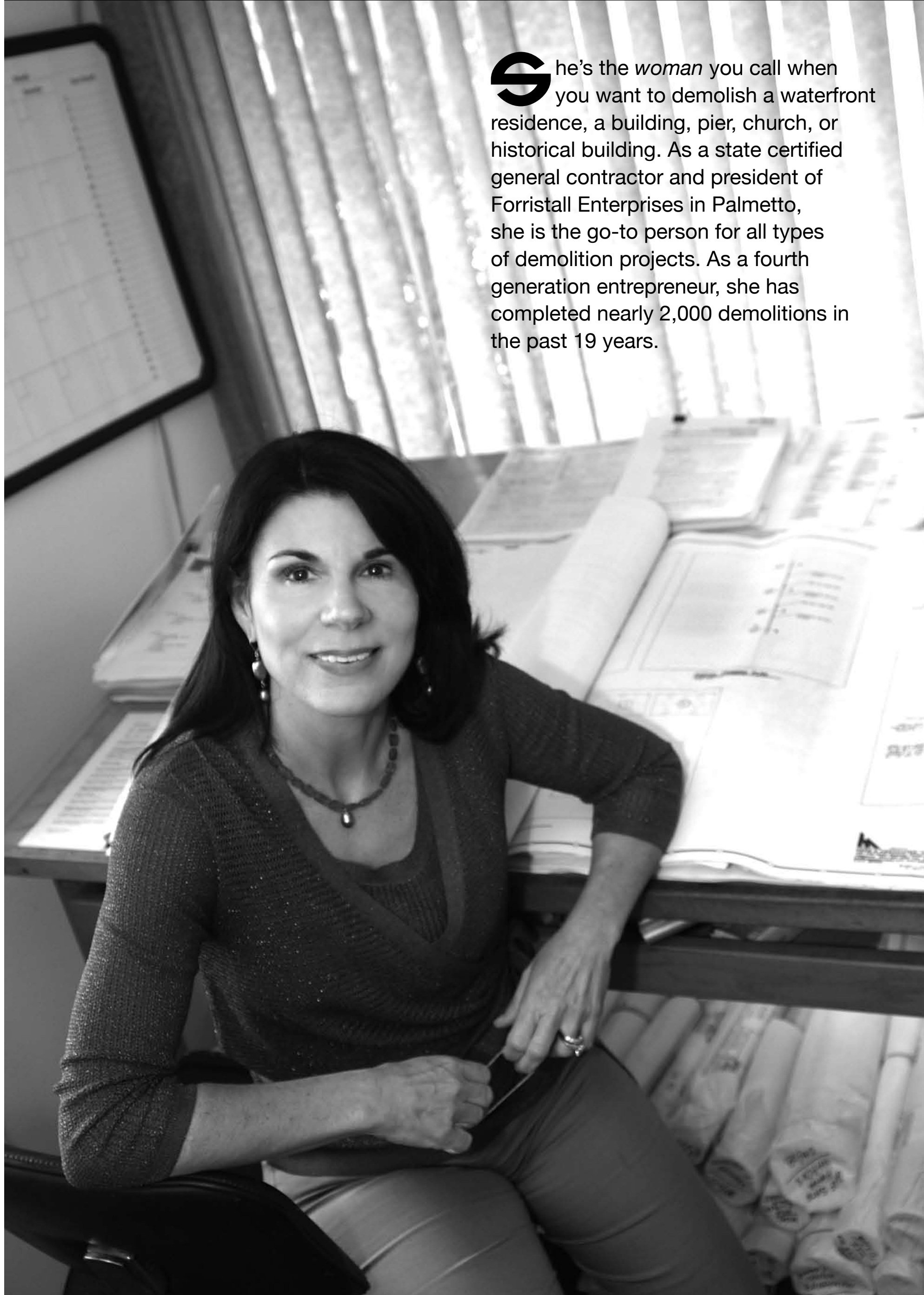


MARY FORRISTALL

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Who do you call when you want to demolish a waterfront residence, a building, pier, church, or historical building? Mary Forristall, of course. As a state certified general contractor and president of Forristall Enterprises in Palmetto, she is the go-to person for all types of demolition projects. As a fourth generation entrepreneur, she has completed nearly 2,000 demolitions in the past 19 years.

"My father was a salvage man. My husband Steve (vice-president and field manager of Forristall Enterprises) and I started a salvage company in Miami in 1987. In 1989 we opened a salvage company in Ellenton and began the demolition company in 1990. I wanted to fashion our company into a large professional demolition company that provides our client with the cleanest, safest, and most professional demolition project possible."

Raised in Miami and ingrained with a strong work ethic, Mary began working at 13, quit high school on the day she turned 16, and struck out on her own at 17 when her mother died. She earned her GED and in her late 20s received her associate's degree and eventually received her bachelor's and master's degrees.

Using only heavy equipment and labor and no explosives, Mary's company completed high-profile projects such as the Van Wezel renovation, the Janie Poe public housing complex, the Sarasota Opera House, Palmetto High School, and the demolition of the historic John Ringling Towers.

Of that controversial project, she explains, "Other than the demolition of the John Ringling Towers, my only involvement was speaking at a hearing on the demolition. The building had been vacant for close to 20 years. I attested to the condition of the building, the structural design, the seven-foot ceilings, and mechanical infrastructure. The project was delayed about two months due to the opposition. When my equipment arrived, the attorney tried to physically block the project, but in the end, the demolition took place."

Warren G. Simonds, Ph.D./LEED AP, and vice president of Willis A. Smith Construction, Inc. says, "I've been immersed in the architecture and construction industry in southwest Florida for over 25 years and in that time I can't think of any person I have dealt with who is more dedicated, focused, ethical and passionate about what she does than Mary. She truly is a role model and the epitome of what the successful businesswoman should strive to be."

In describing her duties and work style, Mary says, "As president of the company I'm responsible for contract negotiations, financial and legal matters, and I set the corporate standard for ethics, professionalism, and morale. I find people who are smarter than me, train them in my expectations, and let them do their work. I thrive on mental and physical challenges and perform well under pressure and deadlines."

The company performs demolitions in all parts of Florida and was featured in a five-page spread in *Concrete Openings*, the magazine of the Concrete Sawing and Cutting Association, for its extensive Clearwater Center project in Pinellas County. "Our most challenging

project was not a total demolition. We were contracted to carefully cut and remove brick on a 140 foot high, 45,000 square foot façade and inside concrete block wall of the existing 15-story Clearwater Center. Since the height of the building and the daily wind speed at those heights presented serious safety issues, I hired a safety expert to provide safety training to our employees and perform site inspections before and during the work."

What is most rewarding and most frustrating about her business? "A great advantage is intuition—I read people and situations. When I figure out how to fix a problem so that the resolution is satisfactory to all, that's the most rewarding. Outside influences that I cannot control are frustrating."

Regarding the economic downturn, Mary says, "Right now there are tremendous challenges. During a few sluggish months toward the end of 2009, our 35 employees worked four days a week for nine hours allowing our employees, some of whom have been with us for 19 years, to save on child care costs and do part-time work on their day off. What has served us well is that I'm a state certified general contractor, bondable to \$10,000,000 per single project, a Minority Business Enterprise, a Disadvantaged Business Enterprise for the Florida Department of Transportation, a Certified Asbestos Contractor/Supervisor and have 19 years of demolition and construction experience. In addition, I have LEED certification for green building."

Mary is cautiously optimistic about the outlook for 2010. "I'm hopeful that 2010 will be better than 2009. I have a backlog of contracts that haven't been started including school and hospital projects. I believe about 70 percent of them will begin either as a total or phased project."

Looking back, she observes, "I was a very shy child, but when my mother died I had to come out of my shell. I was intimidated at first to be in a man's field. But if a woman is smart, professional, and presents herself well, she'll have the advantage. It's really important to understand the market and clients. Also do everything you can to build your credentials with education, training, certifications—whatever your industry offers. Then build relationships in the community by involvement in the chamber of commerce and business organizations, and serving on boards of nonprofit organizations." Mary serves on the Manatee Meals on Wheels and Van Wezel Foundation boards, the Everglades University Advisory Council, and has been a *Guardian ad Litem* for two years.

Mary begins her day teaching yoga, Pilates, and Zumba at the YMCA and arrives at the office after her classes end. In addition to her husband, her family consists of twin sons—both of whom recently became engaged—and a daughter who attends Florida Gulf Coast University.

Living on the Manatee River, she enjoys water skiing, boating, and diving. While her leisure reading includes biographies and American history, she says that she may some day write a novel based loosely on her life. ☺

Story: Carol Darling
Image: Evelyn England