

## ABOUT OUR HONOREE: MIGUEL GONZALEZ

When Miguel Gonzalez and his father decided to start their first grocery business 30 years ago, they knew little to nothing about cutting meat, buying produce or merchandising non-perishables. How far Gonzalez and his family have come since then.

Today, Gonzalez is President of Northgate Gonzalez Markets, a firmly established family-owned chain of 30 supermarkets scattered across Los Angeles and Orange counties in Southern California. The Mexican native's strong business skills and leadership, boundless work ethic, and faithful commitment to the industry and his community have led to his induction into this year's California Grocers Association Educational Foundation Hall of Achievement.

When I think of Miguel Gonzalez, I think of my own family and the thousands of immigrants who have come to this country to start businesses, said Ron Fong, President/CEO of California Grocers Association, whose family once owned a small chain of stores in Northern California. It is inspiring. You just love seeing stories like this.

For Gonzalez, 60, the past 30 years represent a remarkable journey, one shaped by heartfelt dreams and the family's core values of respect, honesty and hard work. Gonzalez grew up the third son in a large family of 13 children, and began working in his father's shoe factory and shoe store in Jalisco, Mexico when he was just 8 years of age. In 1966, his father, Miguel Gonzalez, Sr., and the two eldest brothers moved to Southern California to find work. Gonzalez followed the path two years later when he graduated high school. In California, Gonzalez worked for the Biltmore Hotel, then

later worked in manufacturing and retail. For a time, he ran a small shoe store. By 1974, the entire family had immigrated to Southern California.



The eldest 7 of the 13 Gonzalez children Ana Rosa, Ramon, Francisco, Miguel, Estela, Maria and Victor.

The early years in this country were hard. The family learned English and adapted to a new culture. In 1980, Gonzalez and his father decided to try their hand at the grocery business. Gonzalez, by then married with two daughters, sold his home and bought another while his father refinanced his own home so that the two could invest in a small, 3,000 square-foot grocery business in Anaheim named Northgate Market. The elder Gonzalez was reluctant to take such a big step, but his son was eager and hopeful. The pair bought the business and leased the property. It proved a challenging but fortuitous move.

We had to learn everything about the business, Gonzalez recalled. We

had a 12-foot meat case and didn't know anything about cutting meat. We had no money to hire anyone, so for the first one and one-half years, we relied on family members. One of my brothers learned the meat-cutting. Everybody helped.

In late 1981, when the market's property owner sought to sell at a price that was too high, the father and son decided to invest instead in a larger, 13,000-square-foot store a mile away. Within six months, sales had doubled. Soon, they were able to purchase their original Northgate Market.

Over the years, the Gonzalez family purchased and leased stores in primarily Hispanic neighborhoods. The father set the tone: Stay close to customers, understand their needs, and provide quality products at fair prices. All in the family pitched in. As the company grew, Gonzalez watched his younger siblings mature



The opening of the second Northgate store was a celebration for the entire La Habra community as well as the Gonzalez family.

and become ready to start families of their own. He found himself with a dream:

I wanted a store for every brother and sister, he said. When I shared this dream with other people, they laughed at me: Oh yes, 13 stores, they said. I guess I proved them wrong.

Today, all but one sister is involved in the family business, all in leadership positions. Gonzalez's youngest brother, Oscar Gonzalez, is co-president with his older brother. In a weekly ritual each Wednesday, the brothers and sisters all meet for lunch and an afternoon of business meetings. At least 20 nieces, nephews and young relatives are now working in the business.

They love to work in our company, Gonzalez said. We are preparing them for the future. We just want to keep growing.

The 30-store chain has 4,500 employees. The company still maintains its first small store, but today the chain also includes several supermarkets of 60,000 square feet. Nearly all of the most recently opened stores are in the 35,000 to 55,000 square-foot range. The company continues to dedicate itself to

its original niche of serving Hispanic communities, but welcomes all patrons.

Aggressive growth is on the horizon for the company. Five new stores are slated to open this year. Northgate will continue to invest heavily in its organization including the addition of a 500,000 square foot distribution center in Anaheim scheduled to be fully operational by November 1. The new distribution center will allow Northgate to continue at a minimum 5-stores-per-year growth rate.

Gonzalez is a founding member of the Board of Directors for Northgate Gonzalez Real Estate, LLC. He became President of Northgate Gonzalez Markets in 1999, when his father passed away. Working with other family members and Northgate executives, Gonzalez has directed the growth of the company and has overseen major developments in purchasing, information technology, warehousing and distribution, human resources and financial reporting.

Gonzalez and his wife, Alicia, live in La Mirada and have six children, all active in the family business. Daughters Teresa and Alicia work in human resources, while daughter Michelle handles management of

store exteriors. Son Miguel III is a store director and is studying grocery management at the University of Southern California, son Manuel is a store manager, and son Moisés is a store director and attending Pepperdine University, where he is preparing for work in the chain's administration.

Northgate Gonzalez Markets has been an active member of the California Grocers Association for many years. Gonzalez serves on the boards of the Orange Community Bank and The Gary Center, a nonprofit social service agency in La Habra. Northgate Market's charitable foundation, the Familia Gonzalez Reynoso Foundation, is dedicated to educational programs and donates extensively to help young Hispanic people attend college.

We like to give back to the community. The community has been good to us. It's the least we can do, Gonzalez said. Gonzalez has had a lifelong love of horses and in his spare time enjoys riding with his brothers at family-owned horse properties in Southern California.



Miguel and Teresa maintain a close relationship with their family; daughters Michelle Gutierrez, Teresa Anaya, Alicia Valadez, son Manuel & his wife, Grecia, sons Moisés and Miguel III.



When away from the business, Miguel spends his free time riding horses.