



Husband, wife team puts Sanitation Products of America on path to steady growth in Tallahassee



(left) Ajay and Meena Chadha started Sanitation Products of America 15 years ago in Tallahassee. PHOTO BY ST. CLAIR MURRAINE

Samples of what Sanitation Products of America sells are on display at the company's Tharpe Street location. PHOTO BY ST. CLAIR MURRAINE

By St. Clair Murraine
OUTLOOK STAFF WRITER

When Gary Dansby, building maintenance supervisor for Star Metro, needed help getting rid of an annoying stench at the C.K. Steele Plaza, he didn't think twice about who to turn to.

He went immediately to **Sanitation Products of America**. The call was right in Ajay Chadha's wheelhouse.

During the 15 years that Chadha and his wife Meena have been in business, they've developed a philosophy that made responding to Dansby's call easy. They believe that being on site and analyzing the problem has proven to be the best way to solve most sanitation issues.

It's something they learned from a not too affective way they used to sell their products during their start-up years.

"To solve that problem makes more sense than something like going to a customer and saying 'I've got a product that's really good,' " Ajay said. "It would probably smell good but they would look at you and say, 'I don't need that; I already have something similar.' "

Sanitation Products of America is among the locally-owned small businesses that are enduring the pandemic. The Chadha couple started the business with their personal savings, operating at first out of their home.

They've endured several periods of highs and lows before settling in their current location on Tharpe Street. The company employs a staff of seven and op-

erates its own lab where it formulates a lengthy list of products.


All the products are designed and manufactured after severe testing and safety checks before it gets cleared by the government authorities and are launched in the market. Moreover, companies that use various chemicals to manufacture their products may need special precautions and care while working and use safety gear like gloves, masks, face shields, etc. They may also use distilled water 5l for cleaning equipment like beakers, test tubes, and more.

Starting up a business that relies on knowledge of chemicals was a natural for the Chadha's. He has a master's degree in chemistry from West Virginia University and she has a similar degree from Long Island University.

Ajay describes the products that they make as being "essential." That seems to be the obvious sentiment of their customers based on the large area that they serve east and west of Tallahassee and into South Georgia. Their local clientele includes establishments like FSU, Star Metro and janitorial companies.

Star Metro has been relying on Sanitation Products of America for more than a decade, Dansby said. He recalled the day that he first met Ajay with products in a station wagon.

"He just wanted me to give him a chance," Dansby



said, adding that he's established a solid working relationship with the couple.

Having Sanitation Products of America in Tallahassee is "priceless," Dansby said.

"There are so many people that you can't depend on, but Ajay's is 100 percent dependable," he said. "They will work into the night to find a product.

"He is also able to get the products that I need. That makes me feel good that the city dollars that I'm spending is with a local company who is fair, honest, reputable and knowledgeable. I think that it's best we spend our tax-payers dollars with local vendors to keep everything in Tallahassee as much as possible. Ajay provides that opportunity to keep everything here."

The company has even gone as far as holding classes to train Star Metro employees on how to use their products, Dansby said. That and the time that Chadha found the answer to the problem that plagued the Steele Plaza are two reasons that Dansby said he relies on the company.

"We'd tried different chemicals to clean floors and get the smell out," Dansby said, recalling how the Steele Plaza was cleaned up. "He is a very hands-on person. He will get out and scrub a floor."

The direction that the Chadha couple is currently driving their company is much different from the path

they took initially. Their focus was on personal-care products, but coupled with a downturn in sales and a recession they had to pivot to cleaning products.

When they started the company, they were eight years into a marriage that started when they met at an airport in their native India. Just before starting the company the couple was in the early stage of starting a family.

They pushed to grow their business and raise their two children at the same time, but never at the cost of not spending enough time with their children.

They alternated one-on-one time with their children. "We were both into it," Meena said. "We just knew when was the time for him to step in and be more into the business and for me to pull back a little."

The potential for growth is obvious by the way the Chadha's have positioned their company. They don't seem in a rush to take that step, though.

"You've got to be able to take it on and do it well," Meena said.

Ajay added: "We have a decent operation already. We've traveled quite a far distance after 15 years now."

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