

Jasmine Azima co-chairs Young Leaders for Lila as a major volunteer responsibility.

Using the power of the pyramid

She is only 30, atypical of the women of her country, but is quickly being recognized as a dues-paying member of our community.

As Jasmine Azima moves into the local political arena as co-chairman of the newly emerging Young Leaders for Lila, a support group of community leaders backing mayoral candidate Lila Cockrell, she doesn't forget her roots.

"I left Iran in October 1976, when I was 17, and I would never go back because of my career and interests here," said the owner of Jasmine Engineering, a firm she started in January 1985.

'No rationale'

"There is no rationale for (the Ayatollah) Khomeini to do what he is doing to my people. It was so civilized, forward-thinking. Now the country is moving backward," she said.

But Azima is in fast-forward.

She whipped through her engineering degree in 3½ years at the University of Texas at Austin and almost completed her master's degree.

"I started talking with architectural firms both in Austin and in San Antonio about the quality of engineers and what the problems were. And gradually I began to get work here in San Antonio."

Jasmine Engineering didn't become a reality without some tribulations.

"I had no portfolio, only four years of experience. I had only small projects, nothing major. I had no staff and no money to hire."

She borrowed \$40,000 from a bank with a six-month deadline. "I paid them back in 5½ months."

Four years later, Jasmine Engineering is a solid, downtown rock, located at 309 Third St. "We are a firm of 11, and I am adding three more. Our projects total 350 in San Antonio, Austin, Mississippi, Los Angeles, Memphis, among other sites. Here we are working on projects with the Alamo Community College District, the Police Academy and the Bexar County Hospital.

Board member

"In 1987, I started getting involved in the community, and I began by going on the board of the Women's Employment Network. I was a member of the Greater Chamber of Commerce Leadership San Antonio class of 1987-88, and I am serving on its steering committee this year."

Azima lauded the leadership class concept because "it gives you exposure to all aspects of the community and it teaches you how to work in the system."



Blair Corning

She listened hard; she learned well. She's now in that system. Today, Bruce Bugg, a young attorney as chairman, and Azima, as vice chairwoman and membership chairwoman, head Young Leaders for Lila, a pyramid-building political organization that, if Azima reaches her membership goal, should have a 10,000-member roster by April.

"Our executive committee consists of Henry R. Munoz III, Ben Rodriguez, Rick Bela, Elaine Dagen Bela, Mike Gentry, Dr. Larry Harkless, Bruce and me. And, of course, Lila."

Through the pyramid process, YLL now has a 150-member advisory board. "Through a letter-writing campaign, we should have 1,000 members by March 1. We then push for 5,000 by late March, and by the end of April we want the full 10,000 quota. At only \$10 a member, that gives us a base of \$100,000.

Fund allocation

"But we will only give Lila's campaign up to \$17,500 with the balance used as operating expenses, for staff time, typing, letterheads and stamps. We will also use member monies for future events."

Azima said all 10,000 young leaders in every profession, business or career will be entered on a central data base with his or her specialty noted.

"If Lila wins, she wants to be able to use this data base to get more young people involved in city government. It goes back to the leadership class. After it was over, and we had all this wonderful knowledge about the city, we had no place to go with it. We didn't get a call."

The intent for these 10,000 motivated yuppie YLL members is involvement. "When you are this age — up to 40 and a little over — you don't have a great deal of money. But you can volunteer your time. As mayor, Lila can look to this group to help work on different issues."

The young Iranian woman has quickly responded to one of America's most recognizable traits: the spirit of volunteerism.

"Right now, I'm spending at least 15 hours a week on this. And that should increase. It's a commitment. It's not just an in-name-only."