

ONLINE FEATURE

SOCCER STAR, ENGINEER AND WORLD TRAVELER: FABIO HURTADO '74

Fabian “Fabio” Hurtado was born in October 1950 in Pereira, the Colombian city that claims to have perfect weather and to produce the world’s best coffee. As a child, Fabio dreamed of becoming a civil engineer and a good soccer player. He is quick to point out that some of the best soccer players, such as Pele and Maradona, were born in October.

In the early 60s, Fabio and his family moved to New Jersey. There were not many South American engineers in the area to serve as role models, but he soon discovered that there was plenty of local soccer talent, including a few ex-professional players from Europe and South America competing in various leagues. Luckily, soccer and engineering were a good mix for Fabio.

At the age of 17, he joined the German-American adult league and, in his first 10 games, drilled the ball into the net 20 times. In the championship game, he scored five goals and assisted on the other to power his team to a 6-1 triumph over favorites American-Czechoslovakia. One of his Irish teammates (Bob Miller '72) and his Scottish coach Alex Malone encouraged Fabio to consider NJIT as the best choice for his engineering and soccer career. That encouragement led him to earn a degree in civil engineering and to excel on the soccer field.

Despite his short stature (5' 7"), Fabio was recognized as one of the best players in the college arena. He was selected for the NJIT Hall of Fame, named an All-American, and drafted by the Dallas Tornado professional soccer team in 1975. Thirty-five years after his graduation from NJIT, Fabio still holds several NJIT records, including most career goals (65).

Yet soccer wasn't Fabio's only interest as a young man. Although he says he never thought he'd be accepted at a school like Newark College of Engineering, successfully completing his civil engineering degree opened up the whole world for him. He's worked in Central America, Europe, North America, the Middle East, South America and Africa, and he's traveled to numerous countries as a visitor. He avers that his favorite country is Italy, and that he and his wife of more than 30 years love the country so much they learned to speak Italian.

Eventually, Fabio found working as an engineer more appealing than pursuing full-time employment as a soccer player. He accepted engineering positions in Nevada, at the Kennedy Space Center in Florida, and in Latin America. He became a licensed Professional Engineer and served as City Engineer/Assistant Public Works Director for the City of Maitland, Florida, for more than 10 years. But world travel beckoned, and he found positions that have taken him and his wife around the globe. At the Kennedy Space Center, he worked for several years with fellow engineering alumnus Alfredo Teran '75 – an experience that he recalls with special fondness.

Fabio is proud to mention that some of his most gratifying professional assignments have involved working on projects funded by the U.S. Agency for International Development, the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, and the U.S. Department of State. But reflecting on what life has brought his way, Fabio sums it up by saying, “I never dreamed that this little South American boy was going to actually live the life he strongly desired, or marry Jean Elaine Hinty, such a wonderful person from a small, quaint Indiana town, or travel all over the world as an NJIT engineer.”

FIRST-HAND FROM EGYPT

Recently, on assignment in Egypt, Fabio was caught up in the rising political unrest. Following is his first-hand account.

My wife, Jeanie Hurtado, found herself a long way from the quiet rural life of Randolph County, Indiana, where she was born and raised, after we were caught in the middle of the recent Egyptian uprising. Due to my civil engineering work in Egypt with the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, we had been living on the outskirts of Cairo since September 2010. On Friday, January 25, 2011, the day the riots hit news networks in the United States, we were relaxing at home until Jeanie's mother, Imogene Hinty, called to see if we were OK. Turning on the TV, we saw the demonstrations and understood her concern. We thought this would be a one-day demonstration. But we soon discovered, along with the rest of the world, that the massive protest was going to last a lot longer.

It also became clear to us that we needed to evacuate as soon as possible. A Greek expatriate who worked for me as a manager called to tell me that he was evacuating his entire family to Greece and that all the supermarkets, banks, and stores in our neighborhood had closed their doors to avoid looting. At that moment, my wife and I realized that we were in real trouble and that we could be trapped for a long time. Our Greek friend also

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Jeanie and Fabio Hurtado with their boatman and guide on the Nile.

told us that the Egyptian military had surrounded our entire neighborhood (gated community) with tanks and soldiers and that nobody was allowed to go in or out. This was a half-comfort as we felt protected from looters, but the real danger was about to start.

All of a sudden, several rounds of gunshots were fired and we knew that looters had broken into our neighborhood, mostly gangs of men riding motorcycles. All we could see from our 4th floor windows were men (young and old) armed and running in every direction, yelling, and we could hear more shots. We turned the lights off, closed all curtains, and stayed in

our apartment from Thursday afternoon until Monday morning without stepping outside, or making any noises. We tried to pack, sometimes in the dark, and stayed away from windows in case bullets came in our direction. Since the U.S. had not made any statements to incite disdain, we did not suspect that we were targets just for being Americans. But we learned later that we were very vulnerable. Actually, we did not understand the full extent of the danger we could be in as Americans because Egyptians had always been so friendly to us for the most part.

Communication was a big problem for everyone, especially when the Egyptian government cut off internet and cell phone access. We only had our landline phone, which allowed just local calling. We later discovered that Imogene had become gravely concerned, not being able to contact her daughter for several days. The same concerns were affecting my Mom and family members in the U.S. and Colombia.

After bombarding the U.S. Embassy switchboard all day Sunday with calls, we finally received direct instructions to evacuate after midnight. They told us to be ready to be evacuated at 9:15 a.m. But when we gave

them our address they informed us that they could not pick us up as we were not in their vicinity. We navigated our way out of the subdivision, saw the numerous tanks and military personnel at the gates, and were stopped by vigilantes along the road to the airport. However, we made it to the secluded site that the U.S. Embassy finally whispered to us in the early hours of Monday, January 31. The instructions were to go to Terminal 1, Hall 4 of the Cairo Airport. Embassy workers were late in arriving at the airport and the lines were very disorganized. Despite the long lines and disorganization, we made it out of Cairo on the second plane and landed in Athens, Greece.

We intend to go back to Winchester, Indiana, later this year to resume our duties as sponsors of the June Festival's wine-tasting booths. We also look forward to the more peaceful environment of our Cape Canaveral/Cocoa Beach home in Florida and summer in Randolph County over our wintry brush with Egypt's rebellion! ■

Fabio can be contacted at fabianh3@hotmail.com, 321-613-3365 (home) or 407-334-9832 (cell). He would very much like to hear from alumni and friends.

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