

A photograph of two women in a construction site. One woman is standing, wearing a red dress and a patterned scarf, with her arms crossed. The other woman is sitting on a wooden ledge, wearing a blue dress and a large blue necklace. The background shows wooden framing and a view of a city and mountains under a blue sky.

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RENO  
MAGAZINE

## Framing the Future

Women leaders in the homebuilding industry sound off about building successful businesses and families

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### NOT QUITE ROUGHING IT

LUXURY CAMPING OPENS THE GREAT OUTDOORS TO THE MORE COMFORT INCLINED

# 6

GREAT HOME DÉCOR SHOPS IN RENO



# LAYING *the* FOUNDATION LAYING THE FOUNDATION

THESE LEADERS IN THE HOMEBUILDING INDUSTRY ARE STEERING THEIR COMPANIES TOWARD RECOVERY — WHILE MAINTAINING THE FRAMEWORK FOR SUCCESSFUL FAMILY LIFE

## RAISING THE ROOF

Allyson Rameker and Teresa Di Loreto-Long have shattered the glass ceiling in a male-dominated industry.

**L**ISTEN CAREFULLY: YOU MAY JUST HEAR THE PERCEPTIBLE SOUNDS OF A HOUSING MARKET ON THE MEND.

Only months ago, large expanses of sagebrush seas dotted with signs touting “Future community” sat eerily quiet. Today, they are the sites of residences on the rise — wood frames emerging, saws buzzing, hard-hatted workers skillfully waving hammers.

The din and clamor of construction once again resonates throughout northern Nevada, thanks in part to women like Teresa Di Loreto-Long and Allyson Rameker. These homebuilding executives recently sat down with RENO Magazine to tackle topics like an industry on the upswing, the challenge of achieving work-life balance and the demands facing legislators as they work to quicken the pace of local economic recovery.





## TERESA DI LORETO-LONG

**DON'T LET HER UNIFORM FOOL YOU:** Today, she's dressed in a black Manogue hoodie, charcoal ski pants and a manicured but tousled coarse-cut bob. The swoosh of her stride is audible above the ubiquitous gurgles and groans of a massive Starbucks coffeemaker delivering a steaming venti mocha to a clearly caffeine-deprived patron nearby.

"My son races this morning," Di Loreto-Long says, confirming the time by reaching for her ever-present iPhone. "The Manogue ski team is seeded No. 1 in the state, so I can't wait to watch today."

The power of her name and her role in the building industry are almost obscured by the casual ski garb and family talk — until a Starbucks customer approaches the table and reminds the casual observer of DiLoreto-Long's influence in the community.

"Thank you for everything you do for our veterans," says Clint, a University of Nevada student undertaking a project dedicated to veterans on campus.

"We need to talk," she says, handing him a card. And

in a Starbucks nestled on Di Loreto property in Damonte Ranch, another deal is hatching for the greater good of the community.

Di Loreto-Long plays a critical role in the executive leadership of Di Loreto Homes of Nevada, but says it is the community work she undertakes that inspires her and reflects her passion for the area. She plans the annual team roping event on behalf of the Reno Rodeo and serves as executive director of the Nevada Military Support Alliance.

"My family believes in giving back," she says. "Charity work is very near and dear to our hearts and a driving force for not only why we do what we do, but how we approach homebuilding."

The company philosophy, she says, never changed — despite an industry that has experienced extreme ebbs and flows and a company that has adapted nimbly. After its first foray into homebuilding, Vintage Hills in Sparks, Di Loreto Construction focused on commercial building and land development, deciding to return to new homebuilding when the land in Damonte Ranch became available.

"We just wanted to build homes at a certain level, one that is so rewarding," she says, carefully sipping her coffee. "We're seeing homebuyers coming in and actually owning their first homes. I mean, the excitement — we're really good at nurturing these buyers, taking them through the process. We don't hand them off to someone else. Most of the time you'll see myself or my cousin or uncle right in there, in the sales office to help.

"It's about forming relationships. It's not about just putting sticks in the air, putting in what they paid for and moving forward. This is their home. That's always been our philosophy."

And the philosophy is paying off. In 2012 (February through September), the company sold and closed 14 homes. Now, in mid-February at the time of the interview, 33 sites are in development in Damonte Ranch's La Casata.

"We currently have 13 reservations, which is huge — we've done no advertising, and it's all word of mouth. When the light switch went on, it went on."

But when the switch was off, the dark allowed for enhanced perspective.

"Years ago it used to be so common, every two weeks or so, I'd be on a jobsite and have a flat tire from nails," Di Loreto-Long says. "But just a few weeks ago, I'm out on a jobsite with my cousin for the first time in a long time, and I thought, 'Wow I wonder how long until I get my first hole in my tire?' I didn't realize I would appreciate it so much, but a hole in my tire isn't so bad. It means we're all working."

## ALLYSON RAMEKER

**MOST DAYS YOU'LL FIND ALLYSON RAMEKER DEEP IN HER BASEMENT,** an apt metaphor for the foundational role she plays in the company she owns and operates with husband Victor — Desert Wind Homes.

"It's ideal, because every once in a while I get to take a break, come upstairs and give my kids a kiss," she says of her twins, one boy and one girl, 10 months old at the time of the interview. "Then I return to the basement to get more work done."

The work is important, but so is family to this local. She and her husband met while growing up in Singapore — both moved there with their families at age 6. But they weren't high school sweethearts, and when both left Singapore for college on the mainland she says she "didn't give it a second thought" when they parted ways.

But years later, mutual friends would reconnect them, and their love story would begin.

Both had an interest in real estate — his in finance, hers in sales/marketing. After marrying, they worked for and then took over a successful homebuilding business in Las Vegas in 2010. They began looking for a community in which to start their family. They chose Reno, relocating here and



bringing the business with them when Allyson was 20 weeks pregnant.

A move to one of the worst housing markets in the world might seem daunting. But not to the Ramekers, who were relocating from Las Vegas — a market even harder hit.

"We often sit in meetings, and people will joke 'remember when...' and reminisce about how great things used to be," she says. "But Victor and I have been in the industry only during the bad times. We don't remember the good, which is great for us!"

She compares this professional context to the experience they had taking up an unrelated hobby overseas.

"Victor and I learned to scuba dive in Singapore, where the visibility in the water is like 1 foot in all directions," she explains. "As part of the certification, you have to do all these exercises to navigate this incredibly murky water. It's like that for us in the industry — we know our way around the murky waters. We've done all these exercises and made it through."

In 2011, she estimates they closed 15 homes; last year, they sold more than 60.

"That's a huge positive trend," she says. "Not one that will maintain itself, but one we're hoping will normalize."

Rameker points to the power of a small homebuilder's agility as a key factor in Desert Winds' success.

"Almost every home we build — even the small home that's all of 1,700 square feet — we are more than happy to accommodate buyers with custom requests, like combining two rooms into one. It doesn't cost us any more, and it makes the buyer happy."

A ray of hope for continued future success for Desert Winds and other local homebuilders is offered through this year's legislative session, which may address Chapter 40 laws. Essentially, Chapter 40 allows homebuyers to sue builders for defects. Rameker paraphrases Nevada's seemingly skewed statistics, asserting that the national average for construction defects is about 3 percent; in Nevada, that average is around 113 percent, primarily she says due to a clause in the Nevada law allowing attorneys to get automatic fees for lawsuits.

"So obviously, there's an incentive to sue builders, which has put some companies out of business," she says. "We agree builders should fix legitimate problems, but our hope is the legislature does something to fix the way this law is written."

And just as laws may be changing, so are perceptions of females in a male-dominated industry.

"Look, the woman usually buys the house," she laughs. "We're not just selling to men, so why should only men build them? We value all perspectives in our company, all of us providing feedback about ways to make floor plans better. It's all about improving the product — regardless of gender." ■