

The Free Lance-Star

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WEDNESDAY, SEPTEMBER 29, 2010

THE DEAL >> FOCUS ON LOCAL BUSINESS OWNERS



SUZANNE CARR ROSSI / THE FREE LANCE-STAR

ANNE MARIE AND ANGEL RAMOS

ARE THE OWNERS OF **ZIPS DRY CLEANERS IN SPOTSYLVANIA**, A BUSINESS THAT DRY CLEANS ANY GARMENT FOR \$1.99 AND LAUNDERS SHIRTS FOR \$1.19, WITH THE MOTTO, "WE TAKE THE STING OUT OF DRY CLEANING."

EDUCATION: Angel: I graduated as an officer from El Salvador's Military Academy and received a bachelor's degree in political science.

Anne Marie: I received a bachelor's degree in biology from the University of Houston.

FAMILY: Our daughter, Veronica, graduated this year from the United States Naval Academy with a degree in political science and is currently an ensign stationed in Mayport, Fla. Our son, Cesar, is a midshipman at the United States Naval Academy and will graduate May 2011. Angel has three children from a previous marriage. His son spent eight years in the Marine Corps. His eldest daughter studied criminal justice and is living in Alaska with her children and husband, who is in the Army. The youngest is working and studying in Georgia.

CAREER HISTORY: Angel: I retired as a full colonel after 31 years in the Salvadoran army. I received the Legion of Merit award from the United States for the cooperation I developed between the Salvadoran and American military as the military attaché. I currently own ZIPS Dry Cleaners in Fredericksburg and have been doing so since 1999.

Anne Marie: I started working at my father's import/export company. Later I moved to

Florida and worked for another import/export company until I opened my own company with a partner in 1984. After selling my business in 1988, I started teaching science and Spanish as a Second Language in El Salvador. When I moved to the United States in 1998, I worked as a substitute teacher for Montgomery County and in 1999 opened ZIPS Dry Cleaners with my husband. I also continue to substitute for the Spotsylvania County school system.

FIRST JOB: Angel: I worked on a coffee plantation cutting coffee. Anne Marie: I worked for my father at his import/export company.

WHERE DID YOU GROW UP? Angel: I grew up in Santa Ana, El Salvador, which is a major city on the west coast of El Salvador. Anne Marie: My parents, sisters and I fled Cuba in 1965 to escape the communist regime. My father started working for the U.S. government, and his assignments took him to different countries in Latin America. I lived there much of my life until we moved to the United States when my father retired from the government.

HOW DID YOU END UP OWNING ZIPS DRY CLEANERS? Anne Marie: My husband's last post was defense attaché at the Embassy of El Salvador. At that time, we decided that when my husband retired,

we would live in the United States and raise our children here. We would always take our clothes to the ZIPS Dry Cleaners in Rockville, Md. We had never seen people waiting in such long lines to drop off their clothes at another dry cleaner. At that time, I told my husband, "Angel, this is the kind of business we need."

WHAT DO YOU LIKE MOST ABOUT YOUR JOB NOW? Angel and Anne Marie: After the first few years of sacrificing and working long hours, we now have flexible hours and a successful business. Our business is "literally" recession-proof.

WHAT MOTIVATES YOU? Angel: The success and growth we have achieved with our business. Anne Marie: My religion, family, friends and customers.

WHAT IS THE BIGGEST DECISION YOU'RE WRESTLING WITH NOW? We have experienced great success thus far with ZIPS since opening our doors in 1999. Now we are debating whether we should build on our success and open a second ZIPS location.

WHAT ADVICE WOULD YOU GIVE OTHERS TRYING TO ENTER THIS FIELD? Two words come to mind: perseverance and stamina.

—As told to Craig Schulin