

LASTING IMPRE

Reno paint firm profits from



When they started High Sierra Painting, William Helu and P.J. Guarino had one major goal: “To be the most professional, skilled, and responsive painting company in the marketplace.”

Ten years later, they still follow the same philosophy – and their proactive attitude is working. Beginning as a small residential repaint company with two working owners, High Sierra has grown to be one of the largest custom home painting firms in Reno’s extremely competitive market. The firm employs 40 plus people year round. Annual sales will reach \$2.5 million in 2005.

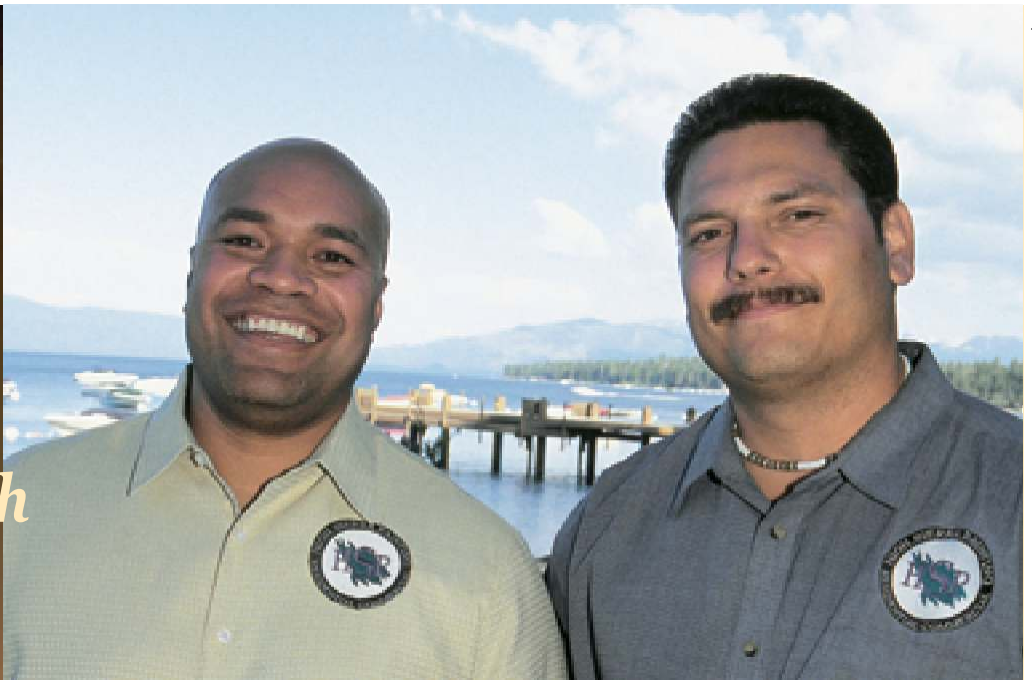
From day one, Guarino and Helu have distinguished their company by setting high professional standards for everything they do – from the quality of their work to their marketing materials to the personal appearance and attitudes of their staff.

“Image is everything to us,” says Guarino. “Our goal is to work with the best builders in Reno, and to do that your operation has to be as



SSIONS

professional approach



A Close-Knit Company: Though it's a large paint firm, HSP still has a family feel. President William Helu (pictured at left, above) was born in Tonga and grew up in Hawaii. Vice president P.J. Guarino was born in Chicago but spent most of his youth in Sacramento, Calif. Guarino started High Sierra Painting while in graduate school at UC Davis. Helu was running Willy's Painting with his wife in Reno. Guarino married Helu's sister in 1994, and a year later, the two brothers-in-law merged their companies to form High Sierra Painting & Decorating, Inc. Not only do they work together on a daily basis, but they have also built homes next to each other on scenic lots outside Reno on the banks of the Truckee River. With their wives and children, it's like one extended family – a situation both say has a positive impact on their business.

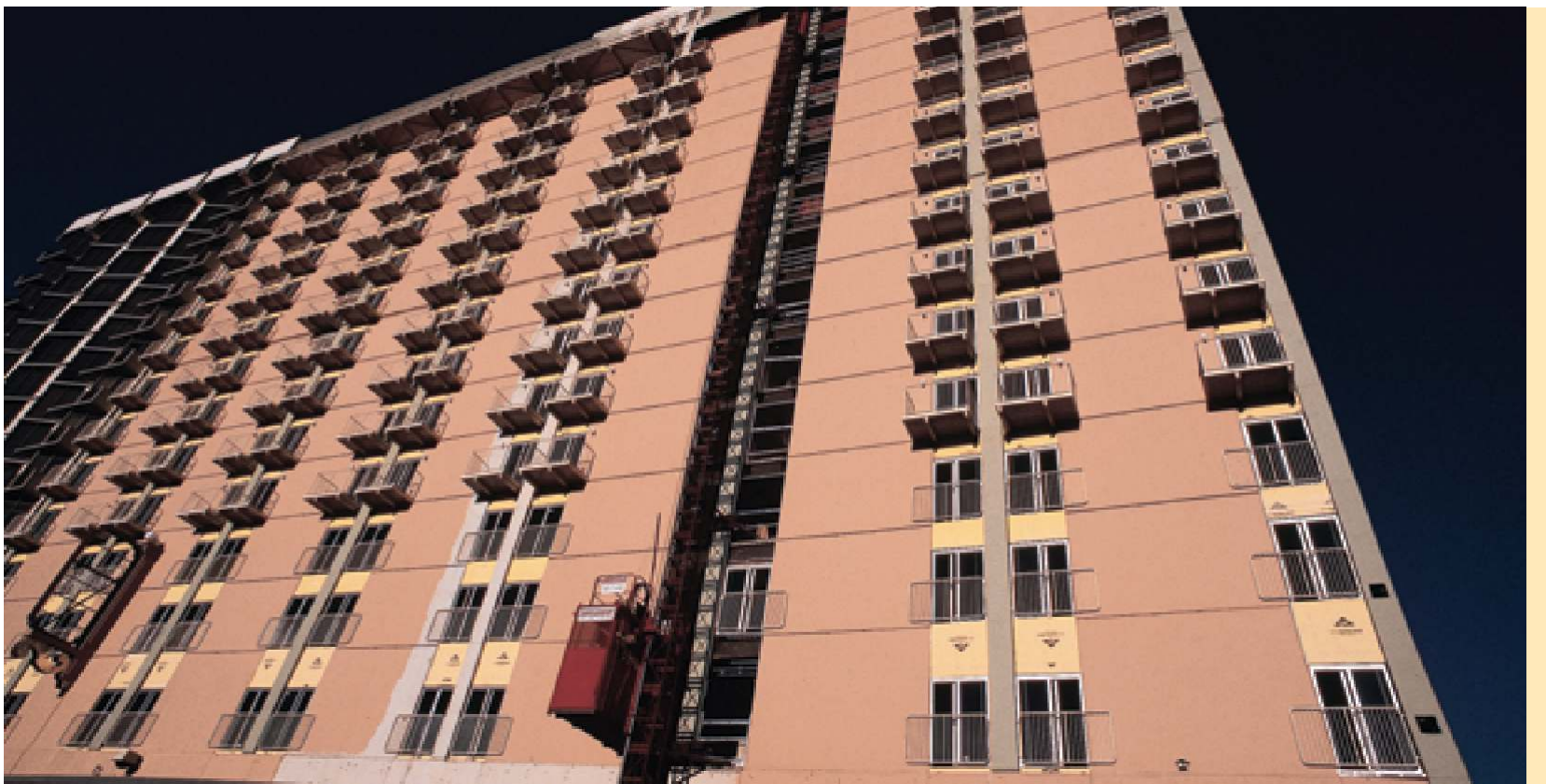
High Sierra Painting & Decorating, Inc. (HSP)

Reno, Nev.
Founded 1995
40+ employees

BUSINESS MIX:
55% custom homes
25% commercial
20% repaints

WEB SITE:
www.highsierrapainting.net





Company image is important at HSP, down to the appearance of its vehicles (above right). Examples of recent work include a Reno casino/hotel (above) and a custom home (below right).

professional as theirs. You have to inspire trust when you work in multi-million-dollar homes.”

Consequently, HSP has invested a lot of time and money in developing first-class logos, stationery, business cards and marketing materials. They believe it helps High Sierra win contracts with homeowners as well as builders, especially when they began to focus on the commercial market.

Each prospective client receives a glossy, full-color folder that includes a full-color 8x10 company profile and business card along with a Sherwin-Williams COLOR palette brochure, a copy of the Nevada State Contractors Board’s “10 Tips For Making Sure Your Contractor Is On The Level,” and a copy of the PDCA Code of Ethics and the PDCA’s handout, “Hiring and Contracting with a Professional Painting and Decorating Contractor.”

They also use a full-color perforated mailer that includes a customer satisfaction survey, business card and a dinner-for-two coupon for successful referrals, as well as a full-color door hanger piece advertising a \$150 “new customer” discount offer. Crews blanket the surrounding neighborhood with the door hangers on the first day of every new res repaint job. Every HSP marketing piece includes logos of the PDCA and Better Business Bureau and the address of the company’s web site.

Work guaranteed

Of course, even the best marketing plans require excellent work to back them up. HSP follows a thorough nine-step prep process and uses the highest quality coatings on all jobs. On their web site, they explain:

“Industry standards provide for a one-year limited warranty. We are very confident in our work and thus offer a two-year labor and material warranty. Elastomeric coatings used for stucco and masonry can receive from 5- to 10-year manufacturer’s labor and material warranties.”

Using Sherwin-Williams products gives High Sierra the confidence to offer these kinds of guarantees on their work. The company also relies heavily on Sherwin-Williams customer service.

“Our local store manager and sales rep have not only kept up with our continued and increasing demands, but have made us more efficient as a contractor,” Guarino says. “The local store runs a night shift that finishes color matches and loads trucks for early deliveries. Without them, we would not be able to keep up with the extremely demanding pace of commercial work.”

Interchangeable components

Joining the PDCA was another crucial step in High Sierra’s growth.

Productive Products: Choosing the right coatings is crucial to HSP’s success. One of the company’s favorite products is Sherwin-Williams Builders Solution System. “With the long lag times in large custom home projects, touch-up is everything,” says HSP president William Helu. “Builders Solution’s touch-up and consistency can’t be beat. And our general contractors love the way it looks.”

“We joined in January 2004, and invest regularly in their workshops and seminars,” Guarino says. “We’ve taken away hundreds of ideas that have helped us improve our company – how to structure it, how to better evaluate company financials, how to revamp our bidding procedures... the list goes on and on.”

One of their most important decisions was to reorganize the company with what he calls “interchangeable components”. First, they separated the duties of the owners (Guarino oversees finances, marketing and res repaint estimating; Helu manages the job execution process, from purchasing materials to supervising project managers and scheduling paint crews). Then, they hired an estimator to bid all projects. A year later, an office manager was added. Six months after that, a project manager was added to help Helu handle the increase in workload. After another five months, they promoted a foreman to a second projectman-



ager position, allowing Helu to oversee production instead of directly supervising individual projects. Their current plans include adding a third project manager and an estimator for repaints. This kind of delegation has increased productivity and enables the operation to run smoothly even when the owners are not present. That means Helu and Guarino can devote more time to planning... and attend more industry seminars to add to their knowledge base.

“The bottom line is that it’s helped us grow and better meet the needs of our customers,” Guarino says.

Tackling tight time frames

A good example is a 30,000 square foot Reno law firm project requiring over 2,000 gallons of paint in multiple colors on an extremely compressed design-to-completion time frame. “The shell and tenant improvement is the largest design-to-completion project in northern Nevada. There was a significant late penalty clause in the contract for the general contractor – putting tremendous pressure on us to perform,” Helu says. “We helped save the builder two weeks within the first three days on site by scheduling multiple crews and working out an aggressive delivery schedule in advance with Sherwin-Williams.”

The main thing, both partners say, is to continually strive to make your systems more efficient and to forge solid partnerships in your market.

“Builders depend heavily on their painters, and we depend heavily on our crew and our paint supplier,” Guarino says. “Whether it’s custom homes, commercial or res repaint, you have to have strong relationships.” **PPC**

