

## Hispanic Heritage Month: A familia affair

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As a child growing up in New York City, Ed Minaya dreamt of a career in law enforcement. After moving to the Dominican Republic in elementary school, Ed's dreams quickly shifted, but he hoped to one day return to the United States. In 1990, while driving through Santo Domingo, a radio ad caught his attention, announcing that American Airlines was hiring at Las Americas International Airport (SDQ). Ed knew that this job would not only give him the opportunity to serve others, but it would also offer him wings. That radio ad altered the course of his and his family's story forever.

Ed soon joined American as a Customer Service Agent at SDQ, and his twin sister Hilda quickly followed suit. During his more than 30-year career with American, Ed has held a number of roles at the airline, most recently as a Customer Care Manager at Miami International Airport (MIA). At MIA, he works alongside Hilda and his wife Elizabeth Helver, both Premium Guest Service Representatives, as well as his brother-in-law Ariel Helver, a Facilities Maintenance Mechanic. For the Minayas, working at American is a familia affair.

The Minayas and the Helvers are as tight-knit as they are diverse: Ed and Hilda are of Dominican descent, while Elizabeth and Ariel are Argentine. While their work schedules don't always coincide, they make sure to make time for family. Almost every Sunday the entire family gets together for a meal where their rich cultural backgrounds are put on display. The table includes a wide variety of dishes that best exemplify their own cuisines, from Argentine staples like choripan, milanesa and chimichurri, to Dominican cake, white rice and red beans.

"Being Hispanic is such a big part of our identities, but it's something so hard to define because our cultures are so unique and varied — from the different foods we eat, our idioms, accents, music, even the teams that we root for. One key unifying thread is our conviction that our familia comes first," Ed said.

After decades working at the airline's Miami hub, Ed, Hilda, Elizabeth and Ariel agree that their family has continued growing, with many of their colleagues becoming sisters, brothers or life-long friends. Walking around MIA, you often hear people calling each other "mijo," "primo" or "hermano," terms of endearment for friends who are now considered family.

The airline's Miami hub is a reflection of the community it serves, with the majority of its residents being of Hispanic origin. Miami's rich Hispanic heritage is celebrated every day at MIA, from the food customers can buy at the airport to team members welcoming passengers with a "buenos dias," "bienvenido" or a "buen viaje."

"In the Hispanic community, caring and helping others is an integral part of who we are, we are nurturers by nature and it's why our families are at the core of our identity. It's a real privilege to work alongside my familia- both my biological family and all of those who have become family along the way," Hilda said.

In 2017, one more Minaya joined the airline industry when Ed's oldest child, Oscar, became a pilot for American's regional partner, Republic Airlines. Four years after joining Republic, Oscar is now an Embraer E175 Captain and hopes to soon join the family business — flying mainline aircraft for American Airlines.

Elizabeth, Ed and Hilda work together at Miami International Airport.

Oscar gets ready for his first flight as a pilot for Republic Airways.