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Katrina & Recovery

In New Orleans, Trash Magnate Cleans Up

by Melissa Block

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Melissa Block/NPR

Sidney Torres, 33, is the president of SDT Waste and Debris in New Orleans. After Hurricane Katrina, when other companies pulled out of the city, Torres jumped in.

All Things Considered, September 12, 2008 · Sidney Torres is making garbage hip in New Orleans. The 33-year-old is president of the company that bears his initials — SDT Waste and Debris.

He's so popular, fans ask for his autograph. He was honored as grand marshal of a Mardi Gras parade.

Here's why he's a local hero: After Katrina, when other companies were pulling out of New Orleans, Torres jumped in.

Pretty soon, his upstart company had won a \$9 million a year contract to clean up the French Quarter and downtown. People in New Orleans say it has never been cleaner.

Torres is obsessed with details, from the hip black-and-white uniforms his workers wear to the scented spray they use to hose down the stinky streets of the French Quarter. He's named his lemony signature scent *Superfresh*.

The spray sanitizes the streets and the occasional partier.

"We had a guy two mornings ago ask us to keep the sprayers on," Torres says. "He wanted to shower down. He said he'd been out all night partying, didn't want to go home smelling like he was smelling. So we did. He went home smelling like a lemon. No charge!"



Melissa Block/ NPR

A truck sprays Superfresh onto the streets of New Orleans' French Quarter. People in the city say its has never been cleaner.

Torres is an unlikely titan of trash. He started out as a personal assistant to musician Lenny Kravitz in the 1990s. Then he came home and made money in real estate. Now, with his rapidly expanding garbage business, he's part of a new generation of New Orleanians who are shaking up the old way of doing business and helping to bring the city back.

"I love where I'm from," Torres says, "and the resiliency of the people. They will repopulate and get back in the area if they see someone else helping make a change and trying to help bring it back."

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