



The Write Place at the Right Time

Native New Yorker John Sotomayor '90 remakes his life as an award-winning journalist in 'the horse capital of the world.'

By Karen McCally '02 (PhD)

BORN IN MANHATTAN AND RAISED IN THE Bronx and Queens, **John Sotomayor** '90 now finds himself in "the horse capital of the world": Ocala, Florida.

The son of immigrants—his father is from Arequipa, Peru, and his mother is from Bogota, Colombia—Sotomayor moved from

▲ **WRITE MAN:** A native Spanish speaker, Sotomayor has won statewide journalism awards in two languages since moving to Ocala, Fla., where he covers tourism, leisure, entertainment, and horses.

New York City to Ocala in 2004, along with his brother, when his parents retired there.

At first, Sotomayor, now founder of Sotomayor Media Creations and associate editor of *Ocala Magazine*, wasn't convinced the move came at the right time.

In New York, he'd floundered in his attempts at a legal career, an experience he talks about freely.

In 2004, he'd just begun to establish himself as a freelance entertainment writer in the largest media market in the world, writing a weekly column on reality television for Elites TV, a web-based entertainment news site.

So what do you do when family commitments draw you to places that seem far from the beaten path? If you're enterprising—as Sotomayor most certainly is—you turn it into a big opportunity.

"I came to Ocala and said, 'Let me use half a year to learn the area and look at the local publications and see what's available.' And I got to know the equestrian circles, the business circles, pretty fast," he says.

Ocala, in north-central Florida, is a small city, of roughly 52,000 people. But it's growing rapidly, as is its Hispanic community. "The Hispanic community is thriving," says Sotomayor. "A lot of people are moving

from the Miami area up North and from the New York area down South.”

Since his arrival in 2004, he’s written on an exhaustive array of topics, with a focus on tourism, leisure, entertainment, and of course, horses. In the past five years, he’s racked up three awards from the Florida Magazine Association, and three more in the Florida Press Club Excellence in Journalism competition.

A native Spanish speaker, Sotomayor has won awards in two languages. But writing in English was something that, as a grade school student, Sotomayor had to work at to master.

“I never really thought of myself much as a writer,” he says. In grade school English classes, his writing was routinely deemed “awkward.” “That was the common feedback I got on papers—excellent concepts, wonderful vision, awkward phrasing,” he recalls.


At Rochester, he studied political science, but says in hindsight that his most memorable class was a course in science fiction film taught by Constance Penley, who taught at the University from 1983 to 1991.

“I’ll never forget. Because she was the toughest teacher I ever had. I thought it was going to be an easy A. It’s a film class. You’re watching movies and you’re writing about it. How hard is that? But she made us work for it. Really, really work for it,” he says.

In 2008, Sotomayor established himself as a limited liability corporation, Sotomayor Media Creations. That allowed him to join the Ocala/Marion County Chamber of Commerce, where he has since become both a member of the board and the chair and founding member of the Hispanic Business Council. In 2010, the City of Ocala awarded him its Mary Sue Rich Diversity Award, recognizing his leadership role in bringing diverse constituencies together.

Jaye Baillie, the president of the Ocala/Marion County Chamber of Commerce, says, “John’s very focused, he thrives on building relationships, and it’s through those relationships that he’s been able to favorably impact our community and our chamber.”

Having become a recognized civic leader in a growing town in seven years, Sotomayor admits he’s very goal-oriented.

“I see what’s the one-year goal, what’s the three-year, what’s the five,” he says. “It becomes a little clearer in a town the size of Ocala.” 



APPLAUSE: Robert Ward '39E (above) poses with Eastman students rehearsing for a 2005 Eastman Opera Theatre production of his opera *Claudia Legare* (below). The Pulitzer Prize-winning composer will receive the nation’s highest opera honor this fall.

An Ovation for Robert Ward '39E

Robert Ward '39E, a composer whose honors include the Pulitzer Prize, a New York Music Critics Circle Citation, three Guggenheim Fellowships, and an Eastman School Alumni Achievement Award, earned his greatest recognition of all in July: the 2011 National Endowment for the Arts Opera Honor.

The honor that many regard as the highest in opera recognizes a lifetime of major contributions to the art form. Over more than 70 years, until his retirement in 1989, Ward composed, directed, taught, and administered—at Juillard, Columbia, and Duke, and for the U.S. Army band during World War II.

His 1962 opera, *The Crucible*, based on the play by Arthur Miller, which earned him the Pulitzer, is perhaps his best-known work from a catalog that includes eight operas, seven symphonies, four concertos, and many shorter works.

Ward and three other recipients will receive their awards at a concert and ceremony in Washington, D.C., in October.

—Karen McCally