

Local construction company rewarded for successful safety program

FRANCISCO MIRAVAL

Under the leadership of Manuel Gonzales, AMI Mechanical has developed such a successful safety program for its 200 employees that the program is now used as a model for other companies and, at the same time, it has generated insurance dividends for Gonzales' business.

Gonzales, 48, has been with AMI Mechanical for 30 years, before this company had its present name. And for the past 26 years Gonzales has been the president and general manager.

AMI Mechanical, with main offices in Thornton, offers consulting services for design and construction projects.

"At AMI, we have developed a culture that promotes an injury-free environment and provides the best workplace possible for our employees, subcontractors, and others who enter the construction site. We want each worker to go home safely every day," Gonzales said.

To achieve that goal, AMI Mechanical uses a number of programs and activities, including zero tolerance drug testing, aggressive fall protection, competent person standards, partnering with the insurance industry to develop the next generation of safety standards along with innovative training and education programs.

For that reason, for the third year in a row, AMI Mechanical's current workers compensation modification factor is 0.67. According to Gonzales, the average in Colorado is 1.00. It is not uncommon for similar companies to have a workers compensation modification factor of 1.25.

"In our company safety is our top priority. It can be achieved even with a significant percentage of employees with limited English. If you train your employees to think safety, they will work safely," Gonzales said.

"I always emphasize safety because I know many of my employees are the only bread-winner in their families. For some of them, working every day is very important," he added.

Of the 200 people AMI Mechanical currently employs, 150 of them are "skilled field personnel including plumbers, pipe fitters, refrigeration experts and sheet metal install-

ers. Another 25 persons are part of a service group, and 25 others work at the administration office.

According to Gonzales, 30 percent of his employees are Latino immigrants with limited English. These employees receive special training in Spanish, under the leadership of Joaquin Guillen, a bilingual instructor from El Salvador.

Gonzales has partnered with Hispanic Contractors of Colorado and with Pinnacol Insurance to create a radio program in Spanish about construction issues, including safety. The program is broadcast Sunday mornings at a local radio station.

"This action shows the commitment of Mr. Gonzales to the Hispanic community. He shares his safety programs and activities with other Hispanic and Spanish-speaking employees, mainly those

in construction companies," said Johanna Mendoza, a spokesperson for Pinnacol.

"There are very few business people with employees working in dangerous jobs who had implemented such extraordinary safety programs as Gonzales did. And even fewer business people share those programs with others," she added.

AMI Mechanical will receive from Pinnacol a "significant amount," as a dividend for the low workers compensation modification factor of this company. Gonzales said he will use those funds to expand and improve his safety programs.

For more information about AMI Mechanical, visit www.amimechanical.com. For information about Pinnacol, visit www.pinnacol.com. For details about services Pinnacol offers to Hispanic construction companies, visit www.hispanic-contractors.org and follow the "Workers Comp" link.

