

JANUARY 2022

FENCE NEWS USA

VOICE OF THE FENCE PROFESSIONAL

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Top of the
CHAIN
with Sharon Felcher
PRESIDENT, NASCO



WOMEN IN FENCING

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WOMEN IN FENCING

While traditionally a male-dominated industry, the fields of fencing, gate operator and access control are seeing women take the lead. Many women bring a fresh perspective to the table, as well as new ideas and opportunities.

This January issue of *Fence News* kicks off a semi-annual look at women in the fencing industry. We look at the accomplishments made by these women and share their stories of success and perseverance.

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Ali Amigoni
*Distribution Program Manager,
Praesidiad*

Kindness and Optimism Can Make a Difference

As a distribution program manager for Praesidiad, Ali Amigoni finds that being a woman within the male-dominated fencing industry can be a refreshing change for her vendors and business contacts.

“Many times, people like speaking with someone different. I think being a female in this industry has helped me. There are many approaches I’ve taken along this journey and I’ve learned that I am just as strong as anyone or any gender,” Amigoni says.

Praesidiad owns Betafence, Guardiar and Hesco brands and is a global market leader of force protection solutions, integrated perimeter security systems, industrial mesh production, and fencing products. Amigoni’s day-to-day responsibilities include working with the Betafence brand to develop and execute the US distribution strategy. This involves developing relationships with key distributors and resellers within the fencing market and supporting distribution operations and developing new partners.

“I strive to be a trusted advisor for all of my customers. Instead of being just another supplier or potential supplier, I want to be considered a strategic partner that the customer sees as an asset to reach their goals,” explains Amigoni. “Kindness

and optimism are helpful skills, especially when dealing with the public. Rudeness and being short with people can spread quickly and has a negative impact.”

She feels it’s important to become a person that adds value. “Don’t wait around for someone to realize the value you bring to an organization, or you’ll wait forever. You have to speak up. If you want to lead a team, say so! You have to appreciate and believe in yourself before others will. Let your voice be heard and stop trying to be a pleaser.”

The advice she would give to other women in the fencing industry is to stand up for yourself and command respect. “Stay confident in yourself and don’t be afraid to make mistakes. After all, we learn from the mistakes we make and no one is perfect,” she says. “Be assertive and trust yourself. Avoid getting easily offended and learn how to handle conflict. Never stop learning. Most customers and many colleagues have years of experience in the fencing industry, so listening and learning are crucial.”

For more information about Praesidiad, visit www.betafence.com.



Andrea Hogan
CEO, Fencing Supply Group

Problem-Solving and Partnerships are Keys to Success

Andrea Hogan, CEO with Fencing Supply Group, says there are a lot of talented, hard-working women out there that may not think about coming into the fencing industry “and we should change that.”

She says she has felt quite supported by her peers in her 30 years of being in the industry. She started in the industrial and building products distribution sector and entered the fence business in March of 2015. “I can point to a handful of wonderful co-workers and mentors who pushed and challenged me along the way,” Hogan says. “They didn’t have the same style or approach; some were positive and optimistic, and others would create a ‘healthy tension’ but in all cases they were invested in my success. This dynamic doesn’t change, because each new experience requires inquiry, learning and support. I grew up playing team sports and I think the experience helped form my belief that you can’t accomplish much without the help of other people.”

Hogan says she’s juggled the work/life balance throughout her career. In fact, she left a lucrative position because of the necessary travel required for the job. “I love my family and I also love to

work! My husband and I made a choice to create a business locally so we could be with our children. It wasn’t great financially, but it was well worth it. Many times, a work/life balance is too often influenced by someone else’s version of what that balance should or shouldn’t be.”

“Achieving success within any industry starts with listening to the customer,” she says. “What does the customer need, consistently, to be put in a position to win? What are the pain points, the issues? Then you must go and solve them; figure out how to make life easier for the customer. We sell to fence contractors and what they need is a supply chain partner; someone who is with them shoulder-to-shoulder making sure the materials show up on time, in the right quantity, etc. Then, when something does not go as planned, they need a problem solver. I think people who are successful in our industry are focused on getting things right the first time but are also engaged problem solvers; they care about supporting their customers.”

For women in the fencing industry, Hogan offers this advice: “I hope they stay, but not stay still. If you are in customer service or operations, engage, offer



Chris Ward-Homer
President, Hampden Fence Supply



Treat Others Well

Chris Ward-Homer, president of Hampden Fence Supply, says her experience in leadership within the fence industry has generally been good. "When I first started in this industry 36 years ago, some of the older generation would not speak to me about business; they only wanted to talk with a man. However, that has completely changed."

Originally, she worked in manufacturing. After obtaining her degree in accounting, Ward-Homer anticipated working in public accounting. In fact, she was hired as an accountant by Hampden Fence Supply in 1985. She became CFO in 1996.

"The owner, Robert Wilmes, gave me and my partner, James Crawford, the opportunity to buy the company in 2010," explains Ward-Homer. "I really enjoyed the family atmosphere of the company and the flexibility management provided for me, so I decided to take the offer and buy the company and I became president."

She has been treasurer of the North American Fence Contractors Association, or NAFCA, since 2014. One of NAFCA's projects is rebuilding fencing at Arlington Cemetery each year. Hampden Fence Supply is one of the donors of materials, along with many other companies within the industry. "People in the fence industry come from around the USA to work on the project without pay. I am proud to be part of that," she explains.

"My advice to men and women starting out in the fence industry is to work hard, treat your employees well, treat your customers how you would want to be treated, and be open to change," she says.


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suggestions, speak with your manager about future roles. Be assertive and innovative starting with customer needs. If you are in a leadership position, get involved with the AFA or CLFMI, meet your peers and build a network. The worst thing that could happen is you will make a friend."

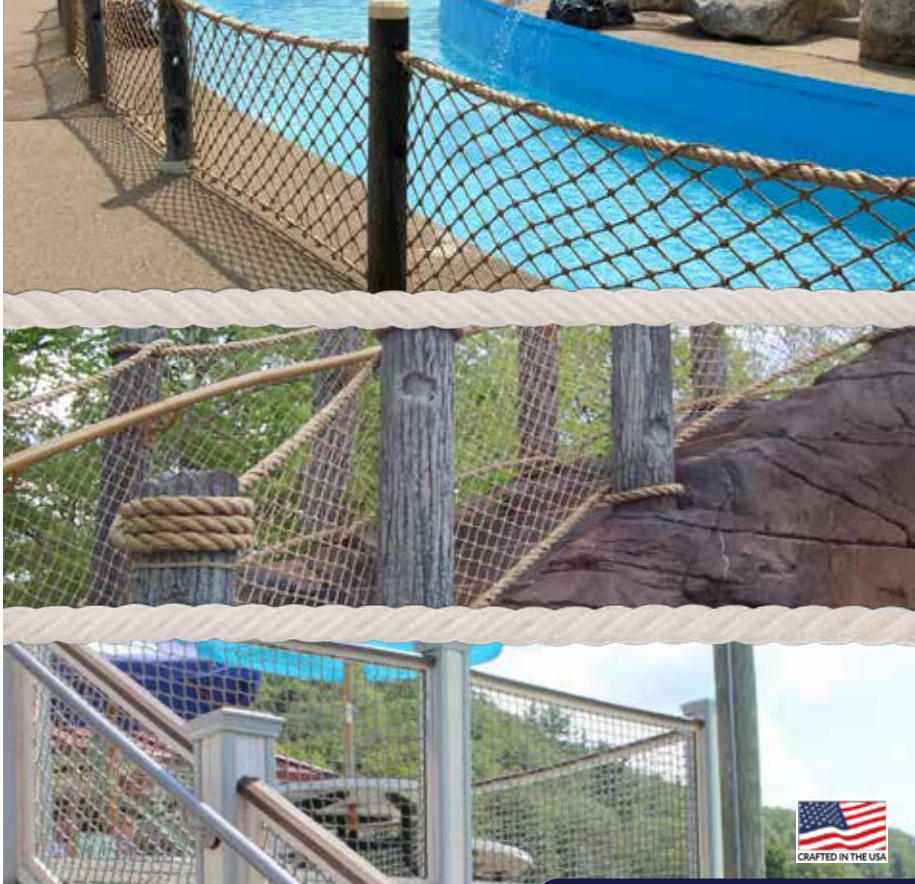
Hogan believes the fencing industry is wide open, no matter one's gender. "My hope, and in fact, what we are actively pursuing, is that people who want to lean in and build out a marketable skill will come into the fencing industry no matter their packaging on the outside or the plumbing on the inside. Once we get them in, the majority will stay because this industry has wonderful people in it who work hard and support each other."




Andrea with Doug Boles, president of the Indianapolis Motor Speedway, during the Project 100 renovation. Merchants Metals supplied the chain link fabric for the reinforced fencing to separate the race cars from the fans.



FENCING, BARRIERS, CROWD & ANIMAL CONTROL





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Meredith Ritz Shay
CEO, InCord

A Different Way of Doing Business

Before Meredith Ritz Shay turned 30, she became CEO of InCord, the largest manufacturer of safety netting in North America and created NetPlay USA, a joint venture with InCord's primary supplier in Germany.

Shay's father, Ed Ritz, founded InCord when she was in kindergarten, and although she spent many summers and afternoons after school working in the office and on the production floor, she says it was never her plan to join the company. "I thought I'd be working internationally in business and prepared for that by pursuing a double major in both international business and Spanish." But after graduating from college in 2011, she applied for and accepted an entry level position as a Project Manager at InCord. "That's when I fell in love with the job and the company," she says.

Over the past 10 years, Shay worked her way up the management track with InCord, constantly learning and refining her leadership style. "We operate by servant leadership here and I really enjoy helping employees use their skills to elevate themselves," she explains. "Treating employees right, supporting their goals, caring about their personal life, benefits them and our company."

As a woman in an industrial leadership role, Shay says she has never really felt a lack of support. "However, I always felt like I needed to over-compensate in my achievements to merit equitable pay. I also felt considerable personal guilt while trying to balance my family and career, but thankfully, other women in the industry gave me guidance in this area. I certainly try to do the same. I've learned that being 100% present is paramount. When I'm at work, I am only focused on work, and when I am home, my husband and children have my undivided attention. I'm lucky to have a family that supports my career and work for a company that supports my family – which makes it easier to find that balance."

Shay feels there is a huge benefit to balancing the masculine and feminine in the workplace. "It's not necessarily gender, but there are general traits associated with masculinity and femininity required in equal amounts to make the best decisions. For example, masculine associated traits of confidence, responsibility, courage, discipline, assertiveness, protection and giving are needed in equal parts with feminine associated traits of intuitiveness, receptiveness, stillness, sensitivity, emotion, collaboration, and nurture. So many manufacturing businesses have a need for more of the feminine qualities to balance out decision-making at all levels, and this is a huge area for more feminine people to feel empowered to play a role in the industry and in advancing their careers."

Shay says she is most proud of the community within her company. "There are so many ways we care for each other, in our jobs as well as life in general. Work is a privilege, especially getting to work with my coworkers, our suppliers, and our customers. I've met so many people who are inspiring and doing such great things in the world, all because of my job!"

Looking ahead, Shay feels very optimistic. "I am most excited for the new technologies, materials and opportunities to make our products more sustainable and the world a safer and more beautiful place."



Teamwork is the Foundation for Success



Jen Klassen

Co-Owner, DAC Industries, Inc.



Jill Thorpe

Co-Owner, DAC Industries, Inc.

A financial advisor and a physician assistant might seem like an unlikely pair to run a fence industry manufacturing business, but that's exactly what sisters Jen Klassen and Jill Thorpe do at DAC Industries, and they've been doing it well for 20 years.

Their father, Dan Hickey, co-founded DAC in 1985 alongside business partner Cal Kooistra, with a goal to provide the fencing industry high-quality gate hardware. The company manufactures industry standard items as well as hard to find sizes and unique hardware, all proudly made in the USA. DAC has grown significantly over the past 35 years with Klassen and Thorpe involved from the early days. "From a young age, we assembled Auto-Latches on our living room floor, counted screws for parts bags, and helped with basic office work," says Klassen.

"We were proud of the success of our dad's company, but neither of us had plans for DAC to be our full-time career," adds Thorpe. "We successfully pursued our own career paths after college, but always remained connected to the company. As DAC grew and the opportunity for us to become more involved presented itself, it seemed like a natural move for both of us to join the company."

Today, as the co-owners of DAC, the two sisters each manage multiple responsibilities within the business. "We've found a balance that works for us," says Klassen. "We spend a lot of time together at work, we live within a mile of each other and our children are very close in age. It's a good thing we get along well!"

Thorpe says being a female in the manufacturing industry was never daunting to them because they grew up in the business. "Although we've had our share of requests to 'speak with a man,' and been referred to as the 'office girls' or 'secretaries' over the years, those types of comments are few and far between now," she says.

"I think we have been around long enough to have proven our capability to our customers," adds Klassen. "It is great to see more and more women in the industry in recent years and we hope to see even more in leadership roles in the future."

Thorpe says balancing home and work is a constant struggle, as it is for every working parent. "We are very fortunate to have family close by and rely on their help. Our parents may have officially retired but have transitioned into drivers/homework helpers/sport spectators for their five grandkids. Technology has come so far, and we are both able to work from home as well." Klassen says one of the biggest lessons to come out of 2020 was that "flexibility and ability to adapt to changes are essential for a small business to thrive."

Both Klassen and Thorpe agree there are certain characteristics, not necessarily gender-specific, involved in building a successful business, including good communication, timeliness, attention to detail, the ability to multi-task and build strong relationships with customers.

"At DAC, we are most proud of creating a work environment where employees feel valued, enjoy working and are happy to help each other out, as well as the reputation we've established as being a company that prides itself on quality products and excellent customer service," says Thorpe. "DAC was built on a solid foundation, and we have a great team of dedicated employees. This sets the groundwork for growth, and we are looking forward to launching some exciting new products in the near future."

Klassen adds that having a strong team that works well together and shares the same goals is critical for growth. "This allows Jill and me the freedom to focus on some larger projects to better serve our customers."

Klassen and Thorpe say the golden rule will always be foundation for their success. "We go out of our way to make sure each customer's needs are met, from having well-trained knowledgeable employees who provide exceptional customer service to using the fastest shipping for their products," says Klassen. "Our customers are the reason we are in business and we are committed to treating them well."

Top of the CHAIN

with
Sharon Felcher
PRESIDENT, NASCO



As president of NASCO, Sharon Felcher has almost 40 years of experience in the fencing industry and has created a unique path. As with many of us, her career path has had some unexpected turns, but it's led to her being at the top of her game today. Read on to learn how she's handled adversity and how she defines success.

WHAT FALLS UNDER YOUR CAREER UMBRELLA?

With NASCO, I import and distribute fence products, working with a variety of suppliers from all over the world. I enjoy working with a wide variety of people and we've developed a great synergy over the years. I wear many hats, as my responsibilities range from sales to sourcing products and supplies to execution.

WHAT WAS YOUR CAREER PATH?

Upon graduating from Boston University with a degree in education and later a master's degree in language, I taught briefly, but felt a nudge from my intuition to consider the business world. My father owned several businesses, one of them being a plastics company. During college, I worked with him in that business and really enjoyed it. As I contemplated my future and career, I decided to take a different path from education and move into the business world.

I started working at an international trading company in Manhattan as an assistant to the commodities trader. Shortly after, they formed a joint venture with another company involved in the fence industry. In 1982, I was asked to join the sales force and I attended my first fence show in Orlando. Today, I own the company and the rest is history.

HOW DO YOU MANAGE THE EVER-PRESENT WORK/LIFE BALANCE?

During the earlier years of my career, finding that balance was a challenge. I think it's difficult for most parents when their children are young. We try our best and that's really all we can do. I relied on family and friends to help me manage many of my responsibilities. Fortunately, thanks to all of the support, both my career and family have flourished.

WHAT ADVICE HAVE YOU RECEIVED AT SOME POINT THAT RESONATED WITH YOU?

Cherish your customers or someone else will.

HOW WOULD YOU DESCRIBE WORKING IN THE FENCING INDUSTRY?

It's exciting and rewarding. Customers have become like family and friends over the years and it's these relationships that make me enjoy going to work every day. I love my job because I truly enjoy the people I deal with. To me, being successful means doing what you enjoy and what you find meaningful. Dealing with people, finding the appropriate supplies, ensuring they arrive when promised (as often as possible), and knowing you helped your customer solve a problem is rewarding.

WHAT ADVICE WOULD YOU GIVE SOMEONE WHO IS JUST STARTING OUT IN THE FENCING INDUSTRY?

Don't let anyone tell you that you can't do it! When I first started in this business in the early 80's it was difficult to be a woman in a male-dominated industry; but today, I've made my path, I've proven my abilities, and I enjoy what I do and the people I get to work with. The most important factor is knowing your products and understanding your customer's needs.