Gustavo A. Hermida – President, CIC Construction Group



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Gustavo A. Hermida, President of CIC Construction Group, shares the remarkable journey of Puerto Rico's leading general contractor. Built on a foundation of excellence in the pharmaceutical sector, CIC has successfully diversified into healthcare, hospitality, and housing while upholding its rigorous standards of safety, quality, and timely delivery. Hermida highlights the company's unique approach to self-performing critical work, ensuring consistency and precision, as well as its employee-first culture, which has fostered loyalty and talent retention for decades. With Puerto Rico's skilled workforce and strategic position, Hermida underscores the island's potential as a global hub for manufacturing and innovation.

Can you give us a brief overview of CIC Construction Group and its history?

CIC Construction Group is a general contractor with a history spanning over four decades. Founded in 1983 as Caribbean Industrial Construction Company Inc., CIC was built on the belief that integrity engineering, talent, and dedication to our clients would make CIC the very best in the construction industry. We initially focused on pharmaceutical projects. The rigorous demands of this sector taught us invaluable lessons, to be a company focused on safety, deliver consistent quality, and complete projects on time. These principles shaped our DNA and allowed us to establish a reputation for excellence. We grew our business through the trust of our clients, making sure that our people understand our vision, which is to create an inspiring, first-class construction company that delivers excellence beyond expectations.

Today, CIC Construction Group stands among the largest general contractors in Puerto Rico, a position earned through hard work, commitment, and the trust of our clients. In 2016, we expanded to the mainland U.S., opening an office in Raleigh, North Carolina, followed by Orlando, Florida, in 2019. Over the years, we've diversified our portfolio while maintaining the standards that set us apart: quality, safety, and timely delivery.

The company began with a focus on the pharmaceutical industry and then diversified into other areas, such as hotels & resorts, commercial, institutional, housing and healthcare. How important are pharma, biotech, and medical device for the company today?

Pharma, biotech, and medical device sectors remain pillars of CIC Construction Group. These industries were where we built our foundation and developed the high standards that continue to define us. However, as we expanded into other sectors in the late 1990s and early 2000s, we faced a challenge: our original name, Caribbean Industrial Construction Company, limited us to a niche perception. This led to our strategic rebrand as CIC Construction Group in 2008, signalling to the market that we were a versatile contractor capable of handling diverse type of projects.

The skills we learned from working with pharmaceutical clients—attention to detail, quality assurance, safety and on-time delivery—gave us a competitive edge as we expanded into sectors like healthcare, commercial, hospitality, and housing. While we've diversified, our commitment to these core industries remains strong, allowing us to exceed expectations across all our projects.

What enabled CIC to stand out and become one of Puerto Rico's leading general contractors?

Our success comes down to three key factors: quality, safety, and people. The pharmaceutical industry's demands pushed us to raise the bar, developing a reputation for delivering projects on time, within budget, and to the highest standards.

As our reputation grew, we were careful to manage growth responsibly. Rapid expansion can compromise quality, which was never an option for us. Instead, we focused on building a team of highly skilled engineers, craftsmen, and professionals who shared our values. This disciplined approach allowed us to scale without losing sight of our commitment to excellence.

How did CIC grow into the company it is today?

CIC Construction Group started with a clear focus: building a team of the most talented people in the industry. By recruiting skilled professionals and craftsmen while fostering a culture of excellence, we laid a strong foundation for growth. Over time, we scaled the company, reaching close to 1,450 employees at our peak.

Strategic planning was critical to this growth. We carefully assessed our capacity and workload, ensuring we took on projects we could execute to our standards. This combination of strong talent and deliberate management enabled us to become Puerto Rico’s largest general contractor while maintaining the quality and reliability our clients expect.

What distinguishes CIC from other companies in Puerto Rico?

The key differentiator is our ability to self-perform much of the work on our projects. While many construction companies rely heavily on subcontractors, we made the decision early on to retain control over civil, structural, and architectural work. This approach ensures consistent quality, safety, and precision.

We briefly experimented with subcontracting certain tasks during periods of rapid growth but quickly found it compromised our standards. Today, we self-perform critical areas such as steel structures and finishes, relying on subcontractors only when necessary, for instance, in concrete work for housing projects. By doing so, we reduce risks, maintain quality, and confidently meet client expectations.

How have construction demands evolved in recent years, particularly with trends like sustainability and smart construction?

The industry has transformed significantly, with sustainability and smart construction now at the forefront. Clients expect environmentally friendly practices and certifications such as LEED or Green Building. For example, in hotel developments, we work to preserve and integrate natural features rather than clearing land, minimizing environmental impact.

Smart construction has also become essential. Clients seek energy-efficient designs, advanced materials, and innovative technologies that enhance building performance. These trends reflect both market demand and our responsibility to deliver sustainable, modern solutions.

High infrastructure costs are a major challenge in Puerto Rico, especially regarding electricity and water. How are you navigating this issue?

Puerto Rico’s infrastructure challenges, particularly in energy, remain a concern. The privatization of the electrical system aimed to improve efficiency, but progress has been slow, especially following Hurricane Maria in 2017, which left the grid in a fragile state.

While high energy and water costs continue to pressure businesses, we remain optimistic. The government is focused on addressing these deficiencies, and we continue to adapt by implementing efficient practices and exploring ways to mitigate rising costs.

The construction sector in Puerto Rico has faced significant challenges, from hurricanes to economic shifts. How has CIC adapted to maintain its leadership?

Adaptability has been key. After Hurricane Maria, our experienced team managed reconstruction projects without major disruptions. The COVID-19 pandemic, however, brought new challenges. The government-mandated shutdown and labor market disruptions forced us to rebuild our workforce gradually, with rising wages adding further complexity.

Despite these challenges, our disciplined approach to growth and commitment to excellence allowed us to maintain our leadership position and deliver critical projects for Puerto Rico.

Your expansion into North Carolina and Florida has been a success. Are there further plans for international expansion?

Establishing offices in Raleigh and Orlando allowed us to broaden our reach while staying true to our values. For now, our focus is on consolidating operations in these regions and strengthening our position in Puerto Rico. Both markets offer tremendous opportunities, and we aim to deliver high-quality projects while ensuring our resources and teams are well-managed.

What are your expectations for a second Trump administration in the US, and how do you think it could impact the construction business, if at all?

It remains to be seen, but Puerto Rico is well-positioned to adapt. Trump's emphasis on nearshoring, particularly in pharmaceutical manufacturing, could benefit the island. Moreover, President-elect Trump's designate as Senior Counselor, Peter Navarro, has specifically mentioned Puerto Rico as a potential site for expanding pharmaceutical manufacturing. Puerto Rico's highly skilled workforce and strategic location make it an attractive site for investment, further solidifying its role as a key hub for manufacturing and innovation.

You've retained employees for decades—some for over 40 years. What's your strategy for talent retention?

Our employees are the heart of CIC. We treat them like family, ensuring they feel valued, respected, and safe. Beyond providing secure work environments, we invest in their professional growth, offering opportunities for advancement and recognizing their contributions. This approach fosters loyalty and creates a sense of belonging, which has been key to retaining talent for decades.

What are CIC's goals for the next five years?

Our vision is to provide "excellence beyond expectation." Over the next five years, we aim to continue delivering projects of exceptional quality, safety, and precision. We are also focused on preparing the next generation of leaders within the company to ensure a smooth succession and long-term growth.

How did you build the company's core values?

From the beginning, we established CIC on three fundamental pillars: engineering, quality, and delivery. I was personally involved in visiting project sites weekly to ensure that every employee understood and embraced our vision. This hands-on leadership and clear communication ingrained our values into the company culture and set the foundation for our success.

Did you ever imagine you would become the leading contractor in Puerto Rico?

When I and my partner started CIC, I was 30 years old, and I had big dreams but never imagined we would become the largest contractor in Puerto Rico. I owe this success to teamwork—to the dedication and hard work of every employee who contributed to our growth. CIC's achievements have always been a collective effort, and I'm incredibly proud of what we've built together.

On a personal note, what keeps you motivated every day?

My family and employees are my biggest motivation. When you see your team as family, you want to give them the best. Knowing that we create opportunities, deliver quality work, and contribute to the lives of our employees and clients drives me every single day.

What final message would you like to share with our global readers?

Puerto Rico is home to incredible talent, especially in industries like pharmaceutical manufacturing, biotechnology, and medical devices. Our skilled and dedicated workforce, combined with the island's strategic location, makes Puerto Rico an ideal partner for growth and innovation. I encourage global readers to see the opportunities here and view Puerto Rico as a key player in the manufacturing sector.

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