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Contractor Close-Up

General Heating & Air Conditioning, Inc. Corinne Grosenbach, President, Phillip Grosenbach, Vice-President

In the '70s, Roy Grosenbach enlisted in the military and was sent to Vietnam. There he worked as a helicopter mechanic. Being mechanically inclined, when he returned stateside Grosenbach went to work for a HVAC contractor on the suggestion of a friend. He found the work to his liking.

Working his way up the ladder, learning all aspects of the trade, Grosenbach decided to go into sales. In time, he chose to branch off on his own and started the Monrovia, Calif.-based General Heating & Air Conditioning with his wife, Corinne Grosenbach, in 1981.

"He went to school to get his contracting license," Corinne says. "Sales was his forte. He was knowledgeable in the industry and good with people." Corinne had worked with Bank of America and knew customer service. She handled the business and marketing side of the company, while her husband worked sales, installs and service. Together they built the company.

Roy and Corinne started, like so many new firms, working out of their home. They kept it very simple, with Corinne doing the billing and Roy out in the field selling and installing with a helper. They ran two installation trucks from their house. By 1986, they needed more space and bought the property at 1310 S. Myrtle Ave. where they continue to work from today.

General Heating and Air Conditioning is a Factory-Authorized Carrier Dealer, working in residential, light commercial and custom. Today they run up to four installation crews and four service trucks, with an average of 20 employees. Half of their workman are NATE certified, which is very important to the company.

"We're known in the San Gabriel Valley as a distinguished HVAC company offering individualized custom proposals," says Phillip Grosenbach, Roy and Corinne's son, and a vice-president at General. "It's not often that when I go out, whether we win or lose an estimate, that we're one of the higher bids. That's because we go the extra-mile to provide high-end equipment, top-quality workmanship and offer the consumer options to help them decide on how to best invest in a home comfort system."

General has always based their business model on slow and continuous growth. "We've never aimed to be the biggest," explains Corinne. "A lot of business can come at you, but you want to have excellent manpower and customer service to back up the quality our customers expect."

Part of that quality is informing the consumer of all of today's different HVAC options and technology. From zoning and indoor air quality issues to regulations, General sends out mailers to its customers keeping them abreast of changes in the industry.

"If you don't give the consumer the information and the

options they need to make an informed decision then you're not doing the service you should be doing," Corinne says.

General also works hard with the technical-minded apprentices it attracts to teach them the business. "We find that promoting somebody from within makes a better employee for us," Corinne notes.

"We teach them about the industry by sending our employees to the classes given by the Institute of Heating and Air Conditioning Industries (IHACI), distributors and Carrier Corp." adds Phillip.

Employment is a problem in the industry. While General can train the sincerely interested beginner, seasoned professionals are harder to come by. "We do everything we can to keep an experienced employee," says Phillip.

"We tell the potential employee that they have ownership of the job," Corinne adds. "We want them to feel good about what they do." Though the company doesn't offer a 401k, it does provide its employees with a profit-sharing plan based on the employee's performance over the year. They become vested after six years.

"We gain the loyalty of the ones that really want to be in the business," says Corinne, "and they feel that they're gaining some security for their retirement without having to put anything into it."

General also offers its employees medical insurance, paid holidays and vacations, paid schooling and training, free uniform services and company barbecues. "We're also considerate of family issues and personal time off," Corinne says. "We value what our employees do, and we know how hard it is to replace them."

Corinne and Phillip are sensitive to family matters. After 20-plus years of service in the business, Roy Grosenbach passed away in February 2002 of a rare cancer. Corinne knew that she and Phillip would have to prove that General could remain in business and continue to grow as Roy had intended. The company has grown considerably since 2002.

Currently, Corinne's son Phillip is well prepared to take over the company when Corinne decides to retire.

Phillip Grosenbach learned the family business by wearing a tool belt around his waist since he was three years old and following his father around. "I never planned to do this," he admits. "Growing up, I'd go on estimates with my dad and climb on the rooftops where his crew was working. Once I got into high school, my Christmas vacations and summer breaks were either here



Left to right: Corinne Grosenbach and Phillip Grosenbach of the Monrovia, Calif.-based General Heating & Air Conditioning, Inc.

in the office or tagging along to help the guys."

After one semester of college Phillip knew that wasn't the place for him. He had enough experience when he left school to run his own crew at General, where he started working at 18. "Dad said, 'If you're not going to college you're working—get on the truck,'" Corinne remembers. From the ground up—installation, service and sales to management—Phillip has followed in his father's footsteps.

One thing that has kept General Heating & Air Conditioning growing is its commitment to education, both for its customers and its employees. Whether it's learning about the new technology through IHACI's training classes or keeping up with the industry at IHACI's annual trade show.

"I remember going to IHACI shows as a kid with my dad," Phillip says. "I looked forward to that every year."

"His son wants to go with him this year," Corinne says. "And his son is nine years old."

Both Corinne and Phillip appreciate the resources that IHACI offers members like themselves, the referrals for business, legal and regulatory advice, and, of course, the training classes.

"If you're not green, you're dead," Phillip likes to say. "There's always something new to learn," his mother adds. "It doesn't matter how old you are. You're always going to be green. Don't be afraid to ask questions, to learn." General is continuously learning and growing, while moving forward within the HVAC industry.