



CONTACT: Roberta Backus Turner
Backus Turner International
954-727-9977

RAFAEL ORDONEZ - OWNER OF DISCOVERY CRUISE LINE

Rafael Ordonez left his native country of Spain when he was a young man to move to the Dominican Republic to live with his uncle in order to have the opportunity to develop his career and become successful. “It was 1955 and I felt the Dominican Republic was the land of opportunity. I left because I had dreams and a young man’s ambition. I knew that I would have more opportunity in the Dominican Republic than I would have if I stayed in Spain.”



Rafael Ordonez

Mr. Ordonez’ instincts were right. When he arrived in the Dominican Republic he began to study accounting and English, both of which would benefit him as he began his future in the Americas. A friend recommended he look into working in the cruise industry because it provided an interesting and exciting lifestyle. So at age 18 he landed his first job working for Eastern Shipping Company as a bus boy.

This decision marked the start of a very successful career that has spanned 45 years. In 1969, Mr. Ordonez founded his own company, Apollo Ship Chandlers. Apollo’s first client was Commodore Cruise Line, which operated seven-day Caribbean cruises, and Apollo handled the food and beverage on board the ship which also included hiring, training and staffing the kitchens, restaurants and bars on the ships. As a concessionaire you basically handle all of the operations in your area and the cruise line pays a per diem per person. Apollo is responsible for the purchasing, preparation and delivery of the product. Today Apollo represents some of the finest names in the world in the cruise industry, including Oceania Cruise Line and Celebrity Cruises, among others.

Mr. Ordonez’ companies employ more than 6,000 people and he regards many of his closest associates as an extended family. “Most of my employees average 25 years with our companies. I am proud of that. We are like a big family. We care about each other, work hard to insure the success of our future and I often find myself making decisions and taking on projects to grow the company more for my team than for my own reasons.” One example that he seems particularly proud of is his personal assistant Maria Cartaya, who has been with him for 20 years. “We work so well together and I value the continuity, friendship and respect we have for each other. There are many people I feel this way about and it makes me look forward to coming into the office every day,” he says.

The success of Apollo Ship Chandlers clearly starts at the top. The work ethic that Mr. Ordonez has influenced all of his employees to not only sit up and admire the boss but to realize that his values are the key to their success as well. “When I was a kid in the Dominican Republic working, if someone had to stay late, it would be me. If someone had to come in on the weekend, I would volunteer. I wasn’t looking for the extra pay but I wanted the experience and I figured I am needed, the job needs to get done and I am willing and able to do it.”



Over the years, hard work and dedication have helped to establish his companies in a volatile business. “We have been around for quite a while. Our reputation in the market is very good. There is no secret to being able to survive for so long. Staying in power is a combination of hard work, having faith in yourself and your staff and sticking to your guns. You have to do your best in everything and try to deliver more than you promised. Going that extra mile has always been critical in business and it’s the key to anyone’s success. I feel very blessed and lucky to have been able to achieve what I have done so far.”

There is no doubt that Apollo Ship Chandlers’ reputation is stellar. Whenever the name is used in the industry, including the travel industry, it connotes top of line product, service and professionalism.

During the years of operation Apollo worked with the owners of a ship named MV Freeport, and through this affiliation had the opportunity to begin its own ship operation in 1987, Discovery Cruise Line. Discovery has been operating for close to twenty years, sailing from South Florida to Grand Bahama Island in the Bahamas. In 2005, Discovery will have reached a landmark like no other; the line will have brought four million passengers and guests to the island.

Discovery is a unique product because it offers all the amenities of a longer cruise in a day. And, because of its daily service to and from Grand Bahama, the cruise line provides the ultimate in flexibility for people looking to visit Grand Bahama. Guests can choose to come for the day or stay any length of time they want to and, with Discovery’s Cruise ‘N Stay Vacation Packages as an option, people can choose the right resort for their individual taste.

Although he is now approaching 66 he has no plans for retirement. “I enjoy doing what I do. I don’t have typical hobbies like golf or skiing. My work is enjoyment to me. I like seeing things grow and develop. It gives me great satisfaction.” It’s no wonder Rafael Ordonez met his wife Alexandra working on the cruise ship as Chief Purser back in 1963. They got married, took a three day break from the ship and spent their honeymoon in Nassau. The Bahamas has always been a special place for the Ordonez family. Rafael Ordonez has over 40 years as a concessionaire in the Bahamas.

One of the positives in his career is doing business with the Grand Bahama Port Authority. Over the years they have developed a mutual respect which Mr. Ordonez regards very highly. “Grand Bahama’s proximity to the United States is very important because we can bring Americans over to the island in just a few hours on Discovery. Many people dream of cruising and, with Discovery, they get that opportunity. Our passengers get three lavish buffet meals during their roundtrip cruise, there are spacious sun decks, all types of games and activities, shows and a casino. So there is always plenty to do on the trip. The destination has also grown up with all types of resorts, attractions, restaurants and activities. The beaches are among the most beautiful in the world. We are proud of Grand Bahama as Discovery’s Port of Call and we look forward to continuing with the destination as we both seek to get better and better.”

In addition to his business acumen, Mr. Ordonez received the highest honor in his country of Spain, “Cruz de Caballero,” which means ‘A Knight Cross’ and is the Spanish equivalent of knighthood for services to the community. It compares to being a “Sir” in Britain.

From humble beginnings to where he is today, the biggest achievement Mr. Ordonez is proud of is the long standing relationships he has established in his personal and professional life.