

## De Leon's Firm Has Seen Lion's Share of Success

- ◦ Email  
Share

"I told the ones that stayed on that, frankly, I didn't have the money to operate and asked that they please pay their invoices within 15 days," instead of the regular 30- to 45-day lapse, he said.

In its first month, the company topped \$22,000 in sales, but De Leon wasn't satisfied. He began to research the commercial market.

"I took a crash course in defense conversion," he says.

Between July and December 1994, the revenue increased to \$104,000 with a 15% profit margin.

"When the workers saw the figures, they were confident we would make it," he says.

In 1995, revenues jumped to \$500,000 again with a 15% profit. Nevertheless, De Leon says he lived off credit cards, refusing to take a salary and reinvesting the profits into his enterprise.

Lacking an adequate credit history, the banks spurned him when he applied for a loan to expand his operation. Finally, the Valley Economic Development Center loaned him \$200,000, which he used to hire 10 more employees, upgrade his computer system and purchase state-of-the-art surface-mounting equipment.

In 1996, his sales doubled to \$1.1 million on a 16% profit margin.

His success has not gone unnoticed--he recently received the Small Business of the Year award from the VEDC.

Today, although he's managed to woo back all the companies that left after the breakup of Electro Fab, defense contracts represent only 5% of his total clientele.

Now he manufactures digital synthesizers for Jet Propulsion Lab's satellite-tracking system; seismographic equipment for Pasadena-based Kinometrics Inc.; and airplane trash compactors for Compton-based Monogram Sanitation.

In 1997, he again expects to double sales to \$2 million. If his business keeps growing at this breakneck speed, he says he may soon be forced to abandon the 10,500-square-foot factory to accommodate more equipment.

It's been a long time since De Leon trudged up and down Sunset, trying in broken English to convince shop owners that he was a good hire.

Now, 19 years later, he sits in the boss' chair and negotiates lucrative contracts with industrial giants such as Hughes, JPL and McDonnell Douglas.

He takes pride in his surname, which means lion in English. On his desktop, bronze lion paperweights prowl about and glossy photographs of the great cat stalking prey in the African savannah line his office walls. Even his business cards are embossed with a lion striding the globe.

His success has bought him a big house with a pool in Simi Valley and a 1996 "candy apple red" Mustang convertible--his slice of Americana.

"My real dream car is a red Jaguar . . . maybe next year," he quips.