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Second-generation thinking provides a bright future for Elmstar Electric Corp.

By Patrick Newman



The construction business is one composed predominantly of males (91 percent of its workforce is male, according to the U.S. Bureau of Statistics), making Carmen Fosick's success story at Elmstar Electric Corp. somewhat of an anomaly within the industry. Kaukauna-based Elmstar was founded by her father Gus Fosick in 1979, who transformed an operation small enough to fit within the confines of half an office building into a burgeoning commercial, industrial and municipal enterprise whose yearly sales amounted to nearly \$8 million in 1996.

In 1998 Fosick assumed control of Elmstar from her father and was both forced to provide herself in a male-dominated industry and confront that the company would have to streamline its business practices.

"We were definitely struggling as a company, and then, above that, I as a young kid was now in charge ... if I were an outsider looking in, I might have felt the same way: Elmstar is probably going to go out of business," Fosick says of her early tenure with the company.

"I believe I succeeded through determination, and really studying the business," she adds. "I'm pretty analytical, so I tried to make what we do into a science."

Her studies identified several areas of Elmstar's business model in need of heightened productivity: Accounting, estimations and managerial practices.

Systemization of each of these facets of the operation has allowed Fosick to lead Elmstar through a rough stretch brought on by the events of 9/11 as well as a drying pool of project opportunities.

As Fosick restructured the company, she instituted policies where everyone — including herself — needed to be responsible and accountable for their actions. At the same time she also added new service lines of data communications and fiber optics to make Elmstar more diversified. Under Carmen Fosick’s leadership, positive changes started to occur.

The end result? An increase in the firm’s profits by ten percent despite the difficult business climate.

Fosick’s efforts have been recognized by the construction industry, as Elmstar was selected in 2008 as the TEGG service data provider for northeast Wisconsin, a franchising opportunity that has allowed them both to better ensure customer satisfaction and reinforce sales. But despite positive results internally and recognition from the external business community, Fosick still identifies her, and the company’s, strongest asset as the staff.

“I really consider my coworkers at Elmstar friends and family...and I know I couldn’t have done it without them,” she says.

“Each of us at Elmstar has the same work ethic — without it, I don’t know if Elmstar would still be around.”