

# Biography

## Carmen Munoz

The fifteenth child in a family of sixteen, Carmen Munoz grew up in the shadow of the Ambassador Bridge on 15<sup>th</sup> Street in Southwest Detroit. Early in her life Carmen was instilled with a strong work ethic, respect for her Mexican-American heritage and love for her Hispanic community. She would help her father print and distribute his newspaper "LA CHISPA," the first Spanish newspaper in Detroit. Her father's community leadership meant that the entire family was involved in community affairs.

A 1955 graduate of Detroit's Holy Redeemer High School, she went to work as a bookkeeper for a Detroit manufacturer that made precision machine parts for the automotive industry. She spent 27 years absorbing as much as she could about purchasing, production control, estimating, and labor negotiations. "I learned the jobs that my boss didn't like to do himself, those he found too tedious."

One of those jobs took her into sales. Munoz became the company's salesperson and things flourished for the next three years – until the owner brought his son in to manage the company. The son told her that no woman should make as much money as she did, especially a Hispanic woman. She quit. The following Monday she leased a building, some employees from the former company came to help out and Munoz Machine Products was in business.

"This was the early 1980's," Munoz says, "and the auto industry was not doing well. I had just leased an empty building, had no equipment, no work. But this is what I had done for 27 years. The opportunity for success, or failure, rested in my hands and the people that chose to work with me."

Munoz faced many obstacles. From the "good old boy" manufacturing mentality to outright discrimination on two fronts – race and gender, Munoz refused to be bullied and pushed back when she was pushed around. "I wasn't going to quit. Tell me I can't do it and I'll find a way to get it done." That determination led Munoz to build Munoz Machine products into a 20 million dollar automotive supplier that was benchmarked by the industry for quality, service and competitive pricing.

Building a strong business was not Munoz' only goal. Over the years she watched as her vibrant, working-class neighborhood became filled with abandoned factories, vacant lots and violent gangs. She wanted to give back to the community she loved. Munoz Machine Products, along with three other Hispanic companies, formed the Hispanic Manufacturing Center (HMC) in an old General Motors building in Southwest Detroit. Today, the HMC is the vibrant home of one of the largest employers in Southwest Detroit, the Ideal Group.

In addition to bringing manufacturing jobs back to Detroit, Munoz also began the GRACE program (Gang Retirement and Continued Education/Employment). The program offered an opportunity of rehabilitation and training to gang members who wanted to leave gang life and become contributing members of the community. Today, GRACE continues to exist through the DHDC's Youth Services. Because of Munoz' vision to build a strong business and an even stronger community, there has been a renewal of life and hope in Southwest Detroit.

Carmen Munoz has been a trail blazer in the Hispanic community, widely recognized for her volunteer work and entrepreneurial accomplishments. She was named by CRAINS BUSINESS among Detroit's Most Influential Women; was a recipient of Avon's Women of Enterprise Award as well as Minority Business of the Year for both Michigan and National Supplier Development Councils. Carmen's grit and determination have influenced many people over the years, but her true pride is in the positive impact she has made in the Hispanic community.