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Posted on Sun, May. 09, 2004

## More women stepping into roles in family business

By Michele Chandler  
Mercury News

Glory Dolphin became executive director of a business that distributes air purifiers in 2000 in part because of family ties: Her fiance was the son of the company's founder.

But during the Silicon Valley native's first years at the Southern California company, IQAir North America, Dolphin so impressed the company's skeptical patriarch that she recently was promoted to chief executive officer of U.S. operations for the firm -- replacing her husband.

Dolphin, 29, assumed her CEO post earlier this week.

She is among a new generation of women succeeding male relatives in top jobs at family-owned enterprises. The trend is expected to escalate as more women secure business degrees and management experience while gender-biased attitudes of the past fall.

It wasn't a given that Dolphin, a Milpitas native, would get such a powerful position at her husband's family company. But she had the education, savvy and drive to get the support of the company's founder.

"It's not automatic. I don't think today that there is some inheritance right," Dolphin said. "Even within the family, you've got to prove yourself."

About 34 percent of family-controlled firms projected in 2002 that their next CEO would be a woman, up from 25 percent in 1997, according to a survey by the Center for Women's Leadership at Babson College and MassMutual Financial Group, which jointly released a report on the subject late last year.

The growing number of female-owned businesses is contributing to the change. Nearly half of all privately held companies in the United States -- 10.6 million -- are 50 percent or more female-owned, according to a study conducted by the Center for Women's Business Research. Those numbers are up 17 percent compared to 1997, the group found.

"As more and more women start their own firms, it becomes much more acceptable to consider that a woman in your family might be the most appropriate person to be included in the business and to have succeed the owner over time," said Nan Langowitz, director of Babson's Center for Women's Leadership.

While apparently on the rise, the number of women taking the reins at family-owned firms remains more of a trickle than a flood. "The tide is starting to turn, although we're probably 10 to 20 years away from it being a major trend," said Andrew Keyt, executive director of the Loyola University Chicago Family Business Center.

About 100 colleges nationwide have launched family business programs to assist companies with everything from helping young family members decide whether they want to work in a family firm and developing a succession plan to defuse sibling rivalry.

### Gender issues

Gender issues are of growing importance to the programs. For example, the University of San Francisco Family Business Center is surveying companies where mothers or fathers work in family enterprises with their offspring. (For information, head to [www.usfca.edu/fbc/research.htm](http://www.usfca.edu/fbc/research.htm)).

Of special interest: mother-son, father-daughter and mother-daughter power pairings. Prior industry surveys only examined father-son relationships in family businesses, as they were dominant at that time, said Eugene Muscat, senior associate dean of USF's School of Business and Management.

The university's researchers will likely find companies such as IQAir North America -- and executives like Glory Dolphin.

It was 1996 when IQAir executive Frank Hammes introduced Dolphin -- a graduate of the University of Southern California in business administration -- to his father, Klaus Hammes, founder and top official of air purification equipment maker IQAir Group.

In 2000, Dolphin was hired as executive director in Southern California to oversee the Swiss-based business's expansion into the United States. IQAir Group of Switzerland is the main firm and does manufacturing; its subsidiary IQAir North America, located outside Los Angeles, handles distribution of air purifiers in the United States, Canada and Mexico.

"She had to prove herself, for sure," Klaus Hammes said. "You can't put a person who is not very able into such a position."

Dolphin, who married Frank Hammes in 2001, quickly showed her ability. Among her top achievements: winning a corporate partnership last year with the American Lung Association, a coveted accolade that gave IQAir wide industry recognition. A short time later, Dolphin said she received a promotion offer to be chief executive officer of IQAir North America. Her husband, Frank, had held those duties before, along with overseeing manufacturing in Europe.

### Name change

Now Frank Hammes handles manufacturing out of the Swiss headquarters for the fast-growing company, while his brother, Jens Hammes, oversees the business operations in Asia. And, at her father-in-law's request, Dolphin has changed her surname to Dolphin-Hammes.

Life circumstances propel other women to the top spot at family firms.

Buffy Cereske was a high school senior in the 1970s with her eye on medical school when her father William, founder of Cereske Electric Cable, died suddenly. A respected longtime company employee, Scott Johnson, took over as general manager of the Oakland firm in 1973, backed by Cereske's mother. Cereske went on to college and earned an undergraduate biology degree.

After her older brother decided he had no interest in joining the company their father started in 1948, Buffy Cereske changed gears. Midway through college, she set her sights on running the family business herself one day. Otherwise, Cereske said, "the company would have been sold or dissolved. I didn't want the company that my father built to die."

Upon finishing college in 1978, Cereske took a job in the sales department at the firm while earning an MBA from Golden Gate University. During the next nine years, Cereske said Johnson ably ran the company, but the man she regarded as her second father didn't teach her the ropes.

``The only women in the industry were in a secretarial role," Cereske said. ``I'd like to say it was a smooth transition where he took me under his wing and taught me everything he knew, but that didn't happen. I just dug in even more and realized I had to do this myself."

From her perch in the sales department, Cereske watched. She learned which manufacturers supplied the best quality products, what items should be bought when and at what price.

Cereske took over the company in 1987, the year Johnson retired. Now 48, Cereske has a thriving business and no regrets.

``I feel very fulfilled doing what I am doing because I am able to carry forth my father's company," she said. ``And I really like being my own boss and the flexibility that comes with that."

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