

BUSINESS

Success story in Indian country

BY DON DECKER,
YAN News

Ever since he graduated from Brigham Young University with a degree in Business Marketing 19 years ago, 42 year old "OJ" Flanders of Kennewick, Washington, a Grand Ronde Indian from Oregon continues to meet his business goals.

Mr. Flanders is the owner of Columbia Fitness Systems, Inc. of Kennewick, Washington and he sold some high tech exercise machines to the housing department of the Yavapai-Apache Nation and the Columbia crew assembled them in 3 days the last week of October inside of the newly built community center in Tunlii.

Mr. Flander's mottoes are "Change your life" and "Inspire, life, healthy" and he spends most of his time promoting these concepts through his business.

You can consider Mr. Flanders as a mover and a shaker. He makes things happen and nothing stands in his way. Presently, he is testing 2 stand-alone health club franchises that features his specialized machines in Marion, Alabama. There are a total of 8 health clubs and soon there will be 11 to 13 before the end of 2019. He hopes to use this as a formula to spread throughout America.

But getting to the place where he is now required school of hard knocks which meant running a concession business which brought him a good income.

"I tried the corporate route for a bit and it wasn't a fit for me. I've been doing this now for 18 years," he says as he looks at the equipment he is assembling inside of the new community center in the community of Tunlii on the Yavapai-Apache Nation.

One can see nothing but positiveness on Mr. Flander's face.

"This all came about when I'd go to reservations and I kept seeing the high turn-over of (tribal) employees which was so dang high and they kept getting shafted in what was getting placed in their facilities," Mr. Flanders says about how he put the pieces together for Indian tribes for their exercise facilities that turned things around for various communities.

"Most of the stuff was the wrong quality, it was the wrong set up, the wrong type. I felt that whoever was responsible for this at the time wasn't qualified to pick and they just bought whatever from the salesman," says Mr. Flanders with a look of disgust on his face.

Mr. Flanders saw a trend across Indian with people being taken advantage of over the exercise equipment they bought and installed.

He is putting a stop to this.

"For you guys (Yavapai-Apache Nation), we're working on more than that by bringing the employees up to our facility and training them," he says. Customer ser-

vice is what is included with Columbia Fitness Systems. "We can teach them how to run the front desk, how to attract people and teach them light maintenance."

Mr. Flanders says that some health clubs are hundreds of miles from service centers and the turnover is high for health club managers and that is the reason why the Yavapai-Apache Nation health club needs additional training for the trainers.

Setting up the facility correctly is a good start according to Mr. Flanders. "That's really my goal when I set up these facilities. It's gotta be done correctly and then we go from there," he says.

"We're at a point now that it is snowballing where I get so much equipment and I got such a good staff and we're growing at such a rapid pace," adds Mr. Flanders.

He talks about current expansions all over Washington and Oregon and says he covers large areas. "I stay pretty busy and its usually not me doing the installs but the Native stuff I like being involved with because we have a good time," he adds proudly.

For example, on the way down from Washington the Compass crew brought their mountain bikes in the back of a pickup truck which tagged the large rental truck hauling the equipment and when the time arrived, they took off on dirt trails along the way.

Dave Knight is part of the crew who set up the



OJ Flanders (r) and crew from Kennewick, WA Columbia Fitness Systems set up the equipment last week in October.

YAN News photo

machines in Tunlii and has been with Flanders for 4 years and he loves his job. He was also setting up the equipment and promoted one of the machines which is considered a "physical side-kit" which develops the muscle on the leg one at a time. "Handicaps use this such as people in wheel chairs and you can adjust it to your leg," says Mr. Knight. The 'Lite Fitness Center' equipment can fetch up to \$2,000-\$3,000 for the 8 piece set he says.

Mr. Knight pieced the rubberized flooring together, degreased the surface and taped it down securely for the new room.

Staying fit is Mr. Flander's primary goal. "Columbia Fitness Systems is 100% me!" he says out loud. "I'm a

huge believer in being fit and this goes hand in hand with fitness especially as Native people. Typically, (we) don't eat right, we're typically heavier," he says about the general population in Indian country.

Presently, the company is building a new facility in Washington and hoping for a June opening according to Mr. Flanders. It is 60,000 square feet which includes a basketball training facility.

"People go to the health club for one reason. It's helps them to feel good and does what it's suppose to do. It's easy to follow. But if you start deviating from that, and to me, that's a compromise. We didn't compromise in your facility. It's smaller to make it work and that's huge in terms of a suc-

cessful facility," said Mr. Flanders.

Columbia Fitness System was seen at a national conference one time by the YAN housing department personnel and this was the opening for the company to set up the exercise machines in Tunlii.

For now, Mr. Flanders is preparing to avail himself to speaking engagements across the country about goal setting in relationship to physical fitness.

Columbia Fitness Systems has worked with mainly Pacific Northwest Indian tribes such as Yakima Nation, Grand Ronde Tribe of Oregon, Umatilla Indian Tribe, Muckleshoots of Washington, and San Carlos Apache Hot Shots in Arizona.

YAN EDA Entrepreneurship Training

EDWIN HAZELWOOD JR.

Over the course of the Summer and Fall of 2017, the Economic Development department hosted several different entrepreneurship courses for the community. The courses covered various subjects of business ownership ranging from business plan development to implementation and execution of your business plan. As an incentive to those who attended the sessions, a laptop bundle was raffled off for those who attended at least 4 out of our 6 sessions. The winner of the raffle was Ms. Leticia Ancira who feverishly attend-

ed ever session that was offered.

The sessions began on July 18th and would continue through late September. The sessions included business plan writing and development, customer service, business statistics, and final implementation of business plans as well as other topics that interested attendees. The business plan covers the foundation of what your company is, and it determines the type of service or product you feel can be beneficial to your targeted customer. Understanding

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Buddy Rocha, Jr., Economic Development Office Director awards a laptop computer to Leticia Ancira, who is manager of the Nation's Montessori School. Courtesy Photo from EDA. Courtesy photo

New asphalt plant arriving at Sand & Rock

BY DON DECKER,
YAN News

The Sand & Rock operations of the Nation will now be on level-playing field in the competitive world of the building industry. The S & R company will be submitting bids for asphalt jobs because they have just purchased a new \$1.5 million dollar asphalt batch plant.

Years ago, the Nation had looked an asphalt plant but the cost were enormous (\$3 million) but the new plant cost half the price. It will only take one person to operate the batch plant according Jerry Piper, general manager of the S&R..

"We're not going after the ADOT (Arizona highways), mainly country roads, parking lots and the Nation's roads. The third product was missing since we already have concrete and aggregate," said Mr. Piper about the latest addition of asphalt.

Since the S & R company has been without the asphalt production, they have lost out on many opportunities in the area said Mr. Piper.

Mr. Piper refers to his new arsenal of building products as "One Stop Shop" where customers can now get all of the 3-product package in one place.

The concrete redi-mix has been on the rebound according to Mr. Piper just recently.

"We supplied 7,500 yards of concrete to the building of the new hotel at the casino. The hotel was the first big job we ever did," said Mr. Piper. Interestingly, to stay competitive



The concrete batch plant now in operation at the S&R .

for the new hotel, the Nation's S&R gave the same price to contractors who bid on the concrete for the new hotel. "We had to come to the bottom line and that's what we sold it as," he added which assured the S&R of sales of concrete for the casino hotel.

Another benefit to selling that particular concrete was that the money turned over internally inside of the Nation. "The money stays in the Nation if you sell to the Nation," he says emphatically about products sold to the Nation in the past. As for the new product--asphalt... Mr. Piper is happy because he can now bid on the same jobs

that other asphalt companies bid on.

The success story for the S&R company speaks for itself. In 2015 the company sold 6,800 square yards of concrete then in 2016 it nearly doubled with 15,560 yards sold. With the aggregate (small, large rocks and sand) in 2015, 270,000 tons was sold and increased to 388,000 tons in a year in 2016.

Mr. Piper is very enthused about the potential of the new Highway 260 construction as he believes that the value of the property is going to go up along

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