

# **J Denise Cook d/b/a Community by Design**

**11/21/2015 Interview**

J Denise Cook d/b/a Community by Design, a local woman owned small business, was started in Las Vegas in May 2009 and continues to provide architectural services to the local community. UNLV Purchasing and Contracts met with the owner, Denise Cook, to discuss the company's history and their interest in providing UNLV schools and departments with their services. The following is a summary of the interview:

*(Q1) Tell us about your company. How did you get started? What are your annual sales? Staff levels? What products and/or services do you provide?*

**Community by Design is a small architectural firm specializing in public projects and community based design. They provide architecture, interior design, construction contract administration for both new and renovation work; along with “on-call” architectural services for smaller projects. They hire drafting staff as part of the project team if the project is small. They also have relationships in place with small firms that they have worked with in the past. For large projects, Community by Design has a teaming agreement in place with a large regional firm CRSA. CRSA augments their staffing levels and as a design Consulting Architect through Community by Design they offer community planning services (campus & urban planning), historical design services, and landscape architecture – along with traditional architectural services. Both firms have extensive experience providing Higher Education Projects.**

*(Q2) How did you become familiar with business opportunities with UNLV?*

**Denise previously worked with other firms for several years before striking out on her own. During that time she was part of the team who worked on the renovation of the Lilly Fong building, the original student dormitory project, and the student union & cafeteria renovation, which included an outreach opportunity with students. Through these projects, she became familiar with various members of the UNLV staff and the higher education design & construction process. In addition, she works directly with the State's procurement outreach staff and regularly attends meetings with public agencies.**

*(Q3) Why did you choose UNLV as a potential business partner?*

**Denise is a specialist in the built environment supporting education and believes that continued focus on education would support Nevada's opportunities in creating a diverse marketplace. She believes, “the education of our population is key to creating a broad-based and sustainable economy.” Based on past experience providing new and renovated education facilities for public & private schools; along with a current contract she has with the construction team within the Clark County School District, she continues to learn about the intricacies of education and how facilities support that effort. She also believes public outreach linked to a design process engages buy-in from the public arena. This creates a very important tie to the community, which is then supported by higher education in particular. She wants to be part of building a better, long-term, and sustainable future for all Nevadans.**

*(Q4) Regarding the process of becoming a supplier and competing for business, did you find it accommodating? Was UNLV staff helpful and engaged? What are some of the things UNLV did right?*

**Denise found the process both accommodating and engaging. She found UNLV staff wonderful to work with. She liked the online sign-up process. The website provides the vendor with useful and accessible information. In addition, she appreciates that she can provide information on the services Community by Design can offer through this interview.**

*(Q5) In your opinion, what are the major obstacles for small and disadvantaged businesses in Las Vegas and how can UNLV be a part of the solution?*

**Denise explained that small businesses like hers do not have the resources to provide the kind of marketing needed to reach key decision-makers. UNLV's vendor website, willingness to meet face to face, and fostering outreach are all great programs aimed at engaging the small business community.**

*(Q6) Are you a certified small, woman, or minority owned business? What are the advantages/obstacles with certification requirements for small/disadvantaged business?*

**Community by Design is a self-certified woman owned business. Denise is currently working on obtaining certification and has contacted the Small Business Administration for assistance. She has completed the Clark County BOWD Program. This program supported her knowledge of NRS for public works along with other business planning, financing, and marketing practices.**

*(Q7) When the economic climate in Southern Nevada improves, what are some of your business drivers for continuing a relationship with UNLV and what do you expect to be the benefits?*

**Community by Design enjoys repeat business. They believe that first and foremost, relationships are based on how deeply your consulting advisor listens and responds. With each project they improve listening skills and the experience necessary to meet budgets, schedules, and project requirements seamlessly. Without fail, they deliver projects on-time, on-budget, and also ‘on-purpose’ – striving to meet the over-arching goals that foster successful architectural solutions. They tailor a process to meet UNLV’s unique requirements, while establishing healthy feedback loops to improve performance with each opportunity. When providing a successfully completed project for a well-respected institution, Community by Design now has a positive success story that improves marketability and profile.**

*(Q8) The Nevada System of Education has recently published a Supplier Inclusion statement below. What does it mean to you and how do you think it will impact the business community serving UNLV?*

*The Nevada System of Higher Education supports equal opportunity for minority owned, women-owned, and other small disadvantaged business concerns (MWDBE) to compete for contracts awarded by NSHE. NSHE also supports efforts to encourage local businesses to compete for NSHE contracts. In some situations, MWDBE and local business concerns may not have the depth or full capability to meet all the requirements of large contracts. Nevertheless, NSHE supports finding opportunities for such MWDBE and local business concerns to participate as subcontractors or Tier 2 suppliers in large contracts.*

**For Denise, this statement and resulting process ‘levels the playing field’ of opportunity for small businesses. Community by Design can put together both large and small teams in response to UNLV’s requirements. They offer agility and a responsive process. They are small and have fewer clients and can take the time to pay attention to UNLV at every level of the design/construction process; while maintaining flexibility for changing schedules, scope, maintenance requirements, and field issues. Success with each client is crucial to their continued growth and profitability.**

*(Q9) Lastly, what do you want the UNLV campus community, your potential customers, to know about your business?*

#### **WHY COMMUNITY BY DESIGN?**

**Customer Satisfaction & Retention – we retain 90% repeat business by developing client trust and consistently delivering projects on time, on budget, and “on purpose.”**

**Experience - Denise Cook has led design processes for over one million square feet of diverse project types, with demonstrated experience in successful delivery of new & renovation work. Denise is a Municipal Project & Education Specialist for projects through all stages of the design process, design review submittals, bidding and construction.**

**Technically Sound Documentation - Adept at advising clients to fit the desired scope to the available budget, known for delivering technically sound construction documents, as evidenced by a change order percentage that is < 1 percent.**

**Tailor Design Process to UNLV’s Vision & Needs**