

Why would a 63 year old gringo move to Medellin and start a real estate company when he was not a realtor and did not speak Spanish?

My name is Rich Holman and I first came to Medellin in August 2006 at the insistence of two friends in Naples Florida who said I would be very surprised how nice Medellin was. Well that could have been the understatement of the century. My initial visit was for ten days and all I could think about as I basked in the glorious daily springtime days was “Wow, Medellin has got to be the world’s best kept secret”.

I have visited every major continent except Africa and I have to say Medellin is the best city I have ever visited or lived in. Springtime every day, no screens because there are almost no bugs or insects, mountain spring tap water that is better than bottled water, the very friendly local inhabitants, the Paisa’s, whose smiles are contagious and manners exemplary, a very positive vibe and energy throughout the city, great transportation, a clean city, 32 universities and eight of the top 42 hospitals in South America. I quickly returned in October 2006 and in the middle of that trip I did something that changed my life.

I kept thinking the world is going to soon discover the truth about this cosmopolitan city so perhaps I should buy an apartment before the prices take off. So I did what all of us do and went to Google and typed in English, “Medellin real estate”, “Medellin realtors”, “Medellin apartments for sale”, etc. and nothing came up in English. My immediate reaction was “who is going to take care of all the foreigners when they discover Medellin and want to buy an apartment”?

Thus the genesis for First American Realty Medellin. I knew the future so now I wished to capitalize on it. So at age 63, not being versed in Spanish and not having been a realtor, I started making plans to start my realty company. I came back in Jan 2007, put together a mock web site and started doing research. I came again in March 2007 and began looking for my own apartment to purchase. It was at this time I told my father, an 88 year old retired Air Force pilot, who was not afraid of anything, my plans to move to Medellin and buy a place and start a company. We talked almost every day and he was my best friend and he told me point blank, “do not go. It is too dangerous”.

No matter what I told him he stuck to his guns. I guess he must have read the US State Department warnings. But he, like most Americans and Europeans, did not have a clue about the truth. If I had not lost my dad on May 1, 2007 I would not be in Medellin. I loved and respected him and would have honored his wishes. But one month after he died I moved to Medellin to begin my odyssey.

And what a voyage it has been. While organizing the company and starting with one part time employee I still had time to take some dance lessons and Spanish lessons. But by year end, when I turned the company web site on, my life as I knew it, ended. For the next five years I averaged 80 hour work weeks and virtually took no holidays, Colombian or US. We grew to 3, 4, 5 then 7 persons. In 2010 my commercial partner, Joe Greco, joined us. Then in 2012 we merged with another property management company, The Apartment Medellin. In 2015 the company doubled in size to 50 people and my work weeks are now down to 50 hours so I feel like I am on vacation. I also am taking time from Medellin to explore the rest of Colombia, taking working vacations where I write about my trips to different cities.

It is very exciting to be a part of the emergence of Colombia and Medellin as world class places. Just last year Medellin beat out Tel Aviv and New York City as being the world's most innovative city. Every day is like a dream and I feel blessed for having the opportunity for making the last quarter of my life, my most fulfilling quarter. If I were still in Naples FL, where I resided for 14 years before moving to Medellin, I am sure they would be trying to push me into a nursing home. But here, living in the "city of eternal springtime", I feel like I have discovered the "fountain of youth". I am sure my dad is looking down on me with a big smile saying, "way to go son".

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