

BY LINDA BARR

Earlier this year, Michele Medaglia was the guest of honor at the Capuchin Food Pantries' Women of Valor Tea.

An ardent supporter of the not-for-profit that fills a major void in the provision of food for the city's working poor, Medaglia has dedicated many, many hours to helping raise the hundreds of thousands of dollars it takes for the charity to fulfill its mission. The annual August Tea is a way for Capuchin both to say thank you and to pay tribute to women like Medaglia who measure their success in life by their capacity to contribute personally, professionally and socially to a better world.

Wife and mother of four-year-old twins, Medaglia is the president and CEO of ACC Construction, one of the tri-state's pre-eminent Women-Owned Business Enterprises (WBE) general contracting and construction management firms. Her company works with such industry heavyweights as Ted Moudis Associates, SL Green Realty, GVA Williams and The Albanese Organization.

Among the many projects ACC has completed are the renovation of the world-famous observation decks at the Empire State Building and the memorial garden that houses the statue of Arthur Ashe at the National Tennis Center in Queens.

While carving out a name for herself in an industry dominated by men, Medaglia has also managed to become an advocate for women in the construction industry and a supporter of many worthwhile causes.

On the same day she was recognized by Capuchin, the group also honored Deputy Mayor Linda Gibbs and Medaglia confessed she was humbled to be cited alongside the woman whose work has been hailed for its impact on tackling poverty in New York City.

But among the audience of hundreds at the event were two people to whom Medaglia's success came as no surprise — her mother, Josephine, and father, Al, the former architect who founded ACC Construction in 1984 and who handed over the reins to his daughter when she was just 24 years old.

"I always knew she could do it," said a proud Al after the luncheon. "Right from when she was a little girl."

Yet as a teenager growing up in Fresh Meadows, Queens, Medaglia said her father never pushed her to get involved in his business. "He always told my sister and I that, whatever we decided to do, we should have passion the way he had passion for what he was doing."

While her sister embarked on a career in the performing arts, Medaglia, a striking brunette who wouldn't look out of place in any of

the city's fashion houses, considered a career in the fashion industry. She'd studied both business and fashion illustration at St Frances Preparatory School and when her father managed to get her an internship at a design company in the Garment District where he was completing a build-out, Medaglia was initially thrilled but soon found she had no real passion for the work.

With the internship over and several weeks of the summer still left, Medaglia was getting ready to pack her beach bag when her father asked her to help out in his office for a few weeks. "I didn't know I wanted to get into his business, but he told me he just needed me for a few weeks — needless to say, I'm still here," she laughed.

Quite unexpectedly, Medaglia stumbled upon a career that she could be passionate about and the inspiration, she said, came from the very man who always gave her the freedom to be whatever she wanted to be.

"My father was born in Italy and came here as a child. He built a good life for himself and his family and did it by not loosing sight of his principals. He always encouraged us to be all we could be and, even if I had had a brother, he would never have excluded me from his business if that had been what I wanted to do, in fact, he'd probably have pushed me harder.

"He's very much a fan of women succeeding in whatever field they chose and believes that, if you are good at what you do, it doesn't matter what sex or race you are, you have the power to go all the way."

And all the way she has gone. Since taking over the firm in 1995, Medaglia has taken ACC Construction from the shadows to the spotlight raising annual revenues from \$5 million to \$50 million and earning a place at the negotiating tables of some of the city's biggest players.

She did it by diversifying ACC from a one-job shop focused on corporate interiors to a multi-disciplinary organization capable of completing projects ranging from transportation to healthcare, retail to residential.

She moved the firm from its base in Long Island City into its present offices in Manhattan and earned certification as a certified woman owned business in 2000, a move that opened many doors to lucrative contracts that have enabled Medaglia to leverage her talents as a business-woman capable of competing on her own terms.

Today, her client list includes World Wrestling Entertainment, Inc. which selected ACC to build-out its new Third Avenue headquarters, and Tiffany & Co. for whom ACC renovated and remodeled the personal shopping and executive retail offices at the world-famous jeweler's flagship Fifth Avenue store.

"Now I have passion and glamour,"

joked Medaglia, adding, "It's such a privilege to be working with the best in the business and one that I never take for granted."

Indeed, Medaglia's growth plan centers on providing her prestigious clients with the very best customer service available in the boutique construction sector.

"It's all pieces of a puzzle that fit together and it includes providing phenomenal customer service, from the CEO to the receptionist, to people in the field, the laborers and the managers," she said. She has plans to attract likeminded professionals to join the already talented ranks of ACC Construction. "I want to add to this company with the very best and have an environment where the people that work here love working here.

"That's my passion. That's why it's so glamorous," she said. "It has to do with being unique. It's not about being the biggest, it's about being the best at what we do. I always wanted to make my mark and to be completely different. It's why I wanted to take over the firm when I was so young."

Medaglia's father had worked her hard through a youthful apprenticeship. Cramping a Hofstra University schedule into two days a week, she managed to tackle every aspect of the business, from contract administrator to pay roll manager to project manager.

"By 1995, I had worked in every single job in the firm expect for CEO. In a company this size, the CEO is the person out selling, the face of the company, the person fully accountable for every action of every employee, everything that happens with every job — that was the only

thing I hadn't done and I wanted to do it.

"At that point, I knew this was for me. I loved every single aspect of this industry and I felt the passion that my father had always spoken of." ■

