

FINDING OPPORTUNITIES

How David Rambhajan of *Industria Construction Services* Became a Small Business Advocate

by Amanda Milford

W

hen David Rambhajan, President of *Industria Construction Services* (Industria), was a kid growing up in Chicago, he played baseball in Horner

Park, which lies along the north branch of the Chicago River. At the time, the river was fenced off from the rest of the park—the water was dirty and dangerous. Residents were urged to steer clear of the area.

Back then, David had no idea that he would one day own a firm that would play a major role in the restoration of this area of the Chicago River.

The child of immigrants, David has always sought out opportunities to enhance the quality of life for himself, his family, his employees and their families. His first opportunity came at age 17 when he joined the U.S. Marine Corps to help pay for college. Then, after graduating from college, he set his sights on graduate school.

Although he was not accepted into graduate school at the time, David didn't give up on his dream. Instead, he changed his focus.

Leveraging his Marine Corps experience in operations and procedures, David became a consultant in the construction industry and launched his own company, *Industria Construction Services*. He gained experience in project management, then moved into process improvement. He received a certificate in project management and completed programs in construction management. He was ready to move forward, again, with his business.

His next opportunity came from the U.S. Small Business Administration (SBA) 8(a) Business Development Program, a nine-year program that helps small businesses compete in the federal marketplace. With the program's counseling, training and assistance in securing government contracts, David was able to grow *Industria* from three to 25

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David Rambhajan, President of Industria Construction Services (center) is pictured with Adam Wavrunek, President of Domain Realty, John Kelecus, VP of Foundation Mechanics, Charles Dierker, Project Executive of FH Paschen and Ron Busczynski, Project Executive of Industria Construction Services.

people and into a prime contractor with capability to deliver bonded projects up to \$20 million in size.

It was this growth that eventually allowed him to land one of his biggest, and most personally meaningful, projects yet.

RESTORING NATURAL HABITAT ALONG CHICAGO RIVER

In 2013, the Army Corps of Engineers embarked on a \$5.6 million restoration project of the Chicago River in Horner Park—the same park David had played baseball in as a kid.

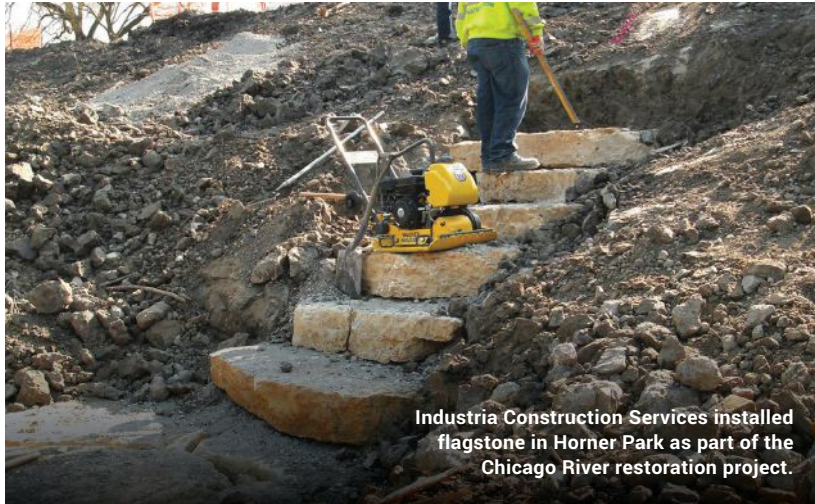
It was the first project of its kind. The plan was to open the quarter-mile section of the river for the public to enjoy, while also restoring the natural ecosystem of the area.

While the project was deeply personal for David, it was also the sort of job he knew would challenge him and his company, pushing his small business to the next level. Winning the bid as the general contractor was a big moment.

The work was challenging: Industria had to remove all the invasive species of trees from the riverbank to help stabilize it and to prevent erosion. While most forms of erosion control in the industry are done mechanically or technically, this project required a natural approach to bring the ecosystem back into balance with how it originally existed.

While Industria's part of the project took one and half years to complete, the schedule for the entire project is five years. In the summer of 2018, the fence along the Chicago River will officially come down and Chicago residents will finally have access to fully enjoy the river.

The Horner Park restoration project is only the beginning. The Army Corps of Engineers announced their next Chicago River restoration project, which was twice as large, measuring more than a mile long. As soon as it came up for bid late last year, Industria jumped at the chance—and won the bid by a narrow margin.



Industria Construction Services installed flagstone in Horner Park as part of the Chicago River restoration project.

“The pinnacle in the delivery of construction is with the Army Corps of Engineers,” says David. “Doing work for the Army Corps has been a rewarding learning experience. What we’ve learned from this work has improved our delivery of construction projects for our other clients.”

GIVING BACK

No doubt, David is passionate about giving back to his community. One way he does this is by supporting Chicago’s veteran community.

Ten years ago, Industria was first given the opportunity to work on one of Chicago’s three Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) hospitals.

“Industria had very little bonding and the company was still growing, but they gave us a small project as our first opportunity,” he recalls. That opportunity served as experience that led to additional VA work, which continued to grow until Industria was awarded a \$4 million project to perform emergency repairs to a VA operating room.

The VA was having mechanical challenges that could put patients in

danger. The nature of the required repairs was such that Industria had to complete the three-month job in just one month.

Leveraging their experience, Industria now performs work at all three VA hospitals in Chicago.

In addition to helping his fellow veterans, David has also made it his mission to help other entrepreneurs looking to grow their own small businesses. He credits the SBA

Business Development Program with his own success, something he believes others in the industry can benefit from. And he’s eager to pass on any advice or knowledge to his fellow business owners.

“During my first 10 years, I was just trying to figure out everything on my own,” he says. “Today, I can help others through my experience by sharing challenges I’ve had and how they can get past those challenges quicker.”

At the end of the day, David is committed to building on his past experiences, taking what he’s learned and applying that knowledge to Industria’s next challenge.

He adds, “Through all of this, I truly have been humbled by the opportunity to build my business and help others do the same.” 🐾

Amanda Milford is a Dallas-based writer and communications professional who loves helping people and companies share their stories.



On the right is David Rambhajan, President of Industria Construction Services, with Jon Kelecus, Vice President of Foundation Mechanics.