



CARIB

Florida contractor finds
high coatings standards
transcend borders

A local painter from the CIC crew applies
Sherwin-Williams DTM Acrylic Coating to an
AES power plant building.

BEAN CALLING

From the start, Michael Serafini has always thought big.

At age 21, after serving in the Navy, he returned to his home in Port St. Lucie, Fla. and carefully considered his future. Should he re-enlist? Look for a job? Enroll in college? No, he decided. He wanted to own his own business. After studying all his options, he concluded his future was in paint.

"I felt that the painting industry was a field in which I could excel," says Serafini. "A bridge builder, after all, can build a bridge only one time, but a painter can paint it 15 times. And my philosophy is, if you do a good job for someone, they always come back."

In 1986, he founded Michael Serafini Painting Contractor, Inc. Within a decade, the company was grossing more than \$2 million a year in commercial and residential work. To take it to the next level, Serafini targeted industrial work. A Cincinnati-based firm called Enerfab gave him his first shot coating floors and tanks at a Florida citrus plant, and he never looked back. Since then, he's tackled everything from tanks and floors to power plant structural steel and a shuttle pad at the NASA Space Center.

Now, at age 40, Serafini has taken on his most ambitious project yet: Opening an industrial painting firm in the Dominican Republic.

A HOT, TRICKY JOB

It's a sweltering, sun-drenched afternoon in Boca Chica, a small beach town on the southern coast of the Dominican Republic. A few miles away lies one of the island's largest landmarks: a 107,000-square-foot boiler that is the heart of a power production facility owned by the global AES Corporation. Along with a second AES plant, the complex provides the Dominican with a third of its daily power needs, and houses a 42 million gallon natural gas tank – second largest in the world.

A crew of 10 painters from Serafini's company, Caribbean Industrial Coatings (CIC), is busy applying a new beige topcoat to the walls of the



AT A GLANCE

- Florida-based industrial painting contractor Michael Serafini has expanded into the Dominican Republic.
- The new company, Caribbean Industrial Coatings, aspires to gain market share by raising application and coatings standards.

Michael Serafini believes the **Dominican Republic** offers substantial **growth opportunities** for his company.

SIEMPRE STRIPING

PROBLEM:

Fork lift traffic at a food production facility in Santo Domingo required constant repainting of yellow safety stripes on concrete warehouse floors.

SOLUTION:

A new process Michael Serafini has dubbed "siempre striping" (siempre means "always" in Spanish).

How it works: First, make 1/8th-inch deep saw cuts along the full length of both sides of the existing paint stripe. Next, use a needle gun to remove the concrete down to 1/8th-inch on the full stripe area. Clean, then prime and topcoat with Sherwin-Williams Armorseal floor coatings.

"By recessing the stripe in this manner, I can give my customers a safety stripe that lasts exponentially longer than standard striping, saving many hours of future labor and materials costs," Serafini says.

gray boiler. The work is hot and tricky, especially on the east-facing side, where access through a thick network of pipes and beams requires a one-man Spyder lift, along with strict adherence to CIC's rigorous safety standards.

"I'm proud to say we haven't had one accident in 14 years," says Serafini, who has accomplished this record through weekly safety training sessions and tough policies. "Employees get one warning for a ground violation, and are fired on the spot if an infraction occurs above six feet."

Safety, access and weather aren't the only challenges, though. There were several discolored sections on the boiler from the prior paint job, so Serafini brought in a thermal photography specialist and technical experts from Sherwin-Williams to test every square inch of the boiler. They found "hot spots" on about 20 percent of the surface, with spikes exceeding 500 degrees F. Working closely with his Santo Domingo Sherwin-Williams rep, Serafini came up with a coatings system plan that would provide maximum protection at the most efficient price point.

CIC crews coated 80 percent of the exterior with a system of Macropoxy 646 Fast Cure Epoxy as a primer, followed by DTM Acrylic Coating, a topcoat that performs well at temperatures up to 110 degrees F. For the hot spots, they used a system of Hi-Temp 1027 Primer and Hi-Temp 500V HA, a silicone acrylic coating able to withstand severe thermal cycling up to 600 degrees F. By carefully identifying the hot spots and using the higher-cost Hi-Temp coatings only in those areas, CIC saved AES almost US\$260,000.

"This would have been a 20 million peso bid (about US\$620,000) if we used Hi-Temp throughout, but with this system, it will come in at about 11.5 million pesos (about US\$360,000)," Serafini says. "I love these kinds of technical coatings challenges. And the market here is ready for a company that can offer our kind of expertise and the product and application knowledge we get from our partners at Sherwin-Williams."



CIC officers Michael Serafini (seated, left), Alfonso Gamboa (standing, left) and Laura Breton Despradel go over blueprints with Ariel Crispin (seated, right) of AES and a Sherwin-Williams rep (right, foreground).

A BRIGHT FUTURE

The next decade, he says, promises exponential growth in the Caribbean country, and CIC is preparing for sales increases of up to 100 percent a year for the next five years. Serafini has installed one of his most experienced and trusted project managers, Texas-born Alfonso Gamboa, at the helm of his Dominican operations, and hired Laura Breton Despradel, a Dominican attorney, as his financial officer. Besides power generation, CIC is targeting the pharmaceutical, food and beverage, water and wastewater, industrial flooring and general industrial markets.

"We've invested in this country. We're here for the long haul," Serafini says. "My pledge to the people of the Dominican Republic is to use as much local labor and materials as possible, to give them good working conditions, a good wage and benefits, and to keep them safe on the job. I'm excited about the opportunities in the Dominican Republic for CIC." ▣