

Starting a successful new business usually involves years of planning, more than a little risk and some pretty lean times before profits start rolling in. But that's not always the case. Take Ultra Private Security, Inc., for example. Not that Ultra was always the thriving and growing Salinas business it was officially a business it was a profitable venture for its owners. In fact, Esteban Garcia Sr. and John Arellanes had so much work coming in that they virtually had to start their company.

Garcia and Arellanes were both employees of Firestone in Salinas when they started moonlighting as security guards. Garcia, a native of Soledad, California, accepted his first guard job in 1974 when he was asked to substitute for the regular guard at an acquaintance's nightclub. He must have done a good job, because security work started looking for him after that. Over the years, he substituted for other guards and accepted occasional jobs on his own. He was frequently called upon to work at dances, weddings, parties and bars, where he gained valuable experience that would serve him well in coming years. When it reached the point the he had more security work than he could handle, he began to pass jobs along to Arellanes as well.

The two became licensed as security guards by the California State Bureau of Collections and Investigations, and jobs continued to come in. Garcia and Arellanes decided the time was right to commit to the security business when Firestone closed its doors in 1980, leaving them both out of work. At that point, they began to aggressively pursue security work instead of waiting for it to come knocking. The new company, which was then known simply as Ultra, hired about 15 people on a part-time basis. Growth persisted and requests for their services continued to pour in, By 1985 more than 80 full-time employees and about 10 part-time worked for the company.

By 1999 Ultra employed more than 250 staff members -150 of them full time- for clients in Monterey, Santa Cruz, San Benito and Santa Clara counties. Due to the long hours often required for some assignments, the company had to beef up its full-time staff since employees on part-time status could not be required to work such long shifts.

Ultra attributes much of its success to an early cooperative effort with another company known as Salinas Safety Security, which frequently called on Ultra for extra guards. Eventually, when new management took over at Salinas Safety, the company began subcontracting all of its guard work to Ultra. That move expanded Ultra's workload considerably, and the company underwent another growth spurt.

While Ultra still provides security for nightclubs, dances, parties and weddings, it has increasingly become involved with larger activities including concerts, rodeos, festivals and other major events that often require the presence of dozens of guards at a time.

But while success has been steady for Ultra, the company hasn't been without its problems. Due to the transient nature of some promotional event, there have been times when promoters failed to pay for security at the end of a concert or festival. One such event that occurred in 1994 cost Ultra \$27,000. The anticipated turnout at the event failed to materialize, and the person who had contracted with Ultra was actually a volunteer for the event who hadn't had the authority to hire security. There was no legal avenue for Ultra to pursue, so its only option was to absorb the loss.

Given the nature of the work, some situations put Ultra employees in the line of danger, but only once has an Ultra guard been shot while performing his duties. The employee had ousted a male

patron from a nightclub he was guarding in 1978. The man, who had been harassing a waitress, left the club with little argument, but later returned. The guard removed him again and again the man left. The unruly patron was gone for a while, but then returned with a gun and shot the guard six times. A security badge stopped one bullet, causing it to ricochet into the guard's arm and hand. He survived the shooting but had no feeling in his arm and hand after that. Two years later, he had surgery that corrected the problem.

Over the years, Arellanes has become less involved in the day-to-day activities of the company, having transitioned into what Garcia describes as a silent partner. But Garcia himself has stayed heavily involved. For him, Ultra is a family business as well as a partnership. His daughter Ruby has worked in administration with the company for 13 of her 22 years and plans to become a licensed private patrol operator soon. Another daughter, Lucero, 18, helps out in the office and also plans to become a licensed guard in the future. A third daughter, Christina, opted out of the family business to become a social worker. Even Garcia's father, 76-year-old Emilio Garcia, still dons an Ultra uniform to help out when needed.

When they first started out, Garcia and Arellanes tried to operate the business out of Garcia's home, but with 30 to 40 extra vehicles lining the street and people coming and going at all hours of the day and night, the partners soon saw the need to move their business out of the residential neighborhood. They relocated to a North Main Street storefront. Several years later, the company moved again to an office on East Alisal Street.

Since February 1999, Ultra has occupied a suite of offices on East Market Street in a building that it shares with another business. Ultra holds the lease for the entire building so it will have access to both units as its growth necessitates more space. The site consists of a small cluster of modest offices teeming with people answering busy phones and coordinating schedules. Guards wander in to check the schedule or await assignments.

Garcia himself is surprisingly calm as he sits at the center of all activity, fielding questions and greetings from all sides. This is work that comes naturally to him and to which he is long accustomed. What appears at first to be a very causal operation actually runs like a well-oiled machine. There is order within the beehive of activity.

In the front office, permits and licenses line the walls, alongside posters advertising events with which Ultra has been involved. And everywhere you look, there are bears – stuffed bears, bear statues and pictures of bears. The firm's logo, depicted on embroidered arm patches, includes the profile of a bear standing on all fours, much like the one depicted in the California State emblem. Many years ago, when the logo was still new, someone gave Garcia a small stature that looked like the bear in his logo. That started a tradition of sorts as others began to bring him bears of all shapes and sizes. Now he has more than 300 that sit on shelves, tables, desks, and even on the floor. Some he keeps at his home, and many more are packed away until he can find the time and space to display them all.

Ultra has done very little advertising over the years and does not even run a Yellow Pages ad. Instead, the company depends on its word-of-mouth reputation, which has worked very well. Garcia says the company strives to provide good service and to give clients what they pay for. That in itself, he says, brings in all the work they can handle and provides for steady growth. What few ads the company has run were in school or church publications, and Ultra has displayed its name on the uniforms of some

youth sports teams. Garcia says he doesn't like saying "no" to prospective clients, so he isn't likely to advertise for more work.

Ultra supports the community in other ways as well. The League of United Latin-American Citizens has been beneficiary of its generosity and also crowned Garcia's daughter Ruby its queen in 1997. Ruby also reigned as queen of another Ultra beneficiary, the Salinas Soccer League, in 1996 Barrio Pride is another cause supported by Ultra. The company also provides support at fund-raising events for many charitable organizations.

Ultra-doesn't advertise for new employees either, depending instead upon word-of-mouth advertising for that as well. A never-ending supply of cousins, friends or acquaintances of current employees always seem to be looking for work. The company provides a starting point for many newcomers to the area. At Ultra, Latino immigrants are welcomed into a company where both Spanish and English are spoken and where they can comfortably earn a living while becoming adjusted to their new homes. Many such employees, including Ultra's former secretary, have gone on to work in city, county and state law enforcement agencies and departments of correction. There are now police officers, sheriff's deputies and highway patrol officers who learned the basics of law enforcement at Ultra. Two former employees have even started their own security companies in the area. Although Garcia laughingly refuses to refer to them as competitors.

But for the most part, staff turnover is very low. That's even more impressive given the fact that security work almost always involves very long hours and frequent weekend and holiday hours. Some of Ultra's employees have been with the company since the earliest years of its existence. Francisca "Panchita" Alvarez, Pancho Castillo, Phillip Celaya and Salvador Macias have all been with the company since the early 1980s, and many others have worked there for more than a dozen years.

Security work, according to Garcia, is not seasonal. At any given time the company has all, or nearly all, of its guards working somewhere. Dances, private and public parties and bars still show up on the company calendar, but the bulk of Ultra's jobs these days includes major community events that often require large numbers of guards and special assignments such as strike details. On Memorial Day weekend in 1999, for instance, Ultra guards were staffing 13 different events in the 4-county area. The large planning calendar in Garcia's office had dozens of names penciled in for each event on each of the three days. The staff roster can become strained at times, which promises more growth in the future.

Garcia attributes the company's success, despite its dearth of advertising, to the experience, work ethic and depth of knowledge the owners and employees bring to each job. Stringent staff licensing, extensive staff training and the longevity of many staff members lend credibility to the company and ensure dependable services to its clients.

That reliability has been recognized. In 1995 and 1996, the editorial staff of *Consumer Business Review* awarded Ultra Security the honor of "Guard and Patrol Service of the Year." Plaques for each year are displayed proudly and prominently in Ultra's front office.

As for the company's future, further growth is inevitable as Salinas and surrounding areas continue to grow. More people mean more events and that always means more need for security. Ultra's staff will continue to grow as well, not only from the expanding population, but from within the Garcia

family. In the summer of 1999, Garcia had a brand new grandchild and another on the way. He is undoubtedly envisioning a coming third generation that will contribute to the family business.