

Louisa Mendoza

'Chandelier girl' turns home cleaning service into success



DIVERSITY
PROFILE

Louisa Mendoza, owner of Keep it Clean Janitorial Service, started her business in 1999 with \$16.17 and a desire to be self-sufficient.

"I was creative enough to buy a bucket, some rags and some dish soap," she said. "My first job was residential. That's how I started, baby sitting kids and taking care of houses."

A Mexican immigrant and a single mother, Mendoza, 35, said when she first moved to the United States at age 18 she had limited English-speaking skills. She eventually overcame that barrier by watching soap operas and using children's books to learn to read, write and speak English. Along the way she also obtained permanent residency in the United States.

"I knew when I had my kid I had to learn English," she said.

She started her business in order to support herself and her son, who is now 13. She also said the business helped her to become a homeowner.

"I was able to sustain my kid and myself from Keep it Clean," she said.

But language wasn't the only challenge Mendoza faced. She also lacked the skills necessary to launch a successful business. However, networking efforts within the business community allowed her to meet people who could help her learn the ropes. She said leaders at organizations like the

Nevada Microenterprise Initiative helped her learn not only how to properly run a business but also how to grow her business.

"I have to admit there's a lot of good people in town," Mendoza said. "People believed in me, they trusted me and they gave me the opportunities. They believed in me because I performed."

Anna Siefert, operations manager for the Nevada Microenterprise Initiative, said Mendoza has overcome the challenges many immigrants face when trying to launch their own businesses.

"Her determination to be self-sufficient and mostly her commitment to herself to make it in the business had taken her from where she was to where she is," Siefert said.

The company has since evolved into commercial cleaning and construction cleanup services. Keep it Clean Janitorial Service's Las Vegas operation now boasts 10 employees; a second location in Tucson, Ariz.

has four workers.

The company has performed construction cleanup services for Fashion Show Mall, The Boulevard Mall, Galleria at Sunset and the Las Vegas Outlet Center.

Mendoza got one of her biggest breaks at a networking event where she happened to sit next to a diversity representative for MGM MIRAGE. She eventually earned a contract to clean chandeliers at the Bellagio in 2003. She said the company took a chance on her because she had no experience with chandeliers.

"I gave Kenyatta Lewis (supplier diversity manager for MGM MIRAGE) my card. I said, 'I'm a small person.' She said, 'No one is too small for MGM.' She called me the next day. Now I'm in charge of 619 chandeliers (at the Bellagio). Everybody calls me the chandelier girl."

— Alana Roberts

Jamie Yoshizawa

Developer fits right into male-dominated field



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As a graduate of the University of Hawaii's civil engineering program, Yoshizawa is also quite accustomed to working in a male-dominated field. "It's kind of like the Mars and Venus thing, men see the big picture and want to kind of plow through things. Women tend to be more detail-oriented. I think you need both."

After arriving in Las Vegas in the mid-1990s with no ties to the community, armed with only her engineering degree and a huge desire to succeed, Yoshizawa used simple hard work to establish her company, which has developed and owns The Cauldron Tavern at Russell Road and I-215, and is developing several other projects throughout the valley.

"I showed up in Las Vegas and met a lot of these great people just by calling classified ads. These people have become my mentors, partners. I've been very fortunate," she adds. "My parents always said I could do whatever I wanted. I think so many of us come from immigrant families. Our parents or grandparents came here with nothing. And what they wanted for us was to get an education. An education is what my parents could give me."

Yoshizawa enjoys the development side of her multi-faceted business the most. "You really can't go to school to learn development. There are so many things to look at and take into consideration, the location, the tenant's needs ... there's so much emotion and other factors," she said.

Some of Pacific's current projects include: The Village at the Cauldron, a retail complex

If you mention the topic of diversity to Jaimee Yoshizawa, you may get an odd look at first. Don't confuse it with a lack of understanding of her own Japanese/Hawaiian roots or ambivalence to the subject.

The 36-year-old president of Pacific Concepts, a Las Vegas-based real estate development, brokerage, civil engineering and property management company, simply enjoys the people she works with and has a tendency to not dwell on differences.

"When people say diversity, I actually

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Jamie Yoshizawa

have to stop and think about it," the energetic Hawaiian said. "I look around me and realize it. My fiancé's a six-foot-seven-inch white guy, my business partners are Cuban, Jewish ... It's one of those things that I don't really think about, but then you mention it and it's like 'oh yeah!'"

that will surround the Cauldron Tavern; Mountain Dream Center, a mixed-use project in Henderson; and The Gables, a residential subdivision also in Henderson.

— Brian Sodoma

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