

LOOKING TO SHATTER THE GLASS CEILING, REGENCY CONSTRUCTION SERVICES INC.'S TARI RIVERA HAS BUILT A CAREER PATH IN HER MALE-DOMINATED INDUSTRY.

Breaking Free

By Peter Strozniak

During much of her engineering and construction career, Tari Rivera was the only one.

She was the only woman majoring in engineering (class of 1982) at the University of Akron where some professors inquired why she was taking their class. And during the 12 years she worked for construction companies as an engineer, she was the only woman at project meetings. Finally, in 1994, she found herself alone once again, this time without a job after the company she worked for went out of business.

Because of her reputation for being a hardworking, talented engineer, Rivera received several offers from other firms. Not to her surprise, however, she discovered those companies had no women in senior management positions. If she joined one of these firms, Rivera realized it would be an uphill battle to break the glass ceiling.

So in September 1994, Rivera established her own construction management and general contracting firm, Regency Construction Services Inc.

While rearing her two-year-old son, she operated her new firm from her North Royalton home.

Within three months, she won several projects as a subcontractor for larger construction companies. By January 1995, she had enough work to open an office in Lakewood. By 2000, she had 20 employees and expanded her office space to 12,000 square feet. In addition to Regency's subcontracting work, the firm took on projects as a lead contractor for the Ohio Schools Facilities Commission that oversees construction of schools throughout the state.

In 2000, Rivera welcomed John Sanner as a

minority partner to continue to grow the privately owned company.

"After six years, I was looking for someone to help me build the firm and share our vision, the burden of ownership and decision making," Rivera says. "John really liked our company culture, which is a culture of people helping each other regardless of what their job titles are. Together we've taken the firm from 20 employees to 60 employees, and we also expanded our markets."

In addition to growing the firm's K-12 school construction business, Regency also developed a list of health care and university construction projects throughout Ohio. Today, the company's annual revenues total \$90 million.

Rivera is most proud of creating a company where women can advance their careers in construction and engineering.

"In our firm, 51 percent of our 60-person staff at all levels are women," says Rivera. "In the construction industry, less than 10 percent of employees are females. I am really proud of that." Regency accomplished its vision of advancing the careers of women in construction by committing to training and development.

For Rivera, her dreams of becoming an engineer took hold when she was in high school. Her father and grandfather, also engineers, supported her. But many girls are not encouraged to look at construction and engineering careers.

Rivera is determined to change that for new generations.

She is involved in many programs at the University of Akron that support and keep women in the engineering and construction fields. Rivera also participates in other initiatives that encourage girls in grade schools and high schools across Northeast Ohio to explore the industry, as well as other careers that require a strong educational background in science and mathematics.

