

## Amazing Women - Business/Entrepreneur: Michelle Molina

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Posted: 09/08/2010 03:33:03 PM PDT

Updated: 09/08/2010 05:40:19 PM PDT

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Business/Entrepreneur finalist Michelle Molina. Molina's **PeacePartners** runs **PeaceBuilders**, a research-validated youth violence prevention program approved for the federally funded Safe & Drug-Free Schools Act. (Brittany Murray / Press Telegram)

## Michelle Molina

**OCCUPATION:** Chief Executive Officer and Owner of **PeacePartners, Inc.** of Long Beach

**QUESTION:** What defines an amazing woman? "I think that an amazing woman recognizes that within them there are all these amazing women who came before her. Amazing women don't do it alone. That's the secret. An amazing woman surrounds herself with amazing women - and men, too - and listens to their advice and recognizes the efforts of the amazing women who came before her."

You could say that Michelle Molina was jarred to action.

Molina was working in advertising at a radio station in San Francisco when the 1989 earthquake hit. The quake, which measured 6.9 on the Richter Scale, killed 63 people and left thousands injured, homeless and without power.

The radio station encouraged employees to volunteer and Molina chose her neighborhood middle school, where many of the students were bused in from the housing projects. There, she was inspired by the caring teachers; it was a life-changing moment for Molina.

"I started liking my job at the school where I wasn't paid better than my advertising job, which is amazing because it's fun to work for a media outlet," she said. "So if something wins out over that excitement, you must be pretty connected to the experience."

She switched from media to education, finished her teaching credential at Cal State Long Beach and became a teacher, administrator and now president and CEO of [PeacePartners Inc.](#), which has brought the violence prevention and character education youth program, [PeaceBuilders](#), to 42 states.

Todd Lemmis, who nominated Molina for the Press-Telegram's Amazing Women contest, said she is at national conventions that focus on youth and education and lobbies Congress on behalf of the children of military service members.

"She does all this while managing to be a loving, caring and dedicated wife, mother, friend and community member," he said. "Michelle ALWAYS puts the needs of others first."

Molina discovered [PeaceBuilders](#) while at Paramount Unified School District, where she was a middle school teacher and an administrator.

"What [PeaceBuilders](#) does is help people create a climate that's positive," she said. "My success in the classroom, my success as a school administrator and how I help families was always connected to [PeaceBuilders](#)."

She and husband John Molina of Molina Healthcare bought the intellectual property of [PeaceBuilders](#) and established [PeacePartners](#) in 2003.

After renting an office on Third Street, they bought and remodeled a building on Atlantic Avenue in 2007. The headquarters - like a bright, cheerful classroom - echoes the program's positive environment.

"You're supposed to get that good vibe and be greeted with cheer," she said. "If you were working on a school campus that does [PeaceBuilders](#), you get the same vibe. If you're a parent, you're welcomed in, you're part of the process. Doing what [PeaceBuilders](#) does here was necessary."

It's also about giving your employees flexibility, she said.

"It's about allowing you to take your dad to the doctor, or allowing your employees to work from home when they need to," she said. "It's about keeping your building site free of trash every day. These little climate things became the way we do things around here. It has to be the model for what we do."

These days, Molina's work keeps her busy, whether it's flying to Oakland to visit schools, meeting with candidates about bullying or flying to Denver to meet afterschool providers.

"It's very busy but fun," she said. "I get to wake up every morning and go, 'Wow, I'm doing my part.'"

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