



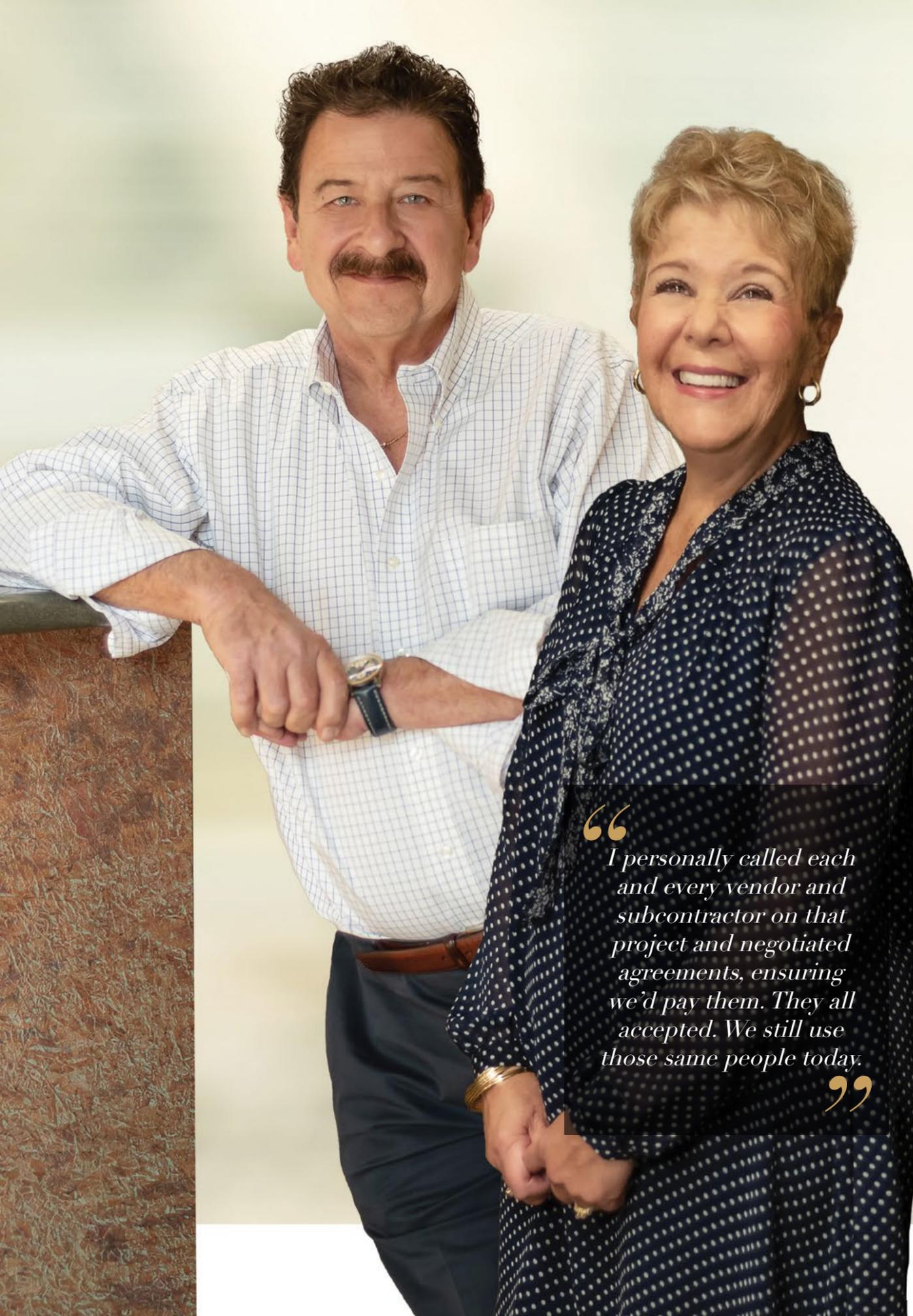
ATHENA ENGINEERING

*CONQUERING
ADVERSITY with
RESILIENCE*

FAMILY, FOCUS AND THE FIRE TO
SUCCEED PROVE A POWERFUL TRIFECTA.

BY ARTHUR SCHURR

Photographer: STEFANIE BLUE, TRUE BLUE PORTRAIT | Photo Shoot Location: ATHENA ENGINEERING CORPORATE OFFICE



“*I personally called each and every vendor and subcontractor on that project and negotiated agreements, ensuring we'd pay them. They all accepted. We still use those same people today.*”

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According to Richard, that failed company left Athena on the hook for \$3 million. Concurrently, another client filed bankruptcy and left the state, leaving them “holding the bag for another \$1.5 million.” Through no fault of theirs, Athena owed nearly \$5 million. In addition, banks were shutting down credit lines for any firm with the word construction in its description. True to form, they just worked that much harder.

“My mom paid every single last damn bill down to the loan on the building. That really speaks to who we are as a company. Whatever the problem is, we figure it out. That's how they raised me. Nothing has ever been handed to any of us. We scrape. We hustle. We don't stop. Every business faces setbacks. It's what you do when they happen that determines your success,” says Athena.

Today, while maintaining their family ethos, their collective focus is on finding new sources of work to create stability in what is generally considered an unstable industry. Not an easy goal. But they have a plan.

“We've diversified our client base in both the public and private sectors,” says Jannie. “We learned from our mistakes, but we also learned a lot about people, who fits in at and with Athena Engineering. We use those lessons to prepare for what's around the next corner.” Part of the client diversification strategy includes acknowledging the firm as a woman/minority-owned business. But there was initial resistance to the label.

“My mom is both a woman and a minority, but she didn't want to be handed anything. Now we know that that's not what the diversity community is about at all. But initially we

didn't. After we understood, I went to my first networking event. But I was clueless. And the first person I interacted with was extremely mean to me. I was literally in tears,” shares Athena. “But the next person, a woman from Northrop Grumman was incredible, an amazing human being. She took me under her wing completely. With her help, I started to figure everything out. Then I became super involved on the women-owned business side as well as the Southern California Minority Supplier Development Council and the Minority Business Enterprise Input Committee. I was the chair for several years. Everybody from Disney, Macy's, etc., has just been wonderful. We've got phenomenal clients that are committed to us through this process. And we've paid it back in many ways as well. It's a great community. Of course, it's not all about business.

“Our commitment to our community runs deep. That comes from my parents' backgrounds. They came from good families, families with little money, but a lot of hustle. My mom is from Cuban immigrants and my dad grew up in Florida raised by a single mom. Both of them grew up wanting to pay it forward once they had the means. So, they do. From food pantries to toys for kids at Christmas, they don't just donate money. They want to be ‘boots on the ground’ to help people, as my mom likes to say.”

Of course, having grown up in it, Athena holds a unique perspective on the business. A graduate of Claremont McKenna College for her bachelor's degree, she also completed an MBA while working full time. She equally claims an informal degree from “Athena Engineering University,” which she's been attending virtually all of her life.

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“It was pretty badass! (Can I say that?) My mom taught me to key in invoices and purchase orders when I was six—and I loved it! I’d go to job sites with my dad and learn to sell. Then, in college and grad school, they’d teach me pie-in-the-sky theory and I’d fact check the reality at work. It kept me grounded,” says Athena. “And though neither of my parents has an MBA, both of them could teach every class I took. Everyone always asks me, ‘What’s it like working with your parents?’ To me, the question seems absurd. I can’t imagine not working with them. I just know it wouldn’t be anywhere near as interesting or fun! I’m enormously proud of them both and I feel lucky to have come from these two.”

Richard adds, “I was thinking about Athena growing up in the business and I remember a turning point for her. She was 11 years old and calling vendors for a project we were bidding. She called one vendor and I noticed her reaction...

He’d said to her, ‘If you don’t know what you’re doing, don’t bother calling me anymore!’ She hung up the phone, tears streaming down her eyes. I reassured her that everything was okay, but also that she had to call him back. She took a breath, called him back, and got the information she needed. But she also told him that if he wanted to bid the job, great, and if not, that was fine, too. I couldn’t have been prouder. She’s always willing to do whatever she needs to do to succeed. She’s amazing.”

At Athena Engineering, you will find that same brand of resilience and moxie from its founders to its latest hire. But perhaps its eponymous employee sums it up best, “My mom taught me from a very young age that words were great, but actions were better. That’s what I was brought up with. That’s who we are.” ☺



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