



Muy Bueno! Self Storage Has Arrived in Latin America

Nancy Torres Spearheads a Movement Picking Up Steam

By John Dunlap – Editor, SSA Globe

In a little over a decade, the countries of Latin America have come to the realization that self storage is, indeed, a valuable part of the daily lifestyle. It is a growth that started small and simple, but now has taken off to include not only climate control in virtually every new facility, but even the start of “green” (environmentally friendly) facilities.

Nancy Torres has seen and experienced the growth firsthand. Since moving to Puerto Rico in 1995 and being involved in the construction of the first self storage facility on the island, she has watched the industry take off in recent years. But she hasn’t restricted herself just to Puerto Rico, as she now travels extensively through the Latin American region in her role

as head of the Latin America Self Storage Association.

Torres’ excitement over the growth of self storage in Latin America is palpable, and her vision of the area as a place rich with possibilities for more and better facilities can’t help but impress. It certainly impressed Janus International, who hired her as Director of Business Development. At the time of this interview, she was looking forward to the April 1–3 International Self Storage Convention & Exposition in Orlando, hosted by the Self Storage Association and the first official meeting with representatives from several Latin American countries of the Latin America SSA.

Construction in Her DNA

So how did Torres make the move into self storage?

“Construction is in my DNA as my father is a residential contractor in Puerto Rico,” Torres says. “I didn’t follow his steps initially; but by a twist of fate, a friend asked me to help set up the computers for a new construction company from Texas that was starting operations in Puerto Rico—Elkin Williams International, Inc. While I was doing my job, a series of challenges developed, from finding labor, material and equipment to logistics.

“I was able to help them resolve most of those problems because of my familiarity with construction. When I finished helping out, the owner asked me to stay as their Operations Manager and I accepted.

It was February 14, 1995 and that’s how I fell in love with self storage... because they were building the first facility in Puerto Rico!”

The change in working environment also signaled a shift in Torres’ career, as she went back to school to learn the entire construction process.

“But I gladly accepted for the challenge it represented: a new company,

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new career and a new industry,” Torres adds. “And it is a learning process that never ends since now, with my position as Director of Business Development with Janus International, I am working on a new area within the self storage industry.”

Going Green in Puerto Rico

So, what has she noticed about the changing nature of self storage in Puerto Rico over the past 13 years?

“From 1995 to the present, the island has witnessed a significant growth; there are now over 13 third-generation facilities and several others in either permitting or construction phases,” Torres says.

“The latest trend is going green; we are currently working on a self storage facility that will run on solar power, which will be one of the first green commercial buildings in Puerto Rico. Also, facilities have moved from industrial parks to more destination-driven areas and developers are switching from the old big box design to a more architectural look. All facilities provide temperature control and/or humidity control, as well as the standard USA amenities, such as conference rooms, internet, security, etc.”

And what has Torres noticed about the growth of self storage in Latin American countries?

“My vacations are spent mostly in South America,” she says “I love the outdoors and on my travels I was amazed by the interest in self storage. Every country seemed to have its own version of it—mainly brick and mortar facilities with swing doors. But in the past three years I have noticed a tendency to build state-of-the-art facilities similar to the ones we have in the United States.

“The industry in Latin America is where the USA was 10 years ago,” Torres adds. “The potential for growth is enormous. New business treaties are put in place, economic growth of the region is promising, and current occupancy levels show the need for further development.”

The Need for Education

Since Torres travels so much through Latin American nations and gets a firsthand view of what is happening in self storage in those countries, what does she see as the areas of greatest concern for the region?

“The Latin America Self Storage Association was established because of the need for education,” Torres says. “That is the primary concern. Lack of industry knowledge affects all levels from banks not willing to provide construction loans because they don’t know the business, to roadblocks on construction permits, to overdesign for not understanding the concept, as well as ambiguous taxation laws and not being able to run operations smoothly because



Torres reviews building plans self storage developers.

no true management system is in place. Still, it is worth mentioning that current operators have excelled in coping with these roadblocks to have a profitable businesses.”

And what is the national SSA doing to help?

“The Self Storage Association was pivotal in the formation of the Latin American counterpart,” Torres says. “From Day One they showed interest in helping our region and encouraged me to keep the effort going. The wheel is already in motion and the SSA has spent thousands of dollars in research that we can benefit from.

“I have seen the interest in every operator I visited on my trips to the region since they are craving the knowledge and networking, but the fact that we are affiliated with the SSA is of great value to them.”

Nancy Torres obviously is a leader and one who is excited about not only the present, but future possibilities of self storage in her region of the world.

“The Latin America Self Storage Association is my most valued goal within the self storage industry and I am happy to see where it is going,” she concludes. “I enjoy working on this industry for what it represents: family-owned businesses and the opportunity for small to medium sized businesses to thrive, which is a primary economic factor in Latin America. And this industry also has highly skilled people willing to share their knowledge and experience.”

“I’ve been able to succeed thanks to them and the support of family and friends that have encouraged me in all my endeavors. In the future I would love to see publications made in our native Spanish language as well as conferences and expos in our region. And who would not like to attend conferences and expos in such exotic places?”

Somehow, given her knowledge and drive to succeed, one can only imagine that conferences and expos will not be long in coming to Puerto Rico or other countries in Latin America. ❖