

## 2022 RHODE ISLAND MINORITY-OWNED SMALL BUSINESS OF THE YEAR

**JAVIER BROWN IS PROOF** that the America Dream is alive and attainable with hard work. Speaking very little English, Javier came to this country from Venezuela over 25 years ago. At the suggestion of a brother living here in the States, Javier began to research how he could start a packaging and fulfillment business; he also set for himself the goal of becoming fluent in English.

In 2001, using money he had saved in Venezuela, Javier rented a 300 square-foot office in Pawtucket and started O2J, which is a full-service product fulfillment, packaging, and distribution company for the fashion jewelry, apparels, promotional products, housewares, sporting goods, and health and beauty products industries, among others. Now, O2J operates out of a 3,000 square foot space and is able to fulfill substantially more orders every day.

Javier is an insatiable learner, and therein lies the key to O2J's success. In addition to four years of studying English at CCRI, Javier has been learning about his new country and culture, as well as topics important to small business success. He is always pushing himself to learn and to continue to grow. Javier has taken advantage, and reaped the benefits, of two US Small Business Administration's (SBA) programs: (1) technical business assistance in the form of trainings/workshops, as well as free, one-on-one confidential business counseling; and (2) COVID-19 relief funding programs.

Although O2J was thriving before the COVID-19 pandemic, the business was not immune to its effects and was struggling to survive. O2J was able to take advantage of two SBA COVID-relief funding programs: (1) to keep his staff employed, Javier received two Paycheck Protection Program (PPP) loans, and (2) the Economic Injury Disaster Loan (EIDL) Program, a way for small businesses negatively impacted by the pandemic to obtain accessible and borrower-friendly capital in order to recover. With this SBA assistance, O2J was able to pivot and scale from bulk order shipping to individual home deliveries, as many businesses



**JAVIER BROWN**  
*President, O2J, Inc.*

and workers were then remote, at-home workers.

To increase his business knowledge, Javier has participated in several SBA programs and workshops and, since 2015, has worked one-on-one with a business counselor at the RI Small Business Development Center (RISBDC), an SBA Resource Partner. Javier's counselor, Manuel J. Battle, the RISBDC Assistant State Director, nominated him for this award because of "Javier's vision to pivot his business from a packaging company in the declining jewelry industry to a fulfillment center in the growing e-commerce industry, his constant quest for business counseling, and his thirst for new knowledge." Javier has also received business assistance from SCORE RI, as well as participating in Goldman Sachs' 10,000 Small Businesses program.

Throughout the many years growing O2J, Javier has been steadfast in his desire to give back to his new home that has given him so much. O2J is an active contributor to the RI community: for example, it has donated money to the Special Olympics of RI, as well as Providence Sports and Leadership; and Javier himself has collaborated with Pawtucket's Blackstone Academy Charter School as a speaker and motivator for recent graduates, sharing his own journey and experiences and encouraging them to believe that any goal can be reached with hard work, continued learning, and skill improvement.

While O2J has not yet recovered to its pre-pandemic levels, it remains in the game and is confidently moving forward to begin its third decade in business. "Javier's journey should inspire every entrepreneur, and we at the SBA are proud to have been able to assist him at various points in his business's lifecycle," said Mark S. Hayward, SBA's RI District Director. "He is a role model for so many, and we are proud to name O2J as the 2022 Rhode Island Minority-Owned Small Business of the Year," he added. ●