

Mobile Man

Young Entrepreneur Building American Dream

Santiago Jaramillo, now 23, initially landed in Indiana without any personal connections. Oh, how that has changed in a short period of time.

Having flourished on a full scholarship he'd earned at a prestigious private high school – American Heritage School in Plantation, Fla. – where Miami Heat basketball players often send their children, he could have attended almost any university he wanted. Yet when he walked onto the campus of Indiana Wesleyan University in Marion following a visit to Chicago, he decided to commit to the school.

“I walked in and said, ‘I don’t know why I should go here – but I think it’s right,’ ” Jaramillo recalls. “I didn’t know anybody in Indiana; I’d never been here before.”

That decision would ultimately open many doors for him after he graduated with a 4.0 GPA and valedictorian status at the university. But it certainly wasn’t the first time a fortuitous instinct paid dividends for him. He remembers a fateful day as a child in his native Cali, Colombia.

“In 1999, guerillas had formed militarized units and – because they were losing revenue from the drug trade – they started kidnapping as a source of revenue. So they started going into the city to kidnap people.”

Although his family had attended a Catholic church each week for about eight years, on one Sunday in late May, he preferred to finish a project he’d started.

“I was building a treehouse with my dad, and I asked if there was any way we could skip church to finish it,” he remembers. “He said ‘sure.’ ”

Living across the street from the church, Jaramillo

vividly recalls hearing gunshots fired into the air – and soon learned militants had invaded and kidnapped over 150 people from his congregation.

“A lot of them were kidnapped for over a year,” he explains. “I had extended family members and friends from school kidnapped. As crazy as it sounds, we had kids staying at our house who had both parents kidnapped. We were just taking care of them so they wouldn’t go into the orphanage system. Things got really tough and my parents got sick of living in that fear and insecurity, and didn’t want their kids to grow up in it.”

His father owned a business at the time and soon opened a branch in South Florida, allowing the family to temporarily move to the United States 12 years ago.

Though he knew very little English, Jaramillo made a commitment to become immersed in the culture.

“I really badly wanted to make it in this country, and I realized that I needed to assimilate completely,” Jaramillo offers. “That meant not going off on my own and only hanging out with Colombians. That meant hanging out with the white kids.”

His own terms

While his father planned to move the family back to Colombia before Jaramillo started high school, the teen felt an urge to remain in America.

“I didn’t really want to go back. ... I wanted to go out on my own and do my own thing,” he declares. “I saw that here I could do that. There was a level of opportunity that there wasn’t in any other place.”

Despite his father’s protests, Jaramillo pleaded, “Let



Santiago Jaramillo spoke very little English as a child in Colombia just 13 years ago. He’s now being recognized in national publications as one of the top young entrepreneurs in the United States.

me prove to you that I can get a scholarship to college.”

He took the SAT test as an eighth grader and applied to high schools, landing at American Heritage.

Sweet sounds of business

Though he studied philosophy and music while at Indiana Wesleyan, Jaramillo decided to try his hand at business as well. His approach was unconventional but direct.

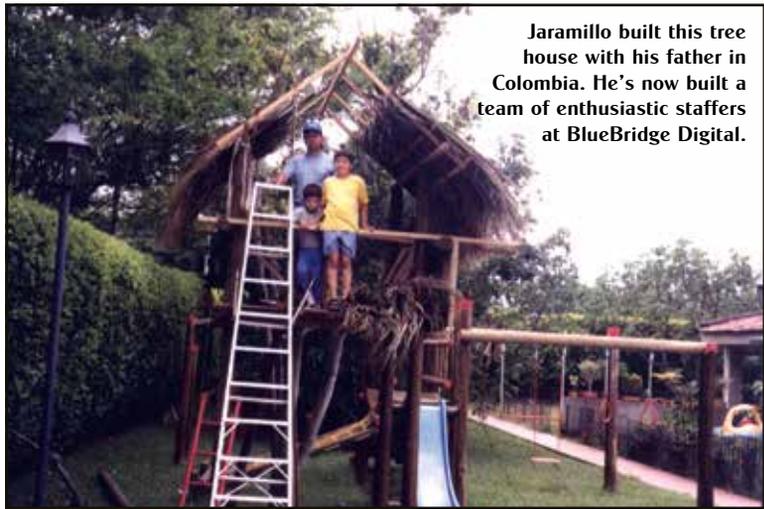
“I figured the best way to decide if I wanted to study business was to start my own business,” he states. “So I started a business called University Storage in my freshman year – basically moving and storing a lot of these college kids’ furniture for the summer.”

He signed up nearly 100 customers in the inaugural year and made a valuable contact at ExactTarget (Teresa Becker, who is now the company’s global marketing manager). That led to an intensive internship with the Indianapolis-based email marketing giant. During his internship, Jaramillo also started another business fueled by his passion for music. My Music Camp is a service providing summer activities for children. He managed directors at its three locations in Anderson, Indianapolis and Florida.

“I would sneak away from ExactTarget on Friday afternoons to attend Demo Day, where all the kids would play together and I’d listen to what they’d learned that week,” he recalls, adding that he was also commuting to Indianapolis from Marion at the time.

Jaramillo then found himself in Australia, where a brief foray into overseas studies spawned a greater opportunity.

“(Studying abroad) ended up not being a great fit, so I



Jaramillo built this tree house with his father in Colombia. He’s now built a team of enthusiastic staffers at BlueBridge Digital.

called ExactTarget because they were starting up an office in Sydney,” he says. “I ended up working in their office for about four months.”

ExactTarget chief marketing officer Tim Kopp now serves as a mentor for Jaramillo, and the two share monthly conversations about the industry.

“It’s absolute generosity and at the end of the conversation I’m just so thankful,” Jaramillo praises, adding that he hopes to mimic ExactTarget’s award-winning “Orange” workplace culture and camaraderie so his staff members remain fulfilled and happy.

Into the blue

Two years ago, Jaramillo created mobile app developer BlueBridge Digital, which now operates out of the Launch Fishers tech space north of Indianapolis. Between full-time, part-time and interning employees, the company has 15 team members, although it has grown exponentially in a short period of time. He says the venture consisted of him alone as recently as last September.

“In July (2012), I decided I was committed to growing this,” Jaramillo notes. “I was able to earn about \$100,000 in revenue in that first year and won the Taylor University Business Plan competition (including a prize of \$23,000). I was the youngest ever to win it ... but with those winnings and that revenue, I was able to bootstrap and self-fund the company.”

BlueBridge offers mobile app development as an ongoing subscription service – as opposed to a one-time transaction with clients. He asserts that having a long-term partner is a better fit for his customers, which includes convention and visitors bureaus, colleges/universities and churches that wish to better engage with their patrons.



Adam Weber, BlueBridge partner and head of sales, jokes about leaving a “cushy” job to join a 22-year-old with a vision – but eagerly explains he has no regrets.

“The reason why we’re different is because mobile apps as a service make a lot of sense,” he contends. “We were doing custom app development, which means you give me a bunch of money up front and I give you an app, and we part ways.

“But when Apple and Android change their technology that app breaks, and we have a weird dilemma because you paid for it to work, I did what you told me to do and did it right, but then it broke. ... So we decided to spread out the cost monthly and form a partnership, so we’re constantly improving the product.”

Adam Weber, a BlueBridge partner and head of sales, explains why he left a lucrative and enjoyable job to join Jaramillo.

“He had a really good business model ... you just felt like it was going to work,” Weber recalls. “He also has a lot of polish, poise and innovation. Those three things come out of somebody so young, and it’s inspiring.”

On a personal level, Weber, 32, adds that teaming up with such a young entrepreneur required approval from “higher ups,” however.

“I made him meet my wife first,” he quips. “You can imagine: I had a great, cushy position – but then a 22-year-old offered me a job. I have two kids and a mortgage and all those things. I made him come over, and he shared the business plan with her. She caught a vision for it too, and she saw how we complemented each other.”

Weber adds that when fellow partner Mitch Shields – a developer with a track record of success – agreed to join Jaramillo and the team, it laid the groundwork for BlueBridge’s rapid success.

Man with the Mira

Jaramillo’s accomplishments came to fruition in April when he was named Young Professional of the Year at TechPoint’s 2013 Mira Awards. Earning the honor over some of Indiana’s top minds meant a great deal to him.

“Whenever you get external validation for what you’re doing, it’s humbling,” he relays. “When I look at the other candidates who were nominated, it’s humbling to be

included in the same sentence.”

TechPoint president and CEO Mike Langellier contends Jaramillo is exactly the type of big thinker the Hoosier state needs in order to excel.

“Finding a rapidly growing sector, which is mobile, and carving a unique business model within that mobile app development space – and doing all that at a young age was an amazing story,” he says. “And he’s a quality individual – representing both accomplishment and humility for someone in his station in life.”



BlueBridge has grown from a staff size of one to 15 in a matter of months. It operates out of entrepreneurial space at Launch Fishers.

Langellier points to eight companies in Central Indiana with recent initial public offerings, which have created 3,500 jobs between them in the last decade.

“Real net new job growth comes from start-ups, and start-ups come from entrepreneurs,” he qualifies. “The more entrepreneurs we can raise and attract, the more businesses we can

grow and more jobs we can create – particularly those high-wage, high-skill type of jobs.”

In his acceptance speech, Jaramillo remarked that he “stands on the shoulders of giants,” crediting his mentors and tech companies in Indianapolis for paving the way for people like him.

“That’s what makes Indiana and Indianapolis so special,” he elaborates. “It’s an ecosystem of technology companies trying to drive Indiana, each other and the sector forward – rather than being cut-throat and competing with each other. ... That level of camaraderie and collaboration is unique.”

Jaramillo has also been recognized on a national level. In late May, *Inc.* magazine named him to its “30 Under 30: World’s Coolest Young Entrepreneurs” list, and he was invited to the White House’s “Champions of Change” event honoring immigrant innovators and entrepreneurs.

INFORMATION LINK

Resources: Santiago Jaramillo and Adam Weber, BlueBridge Digital, at www.bluebridgedigital.com

Mike Langellier, TechPoint, at www.techpoint.org