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WOMEN IN BUSINESS

## Temp to Hire

### Staffing Agency Owner Overcomes Big Obstacles, Now Runs \$25M Business

■ By JESSICA C. LEE

Sometimes when life threatens to knock you down, you have to fight back.

Pati Sotelo Cinkle, who owns Tustin-based Alar Staffing Corp., beat an abusive childhood, single motherhood and unemployment to build a stable life for herself.

Cinkle was one of five women honored at the Business Journal's 14th annual Women in Business awards luncheon in Irvine on May 22.

Alar Staffing generates more than \$25 million in yearly sales staffing industrial and office workers at companies such as Foothill Ranch's Oakley Inc., Rip Curl Inc. of Costa Mesa and Cypress-based Vans Inc.

The company was started in 1989 in Cinkle's home. It now operates out of a 5,500-square-foot office.

Alar sees about 100 applicants a day, most of whom are Spanish speakers seeking unskilled jobs in a variety of companies, from clothing makers to manufacturers of industrial goods.

The company employs 14 workers in Tustin and five others who are onsite at clients' offices. Those employees work with the company to help fill staffing needs. All of Alar's employees are bilingual, Cinkle said.

Cinkle said she expects the company to reach \$32 million in sales this year.

Her career in employee staffing isn't something she planned.

Born in Mexico, Cinkle later moved to West Covina, where she was raised by an abusive mother.

She used school as a means to escape the violence at home, Cinkle said.

"School was my way out," she said.

She read obsessively, studied for hours and took extra classes so that she could graduate high school early at age 16.

Cinkle got accepted to Princeton University and the University of California, Irvine. She chose UC Irvine because she wanted to be near her three

brothers and sisters and it was less expensive than Princeton, she said.

Going to college was the start of a new life, Cinkle hoped. But all that came to a crash when a few quarters into her first year her family ran out of money and couldn't afford to pay her tuition.

Cinkle, still a minor, was too young to apply for the scholarships or financial aid available at the time. She dropped out.

She moved in with a friend's family so she wouldn't have to go home.

At 17, Cinkle got married. She gave birth to her first son when she was 19. By 21, she was divorced.

Unemployed, the single mother hustled to find work.

She worked for various real estate developers in the early 1980s and eventually worked her way up at one to become a director of land purchasing.

But the recession of the late 1980s hit the real estate industry hard and Cinkle soon found herself unemployed again.

She started applying for jobs through employment agencies but grew dissatisfied with the process. The agencies required her to take pay cuts and didn't provide accurate information about the jobs available.

Cinkle started cold calling companies for work.

She eventually landed a job as a receptionist at IBM Corp.'s office in Costa Mesa.

When human resources needed help finding more receptionists and office workers, Cinkle stepped in.

Finding temporary hires quickly became a hobby. It didn't take her long to realize that it could become a profitable business, she said.



**Cinkle: started staffing agency out of own personal frustrations**

"I wanted to start a staffing company that wouldn't do all of the things that I hated about other employment agencies," Cinkle said.

IBM became one of her first clients, she said.

Having a client with name recognition helped her nab more, she said.

Cinkle ran Alar Staffing out of her home until 1996—about the same time one of her clients, Oakley, went public.

As Oakley and other clients were becoming bigger and needed more temporary workers, Cinkle realized that she needed to get serious about her company and find an office.

She leased a small office in Santa Ana and started hiring

employees.

In 2005, Alar Staffing outgrew its Santa Ana office and moved to its current location in Tustin.

Alar Staffing, like other companies, is coping with a down economy. It's targeting solid companies that don't rely on layoffs to provide quick financial fixes, she said.

"Our applicants depend on us to work with reliable companies," she said.

Alar Staffing keeps busy screening temporary workers to make sure they can legally work in the U.S. The company also offers English and job training.

This month, the employment agency plans to roll out a bussing program that will transport temporary workers to their job sites to help cope with high gas prices.

During her off-time, Cinkle scuba dives. She's a certified rescue scuba diver. She's married to Russell Cinkle and has four children. She also boasts a blue belt in Kenpo Karate. ■