

No contract? No problem for Universal Cleaning

By **Eli Sherman** - March 2, 2018 6:29 am



FIRST CLIENT: Evanisio Oliveira, left, owner of Universal Cleaning LLC, shakes hands with Thomas Lent, president and CEO of Thielsch Engineering, which owns Creative Environment Corp. Lent was Oliveira's first client when he started his cleaning business. / PBN PHOTO/MICHAEL SALERNO

The last couple years have been a whirlwind for Evanisio Oliveira and his burgeoning company Universal Cleaning LLC.

A year ago, he took a leap of faith and turned his part-time janitorial-services company into a full-time venture. In January, he was highlighted in Gov. Gina M. Raimondo's 2018 "State of the State" address.

"Evan is determined to succeed," Raimondo said during her speech.

Indeed, Oliveira is bullish about the direction of his life and business.

"This is just the beginning," he said, taking stock of his past.

Born in Cabo Verde, Oliveira immigrated to the United States in 1998. After 9/11, he joined the U.S. Navy and served in active duty until 2011, when he joined the Navy Reserve. He also got a job at General Dynamics Electric Boat and launched Universal Cleaning on the side. The initial goal was to clean some properties and earn him and his family some extra cash.

"I never intended to go full time," he said.

But after garnering encouragement from multiple people, Oliveira decided to apply to 10,000 Small Businesses, a nonprofit sponsored by the financial giant Goldman Sachs. The professional-development program is designed to give Rhode Island small-business owners new skills to grow their companies.

Oliveira's application was denied, but he wasn't dissuaded.

"I reached out to Karina Wood (executive director) and asked her, 'Why didn't you pick me for the program?' " he said.

Wood later told Providence Business News she was excited about Oliveira and his company. But her team couldn't admit him into the program because he was only running Universal Cleaning on a part-

time basis. The business also failed to generate \$100,000 in sales, which is a prerequisite to joining 10,000 Small Businesses.

Again, Oliveira took action.

“When she told me that, I went to my job and I said, ‘I quit,’ ” Oliveira said. “My wife wasn’t thrilled, because we have responsibilities, but in three months I was able to break the \$100,000 mark.”

He reapplied and was accepted. Within a year, his sales tripled, and he found himself invited to hear the governor’s speech.

“That was a big boost because after the speech I’ve been getting phone calls from a lot of people; even the people that I tried to reach out to in the past that never replied to my emails or accepted my phone calls,” he said.

Universal Cleaning provides janitorial services for commercial and governmental buildings. Oliveira said his success in part has been because he doesn’t require clients to enter into contracts. It’s a matter of reputation.

“I believe in my services,” Oliveira said. “If they’re not happy, they can walk away. Give me seven days’ notice and I’m out of there.”

So far, he said, nobody has walked away.

The business, currently in East Providence, is serving clients in Rhode Island and Massachusetts. He’s

trying to expand into Connecticut and is seeking office space in either East Providence or Central Falls.

"My goal is to make the business as big as I can," Oliveira said.

OWNER: Evanisio Oliveira

TYPE OF BUSINESS: Janitorial services

LOCATION: 77 Burgess Ave., East Providence

EMPLOYEES: 12 full time

YEAR ESTABLISHED: 2011

ANNUAL SALES: About \$300,000