

The Lord loves a workin' man

One man's journey toward finding fulfillment

By Emily Clingman
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Thomas Edison once said, "There is no substitute for hard work."

Miguel Sosa said, "Hard work is the principle of a good citizen."

Sosa, referred to by some as "the hardest working man in Johnstown," was once an influential government official in Mexico. He directed programs that implemented sustainable farming practices in impoverished rural Mexican communities. He provided his expertise all over South America, the U.S., Canada and even Germany.

But it wasn't until he became a third-shift employee at Target however – yes, the department store – that he understood the significance of hard work, he said.

When Sosa was a young man, he served in the Mexican military. He went on to receive a master's degree in biology. His career started out in farm and forest management in the rain forests. He taught people how to interact with their natural resources wisely. He also worked with corporations on sustainable development practices.

The stress of working in rural areas all the time took its toll on the family. Sosa wanted more time with them, so he found a job in the city – Chetumal, on the east coast of the Yucatan Peninsula – about four hours south of Cancun.

As assistant to the president of the Mexico Tourism Board, Sosa wrote speeches, assisted on development and sustainability initiatives, and interacted with professionals, investors and governors. He traveled throughout North and South America.

In 2006, his wife Beatriz's mother, who lived in California, fell gravely ill. Beatriz moved there to take care of her. Four months later, Sosa followed.

"Family is important," Sosa said, thinking about the choice that he made. "It comes before professional and personal development."

Sosa was hoping to apply his expertise to a job in the United States, but time went by and nothing turned up. Discouraged, he heeded some advice from his

wife to apply for a job where she was working – Target.

"I couldn't wait for the job I wanted," Sosa said. "So, I started working there too."

He took a position on a construction/remodeling team, working 10 p.m. to 6 a.m.

"I'll admit, I cried the first day," Sosa said. "It's not what I wanted to be doing at all."

"I was starting from zero."

Sosa regained his poise, however, and said he came to appreciate the new situation.

"I began to understand how others lived with less money, education and opportunity," he said. "It was a different perspective of work that I had not known."

He was also surprised at the number of immigrants he encountered with higher degrees that aren't using them.

Sosa eventually took advantage of a first-time homebuyer loan and purchased a modest two-bedroom, \$120,000 home for his himself, his wife and two children.

Utilities, insurance and maintenance were eating away at his income and he was forced to take a second job.

"I worked in a warehouse distribution center from 11 p.m. to 5 a.m.," Sosa recalled. "I'd go home, nap, then take the kids to school. Then, nap. Then work at Target from 11 a.m. to 7 p.m. Then, nap."

He believed in being responsible.

If that wasn't enough, Sosa also took in other family members, including his mother-in-law, who regained her health and still survives today.

Eventually, Sosa's sister-in-law wanted the family to move to Colorado to help her start a restaurant. He jumped on board with the idea, thinking he could eventually open one himself, and make a smart living for his family.

In 2006, they wound up in Windsor.

That winter, not familiar with driving in snow ("You don't get snow in Mexico"), Sosa wrecked his truck.

The economy was taking a dump so the restaurant idea never panned out for him.

In 2008, his two vehicles fell victim to the tornado.

He was still working at Target.

"It was the only stable income we had," he said.

One day, Sosa was grocery shopping at Hays Market in Johnstown. He saw that the deli was hiring, so he applied. He



Photo by Emily Clingman

In his native Mexico, Miguel Sosa shuffled paper as a government official. Last week he was busily shuffling ears of corn at Hays Market during the store's annual tent sale. In addition to working at the local business, Sosa, of Johnstown, also works at Target to provide for his extended family.

had no experience, but Russell Hays, a fourth-generation owner, decided to give him a chance.

Hays doesn't regret it. "Miguel is just all-around a great person," Hays said. "His personality, the way he deals with the customers ... He's far exceeded anything I could have imagined at this point. He's set a great example for my employees. I really enjoy having him here."

Five years later, you can usually find Sosa bagging groceries and chatting with the customers.

"Surprisingly, it's the job I love the most," he said. "I like the training in customer service that I get, and I get to apply some of my tourism career skills, too."

He's probably asked you how work is going, or how your mother is, or if you're playing football this fall.

"I can relate with the people I know here," he said. "We all work hard."

These days, Sosa doesn't have to work quite as hard, however. He still works at Target from 6 a.m. to 2:30 p.m. Then, 45 minutes later, he reports to Hays to work until 9 p.m. But, he has Fridays off now and gets to sleep through the night.

Sosa has never missed a mortgage payment – on three houses. Besides his Johnstown home, he still owns a house in Mexico that his parents live in and the one in California that other family members live in.

"I'm a father, a husband, a responsible man," he said.

Still, something was missing in his life, Sosa said. He didn't feel quite right.

One day his mother-in-law invited his family to Saint John the Baptist Catholic Church. Sosa was raised Catholic but

hadn't been to church for about 20 years. He accepted the invitation but didn't like his experience.

Feeling uneasy about that, he decided to have a chat with Fr. Emilio Franchomme, who encouraged Sosa to attend a weekly bible study for those questioning and exploring their faith. Sosa also attended a spiritual retreat in Denver.

His faith had been renewed and Sosa found that it was bringing strength and tranquility to his hectic life.

"I came to believe that [a strong spiritual life] puts everything else in order," Sosa said. "It's getting me through the tough times."

He now leads that Tuesday evening prayer group.

Hard work, honesty, family and God – This is the mantra that defines Miguel Sosa today.

Does he long for his old life anymore?

"I keep in touch with some of my colleagues," he said. "I see them advance and I think, 'I could be doing that.'"

"But, I'm happy where I am."

Sosa likes living in Johnstown – the small community where everyone is nice, according to him.

"I have found everything I need here," he said.

He still can't get used to the snow, though.

He does miss working in the rain forests, he said, and he often thinks about his father, who was a forest engineer in Mexico, but died when Sosa was 11 years old.

"He instilled a love for the environment in me," Sosa said nostalgically. "I'm thinking about volunteering with the parks service here."

You know, because he's got time for that.

At 47 years old, Miguel Sosa has worked a lifetime. His commitment and love for his family is paramount. He lives with his wife and their three children – one of whom is approaching her Quinceañera – a daughter-in-law, and a granddaughter going on two.

"Sometimes there is craziness in that house," Sosa laughed.

He has some guidance for those who struggle with meeting their obligations in life.

"Just trust the skills you have," he advised. "Show up for work on time."

"Be honest. Work hard. Trust in God."

"Don't give up."