

## Matthew Contreras – T&M Concrete

This is Kansas Profile. I'm Ron Wilson, director of the Huck Boyd National Institute for Rural Development at Kansas State University.

Have you ever turned away business on principle – and found that doing so produced more business in the long run? That sounds like a surprising turn of events, but that is what happened to one small business in rural Kansas. It's today's Kansas Profile.

Matthew Contreras is manager of T&M Concrete Construction. The company office is in Junction City and its shop and yard are located near the rural community of Chapman. That's rural – but there's more.

T & M Concrete Construction was founded by Matthew's father, Joaquin Contreras. Joaquin is a remarkable man. He grew up in Mexico but left school in the third grade. He came to the U.S. and has been a hard worker all his life. Joaquin was working on feedlot facilities in western Kansas when he met a young lady from the rural community of Grinnell, population 323 people. Now, that's rural.

Joaquin married this young woman from rural Kansas and they moved to Texas. Thirty years later, Joaquin's son Tracy who was now living in Junction City encouraged him to come up and join the building boom in Kansas. Joaquin quit his job, bought some tools, and moved up to Junction City where he founded a concrete business.

Joaquin named the business T&M Concrete Construction after his two sons: Tracy and Matthew. They started out doing residential concrete work and then diversified into commercial projects.

Tracy worked with his father and then created a business of his own putting up metal buildings. Matthew went to K-State and graduated in Construction Science and Management. He then joined his father in T&M Concrete Construction.

The company does concrete work for such projects as sidewalks, patios, building slabs, parking lots and driveways. Then the company had the opportunity to get a curb and gutter machine with a partner.

They got the machine – but the partner got into illegal substances. After getting paid for one large project, the partner took the money and skipped town. That left T&M Concrete Construction holding the bag.

“He had bought the concrete in our name,” Matthew said. “But our vendors understood the situation and they worked with us. Eventually we got that debt paid off.”

The curb and gutter machine turned out to be a real asset. T&M Concrete Construction has now done curb and gutter work in various communities.

Today T&M Concrete Construction has the ongoing contract for the street maintenance in Junction City. The company also partners to do concrete work for other companies, such as one which has built hotels from Hiawatha to Dodge City.

The company still does residential work, but perhaps three-fourths of the business is now commercial.

“My dad knows how to work hard and manage money, and I have the book-learning,” Matthew said. “We each run our own crews and then we get together to do the large projects.”

One day several years ago, T&M was contacted about doing a \$2,000 sidewalk repair. “They wanted us to skim off the surface and put a coating on it,” Matthew said. “But my dad wouldn't do it.” Joaquin explained that it would look good in the short term but wouldn't fix the problem. He didn't want his company's name associated with this cheap fix.

Eventually the customer was persuaded to replace the sidewalk and do the job right. More importantly, a representative of the parent company had observed this exchange.

“When they heard my dad’s response, they said they knew they had found a concrete man they could trust,” Matthew said. The parent company asked T&M Concrete Construction to do the concrete on a \$340,000 job in De Soto. By standing on the principle of doing what’s right, even at the cost of the immediate job, Joaquin Contreras gained far more in the end.

Have you ever turned away business on principle – and found that doing so produced more business in the long run? Not all such stories have a happy ending, but this one did. We salute Joaquin Contreras, Matthew Contreras, and all those involved with T&M Concrete Construction for making a difference with hard work and a commitment to doing things right. The benefits are not just intangible, they are concrete.

For the Huck Boyd National Institute for Rural Development, this is Ron Wilson with Kansas Profile.