

## From Importing Oak Vanities to Building a Multi-Million Dollar Construction Company

When biologist Joan Yang eventually decided to take a different path and establish a construction company, many were probably hard-pressed to find a common ground between these two rather disparate careers. Yet for her, she knew it would be an easy transition, as she would simply apply the mantra of a biologist to her new business: nurture to achieve growth.

So in 1985, Yang, who holds a PhD in Biology and an MBA from the State University at Buffalo, and a BS in Plant Pathology from National Taiwan University, entered the general construction business and founded Rand & Jones Enterprises Co., Inc. (R&J) in Buffalo, New York.

As CEO, President & Founder of R&J, Yang grew a fledgling firm into a \$15 million-company over two decades by implementing sagacious management and accounting systems. She ran a team of a dozen managers and oversaw all aspects of the company's operation—from business development strategies to marketing and the successful execution and completion of all construction projects.

In some ways, Yang's career in construction was a far cry from her first business venture of importing oak vanities, which then progressed to ownership of a factory that produced cultured marble on

Buffalo's East Side. By the time R&J was established and started to gain a foothold in the industry, she knew she had to quickly address her lack of knowledge in this area. So she enrolled in Erie Community College to obtain the construction education and management skills she needed to succeed in the business.

Akin to the natural source of the oak vanities she had been importing early in her career, R&J quickly grew roots and started to branch out. It won numerous bids in the Buffalo area and received several awards.

To grow further, Yang knew she needed opportunities for her company. And she thought that the US Pan Asian American Chamber of Commerce (USPAACC) might be the venue to help her connect with bigger clients. So she attended USPAACC's annual national CelebrASIAN business conference in Washington, DC. There she met US Department of Labor officials, as well as those from federal agencies and executives from Fortune corporations. Soon she was learning the inner workings of the procurement process, requirements and how to bid strategically. Little by little, she got leads that led to business

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Joan Yang and the façade of the Rand & Jones Enterprises building in Buffalo, New York

that would not have been possible had she not met the decision-makers "face-to-face" at CelebrASIAN.

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Today, R&J operates from a restored landmark building in downtown Buffalo with multi-million-dollar projects and several joint ventures. It is in the process of expanding its presence in the West Coast.

Now that R&J has successfully proven its mettle in numerous projects for federal, state and local government agencies, Yang has set her sights on bigger things. "I want to play with the big boys," she said with confidence. She is hoping to be taken under the wing of large construction firms such as Hensel Phelps Construction or Bovis Construction, much like how she has taken other smaller businesses through a mentor-protégé arrangement.

Despite her many successes in the male-dominated construction industry, Yang continues to work long hours without sacrificing time for her family. She cautions everyone to have some balance in life. She speaks with authority on this matter, having successfully raised her two sons while building her business. She offers more advice: "Work hard and do the best you can, as there is no substitute for working hard. Be daring to think out of the box and challenge the status quo."

Clearly, Yang has proven that she can meet every challenge head on. But more importantly, she has shown that the path she took mid-career may have been different, yet still shared a common ground in the incongruous areas of construction, biology, and raising a family—all need proper nurturing to grow. ●

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