

Meet the Chamber:

# Michael Marugg, Member of the Board

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The Curaçao Chamber of Commerce and Industry is the voice of private enterprise in Curaçao. It represents the general interests of the Curaçao business community, registers businesses, and provides information and services to local and international companies with an interest in doing business in and with (other businesses in) Curaçao. In order to do this, the Chamber has various executive divisions and a board of directors. The board consists of nine members who are elected by the voting members of the business community, five of which represent the corporate sector (companies with an invested capital of at least 100,000 Antillean Guilders) and four who represent the small business sector (companies with an invested capital of less than 100,000 Antillean Guilders). Board members serve a term of three years and can be re-elected; furthermore they represent the different sectors of the business community. In this edition, Curaçao Business Magazine would like to introduce you to Mr. Michael Marugg, an entrepreneur and developer who is on the board of the Chamber of Commerce and Industry.

#### What is your background?

I was born and raised in Curaçao. After completing my studies at Triniteit College in Curaçao, I moved to Colombia where I obtained a degree in dental mechanics. In 1979, I returned to Curaçao after completing my studies and my first job was at a local dental clinic as a dental technician. I opened my first company, a dental clinic, in Aruba in 1982.

#### The change from dental technician to entrepreneur and developer is quite large. How did you end up in this business?

I started off as a dental technician. Even though I enjoyed my work very much, I wanted to do something different. My entrepreneurial spirit led me to the hospitality industry in the early 1990s, and then I was set on pursuing a business career in this business as well. Soon after, I found another passion of mine: real estate and development. I really enjoy real estate development – recently, I transformed a dump area in Caracasbaai into a tourist area, complete with restaurants, apartments, a dive shop and a docking area. I'm really proud of my accomplishments in this industry.

#### You mentioned that you lived in Aruba, what made you move back to Curaçao?

I moved back to Curaçao for family reasons. At the end of the day, Curaçao is and always will be home.

#### What does a day in the life of Michael Marugg look like?

Let me start by saying no day is like the one before, and I don't have a 9 to 5 work day. It varies a lot but I am very busy, and I sleep about 4 to 5 hours a night. I really enjoy what I do, so that keeps me going.

#### How did you become involved in the Curaçao Chamber of Commerce and Industry?

About three years ago, the Director of the Chamber of Commerce and Industry asked me if I was interested in joining the board. I was actually not familiar with the role of the Chamber and what it did, and was therefore hesitant to join. The director was very persuasive and assured me not to worry because within a few days I would catch up with the inner workings of the Chamber. I gave it some more thought and after learning more, I decided that it was indeed important to be an active voice in the business community. I decided to run and became a board member of the Curaçao Chamber of Commerce and Industry.

#### In your opinion, what is the role of the Chamber of Commerce and Industry?

The Chamber has a very important role and most people on the island don't understand what the Chamber means for our society and for their business. As a member of the board of the Chamber of Commerce, I represent the business community in Curaçao. There are so many diverging interests and priorities and that makes it a very difficult job, where you have to work with various stakeholders. I think locals could make better use of the Chamber if they better understood all that it had to offer them, as business owners and citizens.

#### What is your role as a Board member?

As a Board Member, my role is strategic. The board approves and disapproves decisions of the organization. I attend meetings, and represent small businesses on the island. I help think things through on a strategic level – we leave the day-to-day functioning of the organization to the employees at the Chamber, but give advice on the strategic future of the organization and the business community of Curaçao.

#### In your opinion, what is the most important sector in ensuring Curaçao's economic growth and why?

Tourism is an important sector that has an impact on the development of our island's economy. The main benefits of tourism sector are income creation and job generation. Our island has so much to offer. We just need to market our island more aggressively and ensure that our population becomes more service-minded.

#### What have been your biggest accomplishments so far?

I always wanted to be involved in the hospitality industry, and I did it. I became the director of the Curaçao Restaurant Association and afterwards I wanted to move to real estate sector, which is where my focus is nowadays.

#### Can you tell us more about your role as Director of Curaçao Restaurant Association?

I represented the association for about 3 years. We had about 40 restaurants as members in the association. We organized different trainings primarily on safety and security, and assisted businesses in obtaining restaurant permits, and other operational relationships with the government.

#### What is your vision for Curaçao for the next five years?

Curaçao has a lot of potential, and it's up to us to realize it. Although it may seem impossible, my dream is that we are able to work together. I hope that people open their eyes to see that we can offer so much more if we work together. Private sector, government and civil society need to understand each other's interests and concerns, and we need to make sure we're all moving in the same direction. Only together can we make Curaçao the most beautiful and happiest islands in our region.

#### What would you advise to locals who are living abroad and are considering returning to Curaçao?

Young professionals are promised a lot of things but most of them face challenges upon returning to the island because no one is helping them. The important thing is that they take the space to look for help, and maintain their positive energy and hope for the future. Curaçao can only move further if we work together, and that doesn't mean across sectors, but also across generations.