



Photo Brian Morowczynski

Brian Ortiz, President of Trinidad Construction, in Evergreen Park. The general contractor is responsible for the redevelopment of several Chicago area Walgreens stores, including this one in the city's Little Village neighborhood.

Brian Ortiz: Don't be afraid to pursue clients

If you still don't know what being a "certified Minority Business Enterprise (MBE)" means for your business, you can ask Brian Ortiz. He founded Trinidad Construction just three years ago and now he is building a solid road to his future with clients like Walgreens, the leader in the retail pharmacy industry. This short time in the business has been enough not only to get amazing success, but also to advise other minority firms: "Don't be afraid to pursue clients", he said, and "be creative in the way you build your business". But where does he come from, what does his company do, and what makes Trinidad different? Ortiz answers this and other questions in an exclusive interview with NegociosNow, on 26th Street in Chicago, just a couple of blocks away from one of the stores that he remodeled for Walgreens.

By Clemente Nicado

Q. How did you start your company, Trinidad Construction?

A. I grew up around the construction business. My grandfather owned a small construction company, on the southeast side of the city of -Chicago-, that repaired dry cleaning facilities. My father owned a construction company, Ortiz Mechanical Contractors, and I worked for him for the first ten years of my career. Then I started the Trinidad Construction Company in 2010.

Q. Wow! Not so long ago! Three years!

A. Yes, we are still a new business.

Q. What is the main thing that your company does?

A. I knew when I launched this business, my background being in construction, that I wanted to start a construction company that worked primarily in the private sector, which was something that would be

somewhat different from what I had been doing. A lot of Hispanic and minority-owned businesses tend to gravitate to the public sector because of the programs that are out there, but for me personally, I wanted to get into the general contracting business because that was the easiest way for me to meet face-to-face with customers. My background had been as a mechanical contractor, where typically you are a subcontractor to a general contractor. But as a general contractor, I knew that would give me a chance to be face-to-face with clients and, ultimately, the private sector clients.

Q. How has it benefited your company to be a minority?

A. Like I mentioned, I think that a lot of minority-owned businesses are not aware of the opportunities that are out there for them in the private sector. A lot of companies now have Supplier Diversity programs in place, but a lot of them are not executing them and do not have a full understanding of how to go out and



Photo Jose Calvo

Sindy Sonshine, Program Manager-Business Development (left) and Rona Fourte, Director of Supplier Diversity at Walgreens.

aggressively seek minority business. Walgreens has a very strong program. Rona [Fourte] has been leading that program, actively seeking minority-owned businesses to create opportunities for them, to introduce themselves. Really, the thing to understand is that these opportunities are not really set-aside programs; rather, they are programs in place to create opportunities for the businesses to get in

front of large corporations that they typically could not get in front of.

Q. How many stores have you worked on for Walgreens?

A. Right now we have done major renovations of three complete stores. We are scheduled to do four more. We have done minor work in a number of other facilities: maintenance work, small construction

projects, that sort of thing.

Q. So the certification has been key for the company?

A. The certification has been very important. You know, that is part of what Walgreens contracts, a certified business. Is that what you mean by minority certification? Walgreens has an aggressive diversity program in place, and they are trying to reach the "Billion Dollar Roundtable" ...

Rona Fourte, director of supplier diversity for Walgreens concurred, "Absolutely!"

...so the certification created the opportunity. Rona and I had known each other prior to her working for Walgreens; we met at an event sponsored by the Chicago Minority Supplier Development Council. The reason I was there is that my company is certified through that organization. Later we got together, and she set up a meeting for us with Walgreens cor-

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porate staff. Without that certification, and without our being involved with that organization, I wouldn't have had the chance to run across Rona and have that meeting. So certification, in that sense, has been a huge factor.

Q. Where do you see your company in five to ten years?

A. We are going to continue to grow in the markets that we work in. Walgreens provided an opportunity for us to get into the retail industry. That sort of legitimized us in the retail market. After that, we were able to get a meeting with Macy's, and now we are doing a lot of work for Macy's. We are doing a large project now for Macy's on State Street in Chicago. We are also doing work in the food and beverage industry for Kraft Foods. We are doing work in the pharmaceutical industry for a couple of large pharmaceutical companies, and we are doing a lot of industrial work. My goal for five or ten years from now is to be working for the clients I am working for now, and additional clients similar to these. My goal is not to be the biggest company. Growing up in the construction industry, the expression that I learned was, "Volume is Vanity; and Profit is Prosperity."

So we are trying to focus on strong accounts where we can make a fair profit and build on those relationships.

Q. So the economy is not a problem right now?

A. Well, we are trying to pick markets. Everything is affected by the economy. Healthcare is a market that we work in, and healthcare is a market that is not going away. We work in the food and beverage industry; people are always going to need to eat. We are trying to be diversified. We work in the pharmaceutical industry, and people are always going to need medicines. We try to be in markets that will be there through the highs and lows of the economy.

Q. What is your advice for Hispanic businesses?

A. I would tell them not to be afraid to pursue clients that they don't think they can get. Let me clarify that. Understand that there are opportunities for Hispanic-owned businesses in the private sector. Don't be afraid to pursue clients, and be creative in the way you build your business. Look for additional resources so that when you approach those big clients you have something that is attractive to them and you can offer something that is an added value to their businesses.

"Supplier Diversity is a business imperative for Walgreens and as we effectively partner with diverse-owned businesses, we are better positioned to present customers with the best experience and products aligned to our mission to help people get, stay and live well."

*Rona Fourné, CFE, Director,
Supplier Diversity, Walgreen Co.*