



“To me, the definition of challenge is opportunity.”



Camalia Valdés

President, Cervecería India Inc.

BY DENNIS COSTA PACHECO

Imagine taking over a globally recognized brewery and making it grow by leaps and bounds in the span of just five years; now picture taking over this huge responsibility at the tender age of 29. It may sound like the plot of a Hollywood production but it is instead a reality achieved by *40 Under 40* honoree Camalia Valdés, president of Cervecería India, Inc.

Since her days as a toddler, the Mayagüez-based company has always played a huge part in Valdés' life. Her grandfather, don Alfonso Valdés Cobián, founded Cervecería India back in 1937 together with his two brothers. Valdés remembers when, at the age of three, she visited the company's manufacturing plant with her granddad. "I was practically raised inside the company and since the beginning I always knew that Cervecería India would play a big part in my professional life and my future," said Valdés.

To this day, Valdés considers her grandfather her main inspiration in business. "He was always motivated by innovation and that philosophy has always influenced my decisions in the company," she said. By 1986, her grandfather had passed away and his widow, Grace García took over the reins of the company.

In the meantime, young Valdés was busy

preparing for great things. She studied at Trinity College in Hartford, Conn., where she graduated in 1994 with a bachelor in liberal arts with a major in legal studies. In 1998, she obtained her Juris Doctor when she graduated Cum Laude from Inter American University of Puerto Rico.

After practicing law for a relatively short period, Valdés joined the Cervecería India family as manager of operations, where she started processes aimed at improving the manufacturing plant's infrastructure and developing new, more efficient production methods. In 2002, 29-year-old Valdés firmly took the reins of Cervecería India and she never looked back.

As president, Valdés continued her aggressive efforts to optimize efficiency and infrastructure at the company's manufacturing plant, while developing a detailed master plan regarding marketing and sales. As a result Malta India is the undisputed leader among malt beverages in Puerto Rico, and the firm's flagship product Medalla Light is currently inching ever closer to the top of the highly competitive beer beverage market.

During Valdés' tenure as president, perception of the Medalla brand has also improved exponentially, thanks in part to high-profile

wins in international competitions that pitted the Puerto Rican beer against distinguished competition from Australia, Barcelona, Brussels, New Zealand and Prague, to name a few. Other products manufactured by the company include Cerveza India, Coco India, Kola Champagne, Diet Cola Champagne and Malta India Light.

Given the highly competitive nature of the industry, Valdés admitted steering the Cervecería India ship has proved a challenging affair but, as she explained, "to me, the definition of challenge is opportunity." Another challenge for Valdés has been successfully balancing her professional career with her home life, which she shares with her husband Craig T. Hylwa and her dog Canela.

As to her future plans for Cervecería India, further growth in the local marketplace is certainly in the cards as well as successfully exporting the product overseas. For that reason, the company is currently in the midst of a massive expansion at its manufacturing facilities, with an investment of approximately \$24 million that is expected to increase production by at least 60%. Once finished by early 2008, the plant will become one of the most technologically advanced in Latin America. ■

Birth Date: Oct. 14, 1972

Place of Birth: San Juan

Education: Juris Doctor Inter American University of Puerto Rico, B.A in liberal arts with a major in legal studies, Trinity College, Hartford, Conn.

Marital Status: Married Craig T. Hylwa

Favorite Food/Restaurant: Nobu

Favorite Beverage: Medalla Light

Dream Destination: Florence, Italy

Car She Drives: Lexus

Nightstand Reading: *Good to Great and Built to Last: Successful Habits of Visionary Companies* by Jim Collins

Charity Work: "I like to support projects in education that promote innovation and new ways of thinking"

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