

# Victor Godinez: Hispanic women take charge

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Hispanic women-owned businesses are on a roll.

The number of companies in the U.S. owned by Hispanic women is rising, and sales for those businesses are booming.

That's certainly the case for Jenny Sandlin, founder of Elegante Iron Inc., a Dallas firm that makes intricate iron doors and gates.

"Every year since I started, Elegante has grown tremendously," said Ms. Sandlin, a native of the Dominican Republic.

"We right now are in about 3,000 square feet, and we'll soon be leaving this facility for a facility of about 9,000 to 10,000 square feet."

Launched six days before the Sept. 11 terrorist attacks and in the midst of a struggling economy, Elegante has nonetheless prospered.

The company had revenue of \$2.5 million last year, and Ms. Sandlin believes it could be a \$20 million to \$30 million company within a decade.

Ms. Sandlin's success is not an isolated event.

According to the Center for Women's Business Research, there were nearly 338,000 Hispanic women-owned firms in the U.S. in 1997.

By 2004, that number had topped 553,000, a 64 percent increase.

During the same time, revenue generated by Hispanic women-owned businesses rose from \$27.3 billion to \$44.4 billion.

Ms. Sandlin is somewhat unusual in that her company is a manufacturer.

According to the Women's Business Research data, there were a little over 8,200 Hispanic women-owned companies in the manufacturing field in 2004, well behind industries such as retail, finance, insurance and real estate, and services.

The services industry had the most such firms, about 308,000.

"This is a man-dominated industry," Ms. Sandlin said. "I'm not afraid to say that I may be the only woman in the United States that has an iron door company."

But she's definitely made a name for herself.



NATHAN  
HUNSINGER/DMN  
Jenny Sandlin, the founder of Elegante Iron Inc., is among Hispanic women business owners.

The company's showroom – a dramatic upgrade from the home office Ms. Sandlin started in – houses several massive doors, many of which sell for thousands of dollars.

Many of those works of art are destined to end up in multimillion-dollar homes around the country.

Achieving that level of success required more than a few 14-hour days.

Ms. Sandlin said that being Hispanic also gave her an edge over her competitors.

Elegante Iron has 15 employees in Dallas and 15 at a manufacturing facility in Monterrey, Mexico.

"Because I'm Hispanic, because I speak the language, I was able to travel to Mexico, make the contacts, and establish the business ties that I needed to be able to import my product," she said.

SCORE to expand

SCORE, a free business counseling service for new and existing small companies, helped a lot of businesses last year.

And the organization – the Service Corps of Retired Executives – plans to expand its services this year for aspiring franchise owners through a new magazine and Web site.

SCORE held over 6,700 training workshops nationwide in 2005 that were attended by more than 117,000 people.

In addition, the group conducted almost 100,000 online programs last year.

To expand its offerings, SCORE and Reni Publishing are launching a new magazine this year, *Franchise Market*, and a Web site, *FranMarket.com*, to assist potential franchisees.

The magazine will launch this spring and be distributed in 389 SCORE offices around the country.

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