

Zia Engineering's non-compete clause

CEO offers different take on the local market

By **Alta LeCompte**

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A number of engineering companies are based in Las Cruces, but Edward Martinez of Zia Engineering and Environmental Services doesn't see any of them as competitors.

Martinez initially came to Las Cruces to open a branch for a national engineering firm, so he naturally thought of his territory as extending beyond the Rio Grande and the Organ Mountains.

When he started his own business in 2000, he brought the same philosophy to his business plan.

"I never really focused locally from Day 1, Martinez said. "We went to Nevada, California, Oregon – wherever the work was being done."

He opted not to think small.

"I set up the company from Day 1 as though it was a 1,000 man firm," said Martinez, who's company was one of six Las Cruces honorees for the 2013 New Mexico Private 100, a list of the 100 top private revenue producers among companies that apply for the recognition. "I never worked out of my house. I made a conscious decision this was going to be a firm that I grew."

He opened in one room upstairs at 505 N. Telshor Blvd., where he now owns a number of condominium office units.

"We were able to vertically integrate and maximize work from our existing client base," he said. "That allowed us not to have to go head to head against more traditional competition."

Although the firm began with private sector clients, federal government contracts in most of the early years accounted for more than 50 percent of its business. That percentage



Zia Engineering conducts a construction inspection for the Eagle Bridge project.

has shrunk to 30 to 40 percent, Martinez said.

"We anticipate the federal budget side of the business will continue to shrink some and therefore we're trying to focus on the non-federal, taking advantage of the economic pickup and looking at the energy sector, as well as making a push in IT and safety services," he said.

Current activities include programming, web-based applications, development of modules for clients, safety training for municipalities and utility companies as well as compliance work for White Sands Missile Range.

Zia provided environmental consulting services to Spaceport America.

Martinez said the firm got into IT services as an adjunct to its environmental and engineering work when he realized they inadvertently were doing \$.5 million a year in IT as part of other projects.

"We've been marketing it as a standalone service since 2009," he said. "We do network support and general IT, as well as managing archival records."

Since the firm's inception, Zia has provided permitting and infrastructure support for power plants and the natural gas industry throughout the Southwest, Martinez said.

Although Zia has stayed away from oilfield work in the eastern U.S., it is involved with environmental clearances for wind towers, solar arrays and bio-fuel production in the Midwest and the El Paso area.

"We're heavily involved in pipeline environmental work," he said.

Martinez said the firm has expanded to branches in El Paso, Albuquerque, Arizona and Iowa and even has a marketing office on St. Simon Island, Ga.

The way he sees it, starting a company in Albuquerque and expanding into Las Cruces may be backwards thinking.

"Within a 75-mile radius of Las Cruces, there's a bigger population, more industry, federal facilities and bases than Albuquerque, and from the standpoint of our work, only one-third of the competition," Martinez said.

He said operating in Las Cruces first made it easier to open an Albuquerque office.

"When we started in Albuquerque, we were able to indicate that we already had a client base," Martinez said.

Reflecting its diversity, the Zia team comprises engineers, planners, land surveyors, hydrologists and geo-hydrologists, safety professionals, environmental scientists, solid waste specialists, water resource and wastewater specialists, NEPA specialists, natural resources conservationists, anthropologists and archaeologists, biologists and ecologists, GIS/CADD mapping specialists, computer and IT/IS professionals, archivists and contract compliance specialists.

Martinez earned a bachelor's degree in civil engineering at New Mexico State University. He specialized in drainage, environmental issues, water and waste water.

His success secrets include owning the building where he does business. He recommends ownership as a way for small businesses to avoid the expense of renting commercial space.