

A Career Built on Success

A Look at How the President and CEO of RHD Enterprises Has Turned Opportunities into Achievements.

DEBBIE RITENOUR

Rozanne Garman started a small residential tile company in her home and grew it into a general contracting firm that serves federal, commercial, and industrial clients across the country. Here's how she did it.



“Falling” is not a word you want to hear when you’re in the construction industry. But for Rozanne Garman, president and CEO of RHD Enterprises in Tumwater, falling into the field was one of the best things that could have happened to her.

Garman, who was born in New Zealand and moved to the United States at the age of 8, did not grow up dreaming of owning her own construction company. She didn’t dream of going into construction at all.

“I had no desire or inclination to go into construction. It was not even a thought in my brain,” Garman said. “In high school, I wanted to be a neonatologist.”

But thanks to some early breaks, a few great mentors, and a lot of hard work, Garman now runs a successful construction company that grosses almost \$15 million a year. The company recently graduated from the U.S. Small Business Administration’s (SBA’s) 8(a) Business Development program and is poised to continue its tremendous growth.

“From the very beginning, we’ve experienced significant changes to who we are and what we are about. Every year has looked different,” Garman said. “I’m extremely proud of the team we have and where we’re at today.”

Background

THE JOB:

President and CEO
of RHD Enterprises

ORIGINALLY FROM:

New Zealand

FIRST HIGH-PROFILE PROJECT:

Thurston County Coroner’s
facility

MOST RECENT HIGH-PROFILE PROJECT:

Tumwater Historic Brewery
Tower Renovation

HOBBIES:

Reading, singing karaoke,
spending time with family

PROUDEST

ACCOMPLISHMENT:

Her children

RHD Enterprises
www.rhdenterprises.com



RECOGNIZING OPPORTUNITIES

Garman's very first full-time job served as her launching pad into the industry. She worked for a fire sprinkler contractor in Thurston County, first as a secretary and then as the office manager. In that role, she learned about the accounting side of running a small business. She then served as the office manager for a fencing contractor before moving to a position with a general contractor.

"The owner of that company taught me how to read a spec book, how to read drawings, and how to put a bid together," Garman said. "He basically taught me the fundamentals of construction and gave me my first opportunity to actually lead projects."

He also taught Garman how to design pre-engineered buildings. At the age of 26, she took on her first high-profile project: the design of the Thurston County Coroner's facility. The state-of-the-art 7,000-square-foot building was touted as the best medical examiner facility in the state when it opened in 2003.

At that point, Garman was hooked. She briefly worked for Span Construction and Engineering Inc. in Madera, Calif., but missed the Pacific Northwest. She returned to Washington and began working for a general contractor who pushed her to obtain her U.S. citizenship.

"At the time I was married, and I had started a small tile company with my husband, which was the genesis for RHD Enterprises," Garman said. "Once I got my citizenship, the contractor I was working for gently nudged me from the nest and convinced me that I should go out on my own and pursue my 8(a) small business certification."

LEARNING, LEARNING, AND MORE LEARNING

In the early days, Garman spent much of her time learning how to run a small business. She took classes through the SBA, and she reached out to people in the industry to ask for advice.

"It's a little intimidating to ask questions of people who have been in the field a long time when you're just starting out, but there's a tremendous amount of value in it. I've found that people are so willing to share their lessons learned and advice," Garman said.

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WORDS OF ADVICE

Go to networking events. "When you're a small business owner or entrepreneur and you're just starting out, it's really hard to get out of the day-to-day grind and go to marketing events and network. But I have found that anytime I do, something amazing always happens. Some connection is made, or an opportunity presents itself."

Take advantage of local resources. "There's so much support available for small businesses in terms of training, coaching, or resources. I wish that I hadn't been afraid to reach out for help when I first got started. But at the same time, I wasn't aware of all the resources that were available."

Reach out to those who have paved the way before you. "Look up the leaders in your industry and ask if you can take them out for coffee or have a few minutes of their time. Have a list of questions prepared, and pick their brain. The feedback you can get from sitting down and talking with industry leaders is priceless."

Things changed quickly after the company received its 8(a) certification in August 2009. By March 2010 RHD had been awarded its first project through the program, a renovation of four constant-temperature rooms for the EPA's Region 10 Manchester Environmental Laboratory in Port Orchard. That was followed about two months later by a \$3.5 million renovation of one of the laboratory's wings.

RHD quickly became a small business success story. In fact, in 2017, the SBA named Garman the Washington Small Business Person of the Year. In 2018, AWB awarded RHD the Connect Award at the annual Evening of Excellence.

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PULLING BACK AND REGROUPING

As the end of RHD's 8(a) certification period grew near, Garman knew she needed to act. She and her team began looking at different possibilities and developing a strategic plan for moving forward without the certification.

"Some things in our plan worked, and some things didn't. What I figured out is you don't know what's going to happen until you get there," Garman said. "One of the things that was very interesting was how the political landscape affected us. After the 2016 election, Congress didn't pass a budget and the government was funded through a continuing resolution. During a continued resolution, federal projects aren't necessarily funded unless they are emergent, and most of the work was released late in the fourth quarter of 2017. Because we graduated from the 8(a) program in August, we weren't eligible for many projects that came out during that period. Having a continued resolution affect federal projects we were counting on was a difficult thing to navigate our last year in the program."

Garman realized it was time to course correct.

"If you don't pull back when you need to and regroup, then I think you could be in worse shape," Garman said. "We're doing that. We have pulled back considerably and are looking at what type of work we want to do and who we want to be moving forward."

Some of the opportunities RHD has explored include pursuing more work in the public space and forming joint ventures. The company also has opened specialized divisions, including a steel and metal fabrication division that has grown 300% in the last year alone.

GIVING BACK

RHD supports a variety of organizations and events in the community. The company sponsors youth sports teams, participates in school supply drives, and delivers gifts to needy families during the holidays.

"I have a philosophy that the more successful we are, the more we contribute, both in dollars and time. For me it's a way to give back what I've been given," she said.

Garman also donates her own time to the community. She currently serves on the boards of the Thurston County Economic Development Council and Big Brothers Big Sisters of Southwest Washington and previously served as vice president of the YWCA Olympia Board of

Directors. But generally speaking, she reserves her personal time for her family—specifically her 12-year-old son and 8-year-old daughter.

"I love my company. I love everything about it, even the hard days. But any accomplishment that we have here pales in comparison to my kids," Garman said. "If I'm not here, then I'm with my kiddos. They're what I do all of this for." 