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## Extra effort propels Phillip Garcia's career

By

Tim Linden

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The North American Free Trade Agreement went into effect in 1994 and soon thereafter [Phillip Garcia](#) opened his customs house brokerage business.

“The first year, I crossed about 80 trucks,” he said speaking of the business he cleared from Mexico into the United States over the Pharr Bridge in South Texas. “The second year I did 500 trucks and we’ve been growing ever since. Now we clear about 9,000 to 10,000 trucks annually.”

Garcia said the secret to success is no big secret. “You just have to work harder than anyone else,” he said.



Phillip Garcia in red shirt.

He noted that the first year, he was a one-man team. He would do anything to get the business including being the “runner” by delivering the appropriate documentation from one official to the next. “And we stayed open on Sundays,” he said. “I promoted the fact that we didn’t charge overtime and if you wanted to cross on Sunday, we were there for you. My motto was to go the extra mile to get the business.”

It worked. Today Phillip Garcia US Customs Broker is headquartered in Hidalgo, TX, and still has many of the same customers he gained by working on Sundays in 1994.

“We’ve been in business 28 years -- it will be 29 in April,” he said. “Many of my employees have been with me for 15 years or longer. We are blessed that we have so much business.” Among his employees is his wife, Lucrecia Garcia, who recently received her customs broker license. “She recently passed the test,” he said, adding that they were on vacation in New York when she got the email and she went crazy with excitement.

Phillip Garcia revealed that when he met his wife, she was working for another customs broker and had a great deal of experience. “When I married my wife, she came to the position already trained,” he quipped. They’ve been working together ever since.

About 90 percent of the product that the company clears through customs is fresh produce, but

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Garcia said he also has several other customers. "I have a customer that crosses caskets and others that cross various arts and crafts, boots and buckles...lots of different Mexican goods. I have crossed tile and bricks and auto parts for high ends cars like Audi. We can do anything."

He also revealed that he has a national customs broker permit that allows the company to clear product through other ports as well. "We cross product in Laredo and Otay Mesa (in California)," he said. "And we've brought in product from China through Long Beach (California)."

Garcia repeated that business is good though there is always a summer slow down when fewer fresh crops are exported from Mexico into the United States. "Our busy time for produce is September through June," he said. "During July, August and early September, we take our vacations."

He is anticipating a very busy winter season and noted in early November that volume was beginning to pick up. In fact, he expects the volume to be so great that at times it will overwhelm the Pharr Bridge. Garcia said the operators of the Pharr Bridge are excellent promoters of the operation.

"Pharr Bridge officials do a great job of pushing the bridge in Mexico at a lot of events and shows," he said. "But be careful what you wish for because sometimes there is just too much traffic."

He said the bridge has had many upgrades and expansions and he is hopeful that the latest facility expansion will open soon and relieve some of the congestion. But he added that having too much business is a nice problem to have.

Garcia said broccoli is the No. 1 produce item that he clears, with green beans and cauliflower also accounting for a great deal of business. He said every year there is a new product to cross. "We're crossing Chinese vegetables and some items I've never even heard of."

Garcia reported that Mondays and Fridays are the busiest days for crossing, and yes, the company still offers Sunday service. "We typically clear 30 to 40 trucks on a Sunday," he said, adding that it is worth it to satisfy his customers' needs.

Phillip Garcia US Customs Broker also operates a Primus/GFS certified cold storage facility that gives the company another revenue stream and service to offer its customers.

[Tim Linden](#)

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## About Tim Linden |

Tim Linden grew up in a produce family as both his father and grandfather spent their business careers on the wholesale terminal markets in San Francisco and Los Angeles.

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Tim graduated from San Diego State University in 1974 with a degree in journalism. Shortly thereafter he began his career at The Packer where he stayed for eight years, leaving in 1983 to join Western Growers as editor of its monthly magazine. In 1986, Tim launched Champ Publishing as an agricultural publishing specialty company.

Today he is a contract publisher for several trade associations and writes extensively on all aspects of the produce business. He began writing for The Produce News in 1997, and currently wears the title of Editor at Large.

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