

“From Chicago to South Florida, Meet the Ever Impressive José Fuentes,” Gables Living

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By: José K. Fuentes

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José K. Fuentes's motto is 'Every day is a new start!' He hits the ground running every day, literally and figuratively; Jose is a marathon runner and a very accomplished government relations professional.

Born in Chicago, José moved to South Florida with his family as a child. José is of Cuban and Japanese descent. “I think it’s important to recognize that I am a product of two parents who were, in some way, unique to the fabric of America,” he said. “My dad, who recently passed of Cancer at 87, was a Cuban Refugee and my Mom, a second-generation American, was interned in Gila River Camp in Arizona by FDR’s executive order 1066.”

Both his mother and grandparents were interned in the Gila River Camps during WWII. He publicly speaks about this topic often.

José said his experience of moving from the Windy City to Hialeah was very unique. “My family had just moved from a large city,” he recalled. “And we came into Miami and then later to Hialeah and my first thought was, oh my god, my family has moved us to a farm. Because the landscape was different, the look was different, and at that time Hialeah was not the city that it is today. It was much more green. The community was still not as diverse. It was getting there but, you know, it was 1972 or 1973. So, it was still basically a small city searching for its identity.

For a kid, it was great because you got to see a lot of old-time America which was like the McCrory’s of the five and dime stores and the Schwinn bicycle shop. All those things existed in my neighborhood in Hialeah, so I have that memory of what it was. Obviously today it has grown but I made a lot of good friends who are very hardworking people and I think it definitely teaches you that hard work makes a difference in your life. I now use that model for my own life and I think it is part of my success.”

Success is a great word to describe José and many others agree. “José is a visionary and experienced community leader whom we are blessed to have in order to carry out our corporate mission of promoting independence and wellness

to older adults,” **Carlos L. Martinez**, President and CEO, United HomeCare said of him.

“José is a dedicated leader driven by the desire to see everyone succeed,” **Bernie Friedman**, Shareholder and Chair, Government Law & Lobbying Practice, Becker & Poliakoff, said. “If there is a way to optimize proposed legislation so both clients and communities benefit, Jose will champion it. If it is necessary to negotiate strategic compromises to accelerate forward momentum, Jose will approach the conversation with great sensitivity. I am continually impressed with how he encourages and supports inclusive solutions.”

“José’s heart of service is on display in everything he does – from his legislative lobbying in Tallahassee to his community involvement in Miami. His ability to build consensus for a brighter future is one of his greatest strengths,” added **Yolanda Cash Jackson**, Shareholder, Becker & Poliakoff.

José is currently the Senior Governmental Relations Consultant at Becker & Poliakoff and Chairman of the United HomeCare (UHC) Board of Directors and the Executive Committee. As member of the UHC Board for more than two decades and twice Board Chair, he has tirelessly served United HomeCare’s mission of caring for older adults being instrumental in the expansion of services to continue providing services to clients during COVID-19 and helping address the needs of our most underserved.

He was appointed to the Board of Trustees of Miami-Dade College by Governor Rick Scott. Prior to his current position, he served as District Director of the South Florida Water Management District for 10 years, before moving on to start his own firm, the Fuentes Consulting Group. His career history is truly remarkable, and this list barely touches the surface.

It is no surprise that he is also the recipient of a number of impressive awards. José earned the Lobbyist of Year Award from the Latin American Business Association, the International Governmental Relations Award by the Greater Miami Chamber of Commerce, the 20th Annual Novo Award Finalist by the Greater Miami Chamber of Commerce, the Diabetes Association with the “Valor Award” for community service, and he received the “Annual Sunshine Award” as Public Official of the Year from the South Florida Hispanic Chamber of Commerce to name a few.

José has been very active in his work enhancing the relationship between Japan, Miami, and Latin America. So much so that he was recognized by the Japanese Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

José is also passionate about running.

“I’ve been running for well over 20 years,” he said. “The lesson with running is to be patient and train hard. Put in your miles, hydrate, and enjoy the run. Honestly, after having run over 35 Full Marathons, 60 plus Half Marathons, and hundreds of 5K and 10Ks, all these have two things in common: a start and a finish... and you always want to finish.”

José said his community makes running even more enjoyable. “My community offers some of the best views and distances to run,” he said. “You can enjoy Miami, Coral Gables, and Key Biscayne in just a few minutes from my home. Great restaurants, great community events; I truly love my community. The diversity we have here is unlike any part of this state.”

José has a 30-year-old daughter named Christina M. Fuentes. She works for a marketing firm, called Moxy, out of California. She works remotely from Miami Springs. José said he used to go on an annual vacation back to Chicago with his daughter. “Now, as my daughter is all grown up, it continues to give me a recharge for the upcoming year,” he said. “I catch a Cubs Game at Wrigley and yes, even a few concerts at Lollapalooza.”

José has lived in this area for over 21 years now. He said he moved here because he wanted to truly enjoy the community and its many amenities.

“We are fortunate to have an ever-changing food scene in Miami and Coral Gables,” he said. “I truly enjoy going to Su Shin Izakaya. It always reminds me of my Japanese Grandmother’s cooking. It’s just honest Japanese cooking. On the business side, Hillstone is always a Gables favorite for their excellent service and food consistency, and don’t forget the scene. Sea Grill at Merrick Park and Olds Havana in Little Havana don’t miss the mark either.”

While José thoroughly enjoys this area, he does go back to Hialeah from time to time. “My aunt lives there so I will go visit every now and then,” he said. “My dad passed away recently and he still loved to go to restaurants that were there. You know the more typical Cuban foods. I would drive through Hialeah, pick up his favorite food at a restaurant, and take it to him even up to almost the day that he passed so you know my affinity with Hialeah still exists. I still have great friends there. It was a part of my childhood.

South Florida has so many different communities. There are 35 communities, and you could go to each one and they each have something that is different, something that makes them unique. I think that is what makes it unique to live in South Florida. There’s a uniqueness to all our communities and I am very fortunate that I was able to grow up somewhere that was kind of young and innocent. I had the big city experience even as a young child and then living in South Florida and just enjoying everything it’s got to offer is always amazing.”

José said there is one thing he would love to see happen in South Florida. “My concern always is that we do need more museums,” he said. “For kids and even for adults. That makes us more metropolitan. I went on a trip to Chicago recently and that is one of the things I was fascinated with. I went to the Chicago Art Institute and when you look at some of the collections you are just amazed by the artists, especially my favorite painting, the “American Gothic,” a masterpiece important to American history. In that area, I think we lack a little but I think we have quality people here, and learning from them that is something that is really positive for all of us.”

He said that has no plans to leave the area anytime soon. “South Florida is Home; I love the Gables it has great restaurants, wonderful cultural activities, and my office is one of the truly beautiful buildings in the Gables; We live where everyone wants to visit.”

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