

peoplerebecca o'connor



Photo by Pat Lassy

MARIO GONZALES

He's created a home-building empire in the desert

A Chicago native, but a Coachella Valley resident since he was in his teens, contractor Mario Gonzales built his first house here in 1979. Since then, and 3,000 units later, Gonzales Homes and Associates constructs about 500 units a year and employs 110 people with three offices in Cathedral City.

With developer John Wessman, he recently opened Bella Clancy in Rancho Mirage, a Tuscan-style village of million-dollar homes, and The Campanile, a "walkable" community in Cathedral City with homes in a range of sizes.

WHAT MAKES A HOUSE A HOME? The hearts that are in it. It's the people that make a home.

FEATURES EVERY HOUSE SHOULD HAVE. Curb appeal, functionality within the home and a great room. People have needed a place to gather since the beginning of time.

THE ROOF OVER YOUR HEAD. My fiancée (long-time girlfriend Paula) and I have been building a Tuscan-style home for three years now. It was inspired by a trip to Europe. We're moving in two months from now.

WHAT DID YOU WANT TO BE WHEN YOU GREW UP?

Surprisingly, a pilot and I was also always inspired by music.

WHAT'S IN YOUR CD PLAYER NOW? Earth, Wind & Fire, Santana, Elton John

GREATEST ACCOMPLISHMENT. The birth of my children.

BEST GIFT YOU'VE RECEIVED. A new hat. I've gotten some really cool ones. I love hats!

BEST GIFT YOU'VE GIVEN. The house that I'm building for my family.

FOUR THINGS THAT ARE ALWAYS ON YOUR DESK.

Computer, adding machine, phone and some good luck charms.

IF YOU HAD TO GIVE ONE UP, WHICH ONE? The computer.

FINISH...

NEW HOME OWNERS SHOULD KNOW...the value of what they're purchasing, the credibility of the builder and the quality of the product.

I WISH EVERYONE BELIEVED...that there's opportunity to do whatever you want in life.