

Vera Hall

Innovative Performance Construction Company, LLC

Vera Hall's successful career in the male-dominated construction industry began with a modest screen door built for her grandmother's house. It was her very first trade project for a college elective class in the vocational education program at Alcorn State University. Hall and the other three female students in the elective trade class were not interested in working on the auto mechanics projects like their male classmates, so they went with the screen door. Hall did not know it at the time, but that door opened up to a career path that led her to be selected the 2020 SBA Mississippi Small-Business Person of the Year. Hall is the managing member and principal of Innovative Performance Construction Company, LLC (IPC) of Jackson, an 8(a)/Small Disadvantaged Business, Woman-owned and Hub Zone-certified small business whose mission is to "innovate, perform, construct, and satisfy". IPC's service includes construction management, new construction, commercial renovations, environmental and erosion control to city, Federal, and state entities. The company has completed contracts totaling over \$3.6 million for the Department of the Army. Other clients include the Jackson Municipal Airport, Alcorn State University, the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, The Department of Commerce/NOAA, The Department of Interior and Jackson State University. Hall, a Fayette native, became interested in the construction business while majoring in Agriculture at Alcorn. During that time, she also earned extra money working along with her brother painting houses. "The Agriculture business (Agri-Business) degree curriculum was business-oriented with a lot of accounting, finance, and entrepreneurship. The focus of the curriculum was on training managers to work for somebody else's company", she said. After graduating in 1997 with extra course credits, she went on to earn a master's degree in Animal Science at Alcorn in 1998 and then entered the Doctoral Program in Animal Science at LSU in Baton Rouge, Louisiana. After three and a half years of research, Hall decided to take a break and do something else. She was accepted into the Theology program at Emory University, three years later, earned a Master of Divinity and later married a painting contractor. When the couple eventually got a divorce, the judge awarded ownership of their company to her ex-spouse because she was deemed a "figurehead" owner. The loss of the painting company during the divorce made her dig her heels in and start her own company in 2011. She named it in honor of her father, I.P. Hall (IPC). "It was going to be innovative and I was going to perform", she said. "He would be tickled to know I have a construction company. The company started out at the kitchen table in Hall's home in Fayette where she also studied for the Contractor's state board exam. "When I passed the exam, that was the moment I knew I had to change from proving a point to really having to perform". Her previous experience working with a licensed commercial painting firm and as an independent

contractor helped to deepen her interest in the business. “I really began to understand construction and flew with it”, she said. She reached out to the Small Business Administration (SBA) for guidance in overcoming obstacle as her new business started to take off. Participating in the SBA Model Contractors Program, she learned valuable lessons from large prime contractors and began building relationships within the industry. During her 11 years in construction, construction management, project management and constructing, Hall has completed the Mississippi Development Authority (MDA) Model Contractor Training Program, various SBA Federal contracting training seminars and the SBA Emerging Leaders Training Program. She continues to network through the Associated Builders & Contractors of Mississippi (ABC). Hall is a graduate of Alcorn State University with both a Bachelor of Science and Master of Science degree and Emory University with a Master of Divinity. Hall has done further study towards her Doctorate at Louisiana State University. Hall oversees the entire operation of her company, including marketing, sales, budgeting, and project management in the field. She manages more than 20 employees and conducts training and staff development. Hall said the hardest obstacle she had to overcome was telling the story of her capabilities and “getting people to buy into it because it’s a male dominated industry.” She remembered early on how it was hard to get an appointment with a banker and being told to come back in three months. “That was a hard pill to swallow. It’s easier now because there are more women in construction. Still, you have to have thick skin in this industry and definitely have to be able to accept rejection.” Hall has one daughter, Christian Halle, and recently added another layer to her business by opening a rental property as an Airbnb host. She would like to become involved in other real estate investments as well as commercial real estate. Her overall advice to those considering a career in construction, especially to women, is “not to feed into your fears. You will never know what you can do, because fear will come, but what matter is how you deal with the fear.”