



PEDRO PEREZ
PCY

“For Esperanza, the fog is free,” says Pedro Perez, flashing his characteristic 500-megawatt smile. He’s president of PCY General Services, Inc., the company he started a dozen years ago just as the fledgling Esperanza Health Centers – then Centro de Salud y Esperanza – was looking to contract with a new maintenance and repair service. “Other companies charge \$1500, \$3000 a month for the fog. But not me, not for Esperanza.”

We’ll get to the fog in a bit. For now, suffice it to say it’s part of keeping everyone at Esperanza – patients, visitors, and staff – safe from coronavirus. And as the pandemic has emerged and

DAY 67

MAY 14, 2020

Total # of SARS-COV-2, NAA
Ordered to Date

3,134

Tested Negative to Date

■ **1,472**

of Confirmed Cases to Date

■ **1,662**



exploded on Chicago's Southwest side, no one's been more important to ensuring that safety than Perez.

Most stories about people on the "front lines" of the fight against COVID-19 feature doctors, nurses, and researchers, with occasional nods to community leaders and volunteers working in a variety of critical social services. But it's hard to think of anyone more willing to put themselves routinely in the path of the virus than Perez and his 11-person crew. In addition to daily cleaning and maintenance across Esperanza's clinics, where the lion's share of coronavirus testing on the Southwest side happens, they go wherever there's been a known exposure to the virus. Whether it's an exam room, a waiting area, a reception desk, or an administrative office, they're on-site to clean and disinfect all the things public health officials have warned the rest of us to stay away from.

"Sure, we were afraid at first," Perez says. "Who wouldn't be? But you know, you get the information, you learn what to do. I had to train all of my employees in using PPE, in using the right chemicals to disinfect, the right techniques, everything. And I had Carmen there to make sure we got everything right. And to encourage us not to be afraid."

Perez spends much of his time tracking a target he can never locate. "OK, so it's an exam room where someone with COVID got a test," he begins. "I don't know exactly where the virus will be. I wasn't in the room when the patient was there. So. Start with the door. The doorknob. The garbage can, the desk, the chair, the other chair, the exam table. The floor. Everything but the ceiling. I don't think the patient touched the ceiling." He explodes in the laugh anyone working at Esperanza has heard reverberating down the halls dozens of times before.

"And then...we gotta fog," he says with a glint



*PCY at work at Esperanza's
Brighton Park clinic*

in his eye. "Bring out the fogging machine." It's a portable, battery-powered contraption loaded up with chemicals proven to kill coronavirus. With the flip of a switch, the chemicals are transformed into a thick mist Perez can direct. "Fog everything. All around the room. Everything in the room. If you have carpet, fog the carpet. You can't vacuum up respiratory droplets. Fog the carpet."

In addition to fogging areas where there have been known exposures to the virus, Perez insists on fogging Esperanza's waiting rooms every night. "It takes maybe 20 to 30 minutes," he says. "It's total protection. And I don't charge anything. I mean, it's my community, you know?"

If you stopped by Esperanza most any day since the epidemic began, you would have found Perez there with a mop, a rag, a spray bottle, or a fogger in his hand. "I'm the president of the company, but I like to be on my knees cleaning," he says. "I like to be there with my team to help out."

An added incentive: one of his crewmembers is his daughter. "She's working at the Brighton Park clinic," he says, a sudden warmth infusing his tone. "It's where most of the COVID testing is happening. I could be afraid for her. But I know she's doing everything she was trained to do. I know she's going to be OK."

Still, Perez knows it's impossible for him to be on top of everyone in his crew. "I can't be right behind all of my workers all the time, like children in daycare. My crew knows that if they are in the clinic without a mask or gloves, I'm going to kick their butt. They have to wear them all the time."

Perez's insistence on safety has not gone unnoticed at Esperanza. "The other day, the site director at the Brighton Park clinic, she told me she feels more safe inside the clinic than anywhere else in the community," Perez says with a grin. "That was a real compliment, you know?"

After several weeks on the literal front lines of the epidemic, Perez hired a professional consultant to provide him with all the most up-to-date protocols on coronavirus infection control. "They gave me everything, all the directions," he says, that mesmerizing smile emerging again. "And we were already doing exactly what their protocol said. We are doing it right. We are going to kill this fucking virus."



FRONT LINES

COMMUNITY HEALTH AT THE FOREFRONT OF THE
COVID-19 PANDEMIC

www.esperanzachicago.org