



# **DRSEA INFORMER**

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***Un Paso Mas Y Llegamos*** – I have been in the Dominican Republic now for four months and there is much to report, some good, some bad.

The good includes the identification of land that we are interested in securing for the Dominican Republic Sports & Education Academy. The land is in Boca Chica, not far from Santo Domingo, very close to the airport and within easy access of several Major League Baseball facilities, giving it added value. We are assessing the property to see if it suits our needs AND is affordable, both now and in the future.

We have also forged several alliances with organizations such as Children International that have helped us move forward. Without help from CI, it would have been impossible to launch our reading program.

The bad news is the economy. While the Dominican Republic isn't being hit as directly as the United States, there is a trickle down impact, but the country seems to be weathering it well since it is not as dependent on the U.S. financial institutions.

Dominican President Leonel Fernandez gave a very optimistic State of the Nation address on February 27, the country's independence day, outlining many positive perspectives for the future. In 2008, the Gross Domestic Product was up 5.3%, compared to 4.6% average for Latin America and the Caribbean, and the world average of 3.4%. Inflation ended at 4.52% (the lowest in Latin America), when forecasts were for 12%. Foreign investment totaled a record US\$2.88 billion, balancing the effects of increases in fuel, raw materials and inputs.

Several light manufacturing areas showed growth: electronic products 13%, pharmaceuticals 5.4%, jewelry 11%, cigars 9.5%, agro-industrial 7%. Jobs were down from 128,000 in 2007 to 125,000 in 2008, but the good news is that 102 new companies applied for duty free manufacturing, with an investment of RD\$3.7 billion pesos for 2009, and potential for creating 15,400 new jobs. Tourism receipts were US\$4.2 billion, making it the leading foreign currency producer.

A total of 3.9 million tourists visited the Dominican Republic; over 1 million from the United States. Growth in markets from Canada (up 8%), the US and France also posted positive growth figures, as well as Switzerland, Colombia, Argentina, Chile, Brazil and Russia.

President Fernandez also expressed that improved education would be the salvation of his country and called for an increase in the GDP for education to at least 2.8 %. Hopefully, his call for increased educational spending will have an impact on the DRSEA, helping to create a climate here where education will be viewed as a necessity and not a luxury.

As we continue to move forward, we still look for assistance on all fronts, with the search for money to build the Academy naturally at the top of the priority list, but we are looking for other assistance as well. We need:

🏠 **Grant writers.** There are grants out there, but writing skillful proposals to obtain them is an art.

🏠 **Translators.** We have improved our website and now would like to translate it into Spanish. We have some assistance, but don't want to overload her.

🏠 **Legal Assistance.** We need help with our non-profit status

🏠 **Marketing.** While we don't expect to open until at least 2010, we want to market the Academy to potential donors, investors and sponsors, as well as to potential students, faculty and administrators.

🏠 **Educators.** We are particularly looking for input with experts on curriculum to help develop a course of studies that will adequately prepare Academy student for college in the U.S.

Maybe you or somebody you know can provide that assistance.

***No Hay Hombre Una Isla (No Man Is An Island)*** – I lost a friend recently with the passing of former NBA star Norm Van Lier. He was only 61.



Whenever someone who has touched my life passes away, I always recall John Donne's immortal poem, *For Whom The Bell Tolls*, because it reminds me of how important our friends are, how interdependent we all are, how good relationships with others makes us better. Norm made me a better person.

Norm and I worked together at the Center for the Study of Sport in Society at Northeastern University in the early 1990s. Of course I had heard of him before that; after all, he had been an NBA All-Star with the Chicago Bulls. He has a reputation as a fierce competitor; he once threw a chair at an opponent. Some said he was a hothead, a malcontent.

That second reputation preceded him to the Center and raised some concerns about hiring him, and when a couple of us met him for lunch to discuss his employment, that reputation was definitely on our minds, in fact I was intimidated by that reputation. I remember meeting him for the first time and thinking, “He is smaller than I thought,” perhaps enlarging him in my mind’s eye because of who he was AND who I had heard he was. But here was a man slightly over 6 feet tall, about 170, immaculately dressed and groomed, soft spoken, extremely articulate, far removed from the behemoth, bearded, basketball beast I had convinced myself was Norm Van Lier.

Norm and I become fast friends in Boston, sharing a love for good jazz, good food, a good drink (this was back in the day when I still drank), and sports, as well as conversations about literature, travel, art, love, life – as I said, Norm was extremely articulate and well rounded, in part because he believed in the power of education and he educated himself at every possible opportunity. “You never get too old to learn,” he would tell me.

Norm took to calling me Sir Charles; I never knew the exact reason why, but I came to take it as he had bestowed his own brand of nobility on me, inviting me to a Roundtable that I knew not everyone had a seat. I don’t think Norm trusted too many people, but when he did, you were wrapped in it.

We left the Center around the same time, but stayed in touch, and whenever I needed him, Norm was there. If I needed him as a speaker, he only asked when and where. Ask him to be a master of ceremonies and he showed up in his tux. He was always there, particularly when it came to children and education. “Sir Charles,” he would tell me, “These kids have to understand they need to get into their books. Basketball is fun; education is essential.” The only time I have ever seen Norm get angry was when he felt a group of kids was not paying attention to his message, or the message of others about the importance of education. He was very proud that he played in the NBA, but he was even more proud of his college degree.

Norm and I used to talk every few months, but that dropped off the past couple of years, in part due to the fact that we generally communicated through his wife, Susan, who is a DRSEA Board of Trustees member, who I always asked about Norm and he asked about me through her. The last few months, we had talked about Norm coming to the Dominican Republic this summer to do a basketball clinic and, of course, talk about the importance of education. Sadly, that is not to be.

Donne’s poem reflects that no man is an island, entire of itself, existing independently, for each is a part of a greater community, and contributes to the greater good of that community. And the loss of one part of the community makes the community less. That is the way I felt when I heard that Norm had passed away, that not only a part of me was gone, but a part that wanted to make the world better was gone as well. Goodbye Norm. Thank you for being who you were – a noble man. God sped.

Each man's death diminishes me,  
For I am involved in mankind.  
Therefore, send not to know  
For whom the bell tolls,  
It tolls for thee.

## ***Otras Noticias De Interés (Other News of Interest)***

***Dominican-Cuban Education Pact*** – During his visit to Cuba, President Leonel Fernandez reached an agreement with his Cuban counterpart Raul Castro for cooperation between several governmental educational centers. During his five-day trip, Fernandez visited Havana's Information Technology University and announced plans for collaboration with the Las Americas Institute of Technology (ITLA) and CyberPark in Santo Domingo.

In Cuba, Fernandez praised the country's educational models, and also proposed that the Enrique Jose Varona Higher Education Institute sign agreements with the Dominican Teachers Association that consists of teachers working at public schools. The proposal was welcomed by center director Alfredo Mateo Diaz Fuentes.

Accompanying him on his trip to Cuba were Education Minister Melanio Paredes and Eddy Martinez, director of the Center for Exports and Investments (CEI-RD).

***Quality Tourism*** – The president of the National Association of Hotels and Restaurants (Asonahores), Haydee Kuret de Rainieri, has called for an initiative to place emphasis on the development of a high quality Dominican tourism product as a way of maximizing the great opportunities that the tourism sector has in the country and across the Caribbean region. The Punta Cana hotel executive represented the tourism sector at the "Second Grand Business Forum: World Crisis Challenges and Opportunities" that was held in Casa de Campo, La Romana as part of the "Grand Andalusian Fair in the Caribbean".

Mrs Rainieri said that with the impetus of a quality Dominican tourism there is also an obligation to diversify the offers, overcome the problems of infrastructure, increase promotion, care for the image of the destination on the international scene and strengthen the "Caribbean" brand name. The Asonahores executive presented the wonders of the island to business representatives and authorities from the Spanish province of Andalucia, Puerto Rico and the United States. She pointed out that of the 23 islands registered in the World Tourism Organization (WTO) just five of them garner 67% of all tourism in the region. The Dominican Republic has the largest share (20%) followed by Puerto Rico, Cuba, Jamaica and the Bahamas. None of the remaining islands receive more than 500,000 visitors a year. Mrs. Rainieri closed her presentation by saying that the battle for tourism in the region "is based on the quality of service", and currently the requirement is even greater for the Dominican Republic to maintain the position it has earned in the principal markets whose economies are being affected by the economic crisis.

*Charles S. Farrell*

## **DRSEA Contact Information in the Dominican Republic**

Address: Calle 19 de Marzo, #103, Suite 305, Zona Colonial, Santo Domingo, Dominican Republic

Phone: 829-505-2991

Website: [www.drsea.org](http://www.drsea.org)

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