



E. Joseph Deering / Chronicle

Gloria Niño, owner of Nino & Associates and Hispanic Female Entrepreneur of the Year, learned early that she was meant to be her own boss.

She had to be her own boss

By DAVID KAPLAN
Houston Chronicle

AFTER arriving in Houston in 1977, Gloria Niño became a job hopper, often trying out two or three jobs a year.

She could tell early on if she would have a problem working somewhere: She might pick up on low morale or get a feeling of "being kept in a box."

She decided she was meant to be her own boss.

In 1984 she founded Nino & Associates, one of the first real estate companies in Houston to serve the corporate relocation market. Her offshoot company, Nino Corporate Lodging, generated \$10 million in sales last year.

See NINO on Page 2C.

Nino

Continued from Page 1C.

On Thursday she was named Hispanic Female Entrepreneur of the Year at the Houston Hispanic Chamber of Commerce Triunfando awards.

Niño was 27 when she decided to start her company. When seeking startup capital, she was turned down by many banks before finally receiving a "character loan" from Frost Bank: They liked her passion and her business plan, she said, even though she had no money. The \$25,000 startup loan is the only money she's ever borrowed.

Her first five years of operation were difficult. She often sacrificed her own salary to meet payroll. But her client base of law and accounting firms and oil and gas companies kept growing and put her in the black.

Born in the Rio Grande Valley and raised in Waco, she moved to enroll at the University of Houston.

The seed of the idea of a corporate relocation business was planted in her mind soon after her arrival, when she took an apartment in what she described as a bad neighborhood. She said she made the unin-

formed decision because she didn't know the city.

After getting her real estate license, she started the company in 1984. The Houston economy was souring, but her company was able to prosper. One reason was that Houston-based companies were laying off employees in other cities while moving some back to Houston.

In 1987, she started a full-service corporate lodging company, Nino Corporate Lodging. It was the same year that her husband, Frank Monacelli, joined her. Her lodging company has leased as many as 600 units in Houston.

Niño is active in nonprofits: She is on the board of Teach for America and involved with the charter school, Youth Engaged in Scholastics.

About 10 years ago, she helped found the Furniture Bank, in conjunction with the Mental Health Mental Retardation Authority. It provides mentally disabled and other people with furniture and home accessories. There are now 19 such operations in the country.

One of her passions, Niño said, is advancing her employees, and she has no hard feelings for those who leave her. She holds "Ex-Nino" parties at Christmas for former staffers.