

# In your language: Latinos who build the road to progress

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**M**AITLAND - No wonder your family and friends feel proud to see them be part of the road infrastructure project more complex today in Florida, and one of the largest in the country, which will radically change the way to go forth for residents and visitors to this part of the Sunshine State.

As a continuation of this special series on Hispanic Heritage Month, *The Sentinel* spoke with five of Hispanics employed by SGL Constructors, working on the billionaire Ultimate I-4 project.

If you, like many Central Florida residents, often leads to I-4, you have surely noticed notices, guardrails and massive heavy on the sides of this road artery machinery. And it is expanding a stretch of 21 miles of Interstate 4, better known as the I-4, ranging from Kirkman Road in Orange County, to the SR-434, in Seminole County.

Part of the complexity of these works, which started last February and will run until 2021, is all the work is done along the entire stretch without completely closing the road as most work output ramps, rails and turnouts are made at night.

The project of approximately \$ 2.300 million, which generated hundreds of jobs, will include four new express lanes and reconstruction of 15 primary dealers. And of the 144 bridges along the corridor will be expanded about 13, replaced 74, 53 new and 4 will be only temporary.

Participate in a project of this dimension is a source of great joy for Johann Vivas, who lives in Central Florida since 2006.

Vivas remembered when he called Venezuela to tell his parents about his new job. "It was an experience of great pride in telling them. This is very important for us as professionals," said civil engineer, 38, who works as a field engineer in one of the sections of I-4 Ultimate, along with a group to earth moving and construction.

Vivas, who left his country 13 years ago to continue his graduate studies, said that many Hispanics are part of this project, either in the field, in administration or engineering. "We are people from different countries to achieve a goal and our representation is considerable".

For others, like the Ecuadorian Lisbeth Acosta, and Joseph Morffi, of Cuban parents, working here has meant turning to Central Florida in their new home. Both moved to the area last November: Acosta from New York and Morffi from Miami.

Morffi, who is manager of operations and maintenance, now lives with his family in Sanford. He said that although he had never imagined moving to Orlando, and that the idea had always been living in Miami, where he had 35 years, the diversity of the region has surprised. "There is also a Latin origins and different atmosphere," he said.

An environment that says to please as his family has retained its Spanish roots from generation to generation. To give an example Morffi, 47, born in New York and who describes his Spanish as "Cuban right," she told her

daughter to celebrate you want the Quinceañero.

For its part Acosta, 29, who is coordinator of human resources, said that the city has been changing a bit difficult, mainly because he moved alone. "I'm getting used to, I have tried to leave enough to know, because I really only knew Orlando parks".

Ecuador said slowly discovering places that attract you, like Winter Park and Wekiwa Springs, besides the Latin atmosphere that is felt throughout the region. Acosta recalled that at age 12 came to America, but his family has always preserved its traditions, especially New Year's Eve, as they do on December 31, when asked at midnight 12 wishes, one for each eating grapes.

Returning to the issue of enlargement of I-4, Acosta said he would like that Hispanics have in mind this is a project that will generate jobs throughout its years of construction. "The project continues for several years and the chances are good," said the native of Guayaquil.

### **Insurance I-4**

The Dominican Alejandro Estrella, field engineer who is in charge of traffic and construction in one of the sections of the project, said it is important that the community in general note that in this work on the I-4 will always be the most important that both drivers and keep them "safe and sound".

"We work very close to the traffic that passes us by his side at 50, 60 or 70 miles per hour ... it is important to be aware that when we are working we have families they want to see," said the resident of Altamonte Springs, 25, graduated as a civil engineer at the University of Central Florida.

It is precisely the issue of road safety which also said Francisco Martinez, of Mexican parents and construction worker, who with his team works on bridges. "I want the employees who are with me to go home every day as arrived," said the native of Texas and 32 years.

Orlando resident said it is in the construction industry since I was 18 and I-4 Ultimate has been the largest project that has worked. He also stressed that bilingualism has been an important tool in its work, especially to help other colleagues to communicate better.

About using Spanish Morffi, meanwhile, stressed that it is of great use in doing jobs like those attending to drivers who have been stranded on the highway, the road known as road rangers or guards. "Stopping to help someone and to BE ABLE speak Spanish because they come from another country is a tremendous benefit," he said.

In this topic, Vivas argues that it is for the Latino community in the US is important to learn English, but without neglecting the Spanish. "Mastering two languages offers very great advantages in the labor market, as it is in engineering and construction," said the Venezuelan.

Estrella, who lived in Dominican Republic until age 14, speaking Spanish at home was part of a family rule implemented primarily for his younger brother to learn the language. The engineer said that this "rule", which remained in the family, never bothered him. "Culture is one is from music, food, and Christmas festivities, one continues to live as a Dominican here, there or anywhere else."

Estrella, who lives in Central Florida since 2009 and is considered "lover Orlando" for diversity offered by the area, said it is important that the community see the work on I-4 as an opportunity "to open up doors" in an area where you think there are many things to discover.

"The area [Central Florida] has many secreticos that, if one looks, it really teaches the diversity of this place and culture," he said.

Morffi, moreover, added that the project I-4 Ultimate "is here for the future, to move more easily."

Although still a long time to see the project completed in 2021, and since all these Hispanics say they feel proud because in the future, when speaking of transportation in Central Florida, they have contributed their bit.

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