



# Success Story

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## Camden Architect Rebuilds his Firm with SBA Help; Owner Named SBA 2014 Minority Small Business Person of the Year

**CAMDEN, NJ---** Eduardo Guzman is used to building and designing structures, but when the economy came to a screeching halt in 2008, he found his architecture and engineering firm on life support.

Today, the owner of DCM Architecture & Engineering, a Camden-based design, construction and management company, was named the U.S. Small Business Administration's 2014 New Jersey Minority Small Business Person of the Year.

In making the announcement, SBA's New Jersey District Director Al Titone said that Guzman was selected for the award based on a criteria that includes an increase in number of employees; an increase in company sales and financial strength; innovativeness of product/service the firm offers its clients; and the company's involvement in charitable endeavors..

"Eduardo Guzman and DCM Architecture & Engineering were literally on the brink of bankruptcy," said Titone. "This award is a tribute to Eduardo Guzman's passion, perseverance and his commitment to keeping the American dream alive. It certainly explains DCM Architecture & Engineering's current success."

For Guzman and his business partner Robert Benson, Executive Vice President and Director of Engineering for the company, the choices weren't easy. They had to reduce their staff from 19 employees to two. They had to cut 60 percent of their expenses in order to keep the company going. They found affordable space at the Rutgers Camden Technology Campus, Inc. (RCTC) a not-for-profit, 501(c)3 New Jersey Corporation organized by Rutgers University – Camden to further economic development and high tech job creation in the City of Camden.

It proved to be the perfect fit for DCM Architecture & Engineering. "The move to the incubator helped us to run the business as efficient as possible," said Guzman. "It gave us affordable space, utilities, printers and internet services. It also helped us to network with other businesses and more importantly it helped us to establish ourselves as an urban firm."

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From there, Guzman and Benson rolled up their sleeves and began to reestablish their business. According to Guzman, DCM's immediate need was finding clients. The company's big break came from the Parkside Business & Community in Partnership (PBCIP) a Camden non-profit that needed an architect to design a three-story office/retail building designed to be the first LEED-certified building of its kind in the region and home to several social enterprise businesses. "That contract was everything to us," said Guzman. "It not only helped us to sustain the company, but it also helped us to become part of the community."

From that point on, DCM began to find additional clients. A pivotal moment for the company came in 2009 when it became a certified SBA 8(a) firm. To qualify for the program, a small business must be owned and controlled by socially and economically disadvantaged individuals belonging to a minority group. As a Hispanic-American and majority owner of the firm, Guzman and DCM qualified to participate in the program.

"SBA's 8(a) program has a way of opening the door and leveling the playing field for small disadvantaged companies who want to do business with the federal government," said Titone. "Participants of the program are eligible to be considered for sole-source contracts up to \$4 million for services and \$6.5 million for manufacturing. Contracts higher than those amounts must be bid on competitively amongst 8(a) firms."

Today, DCM provides architecture and engineering design, construction and maintenance services to the following federal agencies: General Services Administration (Region 3), General Services Administration White House Service Center, General Services Administration National Capital Region, U.S. Department of Agriculture, U.S. Department of Transportation, U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, and the National Park Service.

Since participating in SBA's 8(a) program, DCM's sales have increased substantially each year and the company is now back up to 18 employees. DCM also participates in SBA's HUBZone Empowerment Contracting program, which helps small businesses in urban and rural communities gain preferential access to federal procurement opportunities. Recently, DCM received a \$3.8 million HUBZone contract from the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers to provide beach replenishment in Connecticut as a result of beach erosion caused by Hurricane Sandy. DCM recently won a five-year Indefinite Delivery, Indefinite Quantity (IDIQ) Design-Build Contract with the General Services Administration Region 3.

"It's a remarkable comeback for a small business that was on the verge of losing it all," said Titone. "It shows us all how resilient and resourceful small businesses really are. It's always good to see how SBA programs can play a vital role in helping small businesses succeed."

In addition to its government work DCM also provides architecture, engineering design and building commissioning services for the higher education, k-12, retail, local government, commercial, healthcare, and hospitality markets, along with consulting projects in China, Mexico, and affordable housing projects in Turks and Caicos and The Bahamas.

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For the past seven years, DCM has been working with local non-profits based in Camden to assist them with their community and re-development programs. DCM actively supports a number of community groups including, Respond Inc., Coopers Ferry, Parkside Business and Community In Partnership (PBCIP), Camden Hope-Works and Save Our Waterfront. DCM is also Camden-based Adventure Aquarium architect-engineer of record and recently completed the renovation of the hippo exhibit which has received raving reviews. In addition DCM runs an active student internship program in collaboration with Respond Inc. where local high school students work in their office during the Summer to get acquainted with a professional environment and prepare their resumes for potential incorporation into the workforce and higher education programs. DCM has been recognized as an important partner to Respond, Inc. in fulfilling their mission and working with young interns for the last four years. Currently DCM is actively involved with the design of new charter schools moving into the City of Camden.

Other recent awards for DCM Architecture and Engineering, Mr. Guzman and Mr. Benson include The New Jersey Business Incubator Network 2014 Incubator Company of the Year; SJ Biz 2013 Green Company Of The Year Award; Arizona's Cocoino County 2013 Sustainability Excellence Award for their design of the Science Resources Management Center at the Grand Canyon National Park; and The 2013 American Institute of Architects, Philadelphia Chapter Honor Award for their collaboration in the design of the first Passive House certified multi-family building in Philadelphia.

Guzman was recognized as the SBA's 2014 New Jersey Minority Small Business Person of the Year at the Rutgers Business School in Newark, at a Small Business Week Awards Breakfast co-sponsored by TD Bank, JPMorgan Chase Bank and 1<sup>st</sup> Colonial Community Bank.

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