

## Businesswoman Succeeds Despite Odds

BY LEON CREWS  
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Tonya Lewis thinks of herself as a strong Black woman, and from all indications, that's exactly what she is.

Few Black women would start a business at the age of 22, especially in a field dominated by men. But, that's exactly what Ms. Lewis did.

Lewis Lawn Care Service is a very successful business, owned and operated by Ms. Lewis.

Born in Miami, Ms. Lewis said the violence in Miami so upset her mother, she moved the entire family to Mulberry, Florida, then later to Plant City, where Ms. Lewis attended Plant City High School. "In high school, I concentrated on my academics, and actually dabbled in woodwork and agriculture.

"I decided long ago, I wanted to be a business owner. I became educated in several technical skills, and from that point I evolved into a better person."

Aside from the personal obstacles in her life, Ms. Lewis had to deal with first, being a woman in a male dominated field, then being a Black woman in that field.

Ms. Lewis said starting a business isn't easy, and sometimes you want to quit. "My



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first four years were tough. I thought about giving up several times, but I kept going and now I'm glad I did. My experiences have made me a lot wiser."

Ms. Lewis said she has a better understanding of how to set up a business, its long term goals, and how to make it last. "One of the first questions asked of me was whether or not I was getting into this line of work just to make money for a short term, or was I building something for the future. The latter definitely applies."

Ms. Lewis said she still gets strange reactions from people when she tells them she's in the lawn care busi-

ness. But, she says there is a purpose for her choice of careers. "I was never the type to sit behind a desk and interact with certain people. I was made to perform physical work, because that's what makes a Black woman stronger."

As far as her lawn care business is concerned, Ms. Lewis said it stands on its own merit. "My work speaks for itself. I also don't think of myself as having competition. I'll accept any challenge, anytime."

By being a successful business owner, Ms. Lewis said she hopes she's making a statement for the younger generation. "I want to encourage them to keep trying to make something of themselves. I was able to do it, and I had a lot of the same obstacles to deal with as they do right now. By the grace of God. I was able to keep going, and I enjoy my labor."

Ms. Lewis said her clientele has grown in excess of 93 clients. She also supervises a crew of three, but says that varies because of the lack of reliable labor.

Ms. Lewis is proud to say she's helped two men start a business, and they've become quite successful.