

Local lawn care ‘pioneer’ fell into beloved landscaping business

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Gladys Collazo stands on the Pennington property that was once her home and now serves as her business headquarters. Her business, Action Lawn & Landscape, turned 21 this year.

By R. Kurt Osenlund, Pennington Post

Action Lawn & Landscape founder and president Gladys Collazo didn’t know she wanted to be in the lawn care business...until she fell in love with it.

“Action” is the appropriate name for Gladys Collazo’s lawn care and landscaping business, as it’s something the Pennington resident has taken throughout most of her life. Now 51, Collazo has never slowed down and never settled down.

“I never married,” Collazo says. “I’m married to my business. I treat it with kid gloves. It’s been very good to me.”

Her business – Action Lawn & Landscape, of course – was founded in 1989 in Ewing, where Collazo, a Trenton native, was living with her then fiancé. She and her beau started the business together. They manicured their own lawn, got attention from neighbors, and soon saw the business thrive (“It grew overnight,” Collazo says). Since he spoke little English, she took on the marketing and customer service responsibilities, and when the relationship ended, it was she who had the contacts and held on to the enterprise.

Within months, Collazo relocated to Pennington. Her client base grew, as did her confidence.

“Back then, for the most part, [lawn care] was a male-dominated industry,” Collazo says. “I think I was one of the pioneers of women getting into the lawn and landscaping business.”

But it wasn’t always mulch and mowers for Collazo (she herself nudgingly admits she was “completely green” when starting out). Possessing a passion for aviation since high school, she took college courses in airline travel, enrolled in a placement program, and wound up working for Princeton Airport. She eventually worked her way up to executive vice president.

Feeling stifled, unfulfilled, or both, she shifted her focus to Action Lawn & Landscape, taking two-and-a-half years off to cultivate the business. She returned to the airport part-time, and maintained her dual jobs until officially leaving the airport in 2003.

Since then, Collazo has poured her whole heart into her company. She says she services over 500 regular customers, in addition to countless one-time clients. She says there are other businesses out there that offer the same services she does, but she maintains competitive prices, as well as the kind of quality work and customer relations that got the business off the ground in the first place.

“I like to be hands-on and I like to think I provide excellent customer service,” Collazo says. “I treat customers the way I want to be treated. And the work speaks for itself. That’s what’s kept me alive.”

That and the 27 workers she employs, including her sister, Annette, whom she calls the executive vice president of Action Lawn & Landscape and her “mini-me.”

“I’m grooming her so if, God forbid, anything happens to me, she can take over,” Collazo says of her sis. “It’s nice to have a family member sharing your passion.”

Collazo and her sister work out of a home office on Route 31 South, less than one-half mile from Pennington Quality Market. Up until two-and-a-half years ago, it was also Collazo’s home, before she finally caved and bought a new house just next door. The old structure now serves as a comfortable, welcoming office space complete with conference areas and an accessible kitchen for hungry workers (Collazo still uses the second-floor rooms for storage). Next door on the opposite side live Collazo’s parents, Pedro and Gloria, making the whole area a considerable stretch of Collazo property.

And Action Lawn & Landscape, of course, groomed all of the grounds. The office building is surrounded by handsomely designed gardens and stone work, the latter of which is generally outsourced (Collazo says she works with “a network of professionals”). In the expansive driveway lies an entire fleet of Action Lawn & Landscape vehicles, many equipped with trailers that can carry tractors and equipment.

It’s initially alarming to see the petite Collazo among all the machinery, and stereotypical thinking would lead one to believe she’s merely a minor player in the Action Lawn & Landscape operation. But she need only open her mouth to convince you of her passion and assure you she is indeed running the show.

Musing over the history of her business, she says she’s been able to have a lot more face time with her clients in recent years, and the interaction has become her favorite part of the job.

“I love the people,” Collazo says. “The enjoyment it gives me at the end of the day, it’s just very satisfying...to see customers happy with the end result.”

To learn more about Action Lawn & Landscape, including services, prices, work samples and contact info, visit www.actionlawnnj.com. Action Lawn & Landscape can also be reached by phone at 609-737-8955.