

## SMALL BUSINESS WEEKLY

### Recession hasn't slowed contracting firm

**'WE ARE DOING A LOT MORE BUSINESS THAN I EVER THOUGHT WE WOULD.'**

**Julissa Carielo**  
President, Tejas Premier Building Contractor Inc.

BY MIKE W. THOMAS

Julissa Carielo has had a remarkable amount of success with her building contracting business during the economic downturn.

Even while construction projects have dried up across the country, Carielo's firm, Tejas Premier Building Contractor Inc., has found plenty of work. So much, in fact, that the company has grown revenues from \$600,000 in its first year in business in 2008 to some \$5 million in 2009 — and expects to hit the \$6 million mark this year.

"We are doing a lot more business than I ever thought we would," says Carielo, who left her job as vice president of finance for M.J. Boyle General Contractor in 2008 to start her own business.

And Carielo says she has managed to grow her business this rapidly without relying on economic stimulus funding or the military's Base Realignment and Closure, or BRAC, construction projects — which have been credited with largely propping up the local construction industry for the past few years.

Carielo says she never really thought about the economy or its impact on her business. She just never stopped looking for work and she consistently found more and more as time went on.

"I always treat each project like a brand new client who I need to impress so that I can win more business," Carielo says. "And then I use that experience to add more clients so that we can build more stuff."

#### Prime contractor

Carielo says she decided early on that she did not want to be primarily a subcontractor and has sought to always be the prime contractor on most projects so that



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Julissa Carielo, president of Tejas Premier Building Contractor Inc., has seen her business grow substantially during the last few years despite the recession.

she has more control over deadlines and the quality of workmanship.

By the end of 2008, Carielo completed the required certifications to have her company recognized as a small, minority- and women-owned business, also known as 8(a) certification. This helped to open doors to more set-aside projects that she could bid on in San Antonio.

"All of our work so far has been local," Carielo says. "We have been fortunate in that we have not had to go out of town in order to be busy."

Tejas Premier does a lot of remodeling work for Port San Antonio, University Health System and the Alamo Community College District. The company has also been getting a lot of military work recently out at Lackland and Randolph Air Force bases, although none of it is BRAC-related, as Carielo notes, because most of those projects were bid out before her firm came along.

One of her first projects was doing remodeling work on a former Albertson's grocery store at F.M. 78 and Walzem Road, which was being converted into

a retail center by D.H. Realty Partners. Carielo credits Michael Hoover, president of D.H. Realty Partners, with mentoring her and encouraging her to start her own business.

Hoover says he was impressed with Carielo's hard work and honesty when she was with M.J. Boyle and knew she would do well on her own.

"She has built up a great reputation with both her private sector and government work," Hoover says. "I had several large assignments back then that I was able to let her perform on and that helped to catapult her into finding even more work."

Hoover says Carielo is the kind of person who has an answer for any problem before she presents it to you and does so in a way that is fair and equitable for everyone.

"Having a person like Julissa (Carielo) on a project, where I don't have to be constantly looking over her back, makes my job a lot easier," Hoover says.

Carielo recently secured an SBA 504 loan from ACCION Texas for \$400,000 to purchase a 6,000-square-foot building at 1711 S. Laredo St. The move has given her

company the room it desperately needed to grow. She launched her firm in 2008 with just two employees, but is already up to 27 people and growing.

Carielo says that early on she knew that she wanted her company to perform much of its own construction work, rather than subcontracting it all out, so she began hiring carpenters to do finish-out work on her projects.

"This way we are able to better control schedules and provide better quality finishes," she says.

"One of the things we offer is the ability to expedite projects and solve problems by doing most of the design work internally. We hire the architect, review the criteria and price the project up front with the client."

A native of San Antonio, Carielo graduated from SouthSan High School and then earned an accounting degree at St. Mary's University in 1995.

She did some work for an architect while in college and then did accounting work for Fisher Millwork after graduation before joining M.J. Boyle.