

# Bernie Navarro Finds Success in Bringing People Together

How Benworth Capital President Bernie Navarro supports his community and fosters educational and business opportunities for those who call Miami home



Bernie Navarro, President, Benworth Capital Photo by Sonya Revell

#### **By Will Grant**

CEO/President, Finance

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**B** ernie Navarro isn't a tattoo guy, but if he was, he knows exactly what it would be. "It would have to be Miami," the president and founder of Benworth Capital says with a laugh. "This community has been such a wonderful experiment. It's a petri dish of what the future holds, and it's a place I'm so passionate about."

The son of Cuban immigrants isn't just a byproduct of one of American's most dynamic and culturally diverse cities. Navarro has also positioned himself and his business to act as strong shoulders for the next generation of Hispanic leaders and business owners to build their own dreams upon.



Photo by Sonya Revell

## Builders Association (LBA) **Construction and Business** Management Academy and now a governor-appointed member of the Board of Trustees for Miami-Dade College, the largest and most diverse college in the United States, Navarro is looking to extend opportunities even further down the pipeline, helping those who may not yet know their career direction to at least be given the education necessary to empower them on their journey.

As founder of the Latin

## The Law of Contrary Public Opinion

Navarro founded Benworth

in 2008 after selling his previous company, HomeMortage, at precisely the right time. "It was late 2005, and I remember all of our clients and customers telling us we were crazy for selling because it was in the midst of some of the best financial times for our market," Navarro says. "But something told me differently."

The timing proved absolutely correct, with a massive economic downturn just around the bend. "But when we decided to open Benworth, we were once again told we were crazy," Navarro recalls. "Who would open up a lending firm at a time like this? But I thought we had a great opportunity to impact our community, and those contrarian approaches have proven to be fruitful for the people we serve."

Benworth isn't a traditional lending firm, Navarro explains. To the general market, Benworth is a private lending firm, but it also acts as an investor in real estate secured assets. Whether you see the firm as a lender or investor depends on your individual needs and relationship with the company. In this way, Benworth perfectly capitalizes on Navarro's passion for real estate as well as his talent for innovating and balancing both disciplines of finance.

According to Navarro, Benworth focuses on helping those who are looking for an alternative to traditional loans from a bank or credit union. "For some borrowers, there's an educational component that's an essential part of our business," Navarro says. "We work to educate our borrowers to make sound decisions and eventually apply for a more conventional loan. Our approach is, how can we help the borrower get

where they want to be?"

### Without Agenda

Benworth is able to act as a bridge for those looking to make investments in their future, many of whom may have stories similar to Navarro's. Growing up in Miami, Navarro went without many opportunities—but his parents were determined to put their son through college, one way or another. His mother began working with the local church to take care of children after school and, as Navarro recalls, one parent in particular was always very appreciative of the care Navarro's mother provided.

"One day when I was in junior high, Mr. Balter looked at me in front of my mom and asked if I wanted a job," Navarro says. "I said sure. And he said, 'Well, this job pays for your college." Mr. Balter turned out to be the director of purchasing at the University of Miami, and the kindness of Navarro's mother had left such an impact on him that he was willing to do whatever he could to make sure the young Navarro had every opportunity possible to succeed.

The experience has obviously informed Navarro's own approach to his life and career: to give without agenda. "I



Photo by Sonya Revell

think it can drive people a little crazy around here sometimes, but I just try and tell them, 'Do the right thing, and the money will follow,'" Navarro says. "Give your time, your energy, or your effort to something you're passionate about and the rest will always follow. Just do what feels like the right thing; that's worked for me."

## **Building Bridges**

One of Navarro's passion points is expanding educational opportunities for Miami's residents, a mission he has been able to see come to life thanks to his knack for facilitating successful collaboration between political, educational, and business sectors. It is this talent for bringing people and organizations together, Navarro believes, that has empowered his success throughout his career.

"My father has always told me that I have a knack for convening, for getting people together," Navarro says. His father now has an office at Benworth next-door to his son's. "When you do that without ulterior motive, it just works out. And to do that, I need to know what is going on in my community. Maybe it's a little nosy, but that's just how it works. Be present and bring people together."

#### **GUIDANCE IN A PANDEMIC**

Always active in his community, Bernie Navarro has become a key guide and educator during the COVID-19 pandemic. Navarro and Benworth Capital created both SBABizHelp.com and SBAayuda.com to educate small business owners on the Paycheck Protection Program (PPP).

But Navarro was also concerned that banks wouldn't be able to keep up with borrower demand, so he went through the process to become one of the few nondepository, SBA-authorized lenders for the PPP in the nation. Thus, Benworth has become a sought-after provider to businesses and individuals too often ignored by traditional lenders, including gig-economy workers, rideshare drivers, and independent service providers

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