

Dramatic Growth with Helping Hands

Business excels with help from Small Business Administration

BY JAKE THOMAS
THE PORTLAND OBSERVER

After having owned his own landscaping company for over 20 years, Manuel Castaneda seems to have it made.

Pro Landscape Inc. has been ranked as one of the fastest growing Hispanic-owned businesses in the country. It's also made the list of the 100 fastest growing businesses in the state for the last three out of four years in the Portland Businesses Journal. Castaneda was Oregon Minority Small Business Person of the Year in 2008, and currently he has a workforce of 40 employees.

But things weren't always as gravy for Castaneda, the company's founder and president.

In 1986, he and a handful of other employees at another landscaping company had a big falling out with management, according to Castaneda.

Castaneda, 43, knew a big investor who was going to buy a big home and needed some landscaping done, and he quickly secured the work for him and the other employees who had jumped ship.

When the job was done, word had spread on the quality of their work and they found that the other residents of the neighborhood had jobs for them as well.

"Pretty soon we were doing the streets," said Castaneda.

Pro Landscape is now a full service company that specializes in unique water features, irrigation and sprinkler systems, all types of walls, drainage systems, lawn installation, as well as fences, decks, patios, and more. It also does work in hillside stabilization and landslide remediation.

The company's dramatic growth came about with several helping hands, said Castaneda.

One of the big learning experiences came from enrolling in the Small Business Administration's 8(a) program, which helps disadvantaged businesses get experience by work-



Manuel Castaneda, founder and president of Pro Landscape, Inc., took risks to grow his minority-owned business into a national leader.

ing on federal projects.

Participating businesses get work from government contracts that they normally wouldn't have a shot at, and learn how about how to deal with various federal agencies, as well as the bidding and bonding processes. The SBA keeps in contact with them regularly to evaluate their business plan and offer tips on how to excel.

Castaneda also had help from others as well. Shortly after enrolling in the SBA program, he began looking into a bridge project in Depot Bay. The person he was in contact with asked him if he could do sheet pile, which Castaneda said his company was qualified to do. Everything looked good until Castaneda realized that the man had in fact said "sheer pile," which is a complicated soil stabilization process that his company had never attempted.

He called up his SBA program-assigned mentor, Ted Allen, and explained the situation.

"No sweat," was his reply. Allen helped him successfully

bid the project out, and find a sub-contractor for the soil stabilization part of the project. Castaneda said the project was done ahead of time and received accolades from the city.

He also said his business emerged stronger from the experience, having new knowledge of how to do a construction project that it had never attempted before. The contract

also brought in more money to the company and helped establish his market position.

"You have to take that risk," said Castaneda of how to grow a business.

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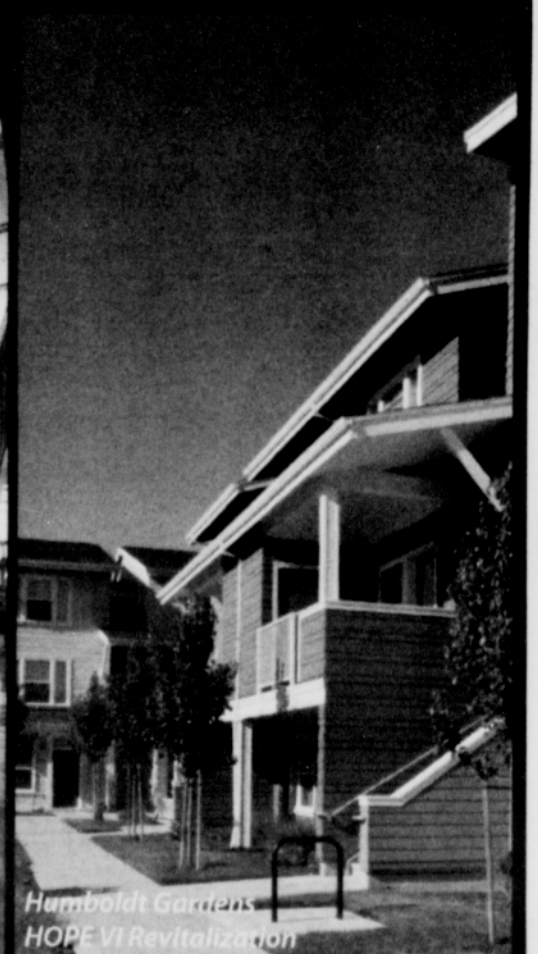
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