

Lack of manpower, not of funding, kills Art Basel Miami Beach buses

By ZACHARY S. FAGENSON

A shuttle system that last December bused thousands of arts enthusiasts around Miami's art fairs and Art Basel on Miami Beach won't be back next month.

The loss isn't due to lack of funds but lack of manpower at the City of Miami department that organized the buses.

"I contributed some money out of my budget," said Robert Parente, director of the Mayor's Office of Film and Cultural Affairs, which organized the shuttles. "Each fair contributed X number of dollars and [the system] was self-sustaining."

But amid city budget cuts, the office in October lost its \$245,000 annual budget and Mr. Parente was forced to lay off his two-person staff. That left him under the city manager's budget. He now focuses on film permitting such productions as the Emmy Award-winning "Burn Notice," shot in Coconut Grove.

Without the staff, the buses

don't roll.

"We were in the process of gearing it up," Mr. Parente said. "We weren't sure if we were going to be successful based on [the fairs'] economic ability to participate, but once I lost all my staff it became a virtual impossibility."

The program began four years ago to move fairgoers around the events in Wynwood.

But as the December art week grew, the system, based at the Shops at Midtown to take advantage of its 2,500 parking spaces, included one route that ran through Wynwood and another that moved arts enthusiasts between the mainland and Miami Beach.

With several buses on each route, Mr. Parente said, fairgoers could hop on a bus about every 15 minutes and, he estimated, 8,000 to 12,000 did.

"It really had to have enough of a budget to establish frequency," he said. "The lack of frequency saves you money, but people are less likely" to

use it.

The bus costs totaled about \$10,000 last year, he added.

And while the buses can "absolutely" come back if the city regains the staff, it's unlikely the myriad art fairs will come together to organize an inter-connecting system.

"Remember," Mr. Parente said, "you're talking about bringing together a group of businesses that while somewhat collegial, their interests are their interests."

But Art Miami Director Nick Korniloff said the competing fairs worked together in the past and may in the future.

"Obviously we would love the support of the city," he said. "Last year it was the shows who came together and collaborated and put the funds together to run the shuttles buses."

And while Art Miami will still run shuttles between its location near the Shops at Midtown and Art Basel, Mr. Korniloff said, the other fairs are "making their own decisions."