

inspirations

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Jeanette Prenger

Exceeding Her Wildest Dreams

For Jeanette Prenger, the definition of persistence is synonymous to success. And in today's society, when so many people are engaged in relationships for strictly career reasons, Jeanette is engaged in a career for purely relationship reasons. A power house of knowledge and energy, her motivation for success has not been to acclaim numerous awards to align her office walls, but it has completely come through hard work, staying power, and putting the needs of others first; ethics her parents taught her as a child.

Founder and president of Kansas City-based ECCO Select Corp., a company that provides project management, information technology, supplemental staffing and consulting, Jeanette has captured the 2010 regional small business award, being named Minority Small Business Champion of the Year for her help to minority small business owners. Criteria for that award includes staying power, adding employees and increasing sales, financial performance, innovation, and response to adversity.

Recently she was elected as vice chair of the U.S. Hispanic Chamber of Commerce, along with Nina Vaca, the new chair. This is the first time that these leadership positions are being held by two women, a groundbreaking and historic

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benchmark for this national organization. And although most of her duties will be focused nationwide, Jeanette is already making plans to utilize the USHCC platform on a local level.

“As part of the first ‘Latina’ leadership team in the 31 year history of the USHCC, I’d like to be remembered for taking the organization to the next level. Leveraging best practices to create a high performing organization that is recognized nationally for its ability to advocate for Hispanic businesses and provide value to our corporate partners. On a more selfish level, I would like to bring procurement opportunities to our local Hispanic business owners and grow our Kansas City Hispanic Chamber of Commerce. There is so much going on and as our economy turns itself around, I want to make sure that I help communicate how businesses can participate in the recovery. The USHCC was the brainchild of local Hispanic business owners, including Manny Lopez (owner of Manny’s on Southwest Boulevard) and I feel honored that Kansas City continues to influence the role of this national organization.”

In 2001, when America was struggling to rise above the rubble of 9/11, Jeanette’s fighting spirit shifted into high

gear. Her company has grown in double digits since 2002, but she attributes climbing the corporate ladder has come from help of those around her. With the strong shoulder of her husband in helping raise their two boys, the foundation laid from her parents and the corroboration of her employees, she realizes all these elements have paved the way for ECCO Select to become a viable company in the heart of downtown KC.

“If it wasn’t for the support of my husband Kevin, I couldn’t do what I have done. He took up the slack in what typically you think the wife should do. He didn’t deter me from it and even though he was skeptical, he remained supportive. I’m really the type A personality and he’s laid back; he balances me.”

Born from ethnic decent, Jeanette is proud of her heritage and the “old school” values her parents instilled.

“My dad is Hispanic and my mother Portuguese. I’m the oldest of six and both of my parents are firm believers in education. And even though my mom didn’t work outside the home, they both taught us how we really needed to take care of ourselves. My dad is very intelligent. My mother is a very creative and strong woman. They instilled in us a strong work ethic and to always strive to be our best. I know that those traits along with a competitive spirit have helped me to have the perspective on how can I constantly improve and be better in all aspects of my life.”

ECCO Select has three offices located nationwide, with the headquarters located at 1301 Oak Street, across from the Sprint Center. The company has steadily racked up an impressive list of awards and recognitions during its growth. In the past nine years, ECCO Select has been among the Top 10 Small Businesses in the Kansas City metro area. It was named one of the top 500 Hispanic-owned companies in the United States, recognized as a “Top 25 under 25” company by Ingram’s magazine and touted as the Minority Economic Development Council Service Firm of the Year. The company was honored by Ingram’s as one of the fastest-growing corporations in the Corporate 100 listing in 2001 and continued to receive that honor through 2006. The company has also been recognized as one of Deloitte and Touche’s Fast 50 Information Technology companies in the Midwest for three years running.

“The company awards make my staff very proud. It’s important to draw out high value in people and bring out their level of success.” Jeanette adds, “But it’s been my focus to strive to do the best at whatever you do. I’m honored that someone would even think I would be worthy of any type of award. I was raised where you don’t put yourself up front, and if you do good work, well...the actions speak louder than words. I’m always wondering what is it that I’ve done that would warrant an award. You just don’t think about it because it’s just the way you do business.”

Jeanette’s love for the community around her is only an outward extension of her warm and outgoing personality. She is always looking inward to see what more can be done to help others. Within the community, she has staked her interest in diverse areas. She is on the board of:

- Boy Scouts of America
- United Way
- Kansas City Convention and Visitors Association
- Friends of the Zoo
- Truman Medical Center Foundation
- Starlight
- KC Friends of Alvin Ailey
- Junior Achievement

There are two women that Jeanette admires most, women that she tries to pattern herself after.

“Adele Hall and Anita Gorman are two women in our community that I admire. They’re smart and are always looking how to make our community a better place. I like to think of them as my informal mentors. I try to pattern myself after them and hope that one day I can contribute as much to



our area as they have.”

In July, Jeanette and her husband celebrated 30 years of marriage, and last November she embraced turning 50. But in her book, she’s just getting started. Her children are grown now but she has the joy of being a grandparent and loving every minute of it.

“I am really blessed and recognize that I am very blessed. In my own terms I have a successful business and have the luxury of seeing my family daily. I remember when I was younger and thinking about those women that have it all, and in some shape or form I’ve been able to have it all. It hasn’t always happened at once, but when I look back I’ve been able to obtain those things, the goals I’ve set for myself. I can’t see myself ever not working. I enjoy being busy. But more time with the grandkids and being more active with our community are future goals. I would like to be more hands on.”

In 2009, ECCO Select reported their revenue at \$8.5 million, growing in double digit percentage increments since 2002. In the early years, Jeanette dug in her heels, refused to declare bankruptcy, pooled on her own personal savings, and went head long into the downturn of the economy; focused and determined to help others through the recession. “Successful people help other people be successful,” Jeanette says with conviction.” You never want to turn your back on someone that has a need. And persistence is the key, I never say never.....bring it on.” ■

