

ORANGE COUNTY BUSINESS JOURNAL

2009

EXCELLENCE IN ENTREPRENEURSHIP AWARDS

Cinkle: Staffing Agency Grew Out of Own Frustration

■ By COURTNEY BAIRD

When Pati Cinkle runs into a problem, her response is to start a business.

In the 1980s, Cinkle, then a single mother, lost her job in the construction industry. She began looking for work through employment agencies and quickly became disillusioned with what she said was a “cold process.”

So Cinkle decided to start her own agency, different from the ones she had used.

Cinkle started Santa Ana’s Alar Staffing Corp. out of her home in 1989. Last year, the company had \$30 million in revenue.

She was one of seven entrepreneurs honored at the Business Journal’s annual Excellence in Entrepreneurship award luncheon held March 18 at the Hyatt Regency Irvine.

Alar provides light industrial workers to companies such as Foothill Ranch-based Oakley Inc. and Costa Mesa-based Rip Curl Inc.

The company saw an 11% gain in sales last year—a notable increase given how employment agencies are among the first to see cutbacks during a recession.

Alar’s job seekers, most of them Hispanic, are treated like family, according to Cinkle. They are allowed to bring their children and spouses to the agency, which doesn’t close for lunch.

If applicants who are hired are having trouble at work or home, Cinkle, who was born in Mexico, often goes out of her way to ensure that they have access to the social services they need.

Cinkle’s 21 employees speak Spanish, the language of most light industrial workers in Orange County, so applicants feel more comfortable, she said.

“About 80% of our applicants are referred from other applicants,” Cinkle said. “Even from those people who we aren’t able to help.”

The staffing agency gets an average of



200 applications a day and sometimes as much as 300, Cinkle said.

The warmth applicants feel at Alar Staffing makes them better workers for Alar’s clients “because they feel a connection to us,” Cinkle said. “We cater to the culture.”

Strict Process

Alar’s applicant screening process is stricter than at many other agencies, according to Cinkle.

About half of its applicants are weeded out after Alar checks for criminal backgrounds, a history of lawsuits and legal work status issues.

“Of our illegal applicants, 95% of them have a history of working with other staffing agencies,” Cinkle said.

By screening out applicants with histories of suing their employment agencies with bogus workers compensation lawsuits, Cinkle is able to reduce the costs of running Alar.

The company’s controlled costs and its high applicant pool allow it to pass on savings to clients in the form of lower prices, Cinkle said.

“Companies are making contact with us because they want to save money,” she

said.

Alar also works with its clients to map out employment strategies that eventually will save them money, Cinkle said.

This has helped Alar keep Oakley as a client for 15 years.

“It’s not because I don’t have competitors breathing down my throat,” she said.

Cinkle’s work at Alar has led her to recently start three other businesses as a way to get around problems she’s encountered.

Last year she opened Candid Research, which runs criminal background checks.

Because Cinkle was having trouble finding a company that could offer accurate background checks at reasonable prices, she started one herself.

She also started Rincon Risk Management last year. The company offers Alar’s employment screening system to companies that want to use it on their own employees and job applicants. Rincon does employee censuses—which check to see if employees are who they say they are—criminal background, litigious behavior and legal work status checks, as well as other services.

Cinkle also started Griffin Transit Express, which shuttles temporary employees to and from client work sites. Griffin has two buses and covers expenses with the \$25 weekly fee it charges riders. Cinkle doesn’t expect much revenue growth from the company, as it is mostly meant to make her temporary workers more reliable for her clients.

Cinkle projects 2009 revenue growth at her other companies, including Alar.

When Cinkle isn’t working, she enjoys spending time with her husband and four children. Her eldest son is a medical student at University of Southern California.

She loves to scuba dive and has a blue belt in Kenpo Karate.

A survivor of an abusive childhood, Cinkle volunteers for groups such as Olive Crest, which provides homes and services for abused children. ■