



A CONVERSATION WITH

Bonnie Strickler

Owner and President, Puff, Inc.

Both behind a desk and on a roof, Bonnie Strickler, Puff Inc.'s Owner and President, has seen the spray polyurethane industry evolve from a specialty niche to a major player in the construction market. She recently spoke with *Spray Foam Magazine* about her role as a leader in a changing, and challenging, industry.

BY JEN KRAMER

Spray Foam Magazine: *What was your path to becoming President and Owner of Puff, Inc.?*

Bonnie Strickler: I started working at Puff with a job in the office. I had no background in spray polyurethane foam. No experience in roofing. I had just left a job where I was “married” to my work and wanted something easy – answering phones, helping the office personnel. But my personality never allows me to rest and I started “fixing” things. I have a background in production and I was able to organize and streamline things very easily. After I straightened out the office and the administration, I worked on the warehouse, and then the crew, and as things improved, the owner started coming in less and less. Eventually, in 1984, I purchased the business from him. Puff has continued to expand ever since.

SFM: *Puff is known for impeccable quality. How do you create and maintain such a high-functioning team?*

BS: First, we don't lay-off. Even though our work is seasonal, we don't view our employees as seasonal. We offer

paid holidays and benefits. And we function as a team. From the very beginning, the best way for me to learn the business was to go out on roofs with my crew. For years, I divided my time 50/50 between the field and the office. In fact, several years ago, I spent an entire year in the field, working on an involved project. I was right there next to my crew, pulling hoses and doing detail work. I learned from my crew, and they learned from me. We gained so much as a company from that experience – our quality, productivity, and efficiency have increased dramatically. I still go out on high profile jobs, or on jobs where safety is of more than normal concern. I don't ask my team to do anything that I won't do myself.

SFM: *You run a very successful, woman-owned company in a male-dominated industry. How has that shaped your business?*

BS: In the beginning, nobody wanted to talk to me about anything. Then, as I educated myself about spray foam and about roofing, more men would

talk with me. Now everybody talks with me, but it took 30-some years to get here. I always say, you can have all the knowledge in the world, but if you don't have confidence, you won't make it. As I was gaining knowledge, I was confident I would make it. I also had the help of some wonderful mentors. If I had a question, I would call Clarence Tolbert (NCFI) for advice on foam or Jim Patterson (GE Silicone) and Jerry Schienke (Futura) for advice on coatings. I also attended SPFA every year to meet with the industry leaders and pick their brains. Irv and Melvin Stumler and John Nolan were instrumental in helping me. I have always made it a point to introduce myself to successful contractors, to ask what works for them and what doesn't. That has helped to strengthen my business and my knowledge base. Now I hear, “Wow. You're a woman in a man's world and you're doing a pretty good job at it.”

SFM: *Beyond the challenge of gender, what challenges do you find within your market?*

(cont'd on the next page)

BEYOND THE FOAM

In addition to roofs, the crew from Puff Inc also applies SPF air barriers. They are an ABBA- and SPFA-accredited contractor.



“WOW. YOU’RE A WOMAN IN A MAN’S WORLD...”

BS: Our main challenge is the weather. In the summer months, we work around rain. In the winter, we deal with frozen roofs. It is always a scheduling challenge. Then, of course, we are always looking to obtain more work. Our primary market is spray polyurethane roofing; we also specialize in roof coating systems. We don’t branch out into shingles or conventional roofing. We just do SPF and coatings. We also diversified into air barriers. We are an ABAA- and SPFA-accredited contractor and that helps.

SFM: *That SPFA accreditation has special significance for you, doesn’t it?*

BS: I would say I spend about 90 percent of my time working as the Chair of SPFA’s Certification Committee. I really believe in giving back to the industry and helping to improve the knowledge base for everyone. Thank goodness Mike Adams, the Vice President of Puff, manages the company for me so beautifully. I have been working with



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the certification program for several years now. SPFA rolled out individual certifications in 2012. We are now working on continuous improvements to certify more contractors. The more contractors who are certified; the better it is for us all. I believe that whatever I give, I get back tenfold, so I am happy to volunteer to help the industry.

SFM: *You’ve seen the industry grow. Where do you see it in 10 years?*

BS: Spray polyurethane foam is booming on the insulation front. It is becoming more recognized in all aspects, especially in terms of energy savings. If this trend continues, I imagine that spray foam will be a very popular option for future building specs. And I hope that I will be right there pulling hoses along with my Puff crew. ▶◀