

# InfrastructureUSA

## Guest on THE INFRA BLOG

**Mr. Serafin Fernandez, New National President, National Board of Directors, The Society of Hispanic Professional Engineers (SHPE)**

**Conversation with Steve Anderson, Managing Director, InfrastructureUSA**

### **Infrastructure investment provides opportunities**

For our society, The Society of Hispanic Professional Engineers, we have several Hispanic owned firms that are in the industry and are looking for these projects to move forward so that we participate in them. So there are definitely opportunities to employ many of the engineers that have been displaced by the downturn in the economy.

We are making an effort this year to address the issues, both through a marketing effort, making our community aware of the problems, and addressing business opportunities for engineers in this area to try to tap into some opportunities as well.

We just want to make sure that the efforts are there to give everybody an opportunity. We understand and we recognize the fact that some contracts or some projects may be too large for smaller companies, so we're trying to address that on our own, making sure that our companies are well informed and educated about procurement procedures. But it is frustrating to still have to be on top of making sure that the process is being followed after almost 50 years of trying to get work for our part of the community.

### **Appealing to young people**

We definitely want to make sure we are recruiting the younger generations into the field of engineering. So it's important for us to have the young minority community members really see their peers at the university level, but also in the professional workforce as engineers working on these large different projects, leading the projects as project managers, or design managers, or designers.

Particularly at our national conference, we will be focusing on presenting seminars that show how engineering not only touches lives, but also improves lives. So there is a marketing aspect that we have to focus on in order to make engineering, let's say, sexy again or a desirable career for young people. But we definitely face that challenge.

## **The challenge of creating a national dialogue about infrastructure investment**

I think that it's been a challenge for us to put this topic at the forefront of, say the elected officials, or even our community as an important discussion topic. I think that's one of the reasons that today we are lacking in the support for funding to infrastructure projects. I think the public is starting to feel it; when you see, for example, in large cities like Chicago and Los Angeles where you have large power failures, or water shutdowns, or water main breaks, or even just highways and freeways that have several cracks in them. Unfortunately it's through the bad experiences that they are starting to pay attention. So, I think just by the nature of failures that it is going to move up in the level of importance for everybody, but it is something that has not been a top priority; you know we've actually paid more attention to sustainability and green technology more so than maintaining and improving our infrastructure.

I think that the Hispanic communities are well in tune with the failures of infrastructure as a whole. On the transportation side, we feel it as well because obviously there's more demand for public transportation systems and so if those particular issues are starting to fail, once again you're feeling it personally. So I think that just because Hispanic populations happen to be concentrated in the large urban areas they are feeling, the need for concentrated efforts in the repair and maintenance of the systems.

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