

"The purity of your purpose is evidenced by the quality of your outcome."

-- Gerald "Gerry" A. Fernandez

President & Founder

The Multicultural Foodservice & Hospitality Alliance (MFHA)

Nearly everyone who knows Gerald "Gerry" A. Fernandez and the work that he does for The Multicultural Foodservice & Hospitality Alliance (MFHA), describes him as a man of vision, dedication, and passion. As President and Founder of MFHA, a non-profit organization that promotes cultural intelligence in the workplace, Gerry has been recognized repeatedly over the years for his work in educating Members on, and advocating for, the business benefits of cultural diversity and inclusion in the foodservice and hospitality industry.

CHANGING COURSE AND THE CREATION OF MFHA

With over 35 years of experience in the industry, Gerry has held leadership positions with several well-known companies including The Waldorf-Astoria Hotel, Hemenway's Seafood Grill & Oyster Bar, The Capital Grille and General Mills, where he got his start in diversity and inclusion work.

Gerry's career-altering moment happened while still employed as a National Account Manager for General Mills. He saw an ad for the 1995 Women's Foodservice Forum (WFF) Conference. After a brief conversation with a WFF contact, he was convinced to attend. It was at the conference that the idea for MFHA came to him. "I thought, if there is a need for a women's group to promote opportunities for women, then there ought to be a group to promote opportunities for minorities," he shares.

MFHA was the first organization to bring about a national discussion on diversity management in the hospitality industry just a year later.

GETTING RECOGNIZED FOR WORK THAT DOES GOOD

Gerry's most recent recognition comes from Nation Restaurant News' "Power List", featuring the 50 most powerful people leading and shaping today's restaurant industry, cited as a Top Catalyst for promoting change. This is the second time he has been named to the coveted list, which counts mostly C-suite executives from leading companies and organizations in foodservice. Quoting the article: "...Fernandez has tirelessly urged foodservice leaders to diversify their workforces, vendor networks and customer bases to unlock their businesses' full potential. In that time, the MFHA has emerged as the industry's premier voice and solutions provider for multicultural business challenges and counts some of the world's largest restaurant companies and food manufacturers among its roster of corporate members."

Some of Gerry's most notable recognitions include:

- Nation's Restaurant News "The Power List: 50 Power Players Top Catalysts" February 2014
- Hermann G. Rusch Humanitarian Award from the American Culinary Federation
- Nation's Restaurant News "50 Power Players," January 2000
- Lodging Magazine, One of the "75 Profiles in Leadership"
- The Black Culinary Alliance Heritage Award
- Rainbow/P.U.S.H. Coalition's Reginald Lewis Trailblazer Award
- Nation's Restaurant News Innovator Award for founding MFHA
- APEX Award for Distinguished Service by Black Meetings & Tourism Magazine

THE ADVOCATE, THE SPEAKER

Gerry A. Fernandez is the "voice" of MFHA, providing keen business building insights gained from actual multicultural Member experiences. An engagingly energetic Speaker who practices "straight talk", he travels across the US and internationally, bringing authentic perspective on building Cultural Intelligence in the workplace.

He is also a sought-after motivational speaker, inspiring others to find new ways to recover and succeed over life's setbacks, based on a personal tragedy.

EDUCATION AND AFFILIATIONS

A former Trustee of Johnson & Wales University, Gerry holds a Bachelor of Science degree in Foodservice Management from the same school, where he also earned a Culinary Arts degree in 1976, and received an honorary doctorate in Business Administration in 1999.

He remains actively involved in allied organizations: as an honorary Board Member of the Rhode Island Community Food Bank, Life Member of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP), The National Council of La Raza, The Women's Foodservice Forum (WFF) and the National Restaurant Association.

STAYING THE COURSE

MFHA remains the leading voice for positive cultural change with its newly launched "Cultural Intelligence" platform and is poised for more. In retrospect, Gerry is proud to see how far the industry has come in embracing the multicultural opportunity but sees more work still.

"The promise of changing the world for the better by literally planting seeds of inclusion in the minds of youth through our 'Showcase of the Stars™' and Youth Cultural Intelligence workshops, keeps me on course", Gerry shares. "Nothing I have done in my professional career is more important or has more potential to transform lives."

GETTING PERSONAL

Gerry has three sons, six grandchildren and lives with his wife, Debra (Jackson) in Warwick, Rhode Island. He is extremely grateful for the professional latitude his family extends to him considering as his work frequently sees him traveling. "I am committed to passing on my knowledge on to my children, grandchildren and extended family and believe in spending time as if it's your last day on this earth."

His personal mission statement reflects a life lived accordingly:

"As a man of action, to serve others by applying the gifts of leadership, passion, and creative energy given by God."

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Media Contact:

Helga Melgar, Marketing & Communications Manager
The Multicultural Foodservice & Hospitality Alliance (MFHA)
Direct: 401.461.6344 helga.melgar@mfha.net

The Multicultural Foodservice & Hospitality Alliance (MFHA)

The mission of MFHA is to bring the economic benefits of diversity and inclusion to the food and hospitality industry by building bridges and delivering solutions. MFHA commits to delivering more connections and opportunities to build its Members' Cultural Intelligence to effectively engage multicultural employees, customers, and communities. Learn more about how MFHA is helping its members in this growing multicultural market. Visit www.mfha.net.