

The Desert Sun

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Business rises to the top

Concrete contractor ranks third-largest in California

BY DENISE GOOLSBY
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Indio-based Desert Commercial Concrete was recently named one of the largest residential concrete contractors in the U.S. by Residential Concrete magazine.

The company, formerly Desert Communities Concrete, ranked fifth among residential concrete contractors in the U.S. and third among those in California. The announcement was made at the recent World of Concrete industry convention in Las Vegas.

Diane Williams, owner and president of Desert Commercial Concrete and Milmark Painting Inc., also located in Indio, said she was surprised by the announcement.

"I just thought of myself as a little concrete contractor," Williams said. "I knew we were the biggest in the valley, but the Coachella Valley is a little bit different than the whole state."

Allen Janisch, senior project manager for Toll Brothers, a nationwide home builder with operations in the Coachella Valley, wasn't surprised by Williams' accomplishment.

Hers are the only concrete and painting companies Toll Brothers has used since expanding its operation to the valley about eight years ago.

Janisch said Williams' accessibility to her customers and the consistency of her workforce are factors that have contributed to her companies' success.

"If you have a problem or you want to talk to her, she's readily available," Janisch said. "She'll come out and meet with me personally."

Employees make difference

The competition to attract and retain qualified workers is a challenge, Williams said.

Williams said she's fortunate to have so many loyal, longtime employees. She thinks the opportunities for advancement within the company contribute to employee retention.

Williams, who is also the president of the Desert Contractors' Association, a trade association of builders, subcontractors, suppliers and consultants in-



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Diane Williams, president and owner of Desert Commercial Concrete.

involved in the construction industry of the Coachella Valley, was instrumental in making English classes easily accessible to Spanish-speaking workers.

The DCA subsidizes a six-week program for those employed in the construction field in the Coachella Valley.

Williams said the incentive for learning English is the opportunity for advancement. Bilingual managers are a valuable commodity.

"Now we can promote them to foreman because they can speak English," Williams said.

In her not-so-spare time, Williams donates her efforts to Building Horizons, a program that teaches kids basic construction skills.

A gender challenge

Williams got her start in the concrete contracting business when she went to work for Frances Markley, Corp. in 1986.

In the early 1990s, when Markley decided to close his business, Williams offered to buy the company.

Williams' prior experience with the company laid the foundation for the next step in her career.

"I said, 'Well, I can do that,'" said Williams, adding that Markley replied that he didn't think women could run that type of business.

"Which made me think, 'Why not?'" said Williams. "He challenged me."

It's been 15 years since she accepted the challenge, and although she works

The Williams Companies

Desert Commercial Concrete and Milmark Painting, Inc., together make up The Williams Companies. Both are the largest firms in their fields headquartered in the Coachella Valley.

The companies provide contracted concrete and painting services to production home builders; custom home builders; homeowner associations; and commercial builders of office, retail and industrial projects.

in a male-dominated industry, being a woman is an advantage, she said.

"It's a little bit easier for women. They don't have to one-up everyone."