





# REFUGIO GALA

Celebrating 55 years of the  
International Rescue Committee in Miami

# Bienvenidos a Los Estados Unidos

*Comité de Rescate Internacional*



The Refugio Gala celebrates those who have endured tremendous adversity in their quest for safe harbor. Funds raised from the Refugio Gala will benefit the work of the IRC in Miami and provide vital assistance to newly arrived refugees as they embark on their new lives in America.

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In the 1960s and 1970s, large numbers of Cubans and Haitians began to flee repressive regimes at home and make their way to American shores. The International Rescue Committee – or ‘El Refugio,’ as it became known to new arrivals – was there to greet them, help them find employment, and support their families as they adapted to a strange country where they did not speak the language. In the years since, the IRC in Miami has provided services to refugees, asylees and survivors of human trafficking from all parts of the world, helping them rebuild their lives and become independent, thriving members of their adopted communities.

Dear Friend,

I am proud to welcome you to the International Rescue Committee (IRC) in Miami’s Refugio Gala. We are excited for this opportunity to recognize the extraordinary work of our staff and the resilience of our clients. And we are delighted to acknowledge you—our supporters—not only for making this event possible, but for making possible all of the important work the IRC does. I thank you, profoundly and sincerely, for your partnership and support.

Tonight we celebrate the achievements of refugees who have transformed Miami since we began our work in the early 1960s. Many of them have children and grandchildren who owe their success to the courage of their families who endured arduous journeys for freedom.

But as we honor those achievements of the past, we are reminded that millions more are still enduring that journey. We are in the midst of an unprecedented global crisis. More people have been displaced from their homes than at any point in history, surpassing the number of refugees after the Second World War. 62 million people worldwide have been displaced from their homes—that’s 1 in every 122 people on our planet.

The IRC was heartened when the Obama Administration stepped up the US commitment to resettle more refugees in 2016 and 2017. The IRC in Miami stands at the ready to welcome the increased numbers of new arrivals.

In 2015, thanks to the commitment of our federal and private donors, the IRC expanded our footprint in Florida with the opening of our Tallahassee office. This office will allow us to serve an additional 100 refugees each year.

Tonight we honor two of Miami’s devoted humanitarians. We recognize Miguel “Mike” B. Fernandez with our Champion

of Freedom Award. Mr. Fernandez fled Cuba as a child and has since built a lifetime of entrepreneurship and investment in Miami’s institutions. We also recognize in memoriam El Dorado Furniture Chief Executive Officer, Manuel Capó, Sr. for El Dorado’s long-time generosity in providing high-quality furnishings to local refugees. Both of tonight’s honorees embody the qualities of the people the IRC serves: courage, determination, resilience, and triumph over adversity. Like many of our clients, Mr. Fernandez and Mr. Capó overcame persecution to build successful lives in their adoptive community.

For the success of tonight’s gala, we are deeply grateful to our honorees, our Board of Directors, and our generous sponsors. And we extend a special thanks to you, our supporters, for making our important work possible.

I hope you have an enjoyable and inspiring evening.

Sincerely,



**Suzy Cop**  
Executive Director of IRC in Miami

# REFUGIO GALA

LIVE MUSIC & DANCING

Lucy Grau & The Karysma Band

WELCOME

**Roman Martinez IV**  
IRC Overseer  
Former Managing Director, Lehman  
Brothers, Private Investor

**David Miliband**  
President & Chief Executive Officer, IRC

REFUGIO GALA AWARDS PRESENTATION

**Champion of Freedom Award**  
  
Miguel “Mike” B.  
Fernandez  
Chairman, MBF Healthcare Partners, L.P.  
Author, *Humbled by the Journey: Life  
Lessons for My Family...and Yours*

**PRESENTED BY:** **Alan R. Batkin**  
IRC Overseer  
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**Corporate Leader Award**  
  
Manuel Capó, Sr.  
in Memoriam  
Chief Executive Officer,  
El Dorado Furniture

**PRESENTED BY:** **Pamela Saunders-Albin**  
IRC Board Member &  
Co-Chair, US Programs  
Leadership Committee

**ACCEPTED BY:** **Pedro Capó**  
Chief Operations Officer,  
El Dorado Furniture





# Miguel “Mike” B. Fernandez

The IRC honors Miguel “Mike” B. Fernandez with the Champion of Freedom Award for his leadership and his investment in the Miami community. Mr. Fernandez is best known for his business acumen, but is also a devoted philanthropist who has made significant contributions to health care and educational institutions in Miami. Mr. Fernandez is an inspiration to the IRC for transforming his experience as a refugee into a lifetime of entrepreneurialism and investment in his adoptive city of Miami.

Mike Fernandez is the Founder and Chairman of MBF Healthcare Partners, L.P., a private investment firm located in Coral Gables, Florida. The firm focuses on investing in healthcare service companies nationwide. He has founded and/or been the majority shareholder of 25 healthcare related companies including Physicians Healthcare Plans, CAC Medical Centers, Prescribit Rx, CarePlus Health Plans, Navarro Pharmacies, Medical Specialties Distributors, Hospitalists of America and Simply Healthcare Plans.

Mr. Fernandez serves on the Board of Directors of Mednax and on the Georgetown University MSFS (Master of Science in Foreign Service) Board of Advisors. He has served on the Boards of the United Way, the University of Miami and Sylvester Cancer Hospital, among others.

He was awarded a Doctor of Humane Letters Honoris Causa by St. Thomas University. The degree recognizes outstanding achievements as a humanitarian, business leader, and philanthropist. Over the past 20 years, he has contributed in excess of \$100 million to charitable causes.

His book, *Humbled by the Journey: Life Lessons for My Family...And Yours*, tells the inspiring story of his arrival to the U.S. at the age of 12, penniless, to his incredible success as an entrepreneur. He has built dozens of successful companies while creating tens of thousands of jobs. In his book, he encourages readers to live life based on one simple yet profound principle: “to take care of those who come after us.”

He and his wife, Constance, have five children.

# Manuel Capó, Sr.

The IRC honors in memoriam Manuel Capó, the founder of El Dorado Furniture. El Dorado provides high-quality furnishings for the IRC’s clients in Miami, helping to create welcoming, safe spaces for those who have escaped conflict and persecution.

Manuel Capó, the founder of El Dorado Furniture embodied the American dream and stood as an example for every father, entrepreneur, and philanthropist. Born in Cuba in 1925, Manuel Capó left school in third grade and began working in his father’s furniture shop, Casa Capó, which was at the time one of the largest furniture companies in Cuba.

When Fidel Castro came to power, he seized private businesses and Manuel’s family lost Casa Capó. In 1966, Manuel and two of his sons, Luis and Carlos, fled Castro’s communist Cuba in a 24-foot wooden boat christened “El Dorado.” After a treacherous journey they arrived in Miami. They knew no English. The family trio worked hard to survive.

In 1967 Manuel Capó expanded his venture with a \$10,000 loan from the Small Business Administration. It was then that he opened his first store in the heart of Little Havana, on Calle Ocho and 24th Ave. Today, El Dorado Furniture is the largest Hispanic-owned retail furniture store in the United States. With over 900 employees, the company is among the top fifty American furniture retailers in the country.

Through his efforts, Manuel Capó never forgot his heritage, nor the struggle and hard work it took to get where the business is today. Manuel always looked out for those less fortunate in the community, particularly children. All of Manuel’s seven sons worked alongside him in the family business, along with ten of his twenty grandchildren.

Here to accept this award on behalf of his father is Pedro Capó, the current Chief Operations Officer of El Dorado Furniture.



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### Suzy Cop

Executive Director  
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The **International Rescue Committee** responds to the world's worst humanitarian crises, helping to restore health, safety, education, economic wellbeing, and power to people devastated by conflict and disaster. Founded in 1933 at the call of Albert Einstein, the IRC is at work in over 40 countries and 26 U.S. cities helping people to survive, reclaim control of their future and strengthen their communities.

[Rescue.org/Miami](https://www.rescue.org/miami)

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