

# El Paso Times Business

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## UTEP encourages women engineers



Rutly Gutierrez / El Paso Times

Margarita Licón started Licon Engineering Co. with her husband, Gerardo Licón. She is the first Hispanic woman in El Paso to head an environmental engineering company.

## Campaign features owner, daughter

By Mike Mrkvicka

El Paso Times

I isn't quite as stark as the World War II poster of a grim Uncle Sam pointing his finger and declaring, "I want YOU for the U.S. Army." But the sentiment is much the same.

The recruitment poster distributed to public schools this year by the University of Texas at El Paso depicts 8-year-old Bianca Licón in a hard hat, deep in thought, pondering her future. The caption reads, "I want to be a civil engineer from UTEP, just like my mom."

"Mom" is Margarita Licón, 40, a highly visible El Paso civil engineer who has worked as a project manager for the city government's engineering department and as a hydraulic engineer for the In-



This poster featuring civil engineer Margarita Licón and her daughter, Bianca, has been distributed to area schools by UTEP.

ternational Boundary and Water Commission.

This year, she went into business on her own. On Jan. 7, Licón and her husband, Gerardo, also a civil engineer, filed articles of

incorporation for Licon Engineering Co. and opened for business at 149 N. Concepcion.

"We want young ladies to see that civil engineering can be a successful profes-

sion for women," said Carlos Ferregut, chairman of UTEP's Civil Engineering Department, who cast Licón and her daughter as poster girls.

Through her career, Licón has encouraged youngsters to consider careers in civil engineering. About 10 years ago, while working for the city, she made presentations to that effect at high schools throughout town.

Then, a few years ago, she had a chance encounter with a UTEP engineering student. She didn't recognize him. He certainly recognized her.

"He told me, 'You are the reason I'm a civil engineer today. You came to my school and encouraged us all to be engineers,'" she recalled.

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## Engineers

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"That's why I wanted to appear on the poster with my daughter. I want to do anything that will promote civil engineering," she said.

It appears her recruitment work on the poster soon will reach a wider audience. "We are planning a version in Spanish to post in Juárez this year," Ferregut said.

"In general, engineering is not popular among female students — although at UTEP, the female enrollment in engineering is about

credibility to the campaign," Ferregut said.

Licón and her husband are products of the UTEP College of Engineering. In fact, they met in 1986, while both were undergraduates.

UTEP is a steady source of engineers, like the Licóns who choose to make El Paso their home. According to a UTEP survey completed in 2001, 40 percent of the engineers in UTEP's previous five graduating classes are working in El Paso, UTEP spokeswoman Christian Clarke Casarez, said.

While in the process of advancing their careers and raising three children, the Licóns continued

We're glad we followed through," Gerardo Licón said.

Licón Engineering focuses on three specific disciplines: environmental, geotechnical and forensic engineering. Geotechnical engineering involves the design of foundations and evaluation of construction materials used in foundations. A forensic engineer looks at structural failures and determines the causes.

So far, the Licón firm has drawn about half its clients from the private sector, half from the public sector. The company now is doing engineering work on the bridge and road at the new port of entry near Fabens, Gerardo Licón said.