These are the worst of times for Steve Quinonez Jr.

For the past six months the Indio prizefighter has been hard-pressed to earn money in the prizefight ring to offset the losses sustained in his construction business that is wobbling along with the rest of the country's economy.

Quinonez needs a job badly to put food on his table and to keep the utilities in his Indio household running. Like so many other professional boxers, he needs to work outside of the ring to sustain him in normal times. But these are not normal times.

Things are so bad for the prizefighter that a truck purchased earlier in the year was repossessed. The guy sent to grab the truck didn't want to embarrass Quinonez so he called him on his cell phone and asked for the keys instead of dragging it from the driveway in front of neighbors.

"I was out jogging and asked him to wait a few minutes," said Quinonez (31-13-1), an amiable family man with a wife named Diana and several kids. "It was really cool of him."

That phone call was the most positive event of the year for Quinonez.

Times are bad for the fighter known as the Mongoose. The sport of professional boxing surprisingly remains his only economical recourse.

"It's very hard right now," said Quinonez, 37. "There's no work at all in construction."

In the worst economic drought since the Depression of the 1930s, boxing is one entertainment venue that remains recession-proof and a lifesaver to those who can fight in the prize ring.

"Boxing has always been able to survive," said Bob Arum, Top Rank's boss and boxing promoter since the 1960s. "People always need entertainment."

Approximately 4,600 professional boxers are active in this country today, but less than one percent is able to live on their fight earnings alone. However, it can be a recession-proof supplement.

But there are adjustments to be made, Arum adds.

A recent fight card featuring Manny Pacquiao against Oscar De La Hoya drew 1.25 million people on pay-per-view television. Both fighters made more than $12 million each for their match last Dec. 6, at Las Vegas.

That may be the last time any pro fighter will make that kind of money again until the economy

bounces back. You don't see fighters like De La Hoya every day who are able to attract more than 1 million pay-per-views on television. It's a very rare fighter who can accomplish that feat on his own.

"We have to look for new ways to make boxing affordable to the public," said Richard Schaefer, CEO for Golden Boy Promotions. "We are partnering with various companies that understand they also need to adjust the way they do things."

Until the economy rebounds, the entire industry will have to make changes such as limiting its pay-per-view fight cards, paying less money to elite prizefighters and actually doing some nose to the grindstone grassroots promoting.

"They have to do it the old fashion way," said Bennie Georgino, who still promotes fights in the state of Washington.

Club fights

The small-time boxing shows remain the same as they've been for the last 100 years. It's a lost art to be able to put on a boxing card and continually fill the seats.

In the Inland area, Thompson Boxing Promotions has been selling out fight cards repeatedly at the Doubletree Hotel in Ontario and at Omega Products International in Corona.

"You can't re-invent the wheel," said Alex Camponovo, coordinator for Thompson Boxing Promotions. "It takes a while to establish yourself and get known in the area."

Other club shows, such as All Star Boxing in Montebello and Roy Englebrecht Events in Irvine continually sell out their venues.

Last Saturday, a fairly new entry to boxing club shows occurred with Art of Boxing Promotions and Steve Bash Entertainment co-promoting a fight card in Inglewood. The fight card drew more than 800. The promoters hope to stage a dozen fight cards in 2009.

"We hope they succeed," said Dean Lohuis, chief inspector for California State Athletic Commission. "It means more work for all of us."

The loss of Telefutura as a venue to televise boxing is a severe blow. But recently Versus has picked up the gauntlet. One source says Azteca television may also begin a regular boxing show.

"Boxing has a good following," said Ricardo Celis, one of the commentators for Telefutura that televised its last show a week ago. "Somebody will do it again."

Quinonez remembers fighting on one of the Telefutura cards and wonders if boxing will be hurt. He's been training for six months under Joel Diaz, who also trains WBC junior welterweight titleholder Timothy "Desert Storm" Bradley, Dominic Salcido, Julio Diaz, Antonio Diaz and a few

others.

Back in June, Quinonez trained with Manny Pacquiao and was invited to spar with the boxing great. Later, he was put on the under card of the Pacquiao-David Diaz fight but suffered a bad ankle injury during a knockdown against Dennis Laurente and was forced to retire in the fourth round.

“My ankle swelled up like a baseball,” said Quinonez, who has beaten foes such as Lovemore N’Dou, Jose Luis Juarez and suffered close defeats to Alex De Jesus, Stevie Forbes and Jose Luis Castillo.

On a Sunday afternoon, Quinonez is preparing his family to attend a church play. He’s also praying a promoter calls him up to offer a fight.

“I don’t have that many years left,” says Quinonez. “It’s a hard life. But being able to box gives me hope.”