

ENTREPRENEUR OPENS HIS OWN BUSINESS—OR FIVE

Having been through 30 surgeries for his back, ankle, and hand—and the time away from work that entails—Anthony LaBadie knew he would have had difficulty keeping a job working for someone else. So, with assistance from the New Mexico Division of Vocational Rehabilitation he was able to open his own electrical contracting company.

That one enterprise in his hometown of Deming has now expanded to five, with the addition of construction, landscaping, t-shirt design, and a disc jockey service. And that's not all: LaBadie is looking to start a heating, ventilation, and air conditioning (HVAC) business. On top of all that, he has begun teaching at Western New Mexico University (WNMU).

“I always did a lot of things,” the 52-year-old says. “Then I'd get bored and want to do something else. Most people focus on one thing. I focus on several. I guess I'm different.”

When he was younger, he couldn't afford to go to school, so he worked in mines and did some construction and electrical work. “I just piddled around a little,” LaBadie recalls. “When I could finally go to school, I took the electrical course at Western, then welding, then construction.”

LaBadie participated in the vocational rehabilitation program from 2013 to 2020, graduating from WNMU in 2018. NMDVR assisted by paying for books and other educational materials, licensing exams, gas to get back and forth to college, and securing Pell Grants. “I'm so grateful. They carried me for years and got me to where I needed to be. I probably couldn't have done it without them.”

He is now teaching the same classes he once took. LaBadie had no previous experience in the front of a classroom, but he wishes he had started doing it earlier. “I like showing the students the stuff I know—the outcomes of what we start and finish. It's nice for them to see what they can build from nothing. The potential some of them have is amazing.”

LaBadie also taught the eight people who work for him. “Most of them can do everything, so I can switch them around (between my companies). They're pretty good at learning.”

Having been an underdog himself, he hires people who don't have experience. “It's difficult to get in with anybody unless you already have experience,” says LaBadie. “I try to accommodate anyone who wants to work. Most learned everything here and they know what they're doing. I'm grateful to have them.”

His main goal now is to be healthy so he can be in the field more with his team. But he has two more surgeries coming up, and all the medical issues have also contributed to depression. “I have



The business that started it all for Anthony LaBadie.

my family and good friends who encourage me. They are pretty surprised at how far I've come," he says.

LaBadie advises others who have challenges to not give up. "Whatever you want to do, you can do it. If you have a dream, you can make it come true."

For help in achieving that dream, people can take advantage of the services NMDVR offers. The agency provided resources to LaBadie that he didn't even know were available. "I was kind of embarrassed, because I was an adult. But they helped me get back into the workplace," he says. "I love what I do. I enjoy helping people, and I enjoy the work."

For information about NMDVR programs, contact your nearest office. There are two dozen locations across the state: dvr.state.nm.us/locations/. LaBadie's businesses are on social media at www.facebook.com/deming.shirts.

The New Mexico Division of Vocational Rehabilitation helps individuals with disabilities find suitable employment. Vocational rehabilitation is a voluntary program supporting people who want to work. With a long history of success and proven methodology for making the best fits, NMDVR is committed to helping participants thrive in their communities. For more information, visit dvr.state.nm.us or call 505-954-8500.

The Vocational Rehabilitation program receives 78.7% of its funding through a grant from the U.S. Department of Education. For federal fiscal year 2024, the total awarded is \$24,698,300. The remaining 21.3% is funded by state appropriations and transfers from the Commission for the Blind and Commission for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing.

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