

Pampuch:

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a fashion designer.

After graduating from **Richland Center High School** in 1977, she enrolled in a fashion merchandising class at **Western Wisconsin Technical College**.

"I took a semester, and my mother said, 'maybe you should do something that's not so risky,'" Pampuch said. "It turns out development is risky too."

Risky or not, Pampuch said her career in developing commercial real estate has been a rewarding one.

What she likes most is figuring out the details on a project when it's in its early stages.

Solving the Puzzles

"You have this puzzle, all these pieces you have to put together, which is what I find is the most intriguing part of the process," Pampuch said.

Among her favorite projects was the **Sanford Consortium for Regenerative Medicine** at **UC San Diego** and a new building for the University of California President's Office in Oakland.

The latter was the first in which Pampuch was project manager and included the office building for the university system and a parking garage for the city of Oakland.

Always Up for a Challenge

The Sanford Consortium project was a special challenge because it came at the start of the 2007-2008 financial crisis when hardly anyone was lending money for commercial real estate projects.

The consortium ultimately sold bonds to help pay for the project.

"Beyond financing, the site was a challenge," Pampuch said.

The property abuts the **Torrey Pines Golf Course**.

"We had to redo the drainage on the 11th hole of Torrey Pines," Pampuch said.

Either by design or coincidence, she said, "Part of our modus operandi is we always take on projects that are challenging."

Founded in 1982 by **Robert Lankford**, the company's early San Diego projects included construction of Regents Square in La Jolla and the San Diego Hall of Justice downtown.

More recent projects have included Punch Bowl Social and the Pinnacle apartments in East Village.

Pampuch started at Lankford & Associates in 1990 as an administrative assistant after earning an associate's degree in secretarial science from Western Wisconsin Technical College and working as a secretary, then a sales agent in a Wisconsin real estate agency.

"That's where I got the bug," Pampuch said.

She moved to San Diego right around the time of the Northridge earthquake and gradually worked her way up in the Lankford operation.

One of the first major projects Pampuch worked on was the Hall of Justice in downtown San Diego, completed in 1996.

ID Studios Principal **Deborah Elliott**, who was the lead designer on the Hall of Justice, said Pampuch adroitly managed what was a very complex project.

"She's a really competent leader," said Elliott, who was with the architectural firm of **Carrier Johnson + Culture** at the time.

At Lankford & Associates, Pampuch is "the go-to person," Elliott said.

"She has put together a lot of the pro formas for their projects, to find the money and put together the development agreements," Elliott said. "She's



Photo by Jamie Lytle

Mary Pampuch outside Block D, a mixed use project Lankford & Associates is building in the East Village.

MARY PAMPUCH

Title: COO

Company: Lankford & Associates

Title: Chief Operating Officer and Executive Vice President

Education: San Diego State University, certificate in construction supervision; University of Phoenix, bachelor of science, business administration; Western Wisconsin Technical College, associate's degree, secretarial science.

Recreation: Hiking, golf, DIY projects.

Charitable work: Financial support of San Diego Humane Society, Family Justice Center, Urban Discovery Foundation Board, and East Village Foundation Board.

Family: Two rescue cats. No children.

been in the thick of it. I've just always admired her ability to navigate the whole thing and be in the middle of it."

With Pampuch's help, **Michele Vives**, managing director of **Douglas Wilson Cos.**, followed a path similar to Pampuch's, who was her mentor at Lankford & Associates.

"She's awesome," said Vives, who went to work for Lankford & Associates in 2005 in hope of finding a second career after moving to San Diego from Chicago.

"I wanted to get into development," said Vives, who had been an industrial psychologist in Chicago, adding that Pampuch "really took me under her wing."

"She would talk about how to navigate the industry, especially since it was a male dominated industry, which it was at the time," Vives said. There are two or three people, if I didn't have them in my life, I don't think I would be successful.

Mary is on the top of that list."

Beyond working together, Vives said she and Pampuch became close friends.

"We meet together when we're frustrated with our jobs," Vives said.

Lack of Women in Development

When Pampuch started taking on big projects as assistant project manager, then project manager, she was one of the few women doing it.

That hasn't changed, she said.

"I go to meetings and I'm still the only woman there," Pampuch said. "There's no more women in it now than there was back then."

Within the construction industry nationally, women account for about 5 percent of C-level executives and about 7 percent of construction managers, said **Catherine Schoenenberger**, president of **The National Association of Women in Construction**.

"As far as reaching the top echelon in those C-suites, we've stagnated at 5 percent," Schoenenberger said. "It's been an old boys club for so long. I know that's a cliché but it's true. We have to attract more women to the industry first and foremost. If we don't get them into the industry, we're never going to get them elevated."

Learn the Business

Pampuch hopes that young women see her as a role model.

Her advice to women who want follow her lead is to do what she did — learn the business from the ground up. Get a job in a commercial real estate firm, or in a property management company.

"You're never going to start at the top. You've got to start at the bottom, unless you've got your own money," Pampuch said.

She said she learned the business most-

ly by listening to people she worked with, especially Lankford & Associates CEO and founder **Robert Lankford** who's been her mentor.

"You've got to be humble," Pampuch said. "You have to be patient too, and if you make a mistake, you have to own it. You get more respect if you do."

Looking ahead, Pampuch said she would like to see more office construction downtown and will continue to oversee Lankford & Associates projects in East Village, Little Italy and elsewhere.

"I am really enjoying the business. I want to stay in it as long as I'm able, as long as I'm capable, as long as they'll have me," Pampuch said.

Away from the office, Pampuch's passions are hiking and golf.

She has a 14 handicap in golf and hikes "anywhere in San Diego."

When she has more time, she'd like to hike through **Mission Trails Regional Park**.

"I'd like to get out and spend some time there," Pampuch said.

Her favorite movie of late was "The Book Club," with **Candice Bergen**, **Jane Fonda** and **Diane Keaton**.

"I think it's interesting that you're seeing these actresses that are more mature and they're still in the movies," Pampuch said.

She's also fond of reading biographies — the ones that come quickly to her mind are those of **Ava Gardner** and **Katharine Hepburn**.

"Back to that actress thing," Pampuch said.

Despite her childhood dream, Pampuch said she's never considered performing in community theater or something similar.

The acting bug is gone, she said.