

NEW HOMES ARIZONA

Created by Republic Custom Publishing

- ◆ COMMUNITIES
- ◆ HOME BUILDERS
- ◆ INDUSTRY

Builder Profile:

Trudy Licano connects people to places

By Joan Westlake

When she was a little girl, Trudy Licano followed her father, Joseph Rogers, as he worked in the in the east-central Arizona town of Taylor.

"I'm the youngest of three daughters," she said. "I guess my dad made me his surrogate son. I loved working with my father. I learned so much about the best and honest ways of running your own business from him."

Licano, president and CEO of Via Homes Inc., said the family business, Rogers Brother Construction, founded by her grandfather Chas Rogers, was involved in many of the state's major dam and highway projects. She said her family jokes that they taught Del E. Webb all about the business, and they have a photo of a young Webb with her father and grandfather to prove it.

"When I moved to the Valley to work on my marketing degree, I started working for a builder," she said. "I discovered I really liked that whole industry."

The builder was selling about 40 homes a year. Licano changed some of the floor plans and targeted the marketing. The next year, sales hit 400 homes.

"I decided to go out on my own, and when I went to borrow money to



Trudy Licano

start the business, one lender said to me, "Trudy, I've lent money to men who know how to build houses,

but not how to sell them. I'd rather lend money to someone who knows how to sell the homes," she said. "He said I'd learn how to build."

In 1984, Licano became Arizona's first female licensed as the qualifying party for a residential general contractor's license. It wasn't an easy road to pave.

"I remember this concrete contractor who was this huge, burly, 300-pound guy who blocked the sun out," she said, laughing. "I was yipping at him saying he was late and he was supposed to be there three days ago. He told me I didn't have the right temperament and I wouldn't last three months. Well, 24 years later, I'm still here. There were a lot of people telling me I couldn't do it. It drove me to succeed."

The company was originally called Vanguard because "the name sounded regal." But within a year, she bought out her partners and changed the

name to Via Homes.

"It is a little word in the dictionary that connects people to things, and that is how I felt I was in the business," Licano said.

"So many of my clients say that they are more comfortable working with a woman," she said. "With a male builder, they feel intimidated or he would talk over their heads. I offer very detailed and very personable attention."

She added that the ability to work out details at the beginning greatly reduces the change-order nightmares and delays that can occur.

As a testament to great contractor/client relations, Licano and her husband, also a partner in the business, recently spent a weekend vacationing with clients-turned-friends. Their 5,000-square-foot custom home came in with only a few change orders and a remarkably low \$15,000 difference from the original estimate.

Licano said Via is weathering the economic situation well because of diversity in its business and involvement in the community, such as being a founding member of the locally owned and run Gateway Commercial bank.

For the distant future, she said she looks to follow in the steps of her mother and paternal grandmother who were known in the Taylor area for their knowledge of health.

"I would like to found a nutrition and wellness non-profit educational program for my local community when I finally retire from the building profession," she said. "I believe from the foundation of health springs all other of life's happiness and successes and allows the golden years to be just that."

Snapshot

Age: "Plenty-9"

Company: Via Homes

Years in business: 24

Family: spouse Michael; daughters Miranda, 14 and Banner, 16

Hometown: Taylor, Ariz.

Community service: Underwrite

"English is Second Language" classes for the non-profit origination Change Point and served for three years as a member of the board of directors for the organization that feeds and clothes hundreds of people annually in the Mesa area. Sponsored organizations such as Sojourner's Center, LaMesta Family Shelter and Habitat for Humanity. A founding member of Gateway Commercial Bank that opened in 2007 and is one of Arizona's most successful de Novo community banks.

Work in progress: The Enclave-Via Bella, a 30-lot gated community in Gilbert; and Gateway Norte Builder Park, a 100-acre park in Mesa showcasing builder-related goods and services.

Greatest accomplishment: "As for personal achievements, I would say I am most proud of my two daughters. Business-wise, I would say it is our Gateway Norte Builder Park. It was the first of its kind, an entire business park dedicated to the building/design/real estate/finance professions."

What is surprising about you: "I can play the accordion. After 22 years of marriage, my husband found out when I picked one up at a garage sale and started to play it."