



STILL MAKING SMILES

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Contributor Landscape Management Magazine



Retired dentist Dr. Mario Gorjon got back to his plant-friendly roots by starting Green Angels Landscaping.

Growing up on a farm in Acapulco as the fourth of five children, Mario Gorjon was responsible for helping to milk the cows, feed the horses, and plant mangoes, corn and coconuts. He was raised to know a lot about plants and their care. But many years would pass between helping out the family business and starting his own successful firm, Green Angels Landscaping.

Gorjon admits that working in the nursery stimulated his passion for plants, but his mother, Rita, had other plans.

"She insisted that all of her children receive a college education," he explains. So, like his brothers and sisters before him, upon high school graduation in 1975 Gorjon was sent to Mexico City to live with his aunt and attend the Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México (UNAM). He decided to study dentistry.



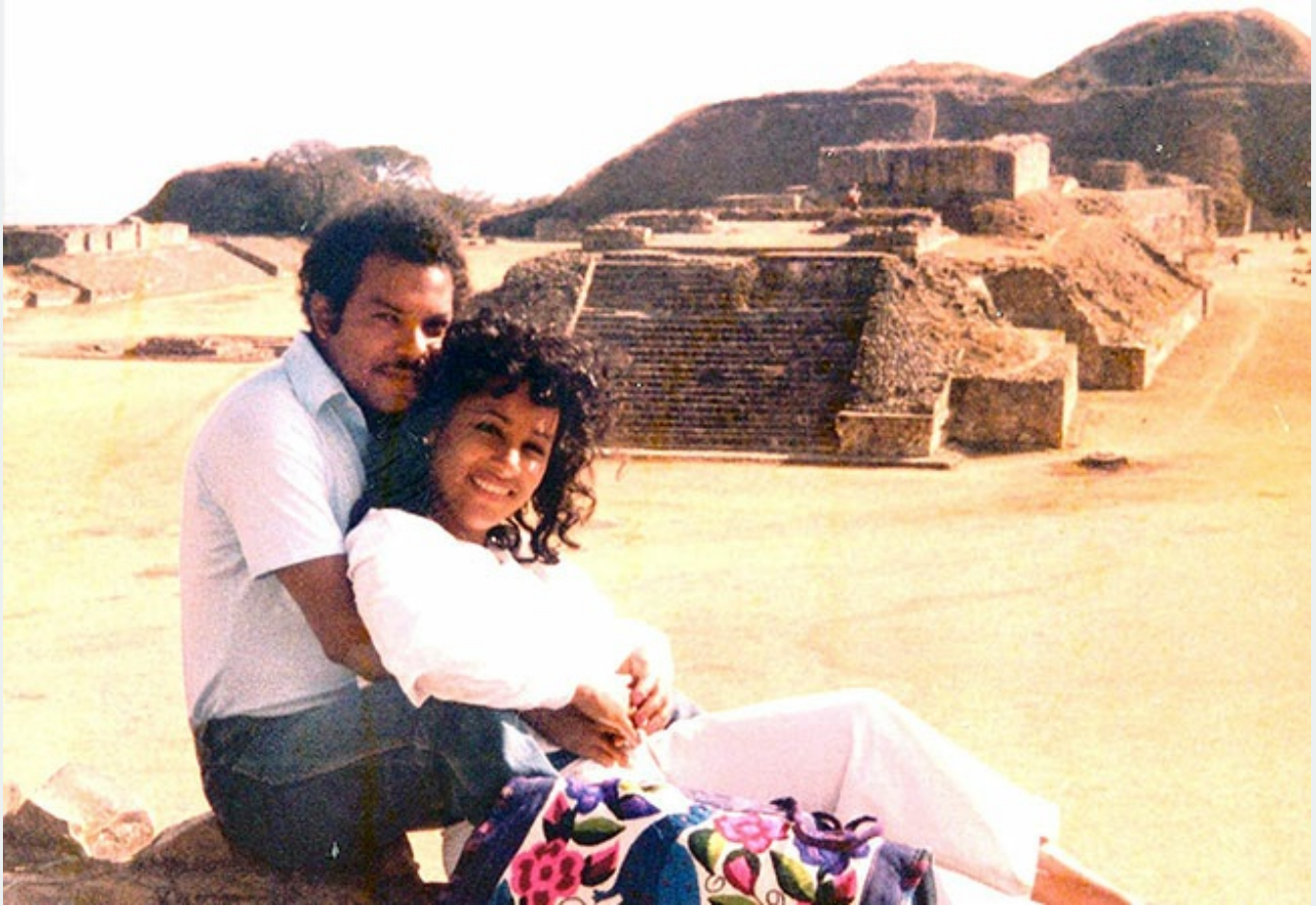
"I always had a talent creating things with my hands," Gorjon explains. "Growing up, I did not have the tools or materials to sculpt, so I used soap to sculpt parts of the body, flowers and other objects. In dental school, I loved working with wax to make dentures and jewelry for my classmates."

While at UNAM, Gorjon studied diligently. But he also made sure he found time to play soccer on the university team, UAG. He excelled in both playing both a forward and a center on the team, and graduating with honors from UNAM in 1980.

Northern exposure

Gorjon's dental specialty is endodontics, or root canals. He worked in Acapulco until he met future wife, Donna, on the beach in front of his mothers' restaurant.

He and Donna, a Virginia native, married in December 1985 and settled in Columbia, MD. Although Gorjon had grown up in a tourist-friendly town, he jokes that his "resort English" did not let him communicate comfortably in the U.S.



Gorjon practiced dentistry in Maryland until 1999, when back problems forced his retirement.

A new beginning

As a newly minted retiree, Gorjon was free to pursue his hobby of landscaping his home. Soon, family and neighbors were requesting his assistance and singing his praises.

"Donna and I decided to take the plunge and start the business in July 1999," he says. "The name, Green Angels, is an English translation of *Los Angeles Verdes*, which is an organization in Mexico that helps drivers on the highways of Mexico. When a car is in distress, the *Angeles Verdes* help drivers. We felt that helping families with their landscape needs was akin to their mission hence the name."

Green Angels began as a residential landscape installation business, but soon experienced growing pains.

"As the business grew, we were challenged by not having commercial property to park trucks and store equipment," Gorjon recalls. "We eventually invested in real estate that would accommodate our growing business in 2003."

The Green Angels Design Center was opened in 2007.



"Clients have a great appreciation for the integration of landscaping and interior design the Design Center provides."

The Design Center is also used for employee training and corporate seminars.

The firm has become a bit of a family affair: Nieces and a nephew have worked for Green Angels, and brother Santiago Gorjon has worked on the team. Another brother, Alberto Gorjon, is the firm's LED lighting engineer.

The Gorjons believe an emphasis must be placed in helping employees reach their fullest potential. With the Design Center as the centerpiece of their initiative, Gorjon notes that their goal over the coming years is to "remain committed to training Hispanic workers and encouraging Hispanic attitudes of success in the landscape industry."

His own experience has shaped the approach.

"The biggest barrier for me in this business has been stimulating my Hispanic laborers to believe in themselves and reach for higher opportunities to work

smarter, not harder," he says. "Also, it's very important to align their goals for working with the vision of the company."



The Gorjons encourage their team to study and "become certified in everything possible," Mario Gorjon advises. "Take every opportunity to teach and train others, because that is the best way to be proficient at your own skills. Mario himself was mentored by world-renown landscape designer, John Brooks.



Green Angels takes a strong position on training its workers, and has used state workforce funds to train its staff. The Gorjons are also proud of the fact that in 2007, seven staff members including H2B workers earned their Interlocking Concrete Pavement Institute's (ICPI's) Certification.

Both Mario and Donna Gorjon are Segmental Retaining Wall (SRW)- and ICPI-certified; Donna is the first African-American woman in the United States to achieve this dual status. But in the end, the initials behind their names don't mean as much as the dedication they have had to get where they are today.

Mario & Donna also believe "its most important to recognize our clients for being an important part of our legacy. In honor of Green Angel's Anniversary we want to recognize our valued clients and say thank you for allowing Green Angels Landscaping to be a business partner."

Gorjon concludes, "The success of our company goes to hard work, determination, and the belief that whatever can be believed can be achieved,"



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