

Orange County Business Journal

[PRINT](#) | [CLOSE WINDOW](#)

Philatron Founder Attracts Father, Sons to Business

By Sarah Tolkoff - 12/1/2008

Orange County Business Journal Staff

Forget about blood right. At Philatron International Inc., a maker of custom electrical wires and insulated copper cables, family members have to earn their own way.

"Just because they are family doesn't mean that they are entitled," said Founder and Chief Executive Phil Ramos Jr. "They know that they have to perform in order to keep their jobs."

Santa Fe Springs-based Philatron was honored with the medium-sized business award at the annual Family Owned Business Awards luncheon hosted by the Orange County Business Journal and California State University Fullerton's Family Business Council on Nov. 19 at the Hyatt Regency Irvine.

Though not headquartered here, Philatron got the nod because its owners have resided in Anaheim Hills for nearly 20 years and are active in the community there.

There are three generations of Ramoses working at Philatron.

Phil Ramos Jr. didn't expect that two of his children, and then his father, would join the team.

"It wasn't really planned," he said. "I didn't force my children to go in any one direction."

Son Nick Ramos is a purchasing manager and son Phil Ramos III is general manager.

Daughter Candy Ramos, who is a nutritionist, doesn't work at the company.

Phil Ramos III, who served in the Air Force, is likely to inherit the chief executive spot, according to his dad.

"If he keeps on growing as a leader, the title will go to him," Phil Ramos Jr. said.

When Phil Ramos III came on board a few years ago as Philatron's technology manager, he got a little taste of his father's tough love.

"(My son) came to me one day and asked to be a general manager, and I said, 'no,'" Ramos Jr. said.

The reason? He wasn't qualified.

"I told him, in a very loving way, 'You don't know anything about the business, the equipment and our product lines. And you come in late every day,'" Phil Ramos Jr. told his son, who came close to quitting.

But Phil Ramos III did a complete turnaround and "worked at 125% to learn the business," his dad said.

"He made a great effort and he earned it," he said. "A lot of the older employees raised a fuss, but now everybody respects him."

Philatron takes copper rods and shapes them into wires and cables used by the military and the construction and transportation industries.

Its niche is making specialized coiled cables—giant versions of the coiled wires that connect a receiver to a telephone.

Mexican Lineage

The Ramos family hails from a long line of Mexican-Americans.

Phil Ramos Jr.'s father, grandfather and great-grandfather are Texas natives.

His grandmother is Mexican.

Phil Ramos Sr., 85, still works alongside his son at Philatron on the board and as a vice president. He's a World War II veteran who held government positions in the city of Montebello.

The company was started in 1974 by Phil Ramos Jr., a Los Angeles native and Navy veteran who calls himself "a natural salesman."

"I always wanted to own my own business," he said. "It was just in me."

After the Navy, he went on to get degrees at East Los Angeles College and California State University, Los Angeles.

He did a short stint at a startup in the same industry, where he learned how to launch a business. Then he struck out on his own.

He started Philatron out of his garage in Cerritos with less than \$200. Initially, Philatron bought and resold copper wiring.

"From day one, Philatron had to start making money to support myself and my family," Phil Ramos Jr. said. "The business could not fail."

Sales at Philatron got a boost during the gasoline shortages in the 1970s when customers couldn't find copper cables, which were wrapped in an insulating material made from a petroleum by-product. Demand pushed up sales and prices.

"There were a lot of companies that could not get the cable they needed," Phil Ramos Jr. said. "They didn't care about the price."

But Ramos wasn't happy brokering deals: "I wanted to own a manufacturing company," he said.

It took nine years to save up enough money to buy a single piece of manufacturing equipment, which he purchased for \$10,000.

Philatron has nine such machines now, which go for about \$1 million each.

Phil Ramos Jr., 65, works mostly from home these days and oversees engineering and new products. His kids and other workers handle the day-to-day operations.

"My family is doing a heck of a job for me," he said. "I'm kind of branching off and letting the younger people do more things. I could cash in and retire, but I'm not going to do that. I'm going to keep it growing for the family."

Orange County Business Journal, Copyright © 2008, All Rights Reserved.