

IFI Construction • Industrial Fence, Inc.

## Saltijeral: Hispanic contractor of the year

**O**n Thursday night, Mike Saltijeral introduced his fast-growing company, Industrial Fence Inc., to some of the most influential politicians and businessmen in Chicago and the state of Illinois.

Saltijeral, 33, a native Auran, earned the Hispanic American Construction Industry Association's Contractor of the Year Award and was one of the guests of honor at that group's 23rd annual awards banquet at the Chicago Hilton & Towers this week.

That prestigious award came as a surprise to Saltijeral, since his company is just three years old.

"I thought it was something I would see in 10 years, after paying my dues and earning respect," Saltijeral said.

That respect was earned rapidly by Saltijeral and Chicago-based Industrial Fence. His company started out building just fences but has since branched into all sorts of ironwork products and even into general contracting, Saltijeral said.

"When you do good work, the word gets out," Saltijeral said. "When you do bad work, the word gets out, too."

For Industrial Fence, the words have been good thus far.

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**Mike Saltijeral**  
Aurora  
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### Working with schools

Recently, Industrial Fence earned a three-year fencing contract with the Chicago Public Schools worth \$2.2 million per year. The company has also done work for the Chicago Housing Authority, the Chicago Police Department and scores of other governmental bodies in the city and state.

In all, the company does about 75 percent of its work for government and 25 percent for private companies.

When Saltijeral started Industrial Fence three years ago, the company employed just six people and had under \$1 million in sales. Now, the company has 38 workers and does \$5 million worth of work annually.

Eventually, with stable growth over time, Saltijeral wants his company to become one of the giants of the Chicago contracting industry and employ 250 to 500 people.

"I'm just aggressive," he said.

### Opening doors

Winning the Contractor of the Year Award and getting to speak in front of an audiences of "who's who" for the Chicago area and the state is another step in growing the company.

"This opens a lot of opportunities for us," Saltijeral said. "It is a very prestigious award."

Even as the company grows, the decorative, iron fences that were the first staple of Industrial Fence will remain important.

"The fencing will always be my baby," Saltijeral said, noting he and other family members are ironworkers by trade.

To give his business a competitive edge, Industrial Fence does all of its work itself, instead of seeking out subcontractors.

Doing that allows Saltijeral to tell his customers to pay only when all of the work on a project is done to 100 percent satisfaction.

"I have faith in my people and myself," he said.

Saltijeral is known for being a hands-on manager, even jumping into a Bobcat on a construction site from time to time to help out.

He was named the 1997 Man of the Year by the Mexican-American Chamber of Commerce of Illinois for his work with Universal Iron Works, the company he worked for before starting Industrial Fence.

Saltijeral is a decorated veteran of the Persian Gulf War and a lifelong Auran.

He is also a precinct committeeman for Ward 8 on Aurora's southeast side and a mentor for the Boys and Girls Club of Chicago's Junior Achievement program.



**Saltijeral**