

# New Jersey Herald

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Hardyston man's painting business is primed to celebrate its third year.

## Painting the county with Fresh Coat

Hardyston man finds police work, business have common threads

By LAURA DEAL  
For The Herald

HARDYSTON — Police sergeant by night and business owner by day, Hardyston resident Lee Castro is priming toward his third anniversary this summer at the helm of Fresh Coat, a professional residential interior painting company. This local office franchise has the backing of a corporate company, based in Cincinnati, with roughly 60 franchises throughout the country.

Castro was the first to break ground in New Jersey with his franchise, which covers the entire northern New Jersey territory. About 60 percent of his business is in Sussex County, he says. In addition to residential work, he also handles small commercial jobs.

One truly unique aspect of this business is the ability for customers to pay by credit card. Local painters (competitors) all request cash or check for their services. However, Castro finds the convenience of allowing customers to pay by credit, eases the entire process.

"I work with my customers in any situation," Castro said. "If a payment system has to be set up there hasn't been once where we weren't able to work something out."

Because of the inherent nature of franchise systems, Castro is able to glean many perks from corporate headquarters in supporting and sustaining his efforts here in the county. One particular help that Castro is particularly thankful for is the 24/7 call center access for all of his existing clients and potential customers, also.

"Customers can call anytime and schedule a free quote," said Castro. "It doesn't have to wait until after hours. Also for the clients I am currently working with, if they need to reach me in a hurry, I get the message forwarded to me instantly. Thank goodness for technology, with my blackberry, whatever estimates or emergencies, I know in advance."

The strokes of Castro's background all blend toward business-owner potential. With a BS in computer information systems, Castro was able to take a full load of business courses as a complement to that degree. Mix in 12 years on the police force at Montclair State Police Department and the rich hue of an emerging entrepreneur glosses over.

"I realized that if I could manage police officers in all types of situations, emergency and non-emergency, why couldn't I manage a group of professional



Submitted photos

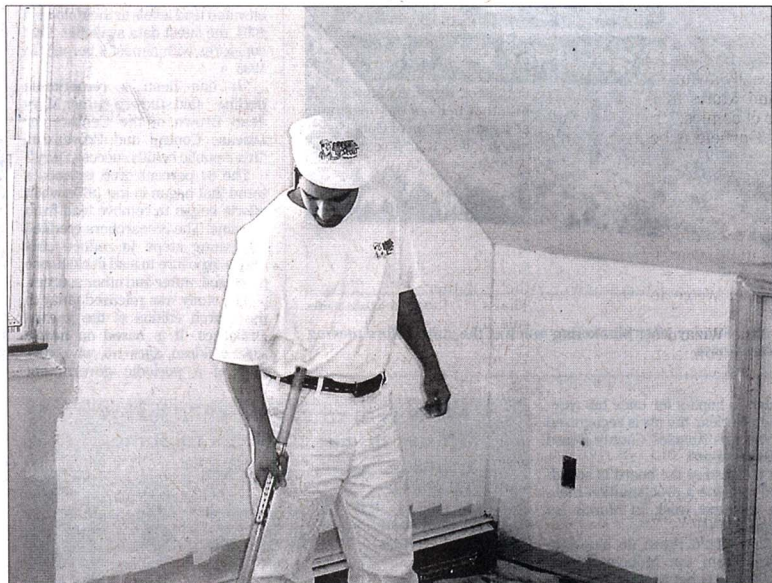
Lee Castro, of Hardyston, a police sergeant at night and business owner by day, heads out to a job. Below, Kenneth Hutchinson, left, and Kevin Castro work on indoor projects.



### Fresh Coat

What: Residential and commercial painting company

Owner: Lee R. Castro  
Telephone: (973) 827-8721  
Web: www.freshcoatpainters.com



painters?" said Castro.

Secondly from a purely conservative point of view, Castro knew the backing he would receive included: a system already in place, marketing help, payroll assistance and more.

"It was all included in the operations manual," said Castro. "All it left for me to do was research my own market. The good thing about Sussex County is that it's growing. People are buying homes, and there's a lot of new construction."

With new construction, Castro finds a lot of work with clients who have recently purchased their home.

"Contractors basically do general white, even though it's a brand new home," Castro said. "Once the buyer purchases it, they want to add their own personality, in color."

Another aspect that Castro sees as separating him from the competition would be his timeliness.

"I have a quick turnaround," Castro said. "I can schedule a quote in three days or less and actually have a job done in three weeks, or less."

For those in need of painting but are afraid of color choice, Castro offers a free one hour color consultation with an interi-

or designer. Myriad considerations are taken into account during this meeting including: lighting, type of furniture, dimension of walls, and more.

The company also has a built-in fund-raising arm that reaches out to local PTAs, Scout groups, etc., and can earn them between \$50-\$100 a stint.

Castro understands the fly-by-night impression that his field has to stand up to and therein commands nothing but the highest standards of all of his employees.

"I do background checks on all painters," Castro said. "My company is fully bonded and fully

insured. Many times people really don't know who they have in their house; it can be a little scary."

Even though Fresh Coat is a mere three years old, all of Castro's painters have 15-20 years of experience. He offers a two year warranty on two coats of paint.

"Why not spend a little bit more and have a painter that is fully insured?" said Castro. "What if something went wrong and you needed to use the warranty, my customers know that I am here. With some painters, they're here today and gone tomorrow."