

# Martinez family celebrates American freedom all year

By Lindsay Norman

Eduardo Martinez speaks with an explosion of speedy words and hand gestures.

His Cuban accent laces his words together, as he sings from one word to the next like a song.

He smiles and laughs in between sentences. If he is not with his family he is talking about them. He has a 6-year-old son Max and wife, Tania.

Today he said he is grateful he chose Arizona as his home because he has the opportunity to run his own business, own a beautiful home and raise a child in a free country.

The Martinez family has lived in Arcadia since December 2005. Eduardo and Tania became U.S. citizens July 27, 2007.

Every year, more than 1 million immigrants enter the United States in search of a different life.

Thousands flee Cuba every year in search of freedom.

Since he moved to the U.S. in 2002, Martinez said he feels more like an American than a Cuban, and he couldn't be more grateful.

After spending the first 19 years of his life in Havana, in 1984 Martinez went to Kiev, Russia to attend college at the Kiev

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Polytechnic Institute where he earned a master's degree in engineering.

However, when he returned home in 1990, Cuba was in what he refers to as the "special period" when trade relations were suspended with what was at the time the Soviet Union and his country was suffering a lack of supplies, electricity and clothing.

Even with his master's and a government research job he was making next to nothing.

"I was making a little over \$2 a month. I couldn't even afford to buy a dozen eggs," he said.

He started looking for something better. In 1996, he joined Marilyn Zeitlin, then-director of the Arizona State University Art Museum who was involved in discovering Cuban artists and bringing their work to the U.S. for sale and exhibition.

Martinez slowly began to learn English and become known as a local guide for visiting Americans.

In 2002 he boarded a plane to New York and never returned as a Cuban citizen.

One of the most influential people in Martinez's new American life was Arcadia resident and fine-art consultant Ted Decker.

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"I put Eduardo to work first in my home and realized that he was gifted," Decker said.

"Then we hatched the idea for a handyman business. He was an overnight success because he understands the value of service."

Even though Martinez was able to transfer his engineering degree by this time, he was doing so well as a general contractor he said he decided to continue in that direction.

In 2005, Dave Takemoto, a successful construction consultant in California, came

to Martinez with a proposition.

Martinez said he was surprised and flattered.

"Wow, a person like Dave is willing to take chance on a person like me?" In his native Cuba, entrepreneurs are few and far between.

The general contracting company was licensed in Arizona in 2006 and was named Martak, short for Martinez and Takemoto. Now, Martinez said he is busy remodeling homes throughout the Valley.

"Having Max, our son, and becoming American citizens are the two most important accomplishments we have made," said Martinez, as his wife Tania nodded in agreement.



**The Martinez family: Eduardo and Tania and 6-year-old son Max.**