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## The Untold Story of Ponce Yacht Club's Road: Tito Castro's Legacy

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### How was the Ponce Yacht & Fishing Club born?

As we celebrate the 120th birthday of Governor Luis A. Ferre, I want to share a story that shows that he and my grandfather were protagonists in their own way.

Every morning as I enter my office, a beautifully artistic photo of the Ponce Yacht & Fishing Club greets me. That photo of a beautiful sunrise highlights the majestic Ponce Yacht & Fishing Club, or "El Nautico" as we ponceños call it, its facilities, as well as the beauty of the landscape around it. "El Nautico" is one of the most beautiful places in Puerto Rico and is undoubtedly an extraordinary place for those who grew up there. For many of us, it was customary for our parents to leave us there at 7:00 in the morning and pick us up in the afternoon during days off, particularly in the summers. Childhood inventiveness allowed us to make fishing rods out of Schaefer beer cans, covered with fishing lines, hooks, and a small weight to dabble in fishing. It allowed us to take out our Sunfish to sail around or venture to Cardona Island. In short, it allowed us to create our adventures every day. Today's Ponce Yacht Club is a beautiful property with beautiful pine trees, spectacular docks for all types of boats, recreational areas, a swimming pool, tennis courts, restaurants, and bars, in addition to being a venue for fabulous fishing tournaments, verbenas, the famous White Christmas dances, in short, a place where you have a wonderful time.

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Very few know that what we know today as Ponce Yacht Club began when a group of friends noticed a small mangrove known as Isla de Gatas, which in 1938 was valued at \$150.00, which today would be about \$2,910.29. This group of friends never imagined how difficult it would be to obtain the permits to build what would become the Ponce Yacht & Fishing Club.

With the help and advise of Attourney Leopoldo Tormes who was able to convince the Ponce Legislative Assembly to approve a 99-year lease for \$1.00 per year. The Ponce industrialist Pedro Juan Serrallés, being president of the Ponce Yacht Club, gave the Government of Puerto Rico a certificate of deposit from the Banco Crédito y Ahorro Ponceño for \$99.00 to pay the leases in advance.

When the clubhouse began construction in 1939, there was no road, and all the materials had to be carried by dinghy to build a reinforced concrete structure mounted on piles driven more than 60 feet below the seabed. Today's clubhouse, where the bar and restaurant have traditionally been located with an impressive ocean view from the second floor, was completed in April 1941 for \$30,000 or \$502,459.51 in today's dollars. Unfortunately, when the war was declared in December 1941, the United States Navy seized the Club for both the Navy and the Coast Guard to use as a surveillance station in the southern zone. Therefore, all that effort lasted only a few months, that version of the Yacht Club.

### How and who joined the Ponce Yacht Club with Ponce?

From its beginnings, the Club did not have road access; it was only possible to arrive via an "ancon" that took the people from the dock where the tuna boats were in the Port of Ponce and near where today is La Guancha to the Yacht Club. All the members and visitors of the Ponce Yacht Club from 1941 until the road was completed in 1966 had to use the famous "ancon".

This is the real reason for this story; it turns out that since the Ponce Yacht Club was born, my family has been linked to it. My grandfather's older brother, Arturo Castro, wrote its articles of incorporation, regulations, and bylaws in its creation and was also Commodore of the Nautico between 1952 and 1955.

My grandfather, Tito Castro, told me about the many conversations he had with his brother and other friends to come up with a plan to not only build a road to link the Club with Ponce but to add several acres of land on loan to the sea to make it more attractive and add more space for docks, a dry dock, among other facilities. For my grandfather, Tito Castro, a great road contractor, building that particular road was a great challenge and a gift he wanted to give to the Club. For about 11 years, he studied the area, its depths, and the contour of the area to select the road we all know today.

Finally, in 1966, my grandfather, Tito Castro, became Commodore of the Ponce Yacht Club and decided to solve the lack of a road once and for all. Having already evaluated everything, he was ready to begin his plan and had determined to involve his friend, neighbor, and member of the Ponce Yacht Club, Don Luis A. Ferre. According to what my grandfather told me and validated by Don Luis himself, my grandfather explained that to make the base of the road, he needed to use a residue material called Clinker to manufacture cement.

## What is Clinker?

Clinker is the backbone of cement production and is essentially a mixture of limestone and minerals that have been heated in a kiln and transformed by this heat when limestone is converted into Clinker, CO<sub>2</sub> is released.

At that time, the Ponce Cement deposited the leftover Clinker on a farm on their property. My grandfather asked Don Luis, "If we use the hot clinker and deposit it directly in the water, the chemical reaction with the water would harden it and create a solid base to build a better and more durable road." Don Luis himself told me many years later, in one of those lunches he used to make to attract young people to the Ponce Museum, and during the conversation, I asked him about the construction of the Ponce Yacht Club road since my grandfather had passed away and I wanted to know his perspective. Don Luis commented to me, "Your grandfather Tito had the correct theory that Clinker from Ponce Cement was the ideal material to be the foundation to build the road for the Ponce Yacht Club." He said, "We went together in early 1966 to evaluate the possibility, and I was convinced it was the best alternative".

So, the Clinker was deposited directly into the water and created a solid base. If enough was poured in, the area would dry out. There were hundreds and hundreds of trips of that Clinker to create the initial base for the road. That was followed by hundreds of trips of marble stone from the Naranjo Marble Quarry that our family has in Juana Diaz and, in addition, other materials used in Ponce Asphalt, also from my family, to build roads, all that work from the collection of materials, design, construction, and labor was donated by my grandfather Tito Castro, for the benefit of the Ponce Yacht Club.

Recently, while expanding my research to confirm all aspects of the story, I was given a photo taken in 1966 by Capitan Alvin Toro showing the completed construction he took from my grandfather's plane.

Once the road opened, the result was a gigantic increase in membership and activity at the Yacht Club, thanks to the vision of my grandfather Tito Castro to undertake this project.

In the summer of 1969, there was an enormous expansion in the Port of Ponce for one of the Tuna processing plants in the Ponce Harbor, and also with the Petrochemical complex at that time represented a threat to limit or take away the Club's access to water and electricity. This fact was the opportunity that the Ponce Yacht Club needed to secure the water and electricity access and to formalize the ownership of the Club's new road access. Fomento Industrial and its then executive director, Manny Casiano, needed to be convinced that in addition to preserving the access to electricity and water, they needed to formalize the access and the permissions of the road, which was finally achieved thanks to those efforts.

In good part, thanks to the vision and help of many members, who contributed their help and contacts, it was possible to turn into reality what in 1941 was a dream, to have a great Club with land access for the use and enjoyment of all.



**Photo from 1966 showing the last truck that finally links Ponce Yacht Club with Ponce. In the photo are, from left to right, Tito Castro, Quique Sans, Cucho Maldonado and Jorge Pérez.**

### **The Final Word: The Legacy of Tito Castro**

Today, a work like this would be challenging to build, but that was the Puerto Rico of yesteryear, where entrepreneurs did the necessary things to expand the frontiers of economic development. After building the initial road, it had to be redone a couple of times due to the impacts of storms or hurricanes, and to learn more information, I called my friend Edgar Domenech, who was Commodore from 1991 to 1995. During that time of Ponce en Marcha, he took advantage of the leftover material to build a solid breakwater that protected the Club from the onslaught of bad weather and hurricanes. That breakwater was helped build by friends Ronnie and Robbie Ramos, then owners of Rama Construction and first-class competitive sailors. For many years, I have wanted to share this story. However, it was necessary to strengthen it with all the historical material available, thanks to many conversations with Captain Alvin Toro and Edgar Domenech, who provided me with their experiences, historical photos, books, and yearbooks in addition to getting valuable information by talking with their friends to be able to offer a historically accurate, appropriate and supported with historical data. To Edgar, as well as to Alvin, my total gratitude and respect. I hope you like how I told the story; without your help, it would not have been possible to say it.

In Ponce, there is a Tito Castro Avenue. However, I am sure that he would have loved to have his name on the road of his beloved Ponce Yacht Club, to memorialize the immense contribution that he made to the Club by building the road, which he paid, and faithful to his style without expecting absolutely nothing in return, expect for the pleasure of seeing the Club grow, contribute to building a place to be enjoyed by future generations and to a lesser extent, to get faster to his Yacht Anita II. Fernando Barnes-Velez (RIP), better known as Nandin to all of us, wrote, "Tito Castro was always a leader, born not to follow anyone, but to be followed, a free spirit who in life refused to follow the existing paths and roads, but rather, opened his gaps and paths. That is why he enjoyed so much and felt in his natural element, in the sea, with absolute freedom of course and movement".

**Photo taken by Alvin Toro in 1966 when the road was completed, note that La Guancha did not exist as it is known today.**

I have wanted to remember the stories that my grandfather used to tell me, supporting them with historical data and, in the same way, perpetuate the legacy he left us and be confident that not a single day goes by that I do not miss him.



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