

BUILDING A BUSINESS

From child carpenter to construction manager

By WHITNEY STEWART

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Amid the din of hammers and saws, a young girl and her father worked from a how-to magazine to build a loft bed in the girl's tiny bedroom. When she grew up, she thought, she wanted to be a carpenter.

Decades later, a love for building stayed with her, but instead of carpentry, Theresa Alfaro Daytner, 44, started a construction management company.

And instead of building beds, her Daytner Construction Group oversees multimillion-dollar building projects in Maryland, Virginia and Washington.

"I've wanted to be an entrepreneur my entire life," she says. "I've been training for this since I was about two feet tall."

In quiet Mt. Airy, Md., far away from the commotion of cranes and bulldozers, Mrs. Daytner sits in her corner office and calls a prospective client. It doesn't take long to get an idea of his project, and in a few minutes, they are chatting like old friends. It's an example of how much she lives by the plaque hanging next to her desk. The painted surface reads, "Enter as strangers, leave as friends."

Since starting DCG in 2003, she has set the vision for building her organization. She makes the executive decisions and keeps an eye on company finances, but she says it's building and tending relationships with clients and partners she most enjoys.

"I'm a super delegator," she says, explaining her vision to create a self-sustaining company that can operate without much direct supervision from her. "It's my job to stay innovative and creative."

Her drive to satisfy clients and find creative solutions has helped her land contracts. Under DCG's management, new buildings have risen on the campus of George Mason University in Fairfax. On top of a mountain in McHenry, Md., a DCG-built whitewater-rafting course swirls thousands of gallons of water between boulders for adventure-seeking rafters. And under DCG's watchful eye, renovations and a new wing are nearing completion at Prince George's County Family Crisis Center in Brentwood.

DCG reached \$1 million in revenues in 2007. Mrs. Daytner hopes to build to \$25 million five years from now, but she knows getting that kind of growth will take playing the right cards. And it won't happen overnight.

"It's a little hard to go out and run some miles when you're just learning how to crawl," she says. "If I say I want to be a \$10 million organization, what does that even look like?"

Mrs. Daytner is training to run in the Marine Corps Marathon next October, but she is also working hard to get her business running at an ever faster pace. (She still has five children to put through college, she explains.) In the last three years, she has hired 12 employees, most of whom work full time to manage the company's ongoing projects. She also surrounds herself with specialists — a certified public accountant, a commercial insurance broker, a lawyer — to

help plan her business moves. And she values the expertise of her business partner and husband of 18 years, Allen Daytner.

"I work with my husband, and he is really, really good at the technical part, and I am really, really good at everything else," she says. "We complement each other so well that for the most part, we know each other would make the same decision."

Mrs. Daytner began her entrepreneurial forays with a roofing business in college and a private public accounting business for 11 years in her home. And although her financial experience has served her well in running her current company, she says she prefers donning work boots and a flannel shirt and walking around a construction site.

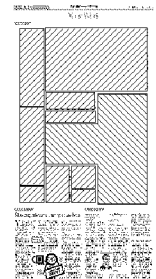
"I'm much more interested in construction than I ever was in accounting," she says. "I love the environment."

But getting the company off the ground wasn't easy. In 2003, five of the six Daytner children still lived at home — including 1½-year-old twin boys — and Mrs. Daytner was caring for her aging parents. In the company's first two years, she

had made only a few contracts, but by 2005, the business was coasting, and she knew she needed to dedicate full time to build it.

"It was, 'Either you're doing it, or you're not,'" she recalls.

She saved money for four months, then hired a nanny to cook meals, clean house and watch the kids. When business contracts still hadn't come in, she applied for a home-equity loan, sure success was just around the corner. She smiles at the memory.



"I gave my husband the application and said, 'Here, honey, sign this but don't read it,' " she says. "I told my nanny, 'We're the poorest family you're ever going to work for.' "

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By 2006, she landed her largest project to date and that year, DCG's revenue grew 800 percent.

"We get in our own way of our potentials more than anybody else can," she says, remembering how she once nearly gave up pursuing her college degree at the University

of Maryland's School of Business in accounting to work in a hospital cafeteria.

But the entrepreneurial spirit she learned from her father and the creative approach to problems she learned from her mother spurred her to pursue her lifelong dream to own her own business. Now, focused on building DCG, she and her husband play tag team caring for the family and running the business.

"We don't have assigned roles," says Mr. Daytner, 49.

"It's not uncommon for me to cook dinner, go to the grocery store. She's been known to install light fixtures. It's divide and conquer a lot of times."

"I think we're very fortunate because separation of duties has never been hard for us," Mrs. Daytner adds.

While she spends most days with clients, Mrs. Daytner participates in CEO organizations, like Make Mine a Million \$ Business Program and Vistage International. And she takes time to counsel others in one-on-one times, too.

Over pizza and pasta one day last week, she met with Sarah P. Moore, a new entrepreneur.

"How have you done so well in a male-dominated industry?" asks Mrs. Moore. Both women own businesses in industries typically not thought of as women's professions — construction and data warehousing.

"I have this uncanny personality where I just feel like I belong there," Mrs. Daytner an-

swers. "And it shows. Being a woman in business in construction, there is a stereotype that I come up against that I am a front and my husband put me up to it." She laughs at the thought and says many barriers for female entrepreneurs are often more internal than external.

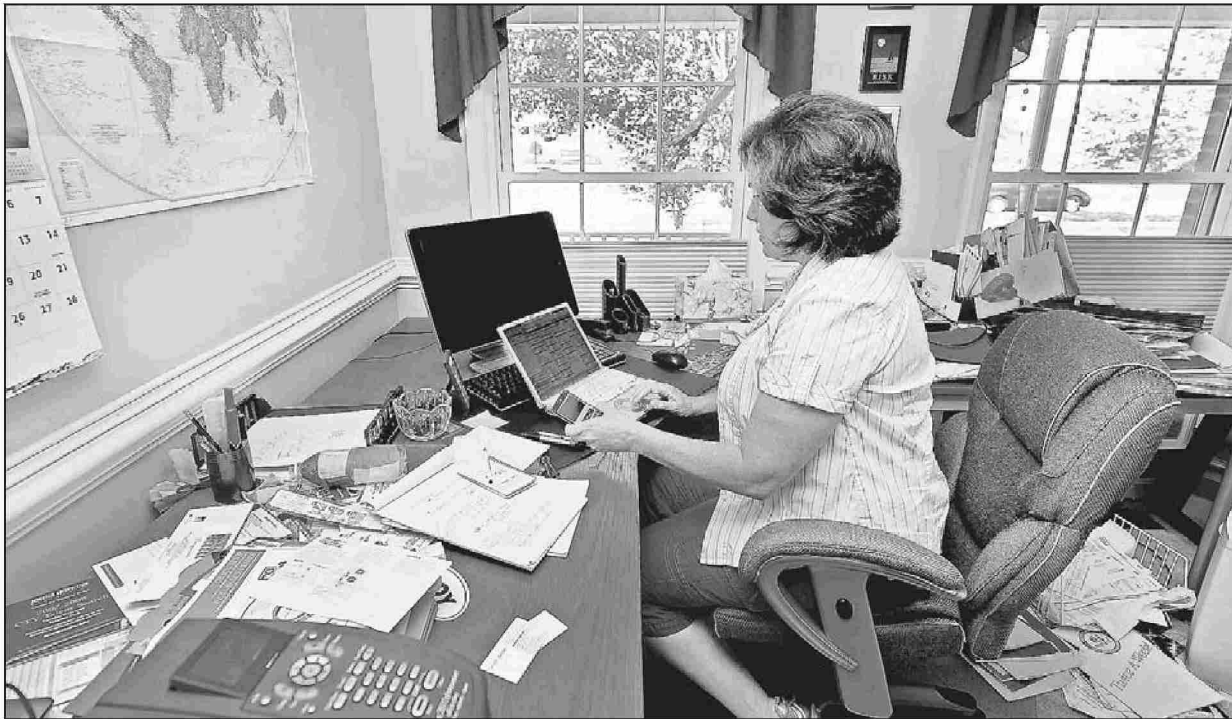
Mrs. Daytner says she thinks of herself as a "wildly successful person." And when she makes a promise, she makes sure to follow up on it, regardless of how challenging it may be to fulfill. It's

an attitude she expects will carry her eventually into an even better financial position.

"I'm going to be the same person I am today in 10 years," she says, "I'm just going to be carrying more revenue under me."

Her encouragement and advice aren't lost on her protege.

"I'm getting the steps," says Mrs. Moore. "I've always known the end result, but I've never known how to get from A to B. And that's what I'm getting from Theresa."



PHOTOGRAPHS BY JOSEPH SILVERMAN/WASHINGTON TIMES

Theresa Daytner gets some work down in her down office before going out on the street and to her downtown office. Theresa Daytner runs a construction management firm and keep track of her 4 children that are living at home.



Theresa Daytner (above right) visits the job site of Dave Scraton of CBI construction in downtown Mt. Airy. Theresa picks up Candice (left) for a ride to camp. Theresa (below with paper) goes over the days schedule with Amanda who will watch the children, Logan, Matthew and Candice.

