

Member Spotlight: Calumet Brass Foundry

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Calumet Brass Foundry production workers (pictured L to R): Antonio Ruiz, Peter Cook, Jorge Mendez, Armando Vargas, Rudy Rabanales, Eduardo Calderon. (Not pictured: Gabriel Fragoso)

Since 1906, Calumet Brass Foundry has provided customers with brass, bronze and aluminum sand castings. Trusted by customers worldwide, Calumet Brass Foundry has a reputation for producing high quality castings in a reasonable turnaround time—in many cases, in 24 to 48 hours. Calumet Brass Foundry's niche is short run, larger castings with breakdown delivery capabilities.

Calumet Brass is recognized across the industry for being a leader in both capacity and on-time delivery. They produce castings very few foundries worldwide can handle – with a total melt capacity for bronze at

3250#s, brass around 2850#s and 1100#s for aluminum.

Calumet Brass is currently owned and operated by Cathy Dolan, in Dolton, Illinois. Calumet Brass received the prestigious Women's Business Enterprise certification for the Chicago Business Development Center in 1999, ensuring a prominent role in today's diverse business world. Combining this progressive business vision with decades of experience, Calumet Brass's legacy of quality is evident in every casting and their dedicated service is second to none.



Calumet Brass Foundry workers pour 2,400 pounds of C93800 into a sand mold.

Q&A with Cathy Dolan, President of Calumet Brass Foundry



Cathy acquired Calumet Brass Foundry in 1995, making her the fourth generation of ownership since her family purchased the foundry in 1906. She has over 20 years of experience and is familiar with every aspect of the foundry business. Cathy joined the NFFS Board of Directors in October 2017.

What advice would you give to someone going into a leadership position in the foundry industry for the first time?

Be passionate about what you are doing. Work smart. Know your business like no one else, but hire people who are better than you at doing those jobs! Know when to give it your all and when to walk away. You will fail from time to time...or learn a lesson the hard way...keep at it and don't give up.

What are the challenges of being a woman business owner in a male-dominated industry?

The challenges I have faced being a woman in a male dominated industry have been congruent to the advantages. Most of the men I have worked with have daughters, and they have seen in me what they hope for for their children. I feel like every time a man did not want to work with me because I was a woman, there was a man that DID want to work with me, because I was a woman. Mind you, things are much more progressive today than 22 years ago. I remember a time when I walked through the old Acme mill and someone "cat called" over the intercom. I laughed...and everyone knew I was there! That would never happen in today's litigious environment. Times have changed so much that now I walk into a mill and I am greeted by a woman, in most cases. There has been so much progress in our industry.... It really has been an exciting time to be in business as a foundry woman.

How have you approached change in your foundry?

Like everything else, with a positive attitude. Regardless of whether the change is from the inside or the outside, we do what needs to be done.

Of course, change from within is usually more fun and relaxed. Change from the outside (OSHA regulations) can be more challenging, but it is all part of business so you have to adapt and change or die.

What keeps you awake at night?

Worry about the future. Specifically the future of my business and whether there will be enough business for a fifth generation. Life is changing so quickly and our economy is changing too! My dad used to tell me that in the 70's there were 4-5 pages of foundries listed in the Yellow Pages. If we are lucky, there is a small section that would take up one page today. With our economy opening up globally and the advancement of metal casting machinery, our business is dwindling. That is why being part of the NFFS is important to me. We, as foundry people, need to stick together and help each other.

What other CEOs do you look up to or draw inspiration from?

The CEO's I have looked up to and have drawn inspiration from are not famous...so this may be a boring answer. They are my predecessors—my father, my grandfather and my great grandfather. My great-grandfather for having the courage to buy an existing foundry. My grandfather for building the company where it is today, in Dolton. And my father, who further developed the business and other businesses. They were very strong men and driven to succeed.

There is also a woman I have admired from afar since I bought the business in 1995. Her name is Marsha Serlin from United Scrap in Chicago. She started her company with a rental truck and \$ 200. She is a HUGE success today. A true story of success based on perseverance, hard work and not accepting failure or rejection, as an option. She is a bold woman who has carved a place for herself in a male dominated industry.

If you were faced with two equally qualified job candidates for your foundry, how would you determine who to hire?

I would consider hiring the one with people skills. Those skills are so important in running a business. You need to manage your employees,



Cathy Dolan inspects the mold poured by her production team.

customers, suppliers and business associates... all people! I would also consider the one that would fit into our group. We have developed a tight knit team here at Calumet Brass and we really care about one another and work really well together. I would have to consider how the potential candidate would affect the harmony of our team.

What is the secret to your success?

Surround yourself with really good people and create an environment that inspires you. I am lucky. I work with a great group of exceptional men, including my husband, Peter. He has run the foundry for about 20 years. I am also lucky enough to work with my best friend, Dawn. She is my sounding board on everything and an example to me in many ways. Also, my mother works for me and sometimes our daughters will help on projects, so I get to work with them too. I am lucky—I love coming to work!

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