



Dani Michels owns Commercial Interior Contractors (CIC), which is finding its niche in interior construction projects, including the new Sucre Patisserie on the Capitol Square and the build-out of the new Thomasville Furniture Gallery in Fitchburg.

Michels founded CIC just over three years ago. A single mom at the time, she was looking to make a better life for herself and her son, and was determined to make good use of her master's degree in business from the University of Chicago.

While Michels started the company out of her east side condo's living room, CIC and its staff of four (plus one office dog named Bessie) now reside in an office suite in Middleton. Projects recently completed include a 4,000-square-foot build-out for the O'Connell Pharmacy's new location in Sun Prairie, a

salon build-out for Salon Studios 101 on Madison's southwest side, a 9,000-square-foot office expansion/remodel for the Carlson Company on the east side, a build-out for Edward Jones' new Hilldale area office, a laboratory build-out for TJH2B in Sun Prairie and a suite of executive offices for T. Wall Properties on Junction Road.

What was your first job?

My junior and senior year of high school I worked as an engraver for a Things Remembered store. Later on, I worked at both their East and West Towne locations here in Madison to earn extra cash while attending the UW as an undergrad.

Which of your career accomplishments makes you proudest?

The first would be graduating from the University of Chicago with a master's in business. The second would undoubtedly be starting CIC. I dreamed of starting a business most of my adult life, and finishing my MBA just stoked that fire. I didn't want to start just any business, though. I was determined to start a business that centered on something I could be passionate about. I'm so grateful that my work experiences ultimately lead me in this direction. Most days, I can't wait to go to work.

What is the best advice you have ever received?

"Life leads you on" — from my mom. Usually there's a "Sweetie" tacked onto the end of that sentence. In other words, pay attention to what's right in front of you.

What book are you currently reading?

I usually have a few books going at once, and what I pick up depends on my mood. At the moment I'm reading *Good to Great* by Jim Collins (for when I have business on the brain), *The Book of Gardening* by Smith & Hawkin (for more relaxed moments) and *Mythologems* by James Hollis (for when I'm feeling philosophical). I tend to save fiction for when I'm on vacation.

What is your favorite way to unwind?

I've recently recommitted myself to a regular yoga practice, and it has quickly become my favorite way to relax. Once a day I take an hour or so for myself to attend a class, and for that time there's no cell phone, no e-mail and nothing that needs my attention. I had some angst initially about stepping away from work for this, but I now realize that taking that time for myself makes me so much more productive the rest of the day.

What do you like most about Madison?

The lakes. The Farmers' Market. Willy Street. The University. The coolest Capitol building there ever was. I love it all. I was heartbroken when I left Madison after college, and missed it every day until I finally came back years later. I think what I love most about the Madison area is that it's home. I've always felt a profound sense of belonging here; like this is where I'm supposed to be. I've lived in a number of other places, and have traveled quite a bit, but there just isn't anyplace in the world quite like Madison.

Wisconsin Woman Magazine
September 2008

