

**Sucesión Juan Serrallés, Inc.**  
**Celebrates 150 Years of History**



Sucesión Juan Serrallés, Inc., a company based in Ponce, Puerto Rico since the XIX century, plays an important role in the history of the sugar industry worldwide, particularly when it comes to Puerto Rico and the Caribbean region. The origins of the Serrallés family trace back to Catalonia, Spain, from where Sebastián Serrallés and his wife Teresa Pont & Puig migrated to the southern coast of Puerto Rico early in the first half of the XIX century and made Ponce their home. They had two sons, Felix and Sebastian Marcial. A few years later, Sebastian fathered another son with Juana Colón whose name was Juan Eugenio Serrallés & Colón. Records show that he was responsible for propelling the family business into high gear. It is from this point forward that Don Juan's efforts gave way to the long history that was capable of redirecting the local sugar economy and subsequent worldwide reaches.

During 2015, Sucesión Juan Serrallés, Inc. will commemorate 150 years of existence. It is a family enterprise that from its origin, followed one North, which was to successfully develop sugar production in a country where the core industry was agriculture, and so they accomplished. The descendants of this family are still the sole owners of the company and they have managed to bring about the inevitable transformation required with the changes brought on by the passage of time. This patriarchal commercial enterprise that began in 1865 with the production of sugar and molasses, laid the foundation for the creation of other businesses that today breathe life into the region and into the whole island.

The first steps taken by the Serrallés family in the sugar industry began a few years earlier with the founding of Hacienda Mercedita in 1861, which was destined to the cultivation of sugarcane and the development of its derivatives. Don Juan's determination and hard work paid off as the business grew and shortly after, it became a major sugar mill called Central Mercedita. This represented an exception in the developmental process of the sugar industry in Puerto Rico because it prospered in spite of the economical challenges of the times, and unlike many others, survived for over one century.

Hacienda Mercedita grew its land holdings to over five thousand "cuerdas" (slightly less than one acre) thankfully due to the fact that it enjoyed continued growth in its production. In the beginning it was just 479 "cuerdas", 300 of which were planted with sugarcane. With the growing need for more space to grow cane and for the installation of a rail system to transport it, little by little the company continued its acquisitions of arable land in the area. If it was to be described today, the properties went from what is presently known as Mercedita, in Ponce, all

the way out to the east side of Coto Laurel, adjoining land ascribed to the municipality of Juana Díaz.

Year after year, the company continued to invest aggressively in new machinery that made it possible to improve its production and quality output. The resulting advantages in cultivation and the fine tuned processing of sugar and molasses, paved the way for the production of rum, which made it viable for the Serrallés family to explore the expansion of their business and commercial options.

Once the owners of Hacienda Mercedita had accomplished the mechanization of their production, they continued to expand their investments in nearby farms with the intent of increasing cultivation of raw material and consequently their production. At this point, the acquired farms were: Laurel, La Fe, Destierro, Bronce, Ponceña and Cintrona.

Don Juan Serrallés passed away in 1897 and with that event, his widow, Doña Mercedes Pérez de Serrallés along with their five surviving sons formed a partnership under the name Sucesión J. Serrallés Sociedad Civil, nowadays Sucesión J. Serrallés, Inc. Mercedes, in its diminutive form, is the name Don Juan chose for the Hacienda to honor his wife. She is also remembered by way of two chapels that carry her name. One is located at La Calzada, to the immediate south side of the sugar mill and the other one is in the town of Aibonito, where they spent their summers looking for cooler climate. She was loved by many, because she was a woman with a great sense of compassion and generously giving with the needy.

In 1926, the group established the Porto Rican American Sugar Refinery, Inc. the first refinery which was dedicated to the development of the whitest sugar available on the island and for over fifty years marketed the brand "SNOW WHITE", which still has a place in the local market.

History tells us that the sugar industry in Puerto Rico was very profitable until the early 60's. However, the decline in revenues caused the directors of Sucesión J. Serrallés, Inc. to redirect their vision and explore other possibilities in agricultural and commercial businesses, as the sugar market was clearly in a steep down turn.

Shortly after that, sugarcane cultivation in Puerto Rico vanished completely, but not Hacienda Mercedita or Sucesión J. Serrallés, Inc. Nowadays, their farms are alive farming other crops that enhance the islands economy, offering new options to the local consumer as well as those in faraway places such as the United States, Canada and several countries in Europe. Products that currently occupy their lands are: a sod farm, ornamental plants, various types of palms, bananas, and seed cultivation among others. In addition to that, some of their farms are leased by companies dedicated to growing other agricultural products.

On the retail side, the company directly operates a gardening supply and ornamental plants outlet under the name **Garden del Sur**, as well as a wholesale and retail outlet for sods under the name **Gramas del Sur**. These operations reach customers as far as the neighboring islands in the Caribbean.

During the 70's and 80's, Sucesión developed massive crops of "gandules" (pigeon peas), plantains, bananas, beef cattle, among others. They also developed a beautiful coffee farm in the mountains of Jayuya where they own a farm called Jauca, which is just under 900 cuerdas. During this period, strategic alliances were formed with companies like Libby's and Caribbean Fresh Produce, among others. This provided a distribution channel for the crops that were being developed.

As time went by and the circumstances of the market place continued to evolve, once again, the directors of the company had to re-examine their businesses and explore other areas of commercial development of a non-agricultural nature. A new enterprise was born under the name Desarrollos e Inversiones del Sur (DIS) Inc. which is responsible for the development of a cemetery known as Las Mercedes Memorial Park. It is also credited with the development of numerous residential projects which include: El Monte phases II, III y IV; Sombras del Real; La Fe phases I, II y III; Laurel del Sur; Lago Horizonte; Hacienda Juliana and Brisas de Juliana.

This company was involved in other projects which included a ready mix, aggregates and asphalt conglomerate, the construction of a site for a Walgreen's store, a group of free-standing structures tailor made for fast food restaurants, a Shell Station, Car Wash & Quick lube operation, Bolera Caribe (Bowling Alley), Caribe Office Center and two Shopping Centers. All of these, except for one of the shopping centers, are located in the Coto Laurel area of Ponce which today enjoys an important and vibrant economic activity.

Through the years, this corporate group developed and promoted other enterprises that have since disappeared or have been sold. These include: SERHE & Inabón, Inc., responsible for the construction of the residential project Alta Vista and numerous paving contracts; Southern Water, dedicated to aerial crop dusting or application; SOAC (Southern Agricultural Corporation) dedicated to the sale of tractors, cranes, finger lifts in addition to the manufacturing of herbicides and insecticides.

These businesses have always been directed and supervised by members of the immediate family which is currently in its sixth generation. Sucesión J. Serrallés, Inc. has always maintained the vision that Don Juan forged back in 1861, when he gave wings to his ideas with the founding of La Hacienda Mercedita. His intentions and his actions gave way to a long and interesting history of an incorporated family circle that has managed to evolve with the changes and continuously maintain an active business enterprise for so many years. This can be seen as an example of perseverance, commitment and determination during good and not so good times. It should certainly serve as an inspiration for many, particularly to the younger members of this family.

It is cause for great pride for the Serrallés family, as well as for all the people that have worked for their companies and for the community that has been its home for all these years, to celebrate the 150 year history of Sucesión J. Serrallés, Inc., "**Casa fundada en 1865**".