





WOMEN, TENTS AND LEADERSHIP

FIVE WOMEN LEADING DIFFERENT SEGMENTS OF THE INDUSTRY
WEIGH IN ON WHAT INSPIRES THEM AND HOW TO FORGE A
SUCCESSFUL CAREER IN THE TENT AND EVENT INDUSTRY.

by Sigrid Tornquist

Women have always played a vital part in the tent industry. They were part of family shops manufacturing and selling tents. They were sewers. They were event planners. They led logistics and helped put up structures. They ran their own companies. But in the big picture, they were not the majority, and because of that their contributions are all the more important—because they paved the road for women coming after them.

Once, women in positions of authority were rare at tent trade shows. No longer is that the case. But while women in the industry are increasing in numbers, they are still in the minority. Here, women leaders of the industry share their struggles, their inspiration and their vision. They continue to open doors for women in the tent industry who come after them—and we are grateful for their leadership.

1



Carol Lee Cundey,
CERP, marketing and customer
service manager
Eureka! Tent Division
Binghamton, N.Y.

www.eurekapaty tents.com
Eureka! Tent Division is a full-line
tent manufacturer with design
capabilities that serve camping,
military and commercial canopy/
rental markets.
Employs: 150

Carol Lee Cundey began working in the event coordination side of the industry doing large-scale corporate events in New Jersey. When life events took her to Pennsylvania, she took a position at the Big Tents Division of Johnson Outdoors Inc., a global innovator of outdoor recreation equipment and technologies. After more than 20 years with Eureka! Tent Division, she continues to tap into what she calls the tent geek within her—something that drives her to use her expertise to contribute to innovations and the safety of the industry.

Q/A

Q: What do you know now that you wish you knew at the beginning of your career in tenting?

A: I always assumed getting involved with associations was for the industry veterans. I thought they were the ones that needed to be at the shows and were responsible for driving the industry. Now that I'm on the board of MATRA (Manufacturers and Tent Renters Association) and I do volunteer work for IFAI and its TRD (Tent Rental Division), I wish I would have done it sooner.

Being involved exposes you to knowledge and networking, and it's a way to drive the safety and success of the industry. And when new people join the industry, they bring a different perspective that can help take us to a higher level.

2



Judy Garcia,
vice president
SoCal Tents & Events—a division of
Pro Em National Event Services
Los Angeles, Calif.

www.proem.org/socal-tents-and-events
SoCal Tents & Events specializes in
major event planning and execution.
Employs: 300+ nationwide (Pro Em)

Judy Garcia broke into the tent industry in 1993 as a customer service rep taking orders for tables and chairs. After working in sales, operations and management positions at a variety of tent companies, in 2007, Garcia launched SoCal Tents & Events with industry mentor Richard Martin.

Though the titles she has held throughout her career have changed, sales has always been an important part of each of them—which she says is the most important part of any company's success.

Q/A

Q: What would you like people to understand about the tent and event industry?

A: I actually believe the tent industry is not as well known as it could be, even within the event industry itself. This is something that I would like to help change because what we do is so unique. We're the bones of an event. Similar to the bones in a person, nobody thinks much about them, but boy, do you need them. It's the same for us. We're the first ones in and the last ones out.

The tent industry is exciting, and the amazing things people do under our tents are beautiful. I would love for the tent industry to be more well known.

Q/A

Saroj Bains' introduction to the tent industry came with Hurricane Katrina in New Orleans, La., in 2005. Assigned to cover the tragic impact of the event as a television reporter, she was struck by the importance tents played in disaster relief. Not long after, she was inspired to make the documentary *InTENTcity*—a film heralding the part that tents play in creating infrastructure in disaster areas. When an opportunity to work for Event Labor Works as an operations and project manager came to Bains in 2010, she remembered her admiration for the industry and agreed. By 2012 she was at the helm of the company.

Q: What challenges do you think women in particular face in this industry?

A: There are more women on the rental and sales side; and the operations side is more male dominated. That alone can feel like an obstacle for women who want to join that side of the business. But it's changing. The more women who enter that side, the more others see it as a possibility.

When I came into this business, the women in operations were an encouragement to me and now I make an effort to support other women, especially when they ask about technical details of tenting, flooring and installation.

Hands-on knowledge and technical know-how make for better sales people. There are a lot of women on the rental side—and if they're interested, I always take the time to train them about the technical side of tenting.

3



Saroj Bains,
director
Event Labor Works
Montreal, Que., Canada

www.eventlaborworks.com
Event Labor Works provides skilled and general labor solutions, specializing in tent installation across Canada and the U.S.
Employs: 14 (during COVID-19)

McCourt

HOLD

1/2 H



Melani Kodikian,

president
A to Z Party Rental
Montgomeryville, Pa.

www.atozpartyrental.net

A to Z Party Rental is an events services firm offering a full selection of tents and event rental items for special occasions of all sizes.

Employs: 25 to 50



Melani Kodikian chose to enter the tent industry because of her early exposure to the family business. Her path to success within the company included learning all aspects of the business and working in all of its departments before taking over the company.

She continually educates herself through collaboration and industry education, resulting in expansion of the products offered, capacity and client base of the company. Her company has quadrupled in size since she assumed leadership.

Q/A

Q: What advice would you give to someone interested in making a career in the tent and event industry?

A: The opportunities in this industry are endless. I would advise anyone interested to cut your teeth and work in every position at a company—starting from the ground up. I would tell you to educate yourself continuously because you are never done learning. Be active in an organization that supports our industry, MATRA, IFAI or ARA (American Rental Association), and make friends in the industry. You'll learn the most from them.

And for women in particular, this is an industry that works very hard and expects the same from everyone around them, regardless of gender. Prove yourself through your actions; set your own goals.



Suzanne Warner,

sales
Tentnology
Surrey, British Columbia, Canada

www.tentnology.com

Tentnology is a manufacturer of commercial tents, event tents and fabric structures.

Employs: 60 to 90

Suzanne Warner's introduction to the industry was fortuitous, both personally and

professionally. With a background in design and cosmetics and working for a major cosmetics company, she found herself 35 years ago sitting in a cafe in Whistler, B.C., Canada, admiring a unique potato-chip shaped tent structure. By chance, a few days later she met Gery Warner, the guy who makes them. She ended up marrying Gery and bringing her talents to Tentnology. Since then, she and Gery have been leading the company in its trajectory of success.

Q/A

Q: What do you think surprises people about what it takes to work in this industry?

A: It is much more than the glamour of the beautiful tent. One needs a lot more financial acumen to excel. ROI (return on investment) and the operating costs of owning, storing and maintaining tents are important. Understanding logistics is helpful, as well as how to read floor plans and the technical aspects of selling space. You need to understand measurements; a 20-foot tent might not fit into a 19-foot space. Grasp field leadership, train crews, know soil and earth considerations for anchorage, and where you will find that 12,000-volt buried line. Moreover, you have to deliver the product on time, every time. Being in this business is like being a swan. It is calm and beautiful above while you are paddling like hell below.