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Capt. Paz Gomez gives a presentation shortly before her July 29 retirement as commanding officer of the Naval Facilities Engineering Service Center.

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Capt. Paz Gomez discusses an issue with her staff shortly before her July 29 retirement as the commanding officer of the Naval Facilities Engineering Service Center.

The developers told Capt. Paz Gomez and her family that they could move into their new Carlsbad home on Aug. 22.

Now, they said, there appeared to be a problem and the date would need to be pushed back.

If they didn't realize it when the conversation began, they would soon learn that meeting or beating construction deadlines, squeezing timelines and getting the job done right the first time is why Gomez is one of only five women with the rank of captain currently in the Civil Engineer Corps and was the fifth ever to attain the rank. If she can meet those goals with multimillion-dollar, state-of-the-art Navy buildings, why couldn't they do it with one house?

Gomez, the commanding officer of the Naval Facilities Engineering Service Center (NAVFAC ESC) at Naval Base Ventura County, Port Hueneme, who retired from a 29-year Navy career on Friday, July 29, is bringing her exactitude to the private sector in more ways than one.

In September, she starts work as the engineering services manager for URS Corp., which provides engineering and construction services to both the private and public sector worldwide. The company's projects involve schools, water districts, utility companies, roads, pipelines and — always — energy efficiency.

About 70 people will report directly to her.

“Designing, building, constructing, renovating — all that is similar to what NAVFAC does,” she said.

And just as she was accountable to her superior officers and ultimately taxpayers for cost efficiency and timeliness, she'll be accountable to shareholders — but in a more competitive environment.

“NAVFAC takes great pride in taking care of taxpayers' dollars,” she said in an interview a few days before her retirement ceremony. “We make sure of what we're doing, that we're doing it the right way. We're always looking to be more efficient, and in private industry, that will translate into getting more profit and gaining that competitive edge that will ensure our viability.”

She'll walk into her office on that first day with the same mindset that she brought to the Navy, but there will be one major difference that she hasn't experienced since she worked at a Jack-in-the-Box in high school:

“I won’t be wearing a uniform!” she said, laughing. “That’s going to be a huge difference! I have a couple of suits, but I have no wardrobe. I’ll be shopping for the next five weeks.”

Gomez entered the Navy’s Civil Engineer Corps at a time when there were few other women around. A strong student who liked and excelled in math and science, she had graduated from high school at 16 — too young to attend the U.S. Naval Academy, which had been her dream. Instead, she studied civil engineering at San Diego State University and figured out another way to enter the Navy: She would enlist after her junior year in college, finish her degree and become a commissioned officer. Every two weeks, she received an E-3’s pay.

While in college, she toured and interned at different naval facilities and met with officers and engineers to discuss careers. Designing schematics, no. But public works? That looked interesting.

Her field chosen, Gomez was commissioned in 1983 and entered basic training at the Civil Engineer Corps Officers School, where she was one of three women in a class of 35. She was the only woman to make the rank of captain, and another woman made the rank of commander.

Through the years, she found her mentors in the Navy, some of whom are now admirals. So even though the percentage of women entering the Civil Engineer Corps has remained about the same, more women are staying in and achieving higher ranks. As Gomez was retiring on July 29, another woman was preparing to be promoted to captain.

“We’ve come a long way in the last 28 years,” she said.

Would she recommend a Navy career to her daughter?

“Of course!” she said. “I’d be very excited if she went into the Navy!”

Gomez’ spouse, retired Marine Lt. Col. John Gaillard, has been what Gomez calls “Mr. Mom” to their 10-year-old twins for the last two years, and he plans to continue that role in Carlsbad. Before that, the two juggled parenting responsibilities, a situation she admitted was a real challenge.

“Someone gets sick. Who’s staying home?” she remembers, and she’s not smiling at the memory.

Gaillard and the twins were three of nearly two dozen family members who attended the retirement ceremony. Gomez has seven brothers and sisters, nearly all of whom live in the San Diego area, as do her parents.

“As much as I’m going to miss this command and Ventura County, I’m looking forward to going home to San Diego,” Gomez said. “I have mixed feelings — I love this place — but I’m looking forward to a new adventure in the private industry.”

But before she starts work, she has to move into her new home. And after long talks with the developer about timelines and construction schedules, the date was agreed upon.

The Gomez family will move in on Aug. 22.