



# Spotlight

## Lynda M. Kornbleet

### Payless Insulation



On a sunny July morning, *Houston Construction News* met with **Lynda M. Kornbleet**, CEO and president of **Payless Insulation** at 1331 Seamist Drive. Kornbleet started her company 25 years ago with \$2000 dollars and a linen truck. Today, she continues to excel in her insulation business, exuding confidence in the dynamic construction industry.

*Where did you grow up, Lynda?*

I was born in Kansas City, Kansas and the formative years of my life were in Lubbock, Texas.

*What were your favorite things to do as a child?*

Survive. I was the typical sixties gal, one of the earthy types. I loved to play cards, golf, football, basketball and I liked to get in trouble. Anything I did, I was not as consistent as I would have liked. I did like the competition.

*Do you have any brothers or sisters?*

I have two sisters and one younger brother. I am very close with my family.

*What did your parents do when you were growing up?*

My father opened up Payless Shoe Store in Kansas, so I learned to sweep floors and stack shoes on the shelves. Eventually, my father opened three more Payless Shoe Stores in Lubbock. He worked very hard and I barely saw him. He died when I was 15. My mother loved theater and performed at the Lubbock Little Theater. I can remember my mom had bad allergies in the Lub-

bock "Dust Bowl".

*Tell us about the kind of jobs did you had when growing up.*

I earned a quarter from my father for a day's work. I especially enjoyed the work because I got to spend time with him. I loved everything about business. In high school, I was a manager at a burger restaurant. Every summer, I would travel to Kansas City to work in my aunt's hobby shop or at an elderly community center. I waited tables all the way through college.

*Who has been an influence or mentor to you?*

My grandmother. She was bar none the meanest person I ever met, but she was a very gutsy female. She was head of the community center in Kansas City. She was nice to take me in every summer, but she was mean! Before she died, I said, "Nanny, thank you. You have taught me how to be an independent woman." It isn't about being better than or less than, it is about being equal. I had great respect for my grandmother.

*What high school did you attend?*

Basically, I have been on my own since I was about 15, which made me a strong person. I went to five high schools. I attended Monterey High School in Lubbock, then I moved to Houston where I dropped out of high school. I was the black sheep of my fam-

"I began with nothing, but I worked hard."

ily, but I ended up doing okay. Everything worked out. I found out I was fed up with school but bored out of school, but I figured it would be better to get an education. I went to a few schools in Houston such as West Chester High School, Robert E. Lee High School and Memorial High School. I then decided it was time for me to go away, so I went to The Valley School for Girls in Arizona for two years. When I was 19 years old I asked myself, "What are you going to do?"

*What did you do in your early twenties?*

I came back to Houston and finished college at the University of St. Thomas with a degree in Drama. All my life I wanted to be an actress. I truly believe that just because a student doesn't do well in math or on standardized tests, it does not mean they cannot succeed in business. I think school is important for some fields, but I have not used my college degree for as long as I know. I had to go into my own business. There is hope for anything if you want to do it.

"When it comes to business, I listen to my heart... and I am attentive. It is really an inside job, inside yourself."

After college, Lyman's Personnel in Houston hired me. Working 12 hours a day, I could not sit for one minute. If I sat at a desk for five seconds, they came in and said, "Get on the phone and make a cold call!" I feel that the more you are pushed and the more you do things you really don't want to do, the more you learn to use for later. Because of everything I learned at Lyman's Personnel, I gained respect for the owners.

*What was your next endeavor?*

When I left Lyman's Personnel, my next endeavor was to become a real estate agent. I failed drastically in real estate because I wanted to do more than "here is your dining room and here is your living room". I needed to have more purpose. At that time I moved away to Dallas with my boyfriend, David Mersky. We ended up starting an insulation business together. I sold the insulation and he installed it. Nine months later we moved back to Houston because I knew more people in the area. In the real estate business, I constantly received "no" as an answer. On the other hand, every time I picked up the phone in the insulation business, I got a "yes".

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*Why do you enjoy what you do today?*

I'm not doing what everybody else does.

I have always liked to do things differently. I am in a field, where I solve insulation, fireproofing and acoustical problems. I am a troubleshooting type of person. And I make sure the people who work for me, do meticulous work. Now, I definitely have a purpose.

*Tell our readers about Payless Insulation.*

Payless Insulation recently celebrated our 25-year anniversary. We started out doing residential projects using organic products on the attics, walls, and floors. In the 80's we moved into the commercial market, doing spray-on acoustical and thermal insulation. I had an old linen truck that I purchased for \$850 and I started the business with \$2000. I began with nothing, but worked hard and now I have 15 trucks around Houston! A couple of years ago, we also started to manufacture cotton air ducts and distribute cotton batting insulation because it is healthier and more efficient.

*Describe your proudest moment.*

It makes me proud that I started out with \$2000, struggling to survive in typically a man's business. Payless Insulation has come a long way in 25 years. The other proud moment is receiving Sears "Contractor of the Year Award" in 1988. In the beginning, I had the wrong truck, the wrong machine, the wrong guys but it all went right. If it is supposed to be, it is supposed to be. This has not been easy! Just recently, a financial planner asked me if I

wanted to retire. I said no, I will never retire, but who knows? Recently, I saw my grandmother's sister at a family reunion in Fort Worth. She is 89-years-old and she just sold her swap shop. She looked wonderful.

*What do you like to do when you are not working?*

I love playing bridge and golf. I am interested in photography and I like to go to art openings. But more than anything, I love listening, watching and spending time with people.

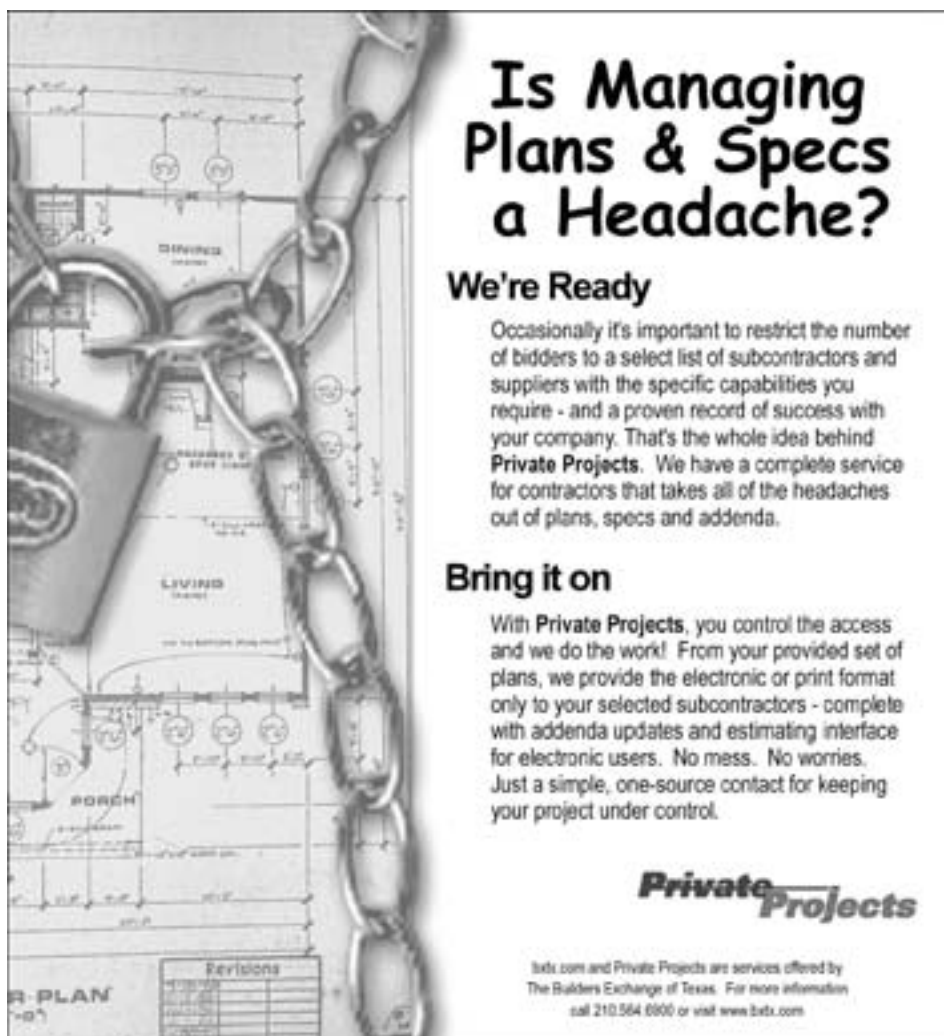
*Do you enjoy traveling?*

I am afraid of flying in airplanes. I like my feet on the ground. Recently, I actually drove to New York City. Clearing my mind in the open spaces, I admired the gorgeous scenery as I traveled through a town in Kentucky. When I arrived in New York City, I visited wonderful art galleries. I also love going to places in Arizona, although it is a bittersweet moment. I love the mountains, but I am afraid of heights.

This next year, my travel destination is Florida. I have never been out of the country, except for Matamoros, Mexico.

*What would you like our readers to know about your character?*

I believe money isn't everything. And when it comes to business, I listen to my heart and I am attentive. It is really an inside job, inside yourself. For example, what can I do to be a part of instead of a part from. I wish more people would look at what they are getting with their eyes wide open. I am a solutions-oriented, honest businessperson and I am good for my word.



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