

Chamber of the Americas: A Conduit to Latin American Commerce and Culture

*by Wayne Trujillo, Director of Communications,
Chamber of the Americas
Taken from *The Huffington Post**

The ubiquitous chamber of commerce populates America's business topography comparable to apple pie, baseball and midsummer pyrotechnics. Every municipality boasts a local business consortium that promotes and facilitates commerce. The Chamber of the Americas (COTA), an organization based in Lakewood, Colorado, but active throughout the Western Hemisphere, is a pithy and expansive variation of the typical American chamber of commerce.

Gil Cisneros, COTA's founder and interim Chairman and CEO, experienced a storied career before initiating his current endeavor. A presidential appointee as regional administrator of the U.S. Small Business Administration for seven years in the '80s and '90s, Cisneros also earned national recognition from both Hispanic magazine and Hispanic Business magazine. (The former publication honored him as one of the 100 most influential Hispanics in 1991).

More important than the accolades, Cisneros' career earned him invaluable exposure to, knowledge of, and empathy with small businesses. Cisneros entered the international business arena in 1992, and through the years he guided American businesses on trade missions throughout Latin America, introducing them to foreign businesses and cultural customs as he expanded personal knowledge and experiences.

COTA also connects Latin American companies with American leaders and culture. COTA has hosted dinners with former Mexican and Honduran presidents; the list of speakers at COTA events includes Senator Mark Udall, former Senators Ken Salazar, Gary Hart and Wayne Allard, then-Mayor John Hickenlooper, and former Governors Bill Owens and Bill Ritter. COTA is not only a resource for established leaders. The organization also introduces American and foreign students, many of them from the University of Denver's Josef Korbel School of Foreign Affairs, to Latin American businesses and culture.

COTA appealed to me more for its international reach and cultural expertise than for its business acuity. My professional experience fixated on the challenges, celebrations, idiosyncrasies and vagaries of multicultural communities and circumstances. However, I've learned that leaders of multinational businesses and organizations spanning continents respect and value the organization's business acumen. Empirical experience earned their appreciation. But, in my position as COTA's Director of Communications, I want to spotlight the intriguing characters, cultures and customs throughout Latin America in future posts rather than merely disseminate press releases, corporate communications and organizational updates through my HuffPost platform. Cisneros is a perfect conduit to those characters, cultures and customs with his organization's expansive embrace of Latin America.

Currently, I'm looking forward to experiencing Peru, COTA's current focus. "COTA possesses the ability to connect small- to medium-sized companies throughout the Western Hemisphere," Cisneros observed. "We have extensive contacts at the top echelon at Peru and can get things done quicker for people."

Personally, COTA's Peruvian engagement offers me the opportunity to experience the people and lives of Peruvian's lower echelon, those people with scarce resources but rich culture. COTA's A-list contacts enable the organization to introduce American businesses to the South American nation, which will directly improve the fortune of not only American businesses and Peru's top tier, but presents opportunities to alleviate Peruvian poverty.