

# Araneda: ranked with the best

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SUSSEX – Laura Araneda has been ranked among the most influential businesswomen in the country.

The busy mom, who is as comfortable in a hard hat as she is chauffeuring her two sets of twins around, has taken little time to bask in the glory of the success she has built in a male-dominated industry.

But over the past two weeks she has been pushed into the spotlight as a leader in the business world for the multi-million dollar business she runs out of Sussex. She has travelled the globe, entering the depths of mining operations from as far away as Chile and Ireland, to as close to her hometown as next-door Penobsquis, making pitches for drilling jobs for mining companies and utilities.

"When I get on site, the men in charge are always looking past my shoulder and asking 'where's the guy?' Araneda laughed from her Sussex office. "I think I have to work 50 per cent harder than a man in the same position, but the older I get, the easier it is. "I guess you develop a sense of humour. You have to roll with the punches and just go with it."

The 42-year-old president of Vic Progressive Diamond Drilling has been named in the Sept. 27 Chatelaine listing of the most successful female entrepreneurs in the nation.

Based in Sussex's industrial park, the company has annual revenue of upwards of \$10 million, with a three-year revenue growth of nine per cent.

Every year Chatelaine and Profit magazine list Canada's top female entrepreneurs, they refer to as W100. In this year's list, the women combined contribute \$1.4 billion annually to the economy.

And on Thursday, the vibrant busi-

nesswoman was named a finalist in RBC's Canadian Women Entrepreneur Awards where winners will be announced during a black-tie awards gala in Toronto on Nov. 28.

For her, the attention is flattering, but her passion lies in creating work that allows families to stay working, and together.

The value of creating opportunities that put families first has never been lost of Araneda. Within the brisk pace of being a professional businesswoman in a highly-competitive industry, she suffered intense heart break in recent months. After battling pancreatic cancer for four years, her husband Cesar died in April.

It was in a different stage of Araneda's life when she met her future husband, an immigrant from Chile, in Regina in 1994. He spoke five languages and was working in the hotel industry when they met – her pursuing her youthful dream of being on stage after graduating with her business degree. She was part of a musical theatre troupe and was performing at a hotel in Regina when the couple met.

"He was wonderful...so I drug him home to Sussex," Araneda smiled at the memory, "and from then on he was with me all the time. We worked together here and ran our lives at home. He was with me 24-seven."

As Araneda and her four children heal from the loss, her focus is sharply directed on her family ahead of any professional role.

"You have to be mom first – if the kids call right now, I will drop everything and go to them. The reason I'm working is for them," the Sussex Corner woman said.

Araneda is a self-proclaimed "miner brat" whose family has deep roots in the mining industry. Her grandfathers were



Submitted

**Laura Araneda has been named to Chatelaine's listing for Canada's top 100 female success stories.**

miners, and her father Vic Fournier was an underground driller before 25 years ago when he founded the diamond drilling company Araneda now leads. He retired in 2006.

So despite the pretty blond hair and radiant smile, Araneda is no stranger to hard, dirty work.

"Maybe I am a tom boy. I love the adventure of this business," she said. "It's always different."

The industry has evolved in recent years to set a more comfortable environment for women.

"When I first went underground... there wasn't even a room for the females to change or wash," Araneda said. "It's so much better now."

"Now 30 to 50 per cent of the geologists on these sites are women. They're running the exploration projects."

Araneda said she always goes underground when there is a job she wants.

"I always want to see the job for myself before I bid the contract," she said. "I need to get under there to see what the challenges and conditions are."

While the business began as a specialist in underground drilling, it has since evolved to surface drilling.

Araneda's company has been contracted for a dozen years to lead high-pressure, high-volume grouting services at PotashCorp's mine in Penobsquis. Throughout the years the mine has faced a serious brine inflow problem, so Araneda's crews work around the clock pumping grout into leaky crevices of the mine.

"We've dumped so much cement in there, it's crazy," Araneda said. "If we took all that cement, we could make a sidewalk to the other end of Canada and back. It's 24-seven we have crews in there."

Vic Progressive Diamond Drilling also uses diamond drilling during exploration processes when mining companies want to know where more deposits are located, as well her workers are permanently on site NB Power's Mactaquac dam drilling and grouting to relieve system pressure.

Araneda has a staff of 85 and is out-

growing her Sussex facility where repairs and administration is done. She has purchased 15 acres on the main stretch to Penobsquis where she can see PotashCorp's mining shafts in the skyline and is ready to start building a more spacious headquarters.

From there, she explained, her company will continue to break new ground in its manufacturing division. Currently her staff is developing a new, self-propelling sky track unit for a northern client that can be driven through the rough terrain of remote, potential mine sites.

The jobs have taken Araneda and her workers everywhere, she explained.

"We have worked in Chile and Europe and all over Canada and the States...we'll work anywhere, and it's always changing," Araneda said. "We have our equipment and will travel wherever the work is."

Also in the Chatelaine ranking is one other New Brunswick success story – Moncton's Lilia Fraser, secretary/treasurer of Pump House Brewery Ltd.



