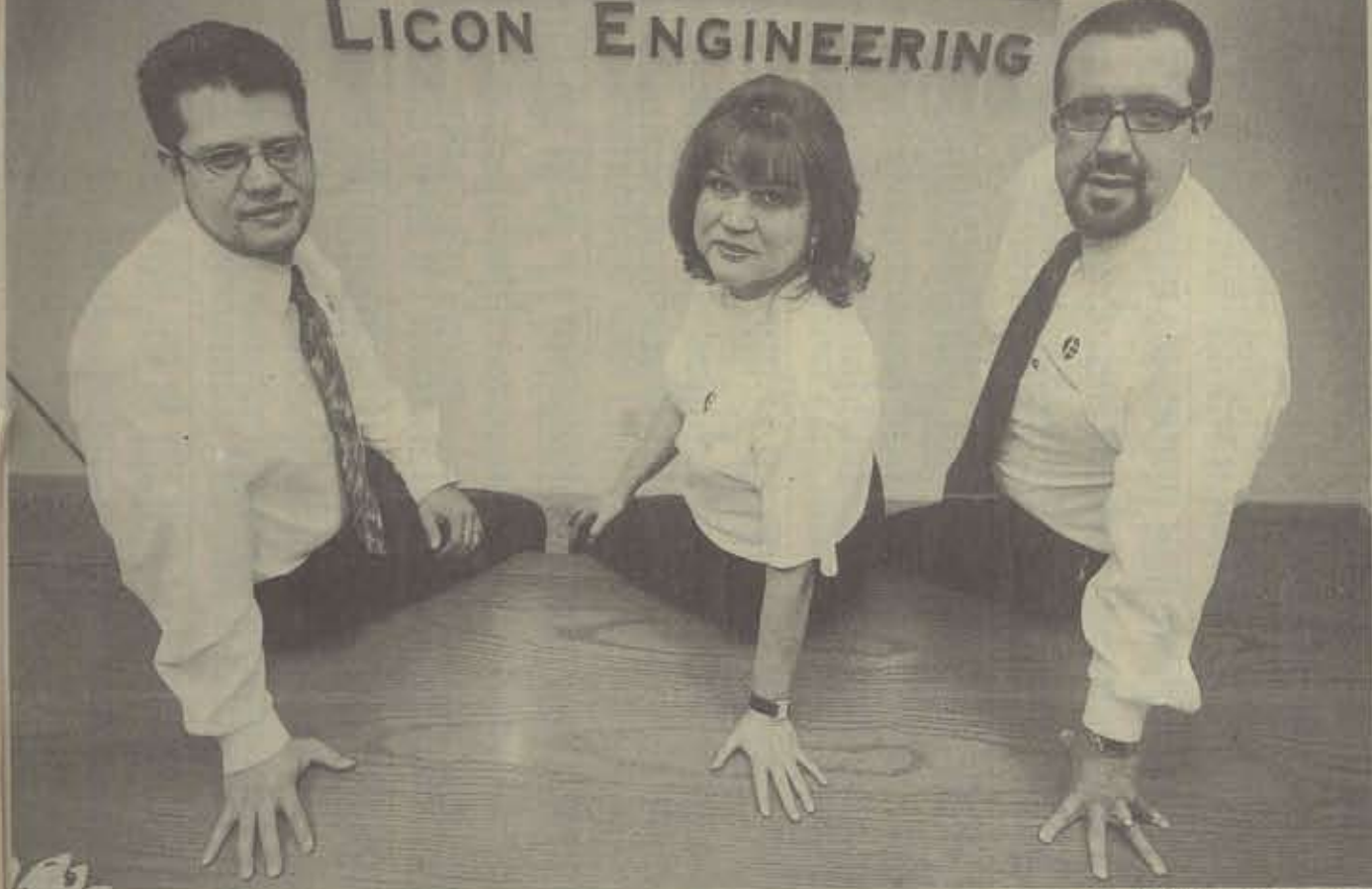


# LICON ENGINEERING



Rudy Gutierrez / El Paso Times

Margarita Licon, center, is president of Licon Engineering, 2101 E. Missouri. The company she started in 2002 has revenues of about \$1 million a year. Her husband, Gerardo Licon, right, is vice president, and Ray Carrasco, is the project manager.

## BUILDING A FUTURE

### El Paso engineering firm's focus pays off

By Michael D. Hernandez

El Paso Times

Even when her engineering company was just a three-person operation working out of her home, the future for Margarita Licon always seemed promising.

That's because she was sitting on a meticulous business plan and a detailed strategy for growth that has guided Licon Engineering Co. Inc.'s quick ascent.

"I mean, we're engineers. Even when we take a vacation, everything has to be planned," she said with a chuckle. "I prepare well for everything because I love accomplishing things. It's how I am."

Licon has been accomplishing quite a lot since January 2002, when she launched her operation,

which provides design, environmental and construction engineering services.

A growing list of clients in the public and private sectors, annual revenues that have reached about \$1 million, and a staff of 20 has the company

eclipsing expectations, company officials said.

It's also brought the company's leader a great deal of recognition within the business community.

Licon, 43, regarded as the first Hispanic woman engineer to

own and manage her own company in El Paso, was recognized as a role model for the city of El Paso last year by the Texas state Senate. She's also been tapped by several entities to share her experiences and ideas with others.

As part of the weekly African-American and Hispanic-American Entrepreneurship Lecture Series, Licon will present "Exceeding Typical Expectations of Minority/Woman Owned Business" at 7 p.m. Oct. 28 at the McCall Neighborhood Center.

"Being honored has been very nice for me," she said. "But I also understand that I have the chance to give back to this community. I think people should always try to do that."

Licon, who worked as an engineer for the city of El Paso and

#### Words of wisdom

Tips from Margarita and Gerardo Licon:

- ▶ **Have a strong vision** for your company and follow it well.
- ▶ **Treat all of your clients** with excellence.
- ▶ **Think of your company** as being regional, and look to broaden

your market outside of El Paso.

- ▶ **Surround yourself** with a good team.
- ▶ **Look for chances** to give back to your community.
- ▶ **Have a detailed sense** of your financial strengths and weaknesses.

## Future

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later for the International Boundary and Water Commission, said she first began to consider ownership of an operation when she was attending UTEP, where she received bachelor's and master's degrees.

The university is also where she met her husband, Gerardo Licon, also an engineer, who is the company's vice president.

Together, the Licons took out a second mortgage on their home and obtained a loan from the Small Business Administration to watch their dream grow.

"She's a visionary, and that's why we've done so well," Gerardo Licon, 40, said. "She always has her eye on our future and how we can grow, how we can get better."

He added that his wife's leadership has helped the company double its revenues in just one year and to purchase its 11,000-square-foot office building at 2101 E. Missouri. Now the company is looking to expand its market into Mexico and the Southwest United States.

Margarita Licon is also hoping her company's contracts begin to expand as well. The company is awaiting acceptance into the Small Business Administration's 8(a) program, which would allow it to seek larger projects with the federal government.

Phillip Silva, district director of the Small Business Administration, has watched the progress made by Margarita Licon and believes her company has set a good example of how an upstart operation should develop.

"She's been very successful and no doubt exemplifies what it takes to move forward," Silva said. "We've helped her business with loans on more than one occasion, and we wouldn't do that if

we didn't see such a sharp focus on their part in what they do."

That kind of focus has carried the company forward during a time when a volatile and sputtering local economy has many business leaders conservative about a pace for growth, said Ray Carrasco, the company's project manager.

"We've never bought into the belief that this economy is too tough, that it would slow us down," Carrasco said.

The Licons pointed to engineering projects for the Public Service Board, the American Consulate in Juárez and the Abundant Living Faith Center and said they continue to attract more work through their reputation for good service.

However, there are difficulties. Gerardo Licon is facing police allegations that he wrote company checks for services that were not complete dating from 2000, when he was employed as the manager and senior project engineer for Raba-Kistner Consultants Inc.

After an 18-month police investigation, he was arrested and charged with misapplication of fiduciary property in March.

The matter is being reviewed by the district attorney's office but has not gone before a grand jury, said Renee Railey, spokeswoman for the district attorney's office.

Gerardo Licon described the charges as being based on "incorrect and false accusations."

Still, the company's staff has an abundance of optimism about where it is heading.

"We've had a lot of faith in what we do," Margarita Licon said, adding that she and her husband are ministers at Abundant Living Faith Center. "But I think the real reason we've been so successful is because we have such a strong faith in God. It really guides us."

Michael D. Hernandez may be reached at [mhernandez@elpasotimes.com](mailto:mhernandez@elpasotimes.com); 546-6151.