



HISPANICS

THRIVING IN ST. LOUIS



Newspapers in Education is celebrating Hispanic Heritage Month in partnership with the Hispanic Chamber of Commerce of Metropolitan St. Louis. This series highlights local Hispanic Americans who are giving back to others in the St. Louis community.



BERTO GARCIA

Rebuild Yourself to Build Your Own Business

By: **Carlos Restrepo**
Hispanic Chamber of Commerce of Metropolitan St. Louis

Across South St. Louis City, old brick homes that have fallen into disrepair are being redeveloped and turned into updated, modern properties that maintain their historic essence.

Developer Berto Garcia, co-owner of Garcia Properties, says he had to reinvent himself before starting his own company.

Berto Garcia comes from a large Hispanic family that never stopped looking for new opportunities. His family moved from Los Angeles, to DeKalb, Illinois, and then to St. Louis, Missouri.

“Looking back, my siblings and I grew up in a family and community that allowed for a lot of mistakes,” Garcia said. “Believe me, we made more than our fair share.”

“We are not originally from St. Louis,” Garcia explained. “I am proud of the fact that we have created a place where our family can work together, our parents included, and share that environment with so many wonderful people that are equally as committed to their family and the St. Louis community.”

Garcia graduated from Northern Illinois University with a bachelor’s degree in finance. After graduating, he worked in benefits consulting, consumer and commercial finance.

“I had no clue that my education and work experience would eventually help as a business owner, but of course it has,” said Garcia. “What I thought was repetitive and often challenging work, helped shape the knowledge base and perspective that I use to make important decisions every day.”

Garcia said although he sees a lot of regional challenges in St. Louis, he and his company are optimistic and excited about the opportunities.

“I see a metro area dripping with wonderful people and culture. We have little traffic, a low unemployment rate and nationally recognized health and educational institutions. The housing stock in St. Louis is the envy of most cities and affordable,” Garcia said. “We want to continue to be a positive influence on our family, friends and community.”

Garcia’s most important piece of advice to young people hoping to start their own business is to not be afraid to make mistakes.

“Don’t be afraid to start over and over again, until it feels right,” Garcia said. “You may surprise yourself and find what is most important to you is not at all what you once believed.”





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QUESTIONS:

What do you think Berto Garcia meant when he said he had to “reinvent himself before starting his own company”?

After college, Garcia worked in benefits consulting, consumer and commercial finance. What skills do you think he learned that helped him later in his own family business?

Garcia’s family moved from time to time, experiencing different parts of the country as he was growing up. Do you think living in different areas helped in starting a business? Why or why not?

Berto Garcia praises St. Louis for its people, culture and accessibility to health care and education. What are you most proud of in the community that you live in? Why?

Why do you think Garcia said it’s important not to be afraid to make mistakes?

If you were to start your own business, what would it be and why?

