

Air Force Academy
to the core,
and still
lovin' it!

By Jeff Mustard



GARCIA in focus

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In 1997, Charles Patrick Garcia '83 launched Sterling Financial Investment Group, an investment bank that at the time employed only three people working out of a cleaned out broom closet of Bear Stearns Corporation. "Our office was so small," says Garcia, "we had to be careful what we ate." Today, Garcia can eat what he wants, as there's plenty of room in his executive office that contains a large teak conference table and double French doors from where he commands over 400 people working out of 56 offices in 10 countries around the world. Garcia runs what the University of Florida has named "the fastest growing privately held company in the State of Florida."

Recognized as one of the top entrepreneurs in the country, Garcia has been profiled in numerous newspaper and magazine articles as well as the subject of many television features. The media have frequently characterized him as "A Jack of All Trades" for his success across many fields as a highly decorated military officer, community leader, philanthropist, attorney, former White House Fellow and pro-

vocative writer. Garcia's success can be traced to a few fundamental principles. "Follow your passion in life, act with honor, and treat people with respect." Garcia says without equivocation that "the success that I have achieved rests squarely on the lasting friendships I made at the Academy, combined with the training, discipline, and code of ethics we learned to live by." According to Garcia, the Air Force Academy is "designed to breed leaders, to identify the bright and the bold, and to teach men and women to live by their word."

It is his field experience in counter terrorism and his writings on guerilla warfare that have recently thrust him into the national spotlight. After the terrorist attack on the World Trade Center on September 11th, Garcia was sought after by CNN, FOX, NBC, CBS, Telemundo, Univision and "Cristina" — the #1 talk show on Spanish-language television — to provide insights into the bio-terrorism threat and what America can do about it. He recently appeared on CNN's show CROSSFIRE. His advice and creative solutions



provided innovative commentary both to the media as well as the American people.

The former cadet still rises at 5 a.m., but no longer reads under the covers with a flashlight at “lights out,” a habit that led to the freshman cadet further ruining his eyesight and his chances of being a fighter pilot, but that influenced his decision to become an intelligence officer, or in his own words, “to do that cool James Bond stuff.” A free-fall parachutist, Recondo graduate, and former captain of his squadron’s boxing and soccer teams, during his senior year at the Academy he served as a Deputy Wing Commander and also the Chairman of the Cadet Honor Committee. His measured words, indistinguishable American dialect, blond hair and green-eyes defy his Latin American roots and had everything to do with his Air Force assignment as an intelligence officer to war-torn Central America.

Ultimately, it was Garcia’s ability to express his observations in writing that truly catapulted his military career. A series of articles he published about Fidel Castro’s communist regime brought him to the attention of General John Galvin, a former NATO Supreme Allied Commander who at the time was the Commander of the U.S. Southern Command. Describing his relationship with Garcia, General Galvin said that, “he developed a relationship of mutual trust and confidence between a senior and junior military officer that was unsurpassed anywhere else in the military.” At General Galvin’s direction Garcia wrote a lengthy analysis of Cuba’s support of terrorists that was declassified and published as a May 1987 cover story by *U.S. News and World Report* titled, “Drugs, Terror and Politics: The Deadly New Alliance.” So impressed with him was the magazine’s publisher, real estate tycoon Mort Zuckerman,

that he urged Garcia to apply for the prestigious White House Fellowship which would give Garcia an opportunity to work for the President of the United States.


In 1988, after undergoing a grueling seven-month selection process, Garcia earned a position as one of 14 White House Fellows — one of the youngest ever selected — and he currently serves on its alumni Board of Directors. Once in the White House, Garcia’s razor sharp analysis of geopolitical events led to work on a wide range of special projects for the Reagan and Bush administrations. Garcia helped former secretary of Education and “Drug Czar” William Bennett draft the nation’s first National Drug Control Strategy, a comprehensive blueprint to fight the spread of drugs in the United States.

Despite what appeared to be a promising government career, Garcia chose instead to go to Columbia Law School. He became the first person in his class to publish an article in the prestigious *Columbia Law Review*. The article won several legal awards, and his scholarship was cited extensively by the Florida Supreme Court in a unanimous decision that helped change the way police conduct searches in the homes of Florida citizens. Despite his law school success and an offer to clerk for a prestigious federal judge, Garcia decided to pull the ripcord on his legal career and instead chose to wander the unknown terrain of business.

Once again, according to Garcia, it was his USAFA training and military experiences that helped shape the direction that he and his newly formed company would take, so much so in fact, that Garcia uses the Academy falcon, with talons spread wide, as part of his company’s logo. The firm’s motto: “We soar above the rest.” As if this is not an indelible stamp of Garcia’s subconscious indoctrination

of the Academy, there is one other prominent display of military genetic coding that is evident in Garcia’s firm. Above Garcia’s office door resides a huge sign carved from wood letters that spells out his business philosophy—“Don’t Bring Me Problems, Bring Me Solutions.” Garcia learned that concept first hand working for General Galvin.

Garcia’s dynamic achievements have captured the attention of many including Florida Governor Jeb Bush who in July 2001 appointed him to a newly formed entity, the Florida Board of Education, a seven member board, the first of its kind in the nation, and one in which he is the only Hispanic. For his contributions to the Hispanic community, *Hispanic Business* magazine named Garcia one of the “100 most influential Hispanics in the United States” and recently, Univision, the nations’ largest television network, selected him for their series “Orgullo Hispano” which spotlights Hispanics who have made “an exceptional impact on the culture and life of American society.” The thirty-second profile airs every day for the next three years to a worldwide audience of more than 120 million viewers.

On October 12th Garcia received word from the White House that President George Bush nominated him to serve on the newly created White House Initiative on Educational Excellence for Hispanic Americans. So, what’s left for this forty-year-old entrepreneur and Academy graduate to accomplish? Stay tuned, it seems he’s just getting started. 

(Editor’s note: Charles Garcia was recently elected to serve on the AOG Board of Directors)

