International Entrepreneur Inspired by the Legacy of His Coach

Enrique Ybarra, left, fights a UCSC player for control of the ball

Enrique’s executive team at the International Tourism Trade Show in Madrid

Enrique with his family at his Menlo College Commencement 18 years ago.

On top of one of Enrique’s buses at the company opening in Marrakech, Morocco (left to right) Enrique, the Minister of Transportation of Morocco, the Minister of Transportation of Spain, the Governor of Marrakech, and the Ambassador of Spain in Morocco

Front Row (left to right) David Johnston, Jason Field, Peter Firmage, Willie Hernstadt, John Fike, Enrique Ybarra-Valdenebro, William Cole, Back Row (Left to Right) Carol Distefano, Herbie Der, Ethan Alexander, Brian Baudot, Lorin Surpless, Grady Trowbridge, Drew Olin, Mark Chocos, Coach Carlos López
C an a Menlo student find exceptional career success and personal satisfaction through a class assignment requiring student entrepreneurs to create a business plan? If your name is Enrique Ybarra ’91, the answer is a resounding “yes!”

A few months ago, President Tim Haight received an e-mail from an alum: “My name is Enrique Ybarra and I am from Spain. I graduated Menlo College in 1991. I am now in Washington DC. Before I come back to Spain Mr. President, if you have 15 minutes for me I would fly to San Francisco to meet you and talk …”

Two days later, Enrique arrived in San Francisco, rented a car, and drove to campus to have a long, private lunch with the president. Embracing warm memories of the Menlo campus and faculty he had not seen in 18 years who had impacted his life, Enrique—in a passionate and animated exchange—told the president how his business plan, written as a class assignment at Menlo College, has evolved into a highly successful and unique international business.

It was his intention, upon graduation, to go to work for Dow Chemical. At the end of his senior year at Menlo, however, while researching and preparing for a class assignment where he was asked to create a business plan, Enrique discovered a large gap in the travel industry: At a time when travel was asked to create a business plan, Enrique was confident that the plan he created for a tour bus business would prove to be successful. His confidence helped him overcome some initial challenges to bring his vision to fruition. Originally scheduled to debut two motorized trolleys at the 1992 World Expo, delays required Enrique to scrap his plans to ship the buses from Oakland and instead hire professionals to drive the buses to the east coast to be shipped by boat to Spain in time for the Expo. During the Expo, Enrique’s tour bus business was quite successful, but surviving the downturn in the international tourism market which paralleled the global financial crisis of the First Gulf War required flexibility, creativity, and commitment to his vision.

Enrique took time during the financial crisis to research sightseeing companies worldwide. Many of the existing companies in the tour bus sector were local small businesses in need of an experienced company to provide business guidance and acumen. With a new vision for a globalized tour bus industry, Enrique revised his business plan and included four key elements:

- A worldwide brand to create a recognizable company image
- A manual of operations to assure consistent customer experience
- A purchasing center to facilitate vehicle purchases, merchandise, uniforms and language systems
- A commercial center to promote all sightseeing companies under the same brand worldwide

In 1996, Enrique and the UK based company Ensignbus Ltd. formed a joint venture under the brand City Sightseeing. The first City Sightseeing operation was launched in Enrique’s hometown of Seville, Spain on March 26, 1999. Today, City Sightseeing is the premier operator of Open Top Sightseeing Tours worldwide, servicing 85 cities in 21 countries.

Throughout his exciting journey from promising student to successful businessman, Enrique has celebrated his Menlo College connection. He is spearheading the formation of a Menlo College European Alumni Chapter. Inspired by the legacy of the coach who guided him at Menlo, Enrique pitched the idea for a Señor Carlos López Memorial Soccer Tournament, and the idea resonated with the Menlo Community. The first soccer tournament is scheduled for noon on Saturday, September 12, 2009 at Wunderlich Field, followed by a reunion of Menlo Alumni at the president’s home from 2-6 p.m.

Although much has changed for Enrique since his days at Menlo—in addition to running a successful global business, Enrique and his wife Alexandra are raising their 2-year-old daughter Allegra—one thing has remained the same: Enrique still holds the record at Menlo for the most goals scored in a single soccer season—29. The Menlo Community is tremendously proud of Enrique’s accomplishments, on the field, off the field, and in the business arena.

Alumni who are interested in joining the Señor Carlos López Memorial Soccer Tournament Committee, or participating in a European Menlo College Alumni Chapter, can contact Alumni Relations at alumni-information@menlo.edu or 800-556-3656.