



Cuban Exile Lives All-American Dream

By Donna Kreutz

Electrical engineer Jose Garcia-Piñeyro came to the US from his native Cuba to present lectures at CUNY College in New York in 1993. He seized the opportunity to start a new life in a country built on freedom, not communism. At the time, Garcia was Technical Director of the Cuban Film Institute. His first job in the US brought him into the trade-show industry. By 2000, he started his own company and in 2013 launched The Water Expo in Miami, FL.

Garcia is President and Executive Director of Show Winners Corporation, the events promotion company he founded. He's directed approximately 40 top-level hemispheric events, many involving the Latin American and Caribbean markets. "Some providers in the US do not understand how to deal with such markets—the language barriers, the different cultures, even the volatility of governments and economies. Our job is to make the connection easy and effective without having to leave the US. We have a bilingual, multi-cultural staff that understands what has to be done to make the connection happen in an effective and successful way."

At a minimum, it's essential that you have someone



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who is fluent in Spanish at your Water Expo exhibit every day, he said. Cultural sensitivity also is key. "That's a huge continent below us. There are countries where the population is descended from indigenous peoples and others whose ancestors came from Spain, Africa or Portugal. Basically you will find a broad mixture, with specific percentages depending on the country. You need to have that perspective before you try to connect. Business starts always with a personal connection. If it's not there, it doesn't matter how good the product is or how much it is needed." Garcia said businesses also need to be informed about government situations and economic conditions. "We are a stable country. We don't have revolutions and coups, but other counties are less stable. You need to be prepared to deal with those that are good at the moment. It's a roller coaster."

The Water Expo is a spinoff of a well-known sustainability event also held in Miami. The MiaGreen Expo & Conference serves the green building, solar, clean tech and energy-saving industries, which originally included water. "Eventually it was clear that water had the potential and merit to become an event



on its own," Garcia said. "Water has very diversified arenas encompassing multiple industries. The Water Expo initially focused on water quality, wastewater and water supply." The 2016 expo will expand to include irrigation and storm water. The fifth edition of The Water Expo (Empowering Water for All of the Americas) will be held August 31 and September 1, 2016 at the Miami Airport Convention Center. It will feature 150 exhibitors, mainly from the US and Canada. The event attracts about 1,500 attendees. Of those, about 10 percent are potential customers from the Caribbean and another 40 percent are from Latin America, Garcia said.

This conference and exhibition present opportunities to meet major suppliers, connect with innovation and uncover top business opportunities. There are two key reasons to attend this event:

1. The exposition attracts attendees from 40 countries throughout the Caribbean, Central America and South America. "This is a huge market of consumers. These nations do not produce what is required to fulfill their needs in all water-related areas, so they are hungry for water technologies, products, services and know-how," Garcia said. "I recently returned from the WEFTEC conference, the top water convention in the US. I received a lot of positive reactions. Major players are now looking at us."

2. The event offers opportunities to connect with and bid on a multi-year, \$13.5-billion capital improvement project for the Miami-Dade County Water and Sewer Department, which serves more than 2.3 million residents, businesses and visitors daily. The county provides wholesale water service to 15 municipalities and wholesale wastewater service to 13 municipalities.

"This is very old infrastructure and it all needs to be replaced," Garcia said. "The county is very pleased that we exist in their backyard and can attract potential providers, suppliers



and experts." The agency participated in The Water Expo last year. "This is one of the hot, hot themes we plan to develop for the 2016 event." Over the next decade, the county investment will enhance and upgrade the system's entire infrastructure, utilizing state-of-the-art technology to upgrade thousands of miles of pipes, pump stations and water and wastewater treatment plants. "I'm very excited about this water expo. We're in the proper place at the proper time to make a difference for companies in the US who like or want to do business with the Caribbean, Latin America and other countries."

Garcia's all-American success story did not come easily. In 1993, he broke ties with Cuba and became an exile. "It's a very traumatic moment in the life of a person. I began one of the greatest challenges in life, starting over from scratch in an unknown territory. Fortunately I was able to keep contact with and bring in my family, enough to make me feel connected."

Garcia has already visited his homeland. Now that diplomatic relations between the US and Cuba have been restored, not surprisingly, this successful entrepreneur sees opportunity there. "I keep track of how things are developing. Things are moving in the right direction, baby-step by baby-step. I see a lot of opportunity. The country needs the trade show industry." ♠



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