



Building MZM

An Interview with Marjorie Perry,
President and Chief Executive Officer, MZM Construction & Management Company Inc.

EDITORS' NOTE Marjorie Perry developed her marketing skills working with 3M, United Airlines, and Johnson & Johnson. She started her own public relations firm locally in 1985 and joined MZM in operations. When the firm's founders decided to leave the company in 1992, Perry bought them out, hired her own team, and negotiated new contracts for her firm. Since restructuring the company, revenues have topped millions annually. Perry's success in reorganizing and growing MZM has led to increased opportunities for her to share her business strategies and motivate others. She has been invited to speak at the Governor's Conference for three consecutive years and shares her wisdom as a trustee on several boards related to advancing business, education, racial, and gender interests. Perry received her M.B.A. in Finance from the New Jersey Institute of Technology and a B.A. in Education from Kean University.



Marjorie Perry

COMPANY BRIEF Newark-based MZM Construction & Management Company, Inc. (www.mzmcc.com) has secured a number of general contracts, including landscaping for the New Jersey Performing Arts Center, excavation and concrete work for Delta Airlines at the Port Authority of NY&NJ, rough carpentry for Verizon and Continental Airlines, and complete room renovations for Marriott Courtyard/Residence Inn hotels. Currently, at Meadowlands Sports Arena, MZM provides safety control services for all construction. Efforts to expand the firm's client listing into full service construction management and bio-solid waste transportation have brought on clients under the MZM Waste Transportation division including New York Environmental Protection Agency and Clean Earth.

What is the range of services MZM provides and the key markets where you operate?

MZM is a construction as well as a transportation company, which means we primarily work on large commercial projects – like Marriott, the Meadowlands Stadium, hotels, airports, etc.

The transportation side is a model that I came up with 12 years ago because we wanted to be in a residual business. Construction can be very cyclical but transportation is needed every day no matter what. We were able to get proper

licenses to participate in transportation, and now we've evolved into construction management as well.

We are now federally certified to do work all over the U.S., but we primarily work in the Northeast corridor.

Over the past few years, how much of an impact did you see on the construction side of the business and is recovery occurring in that area?

Construction is going to be flat for a long time. There is no need for expanded growth in anything in the commercial or residential area. You can take what you have and retrofit it out and go from commercial to residential overnight.

You will see a lot of renovation in construction, but there are a lot of companies hurting right now. I don't see that turning around within the next three to four years. The funds are not there. The cities and private equity are pulling back and banks are more stringent on lending money to construction companies.

I see transportation, health care, federal work, and work for women in the federal sector growing – those are the areas we're focusing on now.

There are a number of players you're competing with for the business. Is it challenging to differentiate and how do you show what makes your individual brand unique?

Branding today includes how much you can accomplish outside your job. Your service, teaching, educating, and civic activism have to be a part of your brand today. Businesses that want to carve out a niche going forward have to be more holistic and people focused rather than just profit-driven.

Being based in Newark, you have a Mayor who has been focused on transforming the city and preparing it for the future. Are the right changes taking place?

In all fairness to the Mayor, he has his hands full here. There is a perception outside of the Newark area and there is an inner perception that goes on here every day. The culture is middle class or lower middle class with a high school education level. So sometimes, the thought process is way at the top and most people don't understand it or have to have it translated for them.

He has to fight very hard to get people to hear him on what he wants to do and how he

wants to transform the city. That is even more of a challenge now with the economic downturn. Sometimes, inner city people tune out because they just want jobs and food on their tables.

I think he'll make a difference eventually, but it takes a long time to break into a culture that doesn't give you the mix of high education, middle education, and minimum education like New York City.

Are the private sector and business leaders engaged in addressing some of those issues and do we need private sector involvement to bring about true reform?

The private sector has always been engaged here; however, there comes a time where they're flat and not necessarily growing. When they cut back, everybody feels the pinch.

However, they continue to support the Mayor and his vision as well as the Governor, and all we can do is keep riding this out until it finally settles, and then we can make progressive movements.

We have some great things happening in Newark, but we don't have the education to meet the new job demand we might have.

If you look back to the early days with MZM and where the company is today, has the ride been what you expected and did you know early on it was going to work?

No, it's like flying blind. In having your own business, you come in with a logical thought process. Then you get in and there is no ideology about it. You're going to win some days, but most days, you lose, and no one even notices you're working – you just get it done. It's pure perseverance that keeps you going.

If you hang in there long enough, your success will come purely by sticking to it. It's about keeping it simple and clean, and anticipating change on a daily basis, and once you get good at that, the ride becomes smoother and more rewarding as time goes on.

Is it possible to have a positive work/life balance?

As a business leader, you have to become married to your business. If you don't have that kind of commitment, then this is not the world to get involved in.

Often, people go into business not knowing how to build the right team so they can lessen their burden.

I don't think I ever shut off, because there is always something more to do. I'm a natural giver. I have just learned to become more disciplined with my time. ●