

# Speaker Biographies

## **The Honorable Carmen G. Rodriguez, Freeholder, Camden County**

Freeholder Carmen Rodriguez is an American success story. Born in Puerto Rico, she came to the continental United States with her parents when she was four. Her family lived in Philadelphia before moving to Camden. Education was her parents' dream for her and Carmen made that a reality.

After graduating from Woodrow Wilson High School with honors, she earned a Bachelor of Science degree in biological science with a minor in Spanish from Rutgers University. She went on to earn two Master's degrees: A Master of Education degree in Teaching English as a Second Language from The College of New Jersey and a Master of Chemistry Education from the University of Pennsylvania. She also earned an Ed.S degree in Education Leadership.

As she earned her advanced degrees, Carmen taught science in both Camden City and Audubon school districts. She has teaching certificates in Physical Science, Biological Science, Bilingual Science and K-8 education. She taught physics and chemistry at Brimm Medical Arts High School before becoming Principal of Kingdom Charter School of Leadership in Gloucester Township in the summer of 2013. In the summer of 2014, Freeholder Rodriguez was appointed supervisor of Bilingual Education for the Camden City School System.

As an educator and the mother of four children, Freeholder Rodriguez knows the value of strong families and the power that education brings to young people. Her education and experience as a teacher and a parent motivated her to expand her role as a public servant, becoming the first Hispanic member of the Camden County Board of Freeholders.

Her concern, kindness and compassion have reached out to touch many lives throughout the county. She is the liaison to the Board of Social Services, helping those in need. She expanded the Code Blue protocol for cold weather to include a new Code Blue warming site in downtown Camden, where the homeless can come to get warm on the coldest winter days. She proactively works with agencies to find permanent homes for the homeless.

She has helped the Health Department maintain a level budget without reducing services and has been involved in bringing more digital access to their services by supporting online health inspections of restaurants and cafeterias throughout the county. She is the liaison to the Covenant for Children, a partnership among various agencies to help children and families guided by a Children's Bill of Rights and the Freeholders' proclamation and support for helping children and families.

In 2012, as part of the Covenant for Children initiative, Freeholder Rodriguez worked with the Board of Freeholders to create an interactive Parenting Conference to help children, youth and families build better, stronger families and smart, happy, healthy children. The conference is now an annual event that reaches hundreds of families and is a great addition to Camden County's annual Women's Health Conference. She is also co-chair of the Mental Health Leadership Task Force.

Freeholder Rodriguez has been honored with the Good Neighbor Award by the Camden County Branch of the American Red Cross, the Legislator of the Year Award from the National Association of Women Business Owners, and was named one of the Delaware Valley's Most Influential Latinos in 2014. The mother of four lives in Merchantville.

Freeholder Rodriguez is the liaison to the following departments and divisions: Department of Health & Human Services, Board of Social Services, Department of Children's Services, Division of Senior and Disabled Services, Camden County Technical Schools, Superintendent of Schools, and Addiction Awareness Task Force.

## **Angel Fuentes, Deputy Clerk, Camden County**

Mr. Angel Fuentes has been a resident of the City of Camden since his family moved from Brooklyn, NY in 1973. He was born in Aguadilla, Puerto Rico, and at the age of 5, they moved to Brooklyn, NY. He graduated from Woodrow Wilson High School in 1980 and received his bachelor's degree in philosophy from St. John Vianney College and Seminary in Miami, Florida in 1985. His mother, who remains as a source of inspiration to Mr. Fuentes, installed in him core values, such as helping those in need, which guide him to this current day.

Currently, Mr. Fuentes serves as Deputy County Clerk for the Office of Camden County Clerk. Previously, Mr. Fuentes held the position of patient relations representative at Cooper Health System in Camden for 19 years. He also worked as a family therapist with Center for Family Services, Creating Alliance and Supporting Adolescence (CASA) and as a case manager for children in crisis with Stieninger Center, during this time though; Mr. Fuentes had a desire to serve his community even more, which led him to run for public office in 1993. He was recently appointed to the position of Camden City councilman at large on February 9, 2016.

Due to his compassion and commitment to empower Camden City residents, Mr. Fuentes went on to serve as a member of City Council from 1994 to 2010; of which he was council president from 2000 to 2010. He then went on to serve as an Assemblyman from the 5th District from 2009 to 2015. During his tenure in the New Jersey Assembly, he sponsored and supported legislation that has truly helped transform and revitalize the City of Camden, such as the Urban Hope Act, Economic Opportunity Act, ensuring state funds were available for the creation of the Camden County Police Department, and many others.

In addition holding public office, Mr. Fuentes has further demonstrated his willingness to give much of his time and effort to helping others by serving on various boards and/or associations such as Cooper's Ferry Development Board; the Municipal Economic Recovery Board; Camden County Red Cross; Youth Advocate Program; Camden Superior Court Child Placement Review Board; Center for Family Services of South Jersey; the Greater Camden Partnership; founder and Chairman of the Hispanic Leadership Association of New Jersey; and many others.

One such organization that Mr. Fuentes is extremely proud to have part since its inception is the Hispanic Leader Summit (HLA-NJ) which is held annually at Rowan University since 2012. The leadership Summit, held during Hispanic heritage Month, strives to empower Latinos in New Jersey by facilitating civic engagement, inclusion, leadership, education and participation while promoting respect, multicultural and diversity understanding. HLA-NJ has raise over \$20,000 in Scholarships. Mr. Fuentes currently serves as President to this organization ([www.hispanicleadershipnj.com](http://www.hispanicleadershipnj.com)). He, along with Rev. Chris Collins and Dr. Martha McGee, have organized a diversity network-for the professionals and grassroots- that meets once a month in downtown Camden.

Mr. Fuentes is proud parent of two children, Josual, who is 24 years old, and Mariangelis, who is 16 years old. He is engaged to Marilyn Rodriguez. His brother, Jeraldo Fuentes, is Mayor of Woodlyne, New Jersey.

### **Adalberto "Bert" Lopez, Public Affairs Manager, Atlantic City Electric**

Adalberto "Bert" Lopez is a Public Affairs Manager for Atlantic City Electric, and responsible for government and communities affairs in Cumberland, Gloucester and Salem counties. He is also producer and host of the public affairs television program "Latino Motion with Bert Lopez" formally with NBC40 and currently at Stockton University. The show covers an array of issues and information of interest to the Hispanic Community and airs weekly on the Stockton channel, NJTV and GCEN stations.

Bert serves on the boards of Atlanticare Regional Medical Center, chairman of the Cumberland Economic Development Board, chairman Cumberland/Salem/ Cape May Workforce Development Board and chairman of the Government Affairs committee for Gloucester County Chamber of Commerce. Bert has served as president of the Atlantic City Board of Education and is past chair of the Atlantic/Cumberland Chapter of the American Red Cross. He was awarded the Hometown Hero Award from the United Way, a volunteer service award from Atlanticare Behavioral Health and the Citizen of the Year award from the National Association of Social Workers, among many other honors.

### **Aaron Mendoza, Vice President, Relationship Manager, Bank of America Merrill Lynch**

Aaron Mendoza is the Vice President, in charge of client relationship management for the Business Banking and Middle Market segment at Bank of America Merrill Lynch. He is based in Cherry Hill, New Jersey.

He delivers strategic, integrated financial advice and solutions to help companies with revenues up to \$50 million to strategically grow, improve cash flow and assists his clients to manage their U.S. and international payments, and invest in their future.

As an 11-year veteran in the business of commercial banking and financial services space serving clients in New Jersey, Aaron is a consummate banker and lender for the clients and industries he serves. With the experienced background in working with companies with revenues between \$5-\$50 million and providing financing up to \$60 million, he is well-known in his market for successfully aiding companies with all of their financial service's needs. He began his career in 2006 with Wells Fargo Bank in San Diego, California while attending San Diego State University and is now a Relationship Manager at Bank of America Merrill Lynch. Aaron has been a South Jersey resident since 2011.

Aaron's commitment to his clients goes beyond his call of duty. His passion for service and working with business owners and executives of companies to improve their cash flow and increase their bottom line has been his focus and formula in helping his clients succeed.

Aaron actively participates in diversity networks across the company, he is a member of Bank of America's Latino Leadership Network (HOLA). Aaron also sits on a Finance Committee for a local non-profit in Cherry Hill, helping oversee an annual revenue budget of \$2.5 million.

**Michael J. Plata Esq., Partner, Business Litigation Group, Archer & Greiner, PC**

Michael Jay Plata is a Partner in the Business Litigation Group. His practice is focused on complex business and commercial litigation in federal and state courts, such as breach of contracts, business torts, and shareholder disputes. Mr. Plata has also directed litigation in matters as diverse as environmental law, employment law, Section 1983 litigation, franchise law, licensing disputes, restrictive covenants, and insurance coverage disputes for several public entities and companies of all sizes.

Mr. Plata is a magna cum laude graduate of Florida State University and a graduate of Rutgers School of Law-Newark, where he was Editor-in-Chief of the Rutgers Race and the Law Review. After graduating from law school, Mr. Plata served as a law clerk to The Honorable Ariel A. Rodriguez, Judge, Appellate Division, Superior Court of New Jersey, and thereafter, The Honorable John E. Wallace, Jr., Associate Justice, Supreme Court of New Jersey. Mr. Plata's experience as a clerk in both the New Jersey Appellate Division and Supreme Court allowed him to develop a comprehensive understanding of New Jersey appellate procedure.

Mr. Plata was named a "Rising Star" for the 2010, 2012, 2013, and 2016 editions of New Jersey "Super lawyers" by law and Politics Magazine. He was recently named by the *New Jersey Law Journal* as one of the "New Leaders of the Bar," which is a profile of rising stars in the New Jersey legal profession who are under the age of 40. Mr. Plata is currently the Immediate Past President of the Hispanic Bar Association of New Jersey and is also an active member of the New Jersey State Bar Association.

Through his participation with the bar associations, he has presented on substantive areas of the law and on the practice of law in general. Mr. Plata is admitted to practice law in the State of New Jersey.

**Michael McCuen, Senior Director of Advanced Field Sales, Comcast Business**

Mike began his Comcast Business career in 2008 and has held sales and sales leadership roles in the SMB and Enterprise spaces. In his current role, Mike is responsible for the Advanced Voice organization, focused on providing Comcast Voice Edge (Cloud Based PBX) to the SMB market.

**Derrick K. Bennis, Program Manager — Business Banking, New Jersey Economic Development Authority**

Derrick Bennis serves as the New Jersey Economic Development Authority's (NJEDA) Program Manager—Business Banking.

Mr. Bennis joined the NJEDA in 2005 as a Business Development Officer in the Authority's Finance and Development Division. In that role, Mr. Bennis was responsible for assisting small, women and minority owned enterprises that were expanding and creating jobs in New Jersey, by providing financing through the NJEDA. In 2012, Mr. Bennis was promoted to Senior Business Development Officer of the Finance and Development Division. In this role, Mr. Bennis became more actively involved in departmental planning, training and working on larger more complex projects. In 2014, Mr. Bennis was promoted to Program Manager of the Business Banking Division. In this role Mr. Bennis and his team of diverse professional staff are responsible for marketing and production of the NJEDA's financial resources to banks, industry professionals and partner organizations.

Prior to joining the NJEDA in 2005, Mr. Bennis' career includes over 10 years experience in lending and business development, for organizations such as PNC Bank, Chase Manhattan and Susquehanna Bank.

**Shawn Abner-Purnell, Manager, Organizational Development & Diversity/Inclusion, South Jersey Industries**

Shawn uses her experience in talent and leadership development to support business initiatives and encourage employees to appreciate differences, increasing the ability to innovate and implement the type of out-of-the-box thinking that cultural diversity brings.

Having spent the majority of her career in the insurance industry, Shawn led a learning and development team whose mission was to drive organizational performance, develop leaders and build a winning culture through targeted learning and development solutions. In her current role as Manager, Organizational Development & Diversity/Inclusion for SJI, she helps build organizational capabilities in its workforce through learning and development solutions, diversity and inclusion programs, and culture transformation initiatives.

Shawn graduated from Morgan State University and received her bachelor's degree in business administration and received her master's degree in organizational development and training from St. Joseph's University.

Shawn grew up in Philadelphia and now resides in Glassboro, New Jersey with her husband and three children.

**George D. Sowa, CEO, Greater Trenton; Chairman, CCSNJ Board of Directors**

George Sowa, whose family history in Trenton dates back over 100 years, brings a successful 30+ year career in real estate development to his role as founding CEO of Greater Trenton. For the past 18 years, he was with Brandywine Realty Trust, one of the nation's largest publicly traded, full-service, real estate companies. Most recently, he served as Brandywine's executive vice president and senior managing director and was responsible for overseeing all aspects of the company's New Jersey and Delaware operations and development. He has substantial experience in urban development, and in 2014 led Brandywine's selection by Campbell Soup Company to be the developer of the Camden Gateway District — a transformative 1.5 million square foot, mixed-use project for that city.

Prior to joining Brandywine, Mr. Sowa was director of development for Keating Development Company and was also director of development and operations for Linpro/LCOR. He currently serves on the National Board and Executive Committee of the Commercial Real Estate Development Association (NAIOP), and is a past President of NAIOP's New Jersey chapter. He is also Chairman of the Board of the Chamber of Commerce of Southern New Jersey.

A native to Trenton, New Jersey, Mr. Sowa holds a B.S. Degree from Cornell University.

**Gualberto (Gil) Medina, Executive Vice President, CBRE, Inc.**

Gualberto (Gil) Medina joined CBRE in June 2013 as an Executive Vice President. Gil provides and coordinates integrated real estate solutions for corporate, governmental, non-profit and academic organizations. He is responsible for local and global business development across all CBRE service lines including: Office, Industrial, and Retail Brokerage; Asset Services; Project Management; and Financial Consulting. As part of developing and expanding major account service offerings, Gil provides corporate occupiers with multi-disciplined, high level strategic advisory expertise. In addition, Gil is involved with multiple strategic initiatives focused on business development and industry advancements. A former New Jersey state commerce secretary, Gil was the point-person in the creation of incentive, finance and regulatory programs that constitute the state's core economic growth policies. He remains a key voice in the New Jersey commercial real estate industry, the larger business community, and public-private sector efforts that are guiding the state's future economic health. In his professional career in both the public and private sectors, Gil negotiated over \$5 billion in incentives. Gil is an attorney, CPA and licensed real estate broker who has extensive expertise in management, sales, business development, technology, and regulatory matters. He serves as an advisor on economic growth policy to government officials in various states and large metropolitan centers.