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## SHOP TALK

BY EMILY HOHENWARTER



Demo Diva Simone Bruni and her crew work hard to give local homeowners a clean slate for rebuilding.

Simone Bruni isn't a typical demolition contractor. But then again, she doesn't work in a typical city. A New Orleans native, Bruni founded her company, **Demo Diva Demolition** (6463 Memphis St., 486-4121; [www.thedemodiva.com](http://www.thedemodiva.com)), when she saw a need for local contractors after Hurricane Katrina. Before breaking into the demolition business, Bruni worked in the hospitality industry.

"It's really quite comical that I'm in demolition," Bruni says. "I went from planning parties to this."

Bruni says she didn't know much about demolition before she started Demo Diva. Because she was the first person on her block to move back after the storm, neighbors sought her advice as they returned and she referred them to a demolition crew that she knew.

"I got in the business after Katrina just by giving my neighbors advice," Bruni says. "Just talking to them, I realized that some houses needed to be demolished, but I knew nothing about the demolition business. It was definitely a learn-as-I-go thing.

Initially, I was involved with a great crew that worked with me and explained things to me."

At first, Bruni just charged demolition crews a referral fee for the friends she sent their way. Later, she decided she wanted to be more involved, became a contractor and founded Demo Diva. Today Bruni's business demolishes three to four houses in a typical week.

Motivated by her own commitment to help rebuild New Orleans, Bruni says she enjoys helping clients through every step of the demolition process. "I'm easily accessible. I answer the phone. I own the business. I'm very involved," she explains. "I hold the hand of the homeowner all the way through the process because I know it's hard. And I've been through the flood, too."

Demo Diva offers a variety of demolition-related services, including slab removal, sidewalk removal, utility disconnection, land backfill after foundation removal and debris hauling. Bruni will even file the necessary paperwork for her clients at City Hall before demolition begins, and she doesn't ask for money until the job is completed. Bruni says she goes out of her way to help customers because she's "passionate about demolition."

"I really felt like it was my destiny," she says. "I feel like I have a spiritual part in rebuilding New Orleans."