

From “Domestic Engineering” to Aerospace Manufacturing to President

Born in the shadow of the war, when women were being driven back into kitchens or steno rooms after doing “men’s work” riveting B-52s for the war effort, my childhood in the 1950s was a confusing mixture of expectations and stereotypes.

Most of the career choices available to me as a young woman in the 1960s included becoming a teacher, housewife, retail clerk, secretary, or nurse. Back then, as now, these are notable and respectable careers, yet for a woman wanting to dive into something different, they were limiting.

I am oftentimes asked how I moved away from the archaic stereotypical occupations and into the field of aerospace when so few women even saw it as an option.

The answer is simply that I could see the commonalities between what I, as a young girl, was being taught and what I observed of manufacturing. Some things are learned, and others are innate; for me, it was a little of both. My passion for manufacturing was born out of curiosity and the wonder of how things worked and how they were made. I understood from an early age that everything is part of a process and order.

What I learned as a child through observing and listening to my peers has given me the depth of knowledge I have today. I was able to transition my early skills in ironing, cooking and sewing into manufacturing and quality processing. Home economics classes that taught 5S and Lean became the foundation for my understanding of manufacturing processes. These concepts, which seem innovative and new today, were the building blocks of home economics.

I had the ability to look at a dress pattern and envision an aircraft

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blue print. I could see a recipe in a cookbook and understand the relationship between the recipes and the assembly procedures for a rocket. This is what allowed me to flourish in the new and uncharted environment of women in the aerospace industry.

I was one of the few women business owners in the mid-1970s. Although I understood the societal norms of the time, it was not easy to be overlooked during meetings when I had much to contribute.

Though much male chauvinism is a thing of the past in today's world, back then it was alive and well. But I was not deterred. I was determined to make a place for myself, and the only way was through hard work, continual learning, and engaging more than my counterparts until I was not only accepted, but respected among my peers.

My journey did not come without its cold shoulders. It was said that I didn't know what I was talking about because I was inexperienced or incompetent. As discouraged

as I may have felt at times, I kept going to those meetings, standing my ground, making my voice heard, and changing one mind at a time.

Many early naysayers have since closed their companies or gotten out of the industry altogether. I have prevailed.

For me, the world opened up once I stood my ground and

worked toward my aspirations. As the President of Hobart Machined Products, a small aerospace manufacturing company I co-own with my husband, Larry, I have met with princes, sheiks, ambassadors, and world leaders. I have worked with Boeing Commercial Airplane presidents from Frank Schrontz to Ray Conner on federal and state policy issues. I used the voice that I have fought so hard for to collaborate with people from all walks of life. Nonetheless, my most cherished experiences were with people who were looking for a better way of life, and being able to give them an opportunity.

My career has led me full circle, and I now have the privilege of developing a STEM curriculum for young women through the Expanding Your Horizons program at Edmonds Community College and teaching it every spring. In my curriculum, I explain through an interactive model the relationship between home economics (sewing) and manufacturing (blueprint reading). It is a model that encourages young women to look beyond what they see and to think about how things are interconnected

or related to each other. The model is creative and energizing, and puts wonder and curiosity back into learning. Through my teaching, I strive to pass along my curiosity for learning about, and understanding, the world around us.

Over the years the industry has recognized my accomplishments and today I serve on steering committees, boards of directors, advisory roles, and government appointed positions. My life has given me a broad range of unique experiences and challenges. It has been most rewarding.

Our small company, tucked away in the Cascade foothills, has made a difference and I am forever grateful to be in the aerospace industry. 

by Rosemary Brester, with Megan Anderson and Kelly Maloney



Rosemary Brester is president and CEO of Hobart Machined Products, Inc. Rosemary serves as a member, officer, or chair of numerous industry and community organizations and is passionate about convening industry, community, and governmental groups to make the most of small businesses.