



Meet Meea Kang

**powerful
inspiration
drives one woman
down the road to
revitalize local
communities**

BY // CHERISE HENRY

I magine a woman with the intelligence of a scholar, creativity of an artist, and heart of a lion.

Meet Meea Kang, residential developer for Domus Development. Kang works out of her office off K Street in downtown Sacramento and is clearly passionate about her work; this is evident to anyone within moments of meeting her.

Kang is president and founding partner of Domus Development, a residential development company. Established in 2003, the company aims to incorporate green, energy-efficient building methods and innovative technologies into affordable housing developments. As the founding board member of the California Infill Builders Federation (CIBF), Kang is also a leader in land-use policy.

Her firm focuses on sustainability and community revival by developing affordable housing with easy access to public transit in order for families and individuals to thrive. "By doing so, we help to protect the local environment, enhance the quality of life, while educating residents on the benefits of sustainable practices. When people have confidence they begin to thrive... and then their communities thrive," she says.

continued on page 20



Necklace // Heart Clothing Boutique // Sacramento

Hair and Makeup // Amanda Lee // Sacramento

Location // La Valentina // Sacramento

MEEA KANG

continued from page 19

With nearly two decades of professional experience in the field of residential development, Kang has a resume to be reckoned with. Her background in art, design, architecture, construction, and community development provides her with a rich source of insight and expertise. With a Masters of Architecture from UC Berkeley and a Bachelor of Fine Arts from Cornell University, she has the perfect fusion of education and professional experiences to succeed as a residential developer.

As proof of her talent and dedication to her career, she has received numerous awards on behalf of her company and its projects. Locally, this includes awards for her La Valentina project here in Sacramento: the Best Infill Project 2012 from the *Sacramento Business Journal*, the Transit-Oriented Development of the Year 2012 from Sacramento Regional Transit, and Blueprint Excellence Award 2012 from Sacramento Area Council of Governments.

Personally, Kang has been awarded the Northern California Real Estate Women of Influence 2011 by the *San Francisco Business Times*, and the Visionary 2020 in 2010 from Sierra Business Council.

When the rubber hits the road

Kang says 2012 was her company's busiest year. They constructed and completed projects up and down the state, creating 1,200 jobs and 400 affordable housing units. Kang shares a look of sheer astonishment as she reflects on their year of huge accomplishments.

Kang talks about several local projects she's worked on in recent years including Kings Beach in Lake Tahoe, California, La Valentina in Sacramento, and Temple Art Lofts in Vallejo, California.

She says one of these projects has proved to be one of the most grueling, yet ultimately satisfying, to complete— Kings Beach. "Kings Beach is a great example of doing the impossible. Absolutely everybody said, 'there's no way you're going to do this, no way you're going to accomplish this,'" said Kang. "And we did."

Residents, individuals and families, who once slept in crawl spaces to keep warm, can now settle into quality living conditions of 77 units of affordable housing in Lake Tahoe. It was the first time in 65 years that affordable housing has been approved and built in the area.

"It's wonderful having my daughter with me now, too, to see the passion I have with what I do, and work so hard for."

—Meea Kang // President and Founding Partner
Domus Development

Meea Kang and eight-year-old daughter Alana, in front of La Valentina in downtown Sacramento.

Necklace and tunic // Heart Clothing Boutique // Sacramento

Hair and Makeup // Amanda Lee // Sacramento

Location // La Valentina // Sacramento

Kang is a fighter; you can see it in her eyes when she talks about all the trials and tribulations she's experienced over the years. Perseverance and thinking about the good she is doing for the communities, she says, is what keeps her going through the most difficult times.

Kang's recent project in Sacramento, in the Alkali Flats area, was known for drug dealing and prostitution for nearly 20 years. Kang has now transformed the area into 81 units of affordable housing called La Valentina. It sits like a work of art on 12th Street at D and E Streets.

"30 percent of these units have children who are now going to neighborhood schools," she says. "At the same time, it's attracting young people who are benefiting from having their first apartment and embracing an urban lifestyle by using regional transit, riding bikes, and working nearby."

Post development transformation, she says, you begin to see the local neighborhood beginning to thrive. "Crime goes down, ridership on regional transit rises, and you begin to see the community blossom."

Inspired by family

Kang's first project after starting her business was in one of Oakland's roughest areas. Shortly thereafter, she became pregnant and had her baby. "Basically, I gave birth as we broke ground," she laughs.

When asked about her daughter, eight-year-old Alana, Kang's face lights up with a smile. Kang tackles the work-life balance head on as a successful, driven businesswoman; she says she has a wonderful and flexible husband who also prioritizes family. "It's important to balance work and life. Her [Alana] youth is so wonderful and reminds us of what's really important in life. To have her lens to look through is important."

Kang spends her free time volunteering and doing fundraising projects for her daughter's school, taking frequent ski trips to the mountains, and visiting close friends in the Bay Area. But typically, she says, they like to keep a low profile on weekends.

Kang says what's been amazing is that Alana has been alongside her for most of her major business milestones. At the Kings Beach project when Kang got her first unanimous approval from the governing board, her daughter ran from out of nowhere and jumped onto her lap, she says laughing and reminiscing.

"I think they [the board] then realized that what we were doing was something far bigger than what I wanted to do because it was serving a greater purpose. My daughter helps me to always see that," Kang says.

Alana was also with Kang at the Sacramento La Valentina grand opening project, cutting the ribbon with her mom and Mayor Kevin Johnson. "She's able to be with me... and that is so important."

Kang says she was encouraged by her mother who was a hardworking woman with great passion in what she was doing every day. "It's wonderful having my daughter with me now, too, to see the passion I have with what I do, and work so hard for."

Kang grew up with two hardworking, loving parents who became true inspirations in her life. Her mother was a social worker working with the elderly. "She always inspired me," says Kang. "She went back to school for her Master's degree when my younger brother was born and yet she still continued to lead agencies in innovative senior social services."

Her father was a professor and educator who worked strongly within the community. "Their jobs were more than just jobs. They were there to support the community." It is obvious how much her upbringing has helped shape Kang into the woman she is today with a dynamic and encouraging spirit.

continued on page 45





Meea and Alana Kang in the La Valentina courtyard.

MEEA KANG

continued from page 21

When times get rough, keep pushing

"It's a hard business [development]. It's not for everyone. But I'm very committed to what I do," says Kang. Sometimes, she says, these projects are overwhelming with such mammoth hurdles and constant changing of direction. "Sure, sometimes we feel as if we were ready to throw in the towel. It's like they're pulling the rug out from underneath us to see if we would survive. And we have... every time."

Kang says she has absolutely no regrets. She pushes the boundaries to get things to happen and, at the end of the day, she knows that she can get things done that few can. "I'm [a] glutton for punishment. If someone says I can't do it, I need to prove them wrong." When you accomplish your goal after all [the] trials and tribulations there's really something to be learned from your experience," she says.

Kang believes that women have incredible inner strength. "Especially when tied with a moral code that you believe that what you do is not only right, but good for you and good for others," she says. "Maybe right now only I see that, but I know I can get others to see it too and believe something positive can happen."

She says if you make mistakes, keep going and just keep trying. "There are always going to be nay-sayers and only one person who says you can do this. And usually, that's just you," she laughs. "It's about just going for it."

It's all about the communities

Kang's most recent project in Vallejo involves the restoration and development of the old Masonic Temple building in the downtown area. "Women were not even allowed into the building back in the day. When I was walking the floors, I thought about that," she says. "How interesting that you fast forward hundreds of years and it takes a woman to save the building and help restore the community."

Kang has redeveloped the building to include 29 apartments and lofts that will be designated to artists to house a creative atmosphere with talented artists. The project is set to finish in the spring. "I grew up practicing art and playing music that inspired me. I think it'll inspire other kids who can find an outlet and help inspire them to get the confidence they need to succeed in life."

She says her work is about injecting life into these communities with creative opportunities for young people, and elderly, who take pride in ownership and to feel secured and respected. "It doesn't stop at the end of our project. The residents take their new found confidence and then spread it out into the community for years to come," she says. "It feels so great to finally get to the end after all the struggles and take a step back and watch these new communities blossom." **(b)**

For more information about Meea Kang and Domus Development's current and past projects visit www.domusd.com.

