

Former NuStar, Andeavor executives launch energy company in SA

By Jessica Corso
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There was a moment when executives at San Antonio's newest midstream energy company considered setting up shop elsewhere.

John Roller and Karen Vázquez discussed basing GTI Statia in Houston, Dallas and Miami. But Roller and Vázquez were raising their families in the Alamo City and, besides, saw plenty of talent to draw from among former colleagues from NuStar Energy LP and Andeavor.

"There's nowhere else I want to be. Karen and I talked about it, nowhere else she wanted to be," Roller said.

Roller and Vázquez sat with the Business Journal to discuss their new company, GTI Statia, which was formed to operate a 60-tank oil and refined products storage facility and loading terminal on the Caribbean island of St. Eustatius after investment firm Prostar Capital bought the asset from NuStar (NYSE: NS) this year.

Roller, now CEO of GTI Statia, is familiar with the facility from his 32 years with NuStar and its predecessors, while Chief Financial Officer Vázquez spent a lot of time looking at other terminals' operations in her role as a vice president of finance with Andeavor. Vázquez left that company last year after it was bought by Ohio-based Marathon Petroleum Corp. (NYSE: MPC), which decided that her role — she was setting up Andeavor's operations in Mexico at the time — should be based in Mexico City. Vázquez wasn't ready to leave San Antonio.

"I loved the work. I loved the people. I loved the company. I still love the company," she said of her work at Andeavor, previously Tesoro Corp. "But I also love my husband, and he lives here."

After briefly considering retirement, Vázquez accepted an offer to be GTI Statia's first employee in June. Joining Vázquez and Roller is GTI Chief Commercial Officer Jim Calvert, formerly NuStar's vice president of international business development, and four other former Andeavor employees. When GTI is done hiring, it expects to have 20 to 25 people working at the San Antonio office. The island facility employs 130.

"There's a really good talent pool here," Roller said. "There's nowhere better. So why would we leave?"

St. Eustatius is an 8-square-mile island with fewer than 4,000 people, and the GTI Statia terminal accounts for 60% of the island's gross domestic product, Roller said. The Dutch province was a major trading port in the 17th and 18th centuries, according to the territory's official tourism website, and it remains an ideal location for shipping fuel around the world, Roller said.

"If you look at the trade flows, whether you're going east to west or west to east or you're going from the South Caribbean or even South America, you almost pass this facility either to the north or to the south," Roller said. "It's been that way since the 1700s."

Though the location may be ideal for getting oil into or out of the Americas, it also poses a potential problem for businesses operating there. St. Eustatius sits in the Caribbean's hurricane belt, and in 2017, Category 5 Hurricane Irma swept through the island, damaging the storage terminal.

No fuel was spilled during the hurricane, and damage to the storage tanks was superficial as the paint was wind-blasted off, Roller said. The damage to the jetty and dock was more than superficial and has mostly been repaired, he said.

The pair isn't too concerned about future hurricane damage, as the facility sits high on a cliff and was built to withstand strong winds. But in the worst-case scenario, the company has emergency procedures in place, Roller said.

"We have a robust plan for hurricanes, so we know when they're coming. We know how to plan for them," he said. "We're very good at making sure that we have a plan in place so that ... we get back into the facility quickly."

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