

Computer class fueled Baldonado's business

By Stephen Nellis

Staff Writer

When George Baldonado started working with computers, they were as big as a house, cost millions of dollars and used punch cards.

He was a math major at UC Santa Barbara, and sometime around 1970, he took an obscure half-credit course called computer programming. He didn't know much about it other than it was required to graduate.

"I took it and just fell in love with it," Baldonado told the Business Times. "I got out of college, and they were looking for these weird kind of people called computer programmers. All you had to do was have a math degree and be able to spell IBM. I just lucked out."

That luck eventually led to quite a bit of hard work at companies such as Pacific Bell, GTE/Verizon, Eli Lilly and Bank of America before Baldonado went into business for himself on June 16, 1979 at what would become Camarillo-based Oasis Technology. Oasis has changed course over the decades as technology and the way businesses use it has changed, and today it takes care of networks for clients as diverse as Amgen and the city of Camarillo.

But back when Baldonado started programming computers, most people hadn't even seen one in person. His family and friends wondered if he went to work and pushed buttons every day. Baldonado said the number of Latinos in the tech world at the time seemed to be

approximately zero.

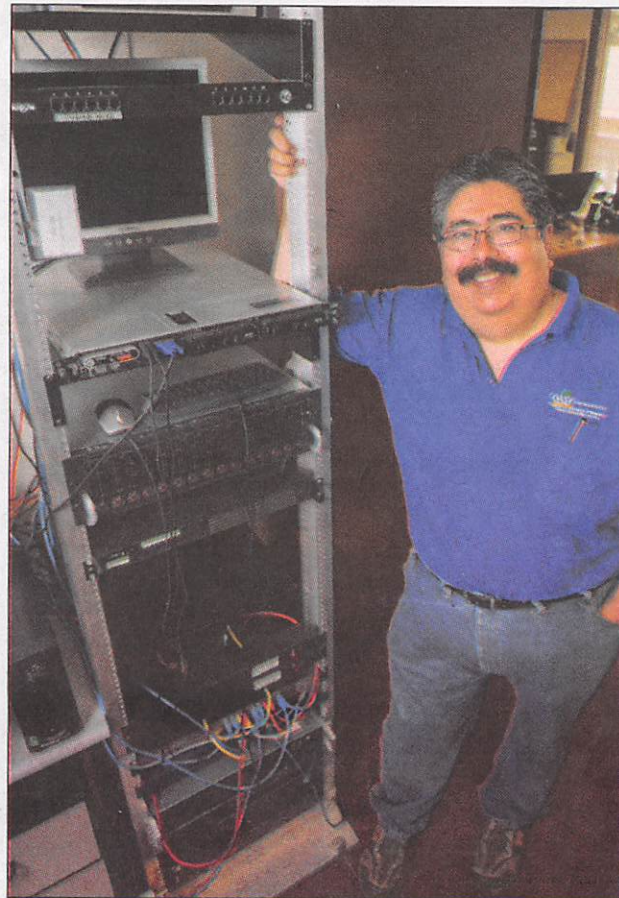
Meanwhile, he was jetting around the country to work on huge and imposing systems from IBM, Raytheon and Burroughs Corp. Programming languages weren't standardized yet, so coding skills were tied to specific hardware.

"There were a million computers out there, and you picked your customers based on what kind of knowledge you had. You had to keep up to date, and only the big companies could afford these computers," Baldonado said.

After about six years of working for others, Baldonado decided to strike out on his own. "The boss I had and I didn't see eye-to-eye. I started looking around at other jobs, but I kept seeing the same thing. I thought, you know, I want to try to it on my own, I want to see if I can do it. I'll go out on get my own customers and be my own boss," Baldonado said.

Baldonado started his business as a custom software shop, and he's done everything from make fixes for the so-called Y2K bug leading up to the year 2000 to tend corporate and government networks with tougher-than-average security requirements. As with programming languages and nearly everything else, he taught himself as he went along.

"I came from a working-class family. I didn't have the contacts or the mentors or the connections in business



NIK BLASKOVICH PHOTO

George Baldonado, founder of Oasis Technology, has worked with computers since they were the size of a room.

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or finance. I just had a lot of talent and energy, so I had to use that. I had to do it on my own, and it really worked out in my favor," Baldonado said.

There's a lot that's changed in 35 years in the technology business, and a lot that hasn't — customers still depend on their machines, and it's still a 24/7 job to keep them running. And customer service still rules.

Al Duran, the director of information technology for Livingston Memorial Visiting Nurse Association, decided to give Oasis Technology a try for a project. He told them his requirements and time frame and was impressed with the results.

"I've really been surprised at the good working relationship we've had. There's a lot of other companies out there like

them, and their staff is booked or they don't have enough staff and can't get out to you. Oasis has been there when I needed them, which for us and our organization is a big plus," Duran told the Business Times.

Baldonado said he's learned two important lessons in his entrepreneurial career. The first is the value of a good partner who can complement your shortcomings. Deborah Johnson, the chief financial officer and chief operating officer at Oasis, is critical to the firm's success and handles business in some of the areas Baldonado realized weren't his strong suit.

"If you don't have the skills, hire the skills. Don't try to do it yourself, because if you can't do it, you won't do it, and your business could fail," he said.

The second lesson is persistence. "If you really want to succeed, there is no Plan B. Never, never, never give up," he said.

For all the things that have gone well



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Although plenty has changed during the 35 years Baldonado has been in the technology business, he has managed to stay on top of the trends.

for Baldonado, there's one thing that didn't go as planned. He intended to work for himself for five years, save up a lot of money and become a writer. He wanted to

pen science-fiction novels that incorporated historical themes.

"When I retire — if I retire — that's probably what I'll do," Baldonado said.