

Raul Deju: A Man of Many Interests

By Sophie Braccini



Deju in front of one the quilts his wife Shari create Photo Sophie Braccini

The Deju family has a long history of adventures and risk taking that has its roots in the Old Continent, in the Basque region, a proud people with a language of its own.

Raul Deju's parents left Europe at the beginning of the 20th century and immigrated to Cuba. After Castro's revolution, young men that were reaching military age couldn't leave the country for ten years, so many young Cubans left under what was called the "Peter Pan Operation". Deju left Cuba at age sixteen, without his family. A physics teacher encouraged him to apply for a scholarship to go to college. He was able to do so on a "work-study program." He earned a Bachelor's degree in math and a Ph.D. in Geology and Earth Sciences from the New Mexico Institute of Technology. He was able to sponsor his parents to come to the States, and he commenced a career in teaching and research.

Deju taught at the School of Engineering at the University of Mexico in the late 60's. He did research and was a consultant to the federal government at Hanford, a Department of Energy Nuclear Research Facility. When he met Shari, his wife, he moved permanently to the West Coast, doing research on nuclear waste management.

In the early 80's he began his business career. "I like to do something different, something that has not been done before," he says. Working with partners, he built the first environmental science and engineering company in

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Working with partners, he built the first environmental science and engineering company in America, International Technology. Later, he participated in the building of Chemical Waste Management, Inc., a subsidiary of Waste Management Inc. In 1997, he started ISG Resources with two partners, a company that took ash from coal-fired power plants and sold it as a cement and lumber substitute. ISG eventually handled 60% of the fly ash sold in the United States. He merged the enterprise with Headwaters, Inc., became President of the merged entity and grew it over two years to a \$1.8 billion enterprise.

When he decided to retire in 2004, nobody thought it would be for long. Indeed, he went back to his passion of growing and merging companies with his previous ISG partners, and some additional muscle from a Wall Street equity partner. He is now the President and C.A.O. of Energy Solutions, Inc., a provider of specialized, technology-based nuclear services to government and commercial customers. The company's range of nuclear services includes engineering, in-plant operations, outsourced specialty services, spent nuclear fuel management, decontamination and decommissioning. The company, based in Utah, operates twenty-two reactors and ten sites in the UK. It is the largest single-purpose nuclear and waste disposal service company in the US.

Deju is an enthusiastic supporter of nuclear energy and he is not oblivious of the dangers. "Every form of energy has risks," he says, "mines, dams can all claim a terrible death toll." "We cannot ignore the challenge of the growing need for energy," affirms Deju. "One can either participate in the game and make sure to minimize the risks or be passive and complain."

Deju travels all over the world and sees first hand the growing needs of economies in Eastern Europe, Asia, and South America. "The first thing to do is to maximize energy efficiency, use solar and wind," advises Deju, "but we won't be able to cover everyone's growing energy needs with just renewables and efficiency, or oil and gas for that matter. Those last two have all the negatives: cost, pollution, non-renewability. So you have coal and nuclear left. The footprint for a nuclear plant is much smaller than a coal operation and I believe it is safe." Deju is well aware of the risk of proliferation. "We can build nuclear fuel that can't be used for weapons," he explains, "especially if the country has a deal to send the material back for reprocessing. We can build nuclear energy without proliferation."

Moraga is where Deju calls home. "Moraga is a great place to live; everything is close by in the Bay Area and, more importantly, our friends are here. We've lived in the same house for twenty-one years. My wife Shari says that we're 'nesters.'"

Deju plans to spend more time at home in the future. "I believe in the importance of education and giving back," says Deju. Energy Solutions has a very active Foundation that provides about two hundred scholarships yearly to sophomores in towns where the company does business. His advice to budding entrepreneurs: "I'm a believer in global business. The key to success when you integrate different businesses and work on different continents is respect of the cultural ways. You don't create business in a vacuum, you have to listen a lot and work very hard."