

# People

ON THE MOVE

## SPOTLIGHT

# Breaking the mold

Maryam Ghyabi doesn't fit the mold.

When most 14-year-old girls in Iran were dreaming of marriage, she dreamt of civil engineering. In her classes, she was surrounded by boys. In her family, she was the first girl to finish high school and college. Owing her own firm one day was her driving goal, and today, with that goal accomplished, she has even more things in mind.

After more than 20 years in the engineering field, Ghyabi opened Ghyabi & Associates Inc., an engineering and planning firm with offices in Jacksonville, Lake Mary and Ormond Beach. In May, Gov. Charlie Crist appointed Ghyabi to an at-large seat on the St. Johns River Water Management District governing board.

Ghyabi came to the United States when she was 18 years old. Her plan to attend The National University in Iran as one of the top 100 students was thwarted when her nation broke into revolution in 1978. Moving to America, she attended the University of Central Florida, where she earned a bachelor's in civil engineering in 1982 and a master's in transportation engineering in 1984.

"I just had to grow up real quick," she said. The language barrier was a struggle at first, but she credits the hardship for helping to develop an important resilience.

Now, she is focused on learning about the projects governed by the St. Johns River Water Management District.

"Water is going to be, and is, a big component of the growth of the state of Florida," she said. Finding the balance between economic development and protecting the environment has been her standard in business and now she said her goal is to bring consensus across the board with her knowledge of this standard.

"Our roads have high accident rates and I'd love to see them come down," Ghyabi said a car is not and shouldn't be the only way to get anywhere in Jacksonville, despite the city's expansive landmass.

"I just don't believe in putting asphalt all over everything. We can be smarter than that."

With federal funding limited, Ghyabi believes it is important for Floridians to come together as a state to decide the future of transportation.

"Our transit system can use work, to become 21st century. We've turned the century, so our system needs to move on."

When she's not busy planning roads or analyzing traffic patterns, Ghyabi enjoys playing golf. She has combined her passion for the sport with mentoring the junior level management of the firm.

"I can tell you one thing, they don't mind playing golf with a girl and I don't have any problem beating them."

She said playing golf is important in building a bond with her associates. But the times with her 16-year-old daughter, Paria, are her most cherished experiences.

"It's constantly a race between us to see who can make the other laugh more. I told her I'm moving into college with her and we're going to be roomies."

