

ENTREPRENEURIAL POWER

THE STORY OF BRAVO ONE UNDERGROUND

This is a story of tenacity, passion for quality and enough 'fire in the belly' to get the job done—regardless. In a time of political correctness, illegal immigrants, and unemployment welfare...there is one success story based in Las Vegas, Nevada that deserves to be told.

NATURALIZED CITIZENSHIP

In the 1960's, José Ledon's Cuban father brought his family to the United States with the skills of an electrician, the fighting spirit of one who had fought with Castro against the past dictator, only to be disappointed as Cuba became communist, and a passion for doing quality work.

The process of becoming a naturalized citizen, going to George Washington elementary school, where the first English he learned was the daily recitation of the Pledge of Allegiance, instilled in Ledon the fighting passion of a true believer in the United States of America. "Another thing I learned early," notes

Ledon, "Is the importance of building relationships of trust. I will never forget going with my father to an electrical supply store where my father explained that he had a very good contract to do quite a bit of work and needed some supplies and tools—but had no money to pay for the materials up front. The owner of the store sized up my father and trusted him by selling to him on credit. He became, in a sense, my father's partner by providing what he needed to do the job."

EARLY HARD KNOCKS

"I came to Las Vegas in my early 20's to become a professional boxer. For decades, Las Vegas had an internationally known trainer and multiple promoters," continues Ledon. "Unfortunately, I was hit by a drunk driver and my boxing career was finished. But, that set me up to be eager to work and I had landed in one of the fastest growing cities in the country."

Bravo Underground works hand-in-hand with some of the largest Las Vegas developers to provide site prep and all underground utilities.



"I'm sold on Kawasaki-KCM wheel loaders. They cycle quickly, they are powerful, have great features and I've experienced few problems," José Ledon.



Because of the hard rock and soil compositions, including 20,000 psi rock conglomerates and caliche, the Las Vegas area came to have one of the largest populations of huge chain trenchers in the world—because of the work and because of the difficulties in blasting.

"I got a job working for an underground contractor and within a week had become an operator," notes Ledon. What he doesn't mention is that he became such a good chain trencher operator that one of the leading trencher manufacturers hired him to help train other contractors around the world. "After a while, I was ready to focus on being part of the amazing growth in Las Vegas," continues Ledon. "So after working for one company, ending up as an estimator, in 1996, I decided to go out on my own."

UNBELIEVABLE GROWTH

Starting with a modest nest egg, Ledon admits he started with belief in himself and a pen for signing loan commitments. But what he quickly learned was that there were equipment dealers and material suppliers eager to see him succeed as well as builders and developers who needed all the young, aggressive subcontractors they could find.

By 2004, just 8 years after their start-up, Bravo Underground was hitting over \$50 million in work, had 320 employees and \$19 million in equipment, including some of the largest chain trenchers, legions of wheel loaders, loader backhoes, excavators and articulated trucks. "We grew into and continue to focus on all aspects of underground construction, with crews

working on electrical distribution, gas distribution, dry utilities and a large number working on water and sewer installation," notes Ledon.

And then, nearly all construction in Las Vegas came to an absolute halt in 2009. Housing stopped. Commercial development stopped. Homeowners defaulted. The city government nearly ran out of money. Las Vegas became the epicenter of all that was wrong with the over-heated construction economy in the U.S. at the time.

"I lost millions. I sold my home to help finance my company. We auctioned off most of our equipment to pay the loans. Our employment went from nearly 500 to 35. I could find work only for my very core. Thankfully, they had all started as operators and could go to the field and work. Which we did. We all just went to work," notes Ledon.

"And I learned again what a difference a great relationship makes between a contractor like me and the local equipment dealer. My Kawasaki dealer, APCO Equipment, helped keep me in business. They rented equipment. They accommodated my negotiated, but still slow pay. Two other dealers helped me as well, but it was a core of a few dealers who helped me survive without bankruptcy.

Since those dark days of the economic reaper about to knock Bravo Underground out of the ring forever, Ledon has become even closer to those who stood by him as he has re-grown his business as all of Las Vegas has come back to life over the past few years.

SOLD ON PARTNER DEALERS

"I can enthusiastically tell you that I'm sold on Kawasaki-KCM wheel loaders. They cycle quickly, they are powerful, have great features and I've experienced few problems. I can also tell you that I feel the same way about the Hitachi excavators that I've settled on for now over 20 years. And, I'm even more excited about the Kawasaki-KCM loaders because they are now owned by Hitachi Construction Machinery Group. I'm sold on the Hitachi hydraulics and systems. We currently have 12 Kawasaki-KCM loaders ranging from the 80ZV to the 115Z7 models."

"But even more," notes Ledon, "I am especially enthusiastic about my relationship with Bob Joyce, the Sales Manager for APCO. I've known him for nearly 30 years and he and APCO simply take care of me. I've learned to buy every machine with an extended warranty with assurance of a loaner machine if one cannot be repaired within a few hours. All of my purchases have the extended warranty to 6,000 hours, which are typically around 3 and half years of use. I take care of the daily maintenance plus fluid changes and our dealer/partner takes care of all repairs. I've decided with the tight margins that it takes to get the jobs, I can't afford to have a fleet of mechanics and their trucks nor can I afford unplanned, major repairs. The 6,000-hour plan is working for me. And, in fairness to the couple of other equipment dealers that I continue to work with--I like John Deere loader backhoes, Deere graders and dozers and Volvo articulated haulers; I have a similar

relationship and the same plan of extended warranties and 6,000 hour trades for each of these pieces of equipment.

"The bust of 2009 taught me many lessons," notes Ledon. "One is to be forever passionate about what you're doing; to never give up; and to cherish and build relationships offered by those who truly want to partner in your success."

Bravo Underground is serviced by APCO Equipment, Inc., North Las Vegas, Nevada.



José Ledon is 100% hands-on for making sure the jobs are done right, the operators know what is expected-while giving them full respect; and for being on top of the performance of his equipment.

