

# ESSENCE

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## WORK & wealth



### BUILDING BRIDGES

**A**fter giving birth to her first child 11 years ago, Bellandra B. Foster knew that returning to work full-time was not an option. She had been the director of the Bureau of Highways and Streets in Atlanta under former mayor Maynard Jackson and was working as a State Transportation District Utilities and Permits engineer in Michigan. So she decided to redirect her career and juggle the demands of being a wife, mother and entrepreneur. Today she is the president and principal engineer of BBF Engineering Services, P.C., a civil and transportation engineering firm based in Southfield, Michigan. With a doctorate in civil and environmental engineering from Michigan State University, Foster has established a niche for herself in road and bridge projects. Her firm has inspected most of the major freeways in southeastern Michigan, and in 2003 generated \$1.3 million in revenues.

**THE BLUEPRINT:** "Because I'd been working for 14 years before starting my company, I had set aside a sizable nest egg. When I was ready to venture out on my own, I used \$12,000

**Bellandra B. Foster**  
**BBF Engineering Services, P.C.**

from my savings to cover the company's insurance premiums and purchase supplies like hard hats, software, upgraded computers and specification books. Business was slow in the beginning, so I built my staff around the company's work flow and my ability to pay them."

**STRATEGIC PLANNING:** "I decided to go into business because I wanted the flexibility to spend more time with my family. As an entrepreneur, I had to decide what was important and what I was willing to sacrifice. Though my company has grown from one to 12 full-time employees, I made a conscious choice to keep it at a manageable size to avoid problems that are inevitable with growth."

**STAYING IN BALANCE:** "It has been a continuous struggle to balance responsibilities at home and at work. But God has shown me that if I take care of His business, He will take care of mine. I stay focused and strive to live by the principles of prosperity and integrity, to keep my hectic life balanced."

— ZAKIYYAH EL-AMIN