

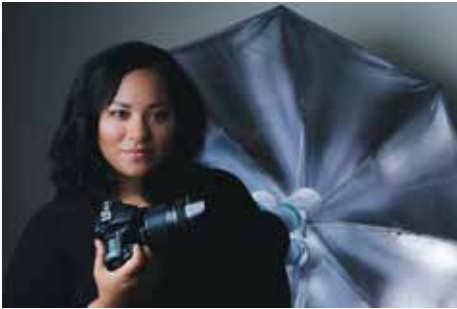


HISPANICS

THRIVING IN ST. LOUIS



Newspapers in Education is celebrating Hispanic Heritage Month in partnership with the Hispanic Chamber of Commerce of Metropolitan St. Louis. This series highlights local Hispanic Americans who are giving back to others in the St. Louis community.



CAROL LARA

Do Something about Your Dreams

By: **Carlos Restrepo**
Hispanic Chamber of Commerce of Metropolitan St. Louis

They say everyone looks at life through different lenses. Professional Photographer Carol Lara takes that phrase a step further: she uses her lenses, both literally and figuratively, to help raise women up.

"I help women build their self-esteem through portrait photography. It has more to do with who they are on the inside than just taking a pretty picture," said Lara about her studio, Carol Lara Photography. "I use photography as the platform to shed some light on the Latino community. I feel that through sharing our stories with one another, communities can heal and flourish."

Lara has lived in St. Louis for 34 years. Her parents left Peru in 1978 and arrived in Connecticut in pursuit of the American Dream. A family friend who lived in St. Louis ultimately convinced Lara's father to move to St. Louis for work.

"We lived in South City and my dad worked at Wonder Bread," Lara said. "I still remember that my preschool class took a field trip to the Wonder Bread factory where we rode on the train. I was so proud of my Dad. My father went on to become the Top Salesman for a well-known pest control company here in St. Louis before he broke away and started his own successful pest control company."

Success continues to run through Lara's blood. Following her father's footsteps, she has gone on to set up her own successful photography business.

That success wasn't easy, however, as Lara built her business and skills from scratch.

"I am a self-taught photographer," Lara said. "I began by reading my camera manual, taking a notebook out with me while I photographed, experimenting and taking notes."

Lara took classes at a local photography studio and then shadowed wedding photographers, which gave her experience in the field.

"From there I decided to take a class at St. Louis Community College to make sure that I wasn't missing anything," Lara recalls. "At this point I was sure that I had the fundamentals down and the rest was up to me to experiment and get creative."

Lara said pursuing her dream wasn't easy, but it is also her proudest accomplishment.

"It took about 6 years, but I finally broke the cycle I had been stuck in for the last 20 years of working for corporate companies," Lara said. "My desire has always been to work for myself as my immigrant parents always encouraged me to do. I combined that with my creativity and broke free in October of 2017. It wasn't easy, and of course I look back and see what I could have done differently, but sometimes when you wait until you have everything in order, you never jump."

For younger people looking to follow on her footsteps, Lara advises them not to be afraid of dreaming.

"It sounds poetic to say 'I'm a dreamer,' but if you never wake up and actually do something about it, you will never make your dreams come true," Lara said. "So, dream and take action. Do the work that it takes to achieve your dreams and then take pride in that."





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QUESTIONS:

What steps did Carol take in pursuing her dream of becoming a photographer?

How does Carol's work influence the people she takes pictures of?

What obstacles has Carol had to overcome in establishing her business?

What role did education play in Carol's success?

Carol's advice is not to be afraid of dreaming. What advice would you suggest to someone setting out to achieve a goal?

Think of a time you set out to achieve a goal or accomplish a difficult task. What steps did you take to achieve that goal? What did you learn along the way? How did you feel in the end?
