



Office of Civil Rights

Perseverance Pays Off

In conjunction with National Hispanic-Latino Heritage Month, Caltrans is spotlighting Disadvantaged Business Enterprise: G&F Concrete Cutting, Inc. This is part of a series of articles showcasing Caltrans' subcontractors' diversity.

Rita Ferguson knows how hard it is to start a business as a disadvantaged enterprise in the highway construction field. Nearly 40 years ago, Ferguson, a Hispanic woman, founded a two-person business that is now one of the largest woman-owned concrete-cutting businesses in Southern California.

Before she established G&F Concrete Cutting, Inc., Ferguson owned and managed her own art gallery. But when the 1973 recession hit, she realized she couldn't rely on an income from high-end art.



At that time, Ferguson was developing an understanding of concrete cutting through her then-fiancé (now husband of nearly 40 years, Greg Ferguson). In 1980, she sold her art gallery and invested in establishing G&F Concrete Cutting, Inc. Although she understood the trade and knew how to run a business, she didn't anticipate the discrimination she would face.

"Potential customers didn't have a whole lot of faith that I knew what I was talking about," Ferguson explained. "When the union dispatched seasonal laborers straight off the strawberry field, I told them not everyone can work a Rivet Buster. The union would respond, 'Don't worry about it, sweetie.'"

When a union worker injured himself on that very machine commonly used to cut concrete, G&F had to handle the workers compensation case.

Since then, Ferguson's business has worked on hundreds of infrastructure projects, including the Cabrillo Bridge and Interstate 405 Sepulveda Expansion. This month, G&F broke ground on a two-year project as a sub-contractor for Atkinson Construction to rehabilitate the East Los Angeles State Route 60 truck corridor.

In the last decade, Ferguson has been recognized numerous times as one of the most powerful women in Southern California construction, earning the National Latinas in Business 'Construction Woman of the Year' and the Small Business Administration's 'Exporter of the Year.'

When she's not managing and operating her business, Ferguson serves as a member of the Southern California Contractors Association, Associated General Contractors of California, Laborers Apprentice Committee, and Caltrans DBE Participation Committee, where she works to help more disadvantaged businesses get on Caltrans projects.

"I want to mentor small businesses because you don't know what you don't know until you realize you don't know it," Ferguson said.