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Jeannette Wyatt
Owner
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The Woodlands, TX

When Jeannette and Tim Wyatt met, it was the start of something great, both in business and romance. With Tim's construction background and Jeannette's marketing and business development experience, the couple is making their mark on construction in Texas and beyond.

Please share a little about your backgrounds and how you began your careers.

Tim: Growing up, my father was an orthopedic surgeon for the Airforce and he wanted me to go into the medical field, but that never appealed to me. While he wanted to fix things, I wanted to build things so I attended the University of Wisconsin and earned my degree in construction management. Following graduation, I worked as a project manager for a large contractor based in Minneapolis that specialized in retail construction. In 1982, they moved me to Houston to open a

Texas office.

Jeannette: I studied marketing communications at UCLA and earned my masters from USC.

After grad school, I took a job working for a woman-owned business that produced multimedia-training programs for leading companies such as Lexus, Citibank, US Airways and FedEx. As the director of marketing, I had the opportunity to perform prospecting and business development activities with the owner, which gave me tremendous insight into the entrepreneurial side of the business. As the company grew, I got a firsthand look at what it takes to run and grow a business.

Since then, I have done marketing and business development for companies in a variety of industries and sizes, from small and medium to Fortune 25.

What made you decide to start Wyatt Management, Tim?

Working for a large construction company was a great learning experience for me, but when they moved me to Texas to open their Houston office, I discovered I really enjoyed being in charge of my own destiny. The idea of building my own company was very appealing to me so I moved my family back to Minnesota and started Wyatt Management in 1998.

What were those first years of business ownership like?

Tim: Scary. I mortgaged my home to get the company off the ground. Having little access to capital meant that if we didn't get paid on time, I wouldn't make payroll. It's still scary knowing other people's livelihoods are in our hands.

In 2008, you relocated Wyatt Management to The Woodlands. What was your motivation to move?

Tim: Over the course of time, Wyatt Management started doing more and more work in Texas. And while 2008 was a



L-R: Wyatt Management's Jeannette and Tim Wyatt

good year, when 2009 came, the country went into a recession. Construction companies took a major hit, us included; we did three little asphalt-patching jobs that year. I was forced to close the Minnesota office and lay off all my staff, except for my office manager. While I moved to Texas to see if I could revive the business she continued to work out of her home in Minnesota. Then I met a woman named Jeannette.

And how did you meet?

Jeannette: I was living in Pennsylvania running the regional marketing division of a company that offered me a national position in 2008. The role required that I move to Houston. My first night out on the town with a new friend and colleague took us to a local restaurant in Marketplace.

Tim: I was sitting at the bar having dinner with a client...

Jeannette: The minute I walked in, I saw Tim and decided I was going to sit down next to him; and well, the rest is history. The universe put us together in the right place, at the right time.

Not only are you his wife, Jeannette, but you also help run Wyatt Management. How did you become involved in the company's operations?

Jeannette: When Tim told me he was rebuilding his business here in Texas, I offered to help. Building businesses and reviving brands is my passion. I initiated a major marketing campaign not only using traditional marketing techniques, but also leveraging the power of digital and social media to increase our brand awareness

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and build a new client base. I was doing all of this while still working my day job. As Wyatt Management grew, we decided I would serve the company best by coming on-board full-time.

Tim, what does Jeannette bring to the company?

Tim: Obviously her marketing and business development expertise. I would have never been able to revive the company as fast as we did without her. Jeannette brings a confidence and tenacity I've never seen before. When we learned Shake Shack was coming to Houston; Jeannette said she wanted to go after their business. My response? "Yeah, us and every other GC in Houston!" But Jeannette was not to be deterred. She worked her magic and before we knew it the Director of Construction called to say he wanted to fly in to meet us. We built our first Shake Shack in the Houston Galleria in 2016, followed by one in San Antonio. We are currently building our third one in Rice Village.

Jeannette is a great networker and also good at building strong relationships with our current and potential clients. Day to day, she works with our office staff on internal operations and manages our finances. Our team calls her "boss lady" (a nickname given to her by a former

employee earlier in her career). She keeps our sups in line (laughing).

Jeannette, what is Tim's most valuable contribution to the company?

Jeannette: Tim is the hardest working, most resilient man I have ever met. What he went through with the business in 2009 only to come back fighting and rebuild his business to the strength it is today is so impressive. He could have just thrown in the towel and gone to work for someone else. That would have been the easy way, but that's not Tim's way.

Tim is a voracious learner. He reads books on everything from how to be successful in business to coaching, mentoring and motivating teams. And, he listens to podcasts while driving to job sites. He injects the value of lifelong learning into our entire team. Continuous learning and self-improvement are part of the culture at Wyatt Management.

How has the construction business changed over the years?

Technology has had a huge impact on how we run both the company and our projects. Whereas we used to bid jobs in Microsoft Excel, we now use sophisticated software. We also employ an online project management system to run each project,

which enables our clients to keep up on job progress through daily logs, photos and schedules. This information is available 24/7 so clients can monitor their jobs and easily share information with their management team.

Superintendents' jobs have changed as well. I find that if field superintendents don't keep up with new technology, they are unable to perform their jobs. That's why it is important that the industry continue to promote careers in construction to the younger generation.

What have you both learned from owning a company in construction?

Tim: It takes thick skin and you have to be willing to put in a lot of hours, which requires you to have a passion for what you do. The biggest impediment to our growth in the past has been the fear of growing. I finally learned to embrace the growth and enjoy the ride. The other lesson we've learned over the years is that you have to invest in your employees and put the right team in place. If you want to be the best, you have to hire the best.

Tim, what do you think is the most challenging part of being a general contractor?

Well, for one, trying to manage a team of subcontractors with different priorities to work together towards one common goal, and that is to deliver the most superior product on-time and within budget.

We are fortunate in that we have a strong base of subcontractors who have been working together on our jobs for years.

What do you love about your work?

Tim: Both Jeannette and I find the most gratifying part of owning a company is being able to reward our employees for their hard work. This year we created a bonus program for our superintendents, which enables them to reap the financial rewards of being a high performer.

At the same time, the superintendents' bonus pool may be docked if they fail to

perform on key responsibilities such as enforcing safety protocols on their jobs and uploading daily logs and photos.

We also have a performance review process wherein our clients evaluate our superintendents' performance at the end of each job. This helps us understand where we can improve and our superintendents can learn what they need to do better.

It's helped us build a stronger team internally and has given our clients a voice, which helps us build stronger relationships with each of them.

Jeannette: Over the years, Houston has become a hot-bed for construction. Our clients are building all over town and it's fun to drive by a restaurant or retail store that we've built. It's also fun when a client or friend says they drove by a job site and saw our sign.

But for me, the best part is the thrill of adding new brands to our portfolio of clients. My mission is to keep growing and expanding our client base.

What do you both do in your free time, separately and together?

Jeannette: Owning your own business means you don't have a lot of free time. Tim works morning to night, 365 days a year. For vacations, we like to go to all-inclusive resorts so Tim is always a phone call or email away.

Tim: We also place a high priority on our health. We do vigorous workout routines like high-intensity training, spinning and lifting weights, as well as yoga. I firmly believe exercise and a healthy diet is what keeps us young.

What do you hope the next five or ten years hold for you?

Tim: Our main goal, of course, is to continue to grow the company, but we're also looking into some development opportunities that will allow us to further diversify the business.

Jeannette: Tim's mantra is that mediocrity is not an option. We want to be known as the best GC in Texas.

Wyatt Management is a general contractor in The Woodlands. –mjm

