

the Man who Never Sleeps

The Big Apple is the city that never sleeps, and Andy Linares won't rest until he's made a difference in the life of every New York pest management professional

By **Pete Grasso** • Managing Editor

Like many pest management professionals (PMPs), Andy Linares had no intention of making this his career. When he started doing work for his uncle's company, Matador, while in high school, it was simply a way to make some money.

"I enjoyed the fact that, after I was done for the day, I got paid pretty well," Linares says. "I did pest management to help pay for school and girls."

Today, after 22 years in this industry, the president of Bug Off Pest Control Center in New York admits he's finally come around to accepting that this was God's calling for him.

International Dreams

As a part-time general pest management and termite technician for Matador, Linares had bigger dreams for his future. Even after graduating high school, he did pest management work on the weekends and in the off-hours while attending Fordham University.

At Fordham, Linares double-majored in political science and French with a minor in philosophy.

"I was never totally disconnected from the industry," Linares says. "But as my college workload increased, my pest management workload decreased."

Pest management was simply a way of supplementing his income — a temporary means of making money — just as it was in high school.

Linares, who is fluent in three languages (English, Spanish and French), wanted to be a diplomat.

After attaining his undergraduate degree, he started pursuing his Master's degree in international affairs at Fordham. At the same time, Linares found employment at the United Nations as a conference officer.

"I organized a lot of the meetings that were held there," he says. "But, that job led me nowhere. It was stifling and boring. I perfected my French and was able to meet people from all over the world, which I found stimulating, but there was no opportunity for advancement."

Linares had felt like he'd hit a brick wall at the U.N. and left his position there to pursue bigger things.

"I got tired of the U.N. and

decided I wanted to do something like, say, be the U.S. Ambassador to Paris," he says. "It was a bad time in the economy, though, and things didn't work out that way."

It seemed no one wanted to hire him. Linares tried to gain positions with several government institutions, multinationals, banks — whatever he could find with a slant toward the international side.

Meanwhile, Linares' uncle was looking to sell his company and retire.

"I wanted to move forward and nail down a career," he says. "It was 1987, and I decided to give myself a deadline of the end of the year."

"I said to myself, 'If no one hires me by Dec. 31, I will buy out my uncle.'"

One final hope came in the form of a letter on Dec. 31, 1986. It was from a large bank, which Linares had interviewed with three times. As he opened the letter, his eyes were immediately drawn to the words, "...we regret to say ..." and he tore it up.

Two days later, on Jan. 2, 1987, he walked into Matador as its new owner.



“I was not happy, though,” Linares says.

The Reluctant PMP

No longer was Linares simply doing side work in the pest management industry. Now, he was the man in charge.

“I got into the industry reluctantly and resentfully,” Linares says. “I was not in a good frame of mind from the beginning. It was not what I had been working toward.”

He couldn’t believe it himself. Here he was a young man with an

advanced degree, fluent in three languages and experience working at the United Nations, and now he’s “going to be a bug guy?” Linares recalls thinking.

But as with anything else he does, Linares bit the bullet and poured his heart and soul into his work.

“I decided to take it as far as I could take it and do it as long as God wanted me to do it,” he says.

For the first year, he put in place many policies directed at cutting costs. He lost money those first couple of years and struggled to

move forward. Then things began to turn around.

“The biggest change I made was a focus on sale of product,” Linares says. “I built up the over-the-counter side, but always felt that distribution was going to be my niche.”

Linares wanted to target the other pest management companies — the smaller companies — that needed supplies. He began working that angle and, after a few years, things began to stabilize — and grow.

“That’s when I started getting

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Andy Linares

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creative," Linares says. "The company was small when I took over. It was well-known and popular, but it wasn't vibrant."

Linares brought that vibrancy to the company, began focusing on distribution and Bug Off Pest Control Center was born.

Knowledge is King

Linares often says, "When it comes to knowledge, nothing goes to waste." It's a maxim he truly believes, and one that has helped him build Bug Off Pest Control Center throughout the years.

"My previous experiences gave me the advantage of instituting the programs I have in place now," Linares says. "I'm doing conferences, training programs and special events all the time."

The skills he learned back when he was at the U.N. as a conference officer have come in handy whenever Bug Off Pest Control Center hosts one of its many events. His language skills have also become absolutely essential to his business on a daily basis in the ethnic landscape of New York.

"I'm taking risks, and I'm not afraid of falling on my face," Linares says. "As long as the concept [of his event] makes sense and the execution is there, even if the response isn't there, that's fine because I set something in motion in an intelligent fashion."

For Linares, distribution is more than simply selling product. He wants to help his customers — and this industry.

Bug Off Pest Control Center regularly holds training programs for people who are looking to get a pest management license. They hold ongoing workshops for continuing education credits and technician recertification.

They've even held a variety of special events, such as the Associated Certified Entomology preparatory course, the Green Pest Management Summit and, more recently, the Business Leadership Cruise.

"The past nine years, we've sponsored the New York Pest Expo, the largest pest management trade show in New York and the only one presented by a distributor," Linares boasts. "It's one of the top five pest management trade shows in the United States in terms of attendance."

Making a Difference

From an outside perspective, it's easy to see the marketing value in holding such events. At each event and program, Bug Off Pest Control Center gains tremendous visibility, drawing in new customers each time. Linares isn't denying that.

"It's a way for customers — and potential customers — to get to know me and get to know what I'm about," he says. "Once someone shakes my hand and gets to know me, normally they stick around. The events are a way of breaking the ice with people who might not normally come in to my showroom."

Another benefit of providing this service is the legitimacy it gives to Bug Off Pest Control Center — the respect Linares' company gains for the quality of the programs he develops. The biggest benefit for Linares, however, is something much less superficial.

"There's a great deal of satisfaction in knowing I have a role in improving people's lives," he says.

“If a person who takes my basic training course can get licensed, and I’m able to help them find a job among my customers, or even help him set up his business and continue to offer him business and technical support, then I’ve made a positive impact on his life,” Linares says. “I’ve initiated a person in a career where he’s making a living for himself and his family, and improving their life and their community. To know I had a role in that is humbling and tremendously gratifying.”

Beyond the visibility, beyond the legitimacy, beyond the chest-thumping results of putting on a successful program, to know he affected someone in a positive way is what keeps Linares working hard.

He may have entered the industry with reluctance and resentment, but he’s turned it around and did the best he could with it.

Linares tried to be creative and innovative as he could, while at the same time, making a positive impact.

“If I’m not the *charge d’affaires* in Paris, that’s OK at this point,” Linares says. “I’ve become a person of respect, and I’ve created an institution that is worthy of admiration.”

The mentorship in this industry is critical to moving forward, Linares says, and Bug Off Pest Control Center is not afraid to share and give ideas.

“We’re generous with our knowledge,” he says.

In today’s cutthroat business climate, that truly is something worth admiring. **PMP**

You can reach Grasso at pgrasso@questex.com. Be sure to check out his blog, *Keeping it Simple*, at www.mypmp.net/PetesBlog.

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