



**Primera Plastics, Inc.**

Noel Cuellar, President & CEO

Ethan Barde, Vice President

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Noel Cuellar is the son of a migrant farm worker family that settled in Holland, Michigan. As he grew up he continued to work with the family as a farm worker until his father got a job at a local pickle factory. After graduating from high school, Cuellar went to work at the same pickle factory for several years. But he soon realized that he had higher aspirations and began attending a community college to learn a technical trade. In 1990 he obtained a job in the plastics division at Prince Corporation and quickly advanced to the technician level. Later he was promoted to department head for the company.

As Ethan Barde grew up in Kansas, he started working in the family's bicycle shop while in middle school and ran the business while going to high school and college. He earned his B.S. in engineering technology in late 1991 and accepted a job offer from Prince Corporation in 1992. During his tenure at Prince, he became a resident engineer and met Noel Cuellar. The experience that both men gained at Prince Corporation convinced them they could successfully operate their own business.

In 1994 Noel Cuellar and Ethan Barde created Primera Plastics, a plastic injection company. Starting with just two machines and two employees, the company has experienced phenomenal growth over the past 13 years. Primera is now located in a 77,000 sq. ft. building (they just added another 40,000 sq. ft. to handle its growth). The company has more than 140 employees and \$19 million in annual sales. Primera has been growing 24% a year since 2003 and expects to hire up to 10 employees this year.

To start Primera, Cuellar and Barde secured an SBA 504 Certified Development Company loan and have since obtained another five SBA loans to finance its growth. They have also used the services and resources of the Michigan Small Business and Technology Development Center (SBTDC) to help them manage and control the company's rapid growth. Cuellar states, "We've surrounded ourselves with the right people and we focus on customers."

The plastics industry is very competitive and Primera's main customer base is the automotive and office furniture industries which have been very volatile over the last several years. Despite this, Primera has grown and the business has added new employees for five straight years.

Centering on core competencies and utilizing advanced technology has allowed them to grow while competitors have been downsizing or going out of business. It has grown by increasing its customer base and increasing its volume with existing customers.

Primera has also had to deal with the negative perceptions that many potential customers had in dealing with a minority owned company. Demonstrating exceptional expertise and providing high quality products quickly dispels any myths about their firm's capabilities. Primera also has a strong commitment to diversity within the business, as the majority of the employees are individuals of color. Employees can participate in tuition reimbursement and a bonus program that promotes self improvement and professional growth.

Under the guidance of Cuellar and Barde, Primera is very involved in supporting the local community. The company provides mentors for at risk youth and a scholarship program for Hispanic students that includes an internship at the company. Cuellar is very active in the Hispanic community and serves on several boards and organizations. He is also very involved with the business community, active with local chambers of commerce and has been asked to present Primera's story to other aspiring entrepreneurs. Primera was named the 2005 Business of the Year Award by the West Michigan Hispanic Chamber of Commerce and in 2006 received the SBTDC Region 7 Business of the Year.

Noel Cuellar and Ethan Barde were named the 2007 Michigan Small Business Persons of the Year by the U.S. Small Business Administration.

For more information about Primera visit their Web site at [www.primera-inc.com](http://www.primera-inc.com).