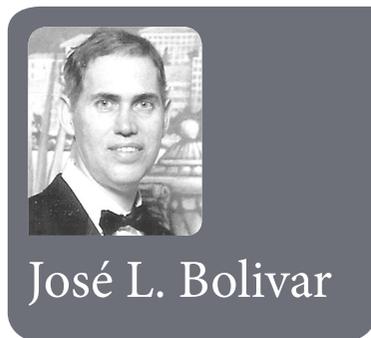


The Development Bank and the funding of private clinics

During the early 1940s, 80 to 90 percent of the population of Puerto Rico was medically indigent and 80 percent of the medicine that was practiced was administered by the state. Control and prevention of diseases with greater mortality rates — diarrhea, enteritis and tuberculosis — were the priority of the Public Health Division of the insular Health Department. Island Hospital Division, also located within the Health Department, administered five hospitals for acute care and surgical services in Bayamón, Fajardo, Arecibo, Aguadilla and Ponce. These five facilities had capacity for 1,300 beds. The Division also administered the Psychiatric Hospital in Río Piedras with a capacity of 1,200 beds, the Hospital for Lepers in Río Piedras with a capacity of 60 beds for tuberculosis patients, and five hospitals located in Río Piedras, Guayama, Aibonito, Ponce and Mayagüez with a total capacity of 1,500 beds. In addition to public hospitals, two hospitals with a lower capacity were managed by religious organizations. These were the Castañar Hospital in Utuado and the Mennonite Hospital in Aibonito, which provided acute medical care and surgical services to the local residents.

According to the 1946 Annual Report prepared under Governor Jesús T. Piñero, most of the medicine practiced in state facilities was considered deficient. The report noted that the medicine practiced in Puerto Rico could “stand much improvement.” For this reason Representative Ernesto Ramos Antonini asked Roberto de Jesús Toro, head of the Finance Division of the Planning Board, to prepare a study detailing health care needs. De Jesus Toro submitted his report on August 30, 1943. In it he estimated that an investment of \$26 million over the next six years would be required to build the needed hospitals. The insular government would be required to invest \$18 million and the private industry the remaining \$8 million.



José L. Bolívar

De Jesus recommended the construction of four district hospitals at a cost of \$5.82 million with a capacity of 1,940 beds and the expansion of the five existing district hospitals to accommodate 1,570 additional beds. He also recommended the construction of hospital units for the 5,000 patients with tuberculosis. The report noted the need for hospital services for communicable diseases, mental patients and lepers. Sales of rum to the U.S., one of the most important sources of income of the insular government, were in a tailspin so the government was more dependent on private sector investment.

Given this pressing need for medical services and the public sector’s inability to provide them, the Development Bank approved more than \$1 million in loans to this sector. In fact, the bank did not reject any loans to this sector. On January 3, 1947, the bank approved \$15,000 to Dr. T. Ramírez Cuerda to start a clinic in Río Piedras. On January 27, it approved \$65,000 to Dr. A. Navas for a clinic in Santurce; on April 22, \$73,000 to Dr. Pilá for a hospital in Ponce; on April 26, \$25,000 to Dr. Hiram Vázquez for the Trilles Vázquez Clinic; on March 27, it approved its third loan to Hermanos Meléndez Hospital in Bayamón, and on June 22, it approved \$26,000 to Dr. J.M. Rodríguez for The Good Shepherd Clinic in Arecibo.

On July, 18 1946, the bank approved \$500,000 for Professional Realty — a com-



Courtesy

The former Professional Building is now called Plaza de Diego

pany owned by entrepreneur Basilio Dávila, who was a medical doctor with a degree from the University of Pennsylvania — for the construction of a 12-story building constructed to house a clinic and commercial establishments. Earlier, on October 9, 1945, the bank had approved a loan of \$270,000 for the same construction of the Professional Building. Because the original estimate had increased \$1.2 to \$1.4 million, Dr. Dávila requested an additional loan in the amount of \$100,000, which was approved on May 28, 1948. In total, the Development Bank provided \$870,000 to Dr. Basilio Dávila for the construction of this building, which became known as the Professional Building.

The Professional Building, a medical clinic with offices located on the José De Diego Av-

enue at Stop 22 in Santurce was inaugurated on May 28, 1949. The building, whose design was changed to increase its height from 12 to 14 floors, including a basement, was “devoted entirely to medical professionals.” The Pereira Leal Clinic located in Río Piedras, where Dr. Pereira Leal worked with Dr. Dávila, moved its offices to floors seven through 12, becoming one of its largest tenants. The clinic also had a conference room for doctors “and all other facilities specific to a hospital.” The University of Puerto Rico acquired the building vacated by the Pereira Leal Clinic, which had been originally occupied by the Baptist Mission.

The Professional Building occupied an area of 150,000 feet of construction, and had two powerful elevators with an astonishing speed of 500 feet per minute. The floors of the building were made of terrazzo, a flooring material of marble or stone chips set in mortar and polished when dry. The building was equipped with air conditioning, foundations were dug 25 feet below ground, and the building had a truss system to withstand earthquakes. It had laboratories, clinics, offices, a pharmacy, a beauty salon, a barbershop and a blood bank. It was the largest superstructure of the island.

Some of these clinics and hospitals inaugurated during this time are still providing services 70 years later. Given the current economic situation of Puerto Rico, the leadership showed by the Development Bank then should serve as a guide for the current Government Development Bank to continue to support private investments in the health care as well as in other sectors of the economy.

José L. Bolívar holds a doctorate in history and is completing a book on the economic impact of World War II on Puerto Rico, which is scheduled to be published this year by the University of Puerto Rico Press. He may be reached at jbolivarpr@prtc.net.

VOICES

Miramar community strongly objects proposed overpass

The Department of Transportation is in the process of developing a highway project that is highly objectionable not only to the community of Miramar residents, but also to any sensible citizen aware of the consequences leading to criminal activity, contamination and devaluation of real estate to name a few. The project, named Boulevard Baldorioty, consists of an overpass to be constructed where the marginal Las Palmas Street leads to the Miramar neighborhood from the Muñoz Rivera Expressway. The objective is to provide easier access for heavy cargo trucks delivering equipment and materials to the Convention Center District already in place, with a hotel to be inaugurated in November.

We all fear the worst nightmare as a result. Just take a look at the overpass at Taft Street across Baldorioty Avenue in Barrio Obrero in order to get an idea of the environmental damage. The unsightly structure is a hideout for drug addicts and criminals, the increase in sound decibels from cars having to accelerate on the overpass, plus a myriad of other possible consequences can be foreseen.

Miramar is one of the oldest and most distinguished

neighborhoods in the metropolitan area, recently recognized as a Historic Zone to preserve the beauty and harmony of its architecture dating back to the beginning of last century.

Through the collective efforts of the Miramar Residents Association, a very civil, intelligent and thorough dialogue has been conducted since 2008 with the Director of the Department of Transportation, who seems to be very forthcoming and reasonable, even when he gives Miramar residents little to no hope in modifying this project from its actual conception. His hands are tied, he claims, with contracts already signed, even when no Public Hearings were ever held in addition to dozens of other irregularities and lack of approval from other regulatory agencies, and when it also goes against the Municipality of San Juan’s Territorial Ordinance.

As a respectable community we certainly do not deserve a “Such is life” argument, since as I expressed before, our Resident’s Association is conducting a very civil discussion with the director of the Department of Transportation, even when we were never made aware of such an impacting project, putting in jeopardy the wellbeing of this well preserved neighborhood. Life in a community is what we as citizens shape it to be. Assistance by government officials with adequate disposition and honesty will help us in the process.

This project, which dates back to the Rosselló administration, has suffered several transformations throughout the two subsequent government administrations, and is now going on its third mayor revision. This seemingly makes it a very complex project considering the \$17 million already invested in planning and infrastructure, with another \$12 or \$13 million to go. Yet, it is very simple to modify should there be the political will to do so. It’s still on the drawing board and all it takes is for the DOT to take a serious look at the three sound and viable alternatives offered by the Miramar Residents Association. For more information you may visit its Web site at www.miramarpr.org

Here is an opportunity for our government to demonstrate, contrary to the negative impression left in the residents of Ceiba with the Riviera del Caribe project, that it does care and is willing to listen to reasonable arguments where thousands of citizens are united in proposing viable alternatives to a common goal: the preservation of a Historic Zone and the future of one of our most prestigious communities.

*Cuqui Santoni
from San Juan on September 15*

These remarks do not necessarily represent the views of the PR Daily Sun.