

BUSINESS



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Running a
family business
the Cuban way***



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Pa'lante!

| By Graziella DiNuzzo, GNPCC Staff Writer

The Father and Son Construction Duo Who Never Stop Moving Forward



Photo courtesy of Alex McIntosh

Dan Labrador had just picked up his son Niko from school when he spotted it – “a white, very used, newly painted van...a beauty,” he knew immediately it was the one. As soon as he arrived home, Dan spoke with his wife Maggie and discussed his plans to start his own contracting business. With Maggie’s support, Dan gave his two week notice to the painting company where he was working full time, “we put everything we had at that time - all the credit cards totaling about \$4,500 and our company was off.”

Dan founded Lyon Contracting Services, LLC in 2011 on the principles inherited from his fearless father who left Cuba in 1967 for a better life in America, “with nothing but a bag in hand,” says Dan. “The fact that you came from a place where you were not free makes everything much more bearable.” In 1970 Dan’s mother, brother and sisters joined his father, “I was the youngest and born here, and consider myself the celebration baby,” Dan laughs.

Dan recalls the moment as a young boy when he listened intently to his father’s conversation about starting a business, “I saw that look in his eyes and I knew as a young boy that one day I would have my own business too.”

Lyon Contracting Services is a full service general contracting company, headquartered in Philadelphia, with commercial and residential clients within 60 miles of Northeast Philadelphia. Lyon offers construction specialties and sub packages from rough and finished carpentry to drywall, acoustical ceiling and millwork installation and full service painting.

Running a family business wasn’t always easy. To get through the day, Dan’s family says this Cuban word ... Pa’lante!

Dan explains,

“When things aren’t going well...you exhale. Pa’lante!

When things are going great...you celebrate, Pa’lante!

When things are going wrong...you make it right, Pa’lante!”

Dan credits his wife, a first-generation American from Puerto Rico, for helping him navigate the challenges of running a family business. While their business was growing, so was their family with the addition of Dan’s two daughters who were born a year apart.

“When my son was in his first year of college he told me he wanted to work with me. That was the game changer and how our business got stronger.”

“Growing up my father and I were best of buds, I was his mini-me everywhere he went,” says

Niko. As I grew older I wanted to be just like him and be with him as much as I could.”

After completing two years of community college, Niko decided to join his father full-time.

“That was in the summer of 2012. I started out just following Dan everywhere. Through the eight years I slowly developed and gained more responsibility and moved up to project manager,” Niko explains.

“The car rides are literally the best times with my father, some of the most hilarious moments and most important life lessons I’ve learned have been during a work day car ride together.”

As a minority owned and operated business, and a first-generation Cuban American, Dan understands the challenges that immigrant communities face in the workforce.

“You’re limited when you are from another country; you have the language barrier and don’t have a huge network.”

Dan has made it his mission to pay it forward by sourcing workers with highly specialized skills, developed in their native countries. “It feels great that we might have a little part in creating a bit of that American Dream for their families.

Every fall, the Greater Northeast Philadelphia Chamber of Commerce (GNPCC) participates in Minority Enterprise Development Week, a citywide initiative giving special recognition to a minority-owned business. GNPCC nominated Lyon Contracting and Mayor Kenney honored the Labrador family in a special ceremony on Monday, October 7th.

According to the US Senate Committee on Small business and Entrepreneurship, over the last 10 years, minority business enterprises accounted for more than 50 percent of the two million new businesses started in the United States and created 4.7 million jobs. There are



now more than four million minority-owned companies in the United States.

“I’m very thankful and humbled,” Dan says. My wife, my daughters, my son are the reason and why we hope to build a business where we can serve our clients, and our entire team for generations to come.

By the time Dan was 20 years old he was married, working full-time, had a young son and was taking college courses at Temple University. In 2017-18, Dan was among the 14th cohort of 20 graduates who recently completed the Goldman Sachs 10,000 Small Business-Greater Philadelphia program.

Niko understands his father’s drive – “it’s in his blood.”

In his new role as Vice President, Niko plans to continue to reach a greater audience through new marketing communication platform including social media and website development. But Niko admits, “There is still so much more. I plan to work beside my father for many years to come, learning from him one car ride at a time.” ●



Photo courtesy of Alex McIntosh