

DID YOU KNOW?

The Man Who Lit Up Boquete — and Planted Its Most Famous Garden

Villa Marta, the roughly 3-hectare estate near the Rio Caldera just north of downtown, was the home of **Eduardo "Don Lalo" González Jované** (1910–2010) and his wife **Marta Halphen de González** — she's the Marta the villa was named for. Don Lalo turned the grounds into his dream garden and opened it to everyone, free, year-round, under the name the whole town knew: **"Mi Jardín es su Jardín."** Koi ponds, waterfalls, painted cows, a tiny six-bench chapel — for decades it was arguably Panama's most famous private garden. The flowers were never for sale.

Don Lalo is the reason Boquete has lights and telephones. His **Empresas Eléctricas de Chiriquí** made this the first province in Panama with a full network of power plants — including the 1957 **Hidroeléctrica Caldera** right here in Boquete district — pioneering the country's rural electrification (the company had 24 MW when the state absorbed it into IRHE in 1973). His sister company, **Comunicaciones, S.A.**, gave Chiriquí's towns automated telephone service *before Panama City had it*, and his **Intercomsa** later took Panama into satellite communications. He was also the founding president of the Cámara de Comercio de Chiriquí (1951).

Don Lalo passed away in 2010, having reached 100 — visitors from the year before recall him still taking his daily drive around town. Today the estate is held through a sociedad anónima and the grounds operate as **Mi Jardín Villas**, a vacation-rental complex on Vía Boquete. The garden itself is currently closed, though the developers say they plan to reopen it to the public.

Sources: La Prensa (21 Aug 2002; Carlos Galán Ponce, 18 Apr 2007), Ecos del Valle (Mar 1957) via Hidroeléctrica Caldera blog, ETESA historical records, CAMCHI 75th-anniversary history, FamilySearch/Geneanet, mijardinvillas.com, traveler accounts 2009–2016.