

In Business LAS VEGAS

Sisters have big plans for construction supply business



Leila Navidi

Determined to succeed: Karly Urata is president and owner of K&K Construction Supply.

By [Brian Wargo](#), In Business reporter

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Two sisters are out to change the perception that construction is a man's business.

The sisters, Karly and Kelly Urata, came to Las Vegas with dreams of starting their own construction supply business a little more than two years ago when construction was booming in the valley at the time.

Despite the slowdown in construction today, the owners of K&K Construction Supply of North Las Vegas are trying to capitalize on their new designation as a woman-owned business enterprise that helps them win contracts for government work and companies that reach out to minorities.

"Being a woman-owned business was an obstacle in what is viewed as a man's world," Karly said. "It is not

like the fashion business where women dominate.”

The sisters are no strangers to the construction industry: They grew up working for their dad’s concrete contracting firm in Sacramento.

Karly started at the bottom as a laborer and eventually moved up to administration where she ran the accounts payable department and worked in estimating. She left the company for three years to work as an industrial real estate broker.

Kelly also learned the business from the ground up and worked in the accounting and real estate side of the company as well.

Las Vegas was a natural choice for the sisters, Karly says. The casino industry was booming and a designation as a minority-owned business would allow them to fill a niche in the market.

“We saw the opportunity to be women in business in Nevada because the casinos were seeking diversity in their contracts,” Karly said.

The designation did not come easily, Karly said. It took about a year to obtain the certification, and because of that lengthy time the company lost out on contracts because it hadn’t been qualified as a woman-owned business. But with the federal stimulus package and requirements that a percentage of the work be done by minority-owned businesses, that is creating opportunities with road contractors and other government building projects, Karly said.

“It is very important to a business like ours,” Karly said. “It took us a while to get started and get our name out, and it continues to grow every month. There is going to be a lot of construction work in the state, and we can get a lot of that. Without that, it would be very difficult to survive in this economy for a newly opened business.”

The firm sells such construction products as lumber, grout, chemicals, formwork, safety supplies, small tools and power equipment.

Not many competitors thought the company would be around for very long, Karly said. People would call and question whether they were still in business and some would suggest they wouldn’t last, she says. Vendors were reluctant to do business with them at first, and it was a challenge to attract employees, she said.

“We are taking millions of dollars of supplies from our competitors, and people still questioned whether two girls could make in the construction business by themselves,” Karly said. “The more they shot us down, the more we wanted to succeed.”

Karly, 31, is the president, and Kelly, 33, is vice president, but those are just titles and don’t reflect who is the boss, the sisters said.

“They are only titles,” Kelly said. “They are irrelevant. We both wear so many hats.”

Working together hasn’t been a problem since they have done so since they were teenagers and are close, Kelly said. She said she wouldn’t have it any other way because it’s family members you can count on and trust the most, she said.

The sisters’ goal is to grow into one of the larger construction supply companies in Las Vegas and be successful enough to open stores in California.

Despite their early success in a man’s field, the sisters said they owe a lot to their dad, Charles, for providing them the framework to operate a business.

“He gave us a lot of the skills to run a business as far as knowing how to manage employees and cash flow,” Kelly said. “He worked long, diligent hours and what he did to make it a success. He pushed through the ups and down and didn’t give up when things weren’t so good.”

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