

APRIL/MAY/JUNE 2013



Building Inroads

As told to Matt Alderton

Many immigrant couples come to the United States in search of a better life for their children. Unfortunately, not all of them find one. **Guillermo Garcia**'s parents were one of the lucky ones who did. When they moved to Illinois from Mexico in the 1960s, they were determined to equip their family with the education, values, and resources they'd need to achieve the quintessential American dream.

Now 50 years old, Garcia has achieved exactly that as principal and CEO of **GSG Consultants, Inc.**, a Chicago-based firm that specializes in civil infrastructure design, geotechnical engineering, and environmental remediation, as well as construction management, site development, occupational safety, and industrial hygiene. Started by Garcia and partner Arturo Saenz in 1992, the past two decades have seen the company grow

to employ more than 60 staff members and two additional partners: Ala Sassila and Santiago Garcia. Today, GSG's goal isn't just building infrastructure; it's building the Hispanic community, too.



Both my mother and father were born in Mexico and immigrated to the United States. My father was a hardworking man who wanted the opportunity to provide a better life for his children. My parents, who were factory workers, were very proud of their identities as Mexicans, so as a form of respect we spoke to our parents in Spanish. However, we were also taught to master the English language so that we could achieve the American dream.

I had construction jobs throughout high school, but I think my interest in construction stems from my childhood. I began working at an early age with my father, who often had my brother and I help around the house, painting and fixing up the home, repairing family cars, and doing regular chores. He instilled in us the value of earning an honest living and taught us about the "luck" of work; "The harder you work," he said, "the luckier you get."

GROWING NUMBERS

- GSG Consultants had **3** employees in 1992 and **65** in 2012
- The firm's capacity to provide services has grown from **1** state to **17** states
- GSG Consultants' revenue was **\$16,000** in 1992, and **\$5.6** million in **2011**
- First office has **1,000** square feet and now has an office of **9,000** square feet

Because my dad instilled in us the value of hard work, I wanted to work for myself, so I took a risk in starting my own business 20 years ago, focusing on three areas: business development, service and delivery, and client management. My people skills have always been good, so the relationships I had gave me the courage to get off the bench and get into the game as a business owner, not to mention access to the capital and space I needed to begin marketing and delivering services.

Today, we deliver services in 17 states. Most of our clients are from local and state government, health care, colleges and universities, nonprofits, and corporations. We specialize in infrastructure development and asset management. Through our growth and success, we've been able to attract and develop relationships with elite companies—not just because we're a minority-owned business, but because we have a reputation for good performance and high quality.

We've developed and maintained projects for numerous agencies, including the City of Chicago, Chicago Public Schools, the Public Building Commission of Chicago, and City Colleges of Chicago. We've also completed numerous works for the State of Illinois and numerous school districts. We're currently working on the Illiana Expressway—the first major expressway in the last 60 years—in the south suburbs of Chicago. We're also working on the Jane Addams Memorial Tollway in Chicago and for the City of Chicago's O'Hare Modernization Program.

One of GSG's competitive advantages is that we hire smart, hardworking people who value what they can bring to GSG overall. I love baseball, and my love of sports is ingrained in my management style, which is to treat my employees as a team and respect their differences in order to get the best from them. I'm challenged to create a workplace and a culture where employees feel empowered and comfortable, have competitive pay and health insurance, and also have time to be with their families.

The support and respect we have for our employees has been key in weathering the economic downturn: When things got tough in 2009, we had an intense transportation project that was keeping our employees very busy and working overtime. At our last Christmas party, one of our employees said, "We could have been really busy looking for a job, instead." We all laughed and toasted, because we're still fighting for our success.

Outside of my business I serve as chairman of the Illinois Hispanic Chamber of Commerce. I appreciate the history and the role that Hispanic advocates have had in securing civil rights, education, and equal opportunity for today's Hispanic community. My goal is to continue to build on what's been done before in the community by increasing wealth creation and financial literacy, building economic power and civil engagement through voting, and building scholarships and foundations that serve leaders in their communities.



Through my role at the Illinois Hispanic Chamber of Commerce I try to be a mentor to new and up-and-coming business owners, helping them through my experiences. One of the biggest things I tell them is: Don't believe your own hype. Having a title such as "entrepreneur" sounds impressive, but you still have to work. Owning a business requires sacrifice. Also, you need relationships. My father always taught me that relationships are a two-way street. When you're seeking out mentors, do your homework and

think about how you can add value for that person.

Family is very important to me, and I am motivated to work hard and develop relationships for them. My wife, Iwona, provides tremendous support for me. Iwona is a hardworking professional who recently completed her master's degree from DePaul University and is raising my sons: Adam, who is 2, and Nicholas, who is 1. The legacy of my father's hopes for me lives in my children. Although my father unfortunately passed away about 20 years ago, my mom is still around. She knows what I do and how many people I employ, and by all means she believes I've achieved the American dream she had [in mind] for me.



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NEWS

The United States Hispanic Chamber of Commerce has partnered with *Hispanic Executive* in what promises to be a banner year for both organizations. *Hispanic Executive* is now an official member magazine of the USHCC, and will be a Platinum Sponsor of the 34th Annual USHCC National Convention this September in *HE*'s hometown, Chicago. [Learn more.](#)

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