

BUILDING BOOST:

Developers try to turn an eyesore into a new project

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sfbj Influential '09 Business Women



MEENU SASSER
Circuit Court Judge
15th Judicial Circuit

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PREVIOUS POSITIONS

■ Shareholder, Gunster, Attorneys at Law

EDUCATION

■ Bachelor of Science in biology and history, College of William and Mary
■ Juris Doctor, University of Pennsylvania (1995)

ASSOCIATION

■ Board of directors and former president, Palm Beach County Bar Association

PERSONAL NOTE

■ Sasser ran the Palm Beach half-marathon last year in 2 hours and 5 minutes, and is training for the full marathon.

Meenu Sasser traces much of the formation of her maturation as an influential businesswoman to her time as an attorney and shareholder at Gunster – and the people she met there. She lists Bill Perry and George LeMieux for their success in leading the firm. She, in turn, found herself working to motivate co-workers and clients alike to strive for their best.

"Everyone works together in a shared mission," she says.

Sasser, a board-certified litigation attorney who was appointed to the Palm Beach County Circuit Court in June, knows women often have to chart their own paths. She spearheaded significant initiatives to promote minorities in law, and helped to create Gunster's Women's Alliance, which focuses on recruiting and retaining female attorneys.

She has served as one of only five female presidents in the 85-year history of the Palm Beach County Bar Association. She believes that, though no leaders may be apparent to emulate, others still need examples to follow.

"Pay it forward so the next generation of women may have it easier," she says.



HELEN SHAHAM
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PREVIOUS POSITIONS

■ Controller, Holiday Inn, Hialeah
■ Controller, Dan Hotel, Tel Aviv
■ Auditor, Levanthal & Horwath
■ Promotional writer, Maariv women's magazine

EDUCATION

■ Bachelor of Business Administration in accounting, University of Miami
■ Education and history studies, University of Hartford
■ Certified elementary school teacher, Hebrew University of Jerusalem
■ Levinsky Seminary for Teachers, Tel Aviv

PERSONAL NOTE

■ Though Shaham, a grandmother of 12, served two years in the Israeli Air Force (not as a pilot), she's a fan of flying who last year tried aerobatics, enjoying a "mach loop and a few barrels."

Asked what makes her an influential female executive, Tel Aviv native Helen Shaham points to three examples. First, her 1,200 employees at The Palace Senior Living, each of whom are introduced to – and none of whom are "redundant" in responsibilities or personalities. Second, her monthly column, "Ask Helen," through which she educates the public about the aging process. And third, by being a trendsetter in senior living and lifestyle design with The Palace brand of communities.

"When I design, I think that I will have to live there," she says. "This sets the stage for the lifestyle of the elderly."

Long ago, Shaham realized that work is not work if you enjoy what you do. That's part of the message she imparts to aspiring female executives. Her life's calling saw an industry that little more than a generation ago treated the senior living industry poorly, resulting in a "real bad reputation."

Today, Shaham has helped "raise the bar" – to the point that others copy elements of her designs. Rather than be concerned, she's honored.

"The bar for our entire industry is raised," she says. "So I am proud to be an influencing power on an entire industry."



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EDUCATION

■ A.B., biology and chemistry, Grinnell College
■ Juris Doctor, University of Miami School of Law

PERSONAL NOTE

■ "My passion (and vice) is speed, whether it is racing cars or riding motorcycles," she says.

When Lea Souza-Rasile thinks of influential executives, the concept transcends gender. She leads by example, showing her people she is "absolutely committed to whatever we are working on." She never wants to "fool myself into thinking that I know everything," and therefore she seeks input from and respects those with specific expertise, builds consensus and makes her decision.

"My team is the very reason that I am the best at what I do," she says.

With her mother as her role model, Souza-Rasile recalls how she pursued her career in accounting while raising four children – "at a time when most women did not attend college or work once they started a family."

Leadership is a privilege, providing the leader with the platform to make truly meaningful changes and the potential to impact many others, perhaps in ways you won't ever see.

"There is an enormous responsibility that comes along with that," she says.