

AMAZON'S ARMENIAN GODFATHER

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By Jirair Tutunjian, Toronto, 4 March 2023

There are no towns in Russia named Mikoyan or Khachaturian. There is no town in France named Aznavour. In Portugal there's no town named Gulbenkian... although [Mr. Five Percent](#) pumped millions of dollars into the impoverished Portuguese economy and his foundation continues to support the arts and academia of that country. While there are dozens of place names in the Americas which bear the Armenia name, outside Armenia, there's no town named after an Armenian.

Correction: There is such a town in Brazil, some 11,500 k from Armenia. The town is Comendador Levy Gasparian. It's named after an Armenian entrepreneur who lived at the edge of the Amazon from the early Fifties to the Seventies.

Gasparian, born in 1906, arrived in the early Fifties to the hard-scrabble settlement called Serraria, 130 kilometers north of Rio de Janeiro. After investigating the potential of the seemingly no-account town, he opened a fabric factory in 1953. He aimed to export almost all the fabric produced at his Alto da Boa Vista Lanificio factory.



To make the town livable for his employees, who often came from long distances, he built a school, sport arena, club, and a cinema in addition to houses, apartments, and warehouses. At its peak, the factory employed 1,400 people. Levy, his wife Armen and their three sons (Armando, Eduardo, and Marcos) lived in the town.

Residents described Gasparian as a visionary-entrepreneur who was “humble, humorous, and approachable.” He loved to party but never gave up his signature bow tie. He often drank with his employees. To entertain his employees, he brought samba schools and sports teams from Rio. He also threw barbecue parties at the drop of a hat. He founded a sports club which won at least five football championships. He built a square in the town centre and built a park to make the town centre more attractive.

Gasparian put an end to the town's water supply problem by building a water treatment centre (ETA). The centre was named after his wife.

Although not holding political posts, the Armenian godfather inevitably became involved in politics

and sponsored a number of politicians who became mayor and deputy mayor of the city.

In recognition of his public work, he was awarded the "Comendador" title by the Pope.

Gasparian died in Oct. 31, 1972. He was buried at Rio de Janeiro's Cemeterio Sao Joao Batista. Hundreds of people attended his funeral.



In

June 1991, the people of Serraria held a plebiscite and decided to rename their town Comendador Levy Gasparian.

In 1997, Gasparian's fabric factory shuttered because of lack of substantial investment and globalization.

Since Rio de Janeiro (the closest big city to Comendador Levy Gasparian) has no Armenian community (most Armenians of Brazil live in Sao Paolo), it's not known whether Gasparian participated in Armenian community affairs. There's also no record about his birthplace (Brazil or Armenia?) or how he earned the capital which enabled him to open the fabric factory in the Amazon boondocks.

Comendador Levy Gasparian has a population (2020) of 8,576.

Comments



Roxanne – 2023-03-15 17:31:00

Thank you for this interesting story. I hope someone in Brazil could investigate Gasparian's roots further.



H – 2023-03-10 02:27:24

Thank you Mr. Tutunjian for the article titled Amazon's Armenian Godfather. Interesting read, but sad ending.