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HISTORY »

## *Reynolds Welding & Fabrication Constructs Business With Community Bonds*

Article by Cheryl Harris Forbes

Photographs by Shana Sureck

Jerado and Joyce Reynolds own Reynolds Welding and Fabrication. The company designs, produces, and installs metal fabrications, and has extensive experience in manufacturing and fitting structural steel. With the address of 3468 Main Street in Hartford's "Uptown" neighborhood, the building is surprisingly unassuming and tucked far behind street frontage. In the absence of employees, flaming blow torches, clanging steel, and the hum of exhaust fans, administrative intricacies are painstakingly reviewed.

It's a lesson Jerado learned the hard way. The now 10-year-old five-employee business, born out of a passion for binding and bending steel to obey Jerado's creative demands, was frequently busy yet barely yielding a profit. Several long introspective conversations with Joyce, his wife of 25 years, led them to consider a change in operations and yet another bold but calculated risk. Under their new plan, she would leave her full-time job as an assistant nursing director and join him full-time in the daily operation of the business. While Jerado would continue to oversee sales and production, her responsibilities would be to analyze office operations, devise new efficiencies, supervise staff, and boost profitability.

"It was a huge sacrifice for her, and a lot for me to ask, but I needed the help. I'd hired an office assistant before, but things just weren't working well. I could relax knowing Joyce was at the helm. She'd have the best interest of the business and our family foremost in mind. She is a smart woman and I knew she would learn what we needed to do to whip the place into shape," said Jerado, looking proudly at his wife.

"How could I say no, especially after seeing how hard he was working? This business is his dream, and it's what we've decided to build together." Joyce chimed in matter-of-factly. They both smile, and then tell the funny story of their business collaboration. Actually, Reynolds Welding and Fabrication was Jerado's brainchild, and Joyce supported what she thought would be her husband's part-time hobby. "I could see how much he loved welding. I always said he loves welding so much he'd probably do it for free. I figured he might as well make some extra money from it."





In her mind, he'd start out with a little shop and a few side jobs. However, soon Jerado was purchasing one piece of equipment after the next and then a truck. Before long he had a full blown operation. "My first 'big side job' was for \$30,000, creating and installing structural beams for a sub-floor for Innovative Property Management," he recalls. With repeat work from his first major client, along with consistent referrals from other satisfied customers, Jerado gave notice to his employer and jumped into the business full-time. After that, he

won contracts for welding, fabrication, and structural steel services for Price Choppers supermarkets, Trader Joes, Whole Foods, Dave & Buster's, and Carabetta Brothers.



Some of the company's most visible work can be seen through Hartford's iconic glass facades at the Hartford Public Library's downtown branch and Jumoke Academy at 875 Asylum Avenue. There, library visitors, school students, and staff walk up and down Reynolds' precisely crafted and reinforced stairwells. They often lean, cling, and sometimes even slide on the accompanying steel rails, with no concern about the structures supporting their weight. While the public accolades may be few, for Reynolds Welding &

Fabrication, the satisfaction of creating enduring functionality and structural integrity is huge. A "can-do" attitude, resourcefulness, and creativity come naturally for the Reynolds. They are Jamaican immigrants and former high school sweethearts who've held tightly to a life-long dream of greater opportunities for their four children.

Joyce begins their story, "Jerado came to the States from Jamaica in 1992 and I got here in 1998. He worked for several large construction companies before going out on his own. He's been welding most of his life. He began learning from his uncle when he was a teen, then went to school to learn the trade while in Jamaica. In the United States, he studied at Apex Technical School in New York for his American Welding Society certification. For him, getting his US license to weld was the ticket to better jobs with top tier construction companies."

Joyce worked equally as hard. Back then, she had dreams of going to college and becoming a nurse, but she was juggling their children and a \$5 an hour job at Nathan's Hotdogs before taking a fast food restaurant management position in Brooklyn. Eventually, she became a Certified Nurse's Assistant, and subsequently a Licensed Practical Nurse, before earning her Registered Nurse credentials. She's currently enrolled in the Master of Nursing Program at the University of Hartford.

Since January 2015 she's given the family business intensive care. Jerado admits, "She dots the I's and crosses every T. Now that everything's running so smoothly, and our bottom line is healthier, I don't want to ever

think about doing the business without her."

Joyce accepts the accolades. Both acknowledge it was a very favorable set of conditions that put them in touch with the Entrepreneurial Center. "From day one, it was eureka! We can't say enough about the place. Everyone at the Center really wanted to see us win," she commented, "At events, they helped us connect with key players. Although we've been in business a while, there is always something new to learn. The Center made it easy for us to keep up and we could take classes and get specific skills to use in our company," explained Jerado.

Joyce added, "What I think I liked best was the detailed personal attention we got from our Entrepreneurial Center business counselor, Lacey Banks. There was nothing generic about her approach. Shelli McMillen was great. She kept checking with us to make sure our needs were met, and to let us know about other helpful resources. The Entrepreneurial Center certainly offers great service. I just hope they never quit."

The Reynolds were connected to the Center by The Metropolitan District (MDC). The Reynolds' reputation for excellent work, and on-time, on-budget delivery, had earned them the attention of MDC's Supplier Diversity Office, which works with the Center to offer small business and contract readiness programming to Connecticut contractors. The result of the in-depth training and technical assistance provided by this programming was a contract award to provide structural steel for The MDC Garage at 555 Main Street in Hartford.

Paying it forward by giving back is central to the Reynolds' way of life. Jerado's love of welding and service prompted him to reach out to the Blue Hills Civic Association to mentor welding students. At his shop, he gives them opportunities to hone their skills before they test for the American Welding Society (AWS) license. So far in the past year, he's been able to coach seven aspiring welders in his spare time. Six passed the AWS test on the first attempt. The growing demands of his company have allowed him to hire one. "I'll never forget where I came from, and what it means to be able to provide for my family. It's my joy to help others. My uncle took the time to teach me. I love the craft and made it my career," he said reflectively. "If I can take a little time out to help someone and give them the same opportunity, I feel good."

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