

The Big Dog

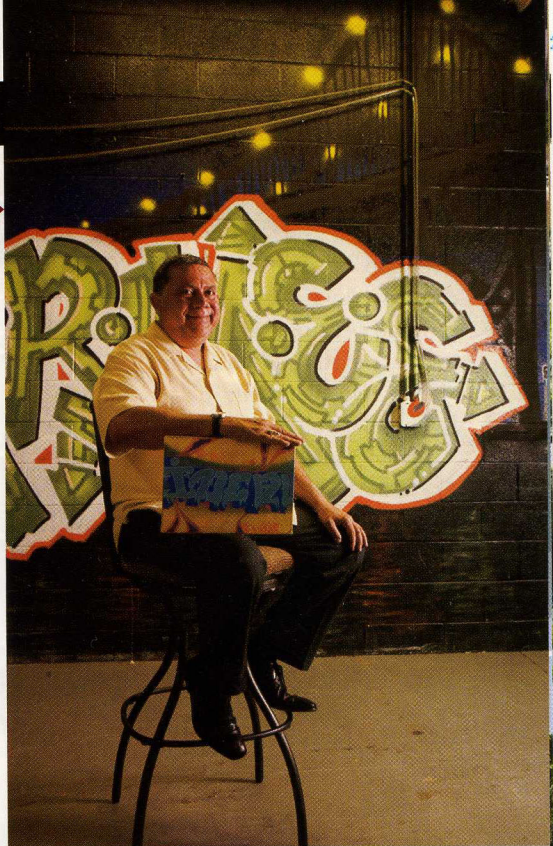
**Frank Venegas, Chairman and CEO,
The Ideal Group Inc.**

Frank Venegas is The Big Dog. His parking space says so. He even walks around with a giant mug that says so. Why the big mug of Joe? “My doctor told me I can only have a cup of coffee a day,” Venegas says. “So I got this.”

And that pretty much says it all. The Big Dog and his brother, Loren Venegas, think big. They own and run The Ideal Group Inc., a collection of companies partly housed in a former Cadillac plant near Michigan and Clark. Its offerings include construction services, patented steel product manufacturing, and specialized concrete shield products. Last year, the pair generated \$160 million in revenue. They’ve received 43 manufacturing patents, with six more pending. And they’ve earned GM’s Global Supplier of the Year award every year since 2002.

But theirs is no ho-hum standard business story. In 1979, Frank plunked down \$150 in a drawing for a Cadillac Coupe deVille. He won — and nine days later, he sold the Caddy for \$12,000. Sixty days later, he started The Ideal Group with the cash.

They started in Hamburg, west



of Brighton — but their old friend, the late Hank Aguirre (a former Detroit Tigers pitcher and the founder of Mexican Industries), kept insisting they move their operation to Mexicantown. “Hank got sick,” Frank says, “and after he died, we got religion.”

They eventually signed a supplier contract with GM. They also heeded Aguirre’s advice and employed local workers. “We’ve never had a break-in in our buildings,” Frank says. “Ever.” ■