



Manuel Cortez

Leak detective enjoys tracking down the source

HE IS

Patching South County's leaky roofs.

NO FIDDLER ON THE ROOF

Even though there hasn't been a lot of rain so far this year, Manuel Cortez keeps busy as a supervisor for Charles Antis Roofing and Waterproofing in Laguna Hills.

He began working there seven years ago and said his boss, Charles Antis, has taught him much of what he knows about leak repairs.

"I fix leaks, break stucco walls and replace flashing on walls," he said.

Cortez almost didn't get the job, however.

After the company where he and Antis worked went out of business, Antis started his own roofing company. He wanted to hire Cortez but didn't know how to reach him.

Cortez said that Antis prayed to find him again after having a dream in which Cortez worked for his company. Then one day, while walking down the street, they bumped into each other—no small coincidence considering that Cortez commutes from Panorama City.

FINDERS, LEAKERS

Cortez said his favorite part of

the job is finding the leak.

"It's interesting," he said. "We get to do water tests to find out where the leak is coming from and figure out the right solution. I like this job because we get to use our brain to solve the problem."

Cortez said, that depending on the person, it takes one or two years to learn the trade.

One way of identifying and fixing a leak is to measure the distance between a window and an interior leak and then to measure the same distance inside along the rafters to find the source, he said.

Another way, which is more suited to locating water intrusion in stucco siding, is to simulate rain and gradually move the source up slowly while looking for where the water seeps in, Cortez said.

He says that because of the dry weather early this year things have been slow, but that there are still plenty of projects on which to work.

Cortez said he now is supervising a water intrusion project in a local townhouse complex, a project expected to take about seven months to complete.

"There are so many units, some of the leaks are coming from tiling and some from the flashing around the windows," he said.

NO SEALING WAX REQUIRED

Cortez, a native of El Salvador who has lived in the United States for 11 years, said he typically works on as many as seven repairs a day.

His least favorite part of the job is sealing windows from moisture.

As he's moved up at the company, his job has grown more challenging. Now he has to check on other employees' work, as well as taking care of his own.

WRAPPING IT UP

One of the more difficult tasks, Cortez said, "is wrapping everything the right way and installing it the right way after it was installed the wrong way before [by the builder or someone else]."

Finding the right solution is critical, he said.

"I think you need to be able to solve problems, Cortez said. "Every leak needs a different type of material to fix it in the right way."

Most of all, Cortez said, he is thankful for the opportunities he has been given.

"This is a nice country," he said. "There's a lot of opportunity. All you have to do is work hard and be honest."

—Story by Meleisa Shaffer; photo by Brian Pobuáa