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Leading the way

He pours energy into commodity business

By David Kaplan

Javier Loya grew up a Dallas Cowboys fan and dreamed of playing for the team one day, but he didn't pull for them when they squared off against the Houston Texans.

He is a minority owner of the Texans, and explained, "I root for where my wallet is."

Loya, who is also president and chief executive of Choice Energy, was named Hispanic Male Entrepreneur of the Year at the Houston Hispanic Chamber of Commerce Triunfando Awards Gala held Thursday.

The 8-year-old Choice Energy arranges commodities futures and other kinds of transactions for oil and gas companies and major banks. His clients include BP, El Paso Energy and Morgan Stanley Dean Witter.

A year and a half ago he formed Choice Energy Services, a retail operation that negotiates on behalf of businesses with the aim of lowering their energy bills. Clients include Home Depot and Spec's.

Loya, one of 10 minority owners of Houston's NFL franchise, said he has loved football all his life. He played in high school and at Columbia University, where he was a

political science major, planning to attend law school.

His plans changed when as a senior at Columbia he visited a Connecticut brokerage firm's trading room, where they were "screaming and



yelling strange things over the phone," he recalled.

At 3 p.m. they left for the day, hopping in their expensive sports cars and driving to the beach to drink beer.

On the beach, one of the traders asked Loya, "You think you could do this?"

"Heck yeah," Loya said, although he had no idea of what they were actually doing when he watched them work that day.

After graduating, he took a job at the company, United Crude Oil, where

he started at the bottom, writing prices on an eraser board.

He rose in the firm and became a broker, but soon he got the entrepreneurial bug.

A first-generation Mexican-American, Loya grew up in El Paso. His father worked at a clothing manufacturing plant, first loading trucks and eventually becoming a supervisor. He had only a grade school education but pushed his children to excel.

Javier and his six siblings got the message. His brother Mike Loya is president of Houston-based Vitrol, one of the world's largest independently owned crude oil trading companies. His sister Irma Tudor is CEO of ASI, an engineering and consulting firm in Alabama. Her

company was named National Small Business of the Year by the Small Business Administration.

A busy volunteer, Loya said his passion is educating children. He is on the board of Hispanic Achievement Place, which provides alternative teaching for underprivileged and abused children, and he speaks regularly to high school students.

He said one of his messages to students is: "I'm living proof that the system works and America works."