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UNITED BUDDY BEARS & HELLMANN – THE PERFECT PARTNER FOR AN INTERNATIONAL DREAM

INTERVIEW WITH MICHAEL STEFANESCU | MANAGING DIRECTOR UNITED BUDDY BEARS

The United Buddy Bears in Cuba are gaining more and more attention for the message of tolerance and culture they represent. Born in Berlin, the idea has now become an international movement with an immense social impact without financial motivation. For that reason, finding the right sponsor is extremely important. Hellmann Worldwide Logistics has been essential for this exhibition in Cuba. Michael Stefanescu, Managing Director of the worldwide United Buddy Bears exhibition talks about this collaboration.

LET'S MAKE A LITTLE HISTORY: HOW DID THIS PROJECT START?

The bear sculptures were created around 12 years ago and the first event was just a cultural one, which we called Art in the City. It didn't have a political message. It was just creating, painting bears, making them look nice and having fun. However, when the first project was over, the idea received a lot of attention from the foreign embassies in Berlin.



The new objective was to do something with a real message and so the idea of the United Buddy Bears, as we now know them, was born. We decided to make a kind of demonstration for tolerance and mutual understanding because all of the countries stand peacefully, hand in hand or paw to paw. It is a visual representation of a future peaceful world. So, each of the bears represents a country acknowledged by the United Nations, and each bear has been created by an artist from its respective country. We have no restrictions in creating the bears. Or perhaps it is better to say that the only restriction we give the artist is that there may not be any political message on the bear but tolerance and mutual understanding, and the bears may not be used for any commercial advertisement.

WHY COME TO CUBA?

Usually we get invitations from people who see the exhibition in another country and we are always inundated with invitations. We decide who is most capable of financing the exhibition. Because it is not for profit, we require financial support.

To be honest we have always had in mind that, "this exhibition should go to Havana sooner or later". The current German ambassador in Havana, who was previously posted in Helsinki, had organized this exhibition in Finland when he worked there. When he came to Cuba he said, "I remember very well it was a great success when we had this exhibition in Finland, I should bring it here". He approached Mister Eusebio Leal saying, "This is great, I want to have it". Then the countless organizational emails and invitations followed... and now we are here!

TRANSPORTING SO MANY SCULPTURES DEMANDS A VERY COMPLICATED LOGISTICS STRATEGY, DOES IS NOT?

In these cases logistics is the most important thing. You need to find the right location in the city, you need to be sure there is some kind

of marketing around it, security etc. Although, to be honest, these are minor issues. The most important thing is the logistics. We always need to rely on capable and reliable companies who know how to do it. In this case we were very lucky to find Hellmann. We have learned that Hellmann has many years of experience in shipping and logistics with Cuba. So, at a very early stage we were utterly convinced that this is the right partner.

Finding the right partner is one thing but there is another point: you can choose a partner but you have to pay it. Therefore, we were even luckier to learn that Hellmann was willing to act as sponsor and carry out the logistics services free of charge. As a tiny non-profit project, we really depend on such support. It was clear from the very beginning of our contact with Hellmann that these are capable people, who know what they are talking about and have the necessary experience. So, I spoke with Santiago Noa, and Máximo López. During the first discussion we were sure: these are the right people.

AND FINALLY HOW WAS IT TO COLLABORATE WITH HELLMANN ON THIS PROJECT?

We are really pleased about it. We had spoken with other companies about transporting 7 containers and we collected opinions such as: "This is hard, really difficult". Upon first contact with Máximo López he said, "Don't worry, we know how to do it. Calm down". I was very nervous.

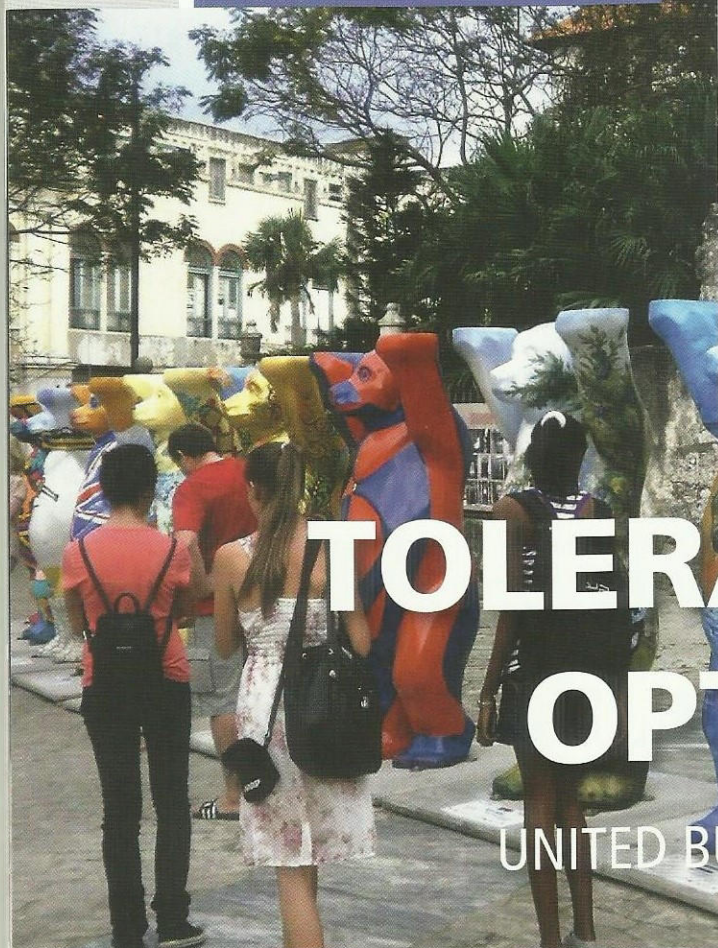
One thing he said and I appreciated this very much because it was very important, was, "You have to have enough time, you need to plan for the unexpected". This advice was very valuable because there was one month from departure in Mexico to arrival in Cuba. Máximo López has a lot of experience and he knew what could happen. It was very helpful to be prepared for that. Not only that, Hellmann helped with all the other issues surrounding the transportation such as customs clearance. They knew exactly how to handle this, which was very important for us.

HOW DO YOU FEEL ABOUT THE CURRENT LOCATION IN HAVANA, ABOUT THE RESULT NOW?

For us Plaza de San Francisco is the ideal location. It is a good mixture of enough local people, for whom this exhibition is made, and tourists. In general people are amazed. The visual experience of this exhibition, with all the different colors, different designs and paintings, is very hopeful and it is very easy for everyone to understand. The many symbols within the exhibition can be recognized easily.



WE ARE HELLMANN



TOLERANCE AND OPTIMISM

UNITED BUDDY BEARS IN CUBA

MAXIMO LOPEZ | HELLMANN CUBA

The travelling exhibition, "United Buddy Bears Berlin" arrived in Cuba pleading for a better world and society. The exhibition, located in the Historic Center of Havana, is of great significance for the organizers and spectators.

The German Ambassador to Cuba, Dr. Peter Scholz explains, "I thought it would be a good idea to bring these sculptures here, now that we are celebrating the 40th anniversary of Cuba and Germany resuming their diplomatic and economic relationship. Every bear represents a nation and has been created by a native artist of that nation. Moving so many heavy sculptures is really complicated, so we needed to call on the help of some sponsors. Working with Hellmann Worldwide Logistics was essential to the success of this initiative. Hellmann's experience in logistics, well-known reputation and strong economic support has contributed very much to this project".

The diplomat explains, "relocating 124 bears of such dimensions is really complicated. The operation of moving all of these heavy elements is pretty difficult. Hellmann Worldwide Logistics stands out in this sector around the world and in Cuba, so it played a very important role in this endeavor, organizing entry into Cuba and the exhibition's subsequent departure to Santiago de Chile.

"The core expo operations team is very pleased with this cooperation. This kind of business implies reliability and high-level efficiency while working to deadline. Without Hellmann's help we could not have carried out these operations in Cuba. We are very grateful for Hellmann Worldwide Logistics' collaboration", underlines the ambassador.

Promoting the idea of tolerance, understanding between countries, mutual knowledge, trust and harmony, the United Buddy Bears will stay around six weeks in Havana. Dr. Peter Scholz summarizes, "for us it is really great to start this celebration year with such a multi-cultural and optimistic exhibition. The philosophy of these bears is a happy group, a happy exhibition that promotes the ideas of peace and understanding between people. These are always welcome principles. That is why these sculptures are so well loved and so welcome. They represent nations working together for the common good and this is reason enough to bring them here. We have all worked in strengthening bilateral relations; the Buddy Bears are also a contribution to this purpose".