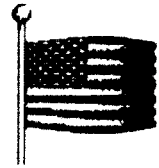


PUERTO RICO HERALD



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By PEDRO VALLE JAVIER

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La Rosa del Monte Express Inc., one of the world's largest Hispanic-owned moving companies, was founded 35 years ago by Jayuya native Hiram Rodríguez Cortés, who at age 18 decided to move away from his hometown coffee farm to New York City. There, he quickly found work as a moving company employee.

Three years later, with money he had saved, Rodríguez Cortés purchased an old truck and began his own moving business, providing his services to fellow Puerto Ricans in and around his neighborhood in the Bronx. Rodríguez Cortés incorporated La Rosa del Monte Express in 1970, with headquarters in the Bronx. He later opened an office in Toa Baja.

As it grew, Rosa del Monte Express opened more offices throughout the U.S. mainland. Rodríguez Cortés attributes the company's success to a unique combination of assets. "While we offer services to the federal government, major corporations, and the military, we haven't forgotten the importance of our private customers. After all, they are the ones who have supported us for the past 40 years," he said.

"It is very difficult not to recognize the company's name if you live anywhere in the Eastern U.S., Puerto Rico, or the Dominican Republic. La Rosa del Monte continues to be the top choice among Hispanics when it comes time to move," Rodríguez Cortés noted. The company provides residential, corporate, international, and government moving and storage, as well as vehicle transport throughout the U.S. and most of Latin America, with door-to-door service that includes packing materials, packing and unpacking, loading and unloading, and debris removal and disposal.

Recognition & growth

Eighteen years after Rodríguez Cortés founded La Rosa del Monte Express, it was given the "Hispanic Company of the Year Award" by then-New York City Mayor Edward Koch during the city's celebration of Hispanic Heritage month in September 1988. That summer it was listed No. 224 among the 500 most successful Hispanic companies on the U.S. mainland by Hispanic Business magazine.

Last year, the moving company was given the Pan American International Movers Association's (Paima) prestigious "Juan Peralta Ecology Award" for its environmental conservation and recycling program.

La Rosa del Monte now has more than 200 employees and 11 offices in the U.S. and the Caribbean: Bronx, N.Y.; Toa Baja, P.R.; Worcester, Mass.; Philadelphia, Pa.; Cleveland, Ohio; both Miami and Orlando, Fla.; Chicago, Ill.; Bridgeport, Conn.; Irving, Texas; and Santo Domingo, D.R. In 2003, its estimated operating revenue was \$14 million, as reported by Goliath.

The company has business partnerships with moving companies in practically every part of the world, allowing it to ship anywhere. Last year alone, the company transported more than 75 million pounds of household goods and 500 vehicles, Logistics Director Anthony Rodríguez revealed. The company's Miami and Puerto Rico operations are currently listed as No. 1 and No. 2, respectively, among Paima's top tonnage-moving companies worldwide, indicated in association data.

Rodríguez Cortés said another important asset of the company is its far reach and reliability. La Rosa del Monte Express has interstate licenses to haul cargo and operate in all 50 states and can move throughout Latin America. "We have employees from more than 12 Hispanic countries, which gives us an edge when moving a customer overseas, and we know all the regulations and requirements in the different countries where we provide our services," he stated. He added that with certified business partners around the world, La Rosa del Monte Express can ship any cargo to reliable hands in places where the company has no local offices.

Expanding & renovating

La Rosa del Monte Express continues to grow. Recently, it completed several major expansion projects and is working on more, Rodríguez Cortés disclosed. The company's Miami office was transformed into its International & Military Distribution Center. In this center, the company receives container loads from Central and South America, international shipments from all of its branch offices, and military shipments to and from Puerto Rico. "The [Miami] operation is so smooth that even our competitors in Miami are giving us their shipments for transportation and delivery to Puerto Rico," he said. The Miami office also operates the firm's International Rate department, which provides quotes for commercial cargo and machine deliveries to and from anywhere in the world.

Another expansion move by La Rosa del Monte Express was its recent purchase of Monti Moving, an independent moving company with offices in New York, Puerto Rico, Orlando, and Miami. Rodríguez said the two would continue to operate as separate companies, sharing logistical and operational assets.

The acquisition has given both companies a significant edge over other moving companies in the region because it increased the amount of container and vehicles they can move annually. "This increase has placed the corporation in a better position to negotiate contracts with steamship companies and suppliers, and it also allows us to fill containers faster, which in turn makes La Rosa del Monte able to deliver shipments to clients sooner than any other company," explained Anthony Rodríguez.

La Rosa del Monte Express will soon open a branch office in California. The volume of its weekly deliveries to the state demand an office in the area, Rodríguez said. The moving and storage company is completing a \$250,000 renovation in its Chicago warehouse, which includes increasing the roof height to accommodate military cargo. In New York City, it is negotiating with city officials to move its headquarters to a larger property.

In Puerto Rico, where its new Machinery & Rigging department kept the company very busy in 2004, the moving company is also expanding its services, Rodríguez said. La Rosa del Monte Express recently completed the first construction stage of a 100,000-square-foot, state-of-the-art warehouse, featuring a temperature-controlled storage area, on PR2 in Dorado.

Logistics Director Rodríguez said the company is also expanding its operations in the Dominican Republic due to all the new industrial growth, which has increased demand for rigging services.

For all of the company's recent achievements, Rodríguez assured he is most proud of its new packing staff. La Rosa del Monte Express is one of the first moving companies to employ female packers. He described this as a very important step, one that gives customers an extra sense of security. "Customers are convinced that when it comes to packing their personal belongings and precious items, the 'female touch' makes a difference, and it does," he said.

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