

Garden City Pathfinder Award Winner Charges Forward

by *Melissa Argueta*

Taniella Jo Harrison honored for success in business



Hempstead Town Pathfinder Award winner and Garden City resident Taniella Jo Harrison.

When Garden City resident Taniella Jo Harrison wakes up every morning, finding new ways to help others is likely on her mind. In 10 short years, the busy executive vice president of Tri-County Home Nursing Services in Westbury has taken her family's business and increased revenue by nearly 500 percent, quadrupling the size of her company's work force.

A Fort Lauderdale, FL native, it seems Harrison's path to success was destined from childhood. One of her earliest memories was when she and her sister would come to New York every summer to visit their grandmother, Ella Ferguson, owner of Tri-County. "When my grandmother opened her first office on 42nd Street in Manhattan 30 years ago, she introduced us as the president and vice president of Tri-County. Of course, we were 8 and 9 years old. That kind of stuck in mind," she said.

Hempstead Town Pathfinder Award winner and Garden City resident Taniella Jo Harrison.

A nurse who moved to New York with her sister from Iowa, Ferguson was always taking care of others and had a natural flair for business. "Whenever I meet someone who knew my grandmother, they say 'wow you are from good stock.' They always say positive things about her and my aunt," she said.

Inspired by her grandmother's example, Harrison studied business in high school and majored in the subject throughout her undergraduate and graduate studies. "I just gravitated towards business and I always wanted to have a holistic look at the way a business operates and how a business ran, because I always felt like one day I am going to have to probably work in my

grandmother's business because she did say 'this is going to be a million dollar business when she gets older,' she explained.

Eventually, Harrison came to New York and moved in with her grandmother and worked for the Girl Scouts of America as a grants manager for national funding. It wasn't long before her grandmother had passed away in her garden from heart failure. "It was a major shock to us all, in particular my mother," she said.

In 2002, Harrison's mother, Linda Cunegin, left her job in Florida and moved up to New York to become the president of Tri-County. Cunegin asked her two daughters to also leave their jobs and work for the family business. "I instantly had to go to a seminar on how to run a home care agency and have been entrenched every since," Harrison said.

Tri-County Home Nursing Services, Inc. is a proprietary Home Health Care Agency established under the laws of the State of New York, for the purpose of participating in the delivery of comprehensive home health services to the elderly, chronic and terminally-ill, and special needs participants within their home environment and the community. "It's strictly home care. We are in people's homes throughout Nassau, Suffolk and Queens," she explained.

With 225 employees, Tri-County is creating jobs for Long Island and business continues to boom and increase revenue significantly. When Ferguson passed away, Tri-County had 75 patients. Since that time in 1981 when Harrison started, through today, the number of patients has grown to 175. The key to the success of the company's growth has been getting the right people and taking care of employees, Harrison said.

In her position as executive director, Harrison says this is her dream job. "I think the key to success is recruiting and retaining qualified people that have integrity and know what they are doing. Once we hired a great coordinator, we were able to attract more and better caregivers," she said.

When it comes to staying motivated, Harrison credits her mother with keeping her organized and focused. "She's a beacon of light. She's a professional auditor and working with government programs...She brings that knowledge of how to keep our records straight," Harrison said.

In celebration of Women's History Month,

the Garden Cityite was bestowed the Hempstead Town Pathfinder Award along with nine other outstanding women in the community. Harrison was not able to attend the ceremony as she was scheduled to discuss home healthcare with legislators in Albany regarding changes in home health care, which New York State regulates.

Nominated by a third party, Harrison said she was surprised and excited by the acknowledgment of her work. "It felt very humbling and I felt very special to be recognized by the community that I live in," Harrison said. "So many women are doing so many dynamic things in the community, for them to select me made me feel really special and made me feel 'maybe I am doing something good,'" she said.

Her advice for women who want to succeed in business comes from something her mother taught her long ago. "I think the cornerstone to my success is that my mother always told me reading and being an excellent writer is something a computer can't do. I've always been into reading since I was a little girl.

"I read any and everything that I can get my hands on. I will spend time to read it so I am informed and I have information so I am able to come up with different ideas just off the strength of reading different materials," she added.

During the award ceremony, Hempstead Town Supervisor Kate Murray commended the winners for broadening horizons and creating opportunities for future generations of pathfinders. "Indeed the women pathfinders whom we recognize today refused to limit themselves or accept the limits that others might place upon them," Murray said.

A member of the Long Island Chapter of the New York State Association of Health Care Providers and the Coalition of 100 Black Women, Harrison remains devoted to many charitable concerns. She has worked to raise scholarship funds for needy high school and college students and advocates to legislative and officials for different laws, rules and funding for local HIV/AIDS services and testing for girls and women on Long Island. She also teaches classes on digital scrapbooking.