60,000.00	55,000.00	50,000.00
41	John	Chief	Police	75,000.00	70,000.00	65,000.00	60,000.00	55,000.00	50,000.00
42	John	Chief	Police	75,000.00	70,000.00	65,000.00	60,000.00	55,000.00	50,000.00
43	John	Chief	Police	75,000.00	70,000.00	65,000.00	60,000.00	55,000.00	50,000.00
44	John	Chief	Police	75,000.00	70,000.00	65,000.00	60,000.00	55,000.00	50,000.00
45	John	Chief	Police	75,000.00	70,000.00	65,000.00	60,000.00	55,000.00	50,000.00
46	John	Chief	Police	75,000.00	70,000.00	65,000.00	60,000.00	55,000.00	50,000.00
47	John	Chief	Police	75,000.00	70,000.00	65,000.00	60,000.00	55,000.00	50,000.00
48	John	Chief	Police	75,000.00	70,000.00	65,000.00	60,000.00	55,000.00	50,000.00
49	John	Chief	Police	75,000.00	70,000.00	65,000.00	60,000.00	55,000.00	50,000.00
50	John	Chief	Police	75,000.00	70,000.00	65,000.00	60,000.00	55,000.00	50,000.00

Figures represent total 2008 compensation, including overtime, settlements, retroactive pay raises, deferred compensation, health insurance, cell phone and automobile allowances. Some individuals who retired at the end of 2008 may have received unused vacation and sick time.

Firefighters, administrators, and department heads were not the only employees who received more than \$200,000 in 2008, according to the city’s spreadsheets. Number two on the list was

## Gravy Train

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Fernando Acosta, a Miami police officer and sergeant-at-arms for the Miami Commission. Acosta earned \$295,075.22 in 2008, according to the city's spreadsheet. Reached at the mayor's office, Acosta had this to say: "I *wish* I made that much money." Then he referred all questions to police Chief John Timoney. (Timoney is number four on the city's list, at \$290,532.66.)

The Miami Police Department's public information office did not reply to e-mailed questions about Acosta's responsibilities as sergeant-at-arms. "He drives the mayor around -- that's *it*," says Tomas Regalado dismissively.

With memories still fresh of a recent sergeant-at-arms controversy at Miami-Dade County, where sworn officers chauffeured county commissioners last year at a cost of \$743,845, *BT* attempted to ask Mayor Diaz how Acosta managed to be paid more than Timoney in 2008, as well as what duties he performs. In response, mayoral spokeswoman Poleo suggested that *BT* "look up" the sergeant-at-arms job description.

The city's Employee Relations Department describes a sergeant-at-arms as "an executive-level position" filled by a sworn police officer "responsible for maintaining order and providing security during any official assembly of the city commission." The

Organization	Job Definition	Name	Change Value Salary Annual \$MM
DDA Aviation General Manager	Aviation General Mgr	DeCosta, Benjamin	275,907
EDC Chief Operating Officer	Chief Operating Officer	Gorelli, Gregory	221,109
DDF Chief Financial Officer	Chief Financial Officer	Glass, James W.	215,000
LAW City Attorney	City Attorney	Chandler, Elizabeth B	209,325
DDA Aviation General Manager	Aviation Deputy Gen Mgr	Diaz, Mario C	205,323
APD Chief of Police	Police Chief	Pennington, Richard J	200,211

officer also provides "protective coverage" to city commissioners and is responsible for "coordinating necessary transportation for city commissioners to meetings and special events."

In other words, chauffeur city commissioners around town and make sure nobody gets out of hand at city hall.

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