

Hard Work Pays Off for Engineer: Son of Migrant Farmers

As a child, Rafael Cisneros spent thousands of hours playing in apple and cherry orchards and fields of asparagus, raspberries, strawberries and cucumbers. When he entered high school in the early 1990s, he began working along side his parents in the fields of Washington's Lower Yakima Valley.

"I was up before sunrise and worked a few hours before school," says Cisneros. "And then I'd be back in the fields after school. It was hard work but I didn't mind."

Migrant workers are a vital part of the community in Sunnyside, where Cisneros lived with his family. Sunnyside High School allowed migrant students to make up missed classes in an evening program.

"I would work late on my schoolwork, and then get up and do it all over again," says Cisneros. He also worked in the fields all summer.

Cisneros's parents often reminded him that if he put his mind to it, he could do more with his life than follow in their footsteps. His mother encouraged him to reach for the stars and go to college. Cisneros, however, had other plans. After marrying his high school sweetheart, Maria, and graduating from high school, he decided that college just wasn't for him.

"After high school, everything changed. A lot of my friends got jobs or joined the Army. Some went to college," says Cisneros. "However, after a couple of years of trying to figure out what I wanted to do, I decided to give DeVry Institute of Technology in Phoenix, Arizona a try. It was there that I discovered that I really liked math."

Today, Cisneros is an engineering manager at dB Control, Inc. in Fremont, Calif. He began working on power supplies and traveling wave tube amplifiers in 1999 and is now responsible for the design and production of large volume jobs.

"dB Control's amplifiers power radar defense systems used in various military aircrafts, helicopters and ships," said Cisneros. "I'm proud to work for a company that makes products that help keep our country safe. And I'm grateful that dB Control gave me the chance to prove what I could do."

dB Control CEO Joe Hajduk says, "Rafael joined us as an engineering trainee and worked his way up to manager. He's extremely dedicated to whatever it takes to ensure our products meet the specifications and ship on time. We're fortunate to have him."

Cisneros has never forgotten his roots. In addition to working at dB Control and helping his wife raise their 10-year-old daughter, Esmeralda, every year he travels 1,000 miles back to Washington to volunteer as a chaperone for the three-day Student Leadership Program (SLP) hosted by the Office of Secondary Education for Migrant Youth (SEMY).

An alumnus of SLP, Cisneros attended the 2007 SEMY conference held last August at Central Washington University in Ellensburg. Two months later, SEMY invited him back to speak at an SLP event, where they presented him with an award for the many volunteer hours he's donated to the agency, and for being a role model for other migrant students.

"It's wonderful to watch kids interact and get to know themselves better," says Cisneros. "I'm honored to be a part of a program that helps them realize they have a future and grateful that dB Control supports my efforts."

