

RICHARD D. SARMIENTO

In 1983, after 10 years with Hyatt Hotels Corporation, Rick Sarmiento was appointed General Manager of the showcase Hyatt Regency Inner Harbor. The responsibilities—525 rooms, 2 restaurants, 550 employees—and the benefits—a substantial salary, company Cadillac, and residential hotel suite—were considerable; but Sarmiento was an entrepreneur waiting for the right opportunity.

In 1985, he took that chance when he opened The White House, Inc., a boutique in Baltimore's Harborplace. The 278-square foot space was so small that Sarmiento had to use his suite at the Hyatt across the street to store stock. In addition, Sarmiento's lack of retail experience and the store's unusual theme—all white clothing and accessories for women—made skeptics of even his closest friends.

In 1987, Sarmiento made what he says was "one of the most difficult decisions of my life" and left the hotel business to run The White House full-time. Liquidating his retirement savings and all his assets, he plunged into the business. "It never occurred to me that it wouldn't work" says Sarmiento, "although I was naive about the dynamics and difficulties of running your own company!"

Even though the success of The White House, which now operates of 48 stores, has exceeded expectations, Sarmiento has always had a keen business sense. Eager to learn hotel operations from the ground up, the University of Kansas graduate joined the Hyatt Hotels Corporation as a front desk clerk, volunteering to work in other departments on his days off. When he left the corporation 13 years later, Sarmiento had turned the Inner Harbor hotel into one of the most successful in the Hyatt chain.



Sarmiento was born in California and raised in Bogota, Columbia until the age of 12. He then lived in Tulsa, Oklahoma until he enrolled at the University of Kansas, graduating in 1967 with a degree in international relations. Sarmiento spent the next five years as a U.S. Marine Corps flight instructor and helicopter pilot in Vietnam.

Sarmiento continues to be active in every phase of his company's growth. By the end of 1998, the company will have 50 stores. He recently announced plans to expand nationally to 60 stores by 2000.

An accomplished public speaker, Sarmiento has been recognized for his achievements by the Hyatt Hotels Corporation, which twice named him a candidate for manager of the year, and by the Baltimore Rotary Club, which gave him the Paul Harris Award for distinguished community service. He currently serves on the Board of the Maryland Chamber of Commerce. Sarmiento is also very active in his leisure time, scuba diving, running and traveling, and spending time with his new daughter.

The White House, Inc.

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