

One-On-One With The Colonel Of The Concourse

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Colonel Emilio Gonzalez is the new Airport Director and head of aviation in Miami-Dade County. (Source: CBS4)

MIAMI (CBSMiami) — There's a new man in charge at Miami International Airport who oversees everything from getting wildlife off the runways to holding the feds to the fire to cut down wait times for passengers clearing customs.

Colonel Emilio Gonzalez is the new Airport Director and head of aviation in Miami-Dade

County. Director Gonzalez likens MIA to a city of 100,000 people.

"I was an outsider in the sense that I've never worked for the county and never worked with the county," he told **CBS4's Brian Andrews** in a one-on-one interview. "And if you add the employees it comes up to about 135,000."

Gonzalez succeeds recently-retired director Jose Abreau.

Gonzalez's background is extensive and has included stints in the military, Department of National Security and the White House and all the travel that's come with it.

"I'm a million-miler," he said about the hundreds of trips he's taken for business. "More than that, a million-four I think."

He runs a tight ship, much like a military operation. In doing so, Gonzalez said his meetings last fifteen minutes or less.

"If you can't tell me what you want in 15 minutes, get another job," he warned.

Each day Gonzalez walks the terminal and simply listens.

"It's amazing what you see," he said about walking through the airport each day. "It's amazing what you hear."

Gonzalez said he 'was floored' when he found out the balance on the airport's annual power bill. "It's like 32 or 33 million dollars a year," he grumbled. His plan to chop the power bill is by installing smart energy systems.

Gonzalez said he's doing a top-to-bottom revamp to the power structure of the Miami-Dade Aviation Department.

"Take this organization, look at it, see where we need to add people," he explained. "See where we need to move people, not necessarily fire anybody."

He wants to increase international flights and reach more of the world with direct flights.

"If I want to go to Korea, I have to go through Atlanta, he said. "Why Atlanta? Why not here?"

Gonzalez said Miami is truly a hub if you base it on location. He said that feature should make room for more carriers, not just American Airlines. "I want to get more Asian and European carriers here."

Gonzalez explained the most interesting thing he learned when he first took the job was the fact that animals live on the runways at Miami-Dade County airports. "Birds can bring down an airplane. Imagine sucking in a deer, or an owl or a rabbit. We've got deer on our runways? That's what I was told. Obviously this is something that has to be managed, and you can't go out there and declare deer season at the airport, but it's one of those things you never think of. "

He's even ordered a redesign of the airport hotel lobby. "The colors are going to be very, very bright," he described. "Yeah, it's kind of dingy."

He wants to move the airport chapel because he feels currently, it's too far away. "It's a nice place to pray, a nice place to be quiet." He wants to call it an 'interfaith center'.

Gonzalez feels that customer service is a top priority when it comes to challenges.

"Someone comes in and spends more time in a line than they do on a flight," he explained. "That's a terrible welcome to South Florida." Gonzalez said that's not MIA's fault, but more of a responsibility that falls on the federal government and he's making suggestions.

"But, it doesn't change the fact that we could lose business if we don't fix this," he warned.

"You never walk by a mistake, Gonzalez said. "You're running in like a colonel, as it should be!"

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