

## East End/Third Ward News

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### Coffee group loyal to East End, company says

Under new ownership, 'Taj Mahal of coffee plants' continues to add jobs

By **DOUGLAS BRITT**  
Chronicle Correspondent

The old Maxwell House plant on Harrisburg has long been an East End landmark, but for Carlos de Aldecoa, it represents something grander.

"I would consider it to be the Taj Mahal of coffee plants," the president of Maximus Coffee Group and Cadeco Industries told members of the Houston East End Chamber of Commerce at their luncheon on Wednesday.

"It would have been a shame had Kraft decided to shut this plant down, so we felt we had to really stand up," said de Aldecoa, recalling Maximus' decision to buy the plant from Kraft Foods Inc., which owns Maxwell House, last December.

The historic facility started life in 1907 as a Model-T Ford manufacturing plant before Maxwell House bought it in the 1940s and converted it to coffee roasting, decaffeination and other food processing operations, de Aldecoa said.

In recent years, the U.S. coffee consumer market has drifted away from "mainstream" brands, "putting a lot of pressure on" brands like Maxwell House, he said.

When Kraft announced it was looking for a buyer, Maximus saw a "tremendous opportunity," he said.

"We're still processing (Kraft's brands of) coffee. We've maintained the jobs in Houston; it's over 350 jobs. Year-to-date, we've added about 50 additional jobs and continue to hire," he said, adding that Maximus, nevertheless, faces "a lot of hurdles on hiring skilled labor."

De Aldecoa said Maximus plans to shift "from using corporate, Kraft suppliers out of Chicago to starting to bring a lot more of that purchasing power down into our region."

While coffee has long figured heavily in the East End's economy, its importance has increased since 2001, when voters amended the Texas Constitution to exempt green coffee and cocoa beans stored in Harris County from inventory taxes, de Aldecoa said.

Eliminating the inventory tax prompted the New York Board of Trade, in 2003, to license the Port of Houston as the only green coffee exchange port west of the Mississippi River, and last year Houston had the fastest growing coffee port in the world, de Aldecoa said.

### In other business

- Melissa Noriega, who will face Roy Morales in next month's runoff for City Council At-Large Position 3, said East End support was crucial to her garnering 46.5 percent of the vote in the May 12 election and urged chamber members to return to the polls June 16.

Both Noriega and Morales are chamber members. Morales, who picked up 18.7 percent, was also scheduled to speak but did not appear.

- Deborah Jacques, academic coordinator of Chavez High School's "Project Lead the Way" engineering curriculum, thanked chamber members "for the time and energy you spend on Chavez."

- Larry Lipton, the chamber's Crime Awareness Committee chair, presented Houston Police Department Eastside Division Senior Officer Richard Rios with the group's "Officer of the Month" award.

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