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Julissa Carielo

Tejas Premier Building Contractor, Inc.

San Antonio native Julissa Carielo grew up on the south side of town. As with many Southsiders, Julissa graduated from South San High School and has strong ties to the community.

She graduated from St. Mary's University and made a career for herself in the construction industry. As the president of Tejas Premier Building Contractor she now has the opportunity to make a difference in the community she so loves.

The company's meteoric rise to success in the construction industry has opened doors to new possibilities. Julissa and Tejas have captured the attention of media and construction associations, and the honors are stacking up.

Julissa's hard work ethic, educational background and faith are reasons for her success along with strong family support, though her parents' careers were far removed from the construction industry.

Tell me about your parents.

My parents separated when I was 13. My father, Rogelio Cantu, owned a transmission shop in the south side forever. My brother has now taken over that business.

My mother, from the time she divorced, started going to college and never stopped until she received her master's degree from Boston College. She was going to college when I was going to college. Her name is Juanita Cantu, she used to run the Southside YMCA Daycare Center. Now she is running the Good Shepherd Lutheran Day School.

Do you have brothers and sisters?

I have three brothers, three half sisters, one step brother and a half-brother.

I understand you have an accounting degree from St. Mary's University. How did you get into construction?

I never thought construction. I just thought I wanted to do accounting. I went to work for Fisher Millwork off Camp Bullis. I was there three years as the assistant controller.

I had a roommate, one of my girlfriends from St. Mary's. She had applied to go to law school in Houston. I wasn't married and didn't have a serious relationship, and I thought, I would go too. I

hadn't interviewed in three years, so I wanted to practice first and then go apply in Houston. I sent my resume out to a few companies and I got several calls. One of them was M.J. Boyle. He needed a controller.

I was there for eight years and moved up to VP of Finance and Administration. I was his go-to for everything. I learned a lot during that time and I enjoyed it.

I left Boyle and at the time I wasn't really sure what I was going to do. I received a few job offers when the word got out. Then I got a call from Mike Hoover, DH Realty, who was a good friend of one of my best friends. I thought he would be an amazing person to work with. I was thinking he was going to offer me a job. He was thinking I could do this on my own.

He talked about all the services he used with construction. He said, "I need some help and I think that you can do this." I took a lot of notes and told him I would write a business plan to figure out what services I could offer. I came back two weeks later and brought him my business plan as a general contractor and I told him I was ready to work. He let me bid my first project with him. I just needed someone to believe in me and Mike was that person for me.

What was your first project?

It was a finish out for Elite Nutrition Center at Bandera Trails Shopping Center. I bid my second project with Mike Hoover, and my third and my fourth . . . Mike Hoover ended up mentoring me as he guided me through the strong demands he put out.

We got certified as a small, minority, woman-owned business and started bidding more local work. My goal was to reach five repeat clients. Mike helped open the doors and introduced me to a lot of people.

Then I applied for my 8 (a) certification for federal projects. I had heard it would take two years. I got mine in 45 days – perfect timing as a lot of the retail work was drying up and local work was getting more and more competitive. The federal work was a whole new arena I knew nothing about but I was going to make it work for us. By that time we had been working with Southwest Research, UHS, ACCD, Port of San Antonio and Mike Hoover (and his referrals) – my five clients.

We got a call from Lackland. That was our first federal project. Now we take care of Lackland, Randolph and the VA Hospital. I am not at Fort Sam yet, but I am working on it.

Where was your office initially?

9200 Broadway, one of Mike Hoover's properties. He told me I would be taken more seriously if I had an office. It was centrally located and cheap. We grew out of that space in about a year and he moved us to the space next door with the agreement that he would help us find a place to purchase within a year.

Then we purchased our new building on 1711 S. Laredo. We gutted it and finished it out. Now we have a place for



Julissa Carielo in the new Tejas Premier Building Contractor's conference room

our office and yard in the same place and we own it!

We will reach four years in business this August. We have been growing in a down economy and have grown to 27 employees and I'm convinced we have not reached our full potential.

What has helped Tejas succeed?

I was in a mentor/protégé program for two years with Zachry and F.A. Nunnally provided by Bexar County and AGC. Rene Garcia and Doug Nunnally would meet with me every month. They would basically talk about my weaknesses and how to improve, what to watch out for and many how to do's. It was the best support my company needed to help deal with our growing pains.

What are your goals for the company?

I think as a business owner, we can do so much to help the community. I think that if I could do that and use the company to help, then we are there. We are doing what we should be doing.

Tell me about your family.

They are the love of my life. I have two boys, Hector (6) and Oscar (8). They are both in every sports you can think of. They go to St. Anthony's, and right now they are going to San Antonio Academy for the summer.

My husband, Oscar, and I will be married 10 years this August. He joined the company over a year ago. He was an architect working in a structural engineering firm for 15 years. He was working on really large projects all over the United States.

I don't think that he honestly knew what I was doing. He probably thought, "She is busy and she is not bothering me." I basically had to present my company to Oscar and convince him why it was important for him to join the company now – how the company had grown more than I wanted to handle by myself and how wonderful it would be for him to be his own owner. I reviewed with him by then my updated business plan and did a lot of begging until he said yes.

He is very detailed and makes sure we follow the specifications and build according to the plans. He became our in-house quality control inspector and our clients noticed it. They said, they enjoyed Oscar and that he was so detailed, solving problems before they become bigger problems.

Oscar is our VP of Operations. I concentrate more on the business development, estimating and finance. I work on finding new projects work closely with our chief estimator and we get the jobs and then hand them over to operations so our crews can build them. They have to be profitable and they have to satisfy the clients.

Do you have any time for fun?

Let's just say we spend lots of time at our kids' activities, practices and games. I even work the concession stand several times and enjoy family outings with friends.

Is there anything you haven't done yet that you want to do?

I don't know. I am doing what I want to do and I think we just need to think about how we can use that for more than just the business. Right now I feel fortunate because there are not just 27 employees, there are 27 families. We get to know them and we do stuff where we bring in everybody because we want to thank them for supporting their husbands to come work with us and their wives, and we want them to be proud that they work at Tejas Premier. We have a good team and it is not just offering good benefits. It is providing the right support for each other.

I feel very blessed. I have a lot of faith. I believe God watches out for me and takes care of me. He sets it out to where I just have to keep walking. Somehow it all works out for me and my family. I have actually enjoyed building relationships with our clients and the people that support us. It's a good feeling to be in a position where they know you. I think the future is based on relationships and business should be that way. –kf