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Village Market Strives To Keep It Local, Fresh

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Carlos Jaramillo keeps a stack of black trays in the garage of his North Valley home.

He hasn't used them in four years. But they remind him of times when he would stack them with red, ripe tomatoes, pack them in the back of his old Chevy pickup truck and walk door to door trying to sell the vegetables.

"I've kept them there, and I never want to move them," Jaramillo said. "That's exactly where I started from."

That was in 2004. Jaramillo's company — R & C Distributing Inc. — now provides fruits and vegetables to businesses such as Flying Star Cafe and Sadie's of New Mexico.

His latest project is Village Market at 133 Osuna NW. Jaramillo opened the store in January with his wife and father.

Jaramillo said he pulls in produce from organic and natural growers around the country: Aspen, Colo., or Salinas, Calif., or in our own backyard — the South Valley.

If the store doesn't carry what you want, just ask Jaramillo. He won't mind.

"Everyone who walks in this store is my boss," he said. "They tell me what to do. If they tell me something to carry, I'll carry it."

He said he tries to get produce from local growers — apples from the South Valley, pinto beans from Estancia, Chile from Socorro.

"It's just keeping it local, keeping it fresh," he said. "Just helping out the little guys."

Jaramillo, 29, knows what it's like to be the little guy. After working in grocery stores since 1994, he decided to pursue his dream. One day, on a whim, he drove to Grants and picked up a truck full of tomatoes.

"One day, my wife couldn't pull the car into the garage, and she said, 'What the hell are you doing?'" he said, laughing. The garage was stacked high with tomatoes. "And I said, 'I'm going to sell them — I guess.'"

He got help from his father, and they would go door to door selling them. It wasn't the most glamorous life. But he was fulfilling his dream.

"You got people who would throw you under the bus; you had people who said, 'No. I only buy from professionals.' I've heard every story in the book," he said. "But then you had people that said, 'You know what? I'm going to help the little guy.'"

Since opening R & C, business has spread quite a bit. He now has more than 20 customers.

Ron Jaramillo, Carlos's father, said Village Market prides itself in customer service. When someone wants to try the green chile, he'll pull out the tortillas and tell them to take a seat.

"We're the type if someone comes in complaining to me that I didn't roast their chile right, I'll give them another bag or whatever it is they want," he said. "And people really like that."

Talya Raveed, a North Valley resident, said there are many reasons to shop at Village Market.

"The prices are good. The people are pleasant," she said. "It's a nice neighborhood store, and it happens to sell organic foods."