

LEADERSHIP PROFILE

Bianca Vogel-Quigley, President of ErtelAlsop

BUILDING A BRIGHT FUTURE



HV Mfg sat down to talk manufacturing and engineering with ErtelAlsop's Bianca Vogel-Quigley. Under her leadership there is a good mix of communication, cooperation, innovation, and commitment to family that creates the perfect circumstances to promote long term growth for the company.

HV MFG: How did you come to work in manufacturing? Is it something you always wanted to do?

BQ: Well, the short answer is that I grew up around manufacturing. ErtelAlsop was founded by my grandfather and then my father ran it for another 40 or so years. In hindsight it seems obvious that it would become my career too, but when I was young, my heart was with horses. I was a competitive rider, and like many others, I dreamed of the Olympics. But, as anyone who has ever owned a horse knows, it is an expensive pursuit and perhaps not a realistic one. So, when I got to be 16 or so and my father asked me who was going to pay for this pursuit (and he clearly intended

for me to understand that it was not going to be him) I took stock of what I was good at and that happened to be science and math. I thought about what I could do with those talents. I considered becoming a veterinarian so I could be around horses, but in the end I followed the family footsteps into engineering.

HV MFG: So you have a degree in Engineering?

BQ: Yes, I have a Bachelor's degree in Industrial Engineering and Management from RPI.

HV MFG: When we first met – just a few years back – you were not with ErtelAlsop. What was your first job after you graduated from RPI?

BQ: Just a few years ago! My first job out of college was with IRECO in Port Ewen. Today they are Dyno Nobel and many, many years ago it was Hercules Powder. They made detonators for explosives, mostly for construction and mining but some military too. The Plant Manager at the time, Dave Nowlen, hired me as an Industrial Engineer.

HV MFG: That sounds like a pretty interesting first job.

BQ: It was very interesting and I learned a lot about manufacturing and business. It got to be a little hairy when there was a management shake-up and several people above me lost their jobs. After being there only a couple of years I was suddenly in charge of a few dozen people. There I was—24 years old and pretty much the only woman—it was scary but I think I did okay. I definitely learned a lot and gained confidence in both my engineering and leadership skills.

HV MFG: We are very interested in that point about the challenges of being a woman in manufacturing and we'll return to that subject. For now let's stick with your career track. When did you come to the family business?

BQ: I started working at ErtelAlsop in 1995.

HV MFG: You said you are the third generation owner of ErtelAlsop. Could you share the history of the company, and tell us about what you make?

BQ: Sure. We manufacture liquid filtration equipment and depth filtration media for pharmaceutical, food & beverage, chemical, and wastewater industries. Our customers are big ones you've probably heard of like Jim Bean, Pepsi, Sanofi, Avon, as well as many smaller firms. The company was founded by my grandfather, Frederick Ertel in 1932, in New York City. He originally manufactured and



Final filter sheet coming out of the oven for inspection and cutting by operator.

sold depth filter media for the pharmaceutical industry. Around 1938, he moved the company here to Kingston. He expanded the products offered to other aspects of liquid filtrations, things like filter presses, pumps, agitators, bottle fillers. Interesting bit of trivia, during the Second World War he developed the first pyrogen retentive filter media for Bristol Laboratories that was used to manufacture penicillin. In 1976, we acquired Alsop engineering. Alsop was founded by Samuel Alsop in 1920 and their first product was an enclosed horizontal plate filter which was manufactured by Ertel. In the 1940's Alsop invented an accordion shaped filter cartridge, which provided an enclosed filtration environment and much shorter changeover cycles than plate and frame filter presses. This innovation proved to be a big productivity improvement for their customers.

So, between the 2 companies – the now merged ErtelAlsop's – we have lots of customers who have been buying from us for over 80 years. Our niche is really a commitment to our customers and the willingness and flexibility to modify our designs to meet their requirements. We want to be big enough to meet demand and keep our costs down, yet nimble enough to meet the emerging needs of our customers.

HV MFG: You and your husband [George Quigley] took over ownership in 2005. Given the changes in the economy I'm guessing these have been an exciting 11 years. Tell us about the past decade or so?

BQ: Wow. Yes, lots of "excitement." Seems like we were just getting our feet underneath us, starting to implement the changes we hoped to make, when 2008 hit and the bottom fell out. Everything ground to a complete halt. Honestly, for a month or so nothing happened; no orders, no payments, nothing. It was very scary. But when things started to turn around they turned around fast. Suddenly we needed to find ways to become more efficient to meet what turned out to be rapid growth. The first challenge was our facilities. As the company grew through the 1970's, 80's and 90's we acquired multiple locations and were spread throughout Kingston. This proved very inefficient. In 2011, the space we are in now—the former Colony Liquor Distribution Center—became available and we consolidated into one location. We worked with another local manufacturer [Council of Industry member] JBT Wolf-Tec to buy the building. We got plenty of assistance from Ulster County, Central Hudson, the City of Kingston as well the State to pull it off and we started moving in during July 2013. In all, between the building and new equipment, we have invested roughly \$6 million. Now, with the improved efficiencies and expanded capacity we are ready to grow.

HV MFG: What do you see as the biggest challenges to that growth for ErtelAlsop in the next 3 to 5 years?

BQ: Challenges...where to begin? First, no doubt is workforce, from entry level workers to engineers we find it is difficult to attract people to a small manufacturing business. Second, the cost of utilities, energy and water in particular. Much of our competition is overseas and their costs are much lower than ours. Finally, the strong dollar right now is hurting us. Again, we have a lot of competition from overseas manufacturers and 40% of our sales are exports. The strong dollar is making our product relatively more expensive than our competition's. We know that in terms of quality and reliability our products are as good as or better than anyone in

the industry and customers are willing to pay for that. But only to a point. If these trends continue we risk not only losing sales in the short run, but long term market share as well.

HV Mfg: What about opportunities?

BQ: We see opportunities in several industries, especially the Life Sciences. I mentioned we helped improve the manufacture of penicillin in the 1940's, and we have some new products that we think will do very well in the Pharmaceutical market. We also sell to distilleries, and the renewed interest in spirits worldwide, as well as the growth of smaller distillers, is an opportunity. We are small and agile. We provide real value added engineering services. And, we provide sales solutions to customers we've had long-term relationships with. I believe opportunities will continue to present themselves if we keep that focus.

HV MFG: Let's return to something you talked about earlier. Talk about your experiences as a woman in manufacturing and engineering.

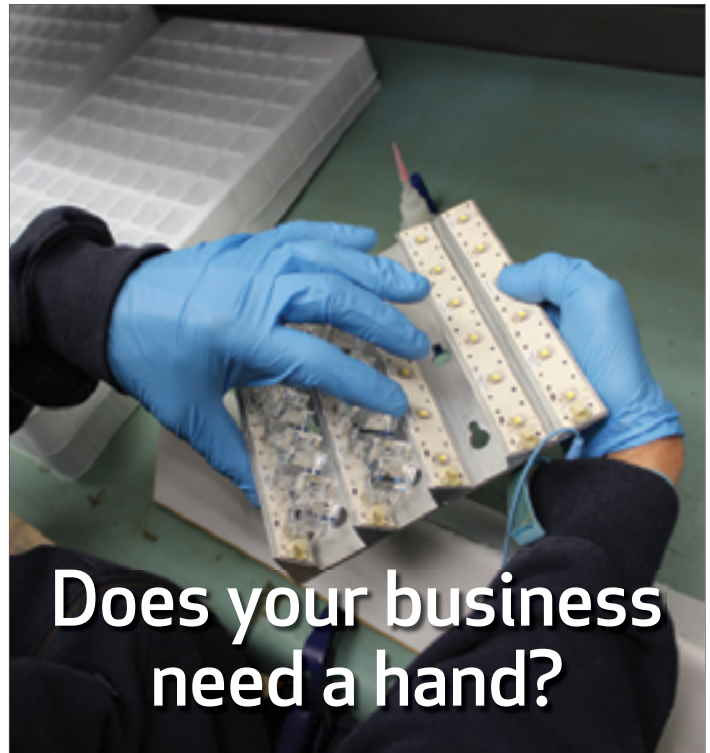
BQ: Well, it's different now than it was 30 years ago. It's far better, but there is still room for improvement. For starters, when I decided to go to an engineering school my father discouraged me because he thought, based on his experiences, it was too difficult for a girl. In truth, when I got to RPI the work was not too hard for me but the fact that there were so few other women did make it harder. In my first job, I was not only a woman but I was younger than the other engineers. When I sat in a room filled with men who were working on a problem I definitely felt marginalized. It's pretty frustrating to have your ideas dismissed out of hand either because of your gender or your age, but my boss, definitely encouraged me and respected my talents. The truth is men and women tend to approach technical problems in different ways and I often saw things differently than the male engineers. I think women bring a different set of skills to the field. Gradually I won people over. Today there are still more men than women in manufacturing and engineering. I still am in plenty of meetings where I am the only woman but I do think there is greater acceptance of women in the field today and most – not all – but most men treat women with respect.

HV MFG: Any advice for a young woman considering engineering and manufacturing?

BQ: Do it. It is fun, and you get to think and work on different challenges every day. There are lots of opportunities too – especially working for a small manufacturer.

HV MFG: What do you think makes a good Leader? Tell us about your leadership style and how it was shaped.

BQ: I believe a good leader is an effective communicator. I believe a good leader embraces change. I believe a good leader surrounds herself with talented people and I think a good leader doesn't ask anyone to do a job she hasn't done or isn't willing to do herself. I think my style is to try to be inclusive, to get everyone involved with ErtelAlsop to believe in the company and to work toward its success. I try to listen and to be responsive to every member of our team. As to what has shaped that – well, as we talked about earlier my experiences as a young woman taught me to seek diverse opinions and approaches to problem solving. My experiences working for my father also influenced my style. My father's style was very much the



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traditional “top down”. He did become the owner/CEO in the 1960’s and that was the more common approach. By the time I came into the business, I did not see that as the most effective way to get the most out of our employees. In 2016, in the competitive world of manufacturing with all its complexities, if you want to be successful you need to empower and rely on talented people. I think we do that.

HV Mfg: This is a family business and you work alongside your husband every day. What’s that like?

BQ: (Laughing) It is an absolute joy every minute of every day! Honestly, it is great and we have built a terrific life together. On the business side we have different responsibilities. I am focused on operations and he is focused on sales. Because of that, and because of our personalities we see problems through different lenses. You could say we bring the traditional “sales/marketing vs. engineering/production” internal organizational conflict to a new level. But in

truth I think this is one of our company’s greatest strengths. We know each other very well and we respect each other. The company gets the best of each of us and we are stronger for it.

HV MFG: You have been involved with the Council of Industry for more than a few years. What are we good at? What could we do better?

BQ: Really all of it is good. I guess the thing we find most valuable is the networking with other small manufacturers in the region. Manufacturing is a unique type of business and the Hudson Valley is pretty unique too. Connecting with others with the same issues really helps. It is also nice to have the Council “watching our back” in Albany. As for what you could do better – I would say using technology more for training and networking. It can be difficult for our people to get out of the office sometimes and the use of webinars and distance learning opportunities might be helpful.

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