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Doing the Dirty Work:

Chatsworth based- Garage Improvement Business Flourishes in First Year

By GEORGE KIOUSSIS, North Valley Community News Correspondent

A frustrated handyman can go a long way. Just ask Gus Gougas.

Gougas and his business partner, Tony Greer, started Chatsworth-based Organiz/IT!, a garage organizing company, more than a year ago.

And now, some 16 months from its inception, Organiz/IT!, much like the garage improvement trade in general, has taken off. The business offers products and services such as flooring, paneling, storage and cabinets to communities including, but not limited to, the San Fernando Valley, Valencia and Pasadena.

"Garage organization is the fastest growing segment of the home improvement industry. The reason it's so fast is partly because everything else has already been done," said Gougas. "We're usually booked early in advance."

Yet Gougas' background is not in home improvement, as one might expect. Rather, he worked in corporate America for 23 years, where he developed his business savvy and where he says he learned the importance of service and professionalism — concepts he would later apply to Organiz/IT!.

Although Gougas thrived in the business world for more than two decades, he grew tired of corporate culture and the politicking within it, and decided to move his talents elsewhere.

"The corporate culture put money in the bank, but it wasn't my lifelong ambition," he said.

Gougas became interested in garage organization because of the flexibility and opportunity available in the field. He felt he could apply the mentality of a large organization to his own business while keeping it relatively small.

"I was drawn to the field because it was new and had a future," he said. "Furthermore, I knew I wouldn't be limited to a franchise portfolio or product."

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The logo for North Valley Community News features the words "North Valley" in a large, blue, serif font. A small circular emblem is positioned between the "h" and "l" of "North". Below "North Valley", the words "Community News" are written in a white, sans-serif font with a drop shadow, set against a yellow rectangular background.

Chatsworth based- Garage Improvement cont.

A self-described handyman, Gougas was also drawn to home improvement by his personal interest in it. His frustration with the way many contractors were running their businesses, coupled with his background in corporate America, helped shape the way he and his partner devised their business plan.

"We modeled OrganizIT! on my partner's and my own vision – a professional, service-oriented business," he said.

The professionalism Gougas hopes to achieve is manifest in OrganizIT!'s charter. Concepts like starting and completing projects on time, returning calls within 24 hours and cleaning up work sites may seem simple, but Gougas says in the home improvement industry they are often overlooked.

The merging of corporate business practices to the home resulted in a unique approach. And even though the garage improvement field continues to grow — it is now a \$3 billion one — Gougas hopes to maintain the level of professionalism that has made his business so successful and not overextend his resources.

"We have a business model which will grow over the next five years, but I don't want it to grow too fast," he said. "I want it to stay service-oriented."